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LSU, EA team up for new facility

(Source: [The Advocate](#))

LSU's planned Digital Media Facility should soon become the new home for video game developer, Electronic Arts, and the university's computer and technology research on campus.

The LSU Board of Supervisors on Friday is expected to sign off on the \$30 million, 94,000-square-foot project to be built on the southeast corner of campus by the existing Louisiana Emerging Technology Center.

"This is an area we think we can be a significant and national player," said LSU Chancellor Michael Martin. "It's important from an economic development standpoint, and it's an important part of an academic area we plan to grow."

Construction is expected to begin this summer and the facility should open in late summer or fall 2012, said Arthur Cooper, who heads the LSU System Research and Technology Foundation

This past fall, LSU started offering an academic minor in digital media that involves fields like video game and animation design as LSU attempts to grow its Arts, Visualization, Advanced Technologies and Research Initiative, called AVATAR.

This development plays in with the state's recruitment of Electronic Arts, called EA, to Baton Rouge in 2008 and the state's "Blue Ocean" economic development strategy of targeting industries with greater potential.

EA, including its EA Sports division, is best known for its Madden NFL football franchise.

Louisiana Economic Development Secretary Stephen Moret said the project will "complete a commitment" to EA that was made in 2008 when the large video game corporation first established a presence on the LSU South Campus with the EA North American Testing Center. That space is now "maxed out," he said.

"This is a critical milestone," Moret said, noting that partnering EA with LSU's academic side allows for the construction of a larger facility that originally planned.

Baton Rouge also has attracted other video game developers like Firebrand Games and Nerjyzed Entertainment in recent years.

"It's kind of given Louisiana credibility in the industry," Moret added.

Baton Rouge Area Chamber President and CEO Adam Knapp said he is pleased the facility will team EA with the research and development in LSU's Center for Computation and Technology.

"This is the first time for LSU ... where they've put a for-profit business on campus in cooperation with the academic enterprise," Knapp said.

EA has about 400 workers in Baton Rouge — some of whom are part-time student game testers — and a \$6 million payroll that could grow by another 200 or so employees, Knapp said.

Cooper said the three-floor building will have a classroom, an auditorium, conference rooms, audio-visual equipment, a coffee shop and some CCT resources on the first floor. CCT will exclusively occupy the second story and EA will have the third floor.

The project is being funded by nearly \$20 million in set-aside state construction dollars, called capital outlay, another \$1 million in operating dollars from the economic development department and \$3 million from a federal Economic Development Administration grant.

The biggest construction hitch in the project is the need to demolish and relocate LSU's Sheep and Swine Exhibit building to make room for the new digital media facility and additional parking, according to the proposal.

Doing so will require nearly \$6 million more in anticipated, but not yet approved, state construction dollars for mechanical plant upgrades and the actual demolition and relocation.

EA will then pay \$465,000 in annual rent, once the new building is completed, and LSU estimates the coffee shop will make roughly \$13,000 a year.

EA's deal with LSU runs through June 2018.

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