Supernatural storytelling and design infuse a video game in development at DePaul Originals Game Studio. See page 4.
Milestones and Memories

Four months ago, we prepared to welcome the majority of our students to campus—many for the very first time and some for the first time in nearly 18 months. I looked forward to being together in person again.

Four quarters of learning and working remotely was challenging, to be sure, but I have been consistently amazed by the resilience, innovation and hard work of our students, faculty and staff, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

This issue of In the Loop highlights many examples of that resilience: a second-place national ranking for our Security Daemons team, news about our DePaul Originals Game Studio, an app that narrates stories of historical injustice through the backdrop of cultural institutions, and exciting projects from alumni.

Looking Back

This year will mark two exciting anniversaries for our college’s earliest major—computer science (CS).

Although the first computing courses were offered at DePaul in the mid-1960s, it was an initiative in 1971 aimed at increasing computer services and curriculum at the university that marked the start of a CS requirement for some majors.

In 1981, the Department of Computer Science, then housed within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, was formed. Fourteen years later, the department was established as a free-standing school (originally the School of Computer Science, Telecommunications and Information Systems).

In 2021, we have celebrated 50 years of DePaul’s commitment to the advancement of computer science education and 40 years of a dedicated CS unit at DePaul as part of what we know today as the College of Computing and Digital Media.

A current CS student recently informed us that her mother took one of DePaul’s first required CS courses, Fortran programming, 50 years ago this fall. What a privilege it is to know that we’ve been able to educate and impact generations of tech learners.

Moving Forward

I began my tenure at DePaul in 1981 as an assistant professor joining seven faculty members who were leaving the mathematics department for this new venture, the Department of Computer Science. After 40 years at DePaul and 15 years as the dean of CDM, I will be stepping down from that position at the end of the 2021–22 academic year.

It has been amazing to watch our college grow during that time. We now have more than 40 undergraduate and graduate degree programs, well over 20,000 college alumni and a catalog of nationally ranked programs.

And we plan to keep going.

The academic year is underway, and there’s plenty of work to do. If there is anything I’ve learned at CDM, it’s that a lot can be accomplished in a year. I’m committed to working hard and continuing the progress we’ve made together.

David Miller
Dean, College of Computing and Digital Media
2021 Emmy Nominees

Art O’Leary (CDM ‘07) was nominated for Outstanding Picture Editing for an Unstructured Reality Program for his work on “Deadliest Catch,” a Discovery Channel TV series about crab fishing in the Bering Sea. O’Leary previously won an Emmy for his editing for the program in 2014.

Dewayne Perkins (CDM ‘13), a comedian, writer and actor, was nominated for Outstanding Writing for a Variety Series for “The Amber Ruffin Show,” which streams on NBCUniversal’s Peacock service.

Kevin McGrail (CDM MS ‘11) and his co-producers were awarded a Sports Emmy in the Outstanding Edited Sports Series category for “The Shop: Uninterrupted,” an HBO talk show set in a barbershop and featuring NBA star LeBron James and businessman Maverick Carter.

Animator Tapped by Cartoon Network

Chaz Bottoms (CDM ‘17), director, animator, writer and owner of CBA Studios, a boutique animation studio based in Los Angeles, is developing an animated musical series, “Battu,” with director, writer and producer Matthew A. Cherry for Cartoon Network. The series follows two teen dancers in Chicago who find community in a dance studio that blends hip-hop and ballet. Since graduating, Bottoms has collaborated with and produced content for SpringHill Company, Adult Swim, Steve Harvey Global, Bleacher Report, John Legend, Samantha Bee, Sony Music, Columbia Records, Atlantic Records and Snapchat. He is also a character animator for Nickelodeon.

Security Daemons Prevail

DePaul’s Security Daemons took second place in the 2021 National Collegiate Cyber Defense Competition (CCDC), competing against nearly 170 teams from across the country. This year’s ranking is the highest in Security Daemons history. The national event brings together the winners of 10 regional competitions; the Security Daemons won the Midwest regional. DePaul has competed in the CCDC each year since its inception in 2005. The team has won the regional competition and gone on to place in the top five nationally in five of the last seven years. DePaul’s 2021 CCDC roster comprised undergraduate and graduate CDM students. Learn more.

IndieCade Horizons 2021

DePaul participated as a premium partner in the inaugural Horizons, organized by IndieCade in coordination with the Higher Education Video Game Alliance. IndieCade is an international juried festival of independent video games. Horizons is a new, online, international event that showcases game design students, universities and colleges to connect them with each other, tool creators, recruiters and the broader public. View DePaul’s games showcase at Horizons.

Hack4Space

The DePaul Center for Data Science, in collaboration with IBM Z, held Hack4Space, a virtual hackathon where teams of students leveraged NASA data to identify a problem and propose a solution. More than 120 DePaul students from CDM, the College of Science and Health and the Driehaus College of Business registered for the event, and about 20 teams worked on a project during the weekend of May 7–10. The kickoff event featured keynote speakers from NASA and IBM.
Students in DePaul Originals Game Studio work with professional tools such as Epic Games’ Unreal Engine under the guidance of Will Meyers, the studio’s engineering director.

Rose, a mystical dog that fell from the sky, roams inside CDM. She scales walls and traverses ominous urban landscapes and sewer tunnels. She is menaced by The Shadow That Pervades, a sinister force that distorts other living beings in these realms into grotesque predators, but is guided by creator spirits that protect and empower her.

The canine protagonist of DePaul Originals Game Studio’s (DOGS) first video game in development has other protectors aiding her journey: Allen Turner, a School of Design (SoD) senior professional lecturer who teaches game design and runs the studio as its creative director; Will Meyers, a School of Computing (SoC) instructor and the studio’s engineering director; and the CDM students shaping her abilities and environment.

Funded by a DePaul Academic Growth and Innovation Fund grant, DOGS was launched three years ago to simulate a professional game studio. Students in the studio help develop a game until it’s polished enough for public release. The experience, mirroring production timelines and the division of design and programming disciplines at professional studios, helps students master specific skills and build a portfolio to show future employers.

“Each of these students works on particular pieces with an eye toward this bigger idea,” says Turner, who emphasizes training through teamwork. “Whether graduate or undergraduate, what matters is the quality of their work and how well they understand it. As people stand out, we want them to mentor other people to help them move forward. That helps us to build a community.”

Kailey Phan Mitchell (CDM ’20) participated in an incubator group that helped conceive the studio and served as its producer while earning her bachelor’s degree in game design. The studio’s real-world workflows are a helpful reality check for students, she says.

“Every student has such a big idea they want to get done, and the studio helps them figure out when they need to take a step back, scope it down and figure out what needs to be done,” says Phan Mitchell. “They’re learning you can’t just go into a professional game studio and pitch your little heart out for a game you want to do. You have to join something that may have existed for years. That revelation is new to a lot of DePaul students who make games for 10 weeks during a class and move on to something else.”

Students also learn the complex hierarchies common to professional studios.

“A lot of people think, ‘I would love to be a designer,’ but you can be a weapons designer or level designer or just design the main character’s actions or limitations,” says Phan Mitchell.
Under Meyers’ tutelage, designers and programmers also learn Unreal Engine, a software platform ubiquitous in the video game, TV and film industries but seldom taught at universities. Epic Games, developer of Unreal Engine, recently accepted DePaul into its highly regarded global academic partner program.

“There’s not much of an Unreal presence in the Midwest,” says Turner. “We hope to develop mastery with the engine here, then share that with others to help build a community around that kind of game design.”

Building an academia-industry pipeline is key. DOGS alumni are already working in industry studios such as NetherRealm and Iron Galaxy. But DOGS is also a research think tank that strives for academic sharing and social uplift by democratizing game design.

As students make their way through in-game mechanics, alpha and beta builds of game levels, and creating various assets, from setting up a quest system to 3D modeling, they document their processes in the Development Diaries section on the studio’s website. The video tutorials, demos and workshop classes shared by students and staff are shared publicly. “We make the assets and content we create available to other people to play around with and remix into their own projects,” says Turner.

Turner, who worked as a designer in the industry and is involved in youth outreach, wants to share the studio’s efforts with Chicago Public Schools (CPS) high school teachers and students, as well as youth in juvenile detention centers. He hopes to secure funding to pursue that goal, partly through the completion of a portable game design studio.

“I’m also teaching gamelike learning and exploring game development tools with CPS teachers to show how they can use them in their classrooms,” says Turner. “We want to give them something to play around with and show how we got to a particular point. Most young people, especially kids from marginalized spaces, are exposed to games as consumers. We want to say, ‘Hey, you can actually use this to express yourself.’”

Turner also encourages students to give their games meaningful narratives related to real-world challenges. Turner drew on his experience in Native American and Afro-Indigenous storytelling and board game design to script the Rose narrative, which he says is “a metaphor for the battle against depression and how it can be a social plague that spreads from person to person.

“Play is parable. We use it to instigate a conversation,” says Turner. “We want our students to build without knowing the particular place they’re going to end up and just be okay exploring. It’s been quite a dance so far.”
Eugene Bush (CDM ’00) knew he belonged in show business. But when he wasn’t accepted into the acting program at The Theatre School at DePaul, he took the long way around. He earned a degree in information technology, spent 18 years accruing wealth in the corporate world and arrived at his destiny on his own terms.

“A high school mentor told me, ‘Do something practical, make your own money and then make your own movies,’ says Bush. “So that’s what I did.”

Now based in Atlanta, Bush heads E-Tre Productions, a video production studio that recently made its first feature film, “Mediator,” a supernatural thriller about a family counselor caught between a psychopathic predator and a missing child’s ghost. Scripted by Bush’s wife and frequent collaborator, Maggie, and directed by Cas Sigers-Beedles, a screenwriter, novelist and director who also helped raise funds and recruit crew, the film has earned accolades at festivals. It screened on Oct. 14 at DePaul’s Loop Campus, where Bush gave students tips on breaking into the industry.

“The barrier is so low now. If you’ve got a 4K camera and the best lights, amazing! Do that. But if the best you have is your Android phone, then do that, and you’ll see success,” says Bush, who produces the majority of the studio’s work for web, social media and network streaming distribution. E-Tre creates corporate brand promotions, live events and, more recently, episodic dramas such as “Mixed Emotions,” an interracial, star-crossed romance set on Chicago’s South Side. “The ones who are winning are those able to produce quantity, tell a story quickly and get it out to market,” he says.

Bush, who also directs, operates cameras and acts, launched E-Tre in 2010 while at Trinal, a Chicago diversity workforce consultancy whose CEO gave him extra office space as partial compensation for IT work. He started by producing gospel music videos and covering promotional events for beer and spirits companies. Feeling he’d plateaued, he and Maggie relocated to Atlanta, the nexus of a growing Black filmmaking community anchored by Tyler Perry Studios, where Maggie also works.

Jay Morrison, an Atlanta-based real-estate developer, helped the couple relocate. Bush reciprocated by filming and live-streaming Morrison’s “Corner Class” multicity tours during which Morrison, mic in hand on sidewalks in underresourced communities, shares financial management and investment advice with local residents.

“Jay’s goal is to give back and decrease the wealth gap,” says Bush. “We can’t rely on the government or others to give us a leg up. We have to learn the system, use our own credit, our own ingenuity and recycle our own dollars.”
Egyptian artifacts often conceal meanings that elude scholars. Sixteen objects in the Sackler Wing of New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, however, are revealing a contemporary message to visitors observing them with a smartphone app co-created by Heather Snyder Quinn, assistant professor of design in CDM’s School of Design, and Adam DelMarcelle, adjunct professor of graphic design at Pennsylvania College of Art and Design.

Snyder Quinn and DelMarcelle created Mariah, an augmented reality (AR) app that uses a smartphone’s camera and geolocative positioning to trigger a multilayered narrative connecting members of the Sackler family, who donated the artifacts, to the opioid epidemic. Purdue Pharma, owned by the Sacklers before its dissolution in a bankruptcy settlement, is widely considered to have fueled the epidemic through the aggressively marketed, prescribed pain medicine OxyContin.

Upon entering the Temple of Dendur exhibit, users can place 3D text, “Mariah Lotti Memorial Gallery,” at any point in virtual space by tapping their screens, which also triggers a video clip of a young Lotti looking forward to her unrealized future.

“It feels permanent and sculptural, as if Mariah has augmented the space with this signage,” says Snyder Quinn.

Snyder Quinn is a recipient of DePaul’s 2021–22 Wicklander Fellowship, which supports faculty interested in applied or professional ethics related to their field of research. Her work challenges technocratic power and employs AR as a speculative tool for understanding interpretations of free speech and property rights.

“Big tech companies want to own the so-called metaverse,” says Snyder Quinn. “We know Siri and Alexa listen to us. What does that mean for the future of virtual space? What can someone put on the front of my house or in the land around me? With most emerging tech, there are few established laws. Collectively, we should make these decisions before others do it without our consent.”

Snyder Quinn and DelMarcelle are also making an app that augments the Louvre Pyramid in Paris with a 3D number that updates every seven minutes to represent real-time opioid fatalities. In 2019, the Louvre Museum removed the Sackler name from its Asian antiquities wing. Snyder Quinn and DelMarcelle think such actions don’t go far enough in acknowledging those who’ve paid a higher price.

“People who die of opioid overdoses aren’t always seen as human,” says Snyder Quinn. “We forget there was a person, like Mariah, who didn’t want to be addicted to drugs. Mariah had friends, hobbies, a life.”
The Finish Line Fund provides critical, immediate-use funds to DePaul students who need financial assistance to complete the final requirements they need to graduate.

Help a student cross the finish line today at give.depaul.edu/finishline