



Baylor's game track is

# LEADING THE

Bobby Martin

# REVOLUTION

by FRANCES ROGERS\_



**WHEN JUNG KIM WAS 8 YEARS OLD,** his cousin brought a computer game to his home. Kim's interest went beyond simply playing the game; he wanted to know how it worked.

"That was it. I was hooked," says Kim, now a freshman at Baylor. "Ever since then, I've known what I want to do with my life."

Kim, pursuing the game track concentration within the Bachelor of Science in Computer Science degree, is thrilled to be studying something he loves and participating in perhaps something of a revolution as the game field grows professionally.

"I took every possible computer class in high school," says Kim, whose family moved to Bridgeport, Texas, from South Korea when he was 13 years old. "When there were no more classes to take, I taught myself from the Internet and books."

Baylor first caught his attention because of the solid reputation of its computer science program. The Baylor game track, which is the only accredited, undergraduate degree-granting software development program in Texas and one of very few in the nation, held the greatest appeal for Kim.



Jung Kim

**T**he specialization is offered in cooperation with the Film and Digital Media Division in the Department of Communication Studies and combines media course offerings with technical content. Students in the game track take computer science core classes, a three-course game development sequence, and a four-course media production sequence taught in Film and Digital Media.

Baylor is distinctively positioned, according to Dr. Jeff Donahoo, associate professor, because of the reputation of its computer science program and because of its proximity to several game development companies.

Texas is home to more than 70 game companies, with many recognizable names such as Gearbox, Electronic Arts and BioWare as close as Dallas and Austin.

says. "But I had been looking for a chance to get some new, hands-on experience."

Sturgill spent most of his time working on the development of a new multi-player game.

"I wish I could talk about it (the game), but I can't," he says, noting professional confidentiality. "I will say that I was really impressed with the way they were exposing me to so many parts of the industry, including properties that are sensitive, and extended their trust to me."

Sturgill is excited about the prospect of sending student interns into that type of environment in the near future.

"It was good that they let me pretend to be a video game programmer for the summer," he says. "And to a student, that

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"Texas is a heavy hitter in the game industry," Donahoo says. "We're establishing relationships with game companies and looking for their input about our program. In turn, we know they'll look to us for interns and, eventually, employees."

One way Baylor has begun to foster relationships within the industry was to send Dr. David Sturgill, associate professor, on a faculty internship. During most of May and June 2007, Sturgill worked at BioWare in Austin as a video game programming intern.

"I had an industry job many years ago before getting my master's degree, so I had some industry experience," Sturgill

experience will be invaluable. It was a great way to strengthen Baylor's connections to the game industry."

Those types of experiences are likely to impress parents, and parents can be a hard sell when it comes to video games.

"Many parents are concerned when their child says he wants to get a job in the game industry," Donahoo says. "They have some big concerns, which all come down to 'can you make a living at this?' And, thankfully, the answer is 'yes.'"

Worldwide, computer games were a \$29 billion industry in 2005, according to DFC Intelligence, a research firm focused on the video,



Jack Hornbuckle



Dr. Jeff Donahoo

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PC, and online game market. By 2011, that number is expected to increase to \$44 billion.

Donahoo cited the release in September of the popular game *Halo 3*®.

“The game made \$170 million on the first day it was released, and \$300 million the first week,” he says. “That’s bigger than any movie ever released.”

According to the Entertainment Software Association, 69 percent of all heads of households in the United States say they play video games. The average age of a game player is 30, and the gender split is getting closer to 50/50.

In online game communities, virtual dollars are being replaced by real dollars. On an average day, consumers spend \$1 million in the popular *Second Life* virtual world, purchasing goods and services. And businesses are taking note. *Second Life* features a virtual Toyota dealership, where you can purchase a virtual vehicle.

“If you fall in love with your virtual Toyota Scion and just have to have one in the physical world, you can buy a real one,” Donahoo says.

Other companies creating virtual stores for very real customers include Adidas, Warner Bros. Records and Microsoft.

Sharing some of the industry facts and figures helped Jack Hornbuckle, a freshman from Katy, Texas, convince his parents that the game concentration is a viable one.

“My mom has been kind of skeptical about the game track,” Hornbuckle admits. “My dad has played the games. He’s the one who got me hooked on them, so he sees it a bit differently.”

His parents, however, want Hornbuckle to do what makes him happy, and for him that means exploring the game track.

“I love to play video games, and writing them would be cool,” he says. “*Halo 3* has been inspiring. I play it and think, ‘if only I could do that.’ And I will.”

Hornbuckle and other student members of the Game Club, a part of Baylor’s chapter of the Association for Computing Machinery, are gaining practical experience. The group is developing a game or virtual tour of Independence, Texas, where Baylor was founded. They hope it will be an entertaining and educational tool to teach others about the history of the University while presenting the virtual site.

In addition to the game development portion of the Game Club, students can participate in game reviews and monthly game nights. Donahoo estimates that approximately 40 students from several disciplines are active in the club.

Because the game being developed by club members has an educational slant, Donahoo believes students will begin to see that games are not solely about entertainment.

“This kind of programming for simulated environments goes well beyond video games for entertainment,” he says. “This kind of technology has long been used by the military to simulate warfare and other situations. The medical field uses it to train surgeons. It helps people apply their training in a simulated world before they do it in real life.” ▶