DIGIPEN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY SINGAPORE

Adrian Lim Xuan Wei
Gameplay Programmer at
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Winning the Game

Students of DigiPen (Singapore) are groomed to excel in their future positions in the interactive media industry. Two graduates tell us about how their experience with DigiPen (Singapore) has given them the opportunity to fulfil their dreams and work in the video game industry.

by **Chai Fook Tien**

Based in Redmond, Washington, US, DigiPen Institute of Technology is the world's first college to offer a bachelor's degree programme dedicated to game development. It is a pioneer in the field of interactive digital media education, offering graduate and undergraduate degrees in game development, computer engineering, game design, and production animation.

In 2008, DigiPen opened its first international campus in Singapore at the invitation of the Economic Development Board of Singapore. In 2010, DigiPen collaborated with the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) as one of its overseas partner universities. DigiPen (Singapore) currently offers five undergraduate programs, including one joint degree program with SIT.

In addition, DigiPen (Singapore) has started a game studio, DigiPen Game Studios, to advance the game industry by partnering with independent developers and taking their game ideas to the global marketplace.

DigiPen (Singapore) graduates are highly sought-after members of the interactive media community. Graduates from DigiPen (Singapore) can expect careers at some of the most prestigious companies in the world, including Microsoft, Continental Automotive, Nintendo, Autodesk, and of course Ubisoft. Adrian Lim Xuan Wei and Chee Meng Yim tell us about how studying at DigiPen (Singapore) has led to their current careers at Ubisoft.

GATEWAY TO THE GAME INDUSTRY

Working on the popular Assassin's Creed franchise is a dream for many gamers and aspiring game developers, but Meng Yim is living that very dream right now. The 27-year-old is now working as a Junior Level Designer at Ubisoft, and he can't help but count his lucky stars. "I've loved games from young. I remember my mom nagging at me for playing games. I've always jokingly thought, 'wouldn't it be nice if I could tell my mom that I was doing work while playing games?'" he tells us with a laugh.

Fast-forward to his National Service days, when he made the decision to enrol in DigiPen (Singapore). "My bunkmates were talking about what they wanted to do with our lives, and that was when I realised that I hadn't given my future much thought. It was quite a wake-up call, so I went online and started doing some research. I searched for video game courses in Singapore on a whim, and that's when I discovered DigiPen (Singapore). I saw that their syllabus was

very detailed and focused on game design theory, and that really caught my attention. I was also impressed by how prestigious and well-known the DigiPen brand name was within the industry. It was right there, ahead of its time, being the first college to come up with a degree in video games during the 'toddler stage' of the video game industry."

27-year-old Adrian Lim is now a Gameplay Programmer, also working in Ubisoft, but his journey was not as straightforward as Meng Yim's. He tells us, "I knew I liked programming, but choosing to study at DigiPen was not an easy decision. I had already applied to all the other local universities that had courses in computing, and had secured a place in NUS School of Computing. While DigiPen is renowned in the industry, it was still relatively unknown in Singapore back then.

"However, when I consulted a few industry leaders in both the government and private sectors, they all recommended DigiPen to me. So here I am today as a proud DigiPen graduate. I can safely say I have no regrets at all."

MELDING CLASSROOM THEORY WITH REAL-WORLD PRACTICES

The highly competitive and performance-oriented nature of the industry places huge demands on graduates today. DigiPen (Singapore) prides itself on producing industry-ready graduates who are highly sought-after by the interactive media industry.

Adrian credits his experience with DigiPen (Singapore) for preparing him for his current role. He explains, "In the current age, you are hardly confined to your own discipline. Even as a gameplay programmer, it's important to know that you never work alone in the video game industry. Knowing and understanding other disciplines is critical. I had the opportunity to work with people from diverse backgrounds at DigiPen (Singapore), which helped me develop my interpersonal skills. Furthermore, there is a mandatory cross-discipline programme that requires students to take modules outside of their major. Because of this, I have an understanding of work processes of people from different departments. These are very important soft skills that have helped me professionally."

Beyond the exposure to different disciplines, students at DigiPen (Singapore) get a feel of the entire process of making a game by working on projects that simulate an actual game pipeline. Meng Yim explains, "DigiPen (Singapore) does its best to emulate the working environment. The lecturers were essentially our bosses – we had to report to them, seek their advice, act on their feedback, and even learn how to pitch ideas. Instead of just studying theory, we were exposed to what it's like in the video gaming industry, allowing us to gain practical experience."

The Overseas Immersion Programme is another unique aspect of a DigiPen (Singapore) education, one that Meng Yim took advantage of. He shares, "I attended classes in DigiPen's Washington campus for three months. In that period of time, I received something I would not have had otherwise – precious insight into the dynamic US game industry. The lecturers there were veterans of the game industry, and it was such an invaluable experience to be able to learn from such experienced and well-esteemed people."

FOLLOWING THE PATH OF DREAMS

Both Adrian and Meng Yim agree that DigiPen is the way to go if you're passionate about video game development. Adrian tells us with confidence, "If you know you want to get into game development, then DigiPen (Singapore) is a no-brainer. There are other schools that provide computing and programming degrees, but DigiPen is the most specialised in gaming. If you want to pursue a degree in simulation programming, I believe that DigiPen (Singapore) is the only choice in Singapore. It might even be the only school in the whole of Asia that provides this programme!"

Meng Yim adds, "DigiPen (Singapore) is truly for anyone who wants to learn about games. Because of the rigorous curriculum, it was quite a tough experience, but you will get to build yourself up and meet like-minded people. Studying there reaffirmed my desire to become a professional game designer, and gave me all the necessary technical knowledge and skills to do that. Now I get to watch people experience and enjoy the games that I help create, and there is really no way to describe the joy that this brings."

Chee Meng Yim
Junior Level Designer
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