SO YOU WANT TO BE A GAME DESIGNER?

THE BEST GAME DESIGN PROGRAMS, RANKED BY THE PRINCETON REVIEW

You've got a great idea for the next big video game. Now you need the skills and experience to bring that idea to life. Take the next step in your game design career and turn your dream into a reality.
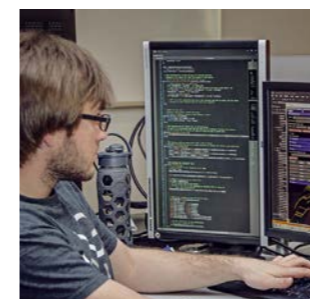
Making games is easier than ever, but it still isn't easy. Whether you want to build a game all on your own or bring your talents to the best studios in the industry, you're going to need more than a grand idea. You'll need the knowledge and skills to design and build a working game and get it in the hands of players. But you can only learn so much on your own, and only so quickly, so you're going to need help.

That's where these schools come in. The next few pages will show you the best places to learn those skills. More and more schools are offering Game Design programs, and The Princeton Review has been carefully tracking

and reviewing them all to determine who gets the best results.

Everything from job placement and graduate salaries to faculty experience and course curriculums was considered to rank these schools. In every sense, these are the best of the best. So read through the lists, see how the top programs compare, and start thinking about the next step in your game design career.

Want to know more? Check out The Princeton Review's website for further information on game design programs: **princetonreview.com/game-design**

THE TOP 50 BEST GAME DESIGN UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

THE PRINCETON REVIEW — TOP GAME DESIGN PROGRAMS — 2018

1 UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
Total Courses: 221
2017 Grads Hired: 70%
2017 Grads Salary: $65,000
Faculty: Dennis Wixon (Halo 2)
Fun Fact: Launching a festival dedicated to displaying USC student-made games and networking with industry guests.

2 NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
Total Courses: 501
2017 Grads Hired: 23%
2017 Grads Salary: $61,000
Faculty: Bennett Foddy (QWOP, Getting Over It)
Fun Fact: 50 graduates have published games via NYU's Game Center Incubator program (the first of its kind).

3 DIGIPEN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Total Courses: 580
2017 Grads Hired: 61%
2017 Grads Salary: $75,904
Faculty: Claude Comair (Super Smash Bros. Brawl, Super Mario Maker)
Fun Fact: Was the first college in North America to offer a bachelor's degree dedicated to video game development.
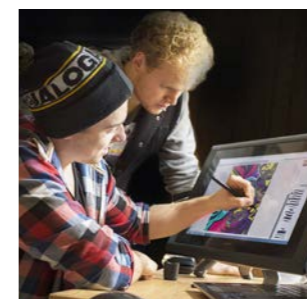
4 BECKER COLLEGE
Total Courses: 125
2017 Grads Hired: 45%
2017 Grads Salary: $30,202
Faculty: Jonathan Rudder (The Lord of the Rings Online)
Fun Fact: Commands the largest Game Design program in the U.S..

5. ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
2017 Grads Hired: 85%
2017 Grads Salary: $67,500

6. UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
Faculty Has Studio Experience: 84%
Alumni: Nolan Bushnell (founder of Atari)

7. MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
2017 Grads Hired: 88%
Alumni: Steven Messinger (GTA 5)

8. HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE
Faculty: Ira Fay (The Sims 2)
Fun Fact: First offered Game Design courses in 1980.

9. WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
2017 Grads Salary: $71,644
Faculty: Keith Zizza (BioShock Infinite)

10. LASALLE COLLEGE VANCOUVER
2017 Grads Hired: 86%
Alumni: Greg Findlay (Tomb Raider, Rise of the Tomb Raider)

11. DREXEL UNIVERSITY
Faculty: Tony Rowe (Star Wars: The Force Unleashed)
Alumni: Seth Kendall (League of Legends)

12. CHAMPLAIN COLLEGE
2017 Grads Hired: 86%
Faculty: Nathan Walpole (Halo 2-4, Elder Scrolls Online)

13. COGSWELL COLLEGE
Faculty Has Studio Experience: 95%
Faculty: Stone Librande (Diablo 3, SimCity)

14. VANCOUVER FILM SCHOOL
Total Courses: 100
2017 Grads Hired: 70%

15. BRADLEY UNIVERSITY
Alumni: Emily Berger (God of War)
Fun Fact: Holds playtest sessions for student games at local public schools.

16. MIAMI UNIVERSITY
Alumni: Chris Craney (Halo 2-3)
Fun Fact: Offers top students trips to Game Developers Conference.

17. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ
Total Courses: 215
2017 Grads Salary: $60,000

18. FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY
2017 Grads Hired: 70%
Fun Fact: Students create fairytale VR experiences for young hospital-bound patients.

19. ABERTAY UNIVERSITY
Alumni: David Jones (GTA, Lemmings)
Fun Fact: The oldest games program in Europe.

20. LAGUNA COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
Alumni: Ben Thompson (Hearthstone)
Faculty Has Studio Experience: 92%

21. SAVANNAH COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
Total Courses: 184
Faculty: Jack Mamais (Far Cry, Crysis)

22. SHAWNEE STATE UNIVERSITY
Faculty: Howard Dortch (Everquest)
Fun Fact: Game Design students work with engineering students on 3D printing and design.

23. NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
Total Courses: 50
Faculty Has Studio Experience: 50%

24. UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-STOUT
2017 Grads Salary: $55,000
Fun Fact: Student-made games are demoed at the Stout Game Expo.

25. THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS
Total Courses: 125
2017 Grads Salary: $62,000

HOMEWORK:
Risk of Rain 2
How to translate 2D to 3D

Risk of Rain developer Hopoo Games has been chronicling the development of Risk of Rain 2 in a dev blog. They answer technical and gameplay questions from readers, and also break down the challenges they've run into making the jump to 3D.

EXAMPLE:
Skills and abilities that were fun and exciting in 2D were suddenly useless or overpowered in 3D, especially piercing bullets and movement abilities. Hopoo didn't want Risk of Rain 2 to be a super precision-based game, and they couldn't directly translate the gameplay of the original. Before deciding to work in 3D, they had to make changes and find a new balance.

READING MATERIAL:
http://bit.ly/Risk2Tumblr.

HOMEWORK:
Play a few rounds of the original Risk of Rain and identify which abilities would work very differently in 3D, and consider how to adapt them without sacrificing what makes them unique and fun.

How to Build a Game Design Portfolio

TIPS FOR PRESENTING AND PRESERVING YOUR WORK TO IMPRESS STUDIOS AND LAND A JOB

THE PRINCETON REVIEW
TOP GAME DESIGN PROGRAMS
2018

Game design is an incredibly competitive field. Practical skills come before pedigree, and people skills aren't far behind because making a game is such a collaborative effort. That makes portfolios incredibly valuable. Your portfolio is the best place to show off your projects and demonstrate your personality. Here are some tips on building yours, straight from professors at some of the top game design schools on these lists.

Be Specific
There's no one-size-fits-all portfolio. A character or environment artist will focus on very different elements than a UI designer or an AI programmer in their portfolio. You need to research your field and determine what individual employers want to see up-front. That said, there are also some general boxes to check, and showing your work is the biggest one. On top of your own skills, this is a great opportunity to demonstrate how you work with others. Your portfolio pieces should answer the questions employers are likely to ask—questions like these:

- **What were your goals with this project and did you meet them?**

- **What problems did you encounter while working on this project and how did you solve them?**

- **What, specifically, did you contribute to this project? Provide descriptions, asset lists, scripts and other details.**

- **How long did this project take you? What was your level of involvement throughout?**

- **Who did you collaborate with on this project? How did you coordinate your efforts?**

Be Prepared
Many students struggle to put together enough work to flesh out their portfolio. But if you start collecting portfolio pieces early, you'll get in the habit of identifying good pieces and you'll never be short on samples. In fact, you'll have a hard time narrowing them down.
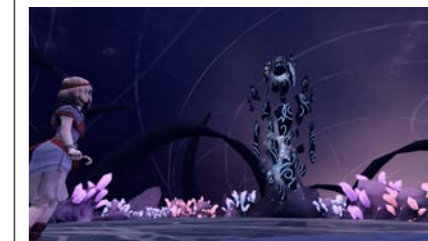
Because you don't want to include everything. In fact, it's better to show two to four superb projects rather than a dozen average ones. You should only show your best work.

If some of your best pieces are class projects, that's great. But you should aim for more. Continue working on class projects even after you submit them, and polish them until they're professional-grade. Seek out internships and game jams and other opportunities to gain experience and create portfolio pieces.

And never let your portfolio lapse. Even if you aren't actively looking for a job, you should consistently update your portfolio as you work on bigger and better projects.

Remember: collect pieces as you go and always show your best work.

THE TOP 25 BEST GAME DESIGN
GRADUATE PROGRAMS

THE PRINCETON REVIEW
TOP GAME DESIGN PROGRAMS
2018

1 SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 95%
All-Time Grads: 724
2017 Grads Shipped Game: 100%
2017 Grads Hired: 91%
2017 Grads Salary: $64,671
Fun Fact: SMU has the only Game Design graduate program with specializations for art creation, level design, production and software development.

2 NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 100%
All-Time Grads: 374
2017 Grads Shipped Game: 62%
2017 Grads Hired: 51%
2017 Grads Salary: $69,000
Fun Fact: NYU's Game Center Incubator has seen nine Steam releases, and publishing deals with Nintendo, Adult Swim, Devolver Digital and IndieFund.

3 UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 82%
All-Time Grads: 606
2017 Grads Shipped Game: 100%
2017 Grads Hired: 78%
2017 Grads Salary: $62,600
Fun Fact: UCF is bringing 10,000 students downtown to Orlando, Florida to open a new campus.

4 UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 62%
All-Time Grads: 369
2017 Grads Shipped Game: 100%
2017 Grads Hired: 81%
2017 Grads Salary: $74,000
Fun Fact: Breaking into virtual and augmented realities with a minor in Immersive Media and a lab equipped with Oculus Rift and HTC Vive dev kits.

TOP 25 BEST GAME DESIGN GRADUATE PROGRAMS (CONT)

5. UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
Faculty Has Studio Experience: 84%
2017 Grads Hired: 79%
2017 Grads Salary: $80,173

6. WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
All-Time Grads: 82
2017 Grads Shipped Game: 100%

7. ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
2017 Grads Salary: $80,000
Fun Fact: RIT has 11 student esports teams.

8. MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
Faculty Has Studio Experience: 80%
2017 Grads Hired: 73%

9. DIGIPEN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Faculty Has Studio Experience: 51%
All-Time Grads: 185

10. DREXEL UNIVERSITY
2017 Grads Shipped Game: 100%
2017 Grads Hired: 73%
Fun Fact: Established an internal game studio in 2013 which provides software access and seed funding for student-made games.

11. ABERTAY UNIVERSITY
Faculty Has Studio Experience: 46%
2017 Grads Salary: $34,000

12. AGUNA COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
All-Time Grads: 122
2017 Grads Salary: $53,000

13. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ
2017 Grads Hired: 56%
Fun Fact: Offers an intense one-year program in Games and Playable Media, which saw an 85% graduate placement rate in 2017.

14. THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS
Faculty Has Studio Experience: 41%
All-Time Grads: 510

15. SAVANNAH COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
Faculty Has Studio Experience: 72%
2017 Grads Hired: 67%

16. FULL SAIL UNIVERSITY
2017 Grads Salary: $42,000
Fun Fact: FSU's Game Design program includes an eight-month capstone course set in on-campus studios with minimum 20-hour work weeks.

17. DEPAUL UNIVERSITY
Faculty Has Studio Experience: 44%
All-Time Grads: 82

18. UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-STOUT
All-Time Grads: 3
2017 Grads Salary: $55,000

19. NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
2017 Grads Shipped Game: 50%
Fun Fact: Students attend local escape rooms and live-action role-playing events.

20. SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY
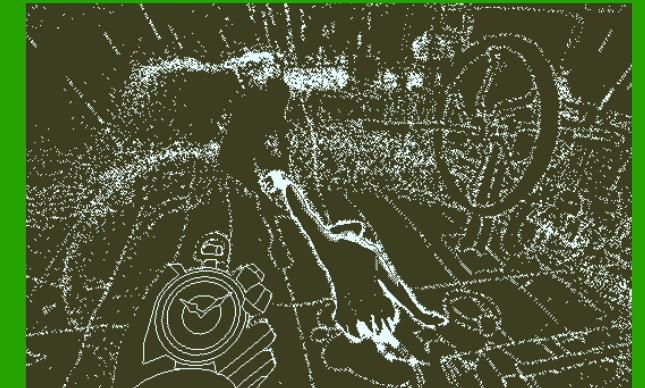**All-Time Grads:** 17
2017 Grads Shipped Game: 100%

21. MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

22. UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

23. THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY--COLUMBUS

24. UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

25. AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

HOMEWORK:
Return of the Obra Dinn
How to guide players without holding their hand

Papers, Please creator Lucas Pope maintains a dev blog on his upcoming game Return of the Obra Dinn, a mystery game about uncovering causes of death. Shortly after finishing the alpha build, he ran into huge game-breaking problems that had to be fixed before development could continue.

EXAMPLE:
Return of the Obra Dinn's alpha build gave players too much freedom and too many things to keep track of. Play testers often got lost or overwhelmed, not knowing what to do next. To keep things orderly and keep players focused, Pope added an archive called The Book which records the hints players have found and orders them on a timeline.

READING MATERIAL:
https://bit.ly/ObraDinnBlog.

HOMEWORK:
Play Return of the Obra Dinn's old demo and note when its hands-off approach feels liberating, and when it feels obtuse.