Imparting Non-Technical Skills in Digital Media Students

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Abstract

Many digital media careers are within collaborative, creative industries. Although a firm grasp of computer graphics techniques and packages is important, students need to possess communication, collaboration and creative skills that are not easily imparted in a classroom setting. Frequently these "non-technical" skills make or break an individual's ability to succeed in their chosen field.

The educators participating in this session are all involved in industry outreach, program development and student interaction. They hope to be the catalysts and guides to a lively discussion of how cg programs can help their students learn these vital skills.

This forum is open to anyone involved in educating artists and technicians for careers in high-end computer graphics.

1. Purpose and Premise

This forum is meant to be an animated discussion among digital media educators on the following topics:

1. What are the non-technical skills necessary to succeed in high-end cg industries?
2. Are these skills part of your current curriculum/program?
3. How do you impart these skills to your students?
4. What are the problems you face in getting students to understand their importance?
5. What can we do to help students acquire these skills?

Because the forum leaders are all involved in industry outreach and program development, they address these topics in their departments every day. Their perspectives and experiences will be used to stimulate discussion amongst session attendees.

It is the goal of this forum to bring about discourse that includes suggestions and solutions that may improve the education we offer current and future students.

This forum is designed for any educators who are involved in teaching, program or curriculum development, and student counseling. It would be valuable to the discussion for educators who attend this forum to first attend the panel on "The Importance of Non-Technical Skills in Visual Effects Careers".

2. The Panelists

Pam Hogarth, [moderator] Director of Industry Relations at Gnomon School of Visual Effects, has been in the world of computer graphics for over 19 years. In that time she has done marketing, public and industry relations, and training for a wide range of companies and educational institutions. She has taught at The American Film Institute, Otis College of Art and Design, and Digital Media Institute (where she was Director) and has lectured on computer graphics, digital careers and visual effects at various international conferences here and abroad. Pam has twice been elected to the Board of Directors of the Visual Effects Society. She is Co-Chair of the VES Education Committee and a co-founder and steering committee member of the Alliance of Digital Effects Production Trainers (ADEPT). For the past two years she has served on the SIGGRAPH Computer Animation Festival committee. She holds a BS in Fine Art from Springfield College

and an MEd in Vocational Counseling from Kent State University.

"Because of my experience with industry outreach, production and education, I believe that I offer a unique perspective on the importance of these non-technical skills in high-end cg work. I also have lived the difficulties involved in getting students to understand that they need to know more than the computer. Possibly we can all find some solutions to these issues together."

"Sometimes I feel like putting the computer curriculum and instructors in place is the easy part. Getting our students – and instructors – to understand that there's more than computer skills necessary in being a good digital artist is so hard. How do we get them to work together? To meet deadlines? To communicate? We've had successes. I hope to shed some light on how and why."

Harry Mott, Chair of the Digital Media Department, was hired by Otis College of Design to design and develop the department that has become one of the most successful in the history of the college. Starting from scratch, Harry has built a program that has garnered numerous awards, including multiple BDA awards. Prior to Otis, Harry was Education Director of the Advanced Technology Department at the American Film Institute, where he built the curriculum for one of the first digital media programs at any film school in the country. He is also founding Chair for DV Expo. He has been a panel host and speaker at NAB, MacWorld and many other digital and creative conferences. He is also the proud owner of Mott 4 Productions which does motion graphics, broadcast design, web design, and general consulting.

"As educators for Visual Effects we prepare our students not only with the technical skills, but also in other very important areas: people skills and art, design and storytelling skills. We'll discuss the pros and cons of going to school, as opposed to just jumping into the workforce."

Michael Scroggins, Director, Computer Animation Labs, CalArts, School of Film/Video, is a pioneer in the field of performance animation. The utilization of realtime visual instruments in the creation of visual compositions of absolute color, shape, and texture has been at the heart of his work for over 25 years. His absolute animation works have been widely exhibited internationally including screenings at the Centre George Pompidou, Paris; Union of Filmmakers, Moscow; Seibu Ginza, Tokyo; and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles. His most recent work investigates the potential of gesture capture in creating realtime absolute animation in immersive VR.

"As an educator I work with students who develop and produce individual 3D CG animation projects. These projects may be intended to meet the requirements of an MFA thesis in the Program in Experimental Animation or the annual project requirements of the Program in Character Animation. Since these are individual artist-based and not team-based projects the need for the development of good communication skills arises in working with faculty advisors and other students in ongoing critique sessions. These skills become very valuable to those

students who enter the animation industry where collaboration and working within a hierarchical structure of creative responsibility is the dominant process of production. Students need to be prepared to take --and later to give-- direction with clear communication and understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities."