

The Hollywood Reporter.



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Wed, 2 Mar 2011

SAN FRANCISCO -- While the top game designers, programmers and artists gather at the world's largest Game Developers Conference at the San Francisco Moscone Convention

Center this week, many of the top minds in interactive entertainment are coming through the University of California's undergraduate and graduate video game design programs. For the second year in a row, GamePro Media and *The Princeton Review* awarded USC the two top prizes in their "[Top Schools for Video Game Design Study for 2011.](#)" The ranking, now in its second year, recognizes the top 10 undergraduate and top 10 graduate programs for video game design out of approximately 150 surveyed in North America. USC ranked highest in both categories.

The university's video game design programs are interdisciplinary, involving the Interactive Media Division of the USC School of Cinematic Arts and the GamePipe program in the Department of Computer Science at the USC Viterbi School of Engineering.

"In the short span of five years since its inception, the USC GamePipe program has become the national leader in education and professional game development," said **Dean Yannis C. Yortsos** of the USC Viterbi School. "It is a testament to the program quality, its leadership and the interdisciplinary strength at USC, which combines computer science, cinematic arts and fine arts in a unique partnership."

The survey, which included more than 50 questions, covered a wide range of topics, from academics and faculty credentials to graduates' employment and career achievements. List choices were based on criteria that broadly covered the quality of the curriculum, faculty, facilities and infrastructure. *The Princeton Review* also factored in data it collected from the schools on their scholarships, financial aid and career opportunities.

"I think it is the balance of practice and theory, entrepreneurialism and research, aesthetics and technology, individual expression and collaborative teamwork along with a vibrant community of making and playing that makes our program such a special place to study game design," said IMD associate professor and Electronic Arts Endowed Chair **Tracy Fullerton**.

"Game development requires design, artistry and engineering -- you sew all of those together and you get USC's program," said **Michael Zyda**, who heads USC's GamePipe Laboratory.

"It's the joint nature of the program between Cinematic Arts' Interactive Media Division, GamePipe and the Computer Science division at Viterbi that makes it so special." Between 20 and 40 new games come out of USC each year. Some of the most notable game titles borne on USC'S campus have included: *Darfur is Dying*, the thesis project of **Susana Ruiz** MFA '06 that's been played more than two million times since 2007; *fLOw*, a PlayStation Network arcade game published by Sony; and *Brain Tuner Lite*, developed by engineering student **Elliot Lee**.

Others graduates have gone on to create award-winning titles. *Reflection* is a game released by Konami and designed by a broad group of USC students, including computer science, communications, cinematic arts, music and business administration majors. The game won the Independent Games Festival's Next Great Mobile Game Award in 2009.

USC is also a leader in the burgeoning serious games sector, where game designers and researchers work together to use game technology to help soldiers cope with issues like post traumatic stress disorder.