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As the month of April draws to a close, we are all experiencing something that most of us have never experienced before – the partial or complete quarantine from our co-workers, extended family, and other people we know and care about. This has been a challenge for all of us, particularly our students. While they are making the best of it, the pandemic will change their outlook on life, school, work, and relationships in ways we may not know yet. To that end, the faculty and staff in CGT have been reaching out to them on a regular basis to check on their well-being, and to make sure they finish the semester as well as they possibly can. I am very proud of our faculty, staff, and students for the resilience they have shown in this unforeseen circumstance. On a more positive note, the CGT department has moved forward with approving our first-year core curriculum, which will go in Fall 2021. In the meantime, we will begin creating and editing content for those courses, with focus areas on design, programming, interactivity, mobility, visualization, and other CG fundamentals. In addition, each major will have one course in the first year that will be unique to them, which will allow more opportunities for horizontal integration between the core courses and each major. All of us are looking forward to this new format for our programs and the advantages it will give our students. This will be our last monthly newsletter for the spring semester, and while we may publish a summer edition, we will resume regular newsletters again in the fall. Until then, be well and take care.

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Department of Computer Graphics Technology

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The most impactful person that Mack met at Purdue was his wife Nancy (pharmacy class of 92). The two met during their time in West Lafayette, and were married in 1992. Nancy strongly emphasized education in their family, and homeschooled their six children. Since her death in 2015, Mack and his children continue to use every experience as a learning opportunity. He feels grateful for Purdue for his education and enjoys camping, gardening, and raising chickens with his children. They currently live near Raleigh, North Carolina.

Dr. Yingjie Chen
Dr. Chen, of the Computer Graphics Technology (CGT) department, has been working in multi-disciplinary domains for two decades, starting as an engineer before moving towards 3D illustration and animation, and eventually becoming a web designer and internet system developer. He has been an academic researcher and educator faculty at Purdue since 2012.

From his education and his time in the industry, Chen learned skills related to computer graphics. He has a passion for data visualization because it integrates the domains of data science, human psychology, and design and leads to real-world potential. Chen received his Master of Science degree in Information Technology and his Ph.D. in the areas of human-computer interaction, information visualization, and visual analytics, from the School of Interactive Arts and Technology at Simon Fraser University (SFU) in Canada.

Dr. Chen is proud of the CGT department because there are so many possible career paths for each major. He believes that the classes give students the ability to develop critical thinking skills to take with them no matter what they decide to do. An important project that Dr. Chen worked on was an information visualization project that shows students’ potential career pathways based on accumulated dataset of Purdue alumni information. It is not only a useful tool for recruitment, but also an elegant resource for graduate students to consider and plan their career and future. His research areas cover interdisciplinary domains of Information Visualization, Visual Analytics, Digital Media, and Human Computer Interaction. Dr. Chen works with students on these topics in his lab, the Purdue Intelligent Visualization and Interaction Library, which is based out of the Heavilon Hall. Currently, there are 12 graduate students and 2 undergraduate students working in the lab with him.

This semester, Dr. Chen has been teaching CGT 370 and CGT 575. His graduate level classes have students from different departments trying to use data visualization to solve problems in their real research projects. Dr. Chen's passion is to help students push their research forward, and to teach useful skills that can benefit his students for a lifetime.

Undergraduate students are special to Dr. Chen. “I have to think carefully about each student in those classes because they have such different capabilities. I try to target each student and their abilities to get the most progress out of that individual student.”

Undergraduates in his classes study a combination of coding and design, with the ultimate goal of understanding both the science and humanity that go into the field.

Professor Michele Walker
Michele Walker, a full-time continuing lecturer for the Department of Computer Graphics Technology, works to teach the students at the Purdue University Richmond Campus. Since 2001, she has served a unique role in her local community as a remote instructor.

With that role, Walker appreciates the smaller class sizes because she gets to know her students on a first name basis, and can tailor the lessons to their needs. “I have the ability to be adaptable and responsive in a smaller class. Sometimes it is challenging to be a part of the department from a remote location. Even with video conferencing and email you miss that face to face interaction, and technology can be an imperfect means of communication.”

Although unconventional, Walker has developed a system that works for her students. Her classes use a combination of Blackboard, Basecamp for file organization, and Discord for live-streaming lectures and sharing screens and images.

Every year, Walker’s classes pick a project that focuses on improving their local community. Last fall, her classes began the “Forward Movers” project. Students were directed to pick an organization, cause, or issue that they could help with their technology skills. They focused on various objects throughout the semester, many of them working with real-world clients in the community. By the end of the semester, her students had created awareness campaigns, brand and business collateral, and 3D animated prototypes for visualization. For spring semester, students turned their focus inward to develop personal branding and portfolio projects to promote themselves as designers and problem solvers.

Walker began her career with Purdue teaching classes in 3D modeling, animation and game studies. She was able to move into this role with ease because of her related passions.

“When being on a statewide campus means you go where you are needed, and you have to be agile, flexible and adapt rapidly to the needs of the local department. Having to learn new skills gives me more a deep understanding of what my students are also going through learning new skills.”

Reid Young, a 2005 Purdue graduate, was a computer graphics technology (CGT) major and a computer engineering minor. Post-graduation, Young did freelance work with his own design firm called Reidesign, LLC. Currently, he works for Fangamer, which grew out of a website created by Young in 1997, when he was only 14 years old. During his time at Purdue, he used it to petition Nintendo to release a video game and learned about the industry from his own company. Eventually, Fangamer transitioned from a hobby to a job. Young eventually made it his full-time operation that sells games and game merchandise.

Young emphasized how important community is to him. By staying connected with childhood friends, he was able to build Fangamer into a successful business. His work community is made up of people from all different backgrounds and career areas, all helping Fangamer succeed. “Due to my fan and friend base, Fangamer had a very successful launch.”

While starting a company was not originally one of his career goals, he saw potential in Fangamer. Young thought about other opportunities, but felt invested and connected to his company and decided to continue the journey. “I’ll admit that starting a company can be risky, but I’m satisfied with that risk I took,” mentioned Young.

To current students of CGT, he says “the best advice I can give is to build up your community because you never know what it could turn into.” Young was able to build his successful company through the people he surrounded himself with. This community has been able to support him since the start of Fangamer.

Young acknowledged that, “it is different to build a community due to the impact that social media has on our relationships today, with less face to face interactions than ever.” He continues to stand by his values of relationship building, networking, and helping one another.

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