For William Erdly, who was the founding director of UW Bothell’s Computing and Software Systems program, the school’s new degree in Interactive Media Design (IMD) is a welcome addition to the campus. “We are continuing to establish a footprint for UW Bothell as being a serious player in both academic and the media design and development space here in the Northwest,” says Erdly, who will head the new IMD program.

Most programs at UW Bothell aspire to be interdisciplinary, but perhaps none can match the broad scope of the new IMD program, which is a joint degree sponsored by faculty across the School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, and the School of School of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Students will choose specialty areas outside of IMD while also learning core theoretical models and processes related to the design, production, and measurement of new interactive media technologies. “We want each student to pick an area, something where they have to dig in deep into a knowledge area,” says Erdly. “Having that depth of knowledge will allow them to think even more creatively about how to leverage the interactive media techniques they are learning.” With help from industry experts who will be brought in as teachers, new developments at the school’s Center for Serious Play, and UW Bothell faculty who will encourage innovation within
traditional disciplines, graduates will be well-positioned for jobs in the burgeoning interactive media industry in the Seattle area.

At first glance, the IMD program may seem geared towards people who want to work in the game industry. Erdly says that while some students will come to the program with that goal, he hopes that students with diverse interests will participate. “We want students coming in with a wide variety of interests and needs with interactive media,” he says. “It’s really pervasive across any topic area.”

The program will prepare students for a diverse array of careers in interactive media that include cloud-based learning systems, emerging approaches to collaborative computing, online social media, games-based entertainment and productivity systems, geographic information systems, and other forms of data visualization systems and digital arts.

**PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE AT THE CENTER FOR SERIOUS PLAY**

Jason Pace, UW Bothell’s new director of the Center for Serious Play, is enthusiastic about the opportunities for students to explore how interactive media can enrich other established disciplines such as medical research or business analytics. Pace, a former creative director and lead producer for Microsoft’s Halo franchise on Xbox, says the gaming world took the lead in developing interactive technologies that can now benefit other areas of life.

“There are so many advances that are coming out in user interface design and how we interact with virtual spaces and virtual communications,” he says. “These need to come out into the other things we do. That’s something I feel really strongly about.”

By its nature interactive media design is interdisciplinary, Pace says. It brings together creative arts, technology, and the psychology of human interactive experiences, often with a team of people trying to get a project completed. Part of the focus of the IMD program is to have students choose a specialty area of interest such as art or data visualization and then also develop an understanding of the other areas of IMD that are outside their specialty focus.

“You have to have at least a grounding in all of these aspects in order to effectively contribute,” he says. “In the game world we frequently see artists and developers clashing because developers are grounded in the reality of what we can implement and the artists are grounded in the vision of what we would like to accomplish.”

Erdly says the program will emphasize working in teams. “Oftentimes people lack the teamwork skills and development methodology skills that are necessary to be effective,” says Erdly. “There will be a lot of emphasis on how to plan, on resource management, and understanding project management techniques. Many workers
Classes will be studio-based and will blend academic theory with digital design techniques, process management approaches, and methods for gathering and analyzing critical metrics. One key feature will be a series of content modules taught throughout each quarter, which are units of varying length taught by industry experts along with UW Bothell faculty.

“I’ll be bringing in very high-end audio engineers, motion capture specialists, studio production management people or producers who will actually teach parts of a course along with a faculty member,” Erdly says. “It will provide the opportunity for students to see what is going on and connect them to a large number of industry experts as well.”

In the students’ final year of the program, they will work on an integrative studio project, in which they complete a substantial body of work in their chosen specialty area. Projects might include developing new social websites, interactive video or audio, game design, health, or education and business applications. These projects may be completed in partnership with community-based learning and research or in close collaboration with faculty members on campus.

THE INTERACTIVE BOOK: BRIDGING CREATIVE WRITING AND NEW MEDIA

Amaranth Borsuk is a senior lecturer in the creative writing and poetics program. She recently published an interactive book of poetry with her husband, Brad Bouse, who is a programmer. The book, entitled, “Between Page and Screen,” uses both the printed page and the computer screen to activate the words in the poems. “It’s a book of poetry whose text does not exist on the page or screen but only comes alive for the reader with access to both,” she explains. "Instead it consists of the instructions to find the words."

The reader holds book in hand and also goes to the website www.betweenpageandscreen.com. The camera on the computer connects the book with the screen via black and white geometric shapes on the page. Coding in the website translates the shapes into words which then appear on the screen as though floating in mid-air. An image of the reader can also be seen. "From the get-go, it wants you to think about the importance of the reader, without whose presence the text remains invisible. It raises the question, where does the body of the book reside?" she says.

Borsuk says she is interested in working with students on making...
connections across creative writing and new media. "Since telling a story is so much part of gaming and creating interactive narrative, there is a lot to be gained from creative writers working with new media practitioners and interactive media practitioners," she says. "I'm hoping to create a bridge there so more creative writing students will begin to think about their work in an interactive way."

Borsuk's project is a good example of innovative uses of interactive media beyond games that the Center for Serious Play's Jason Pace is hoping to see from UW Bothell students. "I hope the students that come to this program come from a lot of different backgrounds and have a lot of different desires," he says. "Whether they want to go into science and bioinformatics and think about new ways to visualize data or they want to create the next generation of interactive entertainment experiences."

There is also room in the new degree program for students whose interests are not technical. For example, Pace says the industry needs more creative writers who can develop non-linear narratives where people make choices and there isn't as much control over the narrative structure. "There's an emerging field that has traditionally been very poorly implemented, but they're starting to make inroads there, and there's a desire to elevate the art form into something that is a little more serious."

The Center for Serious Play will also be offering opportunities for students to engage in new media projects. The center has launched a new website called The Next@UWB (http://uwbnxt.com) that hosts a branded tech blog written entirely by students. The site also contains weekly project blogs, podcasts, reviews and the like under the direction of a student site editorial manager.

Pace says the challenge of working with a largely undergraduate population is in pairing their passion and excitement with the fact that they don't have a lot of domain skill yet. "I think that a lot of what we're trying to focus on in new education is how do we get kids out of just sitting and listening in the classroom," he says. "This environment here where I have students who are editorial managers and web developers and film editors all working together as part of this new media team really sort of drives that mission."

Always looking ahead, Erdly says that he does envision a graduate degree program emerging from the new IMD program. For now, he wants to be sure that UW Bothell students are ready to continue their studies beyond the IMD program. "That's why there's a heavy academic component to this degree," he says. "It will also prepare students for opportunities in graduate school."