Autodesk® 3ds Max®
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—Alex Counsell
    Principal Technician
    Faculty of Creative and
    Cultural Industries
    University of Portsmouth

Higher education.

British University integrates Autodesk 3ds Max and Autodesk Maya into curriculum.

Image courtesy of the University of Portsmouth.

Gateway to Learning

Located on the southern coast of England with easy access to London, France, and Spain, the city of Portsmouth is considered a gateway to Europe. This busy, multicultural port is the perfect place for students from around the world to share ideas, learn new skills, and develop expertise with leading-edge tools.

The University of Portsmouth has recently formed a Faculty of Creative and Cultural Industries, an amalgamation of the creative technologies and the art, design, and media departments, which is offering a full range of foundation, undergraduate, and postgraduate courses. One of the hallmarks of these courses is the integration of the very tools being used by industry professionals: Autodesk® 3ds Max® and Autodesk® Maya® 3D animation and design software.

Training on Industry-Leading Tools

"When it came to choosing the solutions we would be using in the classrooms and teaching our students, we looked specifically at what the industry was using," says Alex Counsell, principal technician, Faculty of Creative and Cultural Industries. "We chose 3ds Max and Maya based on their extensive use in the games, film, and TV production industries."

The university uses 3ds Max and Maya across a wide range of courses and programs, including computer animation and computer games technology. It is also incorporating Autodesk® MotionBuilder™ software into its optical motion-capture pipeline. Other courses that incorporate 3ds Max and Maya are digital media, digital video technologies, entertainment technology, and multimedia programming.

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Software Skills—A Core Unit

"We introduce students to 3ds Max and Maya in a core unit called software skills, which is predominantly lecture- and workshop-based, illustrating 3D concepts and practical hands-on software training," explains Counsell. "In the second year, students are taught the application of animation skills within the software."

Throughout the courses, the teachers provide expert sessions, mentoring, and tutorials focusing on software skills. They also run an animation club with online forums for members, regular weekly workshops, and visiting speakers and trainers.

Most of the core curriculum is delivered through traditional lectures and tutorials, backed up with practical workshops. Some courses also use self-directed learning, designed to give final-year students a practical experience in computer game and animation production.

"A great example of self-directed learning is our Real-Time Group Animation Project, where students form production groups and are given a set of client requirements," says Counsell. "These requirements are deliberately set very high, and the student groups meet with virtual clients (academic staff) to negotiate new, more realistic goals. We usually get one or two outstanding groups, however, that meet all requirements, no matter how demanding."

Students Land Jobs in Industry

Graduates of the University of Portsmouth go on to find satisfying work in the games, film, and TV production industries. Student placements include Pivotal Games, SCi, Climax, Blitz Games, Cinesite, The Mill, Moving Picture Company, CFC, Kudos, and The Creative Assembly.

Lina Kounetkova, a former computer animation student at the University of Portsmouth, currently works for Kuju Games in its London studio and has been using 3ds Max and Maya for more than four years. In 2005 she won the E-Stings competition at Channel 4

for creating the best sting (short animation) and has since gone on to produce another five stings for the successful television channel.

"In my job I work with a team of animators on in-game animation, and everyone is using 3ds Max," says Kounetkova. "I learned 3ds Max at Portsmouth, which helped me to land on my feet in this company. I wouldn't be able to do the job I'm doing without the training I got at school."

Jared Embley, another computer animation graduate, found similar success thanks to his knowledge of Maya software. He is currently a render wrangler at visual effects company Cinesite, where he manages both 2D and 3D renders.

"Maya plays a vital role within the structure of this company by being the primary 3D application used for digital creations," says Embley. "Having an understanding of 3D techniques and animation was a critical aspect for obtaining this job, and knowing Maya gave me an edge."

Embley has been using Maya for more than four years and says his favorite aspect of the software is the MEL (Maya Embedded Language) scripting. "It's powerful knowing that anything is possible with this program," he adds.

MotionBuilder, Combustion Come into Play

In conjunction with Maya and 3ds Max, the University of Portsmouth plans to introduce Autodesk MotionBuilder to its animation and games courses for character animation. Students will learn keyframe animation and solving motion-capture data. The university also plans to incorporate Autodesk® Combustion® compositing software into the under-graduate units in postproduction and compositing, as well as into a new master's degree in postproduc-tion effects. In addition, the School of Architecture within the faculty of Creative and Cultural Industries is interested in using 3ds Max for modeling organic shapes and for visualization.

Image courtesy of the University of Portsmouth.

"There is a growing awareness of the multiple usages of 3ds Max and Maya within other departments and faculties," says Counsell. "The continuing rapid change and growth of the media industries means that Creative Technologies at Portsmouth University is always at the forefront of technology, supporting this with its close ties with industry leaders like Autodesk."

To learn more about Autodesk Media & Entertainment Solutions, visit **www.autodesk.com/me.**

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