

Molding an interest in games into a career path

BY CARISA CHAPPELL

Students will be playing video games for homework as more community colleges begin to offer game development certificates and even degrees. No longer just a hobby, students interested in video games are hoping to tap into the \$11 billion game industry by learning the skills needed to be successful in video and computer-game development.

This growing industry has community colleges across the country adding new programs to their curriculum in hopes of allowing students the opportunity to pursue lucrative careers in game technology.

Farhad Javidi, a program chair in the information technology division at Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) in North Carolina, developed his college's curriculum with help from a national advisory committee of game industry professionals.

"Simulation and game technology plays a vital role in the future of industry, education and entertainment," said Javidi, whose college offers an associate degree in simulation and game development in addition to several certifications.

"The game industry is being fueled by a generation of young people who have grown up on video games. As baby boomers leave the workforce, the demographic changes dramatically, with a shift toward employees who embrace electronic games intuitively and who have never experienced the world without the Web," Javidi said.

The demand for game development programs is evident because students are eagerly signing up for the courses. For instance, the six game-related classes offered at CPCC this semester are all full.

In keeping up with the times, McHenry Community College (MCC) in Illinois recently announced that they will use

a \$15,000 MentorLinks grant from the American Association of Community Colleges and funded by the National Science Foundation to develop a digital media degree. The college plans to launch the program in the fall.

According to MCC computer instructor Meri Albright, a digital media degree fulfills a niche for those looking to

programming, marketing, art, or full-fledged animation for TV or Disney." The college will start by offering a certificate for Internet game programming. A degree program to be added later will include an animation track focusing on the basics of design and computer graphics, 2D and 3D modeling and animation.

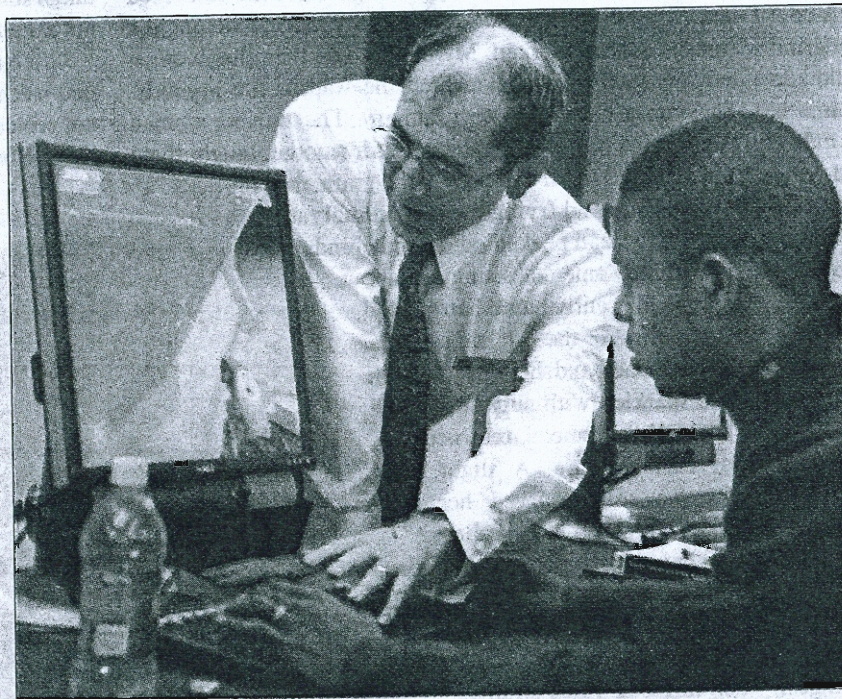
Albright said that her interest in using game technology is to teach today's computer literate video game generation of students.

"The lecture/reading format is losing kids because the entertainment industry has trained them to expect more," she said. "Video technology, taken to a new level, is getting students involved."

Other community colleges offering game programs include Edmonds Community College, (Washington) which has a computer game development certificate program that students can obtain through both on-campus and online classes. The courses help students learn to develop software for computer graphics, multimedia and games for careers in the electronic entertainment industry.

Meanwhile, Austin Community College (ACC) in Texas, which offers a certificate in video game development, is gearing up for their second annual game camp for high school and middle school students interested in the video game industry. The classes, taught by professional game developers, show students how to create games from start to finish and are a good way to expose them to possible careers in the field.

According to a 2003 game development survey, video game programmers earn between \$58,000 and \$69,000 annually, with lead programmers earning up to \$97,907. Art and animation salaries ranged from \$40,573 to \$53,636, with lead artists earning up to \$58,839.



Farhad Javidi of Central Piedmont Community College (North Carolina) instructs students in the simulation and game development program.

combine a love for programming, creativity and art.

"Today's students don't want to learn mainframe or COBOL. They want to learn the latest in today's technology," Albright said. "Video game programming can be incorporated into many other areas, such as Internet pro-