In another sign that video games are growing as an entertainment medium, the number of colleges offering degrees in video game design is on the rise.

But the school most recommended for its video game design curriculum remains the same: The University of Southern California in Los Angeles. USC has held the top spots in The Princeton Review's annual "Top Schools to Study Video Game Design" list each of its first three years now.
"USC comes out on top because of our focus on the artistry of game design," says Tracy Fullerton, chair of the Interactive Media Division at USC's School of Cinematic Arts. "Our faculty and students see beyond the trappings of technology, and we are constantly driving the form forward."

With more schools participating in the survey -- more than 100 in 2011, compared to 50 in 2010 -- The Princeton Review expanded the number of recommended schools from 30 to 50. "There certainly is an increase in visibility in game design, and schools are bringing that to the forefront and putting out students that are employable," says David Soto, director of content development at The Princeton Review, which is known for its annual college "best" lists, including Best-Value Colleges and Best Party Schools.

Top tech schools, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which landed top 10 spots on the undergraduate and graduate school lists, and Carnegie Mellon University, No. 6 on the graduate list, were among the newcomers on the lists. "Those traditional tech powerhouses are doing great things in game design," Soto says, but in previous years the schools did not participate in the survey about academics, faculty, infrastructure and career placement. "We haven’t been able to cull enough data to legitimately rank them. This year, they fully participated. It’s exciting to see these big schools on the list."

The Princeton Review’s top 10 undergraduate schools to study video game design for 2012, with honorable mentions:

1. University of Southern California (Los Angeles)
2. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Cambridge)
3. University of Utah (Salt Lake City)
4. DigiPen Institute of Technology (Redmond, Wash.)
5. The Art Institute of Vancouver (Vancouver, B.C.)
6. Rochester Institute of Technology (Rochester, N.Y.)
7. Shawnee State University (Portsmouth, Ohio)
8. Savannah College of Art and Design (Savannah, Ga.)
9. University of New Mexico (Albuquerque)
10. Becker College (Worcester, Mass.)

Honorable Mentions (in alphabetical order): Bradley University (Peoria, Ill.), Champlain College (Burlington, Vt.), Columbia College Chicago, DePaul University (Chicago, Ill.), Drexel University (Philadelphia, Pa.), Ferris State University (Grand Rapids, Mich.), Full Sail University (Winter Park, Fla.), Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta), Miami University (Oxford, Ohio), Michigan State University (East Lansing), New Jersey Institute of Technology (Newark, NJ), New York University/Polytechnic University of New York (New York, N.Y.), North Carolina State University (Raleigh), Northeastern University (Boston, Mass.), Ohio University (Athens), Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (Troy, N.Y.), University of Advancing Technology (Tempe, Ariz.), University of California, Santa Cruz, University of Maryland, Baltimore County (Baltimore), The University of Texas at Dallas (Richardson, Tex.), Vancouver Film School (Vancouver, B.C.), Worcester Polytechnic Institute (Worcester, Mass.)
This is the second year that The Princeton Review has ranked the top 10 graduate programs for video game design:

1. University of Southern California (Los Angeles, CA)
2. Rochester Institute of Technology (Rochester, NY)
3. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Cambridge, MA)
4. University of Central Florida (Orlando, FL)
5. Southern Methodist University (SMU) (Plano, TX)
6. Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh, PA)
7. Savannah College of Art and Design (Savannah, GA)
8. DigiPen Institute of Technology (Redmond, WA)
9. Univ. of California, Santa Cruz (Santa Cruz, CA)
10. Drexel University (Philadelphia, PA)

_Honorable Mentions_: DePaul University (Chicago, Ill.), Full Sail University (Winter Park, Fla.), Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta), New York University/Polytechnic University of New York (New York, N.Y.), Parsons - The New School for Design (New York, N.Y.), Sacred Heart University (Fairfield, Conn.), The University of Texas at Dallas (Richardson), University of Utah (Salt Lake City)

As students and parents evaluate schools, they should consider programs that foster learning through team-driven inter-disciplinary cooperation, says Michael Zyda, director of the GamePipe Laboratory at USC. USC's joint video game design program is run by the School of Cinematic Arts' Interactive Media Division and the Viterbi School of Engineering's computer science department and GamePipe Laboratory.

"We have programmers, game play designers, and artists and they work to collaborate to build a piece of software that entertains and delights players," Zyda says. In teams as large as 20 or more, students work together and produce products, which prepares them for the real world of game publishing, he says. "There is just no end to the demand for that type of person."

For more information about the video game design programs in The Princeton Review's lists, go to the Top Game Design Programs report.