

Sacred Heart University

From the Selected Works of Robert McCloud

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At SHU, Having Fun Learning Is Part of the Game

Robert McCloud, *Sacred Heart University*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/robert_mccloud/8/

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A collaborative team of faculty and students from across Sacred Heart University is developing a new recruiting and information tool aimed at introducing prospective and new students and their families to the University using media that today's students are comfortable with—gaming technology.

The project team, led by Robert McCloud, associate professor of computer sciences and information technology, includes several other faculty members with complementary skills such as 3D animation and digital motion, music composition and script writing.

The genesis for this effort, recalls McCloud, was linked, in part, to the building of the new Frank and Marisa Martire Business & Communication Center. That opportunity, combined with the need to attract new students, provided the catalyst for the kind of creative problem solving that exemplifies Sacred Heart.

“Between extremely talented staff, enthusiastic students and a supportive administration, we had all the elements we needed to tackle this exciting, dynamic challenge,” McCloud says. “As planning moved forward for the Martire Center, we floated the idea to our Digital Initiatives Committee of creating a 3D digital laboratory that would mimic a moderately sized professional

motion-capture studio, allowing students ‘real world’ access and hands-on experience. Our concept was warmly received, the administration bought in, and the laboratory was built. Developing a game for prospective students began as a graduate class project and then carried over into the summer and fall as a team collaborative challenge.”

The process, McCloud explains, has involved creating three-dimensional models of SHU buildings, classrooms, dormitories, food-service areas, athletic venues and other campus sites, as well as objects typically found in those areas. The team created 3D animated characters including a gremlin, zombie and rabbit, which will be characters in the game. The project also involves developing an extensive digital motion library and has focused on interactive gaming strategies that let users explore life on the SHU campus. The first part of the alpha—or advance version—is now being tested, and the beta—or first revised version—will be available for user testing sometime during the upcoming academic year.

McCloud, who studied at Carnegie-Mellon last summer, says that when completed, the game will be available for free download at the Microsoft Store and possibly at other gaming sites like Steam and FGL.com, a game-distribution site owned by a SHU alum. Microsoft, he added, has provided grants and financial support to the computer science gaming program. Faculty involved in this project include Associate Professor Mike Ventimiglia, who is writing original music; English Instructor Marie Hulme, who is working with students on scriptwriting; Ardiana Sula, director of the Jandrisevits Learning Center, who is supervising 3D object creation; and Jaya Kannan and Barbara Gerwien of the new Digital Learning Center.

“This is a perfect fit for our goal of building worthwhile student experiences and for preparing our kids for today’s rapidly changing world,” McCloud adds. “Having this program on our campus is a magnet for students and professional studios interested in new talent. Additionally, it further demonstrates how SHU is on the leading edge of evolving technologies. Best of all, the collaboration between faculty and students has been extraordinary—we’re all having fun, learning as we go and realizing that this is only a beginning . . . where else do you get to create 3D zombies walking around a college campus, put words in the mouths of animated characters, design and build an awesome recruiting tool and give back to a terrific University all at the same time?”