

# UT Austin | Portugal

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATORY FOR EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES, CoLab

## DIGITAL BITS



### Students Arrive in Austin for ZON Animation Lab

A group of students and professionals have arrived in Austin for what will be an intense educational experience. The ZON Digital Animation Advanced Lab is an eight-week course at UT Austin intended to expand the skills of experienced animators. Ten animators will stay on campus at UT and take accelerated courses with Radio-TV-Film lecturers Geoff Marslett and Ben Bays.

The ZON Digital Animation Advanced Lab is funded by ZON, the Portuguese multimedia company, in order to expand the digital-media talent pool in Portugal. The company covers the cost of travel and living expenses for the students while they're in Austin. ZON holds an annual multimedia competition, and students are encouraged to develop projects during the lab that will be submitted for the call this fall.

The students were chosen through a competitive process administered by ZON. They come from a variety of backgrounds; many are working professionals in the video game and TV industry, while others are college instructors. Two winners of the ZON prize will also attend classes with these students.

The format of the program will require intense effort from the students. On Mondays and Wednesdays, students will attend a three-hour class in the morning taught by Geoff Marslett and then return in the afternoon for another three-hour class taught by Ben Bays. Because animation is extremely time-consuming, the rest of the week will be dedicated for students to work on their projects.

Geoff Marslett and Ben Bays are highly rated animation instructors at UT. Marslett, who recently screened his animated feature Mars in Lisbon, emphasizes character animation and fundamental animation techniques. Bays lends his years of experience in the video-game industry to his workshop on visual effects and 3D animation.

It won't be all work and no play for the students, however. The program has organized recreational outings on an amphibious duck boat, a night at a country dance hall, and even a float trip down a scenic Texas river.

The ZON Digital Animation Advanced Lab follows last year's ZON Intensive Script Development Lab, which led students through an intensive screenwriting and pre-production experience. Several of the students entered their projects in the 2010 ZON competition, and two of the Lab's students, Ricardo Filipe Feio and Pierre-Marie Jézéquel, were selected for the final round of competition.

### DMLP Interns Explore Web, Broadcast Careers

This month, the Digital Media Leadership Program said farewell to two outstanding interns; Ioli Campos and Katerina Markova. Campos interned for public radio station KUT as a digital journalist, while Markova worked in web design and development for the technology startup Infochimps. The interns came here as part of the UT Austin Digital Media Program.



Mentors at the host employers spoke highly of both interns. "Katerina has great talent and skills," Infochimp's Joe Kelly said of Markova, "[Her] output was always excellent." Emily Donahue, News Director of KUT, said "Ioli is smart, talented, humble and very easy to work with...she created some wonderful work for KUT and was generous with her time and talents."

Both interns say that the Digital Media Leadership Program provided them with experiences they wouldn't find in Portugal. "The company environment was quite a surprise," Markova said, adding, "It was awesome to be learning new skills with guidance of highly experienced developers."

Campos says that despite a decade of experience as a journalist, her time at KUT enabled her to further build her career. "The internship has completely surpassed my expectations and provided me with substantial and valuable work experience," she says. One aspect she particularly appreciated was the different newsroom environment at KUT, saying the staff manages to be at once very professional and very cool. "KUT news makes awesome journalism and it was a truly inspirational experience being able to work near them," she said. Campos and Markova provided substantial contributions to their host employers, and they paved the way for future interns. The DMLP is currently accepting applications for Fall internship opportunities from interested parties in Portugal, as well as seeking partnerships here in Austin with interested digital media organizations. To learn more about DMLP, please contact Jonathan Daniels at [jonathan.a.daniels@gmail.com](mailto:jonathan.a.daniels@gmail.com).



### Luis Frias Interacts In Austin

Several UNL PhD students spent the spring semester in Austin, working with UT faculty and making use of UT's extensive research facilities. As the students prepare to leave, we spoke to PhD student Luis Frias about his experience in Austin this spring.

Frias is a career designer who's examining interactive film and interactive narrative for his thesis proposal. His project draws on both conventional film studies and more technical aspects of interface design. His goal is to develop a film interface that uses video to get audience feedback. He says the broad range of Digital Media faculty helped him advance his project and clarify his research questions. Two classes at UT were particularly useful for his work, Frias says. This spring he took a research seminar with RTF professor Joe Straubhaar titled "Analyzing Audiences." In this course, students learned about how ethnographic methods and interviews can be used to study and better understand audiences' relationships with media. Students also took part in field work in East and South Austin, interviewing subjects about the digital divide. "It was very rich in terms of knowledge," Frias says, noting it provided valuable insights into how to approach his topic.

Frias also attended a course in UT's School of Information with assistant professor Luis Francisco-Revilla. In the course on Natural User Interfaces, students explored how devices such as multi-touch screens have the potential to simplify user interaction. Frias says spending time with this technology also directly helped him advance his research.

In addition to these classes, Frias also sat in on two other courses this semester. Also at the iSchool, he took the program's introductory programming course, which emphasized the Java language. Since his project will likely be written in Java, it gave Frias some fundamental knowledge. Frias attended Writing for Interactive Media / Games taught by Sheldon Pacetti in the RTF department. Although the class emphasized video games, Frias enjoyed the class, saying, "It was very rewarding. He's a very interesting guy."

In general, Frias is highly impressed with the range of research facilities and resources UT offers. "The resources for research are completely different from what we have in Lisbon," he says. Although Frias will be returning to Lisbon in July, he already has plans to come back this fall and stay in Austin several more weeks.

Frias also enjoys the cultural climate of Austin. "The town is great," he says, although he has had at least one adjustment issue: finding a place with a good espresso. Frias says the best place he's found for a European-style coffee is actually an ice cream parlor. He prefers the coffee at Dolce Vita in Hyde Park to most of the coffee places in town.

PhD students can apply to FCT for funding for both brief exploratory visits or long-term research visits to Austin. Frias is one of seven UNL students who came to Austin this spring as part of the Digital Media program.

### Design and Computation Series Provides Insights, Experience

Students at Lisbon's Superior Institute of Technology and the New University of Lisbon enjoyed a special opportunity to share and discuss their work with some experienced researchers. The Design and Computation Series exposed the audience to innovative research perspectives. The Universities hosted six speakers in April and May.



The first guest lecturer was Yacov Sharir from UT Austin. He presented some interesting work about the creation of wearable computing devices and the use of ambient intelligence to enhance the performance of dancers. It was a good opportunity for the students to see different applications of the technology they study and build. Sharir's aesthetic perspective of the use of technology contrasted with the engineering-oriented perspective of many of the students.

Ernest Adams was our second visitor. Adams is a game design consultant with broad experience teaching game design. He visited Lisbon for three days. On the first day he presented his views on the future of gaming by projecting the challenges game developers face until 2050. In the next two days, Ernest gave two workshops: one on game design and another on character design.

Peter Hall from UT Austin presented on Mapping as Visual Inquiry. This talk was the starting event for a week-long workshop with Dan Olsen on the same topic. In the workshop, students from different backgrounds including design, communication and computer science used their individual technical skills to make mapping experiments. Projects were designed to provide the students an opportunity to investigate aspects of their own research.

The fourth visitor was Panos Markopoulos from the Eindhoven University of Technology. He presented work about the use of persuasion techniques to help technology convey messages to users. This talk prompted lively discussion among the students, who clearly found it thought-provoking.

The final visitor was Anthony Brooks from Aalborg University, presented several examples of the use of technology to enhance interactive installations as means to generate playful and fun experiences. He showed several examples from the SoundScapes project which was designed with an eye toward accessibility. The videos of these examples demonstrated to students how technology could be used to afford all users the opportunity for creative expression.

The Design and Computation Series was a joint collaboration between three campuses of the UT Austin | Portugal Digital Media Program. Its intent was to both provide students with a special learning experience and open its doors to the broader public in Lisbon.



### Research Roundup

Many researchers affiliated with the **UT Austin | Portugal Digital Media Program** have been on the road further cementing their professional connections and presenting their work.

UT Austin Electrical and Computer Engineering professor **J K Aggarwal** traveled to Porto in May to give a talk on computer tracking of human motion at the University of Porto. He also visited the lab of his collaborator U.Porto professor **Verónica Orvalho** to consult with students and work on their **LIFEisGAME** research project. This project, funded by FCT, investigates how computers can be used to teach autistic persons how to recognize facial expressions.

UT Austin Digital Media research assistant **Nick Muntean** travelled to Lisbon in May to administer surveys for the **ImTV** research project. There, he worked with **João Magalhães** and his colleagues at the New University of Lisbon to visit undergraduate classes and collect data. The survey asked students about the ways they view TV content. The FCT-funded ImTV project examines the changes new technologies such as streaming video and rich mobile devices have on TV distribution.

In July, U.Porto Computer Science professor **Álvaro Reis Figueira** will come to Austin to visit professor **Luis Francisco-Revilla** of the School of Information. They are collaborating on **Project Breadcrumbs**, which analyzes public reception of news stories to better understand the interests of readers and the connections they make between events and press reports.

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