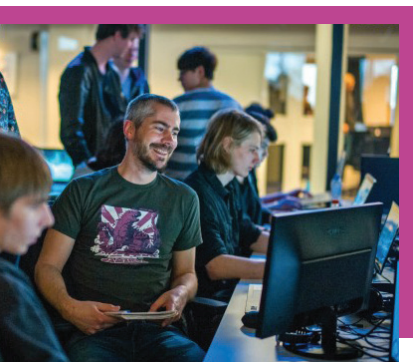# THE BEST GAME DESIGN PROGRAMS
RANKED BY THE PRINCETON REVIEW 2023

Whether it's the best teachers, the coolest graduates, or the most cutting-edge facilities, the Princeton Review has worked to find a great school for you.

It can be a challenge picking a university. Whether it's Balamb Garden, the College of Winterhold, or the Academy at Raya Lucaria, prospective students in videogames these days are spoiled for choice (just mind the ghosts and evil sorcerers). And while we,as lowly meat-based lifeforms, can't attend these prestigious institutions, we can certainly go to school to learn how to design and create them. If you're looking to pursue a career in game design, or are just curious about how it works, we've got you covered.Every year, the Princeton Review ranks the 50 best undergraduate and 25 best graduate programs for videogame design. Rated on a thorough set of criteria from graduate employment percentage to facilities and faculty quality, these rankings are an excellent starting point for students to figure out the next step toward their dream career. We've also included some thought-provoking 'homework' projects to get your game design brain working, based on real challenges that designers face. We also take a look at how narrative design is used to weave the complex stories of today's games with their systems, and how user interface design is used to let players seamlessly interact with game worlds..

Want to know more? Check out The Princeton Review's website for further info: **www.princetonreview.com/game-design**

THE TOP 50
BEST GAME DESIGN
UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

THE PRINCETON REVIEW · TOP GAME DESIGN PROGRAMS · 2023

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.

1 NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

2022 Grads Hired: 72%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $67,500
Faculty: Eric Zimmerman (founder, GameLab), Mitu Khandaker (CEO, Glow Up Games)
Graduates: Robert Meyer (God of War: Ragnarok), Noelle Mazurek (Diablo IV)

2 UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

2022 Grads Hired: 90%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $65,000
Faculty: Ed Zobrist (Epic Games), Marianne Krawcyzk (God of War)
Graduates: Jenova Chen (Journey), Jeff Kaplan (former VP, Blizzard)

3 ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

2022 Grads Hired: 85%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $83,904
Faculty: David Schwartz, Flip Philips
Graduates: Steven Van Slyke (co-inventor, OLED), Anna Sweet (CEO, Bad Robot Games)

4 CLARK UNIVERSITY

2022 Grads Hired: 65%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $65,600
Faculty: Jonathan Rudder (Lord of the Rings Online), Ezra Cove (Dungeons and Dragons Online)
Graduates: Katelyn Anthony (QA lead, Riot), William Parker (Wizards of the Coast)

5. DIGIPEN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
2022 Grads Hired: 57%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $86,865
Faculty: Ellen Guon Beeman (EA, **Microsoft, founder:** Women in Games International), Claude Comair (co-founder, Nintendo Software Technology)
Graduates: Kim Swift (Xbox Game Studios), Adam Brennecke (Obsidian Entertainment)

6. UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA
2022 Grads Hired: 79%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $52,036
Faculty: John Murray, Maria Harrington
Graduates: Richard Ugarte (Epic Games), Alexia Mandeville (Niantic)

7. UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
2022 Grads Hired: 58%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $78,923
Faculty: Joe Barnes (Disney and Epic Games), Roger Altizer (Games Lab)
Graduates: Doug Bowser (president, Nintendo of America), Nolan Bushnell (founder, Atari)

8. VANCOUVER FILM SCHOOL
2022 Grads Hired: 46%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $65,000
Faculty: Glen Hamilton (EA), Jeff Plamondon (Capcom Vancouver)
Graduates: Boris Wong (Riot), Armando Troisi (NetEase Games)

9. MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 78%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $58,000
Faculty: Jeremy Gibson Bond (Maxis, Disney), Ricardo Guimaraes (Blizzard)
Graduates: Brian Murray (creative director, EA), Chris Bray (Bethesda)

10. DREXEL UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 60%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $44,500
Faculty: Tony Rowe (LucasArts), Paul Diefenbach (OpenWorlds)
Graduates: Glen Winters (Red Dead Redemption 2), Greg Lebanov (Wandersong, Chicory)

11. BREDA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
2022 Grads Hired: 81%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $43,500
Faculty: David Wessman (Saints Row, X-Wing series), Mata Haggis (Resident Evil, Dying Light)
Graduates: Jim Hendriks (Ubisoft), Nathalie Jankie (Remedy Entertainment)

12. BRADLEY UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 73%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $45,347
Faculty: Aaron Villarreal (Arkane, Blizzard), Ryan McCabe (Insomniac)
Graduates: Renae Radford (cinematics lead, Blizzard), Austin Holt (Amazon Games)

13. CHAMPLAIN COLLEGE
2022 Grads Hired: 67%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $47,000
Faculty: Jessie Hough (Riot), Nathan Walpole (Halo 2-4, Elder Scrolls Online)
Graduates: Alex Martens (Rockstar), Lucas Annunziata (Overwatch 2)

14. WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
2022 Grads Hired: 70%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $82,000
Faculty: Brian Moriarty (Infocom Games, founding member of GDC), Keith Zizza (Bioshock Infinite)
Graduates: Michael Gesner (Riot), Jon Radoff (Beamable)

15. SHAWNEE STATE UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 31%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $64,875
Faculty: Bastien Lecouffe-Deharme, Greg Lyons
Graduates: Dan Clark (creative director, Epic Games), Derek Lewis (Insomniac)

16. SAVANNAH COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
2022 Grads Hired: 41%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $55,504
Faculty: Jack Mamais (Far Cry, Crysis), Cyril Guichard
Graduates: Harrison Pink (Diablo IV), Matt Ward (Gearbox)

17. FULL SAIL UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 63%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $59,000
Faculty: Patrick Kelly (Namco, LucasArts), Miguel Molinari (Arkadium)
Graduates: Jason Citron (creator & CEO, Discord), Kerry Allen (id Software)

18. QUINNIPIAC UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 40%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $65,000
Faculty: Jonah Warren, Elena Bertozzi
Graduates: Donovan Sepulveda (Riot), Shawn Urban (F84)

19. THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $47,000
Faculty: Nelson Lim (Lucasfilm), Bryon Caldwell (Industrial Light & Magic)
Graduates: Matt Charles (Gearbox)

20. UNIVERSITY OF SILICON VALLEY
2022 Grads Hired: 16%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $62,000
Faculty: Evan Skolnick (Cuphead, Dying Light, Star Wars: Battlefront), Ricardo Kayanan (Cars, Ratatouille, Transformers 2)
Graduates: I-Wei Huang (Skylanders), Rosie Wrede (Call of Duty: Vanguard)

21. LA SALLE COLLEGE VANCOUVER
2022 Grads Hired: 100%
Faculty: Peter Chan (Relic)
Graduates: David Larmour (Dawn of War 3), Greg Findlay (Rise of the Tomb Raider, Thief)nd features a content creator program.

22. LAGUNA COLLEGE OF ART + DESIGN
2022 Grads Hired: 91%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $50,000
Faculty: Javier Perez (PlayStation Studios), Donald Ott (Amazon Games)
Graduates: Sarah Jaques (art director, Nickelodeon Animation), Bobby Hernandez (Insomniac Games)

23. ABERTAY UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 40%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $45,000
Faculty: Joseph deLappe, Ruth Falconer
Graduates: David Jones (creator of Lemmings, Grand Theft Auto), Timea Tabori (Rockstar)

24. FALMOUTH UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 57%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $47,505
Faculty: Tanya Krzywinska, Minhua Eunice Ma
Graduates: Sophie Shepherd (Respawn), James Collins (Firesprite Games)

25. RENSSELAER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
2022 Grads Hired: 15%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $73,200
Faculty: Maurice Suckling (Civ 6, Fortnite)
Graduates: Curtis Priem (co-founder, NVIDIA), Karthik Bala (CEO, Velan Studios)

26. NEW ENGLAND INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
2022 Grads Hired: 57%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $50,000
Faculty: William C. Culbertson (Hasbro), Jim McClure (38 Studios)
Graduates: Daniel Laba (Diablo 2: Resurrected), Daniel Cuccia (Mathworks)

27. MIAMI UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 14%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $58,200
Faculty: Matt Board (Owlchemy Labs), Geoffrey Long (Microsoft Studios)
Graduates: Lauren McKenzie (The Elder Scrolls), Elie Helbing (Naughty Dog)

28. ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 75%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $68,000
Faculty: Brian G. Burton, Rich Tanner
Graduates: Morgan Davis (Gearbox), Michelle Brothers (Sony Bend)

29. HOWEST UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
2022 Grads Hired: 80%
Faculty: Tristan Clarysse (Larian, Bioware), Alexander Delagrange (Guerilla Games)
Graduates: Sofie Debloudts (Netspeak Games), Jeroen Maton (Bungie)

30. UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–STOUT
2022 Grads Hired: 20%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $42,100
Faculty: Dave Beck
Graduates: Chris Grun (DreamWorks), Mae Techmeier (Monolith)

31. OKLAHOMA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 37%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $36,000
Faculty: Kelly Romeo (Borderlands)
Graduates: Alex Waldo (Rise of the Tomb Raider), Travis McIntosh (Uncharted)

32. NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
Faculty: Casper Harteveld (Serious Games)
Graduates: Aslanta Chen (PlayStation), Andrew Knollmeyer (Rockstar)

33. DEPAUL UNIVERSITY
Faculty: Ed Keenan (Midway Games), Brian Schrank (EA, Cartoon Network)
Graduates: Mark Nauta (lead designer, XCOM), Jay Pecho (EA)

34. MARIST COLLEGE
Faculty: Karen Schrier (WHO, Nickelodeon)
Graduates: Daren Sugg (creative director, Fortnite), Ian Clayman (Exploding Kittens)

35. BLOOMFIELD COLLEGE
2022 Grads Hired: 11%
Faculty: Blake Andrews, Dennis Carr
Graduates: Josiah Hunt (Santa Monica Studio), Olivia Zuern (Akupara Games)

36. ACADEMY OF ART UNIVERSITY
Faculty: Jason Weesner (Sly Cooper, Tomb Raider), Mark Girouard (Sega, Activision)
Graduates: Thomas Catalano (Striking Distance Studios), Aimi Watanabe (Intrepid Studios)

37. NEW YORK FILM ACADEMY
2022 Grads Hired: 50%
Faculty: John Zuur-Platten (F.E.A.R. 2, Johnny Mnemonic), Brandii Grace (The Matrix Online)
Graduates: Guillermo Quesada (Amazon Studios), Junliang Zhang (Activision / Blizzard)

38. UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN–DEARBORN
2022 Grads Hired: 35%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $80,000
Faculty: Bruce Maxim, Foyzol Hassan
Graduates: Austin Krauss (Evernever Games), Shane Costello (Godfall)

39. ARTCENTER COLLEGE OF DESIGN
2022 Grads Hired: 75%
Faculty: Zachary Adams (Spider-Man, Ratchet & Clank), Sean Kearney (Maxis Studios - EA)
Graduates: Michael Bay, Zack Snyder

40. DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
Faculty: Peter Britton, Erik Pederson
Graduates: Matt Engesser (Rockstar), David Sotir (Seismic)

41. STETSON UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 75%
Faculty: Dengke Chen, Matt Roberts
Graduates: Daryl Holt (VP, EA Sports), Ben Burbank (Valve)

42. CLEVELAND INSTITUTE OF ART
Faculty: Jared Bendis, Harrison Walsh
Graduates: Tim Elek (Epic Games), Ocean Young (RazorEdge)

43. FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 30%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $60,000
Faculty: Graham Smallwood, Brian Olmstead
Graduates: Lydia Zanotti (Valve), Jessica Plowman (Epic Games)

HOMEWORK:
Directing players
Effective guidance

From Assassin's Creed to Spider-Man to Horizon Zero Dawn, open world games give players huge playgrounds to get lost in. However, that presents a challenge for designers—how to prevent your players from getting tired of being lost. There's a moment in every one of these games where you open up on a scenic panorama or sprawling metropolis and have to pause for a moment and just take it all in, but if designers aren't careful, it can feel overwhelming. How do you design your game to allow for players to explore, but still have an indication of where the story will take them?

EXAMPLE: Elden Ring was PC Gamer's Game of the Year in 2022, and for good reason. It took the Soulsborne formula of bleak, labyrinthine dungeons and challenging bosses and blended it seamlessly into a massive open world experience. It eschewed the usual guidance you find in an open world game— there are very few map icons, no quest logs, and no chatty sidekicks to give you direction. Instead, it relied on a few carefully doled out lines of cryptic dialogue and some vague golden light to guide your way. It also made elaborate use of visual storytelling to clue players in to what was important. When you finish Stormveil Castle, you crawl out of the bowels of the dungeon to find yourself overlooking an incredible vista. Centered directly in the player's line of sight, framed on either side by massive cliffs and a foul swamp, rises the shape of Raya Lucaria. You know right away that this is important.

HOMEWORK: Imagine you are designing an open world game. How would you use the elements of user interface, narrative design, and visual storytelling to guide your players toward your content?

USING NARRATIVE DESIGN TO TELL MEANINGFUL STORIES

The stories in videogames have come a long way from 'some big spiky turtle guy stole your girlfriend, go find her!' Nowadays, we see complex narratives that not only result in compelling gameplay experiences, but that get converted into HBO shows that can bring you to tears on a Sunday night. Videogames are not just playable movies, though—and treating them as such misses a big part of what makes them special. A narrative designer is a person who shepherds the game's story through the development process, blending it with systems, writing, and lore.

It might be helpful to talk a little bit about what we mean by story in the first place. After all, the story of a game can refer to many different things. It can be the tale of how Cloud Strife and his band of heroes save the world from Sephiroth (and his mommy issues), but it can also be the way you crafted a huge wolf pen in Valheim and became an animal trainer, or how your guild dropped Algalon the first time in World of Warcraft. Games are, at their core, about experiences, and a narrative designer helps their team blend the plot and writing with the mechanics and art to give players the best possible experience.

An example of this kind of blending comes from the OG boomer shooter itself, Doom. There are many ways for a game to communicate to its players how much health they have left: Bars, numbers, orbs, gauges, red flashing screens, all manners of uncomfortable grunting. In Doom, there was a bar on the HUD at the bottom that displayed the percentage of health you had left, but it also had a portrait of your intrepid marine that got more bloody and battered as your health dropped. By doing this, the design team blended the story of the game with the mechanics in a way that made the game world feel more alive and lived in, and let you connect with the otherwise silent protagonist in a deeper way.

Sometimes gameplay elements can lead to breakthroughs in narrative, and vice versa. In the development of Deus Ex, the design team had a system where the character installed cybernetic augmentations in various body slots, boosting their aim, speed, or strength. By pondering where these augments came from, the team took a mechanical element of the game and were inspired to write more backstory about these black market augs and their origins, even leading to the thought that some of them might have drawbacks coming from chop shop cyber docs.

Stories in games don't necessarily go in straight lines, either. Take Disco Elysium, for example. In this brilliant game about an amnesiac, alcoholic detective, you have a ton of freedom in how to go about solving the murder at the core of the game's story. The decisions you make, the people you talk to, and the order that you do those things matter a lot, and can fundamentally change the outcome of what happens to our dear Harry DuBois and the other characters. A narrative designer might be in charge of keeping track of all those branching paths, and working with the rest of the team to ensure they all make sense.

As the stories in games have become more complex, so too has the process of creating them. People who work in narrative design tend to wear many hats, taking an active hand in everything from script writing to systems design to directing voice talent. If you're interested in this element of design, be prepared to work closely with other members of your team, bringing the vision of a game's story to every element of the production.

Pay close attention to the next game you play and ask yourself what elements of the gameplay help tell the story, and vice versa. What's working, and what could be better? How would you improve it? What is it doing that's great, making you feel immersed and committed to what's going on, and where are the pain points pulling you out? By doing this, you'll start taking your first steps on a journey toward thinking like a narrative designer.

THE TOP 25
BEST GAME DESIGN
GRADUATE PROGRAMS

THE PRINCETON REVIEW
TOP GAME DESIGN PROGRAMS
2023
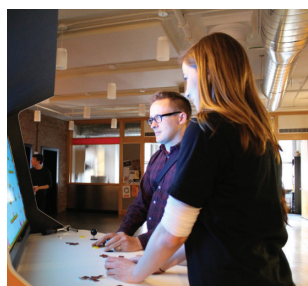
1 NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

2022 Grads Hired: 75%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $84,000
Faculty: Eric Zimmerman (founder, GameLab), Mitu Khandaker (CEO, Glow Up Games)
Graduates: Robert Meyer (God of War: Ragnarok), Noelle Mazurek (Diablo IV)

2 UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

2022 Grads Hired: 88%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $71,133
Faculty: John Murray, Maria Harrington
Graduates: Richard Ugarte (Epic Games), Alexia Mandeville (Niantic)

3 SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

2022 Grads Hired: 89%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $78,121
Faculty: Myque Ouellette (Ultima, Ravenblade), Mike Porter (Halo 3, Shadowrun)
Graduates: Jonathan To (narrative lead, Bungie), Chris Schmidt (Bioware)

4 ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

2022 Grads Hired: 93%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $74,429
Faculty: David Schwartz, Flip Philips
Graduates: Steven Van Slyke (co-inventor, OLED), Anna Sweet (CEO, Bad Robot Games)

5. UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
2022 Grads Hired: 91%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $75,000
Faculty: Ed Zobrist (Epic Games), Marianne Krawcyzk (God of War

6. UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
2022 Grads Hired: 88%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $97,116
Faculty: Joe Barnes (Disney and Epic Games), Roger Altizer (Games Lab)
Graduates: Doug Bowser (president, Nintendo of America), Nolan Bushnell (founder, Atari)

7. CLARK UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 75%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $65,600
Faculty: Jonathan Rudder (Lord of the Rings Online), Ezra Cove (Dungeons and Dragons Online)
Graduates: Katelyn Anthony (QA lead, Riot), William Parker (Wizards of the Coast)

8. DIGIPEN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
2022 Grads Hired: 74%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $121,100
Faculty: Ellen Guon Beeman (EA, Microsoft, founder: Women in Games International), Claude Comair (co-founder, Nintendo Software Technology)
Graduates: Kim Swift (Xbox Game Studios), Adam Brennecke (Obsidian Entertainment)

9. ABERTAY UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 41%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $64,000
Faculty: Joseph deLappe, Ruth Falconer
Graduates: David Jones (creator of Lemmings, Grand Theft Auto), Timea Tabori (Rockstar)

10. BREDA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
2022 Grads Hired: 81%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $43,500
Faculty: David Wessman (Saints Row, X-Wing series), Mata Haggis (Resident Evil, Dying Light)
Graduates: Jim Hendriks (Ubisoft), Nathalie Jankie (Remedy Entertainment)

11. MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 42%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $62,000
Faculty: Jeremy Gibson Bond (Maxis, Disney), Ricardo Guimaraes (Blizzard)
Graduates: Brian Murray (creative director, EA), Chris Bray (Bethesda)

12. DREXEL UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 90%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $74,000
Faculty: Tony Rowe (LucasArts), Paul Diefenbach (OpenWorlds)
Graduates: Glen Winters (Red Dead Redemption 2), Greg Lebanov (Wandersong, Chicory)

13. THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $47,000
Faculty: Nelson Lim (Lucasfilm), Bryon Caldwell (Industrial Light & Magic)
Graduates: Matt Charles (Gearbox)

14. WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
2022 Grads Hired: 71%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $82,000
Faculty: Brian Moriarty (Infocom Games, founding member of GDC), Keith Zizza (Bioshock Infinite)
Graduates: Michael Gesner (Riot), Jon Radoff (Beamable)

15. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SANTA CRUZ
2022 Grads Hired: 85%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $86,500
Faculty: Katherine Isbister (Microsoft, EA, Ubisoft), Michael John (Spyro)
Graduates: Jon Webb (director of global product strategy, PlayStation), Michael Toy (Rogue)

16. SAVANNAH COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
2022 Grads Hired: 63%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $79,278
Faculty: Bastien Lecougge-Deharme, Greg Lyons
Graduates: Harrison Pink (Diablo IV), Matt Ward (Gearbox)

17. FULL SAIL UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 37%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $59,000
Faculty: Patrick Kelly (Namco, LucasArts), Miguel Molinari (Arkadium)
Graduates: Jason Citron (creator & CEO, Discord), Kerry Allen (id Software)

18. NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 22%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $80,000
Faculty: Casper Harteveld (Serious Games)
Graduates: Aslanta Chen (PlayStation), Andrew Knollmeyer (Rockstar)

19. RENSSELAER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
2022 Grads Hired: 60%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $68,400
Faculty: Maurice Suckling (Civ 6, Fortnite)
Graduates: Curtis Priem (co-founder, NVIDIA), Karthik Bala (CEO, Velan Studios)

20. BRADLEY UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 80%
Faculty: Aaron Villarreal (Arkane, Blizzard), Ryan McCabe (Insomniac)
Graduates: Renae Radford (cinematics lead, Blizzard), Austin Holt (Amazon Games)

21. AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
2022 Grads Hired: 85%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $80,000
Faculty: Benjamin Stokes (co-founder, Games 4 Change), Andrew Phelps
Graduates: Austin Branion (Amazon Games), Alex Cha (Modern Technology Solutions)

22. LAGUNA COLLEGE OF ART + DESIGN
2022 Grads Hired: 66%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $84,000
Faculty: Curtiss Murphy (Mobilityware), David Jaloza (2K)
Graduates: Miray Hepguler (Bioware), Andre Thomas (Triseum)

23. UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN—STOUT
2022 Grads Hired: 20%
2022 Grads Mean Salary: $42,100
Faculty: Dave Beck
Graduates: Chris Grun (DreamWorks), Mae Techmeier (Monolith)

24. UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
2022 Grads Hired: 100%
Faculty: Stefano Gualeni (Something Something Soup Something), Georgios Yannakakis
Graduates: David Chircop (CD Projekt Red), Stylianos Avramidis (Blackbird Interactive)

25. DEPAUL UNIVERSITY
Faculty: Ed Keenan (Midway Games), Brian Schrank (EA, Cartoon Network)
Graduates: Mark Nauta (lead designer, XCOM), Jay Pecho (EA)

HOMEWORK:
Iteration
Quantity is a quality all its own

A large part of the work when it comes to designing videogames involves solving problems. Whether it's bugs in the code, issues with how systems interact, or unintended player behavior giving you headaches, there will always be tricky conundrums requiring smart solutions. How you go about them will be instrumental in determining your success as a designer. While there are many ways to go about solving problems in games, one of the best is iteration. Come up with a bunch of different ideas on how to solve the problem and test them out. They won't all work, but each one will give you a little more of an idea as to what the path forward should be.

EXAMPLE: When Blizzard was developing Diablo 3, they had a thorny situation that needed attention. In the previous installation, players could gather full rejuvenation potions, which would instantly heal their characters to full health and mana. This meant that any damage that didn't threaten to kill the character in one hit became largely irrelevant, and minimized the usefulness of all kinds of defensive abilities that reduced damage or healed the player. They coded and implemented a bunch of ways to fix the issue, and through this process came up with the health globe idea that ultimately ended up working.

HOMEWORK: Imagine you're developing the next great battle royale, like Fortnite or Apex Legends. The game is great, but it's taking too long for players to find one another. We've all seen the shrinking circle, but what are three or four other solutions you could use? Then apply this method to a game that you're working on!

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF USER INTERFACE DESIGN

The first time you fire up a new videogame is always a bit of a thrill. Whether it's a small indie puzzler or a massive open world game from a big studio, possibilities abound. And the immediate thing you're going to do is interact with the game's user interface (UI). An element of game design that crosses boundaries between art style, game mechanics, and brand management—user interface design is a critical part of the creation of any game.

Generally speaking, user interface design is the creation of the visual components through which the player interacts with the game. Think start menus, heads-up displays, health bars, map icons, crafting bench interfaces, and the like. The way these things are structured in the game and how player psychology impacts those structures is called the user experience, or UX. UI and UX designers work closely together to make sure that the flow of information in the game makes sense, and distributes the information a player needs to know quickly and efficiently.

The first thing that comes to my mind when I think about UI is the heads-up display, or HUD. This is the frame that overlays the screen that contains all kinds of information—in a shooter, it might have remaining bullets, a minimap, maybe a bar that indicates what button to press to pull out my Explodo-matic 3,000. In a trading card game, it will show me how much life and mana I have, cards in hand, remaining cards in my deck, that sort of thing.

Some games will have extensive HUDs with tons of information, like TCGs or massive 4x strategy games. Any time the complexity of the game requires a bunch of information to be displayed simultaneously, this is what you'll see. In other types of games, like horror games or narrative adventures, you might have very minimal HUD elements. Here they take the back seat to a game's ambience, and the less intrusive they are the less they pull you out of the suspense of the moment. Some important game information can be conveyed effectively to the player without the use of a HUD—think Mario getting bigger when he finds a mushroom, or your character shivering in Monster Hunter World when it gets snowy.

One neat element a game designer can use to shake things up is by putting elements of information that might normally be found in an overlay inside the game world. Maybe your character picks up an actual, physical map and looks at it like in Far Cry 2 or checks the Pip Boy on their wrist in Fallout 4.

UI designers also have to craft all of the other elements that convey information—level maps, menus, quest logs, ability icons and sometimes even narrative elements on a game's website. With all of these separate systems being part of the same game, it's important that they have consistent visual DNA. Between font choice, color selection, and clear design elements, everything should feel like it belongs together.

Another way a UI designer can bring consistency to their game is through motion graphics. Persona 5 has a famously great UI, in no small part because every time the player brings up a menu, there's a stylish flourish that comes with it. The animation included in the movement of the menus or the way a character pulls out their cell phone to make a call from a menu of numbers are great examples of the way motion graphics can be used as a companion to the user interface.

Fantastic user interface or user experience design is about knowing your target audience well and bringing them the best information in the best way. If you're the type of person that took as long tinkering with Leon's attache case in Resident Evil 4 as you did shooting zombies, or that loves to rearrange their furniture to see what different layouts might look like, UI design might be for you.