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Profile, Spring 2012

Columbia College Chicago

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Columbia
COLLEGE CHICAGO



PROFILE

INTERACTIVE ARTS AND MEDIA / SPRING 2012 NEWSLETTER

Interviews

Freshman **Quintin Puebla**
Student **Roel Sanchez**
Student **Alice Werley**
Internship **Sean Clouser**
Alum **Ben Mills**



LIVE
WHAT
YOU
LOVE

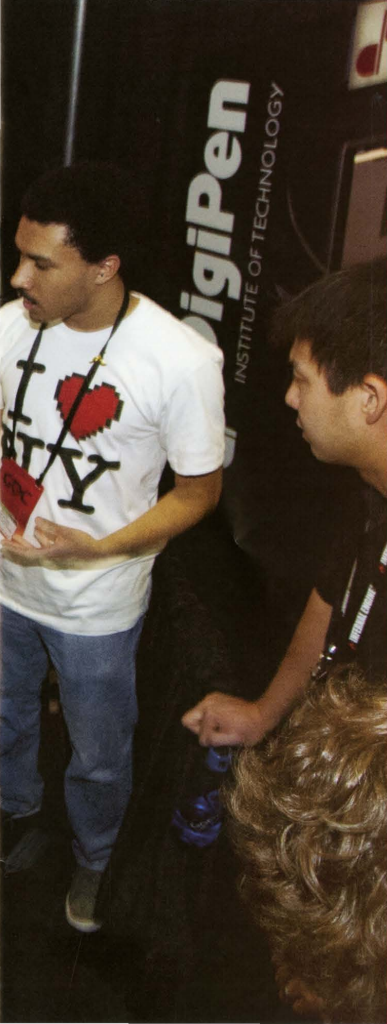
Columbia College Chicago's
Interactive Arts and Media
department offers majors in:
INTERACTIVE ARTS & MEDIA
GAME DESIGN

With concentrations in:
GAME ART
GAME DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMMING
SOUND DESIGN

colum.edu/iam

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IAM PROFILE

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Front Cover

Concept image from the Indie Team Capstone Class game, *Broken*. Artwork by Austin Light and Amanda Humfleet.

Back Cover

Concept Art for *Water Aloft the Ridge* by the Large Team Game Project

Left

Game Developers Conference 2012
Photo by Phillip Nadasdy

Chair

Joseph Cancellaro, Ph.D.

Editor

Claudia Laska

Webmaster

Janet Rooney
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POST CONSUMER CONTENT.

FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE PROFILE

Quintin Puebla

Game Design / Class of 2015

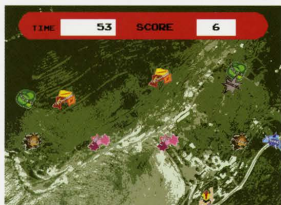


Who are you and what is your major?

As a freshman at Columbia College Chicago, I couldn't be more excited than to be enrolled in the IAM department as a Game Design major. I was born in Princeton, IL and coming from a small town with a population of 8,000 to the grand city of Chicago has really allowed me to grow as an artist. I'm really looking forward to spending the next three years here, preparing myself for the gaming industry.

What projects are you currently working on for your major?

I'm already involved in quite a few projects this year. Just months into my first semester, I was asked to become a member of the Chicago Academy of Music's design team, where we create and sell logos, websites and other digital media. I have learned many new skills, and have also become familiar with the art industry. Developing connections at Columbia has been incredibly fruitful for me as an artist. Another project is my current work with DDNetwork, an up-coming social networking and gaming website. As the lead artist, I am in charge of redesigning semi-finished online games for the website. I'm also a part of the AlphaLab Club, where we spend our time making games and hosting game jams. Being in AlphaLab has really solidified my desire to be a game artist because we're not only making games, but we're working together as a group to achieve a finished product. These activities have taught me how to work well with others and have provided an outlet to create art in many different ways for many different audiences.



This event was made possible by the
First Year Experience Program

Why did you choose to come to Columbia?

Wanting to leave my small hometown for the big city of Chicago made choosing Columbia an obvious choice. However, I chose Columbia primarily because of all the opportunities it offers a budding artist. Between the variety of classes and the overall atmosphere of a truly innovative community of intellectuals, I knew Columbia would be the school for me. Columbia has also given me something I've never experienced before, which is the environment to pursue my passion, while being surrounded by others who are just as passionate about creating as I am.

Favorite classes?

My favorite college class so far has been Digital Image and Design. Now, this isn't just because I'm an art concentration, but because this class taught me what I've craved to learn for years: the technical training needed to make the switch from traditional to digital-based media. Furthermore, this class provided with my many beneficial opportunities, such as being involved in projects outside of class as well as my overall growth as an artist. This class is a must for anyone interested in pursuing a career as a digital artist.

What is your favorite current software and why?

My favorite software at the moment is Adobe Photoshop. This program allows for a multitude of ways to edit, manipulate and create unique pieces of digital art. I mainly use it with my tablet and the brush tool to draw and paint. As a game artist, it's invaluable to be able to create both concept and finished pieces to portray creativity and innovation, all of which Photoshop allows me to accomplish. It is a tool that requires constant dedication and hours of practice in order to even begin to understand how necessary it is for the overall success of aspiring digital artists.

“I want to design a game that will capture a player visually and stand on its own as a one-of-a-kind piece of interactive art, regardless of how complex the story or realistic the graphics.”

What is your greatest inspiration?

My greatest inspiration is found in my metaphysical and abstract. I find it soothing to take simple shapes and manipulate them into abstract, atomic designs. It just fascinates me how everything around me is composed of atomic particles that are held together by energy and that everything has a specific order. This order is what I like to take and manipulate into something completely abstract. Artists such as M.C Escher, Salvador Dali and Pablo Picasso all took defined subjects and altered them into something entirely different. Changing something to make it entirely different really appeals to me.

What types of games do you hope to make?

I would love to make games that visually would be both fascinating and beautiful in a variety of ways. I've always loved the big AAA titles. However, I find the ingenuity of indie games to be the true innovators of the gaming industry. In this day and age, large gaming companies are finding it too easy to stick with game motifs that are over-emulated. This bores me. I believe game designers and artists should be questioning the ideas behind "successful" games by creating games that are unique. I want to design a game that will capture a player visually and stand on its own as a one-of-a-kind piece of interactive art, regardless of how complex the story or realistic the graphics. The video games I make will be original pieces of immersive digital art.

What's the best experience you've had at Columbia so far?

I couldn't have made a better choice than choosing to join the AlphaLab club in the IAM department. Members range from programmers and designers to audio technicians and artists. Yet, to create video games is our shared goal. My experiences with AlphaLab have been extremely positive and beneficial to me as an artist and as a freshman.

What's the best advice you have for new students?

For me, the most important rule when making art is to strive for originality. Anyone can practice drawing something that's already been thought of. However it takes a true artist to create something unique. College is one of the few times when a person has almost no restraints to creating art. So take advantage of the freedom and create as much as you can.

STUDENT PROFILE

Roel Sanchez

Game Design / Class of 2012



Who are you and how did you get to Columbia?

Among many things, I am a technical sound designer Columbia College student and game audio aficionado. I arrived at Columbia as an automotive chemist with a longing to pursue a passion for audio and games. Columbia was one of the very few places that offered a concentration in game sound with a convenient location.

Why sound?

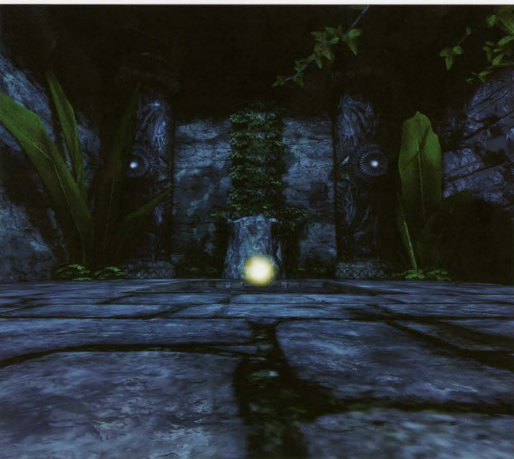
I grew up playing instruments and making absurd noises around the house, so even at a young age I had an affinity for music and sound. I would also occasionally dabble in replacing the audio from my favorite videos and creating beats in music production applications. After deciding to return to academia, I wanted to study a field that would merge my creative and technical interests, something I was lacking at the time. Before Columbia, I researched the core game design disciplines and asked myself, "What would I be happy doing even if times were difficult?" The answer to that question was always audio.

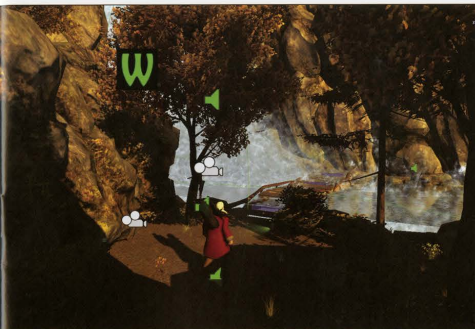
Why the Interactive Arts and Media department as opposed to other departments in the college, that also teach sound?

I chose the IAM department because I specifically wanted to work with audio in an interactive environment, namely games. Taking classes in this department provides opportunities to explore sound design while focusing on programming. Although this may not be the path for every student of sound, the department had the flexibility to help me meet my personal educational goals. I have also take classes in the Audio Arts and Acoustics department, giving me a broader knowledge of audio.

What is your role as a sound person in the production process?

During the production process I try to have my hands in everything related to audio, from its generation to its implementation within an interactive space. The title "sound person" or "sound guy" is commonly used because it is difficult to encapsulate all the job functions expected of a person responsible for





the sound in a project. More often than not, a sound person becomes a mixer editor field recordist, Foley artist, sound designer composer spreadsheet wizard and programmer. While this may seem daunting and frustrating at times, I feel it one of the most satisfying roles.

What is required to study and make sound? A good ear? What does that mean?

Dedication, motivation and patience. Along with having the dedication and patience to hone your sound design skills, you need to be motivated to continue learning, creating content and putting your work on display for criticism. Always go beyond what is required of you. Having a good ear is certainly key. A good ear means being able to critically analyze audio work, identify what makes it great and how it can be improved upon. Understanding design principles are critical in designing effective sound to communicate your acoustic vision to an audience. Every project, even if it is not audio-driven, will require you to apply and identify design principles in order to elicit a desired psychoacoustic response and to complement visual content.

Is there a particular culture that really interests you in terms of music?

There is no particular culture that clearly standouts out for me—each provides its own musical style with unique timbre and

rhythm. If I had to pick one, I suppose the jazz-funk fusion from Cameroon really makes me groove out.

How much of an over-lap is there between knowing about digital sound production and understanding music theory?

A lot of sound folks have a background in music, as a musician or as a composer. Music theory lends a greater understanding of the harmonic relationship between sounds. Being literate in music notation allows a person in sound production to identify the chord structures and tonal qualities of a musical piece. As a result, a designer can model their sounds to have musical qualities with an emotional payload. So, there is a considerable (and beneficial) overlap.

What kind of work are you interested in?

I am primarily interested in audio for games. Being in a position that gives me the ability to work directly with in-game audio implementation, optimizing audio pipelines and creating unique sounds is where I want to be. Such a position is often titled sound designer technical sound designer or audio engineer—it all depends on the company, day of the week and alignment of the sun, or so it seems. I have become enthralled with developing tools and solving audio problems within an interactive environment, through audio middleware or custom tools. It is an incredibly rewarding experience to craft

sounds and insure that they are placed into a game space with the intended behavior and execution. This would be my ideal work scenario, however I am ready to provide audio for any medium and industry.

What sorts of jobs are there?

In the game industry there are variations on the following positions: audio engineer audio programmer composer and sound designer. If you expand your search outside of games, there are post-production audio houses and recording studios, which are also possibilities. My next adventures is finding one of these elusive positions and making it my own!

How do you foresee sound developing and changing in the media arts?

When compared to visual technology, audio always seems to be moving at a snail's pace. In the future, I hope to see a strong push toward procedurally generated audio. There is no doubt that a data-driven approach (recorded samples) to audio currently yields the best results in terms of realistic sound. However procedural audio seems like the next step in the audio field. Procedural audio entails a large paradigm shift in how sound is created. Instead of recording sounds in the field and processing them for later use, a virtual model can be developed that generates a desired sound in real-time given a specific set of conditions. There are many implications regarding procedural audio, and it tends to be a subject of debate. It is nonetheless a very exciting prospect, one I will continue to study.

Who is your favorite artist?

John Coltrane for his musicality, technicality and spirituality.

How do you hear the world?

I hear the world as a range of possibilities. The environment around us is saturated with sounds to discover and rediscover. Even the most mundane sounds have the potential to be transformed into something extraordinary. As my experience as a sound designer grows, so does the range of possibilities.

STUDENT PROFILE

Alice Werley

Interactive Arts and Media / Class of 2013



Describe when you first became interested in the Interactive Arts and Media major

I am from Hinsdale, Illinois and transferred to Columbia after a year as an English major at the University of Iowa. I realized that English was not for me, nor was the school. I wanted to do something artsy, but wasn't sure what I actually wanted to study. I have always enjoyed a variety of artistic media, so choosing one was difficult. While looking at Columbia's list of majors, I literally went through and researched each one to help narrow down my choices. This is when I found the Interactive Arts and Media major

The most appealing part of the IAM major is that it involves the study of a variety of media and skills, and you are free to combine these in a variety of ways. You are not required to choose a specific focus. I have been able to take all sorts of

classes, from animation to programming to video production.

Another aspect of the IAM major I found extremely appealing was its applicability to the real world. I find it very inspiring that there are true "starving artists" and I admire them for their love and dedication. I, however would like to be doing something I love as a career. Considering the increasing need for digital expression and communication, I am confident I have chosen the right major

What has your experience been in the IAM department?

I love it here. The friends I've made are not only awesome in terms of their personalities, but also that they are as driven and passionate about what they do as I am. It's so refreshing to be around people who are not just going to college, but really immersing themselves in what they do, in and out of the classroom. The teachers here are of course the same way. They truly want their students to succeed and because of this, there is overwhelming support.

What are some of the projects you are working on?

One project I've been working on is called "Ridiculousities." It's an interactive website containing a non-linear story I started in my Story Development class and have continued to develop. It is not a story in the traditional sense, but a series of conversations, quips and anecdotes that involve many of the same characters. All of the characters are loosely based on real people, but their names are reduced to single letters. I chose the title "Ridiculousities" because much of the content is humorous. There is a lot of

ambiguity as to the characters and the context of some of the vignettes, but this was completely intentional. All in all, it is a collection of strange and humorous events that have happened in my life that are best expressed in a completely vague but engaging environment.

Another project I am working is called "500 DIVs," which began as an experiment a year ago. After completing Introduction to Programming and Authoring Interactive Media, I decided to write a program in C# that would generate CSS and HTML markup to create a simple design that changes each time the program is run. It is essentially a piece of software art, which is a piece of software or code created not to generate art, but to be art. I have since modified the original program in various ways to test its capabilities, and to create similar chit programs that will produce more dynamic imagery.

More recently, I have been teaching myself JavaScript to convert the C# program into something that can be embedded on a webpage, and perhaps modified by the user to create an illustration tailored to the user's specifications.

What do you want to do when you graduate?

I want to be a front-end web developer and work for an interactive design company like The Material Group or Digitas. These companies have produced projects that are incredibly imaginative and seamlessly constructed, providing me with inspiration and the drive to work as hard as I can. I want to someday be part of a team that can create interactive web experiences like none have ever seen.

Sean Clouser

Game Design / Class of 2012



I'm a post-graduate student in Columbia College's Game Design major with a concentration in sound. I fell in love with sound by editing video during my Television: Post-Production program. Something clicked when I started dropping sounds in the project because of how much it added to the piece. I like the idea that the sound dictates how the audience experiences a scene. Much of what the audience perceives is actually manufactured, like the size of an explosion or the weight of a door. Because of this, I realized sound is the most important tool to convey emotion to the audience.

I intern a few days a week at Robomodo, a video game development studio here in Chicago. They are currently working on Tony Hawk Pro Skater: HD, as well as other unannounced titles. The job is mostly what I expected. I found out about the internship

“Look for an internship you value and realize early on what you have to offer.”

via Twitter when the company president, Josh Tsui, was looking for a video intern who was proficient with Final Cut Pro. I had done contract work for the company on their previous game so there was already an established rapport. I updated my resume, tailored the cover letter and made contact. I started a couple weeks later after the company moved their studio to the West Loop.

Robomodo is a fairly small studio compared to many in the industry so it operates on a very intimate, close-knit level. We usually meet daily and everyone discusses important milestones on the horizon. This helps facilitate communication, expectations and collaboration.

I perform many different jobs around the Robomodo studio: I capture gameplay footage for commercial and archiving needs; I've created sounds for various game concepts; cut footage for a reveal trailer and taken screenshots for press events. It's really cool to see the Tony Hawk gameplay footage that is spreading around the various gaming websites because a lot of it is me playing. I recently took up a role on the quality assurance team helping to verify bug fixes for build version submissions and it's really

exciting because I'm seeing a side of game development and audio I've never experienced before.

I'm also working on a neat side project with Brice Puls, a fellow colleague from IAM Game Design program. Our task is to produce some behind-the-scenes, documentary style footage for the studio. In short, we take a video camera and sit down with the game designers to ask them all sorts of questions. For instance, since Tony Hawk Pro Skater: HD is a remake, how much should remain true to the old Tony Hawk games and how much should focus on delivering fun, up-to-date gameplay?

My internship experience is invaluable and I highly recommend other students to consider an internship as well. However be wary of companies that use internships as a way to find grunt workers. Look for an internship you value and realize early on what you have to offer. My advice to new students is to start creating things. Strike a balance between consuming media and creating it. Pursue outside hobbies as well. It's surprising how much an interest in philosophy or baton twirling can influence your work and help facilitate fresh ideas for game design.

Ben Mills

Interactive Arts and Media / Class of 2010

The screenshot shows the Braintree website homepage. At the top, there is a dark navigation bar with the Braintree logo on the left and a list of links on the right: 877.434.2894, We Developers, API, Blogs, Twitter, Careers, and Contact. Below the navigation bar, the main content area is divided into several sections. On the left, there is a section titled "Your gateway to online payments" with a sub-header "Our customers tell us we're the best payments provider they've worked with. We get it, we care, and we're always eager to improve." Below this is a "Get Started!" button with a right-pointing arrow. To the right of this section is a vertical list of five service categories, each in a colored box with a right-pointing arrow: "Payment Gateway" (blue), "Merchant Account" (orange), "Recurring Billing" (green), "PCI Compliance" (dark blue), and "New to Payments?" (dark blue). Below the "Get Started!" button is a list of five bullet points with checkmarks, describing benefits like "All-in-One: Merchant Account, Gateway & Recurring Billing" and "Eliminate the processing & storage of credit card data". In the center, there is a section titled "Who uses Braintree?" with a row of logos for OpenTable, animoto, Fab, 37signals, livingsocial, airbnb, brightcove, and github. Below this is another section titled "We've got you covered" with four bullet points highlighting Braintree's compliance and customer satisfaction. To the right of this section is a speech bubble containing the text "Braintree has been a superb partner." and a signature for Michael Xenakis, SVP, with the OpenTable logo below it.

877.434.2894 We Developers API Blogs Twitter Careers Contact

Braintree Services About Customers Pricing Get Started

Your gateway to online payments

Our customers tell us we're the best payments provider they've worked with. We get it, we care, and we're always eager to improve.

Get Started! →

- ✓ All-in-One: Merchant Account, Gateway & Recurring Billing
- ✓ Eliminate the processing & storage of credit card data
- ✓ Reduce your PCI compliance scope up to 90%
- ✓ [Client Libraries](#) because we want to save you time
- ✓ [Truth In Pricing Guarantee](#) because it's the right thing to do

Payment Gateway

Finally, a payment gateway not from the stone age. You'll love it so much you'll play with it on the weekends. →

Merchant Account

Bringing honey to the bread and butter of payments. →

Recurring Billing

Sit back and relax. We'll take care of the billing for you. →

PCI Compliance

Simplify this daunting process. →

New to Payments?

We'll teach you the ins and outs and the dos and don'ts. →

Who uses Braintree?

OpenTable animoto Fab 37signals livingsocial airbnb brightcove github

We've got you covered

- ✓ We're a **Level 1** PCI DSS Compliant Provider
- ✓ We processed more than a **billion** dollars in 2011
- ✓ We're trusted by some of the best companies around
- ✓ Our customers frequently write us love letters

Braintree has been a superb partner.

Michael Xenakis, SVP

OpenTable

Two years ago, you interned at Chicago Data Solutions and then later at Sanders New Media, both programming firms. We wanted to come full-circle and see how things are going for you now.

What sort of work are you doing?

I work at Braintree Payment Solutions as a software developer on a small team—currently 15 people. Braintree is a company that allows other web developers to easily accept credit card payments online. I spend my time working on our primary application in the Ruby programming language to manage our Linux servers that run our different applications.

Do you enjoy your work? Which aspects are not so enjoyable? Are there any unexpected benefits you gleaned from earning your degree in IAM?

I love the work I do at Braintree. I spend almost every day solving interesting problems and doing the work I dreamed of while I was attending Columbia and even while in high school. The most unexpected benefit I gained by attending Columbia instead of earning a computer science degree from another college, is the design and user-experience skills I learned. This helps me create better interfaces for Braintree customers. I can't specifically think of something that is not enjoyable about working at Braintree but it has been challenging trying to maintain the culture that I grew to love while we grow rapidly. I think I was employee number 25 and now we're well over 50.

In retrospect, now that some time has lapsed since your internship, how useful was it? How has did internship help define or influence your current work situation?

The internships I completed at Columbia were the most useful thing I did as a student. While Columbia prepares you well for the professional world, there is quite a bit that can only be learned by doing. Especially in the technology field, things move so fast it's impossible to learn everything in the classroom.

How well prepared were you after graduating from the IAM program? Would you do anything differently if you could go to school again?

I felt very well prepared. The best part of the IAM program is they don't hide how rapidly technology changes and that it's impossible to learn everything. IAM program teaches strategies and skills to help students deal with this fast-moving field.

I would say the most important thing I learned at Columbia was the ability to adapt to change. Columbia is not afraid to try new things. It's also in the heart of Chicago. The only thing I wish I did differently was to intern more and to get my hands "dirty" faster. During my last years at Columbia, it was clear how easy it was to get involved with an internship and how silly it was for me to have waited.

What do you see yourself doing in five years?

I want to advance my skills each year and work on increasingly interesting and challenging problems. I look back and can't believe how much I've learned since graduating. I hope I continue to improve all the time.

Any advice for students?

Never stop learning. Just because you're not in school anymore doesn't mean your done learning—it's never over

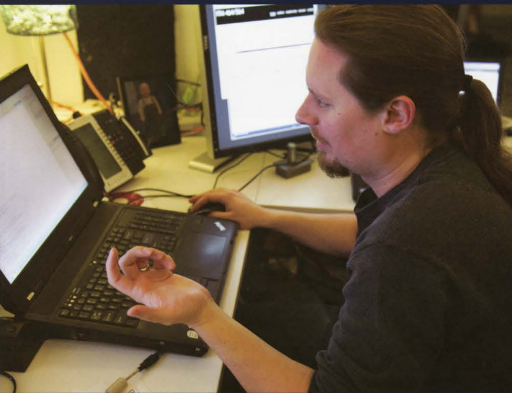
List three words you would use to describe yourself at the time of our previous interview. List three words that describe you now.

Then: Anxious, ready, and excited.
Now: Productive, excited, and positive.

STAFF PROFILE

Jeff Meyers

Operations Manager



IAM recently started an initiative to push mobile application development. Did you play a role in the implementation of this initiative?

Yeah, about two years ago I noticed I was receiving more requests for mobile developers than requests for web developers. I started to feel bad because our department only offered a few courses that were touching on mobile applications. Seeing this growing trend, we needed to infuse mobile in almost every course, not just a few. Teaching programmers to hit the mobile platforms is only the tip of the iceberg. We needed to teach everyone everything about mobile and social platforms.

Don't get me wrong— I still get plenty of requests for web developers, as someone still needs to write all the services that the mobile apps consume.

What kind of phone do you own? What are your can't-live-without mobile apps and games?

I have an older Android Samsung Galaxy S phone (Froyo 2.3.4). It's a fine phone but actually, I'm not a "can't-live-without-a-phone" kind of guy. I think I could even go without having a smart phone at all. This would of course increase my productivity in other areas way too much. At least my Angry Birds calluses would heal.

My kids really enjoy apps and games more than I do. They really like Ultimate Star Wars Blaster and Ultimate Star Wars Light Saber. The older boy also just started playing World of Goo on my phone. I'm glad to see that games that were only available on console or PC a couple of years ago have made it to mobile platforms.

What's your personal favorite development platform for mobile apps? What about the target platform?

It changes all the time. Whichever platform I've developed on last seems to be my favorite. I think a good developer should be able to transcend platform and accomplish their goals regardless. Also, in this market, I think it pays to develop for all possible platforms. If only mono-touch didn't cost \$999—then it might be my favorite.

How has the surge in mobile application development changed our approach to teaching programming here at IAM both for our instructors and our students?

Not only has it changed our approach to teaching programming, I think it's changed our approach to teaching almost everything. Now that mobile devices have taken over and soon everything will have an embedded browser/server everyone should brush up on RFC 2616 and HTML 5. It's also time for everyone to focus on working with smaller screens, and alternate forms of HCI like audio/voice control and natural user interfaces.

The college is in the process of collaborating with other institutions of higher learning to join a high-bandwidth fiber optic Internet network. What role did you play in this process and how do you expect the new network to impact student and staff in their daily duties at the College?

Actually, each year for the last twelve, Dave Gerding and I have a conversation about Columbia and I2 (Internet 2) and we usually come to the conclusion that it costs too much money and Columbia doesn't have the infrastructure to support it, until about two years ago. Then we realized it wasn't that much money anymore and it wasn't a drain on resources like it used to be. At the same time, Dave and I started

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“We are definitely in a post-PC era. I don’t think non-computer folks will be using PCs anymore—this trend is already well underway. In five more years, there will be less laptops and desktops and more specialized apps.”

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working with the School of Media Arts on the CCRP grant. Thanks to Alton Miller and Charles Castle, we realized the grant could support the first stages of becoming connected to Starlight (Internet 2). This started a much larger discussion with IT and everyone agreed that it would be the best thing for the college and even save us money in the long run. After many, many meetings with IT and CCRP, the process has started. Now I2 is here. Yet, Columbia’s IT department still has a ton of work to do to bring the new network online in each building. Because of I2’s arrival, Columbia is actually changing the network architecture of the entire college. Soon, the whole college will enjoy a much faster and more robust Internet backbone.

It will be very interesting to see will be how Columbia’s creative members and artists use I2. Wouldn’t it be great to see some crazy visualizations of LHC data, or a network game that uses 4k cameras?

Do you enjoy teaching? How does your attitude towards technology inform your teaching practice?

I’m grateful that the IAM department lets me teach some of the more exciting, cutting-edge classes like XNA and the Mobile Programming course. Since topics evolve very rapidly, it’s always exciting to teach technologies less than a year old. Other courses I teach don’t change as quickly. This is the first semester of 14 consecutive semesters that I haven’t taught Object Oriented Programming. I’m enjoying the break, but I’ll be teaching OOP again this summer.

Where do you see technology going five years from now? Where will the jobs be?

We are definitely in a post-PC era. don’t think non-computer folks will be using PCs anymore—this trend is already well underway. In five more years, there will be less laptops and desktops and more specialized apps. As mobile devices and specialized alliances and services fill in were the PC used to be, it will be interesting to see what happens to the workstations of yesterday. Of course, all this new development requires designers and programmers. There will be plenty of jobs for people making the right kind of apps.

Looking back, do you think the Internet might have developed differently? What forces have shaped our daily lives up until now? How do you see that changing?

I think humans want to communicate and the Internet just enabled that in a new way. It was a natural extension to the things people were doing already.

If we had the perfect Internet, how would it be different from what we have today?

What do you mean the Internet is not perfect? The only way to yuck it up is to give the government or big business control of it.

Who do you listen to after work?

I used to play guitar a lot but haven’t really practiced for some time. I’ve been listening to Decapitated and Lord Snow.

You are a father of two young boys. Do you plan to encourage them to pursue scholarship at Columbia College Chicago?

My boys have two choices: Astronaut or rock star. Does Columbia have a rock star department? The music department might. It would be cool if one of my kids were the first Martian—the timeline is correct for a manned Mars launch 10 to 30 years in the future. Seriously, the older one wants to be a Lego master builder when he grows up and the little one wants to be an archaeologist. He has no idea what an archaeologist is—he just thinks Indiana Jones’ hat is very cool.

David Noffs

I am the Instructional Specialist in the newly formed Center for Innovation and Teaching Excellence, an adjunct faculty member in the Interactive Arts and Media (IAM) department and the Moodle administrator on campus. Wearing several hats keeps me busy, but I enjoy teaching what I know and my current teaching assignments on campus allow me to do just that.

The story of how Moodle came to Columbia is probably one to be told another day in a different article, but there can be no doubt it has become a very popular teaching tool for hundreds of faculty members here at Columbia, and thousands worldwide. I first installed the open source learning management system (**Moodle** stands for **Modular Object Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment**) on a test server back in the fall of 2008 with a small group of faculty and students (mostly from Film & Video) as the “pilot” members. Since then, the number of teachers choosing to deploy their course content to Moodle has grown dramatically each semester. This spring, we created over 2,400 sections in Moodle and, while not every instructor is taking full advantage of what you can use Moodle for many have. As of the time of writing this article, there were 5,441 active and unique users who had read something, posted a handout, or done an online assignment in the last 30 days, and that includes the holiday break period!

Last semester I had the pleasure of working with Claudia Laska, Mirella Shannon, Patrick Lichty, and Janet Rooney on the first ever IAM Learning Community effort. The group coordinated teaching and learning assignments between two cohorts of three course sections. I was the “Moodle Tech Support” guy in the group, helping out with grouping the sections into “meta courses” and providing advice on how to use various Moodle tools. We had a blast. IAM Academic Manager Mindy Faber also conducted a survey assessment afterwards that showed some great results.

Moodle offers lots of great tools for educators including wikis, forums, glossaries, self-directed learning lessons, feedback surveys, RSS Feeds, Google apps, online tests, a variety of assignment types and much more. Furthermore, because it is open source, we are able



to customize our installation here at Columbia and add third party scripts, or even create our own. IAM's own Jeff Meyers recently piloted a new Moodle filter that allows instructors to automatically color and/or highlight code snippets within Moodle resources and forum posts.

While Moodle is not the only learning management system around, it is one of the most widely used and popular—for good reason—and, it will soon be upgraded on campus to Moodle 2x with new features and built to work natively on desktops, tablets and mobile devices.

Teaching my classes in IAM with Moodle is truly fun for me and I often have students comment on how they like the simple layout and the ability to see assignments, check grades, and contact the instructor all easily from the same page. Moodle also allows students to upload fairly large files (up to 750MB) and any file type. It makes my job teaching other instructors at Columbia about online teaching tools much easier. I can honestly say that being able to focus on the subject matter of my course, knowing that my students can get access to the info they need anytime, anywhere, makes for a better teaching and learning experience.

Arts Alive 45



Arts Alive 45 Team: Caro Griffin, Blair Mishleau and Rebecca Christensen

Arts Alive 45 is an ambitious initiative enacted by Chicago 45th Ward Alderman John Arena, and is run by a small committee headed by his wife and artist, Jill. The aim is to trade boarded up businesses and broken glass for installations, murals and exhibits featuring art created by neighborhood residents and other Chicagoans. Engaging greater community involvement was also a fundamental impetus for the on-going project.

Caro Griffin: Senior, Interdisciplinary, IAM and Creative Nonfiction

Blair Mishleau: Senior, Interdisciplinary, IAM and Journalism

Rebecca Christensen: Senior, IAM

By partnering with local property and business owners, the Arts Alive 45 committee beautifies drab or vacant properties. Following the “broken glass theory,” that run-down locations exacerbate local crime, they strive to add art to the 45th ward, making it more attractive to current business owners and locals, and to invite economic development.

Before they approached Claudia Laska’s Media Publishing class for a web presence, they relied on a few online PDFs and several photo galleries to communicate their message.

A team of three students was assigned to build Arts Alive 45, an interactive website with Google integration as well as social media access. Instructing committee members how to use their new website was also part of the challenge.

Interactive Arts and Media students Rebecca Christensen, Caro Griffin and Blair Mishleau, wrote code, designed, copy edited and provided training sessions.

From the start, focus was on easy usability and maintenance per the committee’s request. The goal was complete autonomy for Arts Alive 45 and to provide them with knowledge to problem-solve basic issues and maintain and update the site entirely on their own. The IAM team used the highly intuitive WordPress CMS to build the website foundation and designed a highly customizable theme with an easy-to-use GUI. An embedded Google Map showcases the various locations of Arts Alive 45 projects and adds a simple interactive element to the site.

After several weeks of trial and error, the site went live. The homepage features a roomy, versatile slider suitable for images, text or a combination of both. Built-in Twitter and Facebook integration synchronizes communication.

Yet, despite numerous efforts to ensure easy transfer of website management, frantic questions quickly accumulated as soon as the hand-off occurred: Lost passwords, deleted code and a pesky Google calendar code added to what eventually became the exchange of approximately 100 emails. The IAM team was expected to respond in a timely and professional manner. It was a valuable learning experience for all of us.

Autonomy has now been achieved, with only some rare tweaking from the IAM team. The experience has been incredibly positive. Arts Alive 45 has an undeniable, strong web presence. Visit www.artsalive45.com

RESTINCT

Independent Student Game Exhibition



The Game

RESTINCT is a 2D/3D puzzle adventure game made in Unity by our team of indie developers. The game is an exploration of character development interpreted through gameplay. The game examines consciousness and the restraints and effects consciousness has on its character's instincts.

In RESTINCT, you play as Norbort, a newcomer to the CTRL. The CTRL is an awareness agency, comprised of a few select members. Norbort is hired by the CTRL to maintain the RESTINCT sector's experiments by monitoring the subject cases. The cases are animals that have been manipulated in some way making them unable to respond to natural

instincts. Gameplay for each case study is directly related to the four RESTINCT case personalities and their psychological and/or physiological problems, confronting the player with four unique puzzles.

There is Solomon, a whale that is taught awareness through repetition of written words, Mash, the bear that has been taught to respond emotionally without having a choice, Mary, an owl that claims to understand color despite her blindness and Adam, the oldest case, a gorilla that is rendered unable to solve problems so instead, and to no avail, must relentlessly calculate and recalculate all possible and infinite solutions.

The Exhibit

RESTINCT Open Development Case Studies was an exhibition to test the relationship between the observer and the observed. Once a week, from September 8 to October 27 2011 we invited visitors to playtest RESTINCT as we developed it live in the IAM Project Room. The exhibit included seven computers featuring three of the four puzzles associated with the case studies. Throughout the exhibit, we updated the game builds based on feedback left in journals by players. We also recorded data through observations during weekly live workshop sessions. The exhibit was an experiment in interactive playtesting, which ultimately provided a wealth of dynamic feedback that could not have been acquired in traditional playtest sessions. Meanwhile, the game was developed with a community mentality by actively involving the eventual game's audience in the development process.

RESTINCT has been a unique learning experience as it constantly presents us with new challenges and unconventional circumstances. Going against convention is a theme that runs through the game's story as well as its game design theory. Although unplanned, it seems only fit we find the theme wedging itself into production. When it came time to playtest, we decided to embrace the idea. Having the open, live playtest approach in the Project Room yielded incredible results. Usually, test participants, especially those familiar with games, enter with a certain expectations. The exhibit setting, however attracted a variety of playtesters and helped balance and broaden the pool. The range included incidental visitors drawn in by curiosity, conventional playtesters, trolls, people who usually don't play games and casual as well as hardcore gamers. Settings ranged from an empty room with one playtester to a crowded room with all stations occupied by two or three people working together

Design and Development

Amanda Dittami, Game Design Lead

Although RESTINCT is still unfinished, it has been an incredible learning experience. Using the Project Room was especially beneficial. By directly observing players, talking with them and reading their journal entries, we could see flaws in the design and in our communication regarding how the game should be played. One of the mini-games in particular was the most difficult to relay. Through much iteration, we were able to help people understand what they were supposed to do. Finding the balance of creating enough challenge within the game experience while presenting clear directions was difficult. Playtesting allowed us to gauge how big (or little) of an audience a game can ultimately have depending on the design choices that are made.

One of the original challenges of RESTINCT was designing scenarios that allowed players to interpret the strange characters inhabiting the game. Harmonizing gameplay with a narrative results in having to make many tough decisions. We continue to face the challenge, even after the exhibition, of interpreting and correcting a character flaw. For example, one of the game's characters (Adam) becomes so frustrated when he is unable to figure out a puzzle in a certain amount of time that he eventually loses control of himself. Players experience this same frustration—not knowing this about his disability—so much so that they put down the controller. While this reaction by the player could be viewed as successful interactive empathy, it is not successful game design in a traditional sense. There are so many different paths to consider—some more conventional than others. In the end, we will have to make a choice.

Anthony Sixto, Art Lead

The art production for RESTINCT has been a valuable learning experience. Over the last year and a half, production has been fragmented. Balancing work on the game with other indie games, completing my senior year at Columbia and now professional work, slows down the progression at times—which isn't

ideal. Yet, stepping away from the project allows me to return with fresh eyes and renewed vigor

The reaction to the art was unexpected. Initially, I was concerned with larger details and how they would display. However to my surprise, it was with these details that people were most forgiving. Reacting to feedback and continually updating the art, it became the smaller details that drew the strongest reactions. Updates to the menus screen, the resolution of text and the presentation of game attributes generated the most commentary. While people appreciated the quality of art direction, they were more focused on the art that directly hindered or helped the gameplay. Aiding the gameplay with quality art was a goal from the beginning but, before playtesting, I considered it to be more of a covert element. In looking back, I thought the game design would overshadow certain elements of the art but I was shown otherwise.

Using an exhibition for live playtests and updates was truly an incredible experience. The game improved by leaps and bounds. It is similar to releasing a beta of the game for download, yet we could notobtrusively keep watch and take notes. Much like beta releases, we are also building a small community for the game. Mixing this strategy with traditional playtests will be a huge advantage. I look forward to releasing the final product around the summer of 2012.

Craig Deskins, Sound Lead

During the exhibition I experienced a level of critique and analysis I have never experienced before. Receiving live feedback about the sound and music from players was a very new process for me. I was able to digest the information much more quickly when I saw the reactions and received meaningful feedback instantaneously.

At first it was difficult for me to analyze the players since they were wearing headphones as they played, but it became easier I watched their body language and their level of dedication to completing the games. In my opinion, the primary task of sound design in games is to maximize immersion and believability within the

game space. I could tell if this was being accomplished simply by watching.

Additionally, it was very useful that we asked players to record their experience after finishing. Reading journal entries and recommendations, led to me make considerable changes to many sounds and resulted in a more subtle soundscape.



Future of RESTINCT

The following months will involve finishing the game and bringing the RESTINCT world together. Players can enter the entirety of the unique world they helped shape. Check out RESTINCT.com for more information.

Crossing Wires: Technology and Play

by Andrew Oleksiuk

Contemporary art trends move slowly compared to the rapid rate of change in technology. Traditional venues in Chicagoland haven't hosted too many new media art exhibitions so I was delighted to read (on Facebook!) about *Crossing Wires: Technology and Play* at the Evanston Art Center.

The show, which ran from February 19 to April 15, featured ten new media artists who use a broad range of materials: tar paper toy robots, electronics, motors, lunch boxes, mobile phones and laser cut plastics. *Crossing Wires* asked a fundamental question: What happens when complex technology is used simply for art or for play?

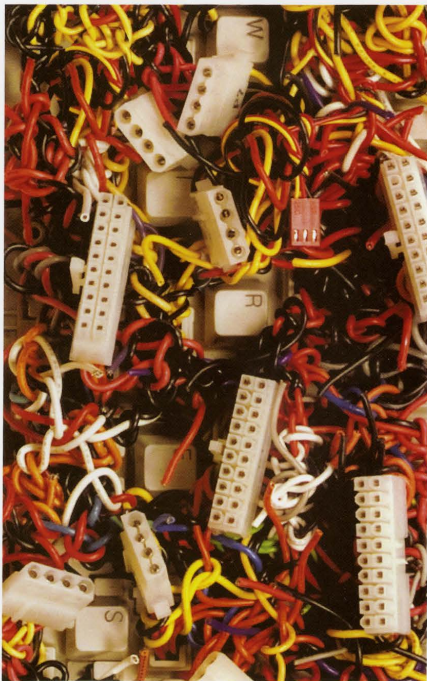
I've chosen four individual works to discuss here. Though playful, each of the four works has deeper meaning at the core. Tiffany Holmes' *We Can't Swim Forever* (2011) explores the ability of technology and art to promote positive environmental stewardship or perhaps

in this case, to also emphasize a lack of the latter. Made to look like white wedding cakes in a bakery window, Holmes created whimsically spinning constructions of recycled materials and laser cut plastics spelling out phrases like, "Where did the winter go?" and other tongue-in-cheek reflections regarding the environment. The serious subject matter as well as the "We" of the title, reveals itself on closer inspection. Hundreds of tiny polar bears arranged like an army of ants live in the shadows of the giant confections.

Toby Zellman's *Strata* (2011), comments on our relationship to technology on a sculptural as well as cultural level.

Stacking discarded personal computer tower cases to form a wall, Zellman stuffs the grid with pigmented tar paper resembling cliff walls or even fungi. This reference to the natural world is an odd enough juxtaposition from afar. The second layer of detail, the electronic circuit boards and system boards central to information processing is brought into relief by the smooth yet staccato repetition of natural forms. That the circuit boards remain also reinforces the ecological problems facing our technology-dependent present and future. France Cadet's *Hunting Trophies* (2009) are robot animal toys that have been disemboweled and strung up in the manner of taxidermed hunting trophies. Commenting on the extinction of wild species, the trophy robot heads are spiritually still "alive" - their eyes angrily flashing and necks twisting, complaining of their condition, whenever someone walks nearby. The *Hunting Trophies* give voice to species harmed by global sport hunting.

Chaz Evans' *Evans Dances Baldessari Sings Lewitt* (2010) is a hilarious send-up of art history and contemporary new media art. Tracing new media art's lineage to conceptual art via video art, *Evans Dances Baldessari Sings Lewitt* (EDBSL) is a twisted remake of a famous video piece in which John Baldessari reads Sol Lewitt's 35 sentences on conceptual art. Says Baldessari in the accompanying



video piece: "I think that these sentences have been hidden too long in the pages of exhibition catalogs and perhaps by my singing them for you, it'll bring these sentences to a much larger audience." Similarly, in Evans' remake, the original content is faithfully reproduced, but with a comical twist: the video is of Evans dancing to the audio from the original video.

The group show, curated by Barbara Blades and Debra Tolchinsky, is remarkably executed, both in theme and quality of individual works. Most of the works are sculptural, some kinetic, others data-driven. All are unique and interesting. Christopher Baker's *Murmur Study* (2009), captures Twitter feeds and prints them out. Christopher Furman's interactive kinetic sculpture *All of the Great Things* (2011) uses pressure sensitive switches, video and moving parts. Joseph Kohnke's *Launch* (2009), features automated missile silos hidden in lunchboxes. Dan Silverstein and Dave E. Tolchinsky's *Apple/apple Beta* (2012), offers another look at technology history, and Ozge Samanci's *Relative Friend* (2012) investigates time and communication.

Left: *Altered Detail, Mired/Wired/Tired* by Toby Zellman

GAME REVIEW

Mass Effect 3

Review by Tom Dowd



Mass Effect 3

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Bioware Corporation
PLATFORMS: Windows PC/Xbox 360/Playstation 3
PLAYED ON: PC
GENRE(S): Action, Role-Playing Game
ESRB RATING: M (Mature)
RELEASE DATE: March 6, 2012

Having reviewed the prior two Mass Effect games (Mass Effect 1 and Mass Effect 2), it seemed only appropriate to review the final entry in the trilogy, the appropriately named Mass Effect 3. Ultimately, the plot of the three games has involved protecting the known universe from the invasion of civilization-killing machines known as Reapers

All of the major races and significant worlds of the galaxy are under simultaneous assault by the Reapers and the only hope in defeating them seems to be in unifying friends and foes alike to fight them together. Yet, even broad alliances may not be enough. I'm not going to delve too deeply into the plot in this review, but suffice it to say the story spans many, many worlds. Through flashbacks of thousands of years, we learn who and what the Reapers are (sort of.) It is epic and grand, gritty and heroic, but in the end more than somewhat somber and reflective. The writers of the game have tried to push the narrative beyond traditional video game "those are the bad guys, kick their asses soundly" tropes and produce something more thoughtful and perhaps profound. They are mostly successful.

Mass Effect 3 (ME3) at the time of this writing sits with an average Metacritic score of 93 across all three platforms and is, as the score indicates, a great game. It is an effective blend of gameplay and story and probably is the game that allows the player the most impact on that story of any current game on the market. ME3, in fact, reaches back to both Mass Effect 1 and Mass Effect 2 to calculate the player's impact on the story by drawing from the final saved game in ME2, which in turn contains information about the player's action in ME1, assuming the player continued the game each time with the last saved game from the previous. A little confusing, but basically by analyzing the ME1 and ME2 saved games, ME3 can track what decisions and actions the

player made in each of the games. It knows who the player's friends or enemies were, what worlds he saved or let die, which characters he romanced (or didn't), which of his teammates lived or died and what critical plot decisions were made. There are supposedly over a hundred data points that are assessed from the prior games to determine how the story in ME3 plays out. As a general example, if a certain character lived through the events of ME2, they participate in a certain part of the ME3 story, making the player's life a little easier. If they died, their role in that part of the story is played by another character, who may not be so sympathetic to the player's desires. In many ways, the narrative part of ME3 is at its best when it's making references to these prior decisions, large and small, and in doing so makes the player feel as if those decisions mattered.

Though ME3 is so effective in those moments it, in some ways, becomes its own worst enemy by setting the bar too high. At one point during ME3, the player has to make a huge decision about which of two civilizations effectively lives or dies. One becomes an ally against the Reapers and the other all but ceases to exist. It is a monumental decision that happens too suddenly (and dramatically) requiring the player to make an unexpected binary choice about which one becomes the ally and which one dies. It is a huge decision, it has a significant personal impact on one of the player's companions, and it should have real long-term consequences for the player. But, very little (if anything) is made of it after the event. Imagine if someone had to make

that decision between England or France, and one of those countries lived on while the other effectively ceased to be, and it all came down to one person's decision. This situation seems like something that would come up again and at least be mentioned by someone. But it does not. (In all fairness, it is addressed in the story, mostly in dialogue, immediately after the event, but never again.) The omission seems jarring.

I was also personally dissatisfied with how the story for one of the companion characters from ME2 wrapped up. I liked how ME2 handled that character and her story, but in ME3 what happened to her was completely out of my control and I basically could only watch as her plot elements from the prior game played out. Nothing I did mattered—even remotely—which was very disappointing.

The climax of the game disappointed me similarly. All through the course of the game I am able to make choices that affect how the final battle with the Reapers plays out. Or, it seems like I do. When that last moment is reached, there is choice, but it is between two options that are pre-set and nothing I've done through the story to that point has any bearing on those choices. It's an either-or moment—the preference of two evils in many ways. But neither really reflects the consequences of the decisions I've made up until then. Each option has significant and decidedly different ramifications, and to choose between the two is somewhat sobering, but the choice feels hollow because it ignores all the effort put into the game to reach that moment. The game does have multiple endings and, to an extent, some variations of those endings reflect my prior choices. However, it is at that very moment of decision that the experience feels hollow, and it feels that way because of how high the bar was set by the rest of the game.

Overall, Mass Effect 3 is a great game and I strongly recommend it, especially if you've played the two previous games. Yet, you can still play and enjoy ME3 even if you haven't played ME1 and 2. Either way it is an ultimately effective, if not flawed, end to a great series.

Game Developers Conference



The GDC is the premiere conference and expo for the game industry, making it a highly beneficial learning and development experience for students and faculty. The Interactive Arts and Media department's presence at the conference establishes Columbia College Chicago within the industry and gives us access to emerging trends, technologies and developments within the field. This year, senior students in the Game Design major showcased their capstone game projects, Water Aloft the Ridge, FearLess and Broken.

Photos by (clockwise): Jacob Mooney, Philip Nadasdy, Jacob Mooney.



Updates

Faculty and Staff Updates:

Department Chair **Annette Barbier** recently received a grant of \$2,500 in visual art from the Illinois Arts Council for continued work on her ecology pieces. Illinois Arts Council funds will support work-in-progress that critiques our relationship to the natural environment using natural materials (native leaves or goose feathers so far) as raw materials into which text, bar code identifiers, or images of invasive (in the case of plants) or extinct (in the case of birds) species are laser cut.

Adjunct faculty **Marc Temkin** works on databases, data mining and web-oriented projects using both Microsoft and open-source technologies. Notable projects have included an expert system that corrects and improves the recorded music library database for radio station, WFMT, and an online music scheduling system (schedule.wfmt.com). The music scheduler, a real-time data comparison tool, constantly looks for changes in the playlist and transforms that data into the source for the station website.

Adjunct faculty **Sal Barry** organized and curated Art of Play 5, the IAM department's annual art show that explores games, fun and play. The show featured a variety of work from students and faculty. He also co-developed a new blogging class, called "Blogging: Beyond the Basics." The class, which is a collaboration between the IAM and Journalism departments, will make its debut in the Fall 2012 semester

Adjunct faculty **Claudia Laska** participated in *The Fluxus/Visual Poetry Project*, one section of the exhibition, "Write Now: Artists and Letterforms," which was held at the Chicago Cultural Center from January through April 2012. She also performed with Dada Machine Fluxus at the Cultural Center during the 2012 Chicago FluxFest.

Patrick Lichty was appointed to the Board of Directors of the New Media Caucus. He is co-producing a documentary on the Bowery underground art scene, "Wednesdays at A's" about punk art doyenne, Arleen Schloss. He finished his first monograph, entitled "Interrogating the Net," and is in negotiations with publishers. He has published a new issue of *Intelligent Agent*, covering virtual art and art as public practice, which is available on Lulu.com. Lichty has joined a research consortium on virtual learning in cooperation with Sabanci University, Istanbul. Lichty has completed a third phase of a US-Iran collaboration entitled "Your Day/My Night" as leader of the three-person American team, and will be part of a presentation of the project in Toronto in May, 2012.

Adjunct faculty **Stefan Brun**, artistic director of Chicago's Prop Thr, is opening a newly translated production of Bertolt Brecht's first play: "Drumming in the Night" on March 23, 2012. Stefan has been invited by the Kennedy Center For the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. to direct one of the nationally selected new plays in their summer New Plays Showcase, July 22 to 29, 2012. The program is a collaboration between the Kennedy Center and the National New Play Network.

The MI Parque app, a mobile app developed by an all-women team including IAM students and led by IAM Academic Manager **Mindy Faber** along with others, was a Grand Challenge winner in the Apps for Metro Chicago contest. The app is a bilingual participatory place-making web and smartphone application that helps residents of the community contribute and share their vision for the future of Little Village's new parks. The app has received a total \$8000 in awards that will go towards app development and the community of Little Village.

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Interactive Arts + Media
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Water Aloft The Ridge



Spirit and Little Girl Concept

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