



BECOME A GAME DESIGNER TODAY

WE TAKE A LOOK AT THE BEST GAME DESIGN SCHOOLS, RANKED BY THE PRINCETON REVIEW.

It's never been easier to make your own video game. Thanks to free development tools like Unity, Unreal, GameMaker, and HTML5, you can start making your dream game without paying a cent.

But a brilliant idea can only get you so far — you're going to need some serious skills and solid experience to break through the challenges of indie game development and emerge with a working, finished product. And those aren't things you can self-teach yourself in any reasonable amount of time — you're going to need help.

That's where the schools in this article come into play. The next few pages will show you who's best suited to teach you those skills. Schools all over the world are launching Game Design programs, and The Princeton Review has been carefully monitoring and reviewing

every single one to identify the best practices and practical results.

Everything from graduate success to teaching philosophies to class structure to faculty experience has been weighed to rank these schools, so that you know which ones are worth your time. So take a look through the lists, learn a bit about the top programs, and start thinking about your future as a game designer — not just playing the best games, actually making them.

Want to know more? Check out The Princeton Review's website for more info: princetonreview.com/game-design.

The Best Game Design Undergraduate Programs

There are a lot of different ways to evaluate game design schools, so we'll look at a couple key metrics for each.



1. UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Total Courses: 215
2016 Grads Hired: 77%
2016 Grads Salary: \$63K
Faculty: Richard Lemarchand (Uncharted 1-3)

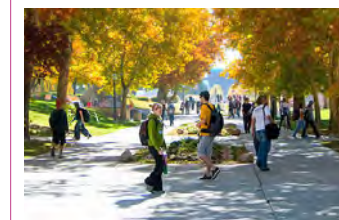
Fun Fact: USC provides direct publishing for faculty and students to commercially release their games under the USC Publishing Games label (the first of its kind).



2. ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Total Courses: 55
2016 Grads Hired: 75%
2016 Grads Salary: \$68K
Alumni: Claude Jerome (Microsoft Spark)

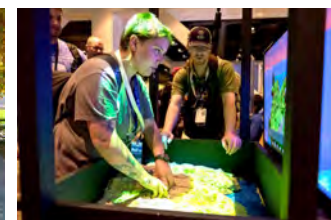
Fun Fact: RIT is building a new multi-million dollar facility for students to collaborate on creation of games, movies, music, and art — including a massive VR lab!



3. UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

Total Courses: 77
2016 Grads Hired: 40%
2016 Grads Salary: \$68K
Faculty: Joe Barns (Epic Mickey, Mortal Kombat)

Fun Fact: Has an industry-leading scanning lab that lets devs capture full 3D CGI models and textures of real people and objects.



4. DIGIPEN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Total Courses: 583
2016 Grads Hired: 52%
2016 Grads Salary: \$76K
Alumni: Kim Swift (Portal)

Fun Fact: Has arrangements with Microsoft and Nintendo to get special dev equipment in all of their labs.

TOP 50 GAME DESIGN UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS (CONT'D)

5. BECKER COLLEGE

Total Courses: 212
Alumni: Eli Whitney (Cotton gin)

6. HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE

2016 Grads Salary: \$60K
Faculty: Rob Daviau (Pandemic Legacy, Risk Legacy)

7. NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

2016 Grads Hired: 77%
Alumni: Nina Freeman (Cibele)

8. THE ART INSTITUTE OF VANCOUVER

2016 Grads Hired: 90%
Faculty: Jarett Metcalfe (Fight Night, FIFA)

9. DREXEL UNIVERSITY

2016 Grads Salary: \$58K
Alumni: Seth Kendall (Guild Wars 2)

10. MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Faculty: David Wheeler (F.E.A.R. 2, Medal of Honor)
Alumni: Geoff Johns (DC Comics)

11. VANCOUVER FILM SCHOOL

Total Courses: 540
2016 Grads Hired: 80%

12. BRADLEY UNIVERSITY

Faculty: Ethan Ham (The Sims Online)
Alumni: Karisma Williams (BioShock)

13. NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

2016 Grads Salary: \$77K
Fun Fact: First offered game design classes in 1982.

14. CHAMPLAIN COLLEGE

Faculty: Nate Walpole (Halo 2-4, Elder Scrolls Online)
Alumni: Alex May (Euforia, Cottage of Doom)

15. UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-STOUT

2016 Grads Salary: \$55K
Faculty: Joshua Seaver (GameSalad, Pixar)

16. WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

2016 Grads Hired: 83%
2016 Grads Salary: \$61K

17. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

Total Courses: 221
2016 Grads Salary: \$62K

18. DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

2016 Grads Hired: 75%
Alumni: Mark Nauta (XCOM 2)

19. ABERTAY UNIVERSITY

Total Courses: 65
Alumni: David Jones (Grand Theft Auto, Lemmings)

20. FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2016 Grads Hired: 70%
2016 Grads Salary: \$45K

21. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ

Total Courses: 207
2016 Grads Salary: \$56K

22. SHAWNEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Total Courses: 41
2016 Grads Salary: \$46K

23. COGSWELL COLLEGE

2016 Grads Salary: \$55K
Faculty: Jerome Solomon (The Godfather)

24. SAVANNAH COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

Total Courses: 177
Faculty: Jack Mamais (Far Cry, Crisis)

25. MIAMI UNIVERSITY

2016 Grads Hired: 62%
Alumni: Steve Weréb (Guitar Hero)



TOP 50 GAME DESIGN UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS (CONT.)

26. RENSSELAER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

2016 Grads Salary: \$75K
Faculty: Ben Chang (BioShock 2, Civilization V)

27. ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

2016 Grads Hired: 66%
2016 Grads Salary: \$58K

28. QUINNIPIAC UNIVERSITY

Total Courses: 29
2016 Grads Hired: 50%
Fun Fact: The new Acting and Directing for Game Design course teaches students specifically how to master cinematics and cutscenes inside games.



29. LAWRENCE TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

2016 Grads Hired: 75%
Faculty: Mark Meier (Guild Wars)

30. ACADEMY OF ART UNIVERSITY

Total Courses: 84
Alumni: Stephen Todd (Industrial Light & Magic)

31. OKLAHOMA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

2016 Grads Hired: 50%
Faculty: Jeff Price (Dead Space 2)

32. KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY

Total Courses: 15
2016 Grads Salary: \$56K

33. FULL SAIL UNIVERSITY

2016 Grads Salary: \$53K
Alumni: Elbert Perez (HTC Vive)

34. MARIST COLLEGE

Total Courses: 30
Alumni: Joey Carmello (Twitter)

35. TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY



2016 Grads Hired: 80%
2016 Grads Salary: \$70K
Faculty: Andre Thomas (DOOM, Fallout: New Vegas)

36. MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Total Courses: 71

37. RINGLING COLLEGE OF ART + DESIGN

2016 Grads Hired: 80%
2016 Grads Salary: \$60K

38. NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY

2016 Grads Salary: \$70K
Faculty: Donald Bitzer (Flatscreen TVs)

39. NEW ENGLAND INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Faculty: Jim McClure (Hydro Thunder)
Alumni: Elizabeth Bergeron (Destiny, BioShock Infinite)

40. SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY

2016 Grads Salary: \$63K
Fun Fact: All students graduate with a Computer Science degree as well.

41. UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN-DEARBORN

42. NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

43. SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY CARBONDALE

44. PURDUE UNIVERSITY

45. WESTERN UNIVERSITY

46. CORNELL UNIVERSITY

47. EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

48. CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

49. HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

50. UNIVERSITY OF TULSA



HOMEWORK: Defender's Quest

Learn how game dev bottlenecks can limit your game's success

Defender Quest's dev Lars Doucet recently published a breakdown of his theory on development bottlenecks. He discusses the different aspects, features, and technical choices that can potentially limit your game's audience and how you should prioritize them.

EXAMPLE: Being locked at 800x600 resolution and overly simple cutscene art scared away a lot of potential fans from the first version of Defender's Quest. There was no value in improving other aspects until that big bottleneck was fixed.

READING MATERIAL: bit.ly/DQBottlenecks — Lars' blog detailing the bottlenecks in Defender's Quest.

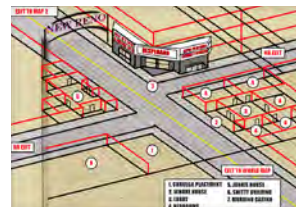
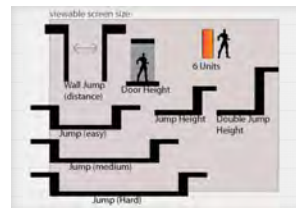
HOMEWORK: Play through the campaign of Defender's Quest and identify what features or technical choices Lars could've made that would exclude you from the potential audience.



How to Ace a Game Design Interview

THEY DON'T JUST ASK YOU WHAT YOUR FAVORITE SHOOTER IS (ALTHOUGH THEY MIGHT DO THAT TOO!).

Game design is a flexible discipline. You do a lot of different things and there isn't a universally agreed best way to do any of them. That makes interviews extremely important — to prove that you're capable and can work with the team — but also extremely tough to predict. Here are some useful tools to prepare.

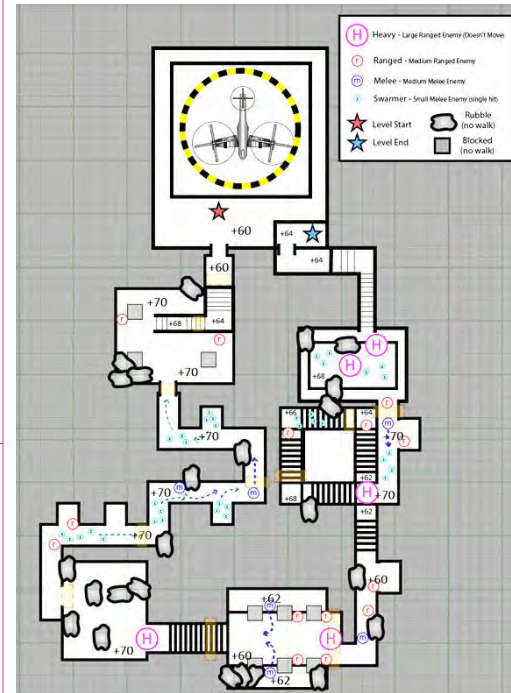


The Questions

Greg Street has been a lead designer for 19 years, manning the helm of some of PC's biggest games like Age of Empires, World of Warcraft, and League of Legends. So when he started sharing his experiences and insight on a Tumblr blog, game designers all over the world tuned in to learn.

In one particularly interesting post (bit.ly/DesignQuestions), Greg lists out all the sorts of questions he'll ask potential game designers in interviews. The whole thing's a goldmine for game designers preparing for their next interview, but here are some of the big ones that are interesting to think about even without an interview:

- Q Let's talk about a problem in a game you like. Now propose 10 ways to fix that problem. Now advocate for the best solution. Now imagine the tech director says your idea won't work. How do you pivot?**
- Q How do you react if player response to your design is really negative?**
- Q What would you do to make Dwarf Fortress more appealing? What about Dark Souls?**
- Q Why don't we see new RTS games?**
- Q How do you defuse an argument if a colleague just irrationally hates your design idea?**



The Tests

Every company has their own tests that they like potential designers to go through, based on their area of expertise. Here are just a few things you should be ready for.

Content designers will likely need to design a level and some basic story to go with it and defend those choices. They'll also probably be tested on their ability to create compelling experiences and characters, and understand the deeper forces that create them.

System designers will likely need to debate the pros and cons of different approaches to a large system like matchmaking, combat, or XP leveling. They'll also be tested on their ability to crunch numbers, create massive spreadsheets that analyze and create data, and analyze larger impacts of their choices.

Every type of designer needs to be able to collaborate with others and get everyone on board with their ideas — which is often the hardest part. So, expect to be prodded and contradicted during the interview. They're not being mean. They're trying to get a feel for how you deal with criticism and gauge your ability to express ideas and concerns in a concise and convincing manner.

Top 25 Game Design Graduate Programs



1. SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 93%
All-Time Grads: 669
2016 Grads Shipped Game: 100%
2016 Grads Hired: 87%
2016 Grads Salary: \$65K
Fun Fact: SMU has gone all-in on VR! Their new 2,000+ square foot lab lets students experiment and play with every single type of VR hardware, from Oculus Rift to Microsoft Hololens to cutting-edge eye-tracking devices



2. UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 100%
All-Time Grads: 537
2016 Grads Shipped Game: 98%
2016 Grads Hired: 95%
2016 Grads Salary: \$64K
Fun Fact: An epic studio houses many different stages that are also used for movies and commercials, which offer students paid internships.



3. UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 89%
All-Time Grads: 214
2016 Grads Shipped Game: 100%
2016 Grads Hired: 95%
2016 Grads Salary: \$90K
Fun Fact: The graduate-level experience is structured to simulate a real game studio, with regular hours and collaboration between departments.



4. ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 90%
All-Time Grads: 78
2016 Grads Shipped Game: 60%
2016 Grads Hired: 93%
2016 Grads Salary: \$88K
Fun Fact: The "Crash Test" club meets on campus every week to play-test games made by students and faculty and provide feedback.

TOP 25 GAME DESIGN GRADUATE PROGRAMS (CONT)



5. UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

All-Time Grads: 332
2016 Grads Salary: \$76K

6. NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 68%
All-Time Grads: 215

7. DIGIPEN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

2016 Grads Shipped Game: 100%
2016 Grads Salary: \$100K

8. DREXEL UNIVERSITY

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 70%
2016 Grads Shipped Game: 100%

9. ABERTAY UNIVERSITY

All-Time Grads: 400
2016 Grads Shipped Game: 85%

10. DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

2016 Grads Hired: 86%
2016 Grads Salary: \$72K
Fun Fact: Octodad: Dadliest Catch originated as a student project at DePaul, a result of their cross-disciplinary structure that put students into real dev teams with designers, artists, and programmers.



11. MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 80%
2016 Grads Shipped Game: 100%

12. WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

All-Time Grads: 25
2016 Grads Shipped Game: 83%

13. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ

2016 Grads Hired: 75%
Alumni: Axel Alonso (Marvel EIC)
Fun Fact: Santa Cruz has been making big improvements in the last year. Students employed within six weeks of graduating has doubled (now 82%), and the female representation has tripled (now 37%).

14. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

All-Time Grads: 390
2016 Grads Salary: \$62K

15. SAVANNAH COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

All-Time Grads: 241
2016 Grads Hired: 67%

16. AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 67%
2016 Grads Salary: \$85K

17. TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

All-Time Grads: 12
2016 Grads Hired: 100%

18. SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY

2016 Grads Shipped Game: 100%
2016 Grads Hired: 100%

19. OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY - COLUMBUS

All-Time Grads: 267
2016 Grads Salary: \$90K

20. UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - STOUT

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 31%
2016 Grads Salary: \$50K

21. FULL SAIL UNIVERSITY

22. MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

23. UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

24. UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

25. UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI



HOMEWORK:

Hex

Learn how to use (and cheat) randomness to ensure fun experiences.

Randomness has always been a core part of trading card games, from drawing cards to flipping coins to determine outcome of effects. But the developers at Hex are taking advantage of being a digital game to artificially manipulate the random outcomes to ensure only fun experiences are created.

EXAMPLE: The devs modified the algorithm for drawing cards into your opening hand to remove the outlier "bad luck" scenarios where you start with too many/few of necessary resource cards.

READING MATERIAL: bit.ly/HexRandom — Devs explaining the change to the opening hand card draws.

HOMEWORK: Play through some of Hex's PVE campaign and note where randomness creates moments that are fun and exciting — and also when it creates moments of frustration or disappointment.

