Whether you're taking your first steps or refining your skills, there's a game design program for anyone. Check out the 50 best undergraduate and 25 best graduate programs out there.

Almost anyone who has ever played a game has wondered what it would be like to make their own, but childhood dreams don’t need to stay dreams. With a lot of hard work, and some guidance, you can help create new worlds that change the way we play forever.

That’s where those awesome game design college programs come in. The Princeton Review has done all the heavy lifting of determining and ranking the best undergraduate and graduate game design programs across North America and Europe. Wondering which school has the best teachers, the most prestigious graduates, or maybe the best classrooms and resources? We’ve got you covered on all that and more.

THE BEST SCHOOLS FOR ASPIRING GAME DEVELOPERS

Almost anyone who has ever played a game has wondered what it would be like to make their own, but childhood dreams don’t need to stay dreams. With a lot of hard work, and some guidance, you can help create new worlds that change the way we play forever. First things first, though, you’ll need a good education to get there.

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THE TOP 50 BEST GAME DESIGN UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

1. UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
   Total Courses: 230
   2019 Grads Hired: 90%
   2019 Grads Salary: $85,000
   Faculty: Marianne Krawczyk (writer, God of War series), George Lucas (creator of Star Wars) and Jenova Chen (Journey director).

2. BECKER COLLEGE
   Total Courses: 132
   2019 Grads Hired: 67%
   2019 Grads Salary: $56,976
   Faculty: Jonathan Ruddick (The Last of the Rings Online).
   Fun Fact: Becker College also features an esports management program.

3. NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
   Total Courses: 539
   2020 Grads Hired: 39%
   2019 Grads Salary: $48,000
   Faculty: Dr. Stephen F. Redfern (director, GSAM).
   Fun Fact: The NYU Game Center incubator helps students turn projects into funded and published games.

4. DIGI彭 INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
   Total Courses: 409
   2020 Grads Hired: 69%
   2019 Grads Salary: $75,425
   Faculty: Claudia Comai (Ellenium Software Technology).  
   Fun Fact: Graduates include Kim Swift (Portal), Adam Brennecke (Obsidian Entertainment), Jon Schuster (EA).

5. ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
   2019 Grads Hired: 97%
   2019 Grads Salary: $64,500

6. UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
   2019 Grads Salary: $72,662
   Graduates: Doug Brouwer (CDO, Nintendo of America) and Nolan Bushnell (founder, Atari).

7. MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
   2019 Grads Salary: 65%
   Faculty: Brian Morley (director, Telltale Games and Double Fine).
   Fun Fact: Game development teams at Bradley are close to 50% male, 50% female.

8. BRADLEY UNIVERSITY
   Faculty: Mark Hamer (founder, Telltale Games and Double Fine).
   Fun Fact: Game development teams at Bradley are close to 50% male, 50% female.

9. SHANNES STATE UNIVERSITY
   2019 Grads Salary: 80%
   Faculty Who Worked at Game Company:
   - 9. SHANNES STATE UNIVERSITY
   - 10. VANCOUVER FILM SCHOOL
   - 11. DREXEL UNIVERSITY
   - 12. WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
   - 13. ABERTAY UNIVERSITY
   - 14. UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA
   - 15. HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE
   - 16. CHAMPLAIN COLLEGE
   - 17. BENSEIEN POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
   - 18. COGSWELL POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
   - 19. THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS
   - 20. BROAD UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
   - 21. HOMESTEAD UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
   - 22. LASALLE COLLEGE
   - 23. LAHEE COLLEGE

10. VANCOUVER FILM SCHOOL
    Grads: 50%
    Faculty Who Worked at Game Company:
    - 10. VANCOUVER FILM SCHOOL
    - 11. DREXEL UNIVERSITY
    - 12. WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
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    - 23. LAHEE COLLEGE
When you think about getting a career in game design, it’s easy to fall into the same old ideas: Game designer, animator, programmer, level designer. These are all great options to choose from, but it doesn’t do justice to the ridiculously wide variety of other kinds of jobs there in the game and tech industries.

Knowing there was more to explore, we spoke with faculty from some of the best game design schools out there: Vancouver Film School, the University of Utah, and more. We asked them what the most interesting but lesser-known jobs are in the industry, what you need to know to pursue them, and why they’re so important.

### GAMES USER RESEARCHER

**What it is:** You’re responsible for running all sorts of psychological tests on people playing a game, which in turn helps a studio learn how their players think, and how to better build every aspect of their game. The University of Utah even has the Games User Research Lab, where researchers use eye and face-tracking technology to record every emotional response to a game.

**Why is it important:** “Through rigorous testing through all stages of game development, we can improve the usability, accessibility, and fun of the games we make.” — Assistant Professor Ashley Brown, University of Utah.

### TECHNICAL DESIGNER

**What it is:** You’re a bridge between programming and designing. Your job is to help create a toolkit for the other developers that’s easy enough for almost anyone to use, but also flexible enough for a designer’s vision to be achieved. Simple, huh?

**What you should study:** Programming, level design, production.

### RIGGER

**What it is:** You build the skeletons and musculature of moving and living things in a game. “It’s a process that requires creativity, precision and an ability to think about all the many permutations a studio’s skeleton will have to undergo over the life of the character in game, accounting for problems that don’t even exist yet.” — Christopher Mitchell, Head of the School of Creative Technologies, Vancouver Film School.

**What you should study:** Animation, anatomy, physiology.

**Why is it important:** Besides being a very in-demand job, but like Vancouver Film School’s Christopher Mitchell says, you’re figuring out problems most other designers won’t even know to look out for. An animator’s job is practically impossible if they don’t have a reliable, versatile “actor” to bring life to, and they need someone to build them and support them.
**TOP 25 BEST GAME DESIGN GRADUATE PROGRAMS**

1. **UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA**
   - All-Time Grades: 737
   - 2019 Grads Shipped Game: 100%
   - 2019 Grads Hired: 62%
   - Fun Fact: Hosts the “Press Play Conference,” which last year focused on accessibility in gaming. Students also take improv acting classes.

2. **UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**
   - All-Time Grades: 423
   - 2019 Grads Shipped Game: 100%
   - 2019 Grads Hired: 82%
   - Fun Fact: The original student version of Outer Wilds was born from USC’s graduate program.

3. **NEW YORK UNIVERSITY**
   - All-Time Grades: 445
   - 2019 Grads Shipped Game: 74%
   - Total Courses: 416
   - Fun Fact: Students end up designing games for institutions like ESPN and The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

4. **SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY**
   - All-Time Grades: 820
   - 2019 Grads Shipped Game: 100%
   - 2019 Grads Hired: 100%
   - Fun Fact: Strong focus on serious and educational games, mobile, social media, VR/AR/Mixed Reality. Becker also offers 4+1 option to finish undegrad and grad in five years.

5. **UNIVERSITY OF UTAH**
   - All-Time Grades: 330
   - 2019 Grads Shipped Game: 44%
   - 2019 Grads Hired: 89%
   - Fun Fact: Offers wide variety of volunteer opportunities at GDC, DOTA II’s international, Vais, Microsoft, Indonesia, PAX, and even grade school game design camps.

6. **DISPEN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**
   - Studios That Have Hired Graduates: 75 (NetBoosts, Microsoft, Activision, Google, and more)
   - Fun Fact: Offers a wide variety of volunteer opportunities at GDC, DOTA II’s international, Vais, Microsoft, Indonesia, PAX, and even grad school game design camps.

7. **AUBURN UNIVERSITY**
   - All-Time Grades: 300
   - 2019 Grads Hired: 88%

8. **WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE**
   - 2019 Grads Hired: 100%
   - 2019 Grads Salary: $71,333

9. **MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY**
   - 2019 Grads Hired: 100%
   - 2019 Grads Salary: $63,000

10. **BECKER COLLEGE**
    - Faculty Who Have Worked at Game Studios: 100%
    - Fun Fact: Human-Computer Interaction Lab allows students to experiment with VR/AR/Mixed Reality.
    - Becker also offers 4+1 option to finish undergrad and grad in five years.

11. **LAGUNA COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN**
    - 2019 Grads Hired: 100%
    - Graduates: Cory Lofito (art director, Disney Animation), Marina Tan (level architect, Arkane).

12. **ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**
    - 2019 Grads Salary: $74,000
    - Fun Fact: A multimillion-dollar expansion allows for collaboration between cybernetics and game design students.

13. **THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS**
    - Fun Fact: 96% of students are women.
    - Fun Fact: Strong focus on serious and educational games, mobile, social media, VR/AR/mixed.

14. **DREXEL UNIVERSITY**
    - All-Time Grades: LLB
    - Fun Fact: Co-op program gets students to work full-time in industry for 6-8 months.

15. **AMERICAN UNIVERSITY**
    - 2019 Grads Salary: $80,000
    - Fun Fact: Strong focus on games for change, not just at game studios, but government agencies and educational institutions.

16. **UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE**
    - 2019 Grads Hired: 100%
    - Graduates: David Chircop (Cyberpunk 2077), Stylianos Averimatis (Sony, Creative Assembly).

17. **UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA - SANTA CRUZ**
    - Faculty: Robin Hunicke (Journey, What Remains of Edith Finch, Jim Whitehead (lead researcher, procedural generation).
    - Fun Fact: Top school in the world for published technical research in games.

18. **SAVANNAH COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN**
    - Faculty: Jared Mammas (Far Cry, Crysis), Michelle Mannari (Farmville, Civilization Series).
    - Graduates: Chad Ocey (3D), Incomence, Matt Ward (Cinematics Director, Bungie).

19. **BRIDDA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES**
    - Faculty: David Weisakman (X-Wing), Matta Higgs (Burnout Paradise).
    - Graduates: Alex Sherry (3D programmer, Ubisoft), Diodo Apera (engineer, Phoenix). 

20. **FULL SAIL UNIVERSITY**
    - 2019 Grads Salary: $45,000
    - Fun Fact: Full Sail degree programs are set at accelerated pace, letting you finish in less time than usual programs allow.

21. **DEPAUL UNIVERSITY**
    - 2019 Grads Salary: $57,000
    - Faculty: David Chircop (Cyberpunk 2077), Stylianos Averimatis (Sony, Creative Assembly).

22. **UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – STOUT**
    - 2019 Grads Salary: $45,000
    - Faculty: Alex Sherry (3D programmer, Ubisoft), Diodo Apera (engineer, Phoenix).

23. **BROOKLYN POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE**
    - 2019 Grads Salary: $60,000
    - Faculty: Alex Sherry (3D programmer, Ubisoft), Diodo Apera (engineer, Phoenix).

24. **UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**
    - 2019 Grads Salary: $52,000
    - Faculty: David Weisakman (X-Wing), Matta Higgs (Burnout Paradise).

25. **BOSTON UNIVERSITY**
    - 2019 Grads Salary: $55,000
    - Faculty: Alex Sherry (3D programmer, Ubisoft), Diodo Apera (engineer, Phoenix).

**EXAMPLE:** Chance Agency had the difficult task of designing a wide variety of characters who felt like real passengers going about their day, with their own interests and arcs. To achieve this colorful, diverse cast, writing lead/story editor Paula Rogers utilized a lot of the same techniques you’d see in general design projects: a thesis, mood boards, a full design brief, and a lot of personal love. With Neo Cab’s overarching theme being “stay human,” Chance Agency had to ask themselves how each specific character would interpret that line, and what drives, fears, or dialogue it might result in.

**HOMEWORK:** As a student, you’re probably pretty used to writing out a thesis or two. You probably start each game design project with an overall theme. When building your characters, think about how each of them would interpret that theme, and how every aspect of their lives might be colored by it, from clothes to body type to personality, resonating thematic vibe.

**READING MATERIAL:** blog.neocabgame.com