

UW-Stout: MFA in design program stands out for game design focus

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Menomonie, Wis. — A graduate program at University of Wisconsin-Stout is building a national reputation for game design to match the university's highly ranked undergraduate program in the field.

The Master of Fine Arts in design has been ranked No. 6 in the nation this spring for game design among public universities and colleges and [No. 21 overall by Princeton Review](#), moving up three places from 2021.

UW-Stout is the highest ranked public university or college within the four-state region of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois for graduate level game design.

Game design is one of eight focus areas within UW-Stout's [MFA in design](#) program, which has a cross-disciplinary approach to help students customize the program to their interests and skillsets.

"This ranking shows that our graduate students are continuing to define new paths for research in the game design, animation and digital media space, finding new ways to explore creative projects and develop new research," said Associate Professor Erik Evensen, program director.

MFA in design students choose their research focus, resulting in individualized coursework and a self-initiated thesis project. Graduate students also can blend some of the program's focus areas. Watch a [program video](#) to learn more.

"We take this individualized approach very seriously, and no two graduates are ever alike," Evensen said.

Two recent MFA in design graduates with a game design focus are doing well

professionally, both with companies in the movie industry. Hue Vang is a matte painter at DreamWorks Animation in Glendale, Calif., and Morgan Brantner is a motion capture technician for Rouge MoCap in Los Angeles.

Vang creates 2D assets like skies, clouds, mountains, rocks and vegetation in films such as “The Croods: A New Age” and “Spirit Riding Free.”

Brantner had a graduate assistantship at UW-Stout’s [motion capture studio](#), helping prepare him for his position.

“The game design focus area really serves as an excellent model of what our MFA program can do,” Evensen said. “It is interactive, research-driven and, frankly, it’s very interdisciplinary. I think our continued recognition in this area highlights a lot of the strengths of the program as a whole.”

The graduate and undergraduate programs, the latter ranked [No. 7 nationally among public institutions and No. 26 overall](#), benefit each other, Evensen believes. The BFA has been ranked highly for a decade and the MFA since 2016.

“MFA students focusing on game design regularly collaborate with our undergraduate capstone teams as creative leaders, sometimes as technical consultants or subject matter experts. They’ve even served as user experience researchers.

“Along the way, they learn about core graduate subjects such as sustainable design, design ethics and design research, interacting with other grad students from different creative backgrounds,” Evensen said.

[Evensen](#), an award-winning graphic novelist, wrote his master’s thesis on board game design, has worked on two major board games, including [Marrying Mr. Darcy](#), and has collaborated with UW-Stout colleague Dave Beck on the upcoming release of the board game [Distilled](#).

The MFA in design is one of 24 programs offered through UW-Stout’s [Graduate School](#).

Along with game design, the program’s other focus areas are graphic design; industrial design; interior design; interactive media and user experience; digital

cinema, photography and video; animation and digital media; and sustainable design.

UW-Stout is [Wisconsin's Polytechnic University](#), with a focus on applied learning, collaboration with business and industry, and career outcomes.