

MORE THAN

Fun & Games





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German students study state-of-the art computer gaming at Sacramento State

In 2008, the interactive entertainment industry generated worldwide revenues of \$40 billion surpassing box-office movies and music combined as the leading source of entertainment. Around the world, the computer and video game market is in hyperspace.

In Germany, over 21 million gamers and 62 million Internet users make that country the largest and most attractive gaming market in all of Europe. In fact, industry professionals are in such demand, German students travel overseas for intensive training in American gaming expertise.

In April 2010, 24 students from Wilhelm Buchner Hochschule (WBH), a private university in Darmstadt, Germany, converged on the Sacramento State campus to expand their opportunities in this dynamic field through a customized computer gaming course designed by Sac State's College of Continuing Education (CCE).

Uniquely Demanding Curriculum

The gaming course concept launched in late 2009 when WBH administrators approached CCE Dean Alice Tom in search of an advanced course in state-of-the-art computer gaming design.

In response, CCE compiled an intense three-week course with curriculum and activities uniquely tailored to meet the German students' needs.

Despite the topic, the 120-hour course wasn't all fun and games. Compacted into 40-hour weeks, the course featured 33 hours of computer gaming instruction on multiple computer subsets such as trendy 3-D modeling with hands-on experience and in-depth team presentations.

Jenni Murphy, CCE's senior director for strategic communications and emerging markets, helped design the course's non-traditional format. "We wanted this to be a seminar style course during which students would hear from a series of industry experts with long histories in the field," she explains. "It was important to make sure that what they learned was applicable, not just theory."

To meet those goals, CCE lined up a series of industry experts, including iconic gaming expert Rich Adam, CEO of Mine Shaft Entertainment, who shared the history of computer games and an overview of game design. "Rich's career has pretty much spanned the entire life of game design," explains Murphy. "He started with Atari and Pong in the 1970's, and now he's doing complex iPhone apps."

Other experts included Todd Wahoske, an environmental artist who worked on the Tony Hawk skateboarding and Guitar Hero 3 franchises, and Barrett Fox of San Francisco State University, who both emphasized the importance of visual design.

The dynamic course's main instructor was JD Corr, a Sacramento State graduate and up-and-coming interactive artist and Flash developer, who guided the German students through programming using ActionScript 3.0.

Beyond the Classroom Learning

The course stretched students beyond the classroom walls as well. Margaret Hwang, marketing coordinator with CCE, handled the complex logistics associated with course implementation both on and off campus.

Hwang says one of the highlights was a daytrip to Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, where the German students attended a lecture