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February 06, 2007

UNM Becomes 10th University-member of Sony Pictures' IPAX



Institution's membership only one given to entire university

Barry Weiss, a Senior Vice President of Animation at Sony Pictures Imageworks, announced on Feb. 2 that the University of New Mexico is the most recent member of the Imageworks Professional Academic Excellence program, called IPAX. The announcement was made at the New Mexico MISP (Media Industries Strategy Project) Conference at UNM.

The IPAX membership will support the interdisciplinary Film and Digital Media Program that is currently being developed at UNM. Other noted academic IPAX members include USC, Stanford, Carnegie-Mellon, and MIT. UNM, however, has the only membership given to an entire university.

“We’re one of 10 institutions around the country to become an IPAX member,” said Christopher Mead, Dean of the College of Fine Arts. “We’re in fairly good company. I don’t mind being associated with Stanford, MIT, Carnegie Mellon, or USC. What distinguishes our membership from the nine other member institutions is that the entire University of New Mexico was accepted as an IPAX member. At the other universities, only individual schools or departments are members. Because the program that we’re creating is so interdisciplinary, this was the only way we could join.”

UNM was contacted by Sony Imageworks when they heard about UNM’s initiative to develop its Film and Digital Media Program in response to New Mexico’s Media Industries Strategy Project. UNM’s program aims to balance breadth with depth, interdisciplinary flexibility with disciplinary rigor.

Its objectives are to bring together filmmaking and digital media in a systematically integrated interdisciplinary program; build a native New Mexican Hollywood that uses the unique cultural diversity of New Mexico; train the citizens of New Mexico with both undergraduate and graduate degrees; and foster research through the Arts Research Technology and Science Laboratory at UNM.

“IPAX was created as a way to partner with universities so that universities could build programs that would better train people to go into the film and digital media industries,” said Mead. “Sony has found that students coming out of universities are too narrow in their training and specializations, when they need people who are interdisciplinary in their ability to understand both the science and the art of visual image generation. They need artists, but they need

artists who understood the engineering of computer-generated imagery. Conversely, they need engineers to develop the programs, but those engineers need to understand how artists create images.

“In this context, Imageworks realized that’s exactly what we’re trying to do at UNM in an interdisciplinary way. This program is about the College of Fine Arts working with the School of Engineering, the College of Arts and Sciences, and every other school and college on campus. What excited the people at Imageworks was that we were doing exactly what they were looking for. IPAX was created with those interdisciplinary needs in mind.”

IPAX is designed by Sony Imageworks to work collaboratively with academic programs and to nurture future generations of digital media talent by helping member institutions advance their programs with faculty and curriculum support. Through faculty fellowships, IPAX offers in-house advanced training and experience in a real production environment at the Sony Studios in Culver City, California. At the same time, the educational division of Imageworks has extensive experience in teaching future digital artists.

Other benefits include internships, guest lecturers and guided faculty tours, as well as a vast array of talented artists, supervisors and designers willing to share their knowledge with academia. The IPAX program also offers a yearly review of academic curriculums to help ensure the incorporation of the latest developments in technology and techniques used not only at Imageworks, but also throughout the visual effects and digital animation industry.

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Posted by scarr at February 6, 2007 03:21 PM