

UCF's FIEA Ranks as World's No. 1 Graduate Game Design Program for 4th Time in 5 Years

The undergraduate games and interactive media program ranked among the top five in the world for the first time.



A student in the motion capture stage of Studio 500 at UCF Downtown, home of the Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy.

Mark Schlueb '93 '21MA, March 19, 2024

When the nation's leading gaming companies seek out the best talent in the world, they come to the University of Central Florida. Exceptional faculty with strong academic and industry backgrounds prepare students for success with rigorous courses and real-world experiences that mirror what they

experience in industry. The Princeton Review and *PC Gamer* recognize that UCF's programs are among the best in the world. UCF's graduate game design program, the [Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy \(FIEA\)](#), is ranked No. 1 in the world for the fourth time in five years.

The undergraduate game design program, [games and interactive media \(GalM\)](#) in UCF's Nicholson School of Communication and Media, achieved its highest ranking ever, advancing to No. 5 in the world.

The Princeton Review ranks top college programs for video game design after surveying administrators at 150 institutions in the United States, Canada and five European countries offering game design coursework and/or degrees. The survey covers a wide range of topics, from academic rigor to faculty credentials and graduates' career outcomes.

"Led by world-class faculty with strong industry backgrounds, UCF's gaming programs excel at providing students with the skills and real-world experiences they need to unleash their potential in their careers," says Michael D. Johnson, provost and executive vice president for academic affairs. "We're pleased that The Princeton Review and *PC Gamer* recognize our exceptional faculty and how our talented graduates thrive as innovators and leaders, often right here in Central Florida, home to many of the nation's leading gaming, film and animation companies."

UCF's gaming graduates thrive in a video game industry that's projected to be worth more than \$360 billion by 2027 — dwarfing the movie and music industries combined. Since 2022, dozens of FIEA alumni have had a hand in developing some of the world's most popular video games, including *Marvel's Spider-Man 2*, *Madden NFL 24*, *Remnant II*, *Diablo IV*, *Hogwarts Legacy*, *The Last of Us Part I*, and *God of War Ragnarök*.

FIEA has graduated 1,000 students since its first classes in 2006. Students form industry-like teams to develop video games together, sharpening their skills in project management and collaboration as well as animation,

computer programming and software engineering.

“When our legislature approved the development of the FIEA program at UCF in 2004, we envisioned an environment where students, faculty and industry practitioners explored, learned and developed the world’s best video games,” said Benjamin Noel, executive director of FIEA since its inception. “Twenty years later, the Creative Village is the thriving home to over 2,000 video game students and professionals. It’s been good for our community and we are positioned for the brightest game development future of any global media hub.”

On average, 85% of FIEA graduates find employment in their desired fields — with a mean starting salary of \$81,300 a year for gaming grads. Roughly half remain in Florida and most stay in Central Florida. More than 250 companies have hired FIEA graduates, including leading gaming companies like Electronic Arts, Activision Blizzard, Iron Galaxy, Microsoft, Universal and numerous simulation and entertainment businesses.

Electronic Arts moved to Orlando’s Creative Village in 2022, strengthening the industry’s presence downtown and enhancing the strong partnership between EA and FIEA.

“FIEA is a major source of new talent at our Orlando location, and we have been fortunate to benefit from that thriving talent pipeline since the program’s inception,” says Daryl Holt, senior vice president and group general manager, Tiburon Studios & American Football. “When we meet a FIEA student, we are confident they have the skills needed to succeed in our industry, integrate quickly with our teams and make an immediate impact on our EA SPORTS titles.”

The undergraduate GaIM and graduate FIEA programs have developed a robust academic pipeline that brings qualified GaIM students into FIEA’s program after they graduate. While most of UCF graduates come to FIEA from the Games and Interactive Media program, there’s also high demand

from computer science and character animation students.

FIEA faculty also instruct some classes in the undergraduate GaIM program, which is also based at the UCF Downtown campus.

GaIM joined FIEA in being ranked first in a new regional category from The Princeton Review: the best schools in the South region.

"I am extremely proud that The Princeton Review has recognized our program in this way," says Professor Natalie Underberg-Goode, assistant director of the Games and Interactive Media program. "The GaIM faculty do innovative research and pioneering creative work in areas such as interactive and transmedia storytelling, games for change, and extended reality, and they are passionate about leveraging this expertise to help students succeed."