

DESIGN TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT
ENTERTAINMENT TECHNOLOGY ADVISORY BOARD
MINUTES FROM OCTOBER 22, 2024, MEETING

Present:

Chris Fria, Assistant Chair, Design Technology Department
Jim Keeshen, Full-time Faculty, Animation
Walt Louie, Full-time Faculty, Digital Media Post-Production
Jan Nagel, Adjunct Faculty, Animation
Ann Marie Leahy, Counselor, SMC Career Services Center
Steven Atha, Alumni (Game Design)
Udhav Detha, Student (Digital Media Post-Production)
Weiling Kha, Student (Digital Media Post-Production)
Michael Fink, Professor, USC School of Cinematic Arts
Judy Kriger, Program Director of Animation & VFX, University of Redlands (Woodbury)
Monica Mitchell, Executive Producer, Rick and Morty
Ron Myrick, Executive Producer, G2 Animation
Jake Street, Senior Game Design Manager, Riot Games
Dan Tirtawinata, VP of Creative Operations, Mob Scene
Jo Wright, Studio Line Director, Ripple Effect Studios

Minutes:

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM.

After brief introductions, Chris Fria gave an update on the Animation and Digital Media Post-Production programs. According to the Institutional Research data dashboard, enrollment increased over the period between Fall 2020 and Fall 2023. Animation had a headcount of 324 students with a course success rate of 80%. Digital Media Post-Production had a headcount of 240 students and a course success rate of 73%. Enrollment in the Game Design curriculum also increased to a headcount of 59 students and a course success rate of 77%.

He then shared the revisions to the proposed certificate program in Game Design:

- Change the name of the certificate to Game Design Foundation.
- Revise the course outline of GAME 2 to emphasize critical analysis of existing games.

- Revise the course outline of GAME 20 to remove references to 2D projects and to emphasize the development of multiple team-based prototypes. Add Unreal Engine as the required software.
- Revise the course outline of GAME 30 to remove references to 3D projects. Add Unreal Engine as the required software.

The changes were approved by the members present. The meeting then moved on to the following discussion items:

1. Artificial Intelligence

The first topic for discussion was the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the entertainment industry. While opinions varied to a certain degree, the consensus among industry advisors was that AI will likely eliminate many tedious, time-intensive tasks that often fall to entry-level employees. Competition for the remaining entry-level jobs will intensify while opportunities shrink.

Students need to be aware of AI tools and incorporate the use of AI into their workflows. Several AI tools were mentioned, including Midjourney, Adobe Firefly and Substance 3D Sampler. Entire new career paths may emerge with the use of AI. Prompt engineering, for example, is a relatively new discipline that involves methods of issuing instructions to generative AI models in order to achieve consistently better results.

Many commented on the lack of quality in AI generated content, positing that AI content creation tools may be used for general mass consumption as opposed to higher-end, artist-made content. As Jo Wright put it, "AI content as Burger King, human-created content as French Laundry?" Still, it remains to be seen how robust AI tools will become over time.

2. Viable Career Pathways

The next discussion evolved from the first topic. What viable career pathways will develop in the near future? The advisors expressed the need for creative people to be able to adapt to change. The emphasis should be on storytelling. Dan Tirtawinata encouraged students to become fluent on a given platform and to be passionate about the work they do.

3. Hybrid and Remote Work Environments

The last discussion item was the seemingly new normal of hybrid and remote work in the entertainment industry. Monica Mitchell stated that only 25% of her production staff worked in-person. Jake Street made the comment that some hybrid studios are bifurcating their culture (in-person vs. remote) while other studios are doing a better job blending those groups. Several advisors said that new hires, especially in junior positions, are encouraged to work in-person initially for mentoring opportunities. Standard practice for remote workers is for employers to provide all necessary equipment. Freelance artists, however, may have to make significant investments in technology in order to be competitive.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 PM.