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Competition spurs collaboration

“Students are already doing game design in their spare time without earning academic credit or recognition for it. The interest is there. We just needed to provide the opportunity.”

– Anson Call, faculty adviser
In his annual message to Congress in December 1862, President Abraham Lincoln said: “It is not ‘can any of you imagine better?’ but ‘can we all do better?’ The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise—with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.”

This was the closing paragraph of a message setting the stage for the Emancipation Proclamation one month later. It was a call to the innovative spirit that characterizes this country, to come together and solve the greatest societal problems.

One hundred forty-nine years later, the grand challenges of 2011 may be different, but the need for innovation and social collaboration to solve them is critical. Innovation is the necessary ingredient to invigorate our nation in a time of crises in many domains—political, economic, environmental—which call for a new social contract that empowers current and future generations to provide innovative solutions.

Design is the key word in that future, and I believe it is our duty to prepare our college and our students to continue to make meaningful contributions in the context of those challenges. Design is the only activity that can marry the intangible values of society with the quantitative constraints we face. This notion drives our ongoing efforts to position the College of Design as a major player not only within Iowa State University, but within the constellation of organizations around the country committed to improving or restoring the quality of life for people in every community.

As you know, we are in the midst of a restructuring process intended to re-envision the college in order to maximize the impact of all of our existing disciplines and several emerging interdisciplinary fields. This spring semester, the college’s Liaison Council has studied the organizational structure of peer institutions and hosted a series of open forums with faculty and staff for input on possible new models for the College of Design. A number of innovative proposals have been presented and will continue to be developed throughout the summer. When we reach consensus on the new direction for the college, we will then need to determine the appropriate administrative structure to support it and develop a resource allocation model that honors its values and aspirations.

These are very exciting times. We can all do better, and we will. As Lincoln said so eloquently, we must rise not only to the occasion—which is a reactive attitude—but with the occasion, in a proactive way, anticipating the future and doing what we can to make it better for all.

Sincerely,

Luis F. Rico-Gutierrez, Dean

With its soaring soundtrack and detailed graphics, the promotional trailer on YouTube makes even a non-gamer want to play Titas, a multiplayer real-time strategy game developed by Broken Lightbulb Entertainment, the winning team in the PC/console category of this year’s ISU Game Development Competition.

Designed for PC gaming, Titas consists of ‘nodes with lanes connecting them. The nodes spawn units (tanks, bipedal mechanical walkers or gunships) that march down the lanes and fight for you,” said team leader Connor Schenck, a senior in computer science from Ankeny (pictured second from right in the newsletter cover photo). “Each node represents a base and the goal is to take over the other bases.”

Anson Call, associate professor of graphic design, and Chris Johnson, lecturer in computer science, served as advisers for the yearlong competition, funded by a $50,000 Innovation Generation grant from the Motorola Foundation.

“Students are already doing game design in their spare time without earning academic credit or recognition for it,” said Call, an avid gamer who teaches digital media and animation courses in the College of Design. “The interest is there. We just needed to provide the opportunity. This grant was a perfect way to do that.”

**Startup companies**

Students were invited to form teams to act as startup game development companies.

Because developing a game draws skills from art/design, technology and business, each team had to comprise members from at least three areas. Most team members were from computer science, computer engineering, integrated studio arts, and management information systems, but included such varied majors as marketing, finance, graphic design, psychology and linguistics.

“One important thing we learned was that so many people and different disciplines on our team, we had to have one overall project manager as well as leaders for smaller groups working on tasks like conceptual design, coding, interface menus and unit animations,” said Brandon Landhuis, a junior in integrated studio arts (ISA) from Ankeny and the lead artist on Titas who appears in the cover photo.

Beginning last September, interested students met with Call, Johnson and other faculty to go over the competition rules and expectations, and participated in several workshops on the design, programming and business aspects of the contest. Other communication took place via the competition website.

In the fall, Johnson taught a new class on computer graphics geared toward students who want to be game developers. Professor Steven Herrnstadt, graphic design, offered a game development class in the spring. A majority of students in these classes were part of the competition.

Most teams focused on research and team building in the fall and actually developed their games during spring semester. Teams could enter in one of three categories: PC/console, mobile/browser or serious (educational), which could be developed for any platform.

**Real games, real rewards**

Of the initial 17 teams registered for the competition, 13 participated in the judging at the Memorial Union Great Hall on April 20. They presented their work to a panel of three judges who chose the top three entries in each category. First-place teams received $10,000; second place took home $2,500 and third place, $1,000. Prizes of $2,000 and $1,000 also were awarded to the top two popular vote-getters.

Nathan Sumison, a senior game designer for Avalanche-Disney Interactive Studios, served as the lead judge.

“I was very impressed with the competition. I was expecting many of the projects to have the feel of ‘assignments for school,’ which are typically not as thoroughly thought out or completed,” he remarked.

“The majority of the entries felt like real games, real apps that the teams intended on completing and releasing. I liked that many of the entries had business plans up and some research went into deciding how best to market and release the product.”

Other judges were Andreas Reimot of Skymoon Labs, the developers of Darkest of Days, and Brian Mennecke, associate professor of information systems.

Devin Sloan (at far right in the team photo) was a member of Knathos, which won first prize in the serious category with That 1 Science Game, an online educational puzzle game.

“We submitted a concept that we thought was unique and had the potential to be a commercial success,” said Sloan, a junior in ISA from Bettendorf. The focus of the game is on learning basic scientific concepts, as well as using logic and critical thinking to solve the puzzles.

“Students grow up with games. Gaming occupies a lot of their thought and takes up a large percentage of their free time,” Call observed. “How do we as an institution use this to our benefit in their education?”

For a complete list of winning teams, games and trailers, please see www.cs.iastate.edu/~cjohnson/gamecomp.

**Game Development**

Yearlong competition spurs cross-campus collaborations

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DEREK ANDERSON

Telling stories, creating worlds: Alumnus lives his dream

It’s a Saturday morning, and the Memorial Union Gallery is packed to capacity. Derek Anderson scans the roomful of expectant faces—from babies to senior citizens—and the storyteller in him takes over.

“It’s not a natural thing to get up in front of people and speak,” Anderson said later. “But I had to quickly get over that fear because it comes with the territory. There are times I have to speak in front of 600 kids or teachers or librarians. Now I enjoy it.”

Anderson, an award-winning illustrator and author of children’s books who was born and grew up in Ames, returned in March to promote his latest, Story County: Here We Come! After sharing a bit of his background with the audience, he delivers a lively reading of this tale of five friends—Farmer, Dog, Pig, Chicken and Miss Cox—who construct a farm through imagination and teamwork.

“In Story County, the characters create the world they want to live in,” he explained. “It’s simple enough that young kids get it, but there are fun details for parents to enjoy too. For instance, Pig can do almost anything with his whiskers—build a model of the barn, sit on it, stand on it, paint the sky, a blanket to stand on when he’s in the living room and scared the heck out of his parents the sky, a blanket to stand on when he’s in the living room and scared the heck out of his parents.”

Anderson decided the image should be more dynamic and representative of racing, so he drew Hamster standing up and gave him a checkered flag. “Cheryl sees every late night, frenzied deadline and every rejection notice. I suggested using it for the front instead. She very honest and lets me know when something isn’t working. I don’t send these things off to my editor until I’ve gotten her opinion.”

A long path

Ten years ago, he wasn’t so sure. After earning a BFA in art and design from Iowa State in 1991 and moving to Minneapolis, Anderson worked for nearly a decade in the gift industry—serving as a freelance illustrator for Warner Brothers and Disney and illustrating greeting cards—and doing freelance illustration on the side. But his dream was to create children’s books.

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There were a lot of long, difficult days. He would send illustration samples to 20 publishers and get 20 rejection letters back. It wasn’t easy, but I knew if I kept creating new stories, new pictures and new characters, I would keep getting better at my craft.

Over the winter of 2000-2001, Anderson’s freelance work slowed, so he devoted much of his time to painting. “It wasn’t easy, but I knew if I kept creating new stories, new pictures and new characters, I would keep getting better at my craft.”

A way of life

Now firmly established as an illustrator and author, Anderson has swapped freelance work for a multi-book deal, “I set up appointments with 15 big publishers. I didn’t go to shows or to kid events. I have the value of using it as a creative diary where you record all of your imaginative pursuits. If I’m flying off to give a presentation or to go on vacation, the sketchbook goes with me.”

Once an idea is fully formed, Anderson runs it by his wife, who always gives supportive of his dream and pushes him to take that New York trip that set everything in motion.

The creative process

While his paintings are always vibrant and his characters often boisterous, Anderson’s creative style continues to evolve. “I don’t want to say that I’ve found my style and I’m never going to change. It’s organic, you have to let things happen. I don’t paint the way I did a year ago. “Storytelling is also a very organic process,” he continued. “I don’t set down and say I’m going to come up with a book today. I’ll be walking somewhere and it will just occur to me. It may start with a scribble, a sketch or a sentence.”

Anderson’s sketchbook is where his ideas take shape. “That goes back to Dennis Dale’s visual studies class at ISU. I kept a sketchbook before that, but Dennis taught me the value of using it as a creative diary where you record all of your imaginative pursuits. If I’m flying off to give a presentation or to go on vacation, the sketchbook goes with me.”

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“A lot of writing is figuring out how to play with the text, how to make it sing and make it fun,” he said. “I learn so much from the text—then I offer to answer questions. Someone asks how long he thinks he’ll keep doing this (writing and illustrating children’s books) and I say ‘You’re going to be working when I do this and your work will just occur to me. It may start with a scribble, a sketch or a sentence.’”

Without hesitation, Anderson scans the roomful of expectant faces. “How many of you are interested in living a story?” he asks. Anderson decided the image should be more dynamic and representative of racing, so he drew Hamster standing up and gave him a checkered flag. “Cheryl sees every late night, frenzied deadline and every rejection notice. I suggested using it for the front instead. She very honest and lets me know when something isn’t working. I don’t send these things off to my editor until I’ve gotten her opinion.”
LA students work with inmates, staff on new prison’s grounds

Softball field.. butterfly garden .. yoga space .. greenhouse .. amphitheater. Sounds like a city park, right? No. How about the grounds of Iowa’s newest women’s prison.

At least that’s the vision of some Iowa State University landscape architecture students, based on their research and discussions that spring with offenders and staff from the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women (ICIW) in Mitchellville. They’ve worked together for the past three months, thinking outside the box of typical prison landscape design to envision something truly unique. And everyone is pretty pumped about what they’ve come up with.

“We’re blown away. This has completely exceeded my expectations,” said Warden Patti Wachtendorf.

When the $68 million expansion and modernization of ICIW is completed in late 2013, the crowded, antiquated facility will be replaced with state-of-the-art resources to encourage rehabilitation. The plan calls for the landscape to play an integral part of that plan.

The request found its way to the ISU College of Design’s landscape architecture program. Faculty created a seminar, “A Landscape Within,” to be taught in spring by Lecturer Tim Stevens, and a studio class. And some seminar students want to continue developing their ideas in independent study projects.

Digging deep

Stevens and the prison project gave the upper-level students “a means to understand some of the deeper psychological issues associated with landscapes.”

About 60 percent of the women offenders at IC&W have mental health issues, about that many need substance abuse treatment. More than half have been sexually abused.

“In the class, we’ve looked at how natural environments have rehabilitative effects,” Stevens said. “Common prison landscapes are void of trees and nature, but we’re trying to make a case that nature actually has a calming effect that would be beneficial.”

Students spent the early part of the semester reading first-person accounts by women prisoners, visiting the facility and expansion site and conducting interviews. They also researched issues related to prison design, such as social and behavioral therapy, therapeutic gardens, recreation, and surveillance. Throughout, they wrote reflections on their experience.

At the beginning some were really nervous about meeting the inmates, and afterwards, they said, ‘They’re just people who are really excited about planting flowers and vegetables.’” Stevens said.

Butterflies and sight lines

As Wachtendorf told the students, the prison is home for these women. “Although it is a prison, we told you that we didn’t want it to look like a prison,” she said. “And you listened. You listened to the officers and the offenders.”

When they listened during focus group sessions at IC&W, the students got an earful. One offender talked about how important it was to look beyond the fence and see a distant farmstead. Another remembered the beautiful arts school and didn’t want that history lost. They told the students they’d like a play area for their kids who visit—something

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LA students work with inmates, staff on new prison’s grounds

Gardening, wholeness, tranquility

“Before we even got started with the design process, we began to understand the importance of color, as it spirals from the upper-level students “a means to understand some of the deeper psychological issues associated with landscapes.”

Lots of color.

The staff had plenty to share, too. Most of it was about security. They stressed the importance of clear sight lines, so their observation would not be blocked by dense plantings, foliage or landscape structures. They asked the students to forgo landscaping materials that could be made into weapons. And to avoid creating potentially hiding places.

Despite the constraints, Stevens said, it was clear that Wachtendorf and her staff “were all committed to finding ways that will allow for an interesting and rehabilitative landscape.” It was up to the students to discover ways to do so.

There was a place to gather in outdoor areas, including (from top of image) a visitor space, amphitheater, therapeutic garden and yoga space.

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Design students shine in annual creativity showcase

Focus is an annual celebration of the arts at Iowa State that encourages and rewards students’ creative endeavors, regardless of their major.

This year, 30 College of Design students received Focus Grants to complete an eclectic array of projects, including a chair made of industrial felt, a tribute to street art, and a visual interpretation of German sociologist Max Weber’s theories on power and hierarchy.

With funding from the student government, the Lectures Program and Student Union Board (SUB) award small grants for visual and performing arts projects, which are exhibited each spring at the Memorial Union. SUB sponsors a separate juried exhibition in which students may submit unfunded artwork.

For Meghan Flynn, whose emphasis has been on portrait painting, this was a chance to explore new subject matter and media. “I believe nature is an excellent source of inspiration, and I have always been fascinated by butterflies,” she said. “I am specifically drawn to the colors and patterning on their wings. They look to me like little paintings in themselves.”

A senior in integrated studio arts (ISA) from Hardley, Flynn received a Focus Grant in fall 2010 to construct three butterfly mobile sculptures of hand-dyed and painted silk, wire, and wood. Titled Harmony, the work “is about the way colors work together to create beautiful visual harmonies,” she said.

Flynn sought advice on textile-dyeing processes and the use of fabric pigment from Associate Professor Cindy Gould. “I was thinking about how people are as fragile and as beautiful as butterflies, and sometimes we label people things that don’t show their true beauty,” Flynn explained. “I made these butterflies with them in mind, to try to help heal them.”

Lepidoptera won Best in Show in the 2011 Focus Juried Exhibit. She graduated magna cum laude with a BFA in integrated studio arts in May and will enter graduate school at Washington State University this fall.

“I became more adept at creative problem solving as a result of the complexity of the project,” Flynn said. “I also explored how different media can come together in a work of art.”

The final hurdle was to install the mobiles at the Memorial Union for the Focus Grant Exhibit. Once suspended in the Pioneer Room, the completed sculptures seemed to float and flutter like real butterflies, their vibrantly colored wings casting shadow patterns on walls and floor.

While mastering the technical challenges of Harmony, Flynn was producing another butterfly-themed project for her advanced drawing class, taught by Associate Professor Brenda Jones. Flynn created a series of 42 butterflies with colored pencil and iridescent acrylic paint on tracing vellum, cut them out and mounted them with pins in a glass-covered display box, mimicking a traditional insect collection. The “data labels” beneath each butterfly are anything but traditional, however.

Each label contains a hurtful word or phrase—such as “stupid,” “ugly,” “lame,” “token”—that has been said about someone, or that has been said to someone else, which resulted in that person being “labeled.” Solicited from friends and strangers, the comments focus on physical appearance, sexuality, ability, race, gender, etc. “I was thinking about how people are as fragile and as beautiful as butterflies, and sometimes we label people things that don’t show their true beauty,” Flynn explained. “I made these butterflies with them in mind, to try to help heal them.”

Green design pioneer retires from ISU

Recognized as a pioneer of green design in Iowa, Professor Dave Block retired from Iowa State University in May after 38 years on the architecture faculty. He received his bachelor’s (1967) and master’s (1972) degrees in architecture as well as a master’s degree in town and regional planning (1974) from Iowa State.

Between his undergraduate and graduate studies, Block worked briefly for Cities & McDowell Architects in Cedar Rapids and Smith-Voorhees-Jensen Architects in Des Moines. He also served two years in the U.S. Army. He joined the ISU architecture faculty in September 1973, just before the first global oil crisis began.

“Passive solar design was discovered at that time,” Block said. “It was environmentally appropriate, and the oil crisis, together with evidence that fossil-fuel energy would not be available forever, gave a moral reason to do all the things I’d want to do anyway.”

He pioneered courses in solar design at Iowa State in the 1970s and developed a course in Sustainability and Green Architecture in 1991.

In addition to teaching, Block founded his own practice, David A. Block AIA, Architect, in 1976, and has designed and built dozens of energy-efficient homes. He was one of the winners in the 1978 National Passive Solar Residential Design Competition for the Hodges residence in Ames—the first scientifically designed passive solar home in Iowa.

“Block was also co-architect of the ISU Solar Research House, built north of campus in 1979, as part of the Family of the Future, built at Living History Farms in Urbandale in 1981. Together with Laurent Hodges, ISU professor (now deceased) of physics, he received a National Science Foundation grant in 1982 for the development of teaching material that could be disseminated naturally to schools of architecture. In 1993, he won a Design Award from the American Institute of Architects Iowa chapter for the Schwartz residence in Parkersburg.”

Applying his extensive experience in passive solar design to his teaching helped Block earn a College of Design Professor of the Year Award at Veishea in 1993 and the AIA Iowa Educator Award in 2008.

Reflecting on his academic career, Block observed that he has most enjoyed “the continuous flow of bright, engaged and creative young men and women. We get them as old children and they leave as young adults; it’s very exciting to see that process. It’s been a joy to watch them grow out and do well.”

Although he retired from Iowa State at the end of spring semester, Block will continue his architectural practice. He also plans to keep painting, a sport he took up as a way to share one of his daughter’s interests.

“I picked it up when I was 59 and ran a marathon. It was one of the toughest things I’ve ever done,” he said. Block has been chosen for the 118-mile road running in the male 60-and-over category six times. Retirement will also give Block more opportunity to travel and spend time with his family. His wife, Elizabeth (MS 1973 / PhD 1984 Child Development), is a retired kindergarten teacher. Daughter Erin (Block) Ward (MS 1999 Psychology) is a researcher and tutor for the SAT and ACT. Son Nathan is a radiologist. Block has four grandchildren between the ages of 4 and 10.
Iowa State University landscape architecture students and faculty have partnered with Des Moines Water Works to develop an international design competition for a vision plan for Water Works Park. This 1,500-acre park in the heart of Des Moines has provided the city’s main water supply since the early 1900s. It is also a major component of the city’s open space system and trail network.

Parkitecture will be a two-stage competition with professional and student categories. The competition’s goal is to generate discussion about watershed issues and best practices and offer innovative design solutions to address ecological and recreational challenges specific to Water Works Park, e.g., prone to frequent flooding.

During the 2011 spring semester, 32 students in the LA 441 Professional Practice course, led by Associate Professor Carl Rogers, collected current and historical site information on the park, wrote the competition brief and designed the website for registration and proposal submission.

“Water Works Park offers a tremendous opportunity for design firms to engage in contemporary issues of river hydrology and urban public space to re-examine the urban landscape,” Rogers said. “We encourage College of Design alumni to submit proposals in the competition.”

Registration is open June 8 through Aug. 1, with the first round of entries due in early October. Proposals will be evaluated by a panel of jurors representing the design industry, Des Moines Water Works, and the community, and up to five finalists will be selected for the second round of the competition. Finalists will have about six weeks to revise and resubmit their proposals for consideration. A winning design concept will be announced by the end of the year. For details and to register, see http://parkitecture.design.iastate.edu. Please check the website for updates—including final submission deadlines—over the summer.