

## Video games

# USC ranked No. 1 among video-game programs

## Tech schools also rate highly

By Mike Snider  
USA TODAY

Have designs on a career creating video games? Now there's a cheat sheet to help you find the best schools.

Head west, to the University of Southern California's Interactive Media Division, for the top undergraduate education in game design. That's the finding of a new listing from test-prep company The Princeton Review, known for its annual college "best" lists, including Best-Value Colleges (BestValueColleges.usatoday.com) — and, let's be honest, its best party school list as well.

Seven other top schools are sprinkled along the East and West coasts:

► **No. 2:** DigiPen Institute of

Technology, Redmond, Wash. (Graduate Kim Swift developed award-winning game *Portal*.)

► **No. 3:** Drexel University, Philadelphia. (Alums include creators of *Alien Hominid* and composer for *Myst III and IV*.)

► **No. 4:** Becker College, Worcester, Mass.

► **No. 5:** Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, N.Y. (Graduate Kathrik Bala is CEO of Vicarious Visions, maker of *Guitar Hero* games for the Wii.)

► **No. 6:** The Art Institute of Vancouver, British Columbia.

► **No. 7:** Worcester (Mass.) Polytechnic Institute. (Grad Mike Gesner is lead designer on virtual world *Second Life*.)

► **No. 8:** Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge.

"Our core mission is providing parents and students with good admission advice," says David Soto, director of content development at The Princeton Review. "We're hoping this can add legitimacy to an emerging market."



**Interactive awesomeness:** Kyla Gorman, left, and Samantha Vick use character controllers at the University of Southern California.

After The Princeton Review collaborated two years ago with game developer Ubisoft on its own *My SAT Coach* game for the Nintendo DS and subsequently

released test-prep apps for the iPhone, "we got the idea that this seemed to be an emerging field," Soto says.

In all, The Princeton Review

surveyed 500 schools before arriving at its top 50 with game design studies. (See the full list at [gamehunters.usatoday.com](http://gamehunters.usatoday.com).)

Programs were evaluated on four main criteria: academics (courses and skills fostered), faculty (especially the percentage who had worked in the industry), infrastructure (technology and game laboratories) and career (internships, job placement). "The schools that scored exceptionally well, the top eight, were really top-notch when it came to all four," he says.

*GamePro* magazine is publishing the list in its April issue, on sale next week.

"Anyone who considers themselves a hard-core gamer, pretty much their dream job is to get into the industry," says editor in chief John Davison. "We wanted to look at finding something to arm (readers) with the knowledge and information to do that."

Top school USC makes good use of its proximity to game stu-

dios located in and near Hollywood. For instance, Electronic Arts has donated \$8 million to the university's interactive entertainment program and an endowed faculty chair, currently held by Tracy Fullerton. Graduates Kellee Santiago and Jenova Chen have created games such as *flOw* and *Flower* for the PlayStation Network, and *The Misadventures of P.B. Winterbottom*, recently released on Xbox Live, was a thesis project for students Matt Korba and Paul Bellezza.

"People are beginning to understand it really is a career," says Elizabeth Daley, dean of the USC School of Cinematic Arts, which houses the Interactive Media Division.

She cautions parents who overly fret about their children's obsessions with video games. "This is a growth industry, a big growth industry," she says. "And I think we are going to see wonderful things happen that we haven't even imagined yet."