

The Entertainment Technology Center, Carnegie Mellon University

The Entertainment Technology Center (ETC) at Carnegie Mellon University is the premiere professional graduate program for interactive entertainment, as it is applied across a variety of fields. The ETC offers a unique two-year master's in entertainment technology degree that is jointly conferred by the School of Computer Science and the College of Fine Arts.

At the ETC, students learn how to work effectively in interdisciplinary teams and create engaging interactive experiences. They are prepared for any environment where technologists and artists work closely on a team; such as theme parks, children's and science museums, Web sites, mobile computing and video games.

We have a project-based curriculum with almost no lecture-based coursework. Our only required courses are in the first semester: Building Virtual Worlds, ETC Fundamentals, Improvisational Acting, and Visual Storytelling. In their last three semesters, students take a free elective that can be any course taught at CMU, and the rest of their time is in the project courses.

Project courses consist of a faculty-assigned, interdisciplinary team of students who share an office for a semester. Each team has a faculty advisor who guides them toward building an artifact; often a prototype, but sometimes a finished product for installation, and some teams have an external sponsor/client. These semester-long projects originate with external clients, faculty research or student pitches.

Throughout their semesters, students are provided with in-depth critiques. These critiques are split between process grades and product grades. Process grades focus on their individual accomplishments and challenges, while product grades assess the work the group has done together as a team.

Pittsburgh isn't the center of the interactive entertainment or video game universe (yet!) so we send students to conferences and to visit the industries for which they are preparing themselves. All ETC students are encouraged and supported to do an industry internship during the summer between their two years. And it should also be noted that several successful ETC projects have inspired entrepreneurial ETC alumni to start local spin-off companies that are creating the future of interactive media and video games. There are now six spin-off companies operating in Pittsburgh.

Looking forward, the ETC has evolved into ETC Global. This involves campuses world-wide, starting with Adelaide, Australia, and California in 2006 and Seoul, Korea; Singapore and Osaka, Japan in 2007. These campuses form parts of a distributed whole; our students will be able to shift from location to location on a semester-by-semester, project-by-project basis to complete their two-year degrees. In a rapidly globalizing world, we think this grand experiment will prepare our students for the jobs of the future, where having a team distributed over multiple continents will become commonplace.

The Entertainment Technology Center is simply different. We emphasize leadership, innovation and communication by creating challenging experiences through which students learn how to collaborate, experiment, and iterate solutions. Our students graduate well-prepared to have a positive impact in their fields. The ETC is the place for students interested in taking the lead in the industry.