

Super Schools

A look at four animation education programs that keep on top of industry innovations to give students the best possible experience and foundation for success.

Knowledge is power and education remains the best way for anyone in any field to become powerful and to take control of their life. For those who want to pursue a career in animation or visual effects or any of the related fields such as gaming or the new AR/VR industries, it's essential to find an education experience that fits your goals, your personality and your budget.

That's why the spotlight is on these four schools in particular, all chosen to be in this edition of the *Animation Magazine International Education & Career Guide*. These schools are ones that look forward, that keep atop the latest innovations and techniques, while never forgetting that the fundamentals are exactly that: Fundamental.

So whether you're thinking about attending one of these schools or not, understanding how and why they keep on top of things will help you better evaluate whichever schools you may be considering.

Miami Animation & Gaming International Complex

A school new to animation education but making a big impact even before its first class graduates is the Miami Animation & Gaming International Complex – a.k.a. MAGIC – at Miami Dade College.

Headed up by Mauricio Ferrazza, the college offers two associate degrees, one in animation and game art and the other in game development and design. Both degrees follow two-year tracks: in the first, students learn core fundamentals such as character and environment design, story structure, etc.; and in the second each student pitches an idea for an animated short or a game. Last year, 26 ideas were pitched and seven chosen for production by panel of local professionals, faculty, staff and representatives from Nickelodeon Animation and Fox, Ferrazza says.

Nick liked two projects enough to co-produce them and Fox chose one to co-produce. "Now we are in the process of producing these three short movies, they are self-sufficient, they are shorts but they also have the potential of becoming TV animated series if the studios decide to buy the IP," says Ferrazza. "By April, we will have a world premiere at Nickelodeon of these three shorts."

The school also is implementing a certificate program for AR and VR, starting next

year. Both technologies are popular in Miami, and the school has "been bombarded" by requests from businesses of all types looking to create products or experiences that can enhance sales. Launching in fall 2015, the certificate program is 15 credits and will teach creation of 360-degree environments. A facility for this program will be added on the fifth floor of Miami Dade's Wolfson Campus.

The addition will build on MAGIC's animation facilities, which covers 9,000 square feet and is designed like a modern animation studios. The centerpiece of the facility is the Open Lab, a large multipurpose space that features 30 workstations with Cintiq HD

2200 Touch tablets, 3D printers and software applications including Maya, 3ds Max, Adobe Creative Suite, Toon Boom and C++. MAGIC also has a full audio suite for recording, a color suite with DaVinci Resolve software for color correction, and a fully operational motion capture studio.

With close to 300 students enrolled, the school's first graduating class will be in the spring of 2017 with 20 graduates set to become, as Ferrazza says, "magicians." All of which is made even more impressive by the affordability of the program, which costs less than \$1,500 a semester for in-state students and just under \$5,000 for out-of-state residents.

