



Photo courtesy Husson University

TEACHING AND TECHNOLOGY

by Eric B. Gordon

Husson University to Demonstrate New Augmented Reality App for Theatrical Set Designers

App for iPhone and iPad created through interdepartmental experiential learning initiative by students from the College of Business and the New England School of Communications

Consider for a moment the challenges a team faces when designing a set for a theatrical production or a large concert. For years, these professionals have relied on drawings, scale models and 3-D visualizations to help them convey their vision to the director, production team, cast and crew. The one thing they could not do, however, was provide this creative team with the experience of being immersed in the full-scale scenery until the set was built.

Today, that's all changed. Thanks to advancements in augmented reality (AR), Husson University's integrated technology department has begun development of an app for iPhones and iPads called AR Stagecraft, which leverages Apple's ARKit to give users an immersive AR experience on an empty stage.

Designing Theater Sets in CAD Class

Students in Husson's entertainment production program are currently designing theater sets in a computer aided drafting (CAD) class, which will be imported into the AR Stagecraft app and provide users the experience of walking through a set on stage before construction ever begins.

"This is just the first step in a long-term commitment to developing augmented reality and virtual reality (VR) presentations at Husson University," said Brave Williams, MFA, an assistant professor at the New England School of Communications.

"In the months and years to come, we will be creating new educational opportunities that focus on the development of immersive technology experiences. The culmination of our efforts will be the construction of an Interactive Experience (IEX) Center as part of the new College of Business building in 2021."

Immersive, Interactive, Collaborative Technology

Once completed, the new IEX Center will serve as a hub for projects related to immersive and interactive technology through a system of collaboration between students, faculty, staff, and outside partners. The interactive and immersive education that will take place in this Center will teach students how to solve real-world problems using the advanced technology associated with this emerging field.

The public was invited to attend a presentation that focused on the mission of the IEX Center and demonstrated the AR Stagecraft app at Husson University's Gracie Theatre at the end of April.

Large television screens helped the audience understand what the AR experience is like. Following the demonstration, the audience had an opportunity to ask questions of College of Business and New England School of Communications faculty members involved in the project.

At the conclusion of the question and answer session, members of the public had the opportunity to use iPads in the Gracie Theatre to visualize the designs, which Husson students have developed in their CAD course.

Developing New AR and VR Programs

As Husson moves forward with the development of new AR and VR programs, the University will be investing in new technology to support these advanced course offerings.

"In the future, there will be numerous career opportunities for AR and VR professionals," said Marie Hansen, PhD, JD, SHRM-SCP, dean of the College of Business and the New England School of Communications (NESCom) at Husson University. "The unique ability of this technology to provide people with an immersive experience can be applied to all sorts of industries. Marketing, business and engineering are just some of the career fields that will benefit from immersive and interactive presentations."

Job opportunities for college graduates with knowledge of virtual and augmented reality continue to grow. The job search website Indeed.com noticed a significant uptick in job postings for virtual reality (VR) specialists. In 2014, there were only two virtual reality job postings per 1 million job ads. Two years later, there were 18 job postings for every million jobs—an increase

of about 800%. Among job seekers, there was only one VR job search per million in 2014. By 2016, there was an average of 19 VR job searches per million—an increase of 1,800%.

It's anticipated that careers in this discipline will offer above average compensation. According to Glassdoor.com, the average base pay for augmented reality/software development professionals is \$80,018 per year. AR and VR professionals can reasonably anticipate a comparable return on their educational investment.

Preparing Students for Jobs of Tomorrow

"At Husson University, we're not only preparing students for today's professional positions, we're developing programs designed to ensure our students' career success in the jobs of tomorrow," said Dr. Lynne Coy-Ogan, the senior vice president for academic affairs and provost at Husson University. "It's just one more example of how our University is working to develop an educated workforce who will drive the economic growth of our region in the coming decades."



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Professors and Students on App Development Team

Professors from Husson University’s integrated technology degree program were an important part of the app development team. The degree is one of the state’s leading educational programs in computer information systems, software development, web design and development. It’s designed to provide students with the skills they need to help organizations achieve business goals by creating computer information systems and new software.

The program is also a great platform for students interested in pursuing a career in web design and development. Joining this integrated technology app development project were students from Husson University’s entertainment production degree program. They helped provide valuable insight into the visualization component by providing a three-dimensional scale representation of theater and concert stages.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Eric B. Gordon joined Husson University in the summer of 2013 and is currently their Executive Director of Communications. He previously worked as the Assistant Vice President for Communications and Director of Public Relations and Special Projects at The American College in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. Eric has received numerous professional awards and holds a Bachelor of Science from Northwestern University and a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

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