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LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

EA game-testing center to relocate to main campus

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(Source: LSU Reveille)

The University will soon provide a résumé-boosting opportunity to its main campus where students can pound Mountain Dew, crunch on Doritos and toggle joysticks — all while raking in a little dough.

Video gaming giant Electronic Arts, better known as EA, will move its North American testing site from its current location at LSU's south campus to the third floor of the new Digital Media Center by Dec. 1, said Arthur Cooper, executive director of the Louisiana Emerging Technology Center.

"This was part of an overall project to try and get the digital media space growing," Cooper said. "The goal is hopefully over time to see collaborations between EA and LSU."

Along with EA, the state-funded $25 million, 94,000 sq. foot Digital Media Center next to the LETC on Stadium Drive and East Parker Boulevard will house the Center for Computation & Technology, the University research program that helps academic disciplines better utilize innovative technologies.

"The Digital Media Center, first and foremost, is finally a good location for [CCT] to operate out of," said CCT Director Joel Tohline. "Right now, we're in an old dormitory [Johnston Hall] that butts up against the football stadium."

Whether it's constructing models of storm surges in the geography department, analyzing genome models in biology or building databases to probe thousands of English or history documents, the CCT mainly functions as a program that crunches endless amounts of data into user-friendly formats.

"The design of the building and the whole concept behind it was to provide a collaborative work space and to be co-located with a major digital media company," Tohline said, "hoping that will then spark and facilitate action between the researchers from the LSU side and the developers from the game design company."

Although EA is scheduled to move in Dec. 1, it will likely be a couple months later before CCT can join it. But as soon as the center gets the green light, even if it's mid-week or mid-semester, Tohline said it would find a way to make an immediate transition.

Charles D'Agostino, executive director of the Louisiana Business Technology Center at LSU South, where EA currently resides, said he believes the new facility will only further solidify Louisiana, and specifically Baton Rouge, as an area for high digital media growth.

"Over the years, we've had a number of small start-ups come just to be around EA," D'Agostino said, since EA has created a surplus of trained testers in the area.

He's currently working on bringing several international media companies to Baton Rouge, from places such as New Zealand, Israel and Canada— which means new jobs and economic growth, D'Agostino said.

Digital media companies come to LSU because of the soft-landing business incubator, but other universities have those, too. What they don't have, he said, is EA.

The Redwood Shores, Calif.-based gaming company will move all of its Baton Rouge employees, which include somewhere between 400 and 600 testers and managers rotating between two shifts, to the new facility, said Sandy Goldberg, a spokeswoman for EA's corporate offices.

"Somewhere between 15 and 20 percent of current testers are students," Goldberg said, adding that since the new location will make it easier for students to get to, the percentage may increase.

The Digital Media Center will connect to the University's new supercomputer, Mike II, with high bandwidth network connections, so that the CCT can take advantage of its ultra-high processing power.

About the size of a large office, the $2.6 million supercomputer will essentially contain about 7,400 Intel processors linked together on super-packed motherboards, making it about 3,700 times as powerful than an ordinary dual-processing personal computer.

"The challenge is to write a program that can use all of these cores simultaneously, and really get, say, the 3,700 times additional potency out of the machine," Tohline said.

Cooper, who also serves as the CEO of the LSU System Research & Technology Foundation that facilitated the funding for the project, summed it up concisely.

"It's going to be cool."

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