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## Miami Dade College plans center for animation, gaming development

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The Miami Animation & Gaming International Complex, or MAGIC, will contain open lab space for students. The center is planned for Miami Dade College's Wolfson campus.

A new Miami Dade College education and training center could help position Miami as a player in the fast-growing video game development and animation industries.

Miami Dade College (<http://www.mdc.edu>) on Friday unveiled plans for a Miami Animation & Gaming International Complex, or MAGIC, to be housed at the Wolfson Campus (<http://www.mdc.edu/wolfson/>) in downtown Miami. The project was announced during the MIA Animation Conference & Festival.

The 9,000-square-foot complex will be part of the college's existing Emerging Technologies Center of the Americas, which will concurrently introduce new curriculum and programs in animation and game development that will complement MAGIC, said José A. Vicente, president of the Wolfson Campus. He said he hopes MAGIC will be open by the end of next year.

“With the ever-changing dynamics of technology and the way gaming has been evolving, it is becoming a major, major industry ... We know entertainment software companies are growing as a source of employment across the country and locally,” said Vicente, adding that computer and video game companies employ more than 120,000 people in 34 states, including Florida, with an average salary of \$90,000 nationwide. “In developing this, we visited a number of studios ourselves,” said Vicente.

Vicente said MDC leaders went to Los Angeles earlier this year and toured leading gaming and animation studios including Disney Animation Studios, Cartoon Network, The Third Floor and Jim Henson Studios, to find out what game animators, designers and developers need.

“We received excellent advice and it was an eye-opener as to the opportunities that this presents for Miami,” said Vicente. “With MAGIC, we are creating a replica of what the students will encounter in the real world. Our objective is to make the transition from training into job placement as seamless as possible.”

For instance, MAGIC, which will be housed in Building 8, will include an open and interdisciplinary living lab featuring “The Brain,” which is a collaborative gamer environment “where the creators get their juices flowing,” Vicente said.

MAGIC will also house an interactive gallery for student projects, a “motion capture studio,” where objects take flight and life, sound engineering and color correction suites, an incubator room where teams of students can seek personalized advice and support from faculty and industry experts and a screening hall.

MDC now offers a few gaming development classes and an associate of arts in computer graphic animation, but “we will be realigning and enhancing our curriculum in those fields concurrently with developing MAGIC,” said Vicente.

South Florida has a small but growing video-gaming (<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/business/biz-monday/article1963821.html>) and animation industry, with companies such as Shiver Entertainment, Darkside Game Studios, Moon Spider Studio, HMC Films, New Art Miami, Final Cutz, Quack Studios and Stellar Hawk that could provide graduates with job opportunities. Although South Florida’s industry is dwarfed by Orlando’s, with more than 70 gaming companies and big players such as EA Tiburon, some local technology leaders believe the industry could be

a bigger player in the future as part of a creative industries cluster. The gaming industry locally and in Latin America was one of the main tracks in the inaugural eMerge Americas conference in May.

John Schappert, co-founder and CEO of Shiver Entertainment (<http://shiver.net/>), moved his startup to South Florida from California earlier this year and recently began moving into custom offices in Sunset Place in South Miami. Although the video game development company already has 40 employees, Schappert has had a difficult time finding talent locally, even for entry level jobs.

“While we have been able to find a few great digital artists within the local area, we have only found one local software engineer who can meet our qualifications. We’ve had to recruit from other universities around the nation and import our talent, which is very time consuming, costly and difficult,” said Schappert, who co-founded Tiburon Entertainment in Orlando 20 years ago, the studio that develops the Madden NFL video game series.

MAGIC “could be a nice contributor to local talent for Shiver and other gaming startups,” said Schappert. “It’s great news.”

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A rendering shows the lobby of the Miami Animation & Gaming International Complex, or MAGIC, planned for Miami Dade College’s Wolfson campus.

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