



Aaron Thibault:

Game On!

WHEN AARON THIBAULT became an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Computer Science at Baylor this spring, the excitement of gaming development students – and their professors – was tangible. Having been an active member of the industry for more than 14 years and serving in both commercial and academic posts, his immense knowledge of gaming will certainly assist students in taking their skills to the next level.

RICH EXPERIENCE

Aaron is currently Vice President of Product Development at Gearbox Software located in Plano, Texas, where he is responsible for production and staffing of all projects. While at Gearbox, he has worked on hits such as *Borderlands 2*, *Aliens* and *Brothers in Arms: Furious 4*.

He has experience in entertainment production, military R&D and academia. After earning his undergraduate degree at The University of Texas at Austin, Thibault began working at Origin Systems where he was a sound designer and cinematic animator, which was a part of Electronic Arts, the company behind the Madden franchise and other popular games. After EA began to downsize, he returned to his alma mater.

"Dr. George Kozmetsky, raised money to build an R&D program with games," Thibault said. "I started with a research agenda of artificial intelligence, learning and online games. I built *Digital Warrior*, which was a learning game for decision-making for the Army. I tied that in to other gaming projects that were happening around the Army. I did a number of very cool projects there."

After launching the IC2 Institute at UT, Thibault moved to the Dallas area where he served as Deputy Director and Senior Lecturer at Southern Methodist University's Guildhall graduate program in videogame arts and sciences.

The time spent teaching and researching was a highlight for Thibault but his desire to return to commercial gaming led him to his current company, Gearbox Software.

"Gearbox has a great team," says Thibault. "I'm able to work directly with the founders of the company, who are awesome game makers, having made some games I loved playing: *Counter Strike*, *Tony Hawk*, and *Halo PC*."

EXCITING PARTNERSHIP

Though the majority of his time is spent on the commercial side of the industry these days, his desire to remain engaged in academic circles has never waned.

Thibault began his relationship with Baylor as a visiting lecturer in the film and digital media classes of both Drs. Corey Carbonara and Michael Korpi. Not only did he share with students his experiences but he also took these opportunities to visit with students about their gaming experiences and expectations of new products on the market.

"I really enjoyed coming down and having a sounding board of students to talk to," Thibault said. "These guys are gamers. They know about games in the market. I love to see the reactions and see what they're thinking about and talk to them about new developments within the industry."

Through these experiences, Thibault began discussions about opportunities to get more involved with the program at Baylor. In January he officially stepped into an elevated role by taking on the challenge of teaching the computer science capstone course for Game Development.

Baylor's program is highly regarded as one that consistently produces graduates capable of positively impacting a business immediately. The addition of Thibault will only advance the University's reputation in this area.

"Aaron Thibault is a major player in the industry and vice president of a major studio, said Dr. Jeff Donahoo, a professor of computer science at Baylor. "He brings many years of experience on a variety of high profile projects to the capstone class, providing a tremendous benefit to Baylor students."

Thibault's involvement will give Baylor students a very special opportunity to learn directly from one of the best in the industry. They will be the beneficiaries of hands-on instruction and practical advice that could only originate from one

who has found a balance between academia and corporate gaming.

Thibault believes students have an incredible opportunity to see the fruits of their labor very quickly in the current environment as games can quickly be created and published through iTunes, Steam, Xbox Live and the PlayStation Network among others.

HIS ADVICE? START LEARNING NOW.

"There's a ton of pickup game programming opportunities available. Students should find hobby projects and actually complete game projects," says Thibault. "Find what's really interesting to you and work to improve each and every day." ■

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GAME DEVELOPMENT: AMAZING CAREER OPPORTUNITY

According to the Entertainment Software Association (ESA), gaming in the United States brought in more than \$25 billion in sales of video games, hardware and accessories in 2010. This is a number that increases significantly each year and shows no signs of slowing down despite an uncertain economy. Seventy-two percent of American households play computer or video games, and those who participate span genders and generations. In short, this is a booming industry that is in need of fresh talent on a regular basis.

To prepare students to enter this rapidly evolving industry with the best skill set possible, Baylor's Department of Computer Science offers a game development and simulated environments concentration within the Bachelor of Science in Computer Science degree program. This specialization is designed to provide an understanding of the development and application of interactive digital media technologies. The program is offered in cooperation with the Film and Digital Media Division and combines media course offerings with technical content in order to produce a graduate with skills that go beyond design and implementation.

The program features a traditional computer science core, with a three-course game development sequence and a four-course media production sequence taught in Film and Digital Media. As a concentration of the BSCS, the curriculum features the breadth of an undergraduate Computer Science degree along with specialization in areas central to the game development industry. Graduates of the program are awarded a fully-accredited Computer Science degree with all the associated career and graduate education opportunities.