Preparing to Create the Sims of the Future

By VINCENT M. MALLOZZI

IF you own a Ph.D. in Donkey Kong or have solid references from the Super Mario Brothers, you might be in line for a job at Bloomfield College, which is seeking applicants for a tenure-track position for someone to teach game design.

“The individual hired will spearhead research in cutting-edge areas: interactive graphics and animation, interactive visual narrative, visual displays for everyday systems, gaming systems,” reads the job posting on the school’s Web site. “The candidate will have a demonstrated record of experience in game design or interaction design through projects and/or research. Doctoral or master’s degree in a relevant discipline and/or equivalent professional standing and industry experience in media and/or gaming and a creative and/or scholarly record with emphasis on visuals for digital media.”

Lynne Oddo, the chairman of the creative arts and technology division at Bloomfield, where game design is being offered at the undergraduate level, said that although the college still offers instruction in traditional arts like painting, “We’re always looking at new trends in education for the most cutting-edge arts, and gaming is one of those areas.”

Game design, which was added to Bloomfield’s curriculum in 2004 at the undergraduate level, is becoming increasingly popular around the country. Southern Methodist University, Carnegie Mellon, Rochester Institute of Technology, New York University, the University of Southern California and Georgia Tech now offer similar programs.

“We believe that in 5 to 10 years, every university will have some form of interactive media or gaming education program in their curriculum,” said Ron Jenkins, the deputy director of external affairs and development at Southern Methodist University, where students can earn a master’s degree in interactive technology and video game development. “This is the 21st century’s new media of expression. It’s like making movies or writing books, but done now with pixels.”

Bloomfield, a small college with an enrollment of 2,000, currently has 57 students majoring in game development, all of whom are on a design or programming track. So Professor Oddo, an admitted newbie, decided that the time is right for hiring a master of the video universe. The job search, she said, ends on Monday.

“This whole gaming thing has really exploded here the past few years,” she said. “And though I’m not a part of that world, I know there is a need for it to be taught to our students. It would be good to hire a really creative person, maybe someone who has invented a video game, but certainly someone with industry experience.”
Brian Haykin, a senior from Edison who majors in game development, transferred to Bloomfield in September 2005 from Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, where he had been studying mechanical engineering. That field “was a bit too sterile for me,” he said.

“I was looking for a more creative program to join, and when a friend of mine told me that game design was being offered at Bloomfield, well, here I am,” he said.

Mr. Haykin, who will graduate in May from the game design track, is now part of a group of students that is producing a video game called Salvage. “It’s a role-playing game,” he said. Players control one or more characters who earn points and become increasingly powerful by navigating courses, winning battles and completing other tasks.

“It’s been quite a learning experience, and we’ve all been having a lot of fun with it,” he said.

On April 30, Mr. Haykin and the rest of his team — a video programmer, artist, producer and audio engineer — will present Salvage as their final project at the Van Fossen Theater on campus. Thirty other students will be doing the same.

“It should be an interesting night,” he said. “There will be a lot of creative projects on display.”

Mr. Haykin, who is also an intern at Arkadium Inc., a game designer in New York, is not too worried about job prospects in the real world.

“When I transferred to Bloomfield, my parents were a little taken aback,” he said. “They asked if I would be able to find a job when I graduated, and I said definitely, because game design is a growing field.”