

## Reflections on Professional Advisory Committee 6/19/14 and Alumni Panel 6/23/14

### Professional Advisory Committee 6/19/14

Our Media Arts & Animation (MAA) Professional Advisory Committee meeting produced several useful items for reflection – here are a few highlights of the discussion:

- This iteration of the committee consisted of three successful and active creatives, two of which are MAA alumni and one a former MAA instructor; as such the members have a good balance of knowledge about our curriculum and industry expectations.
- The committee noted that the value of an education at an institution such as ours lies in the collaborative experience, working alongside other creatives and under the guidance of skilled professionals, learning to critically evaluate others' work and learning to take criticism in stride. The committee noted that one can get online training such as a Digital Tutors subscription, but that alone does not properly prepare someone for the industry – there are too many soft skills and creative problem-solving that are needed to be a successful professional.
- The committee praised our program for having the most well-rounded and technically proficient graduates of the local schools. This is based on their interactions with students approaching their studios for employment. We will strive to keep the broad set of proficiencies while maintaining or increasing creative and design prowess.
- Achieving competency in character animation was cited as one of the more difficult challenges in any education program. The committee suggested implementing a tiered system of animation fundamentals exercises, where students must prove competence in one exercise before moving on to another. This is on the surface a typical model of education but the nuances could suggest a shift where perhaps we implement a pass/fail evaluation to certain exercises based on a focused set of fundamentals as we lead students toward a more comprehensive skill set. The committee suggested not going overboard on teaching character rigging to allow maximum time working on the *art* of animation, and that anthropomorphic, simpler characters are sufficient for demonstrating the 12 Principles of Animation (i.e. full bipeds are not absolutely necessary).
- The faculty and committee discussed an approach to our Traditional Animation Studio course (essentially the first half of a two-course suite where teams produce finished animated shorts) where students “apply” for positions using their existing portfolios, and teams are assembled around complementary skill sets to produce well-rounded teams. What particular skills are needed are dependent on the nature of the project design, and the nature of the design will be influenced in part by the skills of the team members, so there is a bit of a catch-22 here, but the idea has merit.
- The committee strongly suggested that students put more effort into seeking out informational interviews with industry professionals, learning about process and pipeline at studios that they are interested in pursuing. The students should then work to implement similar situations while they are in school. The committee reiterated that it is also useful for the student's work to be in the same wheelhouse as the studios they want to pursue professionally.
- The committee agreed with the faculty in that graduates must be comfortable switching to using software with which they may not be familiar – getting up to speed on the tools of

the studio in which they are working. Showing initiative and doing a small proof-of-concept project if an initial job interview doesn't go well can also send a positive message.

- The committee indicated that students on the whole are not well-versed in writing “professional” emails, and do not know how to follow up on an email if a response is not received. This is something we do not spend enough time teaching, and we will need to find the right spot to implement further instruction (hopefully before 9<sup>th</sup> Level Review since students are expected to be reaching out for internships by then).
- The committee also indicated the students would benefit from more compositing and After Effects software proficiency. They also indicated that the subject matter of a job is sometimes not very exciting, but a potential employer needs to see evidence of “going the distance” and executing the job to completion. I will be looking for opportunities to address these ideas with a corporate communications project next quarter.
- The committee was in favor of “surprising” students with unannounced challenges which would put them in a position of quick problem-solving, both technical and creative. This emulates the fluidity common in a production environment. The faculty will look for room in the course schedules for these unannounced activities.
- The committee noted that moving out of the local market is dangerous without a prior connection – the expenses involved, and unfamiliarity with the landscape, make for an increased risk. The consensus was it that it's a good idea to network while in school, not only with professionals in the industry but with upperclassmen that will enter the workforce before you and may provide ladders of opportunity.

### **Alumni panel 6/23/14**

Our summer faculty development session included a panel of alumni who discussed how we can better prepare today's students for the workforce. Here are highlights from the session:

- The internship is a valuable part of preparing students for the workforce and it must continue to be a priority at the school.
- Getting a job often involves the idea of being at the right place at the right time, but achieving that comes from hard work, particularly in networking with industry creatives.
- The faster pace of production, compared to school, was a shock for the grads. They suggested we tighten deadlines. They also suggested switching things up during projects to simulate the unpredictable nature of client input. I'm wondering about increasing the outside-of-class/independent hard-skill learning so we can spend more time critiquing in class and overall shortening deadlines.
- The panel indicated that the student must be able to justify his or her creative decisions (as though communicating with a client).
- Students need to be able to communicate professionally, both verbally and in writing.
- Students should be able to design for limited budgets, not just the “big” project. Look for ways to use creative talents to deliver messages effectively in a variety of situations.
- Attend industry events. And it's fine to go with friends but then you need to mingle!
- Keep students on their toes with unannounced large-group presentations that must be professional in nature with minimal prep time.