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# FROM SCHOOL TO STUDIO

Industry and academia experts offer advice to students heading into the CG job market

By JENNY DONELAN

Just a few years ago, simply knowing how to use 3D tools could help an entry-level applicant get a foot in the door at a studio. Nowadays, most graduates with degrees in computer graphics are not only familiar with software such as Autodesk's Maya, they may have been using it before they even went to college.

"This is the first generation that has grown up with a mouse in their hand," says Barry Weiss, senior vice president of animation production and artist development at Sony Pictures Imageworks ([www.sonypictures.com/imageworks](http://www.sonypictures.com/imageworks)). "A kid coming out of college might already have had eight years of experience with Maya."

That's great news for studios doing the hiring, but it makes technical knowledge less of a differentiator for graduates seeking jobs in the CG industry. How exactly does an applicant distinguish himself or herself from the pack?

## TALENT, ATTITUDE, EXPERIENCE

When it comes to hiring recent graduates, "we've gotten back to where it's much more about your talent," says Weiss. And depending on your area of CG expertise, that

talent should include artistic skill, not just software know-how. "We look for a fundamental understanding of art and animation as the baseline in evaluating a candidate, says Steve Marrin, vice president of human resources at Midway Games ([www.midway.com](http://www.midway.com)). "In addition, we look for a good sense of timing, weight, and physics." Unfortunately, he notes, "we have been seeing many art candidates who do not have a practical understanding of traditional forms of art and animation."

Knowledge of specific software packages tend to be less important than all-around skill and a general familiarity with 3D concepts. Many studios use proprietary programs anyway, so it wouldn't be possible for a new applicant to be well versed in them. There are exceptions. When hiring people to do visual effects at Rhythm & Hues ([www.rhythm.com](http://www.rhythm.com)), says Barbara McCullough, the studio's manager of recruiting, "We tend to want people who work in [Side Effects] Houdini."

Attitude goes hand in hand with talent as a necessary ingredient in a new hire. "There are many candidates who will have the same skill set that you possess, so your



TIM MILLER WANTS PASSIONATE PEOPLE TO WORK ON BLUR'S PROJECTS, SUCH AS FABLE 2'S CINEMATICS.

attitude and passion will be a difference-maker in a company's hiring decision," says Marrin.

Tim Miller, creative director for Blur Studio ([www.blur.com](http://www.blur.com)), says he has little patience for animators who are just putting in the time: "I want to work with people who are passionate."

Part of having that good attitude is knowing how to work well with others. The student animator who creates brilliant work albeit tucked away all by himself or herself may not be terribly useful in a production setting. "You're working in a highly collaborative environment," says McCullough. "It's important that applicants be good at communicating, problem solving, following directions, and being able to say so when they don't understand something."

Real-world experience, through an internship or other program, helps foster an aptitude for collaboration; it also shows prospective employers that you know how to prioritize and multitask. Many schools offer students the chance to intern at a studio or to work in a production-like setting at the educational institution, or both.

## NETWORKING AND THE DEMO REEL

Either kind of work experience—internship or simulated setting—leads to a better understanding of the market and to contacts that may prove invaluable later on. However, students don't always understand the importance of making and maintaining contacts, according to Weiss. They need to start networking in the classroom, before they even embark on internships or jobs. The person sitting across from them in class may be a mover and shaker in the future. "Start those relationships today," says Weiss. "Managing relationships is key."

Last but not least, the demo reel remains vital when it comes to landing a job. "For any visual position, there's absolutely no point in sending a resume without a reel," says Marilyn Friedman, head of outreach for DreamWorks Animation ([www.dreamworksanimation.com](http://www.dreamworksanimation.com)). That reel, HR folks at all the major CG studios agree, should include your best work, and only your best work. The best of the best should go first, because busy studio recruiters often only have time to view the first 30 seconds or so of each reel.

## PREPARING STUDENTS FOR LAUNCH

On the other side of the equation, schools that turn out CG graduates have been working hard to make sure students are trained in ways studios want. Jeremy Mooreshead, animation department chair at Savannah College of Art and Design ([www.scad.edu](http://www.scad.edu)), agrees that the hiring and training focus has changed within the past eight years. "It strikes me how much emphasis there used to be on the software," he says. "Now the emphasis is on the work the student produces."

To that end, drawing is highly emphasized, says Mooreshead. "We start everybody off with paper and a pencil, whether they like it or not," he adds. Also stressed is what Mooreshead calls "the culture of filmmaking." Students have a chance to direct their own project. "Many of them will never get the opportunity to direct again," he says, but at SCAD, they have that opportunity.

SCAD also addresses the issue of expectations with

its students. "We try not to feed the culture of entitlement, if you will," says Mooreshead. In students' earlier years, he notes, they all want or expect to work at Pixar, for example. "But by their senior year, they find other niches they're interested in." At the same time, SCAD aims to instill a big-picture outlook that goes beyond the CG industry. "We send them out as lifelong learners," says Mooreshead, "not just cogs in a machine."

At Gnomon School of Visual Effects ([www.gnomon-school.com](http://www.gnomon-school.com)), managing expectations is also important, says Pam Hogarth, director of advancement. "All along, when students first come to Gnomon, we tell them they're probably not going to walk out the door and work for Pixar." They might get there eventually, she says, but they need to be realistic about gaining other work experience and proving themselves first.

## OVERSEAS AND OVER THE BORDER

In recent times, notes Hogarth, Gnomon has had to manage the expectations of non-US students to view the job market in different ways. With available US visas down to about one-fifth of what they were not too long ago, the likelihood of finding work in the US is low. "We tell them, 'You're going to need to look for work in London or in Auckland [New Zealand],' " she says.

There seems to be plenty of work in Vancouver, British



SCAD ANIMATION STUDENT BECKI TOWER-HALLOWAY'S "ONCE UPON A THYME."

Columbia, these days, according to Vancouver Film School's ([www.vfs.com](http://www.vfs.com)) Casey Kwan, senior instructor for 3D animation and visual effects. This is great news for VFS students, of course. "Locally, it's all on the upswing," says Kwan. "It used to be there was only Mainframe, Radical Entertainment, and EA. Now, I really couldn't name all the studios in this area."

A notable industry trend, says Mooreshead, is that of 3D work; in particular, the basic modeling of objects and so forth is moving to India and other parts of the Far East, as did 2D animation in previous years. This is another reason why it isn't enough to be someone who is just good at Maya. "Employers want to see a broadly creative person," he adds.

## WORK EXPERIENCE AS CURRICULUM

Studios like to see that students know how to operate in a production environment, so many schools provide that experience as part of the education package. At Vancouver Film School, "we try to simulate a production environment," says Kwan. "For us, the preparation is the process—getting students used to the studio environment." The school has its own version of dailies, he says, in which students receive feedback on their demo reels in much the same way they might receive feedback on their work at a real studio.

Many schools have relationships with studios that

## FIRST YEAR ON THE JOB

Chris Grim, a 2007 graduate of the Savannah School of Art and Design, has been a character modeler with Blur Studio for a year now. Although he had an internship with Gentle Giant while in school, this is his first "real job" out of college.

How does he like it? "It's one of the coolest experiences of my life," Grim says. "I went from having a lot of fun in college to this."

Grim's advice for anyone who wants to land a cool job at a major CG studio right out of college? Work. "College is the time to work," he says. "A lot of people think college is the time to play, but I worked hard." Grim and his friends were the ones putting in the late hours at the computer lab, and he thinks they have done better career-wise than many of their fellow students who worked less. As a bonus, although he puts in plenty of hours at Blur, it isn't the shock to him that it might have been had he been less disciplined in school.

Grim also advises students to find a specialty earlier rather than later. Instead of dabbling in various areas, he specialized in character modeling early on. "I think that helped me get my foot in the door," he says. ■



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# SCAD

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## STUDIO STANDPOINT: PLUSES AND MINUSES OF 'FRESH HIRES'

Most studios that hire recent graduates—and not all do—believe that youngsters bring with them some good aspects, and some bad. Obviously, recent graduates are less costly to hire than seasoned workers, but they need to be trained and will not work as efficiently as long-termers at first.

DreamWorks is one studio that consistently hires recent graduates. It has an outreach program for hiring right out of college that has been in place for five years. This program has been so successful, says Marilyn Friedman, the studio's head of outreach, that for the next hiring cycle, a larger-than-ever percentage of students will be hired.

### THE PROS OF YOUNG BLOOD:

"They've figured out what they want to do, and they want this badly," says Friedman. "Most of them come up to speed remarkably well. And the rest of the staff usually loves these brave little bursts of energy coming in."

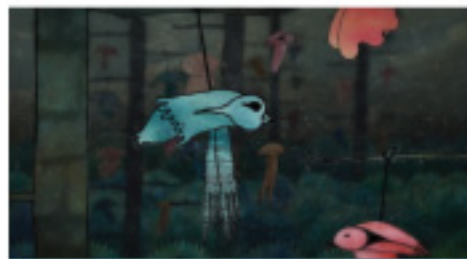
Recent graduates are "very enthusiastic and eager to learn," says Tim Miller, creative director at Blur Studio. "Every once in a while, they even come up with a new technique." Recent grads are a bit more likely to try new programs and new angles, he adds, than are more seasoned workers who might place a premium on the efficiency of the tried and true.

### THE CON SIDE:

"Their social calendars are busy," says Miller. "And there seems to be a little bit of a sense of entitlement recently, with students expecting bigger salaries instead of just being grateful for the job. He also mentions that younger workers sometimes make it clear they expect to move on quickly, perhaps to a higher-level job somewhere else. "As a person who's investing in someone, that's something for me to consider," he says. "On the other hand, it's my responsibility to create an atmosphere where they want to stay. And if not, I can't fight the inquisitiveness of youth. That isn't in my power to control."

Friedman also cites the obvious disadvantage: New graduates have never worked before. "They've certainly never worked in an environment like ours before," she says. One minus that is not the fault of the students, she notes, is managing the expectations of the people already in place. "Their inclination is to hire people who can hit the ground running."

All in all, says Friedman, there are more pros than cons when it comes to hiring recent graduates. These folks, says Miller, "are a whirlwind of unformed energy." If you can form and channel that energy, he says, the effort is well worth it. ■



I-HAN CHENG, A SCAD GRADUATE STUDENT, CREATED THIS PIECE, CALLED "HOMESICK."

allow students to do internships or otherwise gain experience. SCAD, for example, has a relationship with Electronic Arts in which students enroll in a class that involves working on actual assets for a game. There's even an EA Lab on the premises. "If the assets get used, the students get paid," says Mooreshead.

In some cases, the studios have taken steps to work more closely with a variety of schools. Sony Imageworks created the Imageworks Professional Academic Excellence program (IPAX) about five years ago to build stronger relations with schools and help develop future generations of digital talent. "There had been a gap from a curriculum standpoint between what was being taught and what we were doing," says Weiss. "We didn't want to turn this into a trade school for the animation industry, but how do we prepare students for an industry that's always changing?"

### HARD WORK AND HUMILITY

The answer to that question, from a job hunter's standpoint, is both simple and difficult. When it comes down to it, the formula for finding a job in the CG industry is the same as it is most anywhere: hard work and a dose of humility.

"A lot of great animators and modelers think it's easy to land a job in this industry," says Marrin, "as if their two- to four-year educational investment should create an overwhelming demand for them. Fresh-outs (recent grads) should check their egos at the staffing door and recognize that their first job is a continuation of their education. Approaching your initial assignments with this attitude will reap tremendous rewards that will benefit you down the road in your professional career." ■

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# ALTERNATIVE WAYS

Working professionals opt for advanced training at home, to switch career gears

By KEN MCGORRY

**M**ike Stern is a DreamWorks animator who was busy on *Bee Movie* and the new hit *Kung Fu Panda*, and is now toiling on *Monsters vs. Aliens*. DreamWorks Animation, where he started in November 2006, represents Stern's first job in character animation. So he must be fresh out of school, right?

Incorrect.

Stern had a successful computer graphics career going at global ad agency JWT in New York and subsequently at post house Brand New School and, later, at some San Francisco-based video game developers. He earned a hard-won master's degree in digital imaging and design from New York University. But Stern was not a character animator, and he eventually realized it was the character animation bug that was gnawing at him. Animation Mentor ([www.animationmentor.com](http://www.animationmentor.com)) ultimately became the bridge between his professional CG career and that bug—and, in this case, that bug took shape as Barry, Jerry Seinfeld's apian *Bee Movie* hero (see "Changing Careers Midstream," pg. 8).

## ANIMATION MENTOR

It's like a sci-fi plot, really. It is everywhere, and spreads virally. Anyone affected by it swears by it; then becomes one of them. Now they want you.

Animationmentor.com is aptly named, too. Although the company is located near where Stern had been working for a game developer, he could have logged in from Tibet, as the ".dot-com" indicates.

There's a virtual closeness to online learning that Animation Mentor's CEO Bobby Beck cites as a course of study at the school. Stern, who would be a successful DreamWorks animator one day, exhibited a "passion" for animation, even online, and yearned to both receive and give feedback, Beck says. "Feedback" may be a euphemism to some artists, but Beck believes it's essential for

growth. Beck is himself a former classroom teacher and stresses that Animation Mentor classes comprise only 10 to 15 students, and mentors focus on giving personalized, thoughtful "eCritiques" of each animator's work every week.

In addition, the students "meet" with their mentor and classmates for one to two hours each week during a live video Web session called "office hours."

"Plus we have a tech Web conference each week where students get answers to any hyper-tech-related questions," Beck says.

There's more: Campus Mentors give students additional feedback as requested; alumni tutors will return and provide a fresh perspective and instill student confidence; and, finally, graduates reconvene online to continue a feedback-sharing experience that can foster artistic and professional inspiration.

Beck does not hold back. He says animation is "the most fun job on the planet. When I get e-mails from people who have gotten their dream job, I light up with joy."



## BERKLEEMUSIC

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If you are a busy audio or music pro who wants to enhance your skills in these areas, Berkleemusic, the online extension school of the venerable Boston-based Berklee School of Music, offers an array of courses like the ones above—and you can take your courses online wherever you are.

Berklee's online courses ([www.berkleemusic.com](http://www.berkleemusic.com), click "online school") don't have many tweedy professors sit-



# TO LEARN

or just brush up on the latest techniques

ting behind oaken desks as autumnal leaves fall in the quadrangle. Instead, a lot of them are gigging musicians who, while you might complete your course work on a commuter train, may be working with you online from their own professional travels, even from an airport in Europe. The online student-teacher relationship actually can be more productive and less formal, many Berkleemusic instructors say.

Debbie Cavalier is dean of continuing education and was once a Berklee student herself. She developed the online extension school with her boss, VP Dave Kusek. Kusek is a Berkleemusic online professor specializing in the business of music. (Kusek also was a co-developer of MIDI.)

The online school offers courses for undergrad credit or multi-course "certificate" programs. "We typically serve



CAVALIER

an adult audience," Cavalier says, "age 35 through 55 and beyond. Our students are working professionals—people who have always dreamed of going to Berklee but didn't have the opportunity." Such a demographic has an ongoing passion for music and can now "be educated by actual Berklee faculty right from where they are." Online students represent more than 70 countries around the world, Cavalier says. The amazing part of this is they're meeting each other, making connections with each other around the world, and sharing music-making and collaborating, she points out. In all likelihood, their paths wouldn't otherwise have crossed.

"Our students have found opportunities with music for games, music for Web sites, and music for picture," says Cavalier. Regarding film scoring, "we wrap the Berklee production curriculum around how to use a DAW (digital audio workstation), so students really get a holistic approach," she says. "Our film-scoring course is so high level that you are required to come to the table with a functioning home studio and DAW of your choice."

Cavalier says the Critical Listening online course by Dan Thompson, author of *Understanding Audio*, is "amazing." The most popular certificate program is the 27-credit

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Located in the heart of New York City, the world's cultural and economic capital, CADA is inextricably linked to many prominent animation studios and postproduction facilities, as well as many of the region's acclaimed broadcasting and design companies.

The faculty is composed of working artists who value the freedom of ideas and the development of new talent. A mix of full-time and part-time instructors who work in the field, they bring a real-world perspective to the creative process, training students in the leading-edge concepts of computer graphics production.

CADA is proud to participate in school outreach programs with studios such as Sony Pictures Imageworks' IPAX, DreamWorks Animation, Rhythm & Hues, and Blue Sky Studios.

## CHANGING CAREERS MIDSTREAM

It's never too late to re-think and re-train. Just ask DreamWorks Animation's Mike Stern, who, after a successful career in computer graphics, went back to "school" to learn the art of character animation via Animation Mentor's training site.

One of Stern's hero shots on DreamWorks' *Bee Movie* features Barry on a tour of the bees' Honex factory. Asked how much he thinks a bee getting roughed up on the job earns, Barry, voiced by Seinfeld, delivers a classic, sarcastic "Not enough!"

"Jerry was specific about how he wanted that done. He looked into the camera and said, 'Watch this video and do exactly what I'm doing with my face in the shot.'" Stern's responsibility was to get that expression onto the character's face from video of Seinfeld's facial inflections. "I used the basics of his gestures, but I acted it all out myself, and what I gave him was a little bit of an amplified version of him on the tape. When you trace something off the tape, it softens the timing and doesn't have that 'animation feel' to it."

Working through *Bee Movie* to *Kung Fu Panda*, and then *Monsters vs. Aliens*, Stern found he was "moving up to more and more difficult shots as we moved along," and that's gratifying—and mercurial—in the character animation business.

In college, Stern took Syracuse University's illustration program for two years, then shifted to CG classes, taking a shine to Adobe's Director, Illustrator, and Photoshop. But young Stern already had five years of Saturday morning cartoon training through junior high and high school—not from watching TV cartoons, but rather from a class he was taking for youngsters with Hofstra University instructor and Disney veteran Al Baruch (*Lady and the Tramp*, *Peter Pan*). Baruch had his class hand-draw characters, build story, and, finally, animate cels on acetate in the classic style. Stern still maintains a relationship with him.

### ONLINE ONLY

After Syracuse University, Stern found a good job at JWT, where he worked for three years, taking 3D continuing education classes at NYU before finally deciding to go back full time for NYU's master's program.

During his last semester, Stern noticed this online school was starting called Animation Mentor, and it just focused on animation, "and for me that was perfect timing." As an online-only program, there was no classroom, but there was a group of classmates, a dedicated instructor, and a weekly assignment, which Stern

addressed using his educational version of Autodesk Maya on his Dell laptop. Stern found it liberating to go "mobile" on weekends and even moved to San Francisco.

Stern cites his Animation Mentor instructor Jason Ryan—who is now his supervisor on *Monsters*—as an expert on timing and spacing, "and taking it down to the frame." Instructor Tony Smeed of Disney made body mechanics more accessible and "always inserted entertainment into what we were doing." Doug Dooley, an animator from Pixar, offered "great techniques for making performance really entertaining." Stern's final acting class, with mentor Ethan Hurd of Sony, taught the craft of presenting multiple characters in a shot.

In San Francisco, Stern worked for two game developers—Shaba Games (Activision) and Backbone Entertainment—while continuing his online studies and working on his own short film, "Distraction," pecking away in his spare time on Maya and Adobe After Effects.

Ultimately relocated at DreamWorks in Los Angeles, Stern used rare downtime to finish "Distraction" with the help of friends. "Distraction," complete with its sound track parody of Kenny G by Ryan Shore on soprano sax, tells of an office-music dispute and a young man's hilarious solution. In fact, this short has been selected to appear in the SIGGRAPH 2008 Animation Festival (for more, visit [www.sternio.com](http://www.sternio.com)).

Stern credits Bobby Beck, Animation Mentor's CEO, and other mentors with spurring his move into character animation. "As soon as I met Mike online," says Beck, "I knew he had what it took to be a great animator: passion, purpose, and a willingness to seek out feedback from mentors and peers. He was always available to help others in our learning community, and giving others feedback shaped his critical eye to improve his own work."

Today, Stern himself does some mentoring for Animation Mentor. "I do the once-weekly Q&A. It's fun to be on the other side of learning," he adds. ■



Music Business and Technology program.

Online courses are mostly conducted through discussion boards and include listening to one another's projects and collaborating. Once a week the teacher schedules a class meeting in a chat room. "We are unveiling a new tool that will enable the students to see the teacher and have audio as well," Cavalier says.

Students can sign on for credit-bearing, letter-grade courses, or opt for a non-credit pass/fail in the same course for a lower fee—either way, teachers give students the same attention.

## CINEVERITY

Cleverly named Cineversity is an online place to learn, not just about Maxon's Cinema 4D CG animation software, but also about how to interweave lots of new software—including many popular programs whose names begin with "A"—into the larger postproduction picture.

Even with the site's 1000-plus tutorials, a figure that is ever growing, two-year-old Cineversity ([www.cineversity.com](http://www.cineversity.com)) doesn't pretend to cover it all. "It's too vast," says Paul Babb, Maxon's ([www.maxon.net](http://www.maxon.net)) CEO and Cineversity's founder.

A bigger challenge is deciding which new tutorials would satisfy the most people. Cineversity has a place where users can ask for new tutorials and vote on suggestions, "but we have a good handle on what the majority are looking for right now," says Babb. "We're still in the early stages of creating the more project-oriented content, which is the direction we're going right now—a tutorial series on a project from beginning to end."



BABB

Cineversity is adding a robust search engine to allow users, independent instructors, and teachers to go on Cineversity and create a tutorial playlist, to be known as Collections. Collections will take two forms: reference-based and project-based. "One would be teaching a concept, like how to do particles," says Babb, "and one might be project-based, like how to build something from beginning to end—how to make a building assemble itself; how to make a broadcast logo."

Once Collections is up (and that will be soon), "each week teachers might say to the students, 'Go watch these 10 tutorials; they'll help you get into motion graphics. Do the exercises, and then we'll discuss in class.'" Users will be able to search for the type of subject (modeling and games, for example), instructor, length of tutorial, features being used, and so forth.

"We've also been testing some training online, like a WebEx thing, where you're actually watching the teacher work on his desktop," says Babb, "or the teacher takes control of your desktop." In tests, Cineversity has had up to four users log in online and work together.

Cineversity will also be offering a step-by-step series on how to create an animated short, including character animation. Around SIGGRAPH time, Babb expects to have the new site up and running, and to start signing up students for online training with live instructors who are also working professionals.

Cineversity additionally teaches users how to incorporate their Cinema 4D and BodyPaint work with other applications, such as Pixologic's Zbrush and Adobe's After Effects, Illustrator, and Flash animations.

The screenshot shows the Cineversity website interface. At the top left is the Cineversity logo with the tagline "Online Training and Education Resource". A search bar is located at the top center. On the top right, there is a "Welcome, Guest" dropdown menu with options: Register, Login, My Account, My Profile, My Lists, My Favorites, My History, My Recent, My Recent Topics, My Recent Members, My Recent Forums, My Recent Posts. Below the search bar is a navigation menu with "Home", "Select A Track", "Request A Tutorial", "Search Tutorials", "Forum", and "Check Site Links". The main content area is titled "CINEVERITY Spotlight" and features three featured tutorials: "Wednesday, April 09, 2008" (Cinema 4D, 2.5D, 3.5D, 4.5D, 5.5D, 6.5D, 7.5D, 8.5D, 9.5D, 10.5D, 11.5D, 12.5D, 13.5D, 14.5D, 15.5D, 16.5D, 17.5D, 18.5D, 19.5D, 20.5D, 21.5D, 22.5D, 23.5D, 24.5D, 25.5D, 26.5D, 27.5D, 28.5D, 29.5D, 30.5D, 31.5D, 32.5D, 33.5D, 34.5D, 35.5D, 36.5D, 37.5D, 38.5D, 39.5D, 40.5D, 41.5D, 42.5D, 43.5D, 44.5D, 45.5D, 46.5D, 47.5D, 48.5D, 49.5D, 50.5D, 51.5D, 52.5D, 53.5D, 54.5D, 55.5D, 56.5D, 57.5D, 58.5D, 59.5D, 60.5D, 61.5D, 62.5D, 63.5D, 64.5D, 65.5D, 66.5D, 67.5D, 68.5D, 69.5D, 70.5D, 71.5D, 72.5D, 73.5D, 74.5D, 75.5D, 76.5D, 77.5D, 78.5D, 79.5D, 80.5D, 81.5D, 82.5D, 83.5D, 84.5D, 85.5D, 86.5D, 87.5D, 88.5D, 89.5D, 90.5D, 91.5D, 92.5D, 93.5D, 94.5D, 95.5D, 96.5D, 97.5D, 98.5D, 99.5D, 100.5D), "Friday, March 07, 2008" (Cinema 4D, 2.5D, 3.5D, 4.5D, 5.5D, 6.5D, 7.5D, 8.5D, 9.5D, 10.5D, 11.5D, 12.5D, 13.5D, 14.5D, 15.5D, 16.5D, 17.5D, 18.5D, 19.5D, 20.5D, 21.5D, 22.5D, 23.5D, 24.5D, 25.5D, 26.5D, 27.5D, 28.5D, 29.5D, 30.5D, 31.5D, 32.5D, 33.5D, 34.5D, 35.5D, 36.5D, 37.5D, 38.5D, 39.5D, 40.5D, 41.5D, 42.5D, 43.5D, 44.5D, 45.5D, 46.5D, 47.5D, 48.5D, 49.5D, 50.5D, 51.5D, 52.5D, 53.5D, 54.5D, 55.5D, 56.5D, 57.5D, 58.5D, 59.5D, 60.5D, 61.5D, 62.5D, 63.5D, 64.5D, 65.5D, 66.5D, 67.5D, 68.5D, 69.5D, 70.5D, 71.5D, 72.5D, 73.5D, 74.5D, 75.5D, 76.5D, 77.5D, 78.5D, 79.5D, 80.5D, 81.5D, 82.5D, 83.5D, 84.5D, 85.5D, 86.5D, 87.5D, 88.5D, 89.5D, 90.5D, 91.5D, 92.5D, 93.5D, 94.5D, 95.5D, 96.5D, 97.5D, 98.5D, 99.5D, 100.5D), and "Monday, December 10, 2007" (Cinema 4D, 2.5D, 3.5D, 4.5D, 5.5D, 6.5D, 7.5D, 8.5D, 9.5D, 10.5D, 11.5D, 12.5D, 13.5D, 14.5D, 15.5D, 16.5D, 17.5D, 18.5D, 19.5D, 20.5D, 21.5D, 22.5D, 23.5D, 24.5D, 25.5D, 26.5D, 27.5D, 28.5D, 29.5D, 30.5D, 31.5D, 32.5D, 33.5D, 34.5D, 35.5D, 36.5D, 37.5D, 38.5D, 39.5D, 40.5D, 41.5D, 42.5D, 43.5D, 44.5D, 45.5D, 46.5D, 47.5D, 48.5D, 49.5D, 50.5D, 51.5D, 52.5D, 53.5D, 54.5D, 55.5D, 56.5D, 57.5D, 58.5D, 59.5D, 60.5D, 61.5D, 62.5D, 63.5D, 64.5D, 65.5D, 66.5D, 67.5D, 68.5D, 69.5D, 70.5D, 71.5D, 72.5D, 73.5D, 74.5D, 75.5D, 76.5D, 77.5D, 78.5D, 79.5D, 80.5D, 81.5D, 82.5D, 83.5D, 84.5D, 85.5D, 86.5D, 87.5D, 88.5D, 89.5D, 90.5D, 91.5D, 92.5D, 93.5D, 94.5D, 95.5D, 96.5D, 97.5D, 98.5D, 99.5D, 100.5D). Below the spotlight is a "Online Training" section with "Educational Tracks" (General 3D - Reference, General 3D - Projects) and "Sample Tutorials" (Cinematic World Tour 1, Cinematic World Tour 2, Cinematic World Tour 3, Cinematic World Tour 4, Cinematic World Tour 5, Cinematic World Tour 6, Cinematic World Tour 7, Cinematic World Tour 8, Cinematic World Tour 9, Cinematic World Tour 10). The "New Tutorials" section lists 10 new tutorials with their titles and dates.

MAXON'S CINEVERITY IS A LEARNING DESTINATION THAT OFFERS TUTORIALS AND OTHER INFORMATION.

Users learn how to exchange assets or incorporate Cinema 4D into Autodesk's Maya or Max, or Softimage's XSI workflows, and how to use BodyPaint with those apps. Babb points out that a recent survey shows 40 percent of responding After Effects users employ Cinema 4D, and he cites ease of integration as a big factor as to why. Cinema 4D Version 9.5 tutorials are now free of charge (10.5 is the current version), and only about 200 of Cineversity's 1000 tutorials require a subscription fee. "My goal with Cineversity is not making money," Babb says, "it's about making people successful with the product."

## ZIO PRO

If you are cool, you need to grasp where the digital content community is going, and it's going in a bunch of directions. ZIO Pro offers to corral the new media industry for you by focusing on three critical aspects: training, trends, and networking for professionals.

ZIO Pro is a so-called premium channel of its parent site, Zoom in Online ([www.zoom-in.com](http://www.zoom-in.com)), from New York-based Magnet Media. Eight-year-old Zoom in Online is aimed at hip people who crave a close bond with today's creative culture, entertainment, and technology. The growing site offers insider video programs on new music (see Space Rehearsal), film, video, Web/interactive design, and more,

including podcasts from the Sundance Festival.

"We also have tutorials that take you deeper into those projects," says CEO Megan Cunningham, "and those are aimed at professionals who want to see, for example, How was this postproduction workflow accomplished? How was this HD project edited? How were the visual effects composited? That's what ZIO Pro is for—[it is] aimed at professionals working in the business who want to gain an edge and develop the latest skills using the latest technology.



CUNNINGHAM

It's about keeping your skills current, about keeping up to date on the newest trends in the industry, and expanding your professional network."

ZIO Pro (clickable from the parent site) offers members premium content—everything from quick tutorial tips to in-depth libraries of video-based self-paced training. New training series will be made available on ZIO Pro throughout the year, says Cunningham. "Much of it is educational and training content on all the leading applications from Adobe, Apple, Microsoft, Avid, Sony [for cameras]...any of the major tools."

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The in-depth material requires a premium membership fee of \$299, and the first thing you get is a welcome kit, including 16 popular training DVDs equaling 70 hours of relevant training in digital media (think Apple and Adobe), as well as access to updated online tutorial videos. Standard membership is free, requiring only that you fill out a survey; in return, you get access to a subset of the premium benefits. Members also receive an access card that gets them into networking events.

The third aspect ZIO Pro addresses is trends. "For trends, we're rolling out a new series this summer called TMIT: traditional media in transition," says Cunningham. "The tagline is 'from broadcast to broadband.' The whole industry is in transition. Whether you're an independent filmmaker or a television executive, you're trying to figure out what to do with this massive migration in advertising spending that's been impacted by TiVo, the Web, and mobile devices," says Cunningham. The new TMIT will look at major trends as a whole and address "what professionals can do to equip themselves in this changing landscape where content and distribution are no longer separate entities," she adds.

TMIT will be a weekly online series that captures successful case studies in film and television from the leaders at those companies, including TV networks and new media companies, both from a business angle and a technology angle.

## FOCAL PRESS

Sometimes, when you want to get ahead, it's best to sit down with a good book and educate yourself the time honored way. Focal Press has been in the business of educating professionals in our industry for 70 years. The publisher ([www.focalpress.com](http://www.focalpress.com)) has had plenty of time to hone its commitment to high-quality instructional books written by experts in the film and digital media field who handle new and converging technologies. You will find practical solutions to problems, examples you can apply to your work, and insights aimed at keeping you up to date.

Amanda Guest is Focal Press's marketing manager for film/postproduction and animation/CG, and she knows what's new and what's hot among readers keen on professional self-improvement. She says this year's hottest Focal Press titles for filmmaking include: *The Shut Up and Shoot Documentary Guide*, *The Pocket Lawyer for Filmmakers*, and *The Power Filmmaking Kit*. *Film Directing Fundamentals* was just released. Another fun title that



GUEST

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will be out this fall is *Reality Check*. Written by Michael Essany, it will teach readers how to produce reality television while avoiding common pitfalls.

Guest says, "In the academic market, there's actually a huge buzz for *The Video Production Handbook*. It's getting a lot of attention because it's got tons of colorful photos, instructor materials, and other extras, but it's only \$39.95, which is an amazing price when you consider the big competitor." (Focal Press is going after the established *Video Basics* by veteran Herbert Zettl.)

For postproduction, Guest recommends Adobe After Effects titles, such as *Creating Motion Graphics with After Effects, 4e* and *After Effects Apprentice*, both of which came out in late 2007 and are "still going strong." She also points out that Focal Press's *How to Cheat* books are quite popular. *How to Cheat in Motion* is coming out in November.

Animation and CG titles are always big, including *Animating with Blender*, *Force: Character Design from Life Drawing*, *How to Cheat in 3ds Max 2009*, and *3D Game Environments*. Focal Press has three Autodesk 3ds Max books coming out in October: *Deconstructing the Elements*, *Essential CG Lighting Techniques with 3ds Max*, and *Poly-modeling with 3ds Max*.

"Students look to us for practical, real-world tips, tricks, and tutorials," Guest says. "Anecdotally, we often hear that they'll be required to read one of our books for a course, but then they keep the book long after. We have many titles that easily make the transition from the classroom to the professional realm."

Professionals wishing to upgrade their skills also purchase Focal Press books on the latest technologies and software, and teachers and instructors use the books to enhance their course material.

Perhaps this is because Focal Press authors have industry experience. "Most of our authors are not just writing, but also out there doing," Guest says. "That's why so many of our books have such great real-world examples."

Educators play a big role as writers, too. "Many of our authors are either college professors or lecture on their area of expertise," says Guest. ■

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Ken McGarry is a consulting editor for *Post* magazine. He can be reached at [McGarry@optonline.net](mailto:McGarry@optonline.net).



FOCAL PRESS OFFERS A RANGE OF INSTRUCTIONAL BOOKS WRITTEN BY INDUSTRY EXPERTS.



Student harnesses ATI FireGL graphics  
with award-winning results

# Just add your imagination

(IMAGE COURTESY YOUNGWOONG JANG (WWW.MIRAGE2008.COM))

In the award-winning animated film *Mirage* by Youngwoong Jang, a bio-mechanical character is consumed with finding water with which to fill his glass chest in order to survive. Whereas his character is on an endless search for what he needs, Jang possessed everything necessary to bring his imaginative, artistic vision to life, including a tool set replete with powerful hardware and software.

"It has always been my obsession in life to strive for more," Jang admits. "With *Mirage*, I was able to create dramatic visual communication using the best tools the 3D industry has to offer."

Jang relied on ATI FireGL workstation graphics from AMD, in both an HP mobile workstation and a Dell Precision workstation, to produce *Mirage*, his master's thesis project while a student of New York's School of Visual Effects. The eight-minute student film boasts awe-inspiring visuals, created using Avid Softimage|XSI software for 3D work and Next Limit RealFlow for water simulation.

"The ATI FireGL card allowed me to work flawlessly in Softimage|XSI and RealFlow, enabling me to increase the level of creativity with this project," admits Jang. "The graphics processors have been certified to support most of the 3D industry's leading applications, ensuring hardware and software compatibility."

Jang selected a Hewlett-Packard mobile workstation powered by an All Mobility FireGL graphics processor from AMD as his principal modeling and animating tool. He then opted to render the breathtaking imagery on a Dell Precision powered by an ATI FireGL workstation graphics accelerator.

"The pairing of the small HP laptop and powerful ATI Mobility FireGL gave me great flexibility and offered me a comfortable and affordable working environment," Jang explains. "Managing the incredibly large datasets for the highly complex modeling, texturing, and geometry of *Mirage*, I had to totally trust that the ATI FireGL could handle the task seamlessly. I can't risk any downtime and software/card incompatibility when working on my project. The ATI FireGL card works perfectly with XSI's real-time OpenGL view port. The ATI FireGL cards surpassed my expectations in both 3D and 2D applications."

AMD's line of All FireGL workstation accelerators supports the latest OpenGL and Microsoft DirectX 10 programming interfaces; offers hardware-accelerated rendering with OpenGL Shading Language and DirectX 10 HLSL; is compatible with Microsoft Windows Vista; and delivers dual monitor support.

"ATI FireGL is hands down the better product at any price," says Jang. "In the past, other more expensive cards have cost me valuable time and money because of

compatibility problems, causing broken shading and other mishaps."

Student and digital artist Jang tapped the power and high performance of AMD's ATI FireGL professional graphics accelerators to make the imagined real. The result, an animated masterpiece called *Mirage*, continues to gain attention, accolades, and awards, not the least of which is the Gold Medal in animation at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' 34th Annual Student Academy Awards.

*Mirage*'s robo-child continually endeavors to find water and yet, in a surprise twist, is surrounded by water; what he needs is all around him. Jang, like the protagonist in his masterpiece, had everything he needed to bring his vision to life: ample talent, a great story to tell, and an arsenal of software and hardware tools that included ATI FireGL graphics accelerators.

The award-winning student film *Mirage* is a singular, shining example of what can be achieved when a student and burgeoning digital artist harnesses the power of ATI FireGL accelerators.

Today, Jang can be found working on creative projects at Blue Sky Studios. Jang continues to rely on AMD technology, and recently upgraded his personal workstation with AMD's award-winning, high-end ATI FireGL V7600 graphics accelerator.

"I am very happy that AMD continues to offer innovative and high-performance workstation graphics accelerators. The new ATI FirePro series will surely empower digital artists like me to fully apply their imaginations—just like what the ATI FireGL series has been doing," foresees Jang.

For more information about the latest ATI FireGL and new ATI FirePro workstation graphics accelerators from Advanced Micro Devices Incorporated, visit [ati.amd.com/workstation](http://ati.amd.com/workstation).

## Where to find ATI FireGL graphics:

Just as Academy Award-winning digital artist and director Youngwoong Jang harnessed the power of All FireGL accelerators from AMD, you too can access ATI FireGL technology on the latest HP and Dell workstations. Visit <http://ati.amd.com/firegl/dell> and <http://ati.amd.com/firegl/hp> for a list of workstations with ATI FireGL graphics accelerators inside.



# BRICK AND MORTAR BOARD

Today's college and grad-school grads are dynamic and multi-talented at work—something they learned at their alma maters

By KEN MCGORRY

The "finish school, then start your career" paradigm has gotten old. Today, talented artists and filmmakers are finding their dream job via circuitous routes that include internships, networking, returning to school, entering grad school, or all of the above. Here are five very different schools whose job is to put you on that career fast track.

## USC TO PIXAR

Valerie LaPointe joined Pixar Animation in early 2007. The pioneering bastion of all things 3D and CG hired the recent University of Southern California grad-school grad and former Pixar intern despite one unusual trait—LaPointe does only hand-drawn 2D animation. She went to work as a story artist on Pixar's "Presto," an ambitious short directed by Doug Sweetland that will accompany the new feature *Wall-e* into theaters.

Sadly, LaPointe's partner on "Presto," a fellow Pixar intern in 2006 named Justin Wright, 27, passed away recently from a congenital heart problem. She also got to work with veteran storyboard artist Ted Mathot.

Back in 2006, at the end of LaPointe's internship and having overcome "a huge learning curve," Pixar chose a few people for what she considered a dream job. LaPointe was one of the few they wanted—if she was available. "I was blown away!" she says of the tantalizing opportunity. But she had to return to USC to complete her graduate degree, which was funded by a government fellowship grant.

Pixar could not hold open a position for her, but luckily another opened the following year. LaPointe's strategy was

to stay in touch with her Pixar friends while making sure she completed her USC MFA degree in only one semester.

"Presto" was LaPointe's first real project at Pixar. The short's titular turn-of-the-last-century magician has the requisite magic hat and a contentious rabbit. "Our job was boarding—drawing the shots," she says, and Wright's and her work were edited into an animatic. A big rush of "Presto" creativity came early on during comic/gag brainstorming sessions with Sweetland, Wright, and story artist Mathot. The team went back to Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin films for slapstick inspiration.

Today, LaPointe still prefers hand-drawing to CG work, but she does use a Wacom Cintiq, in which the monitor is the drawing surface and artists work directly on screen.

LaPointe was chosen for USC in part because of a narrative short she made at Virginia Commonwealth University, where she majored in kinetic imaging. LaPointe was fascinated with character animation—drawn in 2D—and also loves using watercolors.



VALERIE LAPOINTE USED HER 2D ANIMATION SKILLS TO BREAK INTO PIXAR AS A STORY ARTIST ON "PRESTO."

LaPointe dug the excitement at USC grad school ([www.usc.edu](http://www.usc.edu)) in Los Angeles. Wednesday night seminar classes with industry guest speakers were particularly memorable. "The USC program encourages you to pursue whatever aspect of animation you are most interested in," she says. "They were attuned to what you wanted to do and helped you focus on that.

They want you to get to that point where you are your own filmmaker. I definitely had that feeling by the end of grad school—you make your own films every year."

LaPointe's thesis piece, "Summer Storm" (which she recently finished) is hand-drawn, with a "2D col-



lage look" and backgrounds done in Bauhaus's *Mirage* and Adobe's Photoshop. Another, "Lolly's Box," is stop motion.

LaPointe is now happily at work on 2011's *Newt*, directed by Gary Rydstrom, the Oscar-winning Skywalker Sound expert who has joined Pixar to write as well as direct. "I'm really grateful," she says, "it's awesome."

## NYU GRADUATE PROGRAM

If you're smart enough to be going to grad school for film, then you can rattle off a full name like this: The Maurice Kanbar Institute of Film & Television/Graduate Division, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. Only about 40 out of 800 applicants are admitted to this three-year program, which leads to a Master of Fine Arts degree. It also leads you, in your third year, to Tony Jannelli, head of the cinematography department. Jannelli, a veteran Hollywood DP who continues to shoot commercials, teaches two critical courses: Cinematography for Directors and Advanced Cinematography, and these rarified classes may have fewer than 10 students.

NYU's grad film school (<http://filmtv.tisch.nyu.edu/page/graduate>) teaches Super 16 and 35mm production in the early going, and the curriculum is continually updated to reflect ongoing innovations such as digital filmmaking and the DI process. Electronic cinematography is taken seriously—the school is acquiring a Red Digital Cinema 4K Red camera and has access to a Panavision Genesis kit—and HD is a big part of the program.

Third-year students create a narrative or documentary short, "and all our students have the option of shooting their projects on 16mm, 35mm, or HD," Jannelli says. "It's amazing to see how their choices are not always economically-driven, but also aesthetically-driven. Right now, about one-third of the advanced classes choose to shoot film." Still, Jannelli stresses that the program will not veer toward becoming an HD curriculum. The school is committed to keeping the shooting of celluloid film as the primary center of the program.

"The digital intermediate step has changed the way DPs work," Jannelli says. "There's more, 'I'll fix it in post.'" What can you fix? Besides rig removal, let's say you shoot a day

interior and the exposure is way too hot outside the window, and you want to see some detail out there, Jannelli suggests. It's a good bet that the desired detail outside that window can be extracted from the film frame in DI.

"Which is more time-efficient? To spend that time making things perfect on the set, or to spend that time in DI? The more educated you are about what can be done in post, the better estimation you can make," Jannelli says.

How do you demo DI in a post house? Jannelli starts with the color-correction capability students have in their



**NYU'S TONY JANNELLI (RIGHT): THE HEAD OF GRADUATE CINEMATOGRAPHY SAYS, THE MORE EDUCATION ABOUT POST, THE BETTER.**

Apple Final Cut Pro Color program. "Then I might show more advanced clips of effects work from something like *Spider-man*, which obviously went through a heavy DI process, and we talk about that," he says. The final step is indeed a class visit to a facility, and "the one that's most friendly to us at NYU is PostWorks ([www.pwny.com](http://www.pwny.com)). They do a soup-to-nuts demonstration of what can be done in these rooms," Jannelli says, crediting the shop's Joe Beirne. "They're building client relationships for the future."

NYU's Electronic Cinematography Practicum deals exclusively with newfangled digital capture on cameras such as Red and Genesis. But, Jannelli cautions, "Good storytelling and good production value trump high-end gadgetry." NYU will have a Red for the upcoming school year, but Jannelli also believes something will come along that will replace it. "One thing I know, young people adapt to new technologies without hesitation," he notes.

Upon graduation each May, the newly minted MFAs screen their films at NYU's Graduate Film Market. They also give away DVDs and scripts to drum up potential business relationships.

## CDIA/BU

Sharing responsibilities with Robin Mudge, Federico Muchnik is co-director of the digital filmmaking program at Boston University's Center for Digital Imaging Arts ([www.cdiabu.com](http://www.cdiabu.com)). Muchnik has decades of film experience, but this program is aimed at digital, and earning the Professional Digital Filmmaking Certificate (PDFC) is the students' goal.

Most students, older and younger, come from outside the profession. "We emulate the production cycle of shoot, capture, edit, export over and over, and with each cycle, we add a layer of complexity," Muchnik says. "We're a nine-month certificate program, so it's very aggressive."

The PDFC program includes 28 weekly modules covering camera, lighting, sound, and editing, and many weeks students are treated to a visiting instructor who's a specialist in one of these fields. The program's conceptual components are covered in directing and storytelling modules, and there are business basics, too. "We also have specialized editing modules like Motion Graphics," says Muchnik. The program uses Diana Weynand's *Apple Pro Training Series* books as well as Michael Wohl's *Beyond the Basics* for Final Cut training.

"We are primarily a 'doc school,'" Muchnik says, "and a corporate, educational, informational, marketing, industrial filmmaking school. We try to get people jobs, and like to turn out generalists. We try to teach client management whenever possible so that when they get out in the real world, there's not too many surprises."

Muchnik has students shooting with new Canon XH A1s—20 of them—as early as week one. They also get access to Panasonic DVX100s and Panasonic P2 HVX200s for more advanced work.

One module actually has a real-world client come in and pitch the class a corporate project. Students vote on the best script or concept, and then serve as crew, filling all the positions for the making of the short film. The finished film is screened for the client, and students get professional feedback. "Sometimes the film comes out good enough that the client picks it up for distribution," Muchnik says. Visit [www.enterprisemediacom](http://www.enterprisemediacom) and search for "Change Can Be Good Starring the Stapler Guy,"

to see a funny short film from CDIA that's used professionally as a corporate meeting-opener.

During the last third of the program, Muchnik gets the class into fiction, and they get one month to develop, shoot, and edit a thesis film.

Finally, the class participates in the Practicum. Devised by founder Bob Daniels to connect students with meaningful projects that can have a positive impact on society, Muchnik says this is the most important work CDIA students create. The school sought out organizations in need of awareness- and fund-raising videos, and today you can go to [www.homesforourtroops.org](http://www.homesforourtroops.org) and see some videos produced by Muchnik's students.

The site aids returning injured Iraqi war veterans and fits right into Bob Daniels's concept of "media with meaning."

"We're a Mac house," says Muchnik, "all the students work with Final Cut Studio." However, CDIA offers a third semester, called the Advanced Post Curriculum, the first six weeks of which are all about Avid. The second six weeks teach Avid with Adobe Photoshop and After Effects, and "round-tripping" into and out of Digidesign Pro Tools.

Editing becomes storytelling, Muchnik says, when "shot A plus shot B equals idea C."

## FULL SAIL UNIVERSITY

Mike Retherford is department chair for postproduction in the film department at Full Sail University in Winter Park, Florida. He's been at Full Sail for 12 years and became department chair a year ago. Consider his five years of prior experience at ESPN, and you realize he takes editing seriously. And so does the education community



FULL SAIL OFFERS EXPERIENCE USING STATE-OF-THE-ART EQUIPMENT.

at large—Full Sail ([www.fullsail.edu](http://www.fullsail.edu)) recently received full accreditation on the state and national level as a university offering associate, bachelor, and master degrees in such areas as film, computer animation, game development, recording arts, and much more.

Full Sail students learn postproduction by first shooting a digital cinematography project in high-def 720; they then shoot a 16mm project, and culminate with one on 35mm. Most shorts are 12 to 15 minutes long.

The 16mm and 35mm are transferred to Digital Betacam at Continental in Orlando, Florida, and that tape is digitized into Full Sail's 32TB Avid Unity Isis shared storage, which allows the students to sit at any machine in any room and access their projects.

Retherford's students use Avid Media Composer software to work on their 16mm shorts, and later Avid Adrenaline, with its hardware break-out box, for their 35mm films. Full Sail first installed the Unity sometime around 2000.

In a given program, Retherford can oversee between 40 and 120 students shooting their 16mm film and editing on the Avid Media Composer, with two students paired on each computer. Those two students create their own cut. "If I have 120 students," Retherford says, "I've got 60 different cuts of the same movie." The group gets two

months to complete this project, while the 35mm project warrants a three-month schedule. "It's a little rough when we have to grade them, of course," says Retherford, who works with his associate course director, Jeff Planck, on grading.

Retherford is also course director of advanced postproduction, covering the 35mm post done on Adrenaline, which occurs as the last class in the curriculum. Full Sail's bachelor's program spans 21 months, and Retherford's advanced postproduction is students' final class.

But it's not all Avid. Retherford was instrumental in bringing Final Cut to student work. "When everybody signs up for the film bachelor's program, they get a MacBook Pro with Final Cut," Retherford says. Students use Final Cut Pro in the field and when off-lining editing ideas at home. Retherford is also in charge of Introduction to Editing, a one-month course teaching students Final Cut Pro.

Full Sail students are now also availing themselves of a low-cost educational version of Avid Media Composer, which they receive for a discounted rate in the campus bookstore.

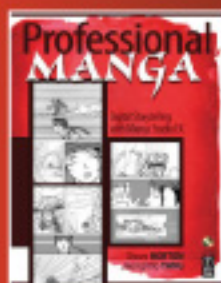
In addition to editing technique, instructors look for script and scene continuity, story, audio, sound effects, music mixing, and graphics—all the Adobe products are



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THE FULL SAIL DUB STAGE HOSTS AN SSL CONSOLE.

loaded onto Full Sail's Avids.

The best student films are chosen for Grad Fest and shown before the class (and teachers, parents, and friends) in a big Winter Park movie theater on Digi Beta. (The school brings in the Sony deck.) A Grad Fest choice will get treated to a mix on the Full Sail dub stage with an SSL console linked to an Avid and with dedicated audio talent at the controls.

Retherford sees a lot of recent grads going to TV stations and TV news as editors and assistant editors. Grads also find lots of work in film, and the local producers of *Larry the Cable Guy* films like to pick up on recently graduated Full Sail talent.

### 3D TRAINING INSTITUTE

New York-based 3D Training Institute (3DTi) has to like a high-profile graduate like Kern Darrabie, what with his position at the Comcast Network's CN8 as senior graphic designer/ animator.

Darrabie was looking to make a move from his freelance Adobe After Effects work, and attending 3DTi turned out to be the key to building a career as an Autodesk 3ds Max and Maya, and Maxon Cinema 4D, expert. Since his arrival two years ago at CN8 ([www.cn8.tv](http://www.cn8.tv)), which serves its nine million cable viewers from Maine to Washington, DC with regional and local news and sports coverage, Darrabie has helped re-brand the network with abstract, layered 3D work. Furthermore, he has redesigned on-air graphics packages for CN8's sports programming, and

has customized titles for many sporting events, including *College Football*, *Primetime Boxing*, *Varsity GameNight*, *Varsity GameDay*, and more. Complex sports projects involve a lot more 3D and a lot more motion graphics work, notes Darrabie.

"It's the network's feeling to go a lot bigger with the design," Darrabie says, "almost pushing it to an ESPN level." Recently, Darrabie and crew were gearing up for the coming college and high school football season—an enormous task given the number of local teams that must be customized, as well as viewers' intense interest. "Over the last couple of years, we've compiled and re-created all their logos in 3D and given them that big, shiny glint across the top," he adds.

Aside from sports, Darrabie and the team readied a political package fairly early, and he expects to revisit it



KERN DARRABIE: WITH EXPERT TRAINING AT 3DTI IN NEW YORK, HE BECAME A SENIOR GRAPHIC DESIGNER/ANIMATOR AT COMCAST'S CN8.

soon. One, "America's Next President," is a deft mix of 2D motion graphics and 3D. "Sometimes," Darrabie says, "if you can just dial it back a bit and mix everything in, it feels great. You don't need massive amounts of lens flares and crazy camera angles." Darrabie worked in Cinema 4D to easily build dramatic, white 3D pillars that rotate seamlessly into a 2D After Effects background.

Proficient in Cinema 4D, 3ds Max, and Maya, Darrabie learned to bounce between the Mac and PC worlds. The former student credits 3DTi ([www.3Dtraining.com](http://www.3Dtraining.com)) and founder Bobby Roy with providing the experience and mentoring he needed about four years ago when he was a freelancing After Effects artist. Darrabie has recently returned to 3DTi and spoken to students there, emphasizing that they should give themselves a complementary background in After Effects and compositing, as well as 3D programs.

Despite his solid grasp of 3ds Max, when Darrabie first enrolled in 3DTi's three-month in-class course, he found the instructors' depth of knowledge humbling, saying, "We're going to show you from scratch everything you



SENIOR GRAPHIC DESIGNER/ANIMATOR KERN DARRABIE WORKED ON A NUMBER OF INTERESTING PROJECTS WHILE AT CN8.

need to know about the program.' It was like boot camp for 3D, and it was great."

Classes would last about six hours. Darrabie appreciated that: "When they talk to you, they tell you to do this and this, and then ask, 'Can anyone tell me why?' You have to involve yourself so you're not just listening." Darrabie believes he got more than he paid for. "After a session's done, the instructors stick around and give you the help you need," he says, and that includes job searches. A three-month course started to stretch into a year well spent: "After awhile [Roy] felt that I was ready to become an instructor and teach some of the courses myself." ■

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# Build a career in 3D and VFX

**Vancouver Film School** delivers a lasting education in a studio environment

The film industry is booming in Vancouver, increasingly referred to as Hollywood North. It is the third largest film-production center in North America, employs roughly 50,000 people, and contributes more than \$1 billion a year to British Columbia's economy.

Walking into Vancouver Film School's 3D Animation & Visual Effects program, you would swear you were in one of the city's many successful studios. And, in a way, you are. The halls, meeting rooms, and labs are buzzing with creativity and productivity, as students and faculty—comprising future, former, and current industry professionals—push the envelope and further the art of 3D animation and visual effects.

At Vancouver Film School (VFS), the 3D Animation & Visual Effects program intentionally emulates a production workflow. "We think of this place as a studio," explains Casey Kwan, professor of Concept Development/Creative Development. "The more we can behave that way and the more it simulates that environment, the more value it holds," not just for the students, but for their future employers and peers.

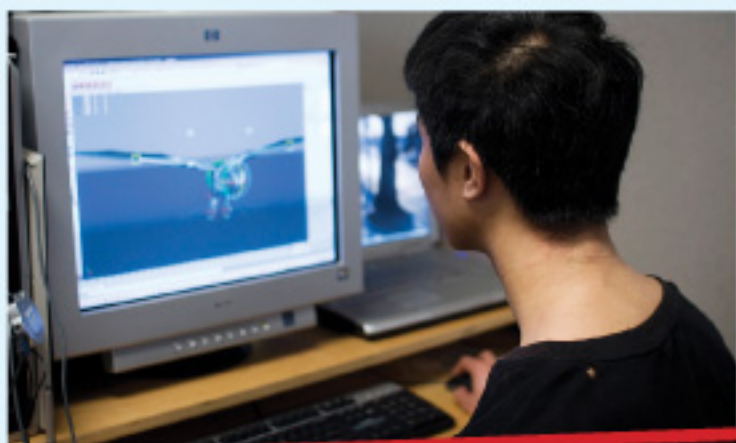
VFS instructors endeavor to mold "creative-thinking artists" who know how to function in production environments, work in a team, fall into virtually any workflow, and anticipate and solve problems in a production. To do so, they expose students to the reality of the workplace, the industry, and the workflow.

VFS's 3D Animation & Visual Effects program teaches students about, and involves them in,

specialist, what happens when someone writes the plug-in that makes you redundant? Be a generalist who can see his way out of that situation."

At the same time, animation and visual effects production is rarely a solo sport. The VFS faculty drives home the importance of working effectively in a team. "You're missing out if you are working in a vacuum," Bafia notes. VFS instructors caution students against narrowing down career aspirations too much. They teach specific tools, technologies, niches, and procedures, but they also put it all in perspective. "Education needs a context. You pick up lots of things at school, but it's about pulling it all together."

3D Animation & Visual Effects students start with a pencil, solving problems in 2D before moving into 3D space. 3D animation



every process from pre-production to postproduction. Larry Bafia, head of Animation & Visual Effects at VFS and a former commercial animation director and sequence lead animator at PDI/DreamWorks, considers it important to have an appreciation of both the project and its production pipeline in their entirety.

In the intensive one-year 3D Animation & Visual Effects program at VFS, students produce a solo project in which they wear all the hats. "At the end, we explain, 'Every single thing you did for that project is an individual career. Which appeals to you? Which did you enjoy the most?' By starting out as a generalist, you are going to find your specialty and understand how what you do contributes to the whole," Bafia says.

"This room is full of chameleons," Bafia proclaims, casting an eye across a sea of people working and collaborating in the lab. "None of them are doing now what they started with; they may do certain things better than others, but they can do it all. If you go in as a

VFS students create impressive work, such as (left to right): "Modeling Reel," Julianna Kolakis; "Bujl," Francisco Moncayo; "Animation Imagination," Zheng Tang; "No Quarter," Michael Trent; and "Iepe," Jonata Alves.

students then take classical animation classes and get hands-on with sculpting, before moving to the latest digital tools.

"The minute you walk in this place, you are creating your portfolio—it's all valid work," Bafia explains. "Studios appreciate that you can tell your story with stick figures and use a storyboard, and students need all of it—not just the finished work, but the walk cycles, sack tests, lip-sync exercises, etc.—in their portfolio. Graduates are now thankful for that foundation.

"It's important to know what your prize is...what your career path could be," suggests Bafia. "The more students can step out of school knowing their career path, how to communicate effectively, and how to present their work—man, they are on their way to a great career."

**To begin your career in 3D animation and visual effects, visit Vancouver Film School online at [www.vfs.com](http://www.vfs.com).**

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### The Programs

Animation & Visual Effects programs at Vancouver Film School focus on telling a great story through movement. Choose your discipline: **3D Animation & Visual Effects**, **Classical Animation** or **Digital Character Animation**

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The Animation & Visual Effects programs at VFS are led by industry veteran Larry Bafia, who was Animation Supervisor at PDI/Dreamworks and worked on hits like *Antz* and *Mission Impossible II*.

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Under the guidance of industry pioneers, you will work and learn in a studio setting, and create a demo reel or film of your own. When you graduate, you're ready to work in a production team.

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VFS student work by Zack Matthew



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