The best game design programs, ranked by The Princeton Review

Take your big ideas and turn them into the skills and tools necessary to make great games. There’s a school for almost anyone, and they’re eager to help you fulfill your dreams of being a game developer.

University of Southern California

Total Courses: 227
2018 Grads Hired: 80%
2018 Grads Salary: $65,000
Faculty: Mike Fischer (Square Enix America)
Fun Fact: USC Games Expo allows students and alumni to showcase their games and network with industry professionals.

New York University

Total Courses: 338
2018 Grads Hired: 35%
2018 Grads Salary: $48,000
Faculty: Bennett Foddy (QWOP, Getting Over It)
Fun Fact: The NYU Game Center Incubator program (first of its kind) has helped more than 50 graduates launch successful or award-winning games. Incubator program (first of its kind).

Michigan State University

Total Courses: 2018 Grads Hired: 90%
2018 Grads Salary: $65,000
Faculty: Dan Winters (Red Dead Redemption 2)
Fun Fact: The Inclusive Game Development Collaborative teaches about industry diversity challenges.

Rochester Institute of Technology

Total Courses: 518
2018 Grads Hired: 66%
2018 Grads Salary: $52,242
Faculty: Brian Moriarty (LucasFilm)
Fun Fact: The Game Development program (the first of its kind) has helped more than 50 graduates launch successful or award-winning games. Incubator program (first of its kind).

Drexel University

Total Courses: 391
2018 Grads Hired: 64%
2018 Grads Salary: $72,183
Faculty: Claude Comair (Ninendo)
Fun Fact: Was the first college in the U.S. to offer a bachelor’s degree dedicated to video game development.

The top 50 best game design undergraduate programs

Hampshire College

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 100%
Fun Fact: Hampshire College's Savanna Graduate Program in Game Design offers a unique approach to game design education.

Lasalle College Vancouver

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 100%
Fun Fact: LaSalle students work in Vancouver games industry than any other area school.

Abertay University

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 98%
Fun Fact: Home to the oldest games program in Europe.

Ferris State University

2018 Grads Hired: 70%
Fun Fact: Developing a 40,000 square foot building for media arts and game design and a VR/mocap lab.

Laguna College of Art and Design

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 98%
Fun Fact: One of 10 schools selected for the Game Designers Guild National Summit.

Champlain College

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 98%
Fun Fact: One of the few schools that offers a Game Design degree.

Shawnee State University

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 88%
Fun Fact: One of the few schools that offers an Associate of Applied Science in Game Design.

University of Southern Indiana

Fun Fact: One of the few schools that offers a 100% online game design degree.

University of California, Berkeley

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 70%
Fun Fact: Home to the oldest and most prestigious game design program in the U.S.

Michigan State University

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 66%
Fun Fact: Home to the oldest game design program in the U.S.

Drexel University

Faculty Has Studio Experience: 66%
Fun Fact: Home to the oldest and most prestigious game design program in the U.S.

The Princeton Review

Largest provider of college rankings and prep courses, providing students with the information they need to achieve their goals.
**TOP 50 GAME DESIGN UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS (CONT.)**

24. ABLENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
   - Emphasis On: Virtual reality and mobile
   - 2018 Grads Hired: 70%
   - 2018 Grads Salary: $60,000
   - Faculty Has Studio Experience: 80%
   - Alumni: Issa Crowe (LittleBigPlanet)

25. FAULKNER UNIVERSITY
   - Faculty Has Studio Experience: 60%
   - Alumni: Tim Schuler (Double Fine)
   - 2018 Grads Salary: $64,000

26. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ
   - Alumni: Tim Schafer (Double Fine)
   - 2018 Grads Salary: $64,000

27. SHERIDAN COLLEGE
   - Faculty Has Studio Experience: 85%
   - 2018 Grads Salary: $66,000

28. KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY
   - Faculty Has Studio Experience: 60%
   - 2018 Grads Salary: $68,000

29. NEW ENGLAND INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
   - Alumni: Adrian Shyong Ao (Respawn Software co-founder)
   - Faculty Has Studio Experience: 75%
   - 2018 Grads Salary: $53,000

30. FULL SAIL UNIVERSITY
   - Alumni: Chris Weaver (Bethesda Softworks Founder)
   - 2018 Grads Salary: $56,000

31. QUINNIPIAC UNIVERSITY
   - Alumni: Tim Schafer (Double Fine)
   - 2018 Grads Salary: $56,000

32. MARYLAND INSTITUTE COLLEGE OF ART
   - Alumni: Tim Schafer (Double Fine)
   - 2018 Grads Salary: $64,000

33. VANCOUVER FILM SCHOOL
   - Emphasis On: Entrepreneurship, or even a Minor in Immersive Media. Minor in Game Entrepreneurship, or even a Minor in themed Entertainment designed and run by a former vice president of Disney.

34. DEPAUL UNIVERSITY
   - Faculty Has Studio Experience: 42%
   - Alumni: Tim Schafer (Double Fine)
   - 2018 Grads Salary: $64,000

35. BLOOMFIELD COLLEGE
   - Faculty Has Studio Experience: 100%

36. RENSSELAER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
   - Alumni: Ben Esposito (Donut County)
   - Faculty Has Studio Experience: 42%

37. THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS
   - Total Courses: 113
   - Female Graduates: 42%

38. NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
   - Total Courses: 65
   - Female Graduates: 42%

39. MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
   - Alumni: Chris Weaver (Bethesda Softworks Founder)
   - Games Companies Visiting School: 200

40. SAVANNAH COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
   - Total Courses: 74
   - Faculty Has Studio Experience: 70%

41. TORONTO FILM SCHOOL

42. INDIANA UNIVERSITY

43. CLEVELAND INSTITUTE OF ART

44. NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

45. EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

46. MARIST COLLEGE

47. RINGLING COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

48. OKLAHOMA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

49. UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN-DEARBORN

50. CORNELL UNIVERSITY

**HOMEWORK:**

Battle Chef Brigade Combining completely different mechanics to make something unique

Rather than make a needlessly complicated and “innovative” puzzles, Trinket Studios wanted to combine separate gameplay mechanics (monster hunting, match 3 puzzles, RPG systems) into something fresh enough to feel like Iron Chef in a fantasy universe. Balancing so many ideas resulted in lots of revision, often wiping away years of work at a time.

**EXAMPLE:**

Battle Chef Brigade’s scope was revised many times, and through three whole years of development included a pantry room for grabbing ingredients, plus extra stirring mechanics. To keep things orderly, Trinket had to refocus on the game as a whole versus constantly overworking individual sections. This meant cutting the fat and adding something unique over more of the game.

**READING MATERIAL:**


**HOMEWORK:**

Play Battle Chef Brigade and note how it blends mechanics that typically aren’t in the same game, and how it toes the line of “feature creep.” How would you mix seemingly incompatible mechanics to evoke something exciting while still focusing on the whole experience?

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**Co-op College: How schools are preparing students to make games as a team**

If you want to make it as a game developer, odds are you’ll probably have to learn to work well with your peers. It can be daunting walking into a team project having only worked on solo projects, or just not knowing your place. We talked to some of the top game design colleges to see what they’re doing to make sure students are ready for challenges of their own.

Long-Term Lessons

“Thinking about the design and production becomes particularly important,” says NYU Professor Eric Zimmerman. “Defining clear roles for everyone on the team, establishing a common vision and set of design principles, and agreeing on a shared set of values and work practices should be part of every team based project.”

Zimmerman found that the act of designing is essentially figuring out how to solve a problem, such as which features make sense in your game, or how to most effectively tell your story. At the NYU Game Center, students work together to design games both digital and physical, sometimes for up to a full year, learning milestone-based development strategies that major studios often rely on.

Me, Myself, and Myers-Briggs

Turns out those personality type tests are good for something! Southern Methodist University uses Myers-Briggs and Bartle Tests to give each student a “game type” descriptor. Then they use those to help students help themselves figure out who they’d best mesh with, or who they might need to fill a gap in their development plan. Students learn values like dependability, structure, psychological safety, accountability, and more.

Cross-Campus Co-op

The USC student body is, to put it lightly, quite big. That means game design students are liable to run into tons of similarly artistic and talented filmmakers, audio designers, and even legal professionals. USC capitalized on this wealth by creating tracks that could both push students to collaborate with others outside their school building and give them a leg up. These include a Minor in Immersive Media, Minor in Game Entrepreneurship, or even a Minor in Themed Entertainment designed and run by a former vice president of Disney.
THE TOP 25 BEST GAME DESIGN GRADUATE PROGRAMS

1. NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
   Faculty Has Studio Experience: 100%
   All-Time Grads: 414
   2018 Grads Shipped Game: 88%
   2018 Grads Hired: 76%
   2018 Grads Salary: $65,000
   Fun Fact: Faculty are required to maintain an ongoing professional practice, releasing games, books, or organizing conferences.

2. SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY
   Faculty Has Studio Experience: 100%
   All-Time Grads: 771
   2018 Grads Shipped Game: 100%
   2018 Grads Hired: 78%
   2018 Grads Salary: $64,671
   Fun Fact: The only masters game design program to include all four of the major specializations: Art creation, level design, production, and software development.

3. UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
   Faculty Has Studio Experience: 63%
   All-Time Grads: 383
   2018 Grads Shipped Game: 100%
   2018 Grads Hired: 91%
   2018 Grads Salary: $88,870
   Fun Fact: Provides funding for students to attend the Game Developers Conference.

4. UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
   Faculty Has Studio Experience: 84%
   All-Time Grads: 369
   2018 Grads Shipped Game: 100%
   2018 Grads Hired: 91%
   2018 Grads Salary: $18,870
   Fun Fact: Provides funding for students to attend the Game Developers Conference.

5. UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA
   Faculty Has Studio Experience: 82%
   All-Time Grads: 625
   2018 Grads Shipped Game: 83%
   2018 Grads Hired: 79%
   2018 Grads Salary: $64,500
   Fun Fact: All FAU students receive an Alienware computer so they can always keep class with them.

6. DIGIPEN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
   Faculty Has Studio Experience: 100%
   All-Time Grads: 414
   2018 Grads Shipped Game: 100%
   2018 Grads Hired: 91%
   2018 Grads Salary: $73,000
   Fun Fact: The only game design undergraduate program to have an exchange program with game development programs in Sweden and Germany.

7. ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
   Faculty Has Studio Experience: 100%
   All-Time Grads: 99%
   2018 Grads Shipped Game: 96%
   2018 Grads Hired: 60%
   2018 Grads Salary: $67,000
   Fun Fact: Has semester to year-long exchange programs with game development programs in Sweden and Germany.

8. MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
   Faculty Has Studio Experience: 59%
   All-Time Grads: 2018
   2018 Female Grads: 60%
   Faculty Has Studio Experience: 80%
   Fun Fact: Home to Europe’s oldest degree program in game development.

9. UARTON UNIVERSITY
   Faculty Has Studio Experience: 89%
   All-Time Grads: 80%
   2018 Grads Shipped Game: 50%
   2018 Grads Hired: 100%
   2018 Grads Salary: $70,000
   Fun Fact: Requires students to work 6-18 months of full-time experience in the industry.

10. DREXEL UNIVERSITY
    Faculty Has Studio Experience: 81%
    All-Time Grads: 60%
    2018 Female Grads: 40%
    Fun Fact: Offers reserved with music for students to learn, lifetime to master gameplay, Into the Breach.

11. BECKER COLLEGE
    Faculty Has Studio Experience: 100%
    All-Time Grads: 88%
    2018 Female Grads: 100%
    Fun Fact: First graduating class is in 2020.

12. WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
    Faculty Has Studio Experience: 87%
    All-Time Grads: 316
    2018 Female Grads: 61%
    Fun Fact: Provides $5,000 scholarships for international students who wish to attend.

13. LAGUNA COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
    Faculty Has Studio Experience: 81%
    All-Time Grads: 98%
    2018 Female Grads: 89%
    Fun Fact: Provides $5,000 scholarships for international students who wish to attend.

14. FULL SAIL UNIVERSITY
    Faculty Has Studio Experience: 100%
    All-Time Grads: 153
    2018 Female Grads: 57%
    Faculty Has Studio Experience: 100%
    Fun Fact: Has semester to year-long exchange programs with game development programs in Sweden and Germany.

15. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ
    Faculty: Robin Hunicke (Journey, Beyond)
    2018 Grads Salary: 85,000
    Fun Fact: Tim Schafer (Double Fine)

16. UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-STOUT
    Faculty Has Studio Experience: 100%
    All-Time Grads: 65%
    2018 Female Grads: 59%
    Fun Fact: Has semester to year-long exchange programs with game development programs in Sweden and Germany.

17. UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
    Faculty Has Studio Experience: 100%
    All-Time Grads: 42%
    2018 Female Grads: 68%
    Fun Fact: Home to Europe’s oldest degree program in game development.

18. NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
    Faculty Has Studio Experience: 99%
    All-Time Grads: 70%
    2018 Grads Hired: 100%
    2018 Grads Salary: $87,812
    Fun Fact: Requires students to work 6-18 months of full-time experience in the industry.

19. MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
    Faculty Has Studio Experience: 99%
    All-Time Grads: 61%
    2018 Female Grads: 50%
    Fun Fact: Provides $5,000 scholarships for international students who wish to attend.

20. DEPAUL UNIVERSITY
    Faculty Has Studio Experience: 59%
    All-Time Grads: 99%
    2018 Female Grads: 57%
    Fun Fact: Provides $5,000 scholarships for international students who wish to attend.

21. THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS
    Faculty Has Studio Experience: 99%
    All-Time Grads: 61%
    2018 Female Grads: 57%
    Fun Fact: Provides $5,000 scholarships for international students who wish to attend.

22. SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY
    Faculty Has Studio Experience: 100%
    All-Time Grads: 80%
    2018 Female Grads: 50%
    Fun Fact: Provides $5,000 scholarships for international students who wish to attend.

23. SAVANNAH COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
    Faculty Has Studio Experience: 99%
    All-Time Grads: 80%
    2018 Female Grads: 50%
    Fun Fact: Provides $5,000 scholarships for international students who wish to attend.

24. AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
    Faculty Has Studio Experience: 99%
    All-Time Grads: 80%
    2018 Female Grads: 50%
    Fun Fact: Provides $5,000 scholarships for international students who wish to attend.

25. UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI
    Faculty Has Studio Experience: 99%
    All-Time Grads: 80%
    2018 Female Grads: 50%
    Fun Fact: Provides $5,000 scholarships for international students who wish to attend.

**TOP 25 BEST GAME DESIGN GRADUATE PROGRAMS (CONT.)**

**HOMEWORK:** Into the Breach

Evolving giant tactical combat by being reserved with music

Sure, a tactics games starring mecha and kaiju being PC Gamer’s 2018 Game of the Year. Who could have seen that coming? Beyond the minute to learn, lifetime to master gameplay, into the Breach’s composer Ben Prunty wanted to evoke those Pacific Rim vibes while avoiding cliches or having the music be all awkward by coming in at the wrong moment.

**EXAMPLE:** Early on in development, into the Breach had music playing almost constantly. The intense guitar strings of Prunty’s soundtrack originally played over the section where players place their mechs on the battlefield, which felt wrong. Prunty changed it so the game would stay quiet until your last mech dropped, the tension released, and the music signaled the drama of a new fight.

**READING MATERIAL:**

**HOMEWORK:** When composing your game (or working with a composer), consider following Prunty’s example. How can you do more with less, and in the process give your game a much more resounding thematic vibe.