

Some words about some recent opinions on this school and this class.

I'd like to take a few minutes to talk about this class, this program, this school and education in general.

You'll excuse me if I need to refer to my notes, but I do want to insure that I get this correct and stay on track, out of respect for your time.

First of all it's very easy and a normal human reaction, when, under stress, we seek someone to blame for our troubles. We find inadequacy and unfairness at every turn, even when every measure has been taken to provide resources, attentions and consideration evenhandedly.

These are stressful times. The general economy is still struggling, unemployment is high for everyone, and with each passing year there seems an exponential growth in the competition for well-paying jobs in our chosen field.

So it's natural for us to find someone to blame. The danger comes when we begin to undermine the efforts of those who sincerely want to help us.

If we do, we can end up causing ourselves greater and perhaps more irreparable damage, and generally not making our world a better place to live.

Such is the danger of hating, of finding fault, of accusations instead of conversations, suggestions, and understanding.

Everyone hates their school. Or they love it. Sometimes one, then the other, and then sometimes back again.

Everyone has an opinion about education, and they all believe they are right.

Even I have an opinion about it. Several, actually.

And I REALLY had an opinion about it as a student.

I went to school to be a writer. Novels, poetry, plays, movies, and yes, cartoons.

I went to the University of Iowa, home of the famous Writers Workshop.

I worked my ass off there and felt cheated and angry when I graduated and found that I couldn't get paid for being a writer of Avant-Garde fiction and plays. I blamed the school for supporting my work as a writer, for saying that I was good when I wasn't, for implying that I would get a good job with my degree, for wasting my time – especially when there were so many great writer's retreats and workshops out there that seemed to really focus on what good writing really was.....

I'm currently getting my MFA in "Interactive Media Design". As a student I was pissed off because there weren't any graduate programs in Animation in this area. I thought that this was as close as I could get

to something actually in my field, and that I would get some good training on creating web, VR and game-based interactive content. I was wrong.

I have gotten very little actual hands-on specific training for any of that.

I have felt at times during my MFA education, and in my undergraduate days, as though I had bought a ticket to go to Las Vegas where I was going to make my fortune, and instead had been locked on a train that was going, non-stop, to the middle of the desert where it was going to dump me to fend for myself.

As I have gained some perspective on it, I have found that, at least now, as a student, during my graduate school time, I am not locked alone on a train bound for the wasteland, but instead on a passenger jet, surrounded by fellow travelers, each of us bound for an individual destination and journey.

Of course, I've also found that the pilot is sometimes dead. Or passed out. Or simply absent. So I've had to take the controls myself. Sometimes the control tower is there to talk me down, sometimes not.

And sometimes, I'm lucky, and there's a navigator there to look over my shoulder, to sit next to me, to help me figure out where I need to go and how to get there.

Now of course this analogy breaks down when we remember that everyone else on that plane is going to a different destination, and the navigator can't watch over everyone's flight all the time.

But at least we're all going in a similar direction, and we can help each other with some assistance from that Navigator.

The fact is that I am the one responsible for my future. There are things I can't control, like the economy, or the fact that I want to do something that I'm passionate about, but there's not a lot of paying opportunity for that.

The question is: How can I adapt to that world and still keep my passion?

To return to our flying metaphor, how do I navigate the weather, the terrain, the traffic and my fuel to land safely where I think I will be happy?

A navigator cannot make those decisions for you. A navigator can only suggest ways to manage the elements, offer options for flight paths and landing sites, and perhaps warn you of potentially dangerous situations.

The rest is up to you.

So there's some thoughts on education in general.

Now, about Introduction to 3D Animation.....

I first taught this class here at AI many years ago, and taught a number of very successful students, Jon Dege, for one.

At that time, I focused intently on Animation fundamentals. While some students thrived on that, I got many more complaints about how they felt that they already knew these principles and were more interested in the technical fine points about animating in 3DS Max.

So I moved it to being a more “cookbook” style tutorial class. The overall quality of the animation coming out of the class didn’t change much for the better, and often went down, but it seemed as though it was based more on the character of the student than the content of the class.

I was moved on to different classes and Dave Wilharm took over Intro to 3D Animation, and, from what I have heard and seen, focused on more technical tools in service of animation principles instead of proscribed tutorials.

Again, there were some complaints and the overall quality of work produced remained about the same, again, dependent more on the character and ability of the student than anything else.

When Dave became the Academic Director I took over the class again, and began to push more fundamentals, less technology.

I gave the class pre-built character rigs and asked them to act out scenes that emphasized specific fundamental principles of animation.

Once again, the quality of the animations stayed about the same and varied mostly with, you guessed it, the character and skill of the individual students.

This time the complaints were more generalized. While everyone (mostly) liked the focus on fundamental principles, many felt cheated because they were not getting enough training on rigging.

They only got a brief insight into it in Maya in Intermediate Animation, and none at all in 3DS Max.

Since Max is still one of the two primary 3D software packages out there in the Professional world, we decided it would be appropriate to introduce basic rigging in Intro to 3D Animation class. So we began to include it while trying not to take too much away from the focus on animation principles.

And that’s where we stand with the curriculum for this class today. Trying to emphasize the fundamental principles of animation, which you have studied in a number of classes, and put into practice in Intro to 2D Animation, and trying to give an understandable introduction to the technological elements of animating in 3D in general and 3DS Max in particular.

As far as this program, Media Arts and Animation, goes –

This is not exclusively an animation program.

Animation is not the only thing we teach in our program.

This program exists to help you prepare for a career in CGI, in Communication Arts, in a growing and rapidly changing and ever expanding field that involves animation.

Careers and paying jobs that are strictly based on Hollywood-style Character Animation are rare – Internationally, Nationally and Regionally.

Most of those jobs nationally are located on the west coast.

Since spring 2008 we've had approximately 80 graduates from the Media Arts and Animation and Visual Effects and Motion Graphics programs. Out of those 80 approximately four, (about 5%), of those have moved to the west coast. All of them, to the best of my knowledge, graduated from VFX, not Animation.

Clearly the people who graduate from this school, from this program, Media Arts and Animation, our students, don't want to or are not able to move to the West Coast, or some other location where there are more positions for character animators, (and consequently, more competition for those jobs).

Because we are a "career focused" school, not a "Fine Art" or "Vo-Tech" school, our purpose is to help you, the student, develop the professional skills necessary to get and keep a job and create a career for yourselves. We focus on trying to help you.

In this region, the Upper Midwest, you will not be able to get a job that focuses exclusively on character animation. The market here is much less specialized. There are jobs out there, but they require more than just character animation skills. They require technical, communication, interpretation, interpersonal, business and social skills, problem-solving and research skills, collaborative and self-motivational skills. They require that you be resourceful and disciplined and focused and determined. It is necessary that you be adaptable and learn to recognize opportunity.

And of course, you also need to be a good artist.

Animation is something we all love and are passionate about. What we are all trying to do is to take our passion and, in some small way, make a living from it.

And that's what we try and teach here.