Time was to be a game designer, all you needed was a computer and a basement or garage owned by your mother. The only education you needed to be a truly great game designer was a stack of Atari 2600 games and maybe a few issues of *Popular Science* magazine.

Those days are done. If you want to be a game designer in the maturing market we have today, you need a lot more than your mom’s basement and some magazines. You need imagination, determination, and preferably a job with a major game publisher or an indie game developer. And before you can have any of those things, you just might need a formal education.

The Princeton Review serves as America’s standard for college preparation and admissions advice. Since 1981, it has been ranking colleges by programs, features, and financial aid packages as well as publishing guidebooks to college admissions. This year, they’ve surveyed 50 different game design studies programs in the U.S. and Canada and have come up with the best of the best for a degree in video games.

The eight schools on this list were selected by The Princeton Review as the top programs. Some offer only minor degrees or concentrations and some are undergraduate major programs. Some of them have been around since those early Atari days and a few of them only just started game design programs in the last few years. Go to any one of them, though, and you’ll be getting some of the best education out there for video game design.

**The Princeton Review surveyed 50 collegiate game design programs and picked out the eight absolute best schools you can attend.**

—AJ Glasser

**1 University of Southern California, Interactive Media Division**

Website: [http://interactive.usc.edu](http://interactive.usc.edu)
Location: Los Angeles, CA
Degrees offered: Major/Minor
Number of students enrolled: 16,283
Student/Faculty ratio: 9:1
Annual tuition: $38,570

The Interactive Media Division of USC has graduated some pretty big names in the indie gaming scene. Jenova Chen of thatgamecompany (FlOw), Matt Korba and Paul Bellazza of The Odd Gentleman (The Misadventures of P.B. Winterbottom), and Justin Hall of GameLayers (Passively Multiplayer Online Game) all came up through Division and all almost immediately made games or have game studios of their own.
Daniel Rosas dropped out of two other colleges before finding his place at DigiPen. "Randomly, I wound up taking a computer class [at school number-two] in Chicago and I really loved it," he says. "So I looked up programs and saw that DigiPen was like the best in the country.

As for the gaming connection, that clicked automatically with Rosas. He finds a little bit of gaming in everything—such as the situation with no on-campus housing: "There are student apartments across the street [from campus], so it's kind of like Frogger to get to class every day."

It's not all fun and games, though—DigiPen students are expected to complete one game each year so they graduate with four "shipped" titles to their résumé. "We don't get enough sleep here—that's just a fact."

DigiPen Institute of Technology

Website: www.digipen.edu
Location: Redmond, WA
Degrees offered: Major/Minor/Conc.
Number of students enrolled: 883
Student/Faculty ratio: 23:1
Annual tuition: $476 per credit

Founded in 1998, DigiPen is one of the oldest game design programs in the country. Recent graduate Kim Swift (class of 2005) went on to develop the award-winning game, Portal at Valve Corporation before joining Airtight Games as project lead in December 2009. Google “most influential women in the games industry,” and you’re sure to find her name on at least half a dozen lists from various publications.

Becker College, Game Design and Game Programming

Website: www.becker.edu/gamedev
Location: Worcester, MA
Degrees offered: Major/Concentration
Number of students enrolled: 103
Student/Faculty ratio: 39:1
Annual tuition: $23,725

Becker College is famous for its graduates outside the gaming community—people like Eli Whitney, the inventor of the cotton gin—but they hope to add gaming industry people to their lineup after graduating their very first class in the Game Design and Game Programming departments just last year. Already, some of their students are finding employment in the industry with studios like Blue Fang Games, which develops the award-winning Zoo Tycoon game series.

Drexel University, RePlay (Digital Media & Computer Science)

Website: www.replay.drexel.edu
Location: Philadelphia, PA
Degrees offered: Major/Minor/Conc.
Number of students enrolled: 13,139
Student/Faculty ratio: 9:1
Annual tuition: $29,800

Graduates from Drexel wind up in a variety of jobs across the games industry. You can find RePlay alumni in everything from animation to community management. Even before the gaming program was formalized, Drexel graduated two people who became big names in the games industry: Tom Fulp is known for creating both the game Alien Hominid and the Flash portal/gaming hotspot, Newgrounds.com; and Jack Wall composed award-winning music for Myst III: Exile and Myst IV: Revelation.

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Games and Simulation Arts and Sciences

Website: www.gsas.rpi.edu
Location: Troy, NY
Degrees offered: Major/Minor/Conc.
Number of students enrolled: 5367
Student/Faculty ratio: 14:1
Annual tuition: $38,100

Rensselaer’s graduate pool includes a lot of chief executive officers: Kathrik Bala is founder and CEO of Vicarious Visions, which developed several Guitar Hero Wii games among other well-known projects. His fellow RPI alumna Tobi Sauliner worked at Vicarious Visions for five years before going off to found and become CEO of 1st Playable Productions—which handles Cartoon Network’s Ben 10 and Secret Saturdays games for the Nintendo DS. More recent graduate Mike DelPrete is founder and CEO of Agora Games, an online game technology and community-building resource for many prominent games such as Guitar Hero and Call of Duty: World at War.
Stephane Cotichini left behind not one, but two successful careers to pursue his passion in game design. At 34 with a wife and a three-year-old son, he took a huge risk giving up medical benefits and a paycheck to put himself through school. But he's confident he made the right choice; he turned down a third job outside the game industry to stay in school and landed himself a position at a start-up gaming company after graduating. “The idea of going back to school was very intimidating for me,” he says. “It's only really in the last decade that they've been able to teach game design in a formalized manner. But I'm happy—I made the right decision.”

Ryan Chadwick never took a single digital art class in high school, but he had no trouble landing a gig as “the art guy” after just one year in WPI’s program. During his freshman year, he met WPI alum Ichiro Lambe and scored an internship at Dejobaan Games working on AaaaaAAaaaAAAaaAAAAA!!!—A Reckless Disregard for Gravity, an IGF Award nominee (see “Independent’s Day,” page 38). His internship ended in summer 2009, but Dejobaan still keeps Chadwick employed part-time. “WPI is very proactive with helping students find jobs,” Chadwick says. “It’s all about refining your painting and spending as long as it takes to make a good product.”

The Art Institute of Vancouver, Game Art & Design/Visual & Games Programming

Website: www.artinstitutes.edu
Location: Vancouver, BC (Canada)
Degrees offered: Concentration
Number of students enrolled: 1530
Student/Faculty ratio: N/A
Annual tuition (GAD): $45,465 (international); $39,375 (domestic)
Annual tuition (VPG): $38,970 (international); $33,750 (domestic)

Though it is an art school, the GAD and VPG programs produce graduates in all kinds of video games industry jobs besides art design and animation. There are alumni in product development, production, game design, level design, and even a film instructor across a number of well known game development studios and film programs.

Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Interactive Media and Game Development (IMGD)

Website: http://imgd.wpi.edu/
Location: Worcester, MA
Degrees offered: Major
Number of students enrolled: 3160
Student/Faculty ratio: 14:1
Annual tuition: $36,890

Pretty much right across the street from Becker College, WPI has a friendly rivalry going for it in the college town of Worcester. Becker College, however, is more of a liberal arts-based school while WPI has a technical emphasis—so it never gets too fierce. Some of its prominent alumni include Chris Dyl, chief technology officer at Turbine; Ichiro Lambe, principle designer at Dejobaan Games (whose most recent game, AaaaaAAaaaAAAAAaaAAAAAAA!!!—A Reckless Disregard for Gravity, is nominated for an Independent Games Festival Award); and Mike Gesner, lead designer on Second Life.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab

Website: http://gambit.mit.edu/
Location: Cambridge, MA
Degrees offered: None (see below)
Number of students enrolled: 4138
Student/Faculty ratio: 7:1
Annual tuition: $37,510

MIT doesn’t offer a game-specific degree; it only has degrees in disciplines like computer science and media studies. Through these programs, however, students can access the Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab to work with other schools in collaboration to create games. The other unique thing about MIT’s program is they teach students not to crunch by restricting their work on a full-time project to eight hours a day.
The Princeton Review’s Complete List of Undergraduate Game Design Programs

The following 42 schools may not have made The Princeton Review’s top eight—but they’re all institutions that at least offer courses in video game design, if not full-blown degrees. For more information on these schools and links to their admissions sites, check out “Your Guide to Game Design Programs” on GamePro.com.

Adelphi University
http://rone.adelphi.edu/~stemkoski/

Amherst College
https://www.amherst.edu/

Angelo State University
http://angelo.edu/dept/computer_science/

Arizona State University
http://engineering.asu.edu/cide/

Baker University
http://www.baker.edu/faculty/vkolesnikov/

Baylor University
http://gaming.ecs.baylor.edu/

Case Western Reserve University
http://www.case.edu/

Clarkson University
http://www.clarkson.edu/digitalarts

Dartmouth College
http://www.tiltfactor.org

Full Sail University
http://www.fullsail.edu

Georgia Southern University
http://bcook.cs.georgiasouthern.edu

Hampshire College
http://hampshire.edu/ispector

Indiana University, Bloomington
http://www.iub.edu/

Lewis University
http://cs.lewisu.edu

Lycoming College
http://www.lycoming.edu/ComputerScience/

Lynchburg College
http://cs.lynhburg.edu/briggs

Marshall University
http://www.marshall.edu/isat/cit/

Miami University
http://aims.muohio.edu

North Central College
http://scc.csc.noctri.edu

Northern Michigan University
http://www.nmu.edu/admissions

Oklahoma Christian University
www.oc.edu/academics/arts_sciences/art_design/

Old Dominion University
http://www.ece.odu.edu/yshen

Pace University
http://vulcan.siena.edu/pace.edu/~skevoulis/

Polytechnic Institute of NYU, Brooklyn
http://bxmc.poly.edu/

Rice University
http://www.cs.rice.edu/jwarren

Sacred Heart University
www.sacredheart.edu/gamedesign.cfm

Stetson University
http://www.stetson.edu/academics/programs121.php

The College of New Jersey
http://www.tcnj.edu/-imm

The College of St. Scholastica
http://www.css.edu/x864.xml

The Ohio State University, Columbus
http://www.cse.ohio-state.edu/graphics

The University of Texas at Dallas
http://iaae.utdallas.edu

University of California, Riverside
http://www.ucr.edu/

University of California, Santa Cruz
http://ugrad.soe.ucsc.edu/

University of Delaware
http://www.cis.udel.edu

University of Denver
http://www.du.edu/

University of Illinois at Chicago
http://www.uic.edu/index.html/

University of Maryland, Baltimore County
http://art.umbc.edu/varts/faculty/mcdonald.php

University of New Mexico
http://agl.unm.edu/games

University of North Texas
http://www.nte.edu/ian

University of San Francisco
http://web.usfca.edu/cs/

University of Utah
http://www.eae.utah.edu

University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point
http://cnmtsrv4.uwsp.edu/