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Friday, February 1, 2008

# Rising game popularity leads colleges to add classes

Boston Business Journal - by [Jesse Noyes](#) Journal staff

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There was a time when video games were on the fringe of Greater Boston's technology industry. But these days the sector is rapidly growing and now Bay State colleges and universities are getting into the game, creating majors and concentrations aimed at churning out the next generation of video game developers.

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From professional certificates to full-fledged majors, area institutions such as **Wentworth Institute of Technology**, **Northeastern University** and **Boston University** are rolling out formal education programs around video game development as the local industry heats up.

Responding to the demands of students and the local market, Wentworth began offering an introductory course in video game development this semester. It plans to expand into a concentration of about five courses in such areas as 3-D game development, game engine design, virtual reality and immersive environments, said Leon Deligiannidis, an associate professor in computer science at Wentworth, who is spearheading the new program. He hopes it will be ready by 2009.

Northeastern also is developing a new game design and development major, which could be unveiled by the fall of 2008 or 2009.

Meanwhile, a first wave of students is going through BU's Metropolitan College four-course graduate certificate in multimedia and video game engineering, which started this semester. The first class, said Eric Braude, a computer science professor and the co-architect of the program, is in computer graphics.

The industry is lucrative -- sales hit \$18.9 billion in 2007, according to the **Entertainment Software Association**.

"People are just buying these games left and right," Deligiannidis said. And many of the best-selling games, such as Guitar Hero and Lord of the Rings Online, are being produced in the region by companies like Cambridge-based **Harmonix Music Systems**, which is owned by **MTV Networks**, and Westwood-based **Turbine Inc.**

"We're heavy players so that means a lot of open positions," said Craig Alexander, vice president of development at Turbine, which has about 250 employees.

In the past, companies would recruit from technical and art schools, Alexander said. But as



W. Marc Bernsau

Leon Deligiannidis of Wentworth will be teaching a course on creating video games.

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colleges adopt programs reaching across various fields, there is less need to handpick from select segments.

"We took an approach that the way to do any sort of treatment ... really has to be a proper balance between the technical side and the arts side," Robert Lindeman, a professor of computer science at **Worcester Polytechnic Institute**, said of the school's interactive media and development major it established in 2005. The program blends faculty from both the arts and technical tracks and encourages interaction among students developing games of their own.

It's the breadth of disciplines encompassed by the industry that leads Anthony Paul De Ritis, chair of Northeastern's music department and a developer of the university's game-design major, to believe the term "video game" shouldn't simply conjure up images of teenagers playing Halo on an Xbox.

Elements of video games will extend beyond entertainment, touching every sector of business, De Ritis said. "Universities are beginning to think of how we are going to deliver curriculum that's going to prepare people to work in that kind of environment."

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