2009

Annual Report, 2008-2009

Ammerman Center, Connecticut College

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Annual Report 2008-2009

Introduction

In my first report as director of CAT I would like to mention that I am honored to be serving in this position and I am excited about the prospects of the Center. I believe that the Center has great potential as it has been the leader and one of the few in its field for quite a while now. Recently, this kind of interdisciplinary exposure at the undergraduate level has started to gain recognition among computing as well as the Arts disciplines. It is interesting to see that other schools are trying to restructure their offerings to establish similar programs. It would be prudent to convey CAT's experience and history in the field of Arts and Technology to students considering studying at Connecticut College.

This year has been a successful year on many fronts: Our postdoc's activities, student projects, fund raising, internship placements, colloquia, symposium planning and an endowed chair talk. I provide details of these activities in the remainder of this report.

Students

Currently, we have 20 students enrolled in the program, including 7 seniors, 4 juniors, 7 sophomores and 2 freshmen. We admitted 8 new students to the program this year, with majors ranging from computer science to architecture to economics.

The senior projects are the culmination of many courses, individual studies, colloquia, symposia, faculty advising, the senior seminar and students' extensive work on implementation. This year, we had a hard working and very enthusiastic group of 7 seniors. They worked systematically toward their project goals during the entire year. On May 8, 2009, the last day of classes, they gave public presentations of their work. The event was followed by a reception, a gallery show and film screening. These formal presentations are usually pitched for a general audience and do not contain details or technical descriptions. The presentations are meant to capture the motivation of the students, explain their approach to the subject and describe their specific projects to a general audience. In addition to the public presentations the seniors also showed their projects in their entirety on two consecutive evenings in installation/exhibition style demo sessions. Visitors interacted with the projects and asked questions directly to the students, allowing them to go into more depth on an individual basis. In addition, on graduation weekend, the students presented their projects to Judith Ammerman and their own families, who were thrilled to see the work that their sons and daughters had done. Almost all of the families were present, and they were truly grateful and appreciative of the Center and the opportunity that it afforded their children.

Senior Projects

The senior projects spanned a variety of topics and technologies. The following are brief descriptions of the projects with a few snapshots from each project.
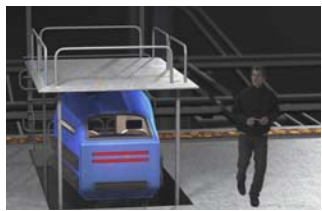
"The Escape" by William Barkus, advised by Bernadine Mellis, Visiting Assistant Professor in the Film Studies Program. This project was a live action and special effects film. Live footage was recorded using green screening techniques. This footage was then placed in a computer-modeled three-dimensional environment that reflected a monotonous lifestyle within an oppressive system from which the protagonist plans to escape.

"Tembo's Great Adventure" by Sara Lesko, advised by Andrea Wollensak. Sara's project was an educational, 3D animated, interactive book for children learning how to read. It utilized a touch screen to facilitate the interactivity. It was centered around a story of a young elephant named Tembo who is migrating with his family to find water when safari hunters split up his herd, leaving him all alone. He then goes on a journey in search of his family meeting various animals along the way.


"Warrior Kid" by Edgar Monteon, advised by Allison de Fren, CAT Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow. This project was an animation based on a story inspired from Mesoamerican culture. The story is about a young Mesoamerican boy who lives in the countryside with his two chickens when one day an eagle dives down and steals one of his chickens. The boy is then left

to use his intuition and creativity to ward off the predator from future attempts.

"**Spare Change**" by Oscar Monteon, advised by Allison de Fren, CAT Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow. The project was a 3D comedic animation exploring walk-cycles, gestures and expressive movement within a French street scene. The story is about an encounter between a mime and a burglar. In the film the mine is performing in front of an invisible wall and drops a coin in a can which the burglar hears from around the corner and acts immediately to steal the coin.
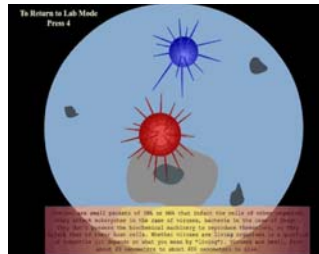
"**Outbreak**" by Nadya Radeva, advised by Bridget Baird and Steve Loomis (Biology). This project was a "serious," interactive, biology game with an audience of high school seniors and beginning college students. It teaches principles in general chemistry, structure and interaction of matter and cell biology. It contains a navigable lab environment and interactive experiments that teach main concepts.
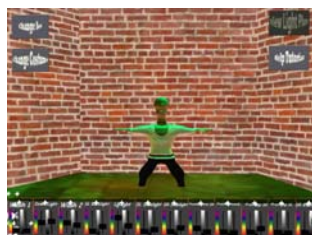
"**Seeing is Believing**" by Laura Schuman, advised by Ozgur Izmirli and Timothy Golebiewski, lecturer in the Theater Department. A virtual reality and theatrical effects project for lighting control in which the color and intensity of all stage lights can be controlled

individually. This software could aid stage and costume designers in testing certain light and costume combinations.

"Sektor Traffing" by AJ Zane, advised by Ozgur Izmirli. A single-player music-oriented computer game which aims at motivating players to create interesting music while they play according to the rules of the game. AJ defines a "Sektor" as a sound wave that has physical force and is visual, and defines "Traffing" as the delivery of sektor waves using a musical instrument. The player plays the role of the main character, Rezner, who uses his guitar to traff sektor waves in order to reach the end goal.

The Center purchased equipment and software directly related to two specific senior projects (SoftImage XSI Animation Software for Oscar's animation, and a touch screen monitor for Sara's interactive children's book). This technology will benefit future students' projects and will be incorporated in upcoming courses.

We held our graduation ceremony in the Chu Reading Room in the Shain Library. Judith Ammerman, Roger Brooks and Armando Bengochea and our center staff delivered addresses to the students and their families. It is always rewarding to hear from the students' families how much they appreciate this program.

Our alumni continue to communicate with us updating us on their current jobs, providing useful pointers to internships and helping our students through advising. Some of our students sent updates and testimonials to be included in the picture frame for Judith Ammerman. Ben Insler '04 worked on a series entitled "Like So Many Things..." with ThisThings Films, that is being aired on Independent Film Channel (IFC); Dave Strick,'04 works as a modeler at Blue Sky animation in Greenwich CT, and expressed his appreciation for the start that the Center gave him in the animation industry; Emily Luce '97 is a New Media/Studio Art professor at University of Lethbridge in Canada, and expressed her appreciation for the Center, as she was a member of our first graduating class. Elena Bessarabova '02, Art Director at Wine & Spirits Magazine sponsored an internship last summer for one our CAT students in their New York office.

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Senior CAT student Sara Lesko was presented the Smalley-Zahler award at the Honors and Awards ceremony, for Excellence in Arts and Technology, and Nadya Radeva was presented the Bridget Baird Excellence in Research Award. These students represented the high level of academic excellence in the Center, and both, additionally, received awards within their majors.

Internships

Our students this year were placed in highly competitive internships. We were lucky to have Sonalysts offer an internship to one our students in their programming and game design team. Another successful placement was with Virginia Tech where Phoebe Bakanas was accepted to work on interactive controller design - a topic that is related to her senior project idea. Jesse Lerch is working as a Design and Architecture Intern at New London Main Street. Erin Okabe-Jawdat is doing a KECK internship with Bridget, focusing on Virtual Reality and 3D modeling, about an archeological site in Ecuador, which will ultimately turn into her CAT senior project. The following table shows the list of internship placements and the source of their funding.

CAT Student	Location	Type of work	CELS	Employer
Phoebe Bakanas	Virginia Tech	REU - research		$4500+
Jesse Lerch	New London Main Street	Architectural Design & Urban Planning	3000	
Colin Hanson	Sonalysts, Waterford, CT	Programming and game design		Sonalysts- $3000
Erin Okabe-Jawdat	KECK, Conn and Ecuador	Virtual reality project in Ecuador		KECK- $3000
Daniel Silberberg	RISE Gaming	Gaming Design/Concept Artist		
TOTAL			$3,000	$10,500

We were very successful in securing three sponsor and grant funded internships this summer for our students, therefore our impact to the CELS budget for internship support was only $3000 for one internship.

Animation Workshop and Senior Project Work

Gerardo Orioli who has taught the animation workshop many times for us taught the workshop again this year. Although he no longer works for Sonalysts, he taught the workshop this year on a freelance basis. The workshop was held during the winter break, the week before the start of the second semester classes. This workshop provides an introduction to computer animation and three-dimensional modeling using AutoDesk's Maya animation software. This year a number of our seniors came back early from their break to consult with Gerardo and work on their projects. A total of 6 students participated in this workshop. The long lasting influence of these

workshops was demonstrated in this year's senior projects as all of them incorporated animation and 3D modeling in some form.

Endowed Chair Talk

On April 1, I gave an endowed chair talk in honor of Judith Ammerman and in recognition of my chair position as the Judith Ammerman '60 Director of the Ammerman Center for Arts and Technology. The talk was entitled "Computer Audition: What the Computer Hears." Prior to the talk the Center presented a digital picture frame containing pictures and testimonials as a gift from CAT student, faculty and alumni. The talk was followed by a wonderful dinner.

Center Staff

The Mellon Postdoc Grant has been a great success for the Ammerman Center. Our Mellon Postdoc Fellow, Allison de Fren has been well engaged with the center and has conducted work in line with the center's mission and has been a great addition to the Center. This year she taught 2 courses for CAT and supervised the CAT senior seminar in the second semester. Bridget Baird and Allison co-led the CAT senior seminar in the first semester. Andrea Wollensak was the Associate Director for Events and organized the colloquia series. I continued to serve as the Associate Director for Technology. In 2010, CAT will host the 12th Biennial Symposium which Art Kreiger and Andrea Wollensak have agreed to co-direct. The theme of the symposium will be "Revolution: Technology as Change".

Libby Friedman is the Center's Assistant Director. She very ably continues to run the day-to-day operations of the center. She brings a wealth of personal knowledge to the job and her ever-growing contacts on and off campus continue to benefit the center in numerous ways. Her ability to network and make connections also extend to our students, fellows, alums, internship companies and other departments on campus such as College Relations, Advancement, Admission and other Center administrators. In addition, she meets with our students individually and advises them on their course planning, projects and the Center's requirements. She served on the Staff Council this year, where she participated on a committee that rewrote and clarified the mission of the Staff Council.

The Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow's Activities

Allison taught AT110: Introduction to New Media and Digital Art during Fall 2008. She designed and taught it as an introduction to the history of ideas around human/computer interaction and immersive and networked space, with special emphasis on artistic practices made possible by digital technologies. She co-led the senior seminar AT401 in which seniors within the Certificate Program plan and start developing their final projects. In Spring 2009 she taught AT215: Remix and Mash-up. This course integrated both theory and practice on the history of

remix culture (aka "culture jamming") and the gamut of aesthetic, political, and social concerns addressed by remix artists, including issues around copyright and fair use. As part of this course, students completed three projects: a 2D collage, an audio remix, and a video mash-up. Also in the second semester Allison led the senior seminar AT402 in which seniors develop and execute their final projects. She also advised two seniors.

Allison attended the following seminars and workshops related to teaching: "Workshop on Creating Multimedia Projects with Sophie" (a program developed by the Institute for the Future of the Book in order to facilitate digital scholarship); Class of '57 Teaching Seminar; Talking Teaching session - Pedagogies for Public Presentations: Facilitating Student Outreach to the Public; Facilitator of Talking Teaching session: Literacy in the Digital Age.

Allison had a productive year of scholarship. She continued research and her writing on the female body and technology. She continued to work on her feature-length documentary, "The Mechanical Bride," which she expects to complete in August, 2009, and screen on campus in 2009-2010. She completed an article entitled "The Anatomical Gaze in L'Eve Future" (to be published in Science Fiction Studies Journal, July, 2009) and is currently writing an article entitled "Technosexuality and the Uncanny Desires of A.S.F.R. (alt.sex.fetish.robots)" for possible publication in the special SF sexuality edition of Science Fiction Studies Journal, November, 2009. Another paper was accepted to the international documentary conference Visible Evidence to be held August 13-17, 2009, at the School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California. The paper was entitled "Bringing out the Dead: The Autoptic Gaze in Anatomy for Beginners." The paper entitled "Disarticulations of the Artificial Female" was accepted to Re:Live: Third International Conference on the Histories of Media Art, Science and Technology to be held November 26-29, 2009 in Melbourne, Australia.

Allison gave the lecture "Disarticulations of the Artificial Female" as part of the Mellon and Ammerman Center Studio Works Colloquia Series on March 25, 2009. She presented her research on Artificial Women and screened a rough-cut of her feature-length documentary at the Conference HASTAC III: Traversing Digital Boundaries hosted by the Institute for Computing in Humanities, Arts, and Social Science (ICHASS) at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign on April 19-21, 2009.

Colloquia Series

This year's colloquia series comprised of four interesting speakers. On January 29 Elaine Chew, Professor of Industrial and Systems Engineering and Electrical Engineering at the University of Southern California spoke on the roles of engineer as artist and artist as engineer in her talk entitled "Musical Science and Engineering Art." She and her colleague also gave a brief talk and demo of their joint work in my Digital Sound Processing course.

Allison de Fren gave her talk on February 25. She examined the way in which women are represented in film and other media in her talk entitled "Disarticulations of the Artificial Woman." This talk was co-sponsored with the Mellon Postdoctoral Fellows Program.

Rachel Boggia, Visiting Assistant Professor of Dance at Wesleyan University, spoke on March 25. Her talk entitled "Getting a Handle on Subjectivity: Remediating Akira Kurosawa's Rashomon through Improvisational Interactive Performance (and other stories of dancers messing with computers)," explored computer use in improvisational and interactive performances. David Dorfman also organized a small workshop for Rachel and a group of dance students on dance and technology during the day.

Finally, on April 22, Andrea Polli, Director of Interdisciplinary Film and Digital Media at the University of New Mexico gave her talk entitled "Ground Truth," and showed her short documentary with the same title. She explained how she created the real-time sonifications and visual representations of Arctic weather patterns. Andrea met with our CAT seniors and advised them on their senior projects as well.

The scope of the colloquia series was supplemented by the various additional interactions with students and faculty, including the individual critiques on the students' work and meeting with faculty with similar interests during the day and at dinner. All four events proved to be very beneficial and inspiring to the CAT community.

Publicity and Media Placements

We created and printed a brochure with a new design and have been using it for publicity at open houses and events related to the center, as our last brochure created in 2004 was outdated. We have been supplying admissions with these brochures to inform the students thinking about studying at Connecticut College. We believe that this publicity is important as we have had many students come to Connecticut College because of the Center. Design of a new web site design is underway. We hope to roll out the new web site this summer.

We participated in the Prospective and Admitted students Admissions open houses and in the "Getting Centered" event with the other centers.

Two of our seniors, Edgardo and Oscar Monteon, were featured in the Fall 2008 issue of the Connecticut College Magazine.

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I was interviewed live during the program "*In the Morning with Bonnie Grice*" (WLIU 88.3 FM, NY) on Jan. 27, along with Elaine Chew, Professor of Industrial and Systems Engineering and Electrical Engineering at the University of Southern California, about her upcoming talk and the center's colloquia series.

Allison de Fren was interviewed by *The New London Times*. The cover story titled "New Works, BIG IDEAS" appeared on the Feb. 19 issue in which Allison spoke about *The Stepford Wives*, the sex-doll industry and the "perfect woman" about her upcoming colloquia lecture "Disarticulations of the Artificial Woman." A screen shot from "The Sandman," a digital short directed by de Fren was used for the cover's art. Andrea Wollensak, co-director of events at the Ammerman Center, was quoted about the concept behind the center's colloquia series. This article was also printed in *The Lyme Times*.

Allison was also quoted in the article "Barbie in our Culture" in the Milwaukee-Wisconsin Sentinel (2/28/09).

Grants, Fundraising and Budget

The center was awarded $25,000 from the Kitchings Foundation to run a new project titled "Thinking and Acting Creatively through Common Use Technology" in 2009-2010. The project will involve working with local middle and high school teachers to form groups of students to explore use of common technologies in creative ways. We undertake these community-based outreach projects to supplement the symposium. In conjunction with Advancement, we are currently in the process of looking for a matching grant.

Steele Blackall's endowed fund assisted us with the MAYA workshops and with equipment and software purchases such as the touch screen and XSI.

This year Sonalysts continued their sponsorship with $5000 and an internship for $3500. This was great news and this contribution, despite the current economic climate, showed their commitment to the sponsorship.

CAT created an award in honor of Bridget's eleven-year tenure as director. CAT staff and faculty contributed $300 to initiate the "Bridget Baird Excellence in Research" award. The first award was given this year.

In agreement with our proposed 08-09 budget, this year ended in a surplus, which will be rolled over to be used for the symposium next year.

Next Year's Outlook and Concluding Remarks

Once again, it is an honor to be serving as the director of the center. I have learned a great deal this year and I am looking forward to next year and our upcoming symposium. The 2009-2010 academic year will be a busy year with the symposium planned for March 2010. We are hoping that the economic downturn will not impact our ability to organize the symposium and to attract participants from other academic institutions. We are also concerned about the endowment income of the center as these funds like all others have decreased and the effects of which will be felt for several years. Allison will be teaching two courses for the center and leading the senior seminar again next year. We will have a lean year in terms of seniors next year but we will continue our outreach and publicity efforts.

Ozgur Izmirli

Judith Ammerman '60 Director, Ammerman Center for Arts and Technology
Associate Professor of Computer Science