UNLOCKING GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS

I by Chai Fook Tien

DigiPen (Singapore) ensures that its graduates are backed by a world-class education, and are equipped with the necessary skills and expertise to excel in the game industry.

It has been long thought that the video game industry is a boys' club where women are discouraged from pursuing careers in. This misconception cannot be further from the truth, say DigiPen (Singapore) graduates Goh Ying Xi and Jurene Chua.

"I spent a lot of my youth in the arcade, playing games such as DDR, Guitar Freaks, Drum Mania, and all sorts of rhythm games. Gaming has always been a part of my life," Ying Xi explains.

As for Jurene, her story is not too different. She tells us that she has been playing video games from a young age as well. She reminisces, "I remember watching my sister play games like Warcraft, and I, too, played many online games such as World of Warcraft and Ragnarok Online. I enjoyed playing so much that I was inspired to create the same feelings for others."

Today, both Ying Xi and Jurene are working in the video game industry, and they owe their success to their DigiPen (Singapore) education.

THE PATH WELL TRAVELLED

Opportunities in the industry exist for men and women alike, ranging from game design to production support. Jurene and Ying Xi represent both ends of the spectrum – Jurene is now a Client Programmer and Game Designer at Singapore-founded game studio SparkJumpers, while Ying Xi works as a Translator at BANDAI NAMCO Studios Singapore.

Jurene believes that her time at DigiPen (Singapore) has really prepared her for her current job. She explains, "DigiPen (Singapore) has a wide network and works closely with game companies, so it knows what the industry needs. You really get to see that what you've learned in school applied in the industry itself.

"Furthermore, the curriculum encompasses the entire flow of game development no matter what your focus is – everyone learns programming languages, game design, math, and art. Since I have dabbled in all these fields, it's easy for me to communicate with colleagues from other departments now."

Ying Xi is grateful for DigiPen (Singapore)'s broad-based education. She tells us, "As a translator, I work closely with the development team. Our headquarters are in Japan, but the local team works very closely with

GOH YING XI
TRANSLATOR, BANDAI NAMCO STUDIOS SINGAPORE

Studied:
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them. I am there to help bridge the language gap, passing on development information and providing clarification on features that are to be implemented.

"It helps that I'm familiar with the game development pipeline and terminology. The rigorous training I underwent at DigiPen (Singapore) ensured that I understand the pipeline for 3D modelling and texturing, allowing me to effectively communicate messages from one team to another.

"For a translator without background knowledge in game development, it might be harder to understand and adjust to the content they're required to translate. I already had prior knowledge from school, so it was a smooth transition for me."

A WEALTH OF EXPERIENCES

Students who enrol in DigiPen (Singapore) can expect an exciting student life that is chock-full of memorable episodes. For example, there is the Overseas Immersion Programme in which DigiPen (Singapore) students spend one semester in the Redmond, Washington main campus. "This is such a great opportunity because the heart of game development is in the US," Ying Xi says.

"The highlight was the visit to Valve that the school arranged for us. It's amazing that we got to go to the office of such a major player in the game industry. They took us into the development areas, showing us what the setup was like. It was quite interesting because they had a movable desk system. If someone wanted to work on a different project, they could literally unplug everything and just do it."

For Jurene, the classes themselves were filled with extraordinary moments. "There was this one module on Artificial Intelligence (AI) that I took. We had to design an AI with the perfect solution to play Tetris infinitely. My classmates spent many nights in the lab, napping on sofas, and eating a lot of junk food to get ourselves through. There was this one time when I almost got the solution, but because I messed up the settings, I had to redo everything," she recalls with a laugh.

GREAT PROSPECTS

The future is undeniably bright for DigiPen (Singapore) graduates who wish to break into the game industry. Take Ying Xi for example – she was able to join Japanese game publishing giant BANDAI NAMCO, because of her education at DigiPen (Singapore). She says, "I majored in game design, and I wound up being a translator. You aren't necessarily defined by your major, but having a qualification specific to making games does help. When I interviewed for my position, the interviewer definitely liked the fact that I had a degree from a school specialising in game design."

Jurene adds that DigiPen (Singapore) goes above and beyond to prepare its students for the working world. "DigiPen (Singapore) organises career fairs for graduating students and provide students with coaching classes to refine our curriculum vitae and ace job interviews. They also encourage us to showcase our work. In my case, a game called United Space Battle that I worked on was entered into the Independent Games Festival (IGF) China. You build spaceships using blocks and battle against other players by predicting and anticipating their moves. The game managed to win the honourable mention award at the IGF China awards."

Ying Xi provides some advice to aspiring game developers. "Play more games, even the ones you don't like. You don't always get to choose the type of games you work on, so you have to know how different types of games appeal to different audiences. Think of what your target audience likes instead of just what you like."

Jurene chimes in with words of guidance for aspiring female developers, saying, "As a girl, you must definitely learn to step out of your comfort zone. Just speak up about anything you don't understand. Be sure to ask for help if you need it, because you won't get any unless you ask."

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