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2012 Forty Under 40

(Source: [Great Baton Rouge Business Report](#))**Robert Kooima, 38****Assistant professor of computer science . LSU**

"Artistry" and "craftsmanship" are words Robert Kooima uses to explain what he most likes about writing computer programs. "Writing code can be art," he says. "It can transform raw data into useful information."

While computer science is something of an art and also a passion for Kooima, it's potentially big business for the Louisiana economy. As an LSU professor, Kooima is sharing his expertise with a new generation of would-be programmers, teaching courses that prepare students for the high-demand fields of digital media programming, interactive computer graphics, and video game design.

When LSU begins construction next year on a new Digital Media Center, Kooima will be at the forefront of the initiative, working with LSU's Center for Computation and Technology to help students be prepared for the high-tech businesses and digital media opportunities.

It's an exciting time and Kooima is as passionate about teaching as he is about the subject.

"It is important for students to work not just in the classroom but also on their own without fear of failure and without someone telling them what to do," he says. "The best students have projects outside of class. They build and create on their own."

Growing up in a farming community in his native Iowa, Kooima always knew he wanted to be in computer science. He had his first computer at 10, and obtained bachelor's and master's degrees in computer science at the University of Iowa. He then went on to the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he received a doctorate.

"I've had an affinity for the sciences since I was a young child," he says. "I left a job at NASA to go into academia."

Kooima's experience at NASA serves as an example of the kinds of opportunities the digital media industry can hold.

"The data from space probes is messy information," he says. "It's a creative process to make it understandable."

Not only has he fallen in love with LSU and its scenic campus, but he has become a big fan of his new home in south Louisiana. "The food culture here is incredible," he says. "In some places, there is no food culture. Here, there is and I've grown to love crawfish."

When you were a kid, what did you want to be?

I've had an affinity for the sciences since I was a young child. I left a job at NASA to go into academia.

What is your best business advice?

It is important for students to work not just in the classroom but also on their own without fear of failure and without someone telling them what to do.

What is Baton Rouge's greatest strength in attracting young professionals?

Louisiana State University is fantastic. It is a community builder for Baton Rouge. Also, Baton Rouge has natural beauty.

What is your favorite place in Baton Rouge?

The LSU campus and Highland Road.

If you had a magic wand, what would you change about Baton Rouge?

I would change the traffic problem in Baton Rouge.

What is the biggest challenge you face in your career?

Handling a wide variety of responsibilities including teaching, research, grant writing, and committee membership.

Where will you be in 5 years?

I have a career goal to achieve tenure and remain on the LSU faculty.

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