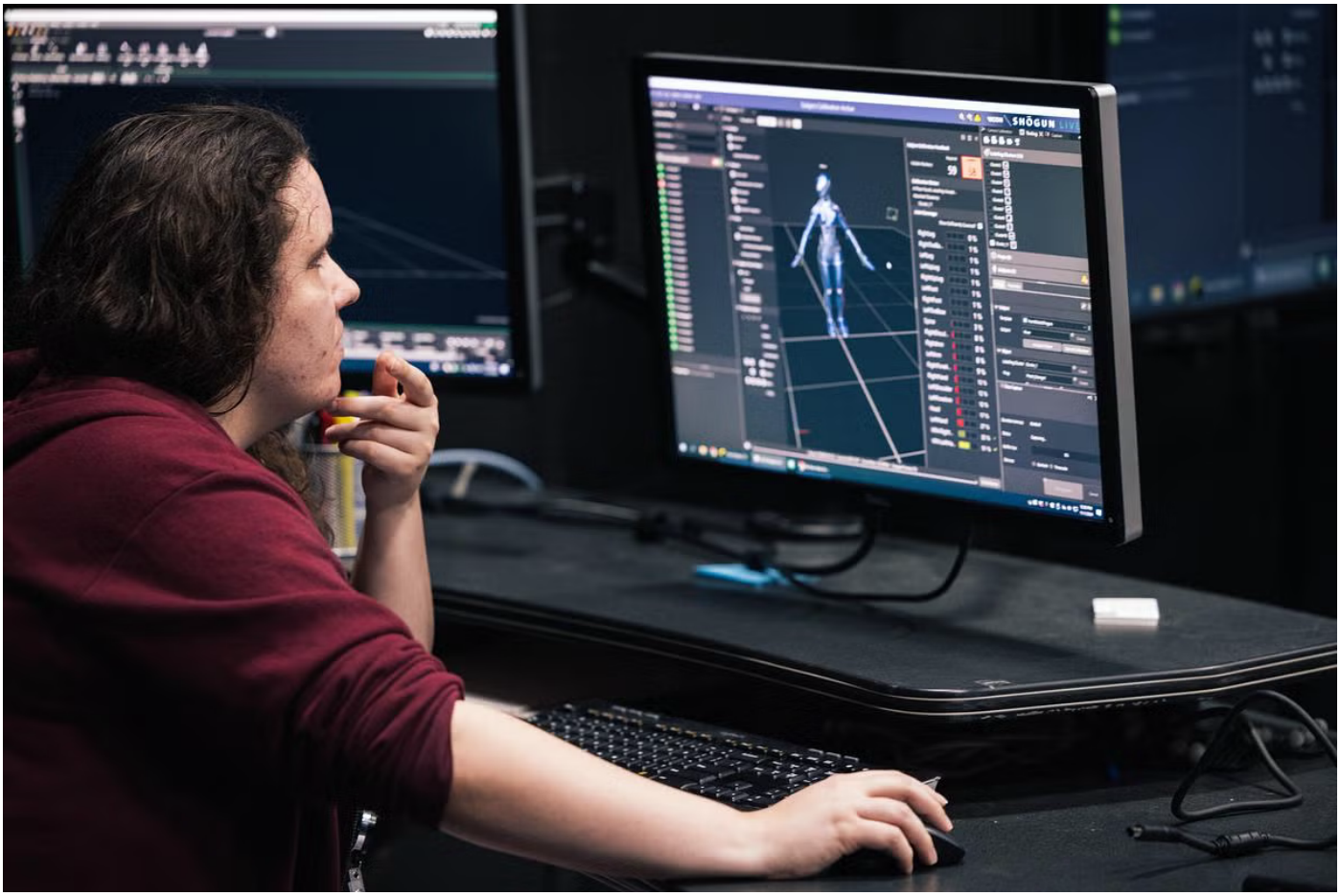
High-Tech Talent: UCF's Video Game Design Programs Rank Among World's Best for 2025

UCF is recognized for its excellence across these programs, which have prepared hundreds of graduates who help craft some of the best-selling video games in the world — fueling a $400-billion industry.

By Mark Schlueb '93 '21MA | March 18, 2025



When the makers of the world's top video games look for talented students, they turn to UCF.

UCF's Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy (FIEA), the university's

graduate video gaming program, has produced more than 200 graduates who worked on several of the most popular games sold in 2024 — including No. 1 seller Activision's *Call of Duty: Black Ops 6*, No. 2 *EA SPORTS College Football 25*, No. 6 *EA SPORTS Madden NFL 25* and No. 10 *EA Sports MVP Bundles*.

"[It's so important to] have a school like FIEA where you are actually in an industry-simulated environment versus just reading textbooks and watching lectures," says EA SPORTS Development Director **Zachary Karlins '19**, who was one of 42 FIEA alums who worked on *College Football 25*.

A Legacy of Leading Graduate Gaming Education

With such highly talented students and world-class faculty who bring academic and industry experience into a class setting that mimics real-world gaming studios, it's no wonder **The Princeton Review and *PC Gamer* have recognized FIEA as one of the top two programs of its kind in the world five of the past six years.**

UCF's undergraduate gaming program, games and interactive media (GaIM), ranks No. 5 in the world and continues to hold the title of the No. 1 program in the South.

Both UCF's graduate and undergraduate programs are sought after by hopeful students — and for good reason.

The average starting salary for a FIEA graduate is over $80,000, and 85% of graduates are in their desired fields at over 400 companies around the world. FIEA has graduated 1,078 students since its first class in 2006.

"FIEA continues to be a premiere pipeline for university talent coming into EA SPORTS and our EA-Tiburon studio," says Senior Vice President and Group General Manager for Electronic Arts (EA) Tiburon Studios & American Football Daryl Holt. "Our ability to collaborate directly with FIEA as neighbors

in the Creative Village in downtown Orlando creates a unique opportunity for us to share the latest developments in our industry with FIEA students who are impressively prepared to contribute from day one."

The global market size for gaming, hardware and software sales is more than $400 billion — overshadowing music and movie industries combined.

"Due to the program's success, FIEA is receiving a record number of applicants for the Fall 2025 class, up 40% from the average year," says Benjamin Noel, executive director of FIEA since its inception. "It's the best year for our grads ever, and we are pleased at the recognition of the program mission to create talented high-wage developers for the growing video game business."

Excellence in Undergraduate Gaming Education

UCF's GaIM undergraduate game design program ranks No. 5 nationally and No. 1 in the South.

"Our faculty pursue innovative and impactful research and creative work in areas including immersive media; games, web, and mobile design and development; and artificial intelligence, while teaching state-of-the-art games and interactive media industry design and production techniques," says GaIM Professor and Associate Director Natalie Underberg-Goode. "Students leave our program having created industry-caliber work. The hard work and dedication of our faculty and staff helps ensure students receive a high-quality education in a program that is noteworthy for its affordability and accessibility."

The Bachelor of Arts in Digital Media program mixes theory and practice with an emphasis on industry awareness. Students learn top-tier programming, game design, 2D and 3D art, animation, and visual effects for games. The GaIM Maker Space lab, located on the UCF Downtown campus, is outfitted with about $500,000 worth of mixed-reality technology — such as

augmented reality and virtual reality, motion capture, physical computing, 3D printing, games, and web/mobile-development equipment, as well as research space.

The Princeton Review's game design school rankings are based on more than 40 data points derived from the company's survey of administrators at 150 schools offering game design courses and/or degrees. Most of the institutions are in the U.S., with two in Canada and four abroad. The 50-question survey covered four areas: academics, faculty, technology and career topics.