Team Pursuits DigPen is a private college offering bachelor's and master's degrees in video game design, art, and engineering, with faculty including veterans of industry giants such as Microsoft, Nintendo and Disney.

Although it's teaching a new medium, DigPen takes a traditional approach, requiring students to learn elementary computer science as well as humanities and game design theory. These fundamentals give the students skills to design games from the silicon up, in addition to using standard game development tools.

What's really unique about DigPen, though, is its project-driven academic program that replicates the intense, collaborative and technical process of creating commercial games. Students work together in small teams to create and build an entirely new

K im Swift set out to become a video game writer and when she enrolled in DigPen Institute of Technology, an unusual school in the wooded suburbs east of Seattle, Washington. She eventually ended up in a real-life fairy tale – rendered in 3D with artificial intelligence.

Swift's senior project – a zany 3D puzzle game with a setting that's constantly changed by players – caught the eye of a nearby game company, Valve Software, which promptly hired her and other students who worked on the project. It evolved into Valve's acclaimed hit Portal and won a prestigious Game of the Year award at the annual Game Developers Conference in 2008, establishing Swift as a rising star in the industry.

Swift – who was recently hired to lead a team at another studio, Airtight Games – is very grateful for the technical training but especially for DigPen's curriculum and environment that encouraged students to experiment and create new types of games. "I've seen some really interesting games come out of the DigPen student projects class," she says, "and I hope that sort of creativity permeates the industry as a whole."