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NEWS RELEASE

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UW-Stout's game design programs ranked among international best by Princeton Review

Side gigs at Roblox, Respawn strengthen students' skills; Stout Game Expo on May 8

[Story Link](#)

Photos attached

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Menomonie, Wis. – For more than a decade, University of Wisconsin-Stout's game design programs have consistently led state rankings and are among both national and international leaders.

[Princeton Review](#), an education services company, recently ranked UW-Stout's undergraduate [game design programs](#), which include the [B.F.A. game design and development](#) and [B.S. computer science – game design concentration](#), [No. 5 in the Midwest](#) and No. 24 of the top 50 international schools, rising from No. 29 overall last year.

UW-Stout's [M.F.A. in design](#) was ranked [No. 4 in the Midwest](#) and No. 21 internationally, rising from No. 23 last year. Game design is one of eight focus areas within the master's program, which has a cross-disciplinary approach to help students customize the program to their interests and skillsets, including play experiences, interactivity, virtual environments, extended reality or narrative-driven storytelling.

“This ranking shows the strength of our students' interdisciplinary research into game design, but also interconnected areas in digital media,” said M.F.A. in design **Program Director Erik Evensen**. “Pursuing game design at the graduate level is interdisciplinary, interactive, and highly

creative, and students continually find new ways to explore creative projects, solve problems and develop new ideas.”

Faculty stay in touch with current global game trends and technology while connecting students to opportunities such as leading student groups to attend M+Dev and the national Game Developers Conference, said [School of Art and Design Director Aaron Durst](#).

“Students bring back those experiences and implement them in their projects, which is core to our [polytechnic educational experience](#). We have a unique program in the state that prepares students to be a part of and lead the game industry in the upper Midwest at a world-class level,” he added.

Rob Franek, editor-in-chief of [Princeton Review](#), said, “The schools that made our lists have awesome programs in game design. Their faculties are superb. Their facilities are state-of-the-art, and their alumni include many of the video game industry’s most successful designers, developers and entrepreneurs. We highly recommend them to any student considering a career in this exciting field.”

He noted the exceptional experience that students at the listed schools receive:

- 66% of undergraduates and 80% of graduates worked on a shipped game as part of their studies
- 93% of undergraduates and 90% of graduates developed a plan to launch a game after graduation

In 2024, the national average starting salary of graduates with a bachelor's degree in game studies was nearly \$63,000, while those with a master's degree was nearly \$74,000.

The 15th annual Princeton Review rankings criteria included academics, faculty, technology and career prospects.

Shipped games and side gigs

All UW-Stout game design students publish games on [itch.io](#), a free, online platform for digital creators to host their independent video games. Each student exhibits at the biannual [Stout Game Expo](#).

“Our students – both the artists and the programmers – learn the importance of designing for a game’s players at every stage in their education,” said game design **Program Director Kimberly Loken**. “Sophomores and juniors exhibit polished tabletop, 2D arcade-style, and exploratory and experimental games at our end-of-semester public Stout Game Expo. Seniors exhibit work-in-progress in December and continue to polish their work throughout spring, shipping a fully functional game alongside their graduation.”

Game design students also take the initiative to develop and strengthen their skills outside of the classroom. A couple of them have substantial side gigs in the games industry:

- **Alex Rowley**, of Minneapolis, is a 3D modeler and asset developer with [Roblox](#).
- **Lila Daily**, of Appleton, is an independent contractor for marketing art with [Respawn](#).

One of Rowley’s creations can even be found on shelves at Walmart – a BONK! Hammer plushie – based on a product design he created for a friend’s game, “Catalog Avatar Creator.”

Senior student-made games published on Steam and Epic Games store include [Bugby](#), [Dawn of the Falkonir](#), [Grape Juice City](#), [HyperPOP](#), [Reaper’s Isle](#), [Ripple and Frawg: The Seasonal Song](#), [Super Nova Stadium](#), [The Witch’s Garden](#) and [Wobble Warriors](#). Advanced students also exhibit their work

annually at the Twin Cities chapter of the International Game Developers Association and at the regional M+DEV conference.

[Stout Game Expo](#), western Wisconsin's largest game developer exhibition, will be at 6 p.m. on Thursday, May 8.

Rowley at Roblox: Creating something people enjoy

In high school, Rowley never considered going to college. But now he can say, without a doubt, that his applied learning experiences at UW-Stout are worth it.

“I can’t stress enough how much better I am now at game design than I was before college, and I can thank all my art and design classes for that. I’ve learned so much about art and design – how to work harder and how to work within complicated game engines,” he said.

“I love game development because it feels really great to create something that tons of people enjoy. People could be playing your game to distract themselves from issues they're facing in real life, connect with friends or to just relax after a long day. Being able to contribute to a form of mental wellness for tons of people means a lot to me,” he added.

Rowley began making video games on Roblox during the pandemic. Roblox, created in 2004, is an online game platform and game creation system that allows users to program and play games created by themselves. It has nearly 80 million daily users.

Rowley had played on the platform before and was eager to be a part of the development community. He and a friend created a simple hide-and-seek-style game called “Mega Hide and Seek!”

“It took us about three months to build and began to gain traction online, which allows us to continue to update the game to this day,” he said.

Over the past four years, Rowley has continued to conceptualize ideas, develop projects and effective advertising strategies, practice his game development skills, and learned how to work with others to help lead a team to make something cohesive and fun.

“The great part about my current work is that I can choose my own hours and have more creative freedom. I much prefer it when I can make my own decisions, focus on my own time and work with those I feel close to,” he said.

Rowley is currently leading a team of six, including other UW-Stout students, on a 10-month-plus project to develop a horror game on Roblox that involves traversing through an abandoned factory with secrets to uncover and creatures to escape. They hope to release it this year.

“The best part about my position is that it’s super fun, and I learn something new every day. Having a wide variety of tasks allows me to see game development at a really broad angle, and I think it allows me to be versatile and prepared for future work experiences.

“It’s also a great way to practice what I love while connecting with my friends at the same time, because we’ll sit down for hours just conceptualizing ideas, debating about how to implement something and coming together to find a good solution,” he said.

Rowley will graduate in summer 2026 and wants to pursue opportunities within small game development groups and hopes to continue practicing organic modeling in 3D design.

Daily at Respawn: You get what you put into your art

Daily explores and practices art outside of school using the skills she’s learned in class.

“Assignments are helpful, but Stout has taught me that you really get what you put into your art. Just ‘drawing more’ isn’t a good way to improve your skills and gain experience. Challenging yourself with a variety of mediums and focusing on fundamentals is. That’s what the game design program offers.

“I’m a pretty critical person when it comes to art, so a lot of enjoyment for me comes from improving my skills and striving to make artwork that I’m proud of,” she added. “Another big piece of the puzzle is community involvement, like interacting with my peers and the people that gather around games I’m interested in, sharing and talking about art and design and doing collaborative work.”

Daily does contract work with Respawn for a variety of 2D digital artwork, including layered digital paintings and static images. Respawn is the creator of critically acclaimed multi-platform games, such as Apex Legends, Titanfall, Star Wars™ Jedi: Fallen Order, and Medal of Honor: Above and Beyond. It has locations in Madison, Los Angeles and Vancouver.

“Respawn originally reached out to me to work on an in-game weapon skin for a set of community-created cosmetics given out for the anniversary launch of Apex Legends,” Daily said. “Every year, they’ll do a new set of items featuring new artists and creators, so not only is it a really fun opportunity for people in the community to make something for their favorite game, it’s also a really cool opportunity as a game design student to get some experience.”

Daily will graduate in spring 2026. She plans to pursue a position in a support studio to build experience working on larger projects or on an indie project.

Professional development opportunities in game design

More than 50 students, alumni and faculty from the university’s game design, computer science and master’s in design programs attended the [2024 M+DEV](#), a national game design industry conference, held in Madison.

Professor Andrew Williams presented “Re-creating and Creating Colonial Boston: Environment Art & Historical Interpretation in the American Revolution Series,” in connection with his game [Witness to the Revolution](#).

Students and alumni exhibited four original games: [Atom’s Embrace](#), [Skyline Citygirl](#), [HyperPOP](#) and [Ripple and Frawg: The Seasonal Song](#).

Animation Career Review rankings

For animation programs, Animation Career Review listed UW-Stout’s [animation and digital media](#) program among public colleges:

- No. 16 for [top animation schools in the Midwest](#)
- No. 35 for [top public animation schools in the U.S.](#)

More than 200 schools were surveyed.

UW-Stout’s game design and animation lab spaces include a state-of-the-art Vicon [Motion Capture Studio](#), along with many other [labs, studios and galleries](#).

The [game design and development-art](#) program is part of the [School of Art and Design](#), one of the largest public art schools in the Midwest. It also offers bachelor’s degrees in [animation and digital media](#); [graphic design and interactive media](#); [illustration](#); [industrial and product design](#); [interior design](#); [studio art](#); [arts administration and entrepreneurship](#); [fashion design and development](#); and [video production](#), and an [M.F.A. in design](#). UW-Stout also has a new program in [game and media studies](#).

UW-Stout, a member of the [Universities of Wisconsin](#), is [Wisconsin's Polytechnic University](#), with a focus on applied learning, collaboration with business and industry, and career outcomes. Learn more via the [FOCUS2030](#) strategic plan.

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Photos

A character illustration by Lila Daily, an independent contractor for marketing art with Respawn.

A character illustration by Lila Daily.

Roblox assets and BONK! hammer plushie, sold at Walmart, developed by Alex Rowley, a 3D modeler and asset developer with Roblox.

An abandoned factory illustration by Alex Rowley.