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Entering the Digital Society

(Source: Dig Baton Rouge Uncovered)

LSU's Digital Media Center will usher us into the future

LSU is bolstering Baton Rouge's growing presence as a media hub with a new 94,000-square-foot Digital Media Center. The $29.3 million project will house LSU's Center for Computation and Technology, the AVATAR, or Arts, Visualization, Advanced Technologies and Research, Initiative, and gaming giant Electronic Arts' North American Test Center.

Slated to open in 2012, the Louisiana Digital Media Center aims to support LSU's academic research as well as provide a catalyst for high quality jobs in Baton Rouge. The surging focus on digital media in Baton Rouge is no coincidence; it stems from generous tax incentives from the Louisiana legislature, grants from Louisiana Economic Development funding, and support from LSU, CCT, the Mayor's office, and the BR Area Chamber, among others. With a rapidly developing film and video game industry, digital arenas may be the perfect solution to a slumping state economy.

"There's no real mystery here," said Robert Kooima, professor and faculty member of LSU's Center for Computation & Technology. "By producing a qualified workforce, [it is] helping to attract high-tech businesses and jobs to Louisiana. These jobs are interesting, high-profile, and high-paying. This allows our students, Louisiana natives in particular, to find promising careers close to home."

In particular, Louisiana natives will have access to broaden their expertise in fields like computation technology, digital art, electro-acoustic music, animation, video game design, scientific visualization, software development, and more. Also, students will have new research opportunities, interdisciplinary undergraduate digital media minors and a Master's degree program in digital media coming next fall.

One of the primary components of the Digital Media Center, the AVATAR Initiative, is focused on bringing the best interdisciplinary faculty to LSU in order to provide the best resources for students interested in these digital media fields.

The world of digital media is quickly becoming a highly specialized, highly demanded field; however, it is also a pervasive aspect of everyday life for many people, regardless of age or occupation.

"We are digitally connected to one another 24 hours a day, and we can expect our level of immersion to increase as technology continues to develop over time," stated Dr. Kooima. "To be an effective member of this digital society, [and have] an understanding of digital content and its related technologies, is as fundamental as reading and writing."

Perhaps this is one of the most crucial issues when discussing the Digital Media Center and rise of digital media production within our state. Technology is actively involved in transforming daily life and interactions for both producer and consumer.

"There's a meme rolling around the Internet that if it's not on YouTube, it didn't happen," said Dr. Stephen D. Beck, Area Head for CCT's Cultural Computing focus and director of the AVATAR Initiative, "meaning that our society now expects information about everything to be readily available in text, audio and visual forms on the internet." It is this precise dichotomy between media, reality, and social expectations of real-time data sharing that provides the push for further technological research and spurs rapidly changing culture.

"Digital media has become an asset that we expect to be ubiquitous and readily available, on demand, anywhere, anytime," Dr. Beck said. "The same technologies that deliver video games and computer music also deliver every other aspect of digital media, and it is the pervasiveness of media content that informs and guides us through the exceptional as well as mundane parts of our lives."

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