

From Diverse Online

Feature Stories

Getting Into the Game

By Peter Galuszka

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Summary:

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A student tests a board game at the Game Developers eXchange 2008 conference, which was held at the Savannah College of Art and Design's Atlanta campus.

Malcolm Perdue faces a dilemma as challenging as the computer games he loves to play. The 19-year-old student at Atlanta Metropolitan College wants to learn how to become a game designer. Not only would doing so be a lot of fun, designers can make \$80,000 a year early in their careers.

But his school has limited options in the field. Nearby Georgia Institute of Technology and the Savannah College of Art and Design, which has an Atlanta campus, offer full curricula in game design, but SCAD costs nearly \$28,000 a year in tuition alone, and Georgia Tech

demands high math scores. "Right now, I am focusing on my school," Perdue says.

Indeed, minority students may find their options limited for what is a fast-growing and lucrative field. According to the Entertainment Software Association, game sales have reached \$9.5 billion, triple what they were in 1996. The average age of players is 35, and 40 percent are women. By some accounts, before the economic downturn, gaming was growing at a rate of 24 percent each year and had been offering 822,000 new jobs as smaller companies such as Bandai Namco race to catch up with leaders like Sony and Nintendo.

According to the International Game Developers Association (IGDA), a trade group based in New Jersey, some 80 percent of the

designers are White, 4 percent are Hispanic, and 3 percent are Black. Asked about the discrepancy, Joseph Sapp, community liaison for IGDA, says "there's a concerted effort all around to get more people involved in game design."

Yet few historically Black colleges and universities offer much in the way of computer gaming, which can involve a wide range of specialties from graphic design, to computer programming to marketing and accounting. For example, Howard University's College of Engineering, Architecture and Computer Sciences offers only two courses in game design and none at the graduate level. Many schools that do offer such courses in the field are fine art schools or heavy-weight engineering universities such as Georgia Tech or Carnegie Mellon University. Distance educators such as DeVry or the University of Phoenix are also options.

Experts are aware of the lack of minorities in the game design field and say they are working for improvements. "Gaming is a wonderful opportunity to bring nontraditional students into various fields of college study," says Dr. Keith Moo-Young, dean of the California State University, Los Angeles College of Engineering, Computer Science, and Technology. "It's a great way to lure minority students into fields such as art, engineering and computer science all at once. Once you get in, you are exposed to all three," he says.

