The 2023 Fest IQP

An Interactive Qualifying Project
Submitted to the Faculty of

<u>WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE</u>

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Science
Degree of Bachelor of Arts

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__Acknowledgments__

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The support extended to this team by the current IMGD Operations Manager, Allison Darling, cannot be understated. Allison handled a great deal of our financial tasks, helping us order catering and merchandise, book hotel rooms, secure event spaces on WPI campus, and complete the order forms necessary for reserving a PAX East booth and passes. Most of this project could not be accomplished without the aid she supplied.

We would also like to acknowledge the aid of Mikel Matticoli, a notable WPI IMGD alumni, for his tireless support throughout the IQP, as well as Varun Bhat of the Global Lab for his help planning and orchestrating the technical components behind Showfest 2023.

Introduction

IQP Structure

WPI's Interactive Media and Game Development (IMGD) program is one of the first in the country to offer degrees in game development. As of 2023, the program allows students to receive a Bachelor in Science or a Bachelor's in Arts and pursue various concentrations.

As part of the WPI IMGD program, an annual Interactive Qualifying Project (IQP) is run with the responsibility of organizing and coordinating the department's booth at PAX East: the PAX IQP. In recent years, this IQP has expanded to assume responsibility for the department's other events, including Alphafest and Showfest. Organizing and running these events, in addition to the newly established JoyArt event, composes the majority of work the IQP team handles as part of their project. Running from B to D term with informal preparations and research occurring throughout A term, the 2023 IQP team accomplished its goal to organize and expand the litany of IMGD community events and traditions.

This project, dating back to 2013, has historically been advised by the late Dean O'Donnell, whose experience with running the IMGD community events and PAX East booth made him an invaluable component of the project team. In order to supplement the immense loss of the IQP's key member, the team was assigned two advisors: Monty Sharma and Melissa Kagen. Monty's experience running events and convention booths through MassDigi was an essential addition to the team; Professor Kagen, despite being a new addition to the program, provided critical academic guidance regarding IQP requirements and internal support within the IMGD department.

In order to accurately reflect the majority of work performed by the PAX IQP team, the team this year decided to rename themselves as "the Fest IQP." Not only did this name more accurately convey the majority of work handled by the team across the year, but it allowed team members to present a consistent and clear brand while corresponding regarding the events outside of PAX East.

The Fest IQP's goals for this year were to increase student engagement, work with teams to best showcase their projects, and — despite the onslaught of many events managed by the IQP team — hopefully allow individual team members to retain their sanity by keeping the project in scope.

Report Structure

The structure of this report is a novelty amongst previous PAX IQP papers. Each of the following sections is broken down by event, first providing a brief description regarding the purpose and history of the event. Each section is then further split into two components: a practical paper, which documents the team's process organizing and running the event, and an analysis paper, which takes a critical look at some component relating to the event through the lens of academic research.

Alphafest

About

Alphafest is an annual tradition amongst the WPI IMGD community, hosted on campus to showcase early game alphas for student game and interactive media projects. IMGD MQP teams are required to submit and exhibit their projects at Alphafest in order to collect feedback and playtesting data from the event attendees, though students with personal or class projects they'd like to demo at the event are also encouraged to submit.

Alphafest 2022 occurred on November 11th, 2022 from 5:30 PM - 8:00 PM in Innovation Studio 203/205. This date was selected by the IMGD Community Committee to be a week earlier into B-term than when Alphafest traditionally occurs.

The practical component of this section of the paper is dedicated to documenting the IQP team's process of running Alphafest 2022. While earlier PAX IQP teams have simply helped to provide manual labor for the event, facilitating equipment and layout setup and breakdown, the responsibility of organizing and coordinating Alphafest has fully transitioned to the IQP team since 2021. This was due to the coronavirus pandemic, since the convention was canceled that year, and Alphafest and Showfest were assigned to be run by the IQP team to replace their original responsibility. Now that the convention has returned to Boston, Alphafest and Showfest have remained an additional responsibility of this IQP team.

The analysis component of this section of the paper discusses the past, present, and future of this event, and takes the opportunity to discuss how this IQP might be restructured to include research as a more feasible part of the project. It goes into depth on several different ways that the event could be improved, why it hasn't been in previous years due to the ballooning scope of the project, and proposes a way to split the overall scope of work into sections that smaller teams of students could tackle.

Practical

Interviews

From the start, the team decided that it was important to establish connections with the MQP teams for future communication and help them display their work. This connection was intended to be maintained throughout the term, facilitating communications before PAX and Showfest. To do this, the team decided to meet with and interview each team individually by making schedules on when2meet, having a representative from each MQP team as the IQP team's point person before Alphafest, and booking library suites for in-person interviews and creating Zoom meetings for remote ones. These interviews gave the IQP team more insight about what each MQP team was making, what they might need in the future, and established one of their team members as a point of contact.

Out of the interview meetings with each IMGD MQP team, the team learned that the timeframe between the beginning of A term and Alphafest was proven not long enough for some MQP teams to make a base playable or interactable game, which means these interviews could be set up earlier to accommodate to each MQP team's situation better and have a clearer understanding on what hardware needed to be prepared for the event itself. The interviews also made sure the team knew which teams needed special accommodations such as extra chairs and access to one of the six projectors in the room to show off artwork, diagrams, and in one case, a game intended to be projected on walls as part of gameplay.

These interview meetings with MQP teams also played a role of setting the tone for the rest of the school year for the IQP team, since they would end up coordinating with them even more for PAX East and Showfest, which meant the point person for each MQP team established from Alphafest would end up becoming the point person for MQPs for the rest of the year. The Alphafest interviews also set the tone in terms of the IQP team focusing on assisting MQP teams showcasing their projects besides their original tasks of running IMGD events.

Layout

For this year's Alphafest layout, The IQP team were given the same space as last year's Alphafest: the Innovation Studio room 203 & 205. They followed the same basic layout structure as previous Alphafests where all the tables would be at the edge of the room, with games like Robot Escape Room and the VR/AR projects taking up the corners since they need more space for their projects to operate. However, this year's Alphafest also includes many non-MQP projects, and more projects in general, so the team decided to set up a few tables right in the center of the showroom to make sure every project is presented while retaining normal attendee traffic.

The IQP team created a layout plan for the project teams presenting at Alphafest to make setup easier. However, due to the fact that the date for Alphafest was not announced until the event was nearing, the IQP team was not able to communicate with the presenters ahead of time, which would lead to the issues described in the Event Setup section.

Marketing

In terms of marketing, we made multiple poster variants before the event itself via Canva, a website that has free poster templates & elements and allows us to format them easily. We also printed them out and put them up in places where IMGD majors or people who are interested in IMGD projects would show up often, namely Fuller Laboratories, Gordon Library as well as Morgan Dining hall. We also used the IMGD discord server to encourage people to submit projects to Alphafest and inform them about the event's time and place.

Materials

We printed the sandwich board posters via the Academic Technology Center. Additionally, we printed every team's posters in color at the library and placed them in plastic stands that were located in the IQP chest. Beyond that, we did not use many materials; Alphafest is a comparatively simple event.

Catering

The team was provided a $450 budget to plan catering for the event; traditionally, since Alphafest is an on-campus event, catering is required to be provided through Chartwells. However, since this year's Alphafest occurred on Veterans' Day, when Chartwells is closed for catering, this stipulation was no longer a requirement.

The team placed a catering order for 20 large pizzas and several 2-liter soda bottles from Antonio's through Allison Darling, the IMGD Operations Manager, two weeks prior to the event. As part of this catering order, plates and cups were to be provided.

The day of the event, this food arrived significantly earlier than the requested arrival time, and threw a wrench into setup, as the tables for catering were not yet set up and no one was immediately available to retrieve the food from the delivery driver that arrived at the base of the Innovation Studio. This complication could have been mitigated with an earlier setup start time (*see Event Setup subsection for more information*).

A shortage of cups and plates to match the order were provided, and they each ran out far before the food itself. Finally, even with the care the team took to stretch its food budget as far as possible by selecting the cheapest feasible and desirable catering option — pizza — the entirety of food ran out in 30 minutes. This became a lesson for the team to plan for higher attendance and catering budgets for future events.

One additional lesson learned by the catering faux pas of Alphafest was the need to clearly label food items to designate dietary restrictions and alternatives. Although the team ordered with a diverse menu in mind, selecting vegetarian and vegan alternatives, the lack of clear signage indicating which items were which caused the more limited options to be consumed by everyone, as people tended to select the vegetarian and vegan options based on their preference for those pizza types, unaware that they weren't what they were entirely expecting. This became another learning lesson for the team.

Event

In the leadup to the event, roles were delegated to each of the team members, as a decent amount of setup was required the day of the event. These tasks included:

- Marketing tasks such as the placement of sandwich boards and posters outside of the Innovation Studio to drum up attention for the event throughout the day, as well as the printing and preparation of event signage such as the tableside posters for each team.
- Setup tasks such as reorganizing tables for the event, preparing the event space by putting away barriers and opening its garage door entrance, and transferring supplies from the PAX chest to the event.
- Catering tasks such as greeting the caterer upon their arrival, carrying food into the space, and assembling the utensils and food for event attendees.

Unfortunately, the team miscalculated how much time many of these tasks would take and only arrived at the Innovation Studio shortly before the designated setup time for project teams, which was 30 minutes before the event. With project teams arriving earlier than anticipated, tables had not yet been arranged in their proper places, and the presenting teams had situated themselves at positions differing from their assigned placement — as this assignment had never been communicated to them.

Only by corralling the attending students to help arrange the tables was setup completed just as the first attendees started arriving; the original plan of assigned placement for teams was scrapped in favor of having the exhibitors setup and claim their own tables. In the future, Alphafest organizers must arrive a substantial amount of time prior to teams' arrival to avoid the frantic start experienced this year. Students showing off projects should still be instructed to arrive a half hour early, so that the organizers have time to set up the space before anyone else arrives, but ideally, the floor plan should be set up and the layout should be communicated ahead of time. Complexity regarding this matter arises considering that the event must be planned around the room being available; if there is a class in the space until 5:00 PM, organizing everything for the event to begin at 5:30 PM is difficult.

This year, the team put together a check-in system to monitor the number of attendees and collect data about their affiliations within the school. Though likely not everyone who attended filled out the form, around 130 responses were recorded. The survey found that the grades highest in attendance were sophomores (37) and seniors (38), though the majority of the seniors were there as presenters. Juniors followed at 29, and Freshman were numbered at 18. In future, the team is interested to see if organizers can coax more freshmen to attend events, motivating them to start participating in their second years.

Around two-thirds of the responders were IMGD-affiliated, the majority of whom were majors rather than minors or professors. The attendance of non-IMGD individuals is promising as an indication of the event's ability to expand the celebration of student work beyond the major. This event and other showcase events could be advertised more heavily around campus to encourage engagement across the institution.

Only six of the responders were professors; only four of those six were IMGD professors. In future, the team should advertise more heavily to faculty and meet with them one-on-one to encourage attendance. Encouragement and interest from professors could be a form of strong positive feedback for students, and may present a more unified community within the department, leading to more student projects and better visibility for the program.

Conclusion

Being the first event run by the IQP, Alphafest was an opportunity for the team to get a handle on how events like it are to be run. Though not without its misgivings, the team was able to run a successful event that received positive reception, being featured in WPI's Tech News and receiving congratulations from the IMGD department. Despite the relatively small and internal nature of Alphafest, it still served as an important opportunity for the team to learn the ropes behind event management and build their confidence before the larger-scale events occurring throughout the rest of the year. Much as the name suggests for the quality of projects being shown at Alphafest, this event, too, was only a prototype for the events to later be hosted by the Fest IQP team.

Analysis

An iconic and vital part of the school year for students of the Interactive Media and Game Development program at WPI is Alphafest, a student-run showcase event in which MQP projects and other student games show off their project alphas for the community to playtest and enjoy. This event is a great way to bring the WPI community together and showcase what Interactive Media and Game Development (IMGD) students are capable of, and it also serves a vital role in an IMGD student's education. This is because Alphafest provides a way for IMGD students to gain feedback and use that feedback to iterate on their project. By doing this, they are learning the importance of feedback and iteration in the game development cycle, which is something that's hard to learn in a typical 7-week course and which is critical to learn if they want to go into the game industry. The yearly event is run by students as part of their IQP, who are in a position where they are encouraged to find a topic of interest to research the event and its context, to further the project's effectiveness in future years and to increase the understanding between the department faculty and the student experience. However, the way that the IQP is currently organized makes this research unfeasible. This paper will cover Alphafest as it existed this year, its history within the IQP, and a proposal for its future.

Alphafest was, as a whole, a resounding success this year. The event drew a large crowd of people into the open space, and the games being shown were fun, varied, and numerous. From MQPs to class projects to independent games, the event showed off the potential of the IMGD department's students and garnered excitement for the coming year. When planning the event and throughout its duration, the team's enthusiasm for showing off this multitude of interactive projects from the student body grew, increasing inspiration and ideas for Showfest the following D term. The team met with MQP projects to facilitate their ability to showcase their projects and surveyed attending guests to understand the demographics of those who attended the event. Ideas were forming that may well have been turned into interesting and helpful research, turning the IQP into a thoughtful project looking into the value of showcasing of student games within the department and how to better bridge the gaps between grad and undergrad, between student and teacher.

One thing that the IQP noticed is that some of the exhibitor teams could have benefited from having the event pushed back a few weeks. Since Alphafest took place mid-B-term, that means that teams that started their projects in A-term likely wouldn't have had much time to prepare and polish an alpha build of their projects, leading to undue anxiety which could discourage students. This is harmful as "motivation is positively related to educational outcomes" (Shin, 2018).

As MQP teams are required to go to Alphafest, this can result in the teams having tunnel vision and only working towards the next requirement, rather than working to show a completed project at showfest. In fact, one study suggests that "mismanaging a project's requirements may be a major cause of project failure," and that "a major educational gap is identified whereby students learn requirements utility in a limited capacity in formal design courses – graduating with a limited understanding of how requirements may and should be used in design" (Morkos et al., 2019). This means if students' projects aren't in a state where they could reasonably meet certain requirements, such as displaying their work too early at Alphafest, then those requirements could hurt the project or result in the students not fully understanding how those types of requirements are supposed to benefit them and their project. This is important for IMGD to keep in mind as iteration is a critical part of the game development process and something students should learn.

One way to instill the importance of iterating on feedback in IMGD students, while ensuring that projects are progressing at a reasonable pace, is to hold an additional internal showcase in C-term, which, for the purposes of this paper, we'll call Betafest. Importantly, students should be required to present their project at Showfest and either[1] Alphafest or Betafest. This would ensure that students could get useful feedback that they could use to help improve their project, rather than having to show off a project that's too early in development and receiving bad or otherwise unhelpful feedback. Additionally, including Betafest in C-term would improve the sense that IMGD's internal showcases are building to Showfest and the release of the project. However, creating a new event for this IQP to cover would be yet another increase in work on top of a steadily ballooning project scope.

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[1] With the option to present at both Alphafest and Betafest.

Over the span of the four years since Covid hit, this IQP has been going through a transformation. Since the project's conception in 2013, it has been an unconventional one; rather than the research most IQPs focus on, the PAX group had focused solely on setting up a booth at the Penny Arcade Expo, where it represented the school, the program, and the students, showing off a range of impressive ongoing student projects. In the 2019-2020 school year, as Covid began to creep its way into the states, the project shifted slightly. According to the 2020 IQP report, for unspecified reasons, the group decided to help out with Alphafest and Showfest. Showfest was ultimately canceled that year due to the pandemic, but the team helped out with the manual labor part of Alphafest's setup (Dawson et al., 2020). The following year, the pandemic was in full swing, and the IQP forewent attending PAX's online replacement, focusing instead on the full planning and setup of the two showcase events, made more complicated since they were online due to social restrictions at the time (Baldwin et al., 2021).

The PAX IQP of 2022 marked the first year that the two versions of this project were combined into one. The team was tasked with fully planning the PAX booth, Alphafest, *and* Showfest. Not only that, but the team was one of the smallest in the history of the IQP, at only two members for most of its duration (Bajer and Peavey, 2022). This year's team is a group of five, above the average size. Due to this increase, the team was encouraged to start a whole new event in Boston in addition to the current events the students were tasked with organizing.

Despite the large workload, involving students in the organization of IMGD events is by no means a bad idea. The experience has been educational, rewarding, and even exciting at times, and an excellent project to put on one's resume. One team member has already received a job opportunity from connections made through JoyArt, and the abilities of the entire team in communication, organization, and collaboration have been strengthened immensely. However, the team has consistently been pushed to and past their limits by these events, unaware at the start due to their inexperience of the scope they had agreed to take on. This meant that the budding ideas and questions about the betterment of the department and the excitement of further developing the on-campus events, prompted by the excitement and success of Aphafest, had to be laid to rest. There were no interviews, surveys, or studies that could be done in between the tasks required to set up an event. The opportunity for properly and effectively bringing the academic side of an IQP into the practical nature of the project was lost. In order to be able to

fully explore this side of the project, the organization of this IQP must be fundamentally changed.

The events that this IQP organized this year can be split up into three groups, each with its own area of research to explore. JoyArt focuses heavily on the artistic side of game development within universities, and can be utilized to get a better understanding of the experience of art students at WPI, a largely tech-oriented school. A group of students manning this event could also focus more attention on the Arts & Humanities department at WPI, encouraging more collaboration between it and the IMGD department. This group could focus on this event A, B, and C term. PAX brings this project outside of the sphere of academia only, and can focus their attention on the game development world, as well as showcasing and merchandising games. This group could work in B, C, and D term (depending on when PAX runs in a given year) and work closely with the games selected to be displayed to properly showcase them as professional games rather than student projects. Lastly, Alphafest and Showfest (as well as, perhaps, Betafest), which are very similar events, could be grouped together and used as an avenue to explore the process of making games within the IMGD program, and work with MQPs on their journey from Alpha to Beta to final build.

The PAX IQP has grown far beyond its initial scope, goals, and motivations. It has become a core part of the IMGD department, and as such, its goals and organization must be revisited and reframed in order for events such as Alphafest to be utilized to its full potential. Whether it be moving the date, creating a new event to connect it with Showfest, or reframing the event so as to truly explain its importance to participating students, the student team of organizers could be enabled to improve the event so much more easily if the IQP were changed so that a core team could focus on the event and its importance to the department. Alphafest, JoyArt, PAX East, and Showfest as they took place this year showed off the abilities of WPI students to put care into events that are important for student growth, and future years of this IQP should be enabled to take the large foundation of this long-standing IQP to its full potential.

JoyArt

About

JoyArt was a brand new event for the WPI and IMGD communities, borrowing its name and concept from a similar event run by Becker College. The original JoyArt ran for multiple years at Becker College as a game art competition where artists submitted their artwork to be exhibited and judged by industry professionals. In the wake of the pandemic and Becker College's shutdown, this event was revived by the Fest IQP team in an effort to help game artists showcase their work and network with industry professionals, catering to a need in the WPI IMGD community to showcase its game artists. Despite being a WPI event, the Fest IQP extended the competition to other schools and game art programs in New England in order to put on a more successful event that would attract industry attention.

JoyArt 2023, alternatively branded JoyArt Boston, was hosted on February 24th, 2023, from 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM in the WPI Seaport space, a location in downtown Boston conveniently located closer to the studios and games industry professionals the team wanted to attract.

The practical component of this section of the paper is dedicated to documenting the IQP team's process of running JoyArt Boston 2023. Being that reviving JoyArt was a student initiative, a lot of planning went into hosting this game art competition in order to feature artists from multiple colleges, offer industry-led portfolio review sessions, and display finalist artwork in a gallery setting. For its first year under WPI management, the event was a remarkable success, receiving over 200 art submissions between its 8 categories, with submissions coming in from 12 different schools across New England.

The analysis component of this section of the paper is dedicated to the experience of game art students in a new and evolving field, especially within WPI. It discusses the importance of adequate portfolio feedback on their education, the drawbacks of WPI's 7-week term structure on students' abilities to be properly invested in creative projects, and the lack of opportunities for networking for WPI art students. The paper then explains how Joyart as an extracurricular event fulfilled many of these needs.

Practical

Conception

JoyArt was originally run in 2018 & 2019 by the Becker College IGDA branch, in order to showcase interactive media and game art from the college's students. In preparing for this year's IQP, the team talked with one of their advisors, Monty Sharma, and learned about the history of this event and what it entailed for the students of Becker College. The team's decision to revive the event for the 2022-2023 academic year coincided with a perceived need for student game artists in colleges like WPI to network within the industry. So with the goal of creating a game art competition and getting student game artists' works out there, JoyArt Boston was born.

During A-term, two members of the team discussed preparations for JoyArt as the two IMGD art majors in the IQP team, where they established people to potentially contact for help as well as planning out for the event's size, location and various other specifications. These preparations laid the groundwork for the event to come into fruition through B and C-term.

Advisory Board

A critical component of preparing an event of this caliber was establishing a practical and efficient way of communicating across college campuses to ensure JoyArt Boston 2023 could reach an audience beyond the WPI community; the solution to this matter came through the formation of the Advisory Board.

The Advisory Board was an intercollegiate student and faculty council made of contacts from each officially partnered college for JoyArt 2023. From November to February, the team grew this board to encompass 21 members from 10 different schools. This process made use of numerous manners of outreach, including the Fest IQP team's personal contacts, known faculty at partner campuses, and cold-emailing department professors at colleges we knew had an active game art program and community.

Using a Discord server to connect all these advisors, the team had at their disposal one centralized place to converse with an advisory board of contacts from each officially partnered

school. Building this network was only the first in a series of key objectives for the Advisory Board, stated since the council's inception. These objectives included the following four parts.

1. Establish a network of students and faculty related to game art from each participating school.

2. Collect feedback on how the art contest should be conducted to provide the greatest value to students.

3. Spread awareness of the event through a multi-school marketing push coordinated across campuses and social media.

4. Gather submissions for student game art from each school to be showcased at the contest.

The second of these points, the collection of feedback, was essential in ensuring that the event was an appealing and desirable opportunity for students from many different campuses. The IQP team needed to consider the demographics of each school's program, including what type of game art they worked on, and what they would like to get out of the event, in order to ensure that it was a worthwhile opportunity for them.

The third of these goals, the spreading of awareness, was essential to ensure JoyArt Boston's marketing campaign was coordinated beyond WPI. By providing the Marketing materials the IQP team generated to the Advisory Board, the team's contacts were able to signal boost the message across their own channels, both making the IQP team's job of outreaching to other schools' students easier and more manageable, as advisory board contacts were responsible for marketing the event to students at their own school (*see Marketing section for more information*).

The fourth and final objective is perhaps the most essential: gathering submissions for student game art from each school. Marketing helped the IQP team get the word out to students at each campus, but the most effective motivator for encouraging submissions was having advisory board contacts directly indicate to their peers and students that they should be submitting to JoyArt.

Gathering submissions for their school extended beyond just encouraging students to submit; the IQP team also used the Advisory Board as the voting body to determine which artworks would be going to the Finalist Event. In a blind vote, removing any identifying information from submissions, we asked Advisory Board members to select their favorite works in each category. The highest rated of which, ended up being selected as finalists (*see Selection section for more information*). There was one stipulation to this — the team committed to showing the top 3 voted works from each officially partnered school at JoyArt. This decision ensured JoyArt would have works from a vast array of schools, and incentivized official partnering.

Sponsors

The event was well conceived and planned, with plenty of interest but with one setback: due to the novelty of the event in this IQP, there was no feasible way to get funding from the school. Any budget the Fest IQP did have set aside for it was expressly for the purposes of running and coordinating the WPI IMGD's booth at PAX East. Instead, the team turned to industry sponsors to provide money for catering, prizes, and other costly materials.

The benefits of these industry sponsors went beyond the money they provided. Being able to market the event with the names of well-known local game companies attached gave credibility to an event that most people had not heard of; this meant that students were more likely to submit artwork in hopes to gain connections with future employers, and that industry professionals were more inclined to attend and see the artwork, with the assurance that this was more than just a student event. In addition to the credibility and financial aid these sponsors' support leant, it also provided IQP team members with the novel experience of connecting to relatively big names in the games industry.

Before reaching out to sponsors, the team made a low estimate for how much money they would need (*see Budget section for more information*). Based on that estimate, and with advice from advisors and experts, they determined they would request sponsorships between $200 and $500. With help from MassDigi, the IQP team put together a list of around 30 companies they wanted to reach out to. The team then attempted to find contacts with each of them. This proved a challenge until Tim Loew from MassDigi was able to give the team some emails to reach out

to. From there they were able to reach out to around half, and in the end secured a total of eight sponsors, including one individual person who wanted to sponsor JoyArt independently of their employers.

The IQP team was also able to secure further contacts from these initial sponsors, expanding the industry network for the event beyond its initial plan. In one instance of this, an employee at Zapdot put the team in contact with multiple artists and secured a sponsorship from another studio altogether. Yet the bulk of successes came through the IQP team's interviews, emails, and friendly conversations, which proved to be the most rewarding and productive part of some sponsorship connections; though the team did not always get a yes from companies, people were still excited to hear about the event, and will likely be more willing to contribute in future years, being that they are now familiar with the name and this year's success.

Some sponsors were straightforward in answering with a number they were willing to give; others took a while due to internal processes. For example, Demiurge, JoyArt's largest sponsor, was an unexpected and last-minute addition. We had been in contact with someone at the company for a while who had offered a lot of helpful advice and connections, but an answer on sponsorship was unclear for a long time of back-and-forth emailing. This would have been a much easier process if the team had reached out a good deal earlier; sponsorship conversations would have been much easier if the team had started them at the beginning of B term.

Overall, collecting sponsors for this year's JoyArt was a success. One task that needs to be improved on for further iterations of the event is the handling of sponsorship dedications. While the team committed early on to attributing specific awards to high-paying sponsors for the event, it wasn't until the day of the showcase that they realized none of these dedications had been decided. Partway through the event, several of the organizers stepped aside to straighten the issue out and decide which awards would be attributed by which of the event's patrons. Future teams should take care not to forget this important dedication, as making this decision earlier would've allowed for adding special designs and care to be taken in preparing award certificates based on their sponsoring companies.

Marketing

One of the team's vectors for marketing was a Twitter account (@JoyArtBoston) that posted visual advertisements, reminders, judge announcements, finalist announcements, and other information about the event. For the marketing campaign, the team created a schedule for the Twitter account. This schedule was done in phases that correlated to a certain type of post: the team announced the categories with examples, announced the schools and companies that would be working with them, the finalists for each of the categories, and the judges. This was designed to make a constant media presence and keep the event in peoples' minds. In the end, the schedule was not entirely followed to the specific day, but it was still used to keep track of the order of posts and when they should generally be posted.

The JoyArt Twitter account also followed a lot of other students, professors, and industry accounts to spread awareness of the event by hopefully getting them to like and retweet our posts. Additionally, the team occasionally liked posts by those accounts both to celebrate other peoples' achievements and also hopefully make them more likely to like and retweet JoyArt's tweets in return.

The IQP team also made numerous posters and infographics to be distributed across the campuses of officially partnered schools. These posters' contents included JoyArt's time and place, submission information, sponsor names as well as the categories of art the event accepts. Additional posters were created over the course of the submission period, as the team received repeated questions and were made aware of what areas were unclear; most notably, an infographic illustrating in detail what each category meant was much more effective than the original contest details document that explained the categories *(see Figure B2 in Appendix B).*

Posters such as these were put up around campus and sent across various Discord servers, both belonging to WPI and beyond. These materials were distributed to the Advisory Board directly in order to create a coordinated marketing push across the officially partnered campuses. However, the team found that the most effective marketing tool for universities proved to be sitting down with programs' art professors and informing them of the event. By encouraging professors to engage with their students individually and sign up for the event, more students felt compelled to participate. One-on-one communication from peers and professors consistently

received the best response, serving as the important motivator for many students to participate in the event.

Website

The IQP team initially weren't going to create a website as they wanted to prioritize Twitter and they felt the creation of a website would be an unnecessary drain on their time and resources. However, while talking to Mikel, he offered to make a website and register a domain with WPI for us, as many people are hesitant to go on Twitter and it only allowed us to convey information about JoyArt through tweets. The IQP team happily took him up on it, and he shared a GitHub organization with the team for the site.

The IQP team used the website to deliver key information such as information on the categories, submitting, where to get tickets, the devpost gallery, who the sponsors are, and who the judges are. The team also linked their Twitter feed on the site so visitors could see daily updates. Due to our late start in making the website, it took considerable time to get the website ready to launch.

Categories

JoyArt 2023 included the following eight categories: 2D Character Concept Art, 2D Environmental Concept Art, 3D Character Art, 3D Prop and Environmental Art, 2D Animation, 3D Animation, Pixel Art and In-Game Art Implementations.

Overall, the IQP team felt the categories to be good choices, having taken into account much of the feedback and information gathered from interviews with Advisory Board members. Still, some changes ought to be made in future years. One such problem arose regarding the 3D Environment and Prop Art category, being that there ended up being very little distinction between it and the In-Game Art Implementation category. By these categories current descriptions, a fully modeled scene could ostensibly belong to either category depending on the software chosen to render it. As such, the Fest IQP team recommends that the 3D Environment and Prop Art category be narrowed down to individual assets or groups of assets that would be placed in a larger scene, and not accept works that are in and of themselves a large environmental scene.

The IQP team received some feedback about 3D categories in general from students dissatisfied with the lack of restriction over polycount and topology; the team took it with a grain of salt due to the small nature of the competition and the fact that the 3D pipeline is so large and all aspects of it deserve recognition, but it is something to keep in mind for the future.

When it came to the popularity of each category, there was a very large range. The highest number of submissions was Character Concept Art with 40 submissions *after* the IQP team had consolidated groups of submissions and eliminated disqualified submissions. The lowest, on the other hand, was 3D concept art with 6 submissions. The 3d categories also did very well with 33 and 32 submissions. Pixel art and in-game implementation were solidly in the middle with 19 each, and 2D environmental concept art dragging a bit behind with 14. 2D animation was not far off from its 3D counterpart with 10 total submissions.

Submissions

The IQP team provided a Google Form for prospective submitters to add their contact information to and then submit their art. The team asked for their name, email, Twitter and Discord handles, and which school they attended. After they selected the type of art they were submitting, the team asked them to provide an artist's statement that included how their art in the context of game art, three high-quality images used for judging the overall project, and then a Drive folder that contained their entire submission and proof of work files, such as a .psd or progress images.

The way the submission process was initially set up included these three thumbnail images because the IQP team planned to use those images for voting to ease the selection process. Ultimately the team wound up providing the link to the submitted google drive folders as well, but they still felt that the thumbnail images were important for initial impressions and decisions by those who voted for the selection (*see Selection section for more information*). In the future, it is recommended that the team rethinks this process, as it led to a lot of confusion on the sides of the artists and the organizers. Artists expressed confusion over the many different avenues through which they had to submit their art throughout the event's multiple phases, so any action that can be taken to streamline the process is highly recommended.

In some cases, but especially with the Concept Art categories, individuals either didn't realize or elected not to submit related pieces of work together. In order to strengthen these submissions, the IQP team took a significant amount of time to consolidate character designs: this decision both improved the individual submitter's chances of being selected and allowed for more people to be invited to the finalist competition. The team encourages making the option of grouping related works and its importance for submitters more clear for the categories that the rule applies to.

As part of the lead up to the submission period, the IQP team published a document containing all the contest rules, including complete descriptions and art examples for each category. It became very clear soon after submissions opened that very few people saw this document. We recommend consolidating and clarifying all the information to the submission form and the website for ease of communication. As part of this informational displacement, the IQP team wound up disqualifying some submissions for a failure to follow the contest rules: such as a failure to qualify for any of the contest categories, or the use of another artist's work in their own submission.

Submissions were open for four weeks, from March 3rd to March 31st. Half of the total submissions were sent in in the last 24 hours, so lengthening the amount of time submissions are open is unlikely to change the submission count. Future teams should consider making the due date earlier to leave more time for picking finalists, and simply begin marketing the event sooner to increase engagement.

Selection

The selection process was ultimately spearheaded by voting done through the Advisory Board. Though each person on the council was encouraged to vote, only half wound up sending in their answers. The five members on the IQP team also partook in the voting process. It's worth noting that in total, over half of the people who voted were Clark or WPI representatives. The IQP team did not notice a discrepancy of votes in favor of WPI or Clark student submissions, but in the future, it is recommended to secure a larger pool of voters to participate in favor of a more balanced result.

Once the votes were in, the IQP team spent a night hand-selecting the finalists based on these votes. To uphold their promises, the team first made sure that at least three people from each officially partnered school were represented. Typically, these were the top three students from the school with the highest number of votes, meaning they were more than likely going to be selected as finalists regardless. After these reserved finalist spots were filled, the team selected the remaining finalists based on voting majorities for each category, putting any tiebreakers up to the discretion of the IQP members. For future years, this promise of three accepted students per officially partnered schools is one that should be reconsidered; it was only ever included this year as an incentive for representatives from schools to join the Advisory Board, as JoyArt was an event many had never heard about, being that it hadn't run for about four years.

The logistics of the voting itself were less than ideal due to the fact that Google Forms has little support for images and videos in multiple choice questions. The IQP team looked at other online survey services to see if there was a better option, but ultimately decided to keep the voting within Google services. The team wound up with one Google Form and eight documents; the form had eight different sections, one for each category, and each with an associated pageles Google Doc. This document contained each submission for the given category. Each submission had an ID number for voting purposes, the given artist statement, and 1-3 thumbnail images. The goal was to hide the names of artists to prevent biases, but some artists had included their names on files in their drive folders, so this was not something the IQP team could fully manage.

Given that some students on the advisory board were also participants submitting to the contest, the team also made the rule that if a student advisor had submitted to a category, they could not vote on that category.

Due to the impractical nature of these tools for voting and managing votes throughout the selection process, the IQP team also made one very unfortunate mistake: one of the selected finalists never made it to the sheet that listed each person we needed to reach out to, and never made it to the final event. It is encouraged finding better solutions to making sure nobody slips through the cracks in future years.

DevPost

Once the IQP selected event finalists, they were emailed and asked to submit their chosen works to Devpost. DevPost is a website typically used for holding hackathons and archiving hackathon projects. While DevPost isn't incredibly artist-friendly and the resubmitting process was annoying, DevPost allowed the public to see, engage with (comment, like, share), and vote on the submissions in the gallery. Additionally, the use of a gallery also allowed DevPost to be used as an archive of sorts, which JoyArt finalists could point to as proof of participation or that they won one of the categories.

Judges

The process of finding judges was in some ways similar to the process of finding sponsors; it involved finding who might be interested first, seeing if we could get their contact information, and then sitting down and having a conversation with them to get advice and see if they were interested. Some were unable to attend, some didn't feel up to the task, and some were willing but disappeared when we tried to follow up.

Though the IQP team planned to have five judges from the start, going into the week before JoyArt we only had five judges. This was in part due to artists not responding, miscommunications via email, and one person going missing from the email list. Luckily, some very helpful and talented artists were willing to take up the role last minute due to contacts we had made with them early in the process for advice.

To give the judges a sense of what they should be looking for in winners, the IQP team put together a list of judging criteria. This helped define gray areas such as whether 3D modeling characters should be judged on character design, and the difference between the in-game art implementation and environmental modeling categories.

After the event, the IQP team received a small amount of negative feedback from participants about the choice of judges; they were under the impression that there weren't any 3d artists included. This confusion was likely due to the fact that many of the judges were multidisciplinary. In the future, the team suggests organizers focus on selecting a better spread of artists that represent both 2D and 3D art; pick at least one guest that focuses solely in 2D art, and

at least one in 3D art. It's also a good idea to find judges with more explicit experience in pixel art and animation, as these areas were especially lacking in representation. Finally, it's worth noting that every person on the panel was white or appeared white. This lack of diversity is concerning as the face of the event, even if it is the unfortunate result of industry demographics. More work should be done to correct this area in the future.

Portfolio Reviews

Soon before the event, the IQP team were reached out to by an artist at Demiurge offering to set up portfolio reviews. We jumped at the chance and set aside two tech suites for four of their artists to perform portfolio reviews throughout the night, with two sessions going on at a given time. Each session was to be fifteen minutes long, resulting in 24 total sessions over the three-hour event.

The portfolio reviews were helpful for the students who took them, and a good opportunity for Demiurge to get in touch with soon-to-be-graduating talent. The fifteen minute time allotment was enough time to get an in-depth review of portfolio sites without being too short or dragging on too long. Sessions were also open to non-finalists, meaning people who didn't get into the competition were also able to participate.

Unfortunately, 24 slots meant that not even half of the participating students could get a spot over the course of the night. They'd all filled up by the start of the event, so nobody who came in person and wasn't in touch with the event updates online didn't get a chance to sign up. There was also a confusion at the start of the event that set the first time slot off to a late start, delaying and shortening a lot of the future slots. In the future it is recommended to be very clear about portfolio reviewers needing to show up before the event starts, or setting up their rooms for them in advance.

In the future the IQP team would suggest finding a way to fit in more reviewers, maybe even from different companies if they are contacted early enough. This may well be limited by the space; maybe the Pixel art category could be moved to the kitchen area and the two rooms devoted to more portfolio reviews.

Budget

Early on in the organizing of JoyArt, The IQP team realized they'd need additional sources of funding to make JoyArt a successful event. The team began to budget how much they needed out so they could approach any potential funding sources with a target number and figure out if they'd be able to run the event. The IQP team's initial budget included a reduced catering budget and no funds for prizes.

The IQP team reached out to Gillian Smith, WPI's CDC, and WPI's Department of Art and Science as potential sponsors with no success. However, the team was able to secure $2,850.00 from outside sponsors, and they were able to adjust the budget accordingly, mainly by increasing the food and prize budget (*see Sponsor section for more information*).

Catering

With the budget secured, it was time to spend it. Catering was the single most expensive cost for running an event of this size — as part of organizing an event at the end of the work day is the inevitability that everyone will be hungry.

The IQP team looked at numerous catering options in Boston to determine the cheapest feasible manner of feeding people that could still be delicious and appetizing. Our first choice was Viga's, which specialized in catering sandwiches: simple, but effective. Yet by 2 weeks before the event, the time we needed to lock-in our catering selection, the cost was too great compared to the overall amount of sponsorship money we had secured at the time.

The IQP team went with the cheaper, yet still costly and delicious, tried-and-true alternative: pizza. Catered by Ottos', over $800 was spent on salads and pizzas; over $100 was spent on drinks, utensils, napkins and plates purchased by the team in preparation for the event. Placing the order through the WPI IMGD Operation Manager Allison Darling, the catering menu was locked in two weeks ahead of time to arrive 15 minutes before the start of the Finalist Event.

A significant faux paus in terms of catering decisions, however, stemmed from a fundamental lack of understanding dietary restrictions and caterer's notation. In an attempt to be cognizant of dietary restrictions, the team selected a fair spread of Vegan, Vegetarian alternatives.

Multiple gluten free pizzas were also ordered — however, the team did not realize that Gluten Free options as ordered through the caterer were not indicative of the food being celiac safe. At the event, two guests with Celiac Disease were unable to consume the Gluten Free food because of this noteworthy distinction. Teams hosting events in the future should be aware that in order to deliver food which is celiac safe, it is required to be prepared and packaged in a distinct area such that no cross-contamination with gluten is possible.

Tickets

Eventbrite is an online event and ticket manager that allows organizers to easily create events and people to reserve and purchase tickets. Additionally, Eventbrite allows event organizers to add additional information about the event, such as a description and location information, and requires users to have a specific code to access certain tickets. The team elected to use Eventbrite to manage public, sponsor, and finalist tickets.

Having an Eventbrite that the team could use to give out tickets was incredibly helpful as it allowed us to manage the amount of people coming in and out of the event, which was important given that the venue could only hold 120 people before becoming a fire hazard. We planned to release ~150 tickets (54 for finalists, 10 for WPI faculty, 20 for our advisory council, 50 for the public, and 30 for sponsors) as the team knew there would be cancelations or that people with public tickets wouldn't be at the event for long. Future teams can likely release more as we only sold 120 tickets.

Giving out tickets is a great way to get public engagement and allow artists who weren't selected/industry pros to come and network at the event. The IQP team chose to release our public tickets in 2 waves, with the first wave being smaller to create an artificial sense of scarcity. The team released 15 in the first wave and 30 in the second wave. The first wave tickets sold out in about an hour, but the second wave took around 2 days to sell out.

Materials

In preparation for the Finalist Event, a number of materials needed to be prepared by the team as part of coordinating and running a successful event.

Name Tags

To maintain a professional atmosphere and make networking amongst strangers easier, the team decided early on that name tags would be a good addition to the event. Feedback from regular event coordinators from MassDigi indicated that lanyard-affixed name tags tend to be received more favorably than pinned tags, so the team went about gathering the resources to create 100 nametags.

Reaching out to their WPI Marketing contact, the team was able secure 50 WPI-branded lanyards; another 50 non-branded lanyards were purchased for cheap on Amazon, along with 100 plastic card holders. In the days leading up to the event, after finalists, portfolio reviewers, and judges had been determined, the team prepared printed name tags for all VIP guests with their corresponding school or company logos. The remainder of name tags were left blank, allowing for any additional attendees to fill them out as they arrived at the event. By the time the event was over, the team had entirely run out of these 100 lanyard-affixed name tags, as well as multiple sheets of backup name tag stickers that were secured the day of the event.

Art Collages

To showcase submissions from the concept art categories in the best possible manner, the team decided to print poster collages of concept art. The IQP team edited together collages from submission images into 12" x 18" images along with artists names and schools *(see Figure B7 in Appendix B)*.

Concept Art Collages were printed on cardstock with a semi-gloss finish through Park Print for a relatively low price. The prints were ordered 4 days before the Finalist Event, and were only ready the afternoon prior to the event; the team would urge future years to print posters further in advance to avoid any issues with timing.

Alongside the collage prints, the team prepared printouts containing the artist descriptions and a QR code to the corresponding DevPost page for public voting. To display the Concept Art Collages and print materials, easels were used to turn the North Lounge into a gallery setting. Easels were borrowed from MassDigi and WPI Seaport.

For digital submissions from non-concept art categories, printing collages was not the best manner of showcasing artwork, so the team decided to edit together slideshow videos for related artwork categories. Each video combined images and videos of submissions for their respective categories, along with student names and artwork titles. These videos were played on loop across multiple screens throughout the venue, something that was met with mixed results (*see Event section for more information*).

Print Materials

Additional print materials were prepared, including room signage to indicate which rooms corresponded with which categories and the QR codes to vote based on those categories. Schedule sheets for the Demiurge Portfolio Review sessions were also printed off and affixed to the related rooms to remind finalists on when their review sessions would occur. Certificates for winners of each category were also printed on heavy card stock and awarded as part of the event conclusion.

Event

Having learned from the chaos of limited setup time from Alphafest, the IQP team arrived as early as noon, several hours before the event started, in order to set everything up for JoyArt. After bringing in all of the supplies, they set up the easels along the walls for the 2D Environment Concept Art to be displayed along, taped 2D Character Concept Art posters on the windows, cleared the desk areas for the In-Game Art Implementations, and put all of the drinks in the fridges.

The team also finished the videos that contained the 3D Characters and Environments, the 2D and 3D Animations, and the Pixel Art. The 3D model video was played in the Conference

Room, the animations were played in the Classroom, and the Pixel Art video was played in Tech Suites 3 and 4. Unfortunately this layout did not work particularly well for the pixel art videos, as they were stuck in dark, small rooms that were not as immediately obvious to enter as the other rooms. This caused the pixel art rooms to be less popular, and for some small groups of people to sit and stay for an extended period of time when they should have sat elsewhere.

The feedback received from judges in the wake of the event echoed this sentiment: not enough of the work available online was presented in person. The complete DevPost submissions contained written statements, galleries of images, and artist information for every entry. The video reels scattered throughout the event's many rooms and the concept art hung up around the main show floor wasn't enough to do the digital work entities justice.

Prizes

Initially the IQP team planned on having a mix of monetary and actual prizes such as drawing tablets and software. They tried to reach out to art supply stores and chains around Massachusetts, regional distributors of Wacom and ZBrush in hopes of getting art supplies, gift cards, drawing tablets or ZBrush licenses as prizes. However, after weeks of no responses, the team instead decided to go with solely monetary prizes rather than a mix of the two. Cash prizes were $75 for category winners, and $250 for the overall winner.

Ultimately, the team members feel that the cash prizes were a safer bet in the end, especially since they were able to raise enough money to cover them. Specific prizes can be hit-or-miss, especially in such a diverse subject. In future years as the competition grows, we hope that more money can be raised for prizes.

Conclusion

For the first year under WPI management, JoyArt Boston 2023 proved to be a tremendous success for the Fest IQP team. With over 200 student submissions from 12 different universities across New England, the event received a record number of game artists participating in the event, dwarfing the numbers of previous JoyArts run by Becker College. With 8 industry sponsors raising over $2,850.00, not only was this year's event fully financed, but an effective job was done laying the foundation for future WPI IMGD students to repeat the

event in the same space, contacting the same people. The competition sought to fill a much-needed empty space in the sphere of student game artists, as events hosted specifically for them are difficult to come by. While there are still many things to be improved in future interactions of the event, the Fest IQP was proud to organize the revival of this annual tradition through Joyart Boston 2023.

Analysis

Art has always played an important role in the development and success of games, from the early 8-bit pixel games found in arcades, to the painstakingly painted cards found in beautiful and complex board games, to the modern realistic and immersive experiences worked on by hundreds of artists. However, art on its own has existed for all of human history, and its application to games is relatively quite recent. The addition of art in relation to games as a subject taught in universities is an even newer topic. Due to the modernity of the subject and lack of research into effective curriculums, traditional academic structures often lack the necessary support and resources for budding game artists, even within dedicated programs and curricula. Extracurricular activities, such as game art showcases and competitions, are becoming increasingly important as supplementary tools for developing student game artists. In addition to the shortcomings of the curriculums, many colleges lack an understanding of the importance of networking within the game development sphere. As a result, there is a lack of career-based opportunities to meet future employers and coworkers. This holds true for WPI students in the art-focused track of the Interactive Media and Game Development department.

WPI is a very unique and successful school in many ways. According to US news it is ranked #86 in the country in Engineering, and since it was founded in 1865 it has been on top of the latest technologies and facilitating research into modern issues that affect people across the globe. Its strength, in many ways, lies in its project-based curriculum, and its short-term 7-week classes that split the school years into quarters, giving students opportunities to focus harder on smaller numbers of courses at a time. However, the IMGD art major is inherently very different from other majors. It exists in parallel with the tech track, but is at its core a humanities-oriented art program, rather than a STEM program that the university has focused on and excelled in since its conception. WPI was not built for artists, and it was never meant to be until recently.

According to the WPI website, on the page that details its blueprint for project-based learning, the purpose of the seven-week terms is to "create space for team-based, real-world experiences." On its very main page, the site promises that students "create solutions to problems faced by real people." Unfortunately, this element of real-world problem-solving does not seem to be present in WPI's art classes. Creative arts are usually an area in which important ideas are

explored and communicated, and artists frequently pour hours of work, energy, and love into projects that they care about. But projects like these are rarely taken to completion or even close in many WPI art classes. Though these courses encourage creativity and exploration of important ideas in their projects, there isn't enough time for the majority of students to become invested in a story or idea they are trying to develop. In courses such as 2D animation, Human Figure in Motion, and Concept Art, students aren't expected to even complete their projects, simply and necessarily because there is not enough time. Continuing projects over the course of multiple classes is also discouraged by many professors; this is important for encouraging iteration of new designs and improving on art skills, but does not facilitate long-term projects within schoolwork.

In an article from the Harvard Business review entitled *Creativity under the Gun*, researchers explore the effects of time constraints on creativity. They address the commonly believed notion that great acts of creativity are encouraged by stressful and limited environments and time periods, monitoring hundreds of creative individuals and their responses to creative pressures at work. The paper's findings indicate that creativity in the area of short-term problem-solving can occasionally arise under pressure, but that as a rule, "complex cognitive processing takes time, and, without some reasonable time for that processing, creativity is almost impossible" (Amabile et al., 2002). WPI art courses provide that high pressure environment, and students do wind up creating beautiful and impressive things, but the problem they are solving is not a real-world one, it is a deadline and a grade. In order to have the bandwidth to make meaningful projects that address real-world issues, students must take their creativity out of the classroom.

Within the classroom, students are pushed to do great work within the constraints of their assignments. From 2D animation to concept art to 3D modeling, there is a host of courses available to students to fine-tune their skills. Within those courses, students are graded on their abilities and encouraged to improve, as one would expect from any art program, but the overall breadth of a student's work across each skillset is not examined until their final year, and even then it is only within the context of their Major Qualifying Project. For this reason, many students have expressed discontentment with the assessment of their work, and how well it is preparing them for professional work and hireability.

According to a predictive correlational study performed by Nicole R. Lesher at a Southern Californian art school, plenty of research and historical support exists surrounding the positive feedback of assessments in technical subjects and the best way to reinforce confidence and learning, but little is available in the context of artwork and modern creative disciplines. This lack of evidence behind the assessment-based foundation that many art programs at universities employ calls into question the fitness of these programs to teach their students and better their skills. When artists are overlooked in the grand scheme of a university's programs, this lack of support is felt in the education and confidence of its students (Lesher, 2022). Within the sphere of game art, however, a small amount of research and curriculum exploration has been done that is worth considering.

In an informational article about careers within game development from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the authors assert that "an artist's most important asset is the portfolio" (Liming and Vilorio, 2011). This sentiment is shared across the majority of resources easily found online for aspiring game artists, and is echoed in many institution's suggestions for game art education curricula. One such example is a curriculum design project from the Games Research Association of Poland, portfolio lessons and reviews are recommended for each year a student participates in a game development program. One of the important pillars of teaching the authors highlight is "making time for the preparation of a professional portfolio, checked by instructors before graduation" (Mochocki, 2018). Portfolio reviews should be a given at an institution that hopes to prepare its students for a career in games, especially for artists whose success relies upon the impactfulness of their visual work put together rather than grades or awards.

At WPI, portfolio reviews are occasionally offered, but are by no means a consistent part of the curriculum. They happen sporadically and infrequently, and when they are done they are usually at non-required events, in group settings rather than one-on-one, and often different professors give conflicting advice based on their own very different experience. What may be a large part of the problem is that very few WPI art professors have experience in the industry making art for games. It is due to no fault of their own that they are not able to provide the advice students need to get into the industry. To make up for this gap in its artistic education, the school or the program would greatly benefit its students by looking into setting up periodic, mandatory events in which students may receive constructive, general, and knowledgeable

criticism of their portfolios by older artists who have experience working or even hiring in the industry.

Such events would also help to make up for WPI's lack of networking opportunities for IMGD art students, which can be seen in the negligible exposure to the game industry at WPI's career fairs. For example, a 2015 IQP from WPI researched this lack of exposure to industry opportunities that the school affords IMGD students by surveying the population and checking the numbers on previous career fairs. According to their research, there is a distinct lack of a presence of game-related companies at the WPI career fair. Whether or not a career fair is the most helpful way of making industry connections, students feel discouraged, like they are missing out on important opportunities when they go to events such as these and find that there is nothing for them, especially since there is so little else in the major to make up for this discrepancy.

Colleges can resolve this issue with holding mandatory portfolio review events, as mentioned previously, and by increasing networking opportunities for game art students. In fact, one study found that students in creative industries face a seemingly insurmountable challenge in making the connection between what they are learning in education and the industry they seek to join; getting people from this industry in the room to simply talk and, conversely with aspiring students is a great first step on getting them comfortable with the culture and community of their intended future employment (Ball, 2002). Additionally, Linda Bell indicates that students in creative industries face a seemingly insurmountable challenge in making the connection between what they are learning in education and the industry they seek to join; getting people from this industry in the room to simply talk and, conversely with aspiring students is a great first step on getting them comfortable with the culture and community of their intended future employment. Therefore, finding ways to expose game art students to the industry would be an excellent step in improving the quality of their education and chances of entering the industry in the future.

One way colleges can do this is by taking advantage of pre-existing communities such as clubs to organize events such as workshops and game jams where industry professionals are welcome to participate. This would allow colleges to further their students' education while exposing them to the game development industry. Clubs such as WPI's International Game Developers Association (IGDA) chapter already serve a similar function, so providing more

support - such as funding, industry connections, help with workshops, and advertisement - would allow those clubs to improve upon the education that they're already giving to their club members.

Additionally, colleges can create their own events to serve similar functions. Notably, WPI is taking steps in this direction with its creation of IMGD colloquiums, which allows professors and industry professionals to present industry information to students, after which students can talk directly to the presenter, ask questions, and connect with them. While these colloquiums can be helpful, only a limited amount of industry professionals have presented so far. The organizers should prioritize having industry professionals present to achieve the full potential that the colloquiums offer.

Events such as game jams, workshops, and colloquiums can also serve as, what Vogl's 7 Principles for Belonging would refer to as, rituals. These rituals would help to strengthen the community, as they could have the potential to further the education of game art students while regularly allowing alumni to come back into the community temples and share their knowledge.

In an attempt to create such a ritual, help expose burgeoning game artists to the industry, allow them to show off their work, and receive critique, we decided to revive an event hosted by Becker College students a few years ago called JoyArt. JoyArt Boston 2023 was run as a game art competition that recognized over 60 finalist submissions as the top artworks among 8 categories. By inviting this many finalists and taking great care in the display and showcase of their works — printing high-quality collages of concept art and editing together looping videos of digital art compositions — many of the students at the event had the experience of their game art being displayed in a gallery setting for the very first time. The effect allowed for a much more tangible validation of student achievement and a marker of overall performance. To supplement a lack of industry exposure, contacts from the Boston game development scene were invited to the event as judges and guests to connect with students to discuss their artworks. While these early conversations between students and industry professionals may not have launched anyone directly into employment, demystifying the target industry in which game art students hope to reach is a leap forward for many young people who had never had such an experience before.

Additionally, to encourage students' self-improvement, one-on-one portfolio review sessions with professionals were run throughout the event, where 15-minute conversations gave the budding art students mentorship and guidance on their skills, artwork, and professional application materials. These sessions turned out to be invaluable, becoming the most popular aspect of the event, most simply because they fit the form of student assessment most compatible with game art students and the perception of goals. Portfolio review sessions align with what was originally termed the "best practices of assessment" for the game art industry, as initially described by Driscoll and Wood. By engaging the learner in a relevant context and discussing their work, "students receive the information they need to continue to improve while they have the opportunity to incorporate the feedback rather than postproduct" (Lesher, 2022). Because the value of this assessment is clearly defined to the students, and their participation in the matter entirely voluntary, it was far easier for students to seek avenues for self-improvement based on the information and outcome of the assessment they had received.

These facts, in summation, mean that JoyArt Boston 2023 exemplified what extracurriculars are capable of accomplishing, especially amongst students of game art; whereas academia has historically failed to do justice for the arts, events beyond the classroom provide the support and resources that students seeking to enter industry require. Even as game art remains indispensable to the rest of the games industry, academia has failed to fully integrate it into its curriculum beyond the traditional format of classes. This lack of well-tailored support for game art students has made extracurricular activities, such as JoyArt Boston 2023, essential in providing students with opportunities to showcase their skills, connect with industry professionals, and gain the knowledge for self-directed future growth that can help them launch their careers in the game development scene.

PAX East

About

The Penny Arcade Expo (PAX) is a convention that celebrates all things gaming, providing an opportunity for attendees to get their hands on new and yet to be released games, interact with the broader community, and learn about the industry they enjoy. PAX East is an annual instance of this convention for the United States East Coast. While its appeal to the general public is evident, PAX East is also very popular among game developers and industry, as it allows them to exhibit their products at a booth and show their work to a massive audience.

PAX East 2023 was held from March 23rd to March 26th, 2023 at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center. The WPI IMGD PAX East booth is an annual tradition that makes the most of this tradeshow to share the work of its students, while at the same time, marketing the program amongst the general public and industry.

The practical component of this section of the paper is dedicated to documenting the IQP team's process of running the WPI IMGD booth at PAX East 2023. The Penny Arcade Expo has historically been attended by this IQP as the primary and previously only event the IQP has been responsible for. Given that this was not the case for this year's IQP team, it was handled just as one event on a roadmap of many.

The analysis component of this section of the paper is dedicated to taking a critical look at the motivations behind this annual tradition. The stated goals of the WPI IMGD PAX East booth have remained consistent across the years, as teams have asserted the value of the booth for the program as attracting prospective students, raising awareness about WPI IMGD, and establishing employer and industry relationships for its students. The critical analysis featured in this paper seeks to address how well the booth accomplishes these tasks, as well as the actions that may be taken to improve upon achieving these goals.

Practical

Research

Given the recurrent nature of the IQP and the well-documented practical aspects of the project, significant effort was poured into the research phase to establish an understanding of how WPI IMGD's booth at PAX East has historically been run. This task was especially important this year, as the passing of the IQP's long-time advisor the previous year, Dean O'Donnell, meant the project was running under new advisors for the first time since 2014.

Throughout A-term, research into the event was conducted by pulling previous PAX IQP reports from the WPI Gordon Library student projects archive, which is publicly available via its website. Part of the team combed through the past ten year's worth of reports and took note of their relevant information. This was an invaluable experience, since it provided much-needed context and understanding to many of the choices made by previous teams, and allowed this year's Fest IQP to avoid pitfalls and previously made mistakes — such as how WPI IMGD PAX booth shirts that are red with a goat on them end up being vaguely demonic! Looking back, this is an important enough experience that it's fair to say all team members should've taken part in this research.

The practical papers of previous years teach how to build a framework for planning the event, including major milestones that need to occur in the months prior to PAX, but they don't fill in all the gaps. As part of the project, a number of inquiries regarding budget, order forms, and hardware were fielded through the IMGD Administrator, Allison Darling, and numerous previous IQP team members and student advisors. These resources, combined with the experience of the project's co-advisor Monty Sharma in managing PAX booths for MassDigi, resulted in a vast repository of information the team could pull from for all things PAX East.

Budget

We knew going into the IQP that PAX East would easily take the majority of the project's budget, and it was very difficult to get a straight answer from advisors, administration, and faculty regarding the budget going over the standard $8000. Therefore, we felt it was necessary

to plan out the budget far in advance and provide buffer room for whenever things inevitably went wrong. We did this by looking at the budgets of the previous IQPs and coming up with generous estimates based on that.

It was also necessary for us to take inventory of the equipment from previous years that we had at our disposal so we knew if we had to budget for extra equipment. We highly recommend that future teams take a thorough inventory of the remaining supplies at the very beginning of their IQP. Most of the supplies and materials you need - such as HDMI cables, cleaning materials, headphones, etc - should be in the PAX Chest. Additionally, Our IQP was fortunate enough to only need the surplus materials that we inherited from previous years, so we didn't need to spend that much of the budget resupplying.

After we reviewed the budgets from previous years, we started budgeting for the PAX Booth itself and planned to get a total of 15 exhibitor badges. We bought 15 badges so that we'd be able to have four volunteers at the booth at a time, with some members of the IQP doing multiple shifts each day. In the future, we'd recommend reducing the number of volunteers on a shift to 3 to help conserve the budget, as we found that the booth didn't need four people. Additionally, ReedPop ended up comping 5 of our badges as they had made a mistake on their end. This is not a repeatable thing for future years, but it made the rest of this year's IQP a bit easier.

In order to keep the budget in the green, a number of budget cuts were made, and we removed traditional aspects of the PAX booth, such as the T-shirt prizes. This meant we only needed around 40 shirts for the volunteers to have one each and each of the IQP members to each have two. We also reduced the number of pins, as we had a large number of pins from previous years.

WPI Marketing

In addition to pins, we also placed brochures and flyers on the table that faced the pathways. There was a small flyer that simply advertised the IMGD program in general, and a booklet/pamphlet that specifically advertised our graduate program. The flyer is passable and just gives general, perennial information, but the pamphlet is severely out of date. It features

images of campus from at least 6 years ago, features people who have not gone to or worked at the school in a very long time, and lists companies that do not exist anymore. Also, these pamphlets were picked up and taken frequently and needed to be entirely restocked from the box on Saturday. Small stacks of both kinds of advertisement remain in the PAX chest. Ideally, these would be replenished or replaced with newer materials.

Another, larger feature of our booth was the banner. It is a large rectangular backdrop that is stood up against the back wall of the booth, and features the WPI logo, vague quotes about the IMGD program, three pieces of artwork (two by professors, one by a student that has not gone to WPI in a long time), and several outdated or bland stock photos. Also, the frame that the banner is attached to has many broken internal parts and seems to be warped. It was a small challenge to construct the banner with these flaws.

We recommend, given time, connections, and the budget, that these marketing materials be replaced somehow. Ideally, the marketing department would purchase these materials in the name of investing in and improving marketing for the IMGD program, but it may be that these materials must be paid for by future teams. In addition, it is recommended that these materials focus on current work by current or recent students, and rely less on blatant stock image use, along with information that cannot become dated in just a couple years.

ReedPop

ReedPop is a company that runs many pop culture events, such as PAX East, so we had to go through them to book the booth area, exhibitor badges, and some equipment. We received a lot of support from Allison Darling, who helped make this IQP possible by handling the majority of our ReedPop-related tasks such as booking the booth, ordering the exhibitor badges, submitting forms, and booking the hotel.

We highly recommend that, before going to set up for PAX at the convention center, future teams call ahead to confirm the number of exhibitor badges, as ReedPop initially messed up our badge order. This led to us not being able to pick up all 15 of our badges on set-up day and sending frantic emails to Allison about our situation. Allison was able to help us through the

whole situation, by calling ReedPop, ensuring we got the badges the next day, and putting us in contact with an employee who could help us if we ran into more problems.

Hotel

To avoid traveling to and from Boston during PAX, we decided to book two rooms in the Boston Park Plaza Hotel. Since we booked the rooms early on (late December) and ReedPop offers discounts for exhibitors through its website, we were able to stay at the hotel from Wednesday, March 22nd to Sunday, March 26th, for $2,028.05.

Our hotel was 1.6 miles away, and, while they offered a shuttle to and from the convention center, we often had to walk all the way back as we got dinner right after PAX ended. We highly recommend that future teams book hotel rooms early on as the rooms are less expensive, and you can try to get a hotel that's closer to the convention center. Additionally, we recommend checking to see if the hotels offer free meals, as the Boston Park Plaza did not, which meant we had to eat out for every meal.

Merchandise

Creation

For this year, we chose to design a pin and a T-shirt as previous years did, but due to budget constraints, we decided that the T-shirt would be exclusively for volunteers and not be handed out at the event. T-shirt designs were limited due to color limitations. Keeping them as volunteer shirts made the booth feel cohesive, and we felt that giving them out was unnecessary, as there were not many booths giving out T-shirts and it would have been a large expense. The pins were sufficiently popular and we ran out of our own design within two days and were able to use up old pins in the following two days. We had three variations in total: WPI basic pins, the 2020 designed pins with a goat on the front, and this year's goat pin. A lot of people came by and took a pin or the full assortment of pins without stopping to see the booth. In the future, to save supply and encourage engagement, a sign that offers a free pin in exchange for playing a demo might be a good idea.

In the future, the booth might benefit from pins associated with the games themselves. This would communicate a higher investment in the student work as opposed to displaying the booth as exclusively a marketing campaign for the school. A number of pins for each game and a goal in the demos that need to be reached before getting a pin would generate more interest in student work, and leave a much more meaningful impression on PAX-goers.

In addition to pins, the signage for the booth is incredibly outdated and needs to be updated to properly draw attention. Many people who came by were confused by what exactly we were representing as a booth, and a new banner should more clearly introduce WPI and IMGD. The artwork on the banner is also almost all professor work as opposed to student work, which feels confusing considering the rest of the booth is focused on displaying student work. Other images are stock photos of people playing video games, which feels unprofessional and dull at such a colorful convention. As a more affordable alternative, retractable banners advertising what games are being shown off that year would add an element of care and attention to the booth for only ~$120 each (Example price taken from Vistaprint).

Halfway through the event, we realized that there was no way for people to find the games after the event (as we had no game merchandise to hand out), and the context behind the games was absent when people were playing them. We wound up making some quick descriptions of the games' creation processes with QR codes to follow up if anyone was interested. The intention was to put them in little plastic stands we thought we had with us, but they were not brought up to PAX so we just printed them out at the printing services in the convention center and placed them next to the computers. We recommend repeating these posters or something similar in the future, and planning in advance to make them more professional-looking.

Ordering

We investigated the price and delivery times for several websites before ordering the shirts and buttons. This included Vistaprint, Custom Ink, ooShirts, and various local options for the shirts, and Just Buttons and Sticker Mule for the buttons.

Submissions

Submissions were opened January 10th and closed on February 28th. We reminded people consistently through Discord announcements in the IGDA and IMGD servers and over email. We made sure to mention that resubmissions were welcomed and that selected teams would have the opportunity to modify their submissions after being chosen, though this could have been repeated more often. We also asked our MQP representatives whether their teams were planning on submitting their projects.

Very few projects were submitted early on, and almost all of the games were submitted on the final day. This can be attributed to typical student procrastination, being generally too busy, and wanting the build to be as new and feature-complete as possible. The detail that teams were allowed to edit their submissions was intended to limit this, but it might not be possible. Either way, getting most of the submissions on the final day doesn't actually hurt planning that much, as we had a general idea of how many MQPs were going to submit their projects.

Selection

Selecting which games went to PAX was a little bit challenging, despite the number of submissions. Most of the submitted games were not nearly at a demo state where they could be shown off at PAX, and others were polished but had no clear purpose, making them a bad game to show off at a convention.

We were able to pick three solid choices, but we didn't feel this was enough to show off what WPI students were capable of. There was another three we wanted to show off but needed a minimal amount of tweaks to make them presentable. We decided to put them on a "waitlist" of sorts, where we informed the submitters that they had another week to fix the problems we identified, and then we would reassess. From this, two were able to make their games into nice, presentable demos, but one was unfortunately too buggy to be chosen.

While creating the waitlist resulted in us having five presentable games to reflect the work of WPI students, it did mean that we only had a little over a week between choosing the games that would be at PAX and setup day. If we had wanted to customize the booth and print out marketing materials and merchandise specific to the games, this would not have been enough

time. In the future, we highly recommend the PAX team leaves more time between the submission due date and the event so that more care can be put into the booth setup.

Despite these drawbacks, we were very happy with the selection of games we wound up presenting. The games included 2 MQPs, 1 ISP, 1 independent project, and 1 3d art demo. In terms of visuals, we had 2 pixel art games, 1 2D isometric game, and 2 3D games. We felt this was a good demonstration of both what project types are available to students who want to make games, and the range of creative styles present on the art side of IMGD.

Volunteers

One implicit goal of the Fest IQP team was getting as many people to work the WPI IMGD PAX East booth from the program as possible: not only is it a great chance for IMGD students to stand on the industry side of a major conference in a professional setting, but it also gives them great experience demoing game projects. Past years have also demonstrated that more volunteers allows the team more flexibility with shift breaks and a better-staffed booth to answer people's questions — indeed, the only downside is the additional price for getting more exhibitor badges, but due to this year's chance circumstances, that hardly seemed the case (*see ReedPop section for more information*).

The process of gathering volunteers was largely simple: one of the upstanding traditions to the IQP, and perhaps the largest incentive towards attracting volunteers, is that off-duty volunteers get to keep the exhibitor pass for the day and explore the expo for free. In keeping with this tradition, the team was able to easily attract an influx of volunteers by opening an interest form late C-term until the end of spring break, giving IMGD students a large window of time to decide to volunteer for PAX East during their week off from the typical WPI term structure.

The downside to this large registration window was that even though the Fest IQP team met on the first day of D-term to put together and announce the volunteer schedule for PAX East, that still meant revealing who had been selected to be volunteers just 10 days before the expo, on March 13th.

In a rush to get this information out to selected volunteers as soon as possible, the team also overlooked sending messages to update those interested in volunteering who hadn't been selected. The following day prompted a bit of confusion from these unfortunate parties who had no way of knowing their selection status until the Fest IQP corrected the issue with a wave of messages to the non-selected volunteers. Nonetheless, the lesson is clear that those people who hadn't been selected from the volunteer interest list should've been informed of the decision at the same time as those who had been selected.

This late volunteer decision also meant the Fest IQP team had a relatively short turnaround period for preparing the selected volunteers for PAX. Information regarding their roles at the booth needed to be organized and delivered rapidly to prepare volunteers and their exhibitor counterparts for the expo (*see Communications section for more information*).

In addition, it was essential to ensure that volunteers were intimately familiar with the projects they would showcase at the booth. They needed to know what the games were, how they were controlled, how they should be managed throughout the event, and any auxiliary information their developers wanted them to relay. A Demo Night was organized to this effect (*see Demo Night section for more information*).

Demo Night, in combination with our Discord communications, ensured that the volunteers were brought up to speed on what was expected of them as part of helping staff the PAX East booth. The volunteer staffing process at the WPI IMGD booth for PAX East 2023 went fairly smoothly, without any major issues: in total, 35 unique non-IQP team IMGD students, alumni, and faculty volunteers were brought to the PAX East booth over the four days of the convention. This meant the selected 35 of the 49 interested volunteers had the opportunity to demo game projects at a professional expo annually attended by tens of thousands, rub shoulders with fellow exhibitors, and market the work coming out of WPI IMGD students. All in all, good progress was made in our implicit goal to get students from the IMGD program involved!

Communications

Since such a large part of PAX East preparations requires getting the wider IMGD community involved — either by collecting students' project submissions to exhibit or volunteers

to help run the booth — proper communications channels are a must. Getting the initial word out for submissions and volunteers ends up being just one small part of this task, as managing the selected volunteers and exhibitors is an essential task in the weeks leading up to the expo.

The team facilitated communication between themselves and the booth staffers over Discord; the commonality of the application among the WPI IMGD community ensured access and encouraged active use among many volunteers and exhibitors.

On the first day of D-term, immediately after all exhibitor teams had been selected, (including those from the waitlist), and all volunteers had been scheduled, the team released Volunteer Instructions and Exhibitor Instructions guides, each of which contained all relevant information for their respective parties on all things PAX.

For the exhibitors — any developers of the games selected for the booth, who may or may not themselves also be volunteers staffing the booth — this document contained all information and deadlines related to submitting final builds and trailers to be shown at PAX. It described the roles of exhibitor teams in demoing their game to volunteers at the upcoming Demo Night, and how their games would be displayed at the PAX East booth.

For the volunteers — anyone staffing the booth, who may or may not themselves be exhibitors with games on display — this document contained all relevant information for transportation to the Boston Exhibition and Convention Center, arrival procedure, and event conduct. This document also relayed the purpose of Demo Night for learning about the games selected this year, as well as how information on these games would be compiled together and sent to the staffers in preparation for the event.

Beyond these initial info-dumps, the Discord gave the team an opportunity to relay important communications, updates, and reminders to both exhibitors and volunteers in the days leading up to PAX. Last-minute shift changes, questions about games, and communicating alternative arrival procedures wouldn't have been possible without this channel of communication (*see Event Badges subsection for more information*).

Demo Night

Demo Night was a way for the IQP team to answer questions, ensure the volunteers knew what was expected of them, and hand out the booth's t-shirts. We also had the exhibitors present their games, and how to play them, so the volunteers would be able to answer any questions from attendees. For the volunteers who couldn't make it, we compiled one document covering volunteer instructions and another that gave a brief overview of each exhibitor project and its controls. We distributed those documents to all the volunteers via our discord server so that volunteers could review them later.

While we didn't have enough time to let the volunteers play the games during Demo Night, we were able to provide them with builds that they could play later. We highly recommend scheduling some time in future Demo Nights to allow volunteers to play the exhibiting projects, as it will give them a better understanding of the projects and how to pitch them.

Materials

In an effort to expand the variety of student work showcased at the PAX East booth by WPI IMGD students, the team decided to make use of its two televisions to showcase trailers and game art developed by students in the program.

Trailers

On the standing television, a looping video of trailers for WPI student games was played. This allowed the booth to attract passerby's attention by playing videos of student projects beyond just the games exhibited at the booth, meaning a greater variety of games were shown in at least some manner at the booth.

In total, six ~30-second trailers were cycled on a loop on this television, 4 of which belonged to games at the booth, and another 2 from titles waitlisted and rejected from the selection process. The team decided to directly outreach to teams they thought had high-quality titles that would demo well in a trailer format, even if it had been determined that the games themselves wouldn't necessarily demo well in the PAX East environment.

On the second television, a looping video of game art created by WPI students was *intended* to be played. The team sought to make use of art already collected during the JoyArt submission phase from WPI students to continue to showcase the range of student talent in the arts at WPI.

A 3-minute video was edited together to showcase the art from 12 different IMGD students whose work had been submitted and approved for use at PAX East. The video was meant to shine a light on some of the best art IMGD was putting out, including artist credits and QR links to their portfolios for every piece.

Unfortunately, a hardware issue discovered during the booth's setup made the second television unusable for the duration of PAX East, and the team was unable to make use of this video. Although the team has since secured a second full-size television stand for free from one of the event goers at the end of PAX East, they were unable at the time to attach the television to its regular in-box stand (*see Event Setup subsection for more information*).

Hardware

In terms of hardware, we contacted the IMGD lab manager weeks beforehand to check out all the items in the PAX chest including wires, sanitation supplies, pins and marketing material left over from previous years; as well as all the computers, monitors and TV screens needed. We stored them in a specific room in the Fuller Labs sub-basement to prepare for moving them. However, we were only able to secure 1 TV stand for the two TV screens we have.

Layout

We had planned the booth layout in advance as we knew it would be important for deciding how many projects we were able to take to PAX. The IQP doesn't have any fold-up tables, but, helpfully, one of our team members was able to supply two fold up tables and we received one table, a trash can, a carpet, and 2 chairs from ReedPop for free by filling out a form they emailed us.

Our initial plans used three tables, but, due to a mistake on the convention center's part, we ended up with an extra table. We ended up with a few problems because of this, like not having enough table clothes and having an awkward layout on the first day of PAX. On the first day, we had a table in front of the booth where we sat and talked to people. This wound up blocking people from accessing the games behind us. We fixed this issue on the 2nd day, by setting up the tables in an L-shape which allowed attendees to access all of the games.
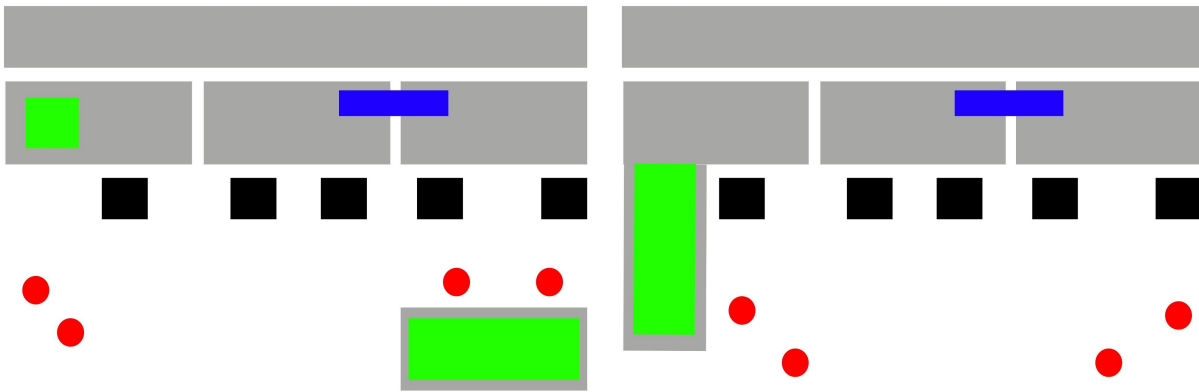
Legend
Space: 10x20
Gray: Tables (6' x 2.5'), Banner (20' x 1.5')
Blue: Televisions
Green: Marketing Materials
Black: Chairs
Red: Volunteers

We also noticed that people were confused by the mix of project types and who they were made by, so, in the second half of the event, we made posters explaining the context of the projects and QR codes that they could scan to find out more. These worked well and should be prepared in future years.

One other issue we ran into was not being able to access the second TV stand that last year's team was able to use. We had planned to display student artwork on the 2nd TV, but we weren't able to without the stand. However, one of the other PAX exhibitors gave us a TV stand as they were leaving, so future teams should be able to use that. We recommend practicing setting it up, though, as you may need more screws to be properly set up.

Travel

For setup day on Tuesday, the team took two separate cars, each with two people, which was enough to store all of the materials and set them up in a timely manner. We left during the morning and traveled without much traffic, but the return trip was during the afternoon, and dealt with significantly more traffic. We had to pay $25 for each car to be parked in the convention center parking lot. Then we attempted to gain access to the loading dock to reduce time spent setting up, and the security guard at the gate only let the first car in when we promised to not take much time. We did not attempt to bring the second car into the loading dock and carried everything from it all the way down half the length of the convention center. Also, the parking claimed "no reentries" but luckily when returning the first car from the loading dock the guard let us park again after we showed them the receipt from parking earlier. Do not count on this being the case in future years. Additionally, in future years make sure to get an explicit loading dock pass in advance or through the correct channels to reduce the amount of time spent figuring out loading logistics and physically moving items into and out of the convention center (*see Event Setup subsection for more information*).

On Wednesday the team drove into Boston in a single car during the middle of the day, encountered middling traffic, and temporarily parked at a parking garage near the Park Plaza hotel, costing $10. After setting up everyone's rooms, the car was parked in the Motor Mart Parking Garage near the hotel, where it remained until the return trip on Sunday. The cost for parking for four days was $160.

For the first two days of the event, we took the regular bus from a station near the hotel to a street that led to the convention center. The first day we neglected to pay but were still allowed to board. The second day we created a bus card and paid the fare. Future teams should check the locations of bus stops in advance, if the PAX-specific buses are not available, as those were what we used the remaining two days. They run every 15 to 25 minutes, and drive directly from nearby hotels to the convention center, which is extremely convenient.

Finally, when leaving the event we had to perform some convoluted travel maneuvers. In the middle of Sunday, while PAX was still running, two of the team members first returned to the parking garage, then returned to Worcester in one car to get the other one, and finally the two

cars returned to Boston to pick up the booth materials. This time both cars went to an office near the loading dock gate and got loading passes. Finally, after loading the two cars, everyone returned to Worcester Sunday evening (*see Event Breakdown subsection for more information*).

Event

Setup

For setup, we spent both Tuesday and Wednesday setting up all the hardware and installing games for the computers. Setting up two days before the event gave us more prep time just in case anything happens. However, we were not able to set up the second TV screen ahead of time since we were not able to find a TV stand for it, and by the time we tried to set the TV up without a stand, we discovered that it had a few screws missing, resulting in us unable to showcase the student art submissions for PAX that we had.

Breakdown

We started breaking down the booth at 6PM on Sunday, in the order of moving smaller hardware then larger ones. We were able to park our two SUVs at the loading dock after filling out some paperwork, which made it easier for us to carry things since our booth is relatively close to the loading dock. We also had another WPI student who was able to help us move things.

Badges

One part of the event that requires a large amount of attention and tracking are the exhibitor badges distributed for volunteers. Volunteers or exhibitors for the booth were allowed to show up for their daily shift at any time earlier in the day, to make the most of the team's free PAX pass for a day policy. A dedicated Discord channel was prepared ahead of time to warn about impending arrivals and request badges at a designated meeting spot as decided by the team; however, whenever someone needed to get badges for entering the expo, it did require one of the currently on-duty organizers to exit the convention center to deliver the badge to them.

Given the tight nature of scheduling the booth shifts to maximize the number of volunteers from our given number of badges, the team had to ensure all badges lent to volunteers

were returned by the end of the day. A tracking sheet recording the serial number of each badge and its status was created and used to ensure none of these essential badges went missing or overlooked.

In the leadup to PAX, the question of safety from strangers at the event, especially for young feminine organizers and volunteers, was never brought up. However, one of the organizers had a run-in with an older man who had in the past paid unwanted attention to a previous PAX organizer over social media. The organizer was able to take precautions to keep their distance during the event and make the other organizers aware of the safety risk due to their knowledge of what had happened in the past, but the fact that it happened raised some concern.

In the future, we highly encourage having some sort of safety training or information available and/or mandatory for young PAX-goers. Information that may seem obvious can be forgotten, so it's important to highlight things to pay attention to:

- Older men approaching young, feminine-presenting people to talk about themselves and their successes. Sometimes talking to someone in the industry about what they've done can feel like making a good connection, but successful people should not feel the need to tell the story of their success unprompted to a young student.
- Promises to add a student to a helpful networking discord server. If the only way someone wants to connect with you is over Discord or other similar social services because they "don't have a LinkedIn" or "don't have any business card left," take this as a red flag.
- Attention paid to you in a way that feels more personal than professional. Successful industry workers should not be trying to make personal friends.
- Do not attend events outside of PAX during the week of PAX that you were told about by a stranger.

Conclusion

WPI IMGD's booth at PAX East is an event looked forward to by many in the community: it represents an opportunity for student projects to be shown alongside the industry

at a major convention, rubbing elbows with studios both small and large. Yet while it is the original focus of this IQP, it was also one of the less flexible events in terms of what could be done by this year's team; most of the logistics and planning tended to echo that of previous years. Due to the planning involved with selecting games, training volunteers, reserving and running a PAX booth, and preparing merchandise, not much that was done was beyond what is traditionally accomplished for PAX East. This year, the Fest IQP's role was that of a coordinator, interfacing between the many parties involved with the event to hit all its checkboxes, but this also means the booth accomplished the role that it has traditionally filled without any major flaws.

Analysis

Ever since first being run in 2013, this IQP has been responsible for showcasing student projects at the annual games convention PAX East. While recent years may have increased this project's scope, bringing WPI IMGD student work to the Penny Arcade Expo has been a consistent pillar in this team's itinerary of events. And why is that?

There is an extensive history of documenting the purposes of WPI IMGD at PAX East. As stated by the 2018 report, which was the last of the teams to run this IQP as a PAX only project, the goals of the booth are to "attract prospective undergraduate and graduate students to WPI's IMGD program," to "raise awareness about WPI's IMGD program," and to "bring in potential employers and networking opportunities" (Buffum et al., 2018). These directives are cited almost verbatim in every one of the previous PAX IQP teams' end of year reports from 2018 to the project's inception back in 2013; while secondary goals may come and go with each new team, these three core ideas have remained a static foundation in the team's approach to PAX East (Miller et al., 2013).

Arriving at the decade anniversary of this project, the current team would like to take the opportunity to analyze how the program's booth at PAX East aligns with these previously self-proclaimed goals. By classifying the first two goals under their broader objective of image and brand awareness, this paper shall assess the validity of PAX East as an apt, albeit underutilized, marketing tool for the department. The final goal, categorized as one of networking and career development, will be viewed through the lens of convention culture and department precedent to assert that PAX East is an ill-fitting replacement to viable alternatives among the industry.

Beginning with the discussion of PAX East as a marketing tool: both the recruitment of future IMGD students and the outward facing image of the department projected at the convention fall within the conversation of marketing the institution's image among the public. For this task, PAX East would be a fitting choice, yet the current implementation of the booth severely lacks for accomplishing this goal.

According to a study into destination trade shows and the motivations of their attendees, the primary goal of convention goers such as those attending PAX East is "obtaining information on new products, seeing new properties and meeting new suppliers" (Menon and Edward, 2014). The niche WPI IMGD seeks to fill at the convention doesn't specifically align with these goals, being that it is an educational program designed to train students to develop interactive media and game projects — however, displaying student work alongside the convention products and studios gives an air of legitimacy to the creations coming out of the program, bolstering its reputation as an active and committed part to the industry among the convention goers.

As for the recruitment of potential students, there is an argument to be made that a significant overlap exists between fans of the industry attending the conference and young people looking to enter college. According to a 2017 culmination of data by the Entertainment Software Association, roughly 14.5% of gamers are under 18, implying that a similar portion of attendees at PAX may be minors interested in games. In addition to this, there may also be adults who have yet to get their bachelors degree or are interested in a graduate program; all of which serve as potential students for the WPI IMGD department.

Having established that convention goers are people the department cares to market towards, as well as being at least partially made up of potential students for the program, the question becomes how *well* the annual WPI IMGD PAX East booth is doing to accomplish this task. A gut reaction from this year's team tells us this task is not being performed adequately, but this must be understood as an assertion derived from the anecdotal experiences of the team interacting with event attendees at the booth as well as comparisons made between WPI IMGD and similar university programs present at the expo.

Typically, attendee interaction for people stopping by the booth can be classified into one of two groups. The first group, who engage most meaningfully with event staff, are people that are already familiar with the school or its program: these tend to be potential students who have already applied, graduate alumni, and peers of students and faculty in the program. These interactions tend to be the most effective, albeit rarer variety, as they serve to boost the awareness and positive associations with the WPI IMGD brand through repeated exposure, exemplifying a psychological concept called the mere exposure effect, in which "repeated, unreinforced exposure is sufficient to enhance attitude toward a stimulus" (Bornstein et al.,

1992). The second and more common case of interactions are with people unfamiliar with the program and school; these attendees, typically pulled in by the booths games and free merchandise, tend to engage on a surface level with the booth before pulling away.

When comparing the quality of WPI IMGD's booth to rival universities, the school is in a sorry state. Over the years, the booth has been downscaled in size from 10" x 30" to 10" x 20" while the school's closest competitor, Clark University, has increased its presence with the acquisition of Becker College and its high quality exhibitor booth. In terms of games being shown off at the booth, the school is equally outpaced by exhibits such as the Academy of Arts University, who prioritizes a quality over quantity, showing off yearlong games such as Plague, which boasts a 20+ person graduate student team, while the WPI IMGD booth focuses on showcasing a variety of projects created under the school's term schedule which by design encourages smaller projects with less time for polish.

If one of the goals of WPI IMGD at PAX East is to leverage the marketing potential the event has to offer, action must be taken to radically evolve the booth and make it more appealing to those event attendees experiencing first contact with the brand. It is not merely enough to run this event on autopilot as one of a dozen other responsibilities this IQP has taken on — the booth must be brought into the modern era to compete with other schools present for the eye of the public. That is to say, bolstered marketing resources, departmental support, and attention from the IQP team itself is owed to make future iterations of this project a success, as defined by its original goals.

Having compared the quality of the PAX East booth and the quality of WPI IMGD's games to that of rival schools, the former seems more easily addressed by this project team than the latter. In past iterations of this project, the team worked more closely with the marketing department to make use of their resources and expertise, gaining insight on merchandise design, booth ornamentation, and website maintenance to make sure that WPI was well represented at PAX East. As the years have continued, this relationship has been less intensive and WPI Marketing's interest in the project has faded. Instructional support for banner assembly is still provided, and the Marketing team is more than agreeable for lending the IMGD banner to the IQP team, but the relationship enjoyed by the team in this project's formative years has certainly dissipated. To make up for this, a designated marketing liaison from WPI Marketing to serve as a

contact person for the IQP team seems like a great idea. Regaining WPI Marketing's interest in the exhibition by appointing an administrative contact would allow the IQP team to work on a number of brand issues that have built up over the years related to its PAX East booth — one of which being the backdrop to the booth itself. This IMGD backdrop supplied by WPI Marketing is professional but entirely drab, with washed out and muted colors doing nothing to attract attention amongst the sea of exciting posters and banners draped across the PAX East showfloor; previous years have expressed identical sentiments to this, looking to take the backdrop out of commission and replace it with something more modern (Bajer & Peavey, 2022). By appointing a WPI marketing liaison, hopefully something can be done to finally accomplish tasks like this and increase the quality of resources available for the PAX East booth. The potential for this change extends vastly beyond material gain, however, as WPI Marketing's resources far surpass that of the independent IQP; closer associations with WPI Marketing could even provide training experience to the IQP and its volunteers, demonstrating how one may effectively market the school at a convention.

Departmental support for the PAX East booth can only be increased by incentivizing faculty to care about the booth, a trial in its own right because showing up PAX East either means missing a weekday, when classes must be taught, or working a weekend, on a faculty's day off. Neither are reasonable asks, but they are *important* nonetheless; they're important because when students see faculty putting the extra effort in out of their passion for the program, they tend to follow suit. This year, only two IMGD faculty signed up to volunteer at the booth, and only one ended up being able to attend, which meant a majority of the time, WPI IMGD was being advertised at PAX East by volunteers who felt disconnected from the program and its leaders. This is the sort of problem experienced by large organizations — not exactly the sentiment small university programs want to give off. Söilen's book more thoroughly explores this idea of a disconnect between people running a convention booth and their attitude towards visitors as a fundamental issue leading to ineffective marketing, but ideally, exhibitors need to have vested interest and passion to market effectively (Söilen, 2013). When the majority of attendants behind the booth are students recruited by other students, and have seen no departmental support behind the project, they have no stake in the booth as a potential marketing resource to improve their program. Instead, the task is one of purely self-interest: volunteer for two hours, just to get a free PAX East badge. The presence of more IMGD faculty at the expo

wouldn't entirely rid volunteers of this self-interest, but it would exemplify passion and care for the program that would resonate across other students' demeanor and care for the event itself.

However, perhaps the most important change is that attention from the IQP team is a must to seek out and implement these improvements. The Fest IQP has become, without a doubt, too vast in scope to give a single event like PAX East the full attention it demands to be pulled off at a high level of quality. There is a reason the project from 2013 to 2018 was entirely focused on PAX East — there is a lot that can be done with an impassioned team, supportive department, and working relationship with WPI Marketing, none of which are even remotely feasible if the IQP team remains in its current state. Perhaps the biggest change that needs to be made for the Fest IQP to better make use of the PAX East booth as a marketing tool for WPI and IMGD is to allow a team to throw its uninterrupted attention at making the necessary improvements and changes to the structure of this event to create an exceptional booth for the program: anything short of this would be a disservice.

All of this only assesses the PAX East booth and its purpose as a marketing tool for WPI IMGD, which is only two thirds of the original intent behind the project throughout the years. Pivoting now to shift focus to the last goal, which consists of attracting employers and networking opportunities for students of WPI IMGD, the team would like to assert that the current culture of PAX East makes it a poor choice when considered amongst potential industry alternatives.

What exactly does the employers and networking opportunities sought out from PAX East entail? Paraphrasing from the 2015 report, this objective means building lasting connections between the IMGD program and the games industry, using the networking opportunities of the convention to pave the way towards potential job offers for graduates and MQP sponsorships (Porell et al., 2015). This idea is so pervasive to the philosophy behind the PAX East booth that its exact wording echoes through nearly every IQP retrospective to date. This long-standing belief of the IQP is built upon flimsy logic, tantamount to "if you build it, they will come," being best summarized by the 2018 report: "by giving our students a platform to showcase their work, we offer them a unique opportunity to network with possible employers who see their work" (Buffum et al., 2018). This philosophy inherently assumes that companies from the interactive media and games industries are present and touring the showfloor, in a position to hire students

and recent graduates, and have sent staff from their company that have a vested interest in its hiring practices. While each of these claims seems reasonable at a glance, upon taking a more critical look, PAX East is clearly not the networking environment previous PAX East IQPs have drummed it up to be, with the problem being quite simply that PAX East is a *trade show* rather than a *conference*.

Recall that the motivation behind trade shows for attendees is "obtaining information on new products, seeing new properties and meeting new suppliers" (Menon and Edward, 2014). While WPI IMGD may not be marketing products directly to consumers, instead spreading its brand image and awareness amongst the public and college-bound young adults, the majority of booths at the event are trying to sell themselves and their products. Their primary goal isn't to network with college game developers and tour the showfloor themselves to see what WPI IMGD students are creating; they are trying to make the most of the money they spent participating in the convention to appeal to the consumer population attending the event. This idea is ironically best illustrated through research conducted by the 2019 PAX East IQP, who ran a series of interviews among developers attending the convention hoping to pinpoint down their purposes and benefits for attending PAX East. While the team identified value in how convention experience is a positive among potential hires in the industry, a fundamental detail in the developer teams' answers had been missed: something implicitly understood and obvious, but clearly incongruent with the IQP's stated intention. The truth is that no one was focused on hiring or cultivating future talent as part of the expo — sure, it may make potential hires better in the long run, but that was of no interest to these companies now. The goal of nearly every company interviewed regarding PAX East was to market and showcase their own products to the heavy consumer base in attendance, fulfilling a concrete goal, regardless of whether that be populating a mailing list or generating media attention (Ferguson et al., 2019). As obvious as it may seem, in a convention catered towards consumers, companies are not necessarily focused on viewing the talent and products of other booths.

Then what is a conference, and how does it differ? Unlike a trade show, conferences are meant for the people of the industry, those seeking to "contribute to their respective industry sectors through sharing knowledge and information, building relationships, and building brand reputation within the industry space" (Schlenker et al., 2022). If a trade show is populated with

consumers for a company's next product, a conference is populated with resources for said company: trainings, information, and future talent. If a long-standing goal of this IQP is to network with potential employers, build industry partnerships, and foster contacts for the greater games community, then this goal is better accomplished at a conference rather than a trade show. Trying to make networking a main focus of a trade show like PAX East is incompatible with the core philosophy of why companies attend the event: if this third and final stated goal of the PAX East booth is still relevant and valuable to the stakeholders behind the IQP year over year, serious work needs to be done to reassess where resources are being distributed, as PAX East is not the ideal venue of choice for completing this task. But more realistically, it needs to be asked why PAX East is being viewed as the leading networking opportunity for IMGD students, especially when superior industry alternatives exist.

There is a sentiment that WPI IMGD is becoming increasingly withdrawn and detached from the greater games community in the wake of COVID-19 and significant changes brought about by the pandemic. This conversation is further expanded upon in a later analysis, but one component of this issue is demonstrated through the loss of department traditions and events that originally served to open IMGD students up to the wider game development scene and encourage networking and industry contact in a setting better suited to the activity. In the wake of their loss, PAX East is beginning to feel like an ill-fitted crutch, leaned on too heavily by students expecting it to hold their weight against the brunt of lacking industry connections.

BostonFIG and the Game Developers Conference (GDC) are proudly displayed on IMGD's website, listed under the department's Conferences and Opportunities, but they aren't advertised or supported as they ought to be. BostonFIG is an annual conference that aims to celebrate independent game development in New England through an online expo, educational talks, and games showcase competition; the Game Developers Conference is one of the largest annual events for the international game development community, showcasing games, companies, and studios in a weeklong conference of lectures, events, and expo halls. While PAX East provides an opportunity for students to converse with developers and marketers showcasing games across a trade show, it is nothing close to the opportunity to build promising industry connections and find employment opportunities that these events are. With one of this year's teammates, Nicholas Frangie, participating in both GDC and PAX East back to back, the

difference in value between the two was made abundantly clear; the consumer-centric focus of a convention like PAX East being entirely absent from GDC meant it was an environment almost entirely focused on career development, networking, and brand recognition — among both schools and industry companies. It was the perfect environment to accomplish the third stated intention of the PAX East booth… and only 2 IMGD students were there.

Realistically, PAX East shouldn't be viewed as the premiere career development opportunity for students in the department: networking shouldn't be listed as one of the project's main goals, nor should it be communicated to students as a viable alternative to real conferences. Financial support and department encouragement for participating in conferences like these are the only solution to supplementing PAX East's less than ideal networking environment. Programs like the Game Narrative Review competition, which award winning students free passes to GDC, should be built into the program curriculum for classes, similar to how it is done at Digipen and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, two universities which produce the largest confident output of contest winners. Game development classes should run with the intention of having students submit projects to BostonFIG, to encourage IMGD students to win the game submission showcase, as they had in the past. IMGD and IGDA should work together to restore the defunct Game Developer Club's tradition of funding student trips to GDC; professors should encourage students to attend BostonFIG's virtual conference by using the online educational opportunity to supplement weekend assignments.

In other words, networking and participation in the games community needs to be breathed back into the program through incentives and initiatives that actually accomplish the task. Not positioned as a secondary objective for a singular event at year's end that fails to accomplish the task.

PAX East is a marketing tool — and that's fine, but work needs to be done to ensure that this being the main focus of the event, it is pulled off well. A relationship with WPI Marketing needs to be revitalized, the department incentivized to participate, and the organizing team given less to do outside of PAX East. Likewise, work needs to be done to draw IMGD students out into the professional community through environments properly suited to serve as networking opportunities — establishing industry contacts can't just be a secondary task to an event poorly suiting it.

Showfest

About

Like Alphafest, Showfest is an annual showcase for IMGD student projects. However, taking place at the end of the academic year, its scope far eclipses that of its predecessor. Traditionally, Showfest includes livestreamed interviews for IMGD MQP teams and graduate capstone projects; as part of planning the event, these projects are hosted on the event's website, as both an archive for these projects and a repository for accessing digital builds and materials. Industry professionals and alumni are invited to attend the event and interview the team, and the whole show is captured live via Twitch.

Showfest 2023 was held at the same time as many previous Showfests: exactly one week after WPI Project Presentation Day. On April 28th, 2023, Showfest 2023 was held across the second floor of the WPI Innovation Studio from 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM, featuring 23 projects, 15 interviews, and closing into the IMGD Awards Ceremony after the event.

The practical component of this section of the paper is dedicated to documenting the IQP team's process of running Alphafest 2023. Similarly to Alphafest, this event has shifted from the department to being the full responsibility of the IQP; while the event is much like Alphafest in terms of content and interfacing with project teams, its scope is significantly increased with the addition of its interviewing and livestream components. Much of the work done for Alphafest was replicated and improved on as part of preparing for Showfest, with extra care given to prepping interviews and tech, as per the event's unique demands.

No analysis component was written for this section of the paper, given that the event runs almost immediately before the end of the term and the completion of this IQP.

Practical

Marketing

The team started planning the Showfest marketing campaign before PAX, and as soon as we got back from the convention we started putting up posters. Marketing was planned in three waves:

- Phase 1: "Getting the word out there." Simple posters with just the name and date were put up all around campus to familiarize the student body with the name and remind those who already knew about it that it was coming up.

- Phase 2: Game project team members were encouraged to make posters for their games, or to give us the materials to make posters for them. We wound up with six full-size posters, and with two variations of a combo poster that featured banners from five projects each. We posted two copies of each of these eight posters in all major locations around campus. All of these posters included the date, time, and location of the event.

- Phase 3: In the week leading up to Showfest, we made posters with the event details as a final reminder that the event was coming up. Instead of just the standard 8.5' x 11" we also printed out tabloid-size posters that were more eye-catching. We also made an image to do on the displays in the Innovation Studio, and printed out a large poster to be hung in one of the big picture frames at the bottom of the stairs in Fuller.

To keep the image of the event consistent and eye-catching, we decided to make the visual theme of the event's marketing materials Art Deco inspired. Most posters featured dark backgrounds and bright gold lettering.

For the day-of, the team also assembled five sandwich boards directing visitors to the event location: one at each of the two doors to the Innovation Studio, one at the bottom of the stairs near the parking lot and one at the top, and one at the bottom of the stairs in the Innovation Studio.

Printing of the posters generally worked out well in the Library printers, but for printing out the large sized poster and the sandwich boards, we ran into some issues due to the heavy

print job required to print the dark backgrounds of the posters. At Park Print, our go-to place for printing out tabloid papers (which worked well), a large-scale piece on standard weight paper cost $40. Our backup plan was then to go to the ATC, where we submitted a request for printing. The turnaround was fast, but since we didn't ask what the cost would be in person and the submission form didn't provide a quote, we only found out that the five sandwich boards cost $90 after they were printed. In the future, when printing at the ATC teams should *not* choose semigloss finish, especially with ink-heavy prints, as those two factors were what drove the price up so much. Four of the sandwich boards from this year are stored along with other PAX materials in case future teams would like to reuse them.

For the day of, the team repeated the well-received game signs for each table. Only 16 teams submitted game posters or materials to make posters, and the team should have asked earlier than a few days before the event.

Submissions

This year we allowed non-MQP, MQP, and grad project submissions and were able to receive a total of 23 submissions. We also asked for the discord contact information from each team, which allowed us to easily communicate with them through our discord server.

We planned for website submissions to be due on April 16th so that interviewers would have ample time to review each project prior to Showfest to review them. Unfortunately, we received many late submissions from both grad students and MQP teams. In one instance, one team was so late with website material submissions that we had to cancel their interview. Additionally, late submissions from grad students was partially due to the fact that there isn't a list of active IMGD grad student projects, so we weren't able to reach out and connect with them like we had been doing with the MQP teams.

Website

While the team didn't have time to implement the intended full overhaul of the graphics, the website was very well received. The website served an important function as it allowed interviewers to look at the MQP projects that they would need to focus on during their interviews. The website also showed off some of the non-MQP teams, such as personal projects

and grad projects, that would be shown off at Showfest, as well as projects that were shown at previous Showfests.

We also posted panelist biographies to the site as a way to spark more interest in the event as all of the panelists are industry professionals. The biographies also allowed the MQP teams to learn more about who would be interviewing them and how to connect with them if they wished to in the future.

Unfortunately, the website is on CampusPress and uses Divi, which is frustrating to learn. Divi also didn't allow us to automatically upload content, so we manually had to insert projects and information about each panelist.

Interviews

Preparing interviews is one of the larger components for Showfest, requiring significant communication, planning, and logistics balancing — but this is all to be expected. After all, the interviews, alongside the livestream component of Showfest, are what makes the event stand out as the end of year showcase for IMGD projects, expanding its scope and fanfare beyond that of similar events like Alphafest.

As with everything, the first step of planning interviews is understanding the purpose and goal behind them. The Showfest interviews are about getting MQP and graduate capstone teams to talk with industry guests about their work: it is an opportunity for project teams to professionally discuss what they've accomplished as part of their project, celebrating their work by broadcasting these conversations live via the IMGD Twitch. The actual contents and formality of the interviews is less of concern than just getting students in a room to talk about their projects with the guests: as most of the interviews are fairly informal regarding surface level questions and their projects and development process.

After understanding the goal of these interviews, the team needed information from project teams regarding what types of interviewers, or panelists, best appealed to them. In a series of follow-up communications to the original Alphafest interviews, project teams conveyed what roles and topics they would most like to discuss during their Showfest interviews. While

the team wasn't always able to match project teams with panelists that hit all of their desired points, they tried their best to keep their initial requests in mind.

Interviewer outreach was the next essential step, which needed to start over a month before the event. By making use of contacts the team had secured from events like JoyArt, inviting guests from previous years, and receiving support from faculty like Ben Schneider, who were able to call upon their own industry connections, the team was able to track communications from the outreach to confirmation state, securing a final roster of 21 unique panelists.

After confirming their participation in the event, a number of steps occurred with each panelist: biographies, profile photos, and links to any socials were collected to be displayed on the Showfest website. Communications regarding coming to campus, remote interviewing, and a full write-up of the event were delivered. Most importantly, matching needed to occur to pair panelists with the projects they would be interviewing, giving them the opportunity to view the submission materials for projects made available online prior to the event in order to prepare their interviews.

The final steps of the interview preparation process were a welcome addition made by this year's team, who elected to select faculty backup interviewers for each project and send out a pre-check form for panelists in the week leading up to the event. In order to mitigate the risk of no-shows and facilitate the interviews at Showfest running smoothly, these changes were made to cover all the bases. The pre-check form required panelists to confirm they were up-to-date on Showfest information going into the week of the event, ensuring that it hadn't slipped their mind and communications hadn't been piling up in their inbox. Any pre-check forms that weren't filled out meant individual outreach was sent to that interviewer to confirm directly with them that they were prepared for the event. On top of that, faculty backups ensured that even if there were no-shows the day of the event, an assigned faculty would be nearby and prepared to step in for any interview that needed them, keeping the event running smoothly along the designated time schedule for the livestream.

These extensive preparations, along with the mixed methods of panelist outreach, meant that even though Showfest 2023 had more unique panelists than usual for the event, it was also

one of the first instances of there being zero no-shows among them on the day of the event. Interviews were able to run smoothly throughout Showfest 2023, as team members shepherded panelists and project teams into the Diamond Lounge of the Innovation Studio consistently on time throughout the three hour event.

The largest shortcoming to be had by Showfest 2023 interviews was that they had to be relatively short. Between MQP and graduate capstone projects, 15 teams were interviewed throughout the night. Considering the time window for the event, as well as the need for buffer time between interviews to situate each new group into the space, this meant interviews ran for eight minutes apiece. While Showfest has always been about providing informal interviews to project teams, the team regretted not being able to give projects more time in the limelight.

Emcees

Back at JoyArt, the team connected with two of the founders of the local game studio Snoozy Kazoo, both of whom are Becker graduates, and invited them to Emcee at Showfest due to their outgoing and friendly demeanor. The team felt that the duality of them would be a fun addition to the traditional singular Emcee who would in the past walk around the room, asking people questions as a lighthearted break from the more serious interviews taking place in the live stream. The two accepted, and we kept in contact semi-regularly over the next few months leading up to the event.

The MCs were given written instructions and suggestions in the week before the event, and were walked through their roles the day of. They were given three ten-minute segments: an introduction, and intermission, and an ending. The team member in charge of guiding them through the event introduced them to exhibiting students, professors, and visitors before each of their segments to prepare both for the encounter.

The Emcee portions were filmed using one of the two cameras from the Global lab, and it was wheeled around on a large rolling stand that proved to be very unwieldy, especially in the cramped VR space. A team member was in charge of holding the laptop connected to the camera and follow it around. Overall, the setup was complicated and stressful, but did work in the end to satisfying results.

At a certain point, on of the emcees accidentally muted their mic by pressing the button on the handle. Future teams should properly instruct emcees beforehand, clearly and repeatedly, as the nerves of being on camera can also cause hands to fumble with equipment.

Layout

Given the end of year nature of Showfest and the amount of functions running throughout campus during such a time, planning needs to be done early to book the space for the function. Booking through Allison Darling and 25 Live, the required rooms in the Innovation Studio were booked as early as November to ensure their usage for the event, but even that wasn't enough to prevent all issues.

The team desired to expand this year's Showfest across the second floor of the Innovation Studio, making use of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center as a secondary location to host projects. Mistakenly believing that the space was booked as part of the initial 25 Live request, it wasn't until the week of the event that the team met with the WPI Events Office and realized that there was an issue.

Meeting with the Events Office is a critical step that the team put off as they focused on other priorities in the lead up to the event. For every booking on 25 Live, a coordinator from the Events Office is assigned as the event's scheduler. Meeting with them and providing an accurate layout description for the event is an essential component to making sure a facility detail is assigned the day of the event and informed of their responsibilities. The importance of this communication cannot be understated — especially when it is put off to the week of the event.

The last minute nature of the communication with the Events Office revealed an issue with the team's original plan: the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center is not a space that could be booked through the Events Office, functioning independently under its own management. As such, the team scrambled to correct this issue several days before the event, as the space was an important requirement for fitting all of the projects participating in Showfest 2023. With the help of the team's advisor, Monty Sharma, who works in the space and maintains an amicable relationship with its Executive Director, the team was able to book a last minute reservation for the room.

Beyond booking the space was the task of planning its usage: after Alphafest's layout and setup kerfuffle, the team knew a better job needed to be done planning the layout for the event floor plan and communicating the placement of teams for the event. Work was done to create a mockup of the Innovation Studio's second floor, placing and labeling tables for student teams according to the unique demands of their project. With the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center now fully secured, the team moved projects that required larger spaces into the secondary room, designating it as the area of XR, VR, and alternative media projects such as the Robot Escape Room.
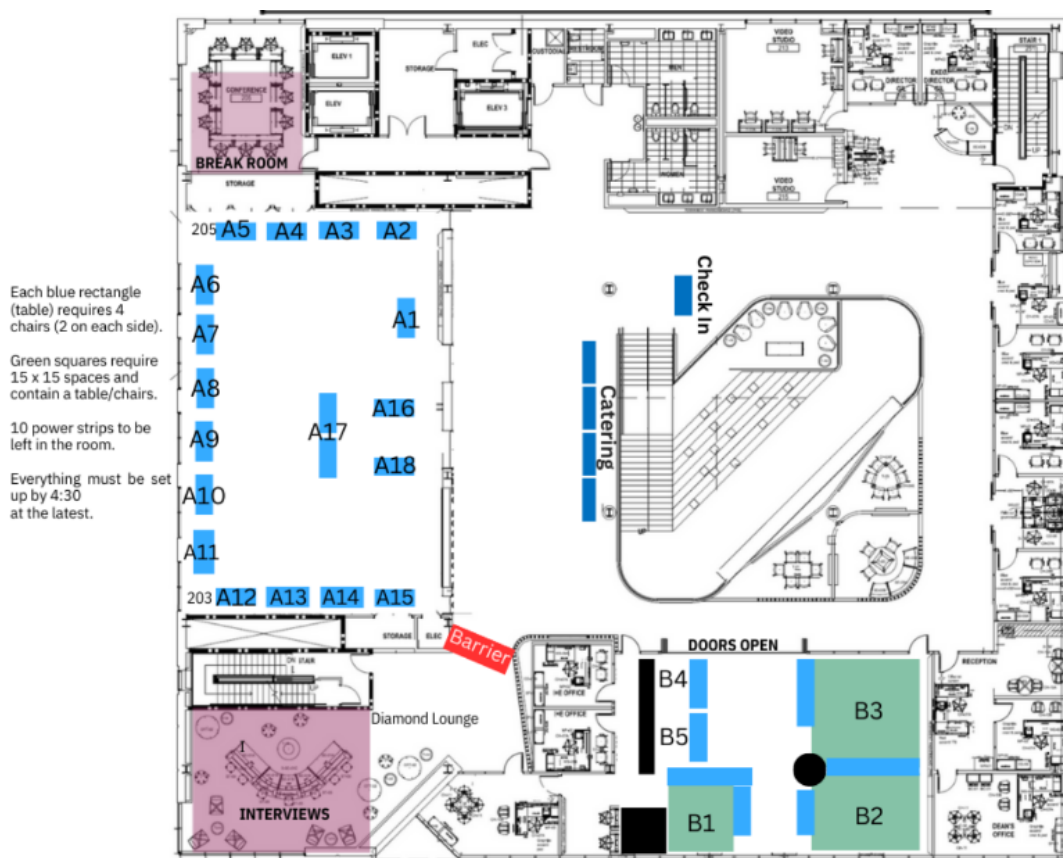
While this did work well to fulfill these project teams' requirements for extra space, it also had the effect of sequestering them from the main showfloor, meaning the secondary room was significantly less filled throughout the night. The tradeoff may have been inevitable, but perhaps better branding and signage would've diminished its effect by encouraging more foot traffic into this space.

Catering

The IMGD department itself, more specifically Allison Darling, handled the catering and ordered from the WPI campus center. Considering the size of the event, the food was ordered in two big batches in anticipation of the amount of people attending the event. The food options were also labeled before the event to take dietary restrictions into account. However, the food immediately ran out during the event despite the amount provided. There were also no gluten-free catering options because according to Allison the gluten-free pizzas provided by the campus center are too small for event catering. The second batch also didn't have any cheese pizzas.

Livestream

Hardware

Setting up the livestream required a lot of planning, testing, and equipment. First, we referred to what was done the previous year: a camera filming the interviews, and then a camera on the MC at her table, which they moved for the ending statements. We decided on a similar setup: use the built-in camera in the Diamond Lounge for recording interviews, and a mobile camera on the MCs. Setting this up first involved meeting with Mikel to discuss the overall ideas and where we should go next. We then talked with Varun Bhat at the Global Lab to use the space for our livestream editing room, as well as the cameras available there. We used one of their professional Sony cameras on a tripod for filming the MCs. We also used a Rhodes shotgun microphone to record the interview audio. Finally, we went to the ATC to meet with Ellen Lincourt, and she provided us with both handheld and lavalier microphones to use for the MCs, as well as several cords and other small necessities to connect everything together.

We tested this setup multiple times, first assessing the viability of filming the interviews in the Diamond Lounge with a professional camera. This proved difficult, as the couches are too close to the wall, so we instead decided to simply use the wall-mounted camera attached to the TV. This also simplified the setup in that room, as that camera is attached to the computer that runs the TV. The microphone could be connected to that computer, and Zoom could be opened to both let the teams see online interviewers and to directly stream the camera's view to Zoom. We

did a second test later to finalize the interview setup, and make sure the microphones worked with the camera.

<u>Software</u>

The livestream incorporated two software interfaces: OBS Studio and Zoom. The actual livestream was recorded and sent to Twitch via OBS, where we screen-recorded Zoom and interspersed game trailers in between interviews. The two cameras (interviews and MCs) were being streamed to two separate Zoom breakout rooms, so when it came time to switch the camera between the two views, we simply changed which breakout room the streaming laptop was in. These transitions were all done while a trailer was being played, so efficiency was key. Additionally, the computer streaming the Zoom room to the TV for the interviews took care of letting people into the room, so the person running the livestream did not have to deal with that.

The intro, ending, and break cards were all simple images and featured the art-deco themed marketing visuals our team made specifically for the event. Additionally, royalty-free jazz was played during the intro and ending cards to make up for the lack of any animated intro or pre-stream video. Also, each trailer that was played was usually tied to the interview just before it. However, there were some trailers without an interview, and some interviews without a trailer, so these were fit together when possible. Some trailers were also replayed later during the gaps before and after the MC intro, intermission, and ending. Finally, in the small window of time between the end of a trailer and the return to an interview, there was a simple break card that automatically appeared to let viewers know the stream was not over, and so that the person running the interviews had enough time to lead the current team out of the room, get the next team in, and then tell the team member running the livestream that they were ready to cut back in.

While all of this was going on, communication was done through the IQP's main Discord server text channels. This mostly involved the person running the livestream telling those running the cameras to change various things about the setup, from the location of the MC camera, and how the microphones were being positioned, to whether to keep the blinds in the room up or down. Scene transitions for the interviews were done by both parties verifying that they were ready, then the team member running the livestream would say they were cutting in 5

seconds, and then that the interview was live. For some precise scene transitions, voice calls were made over Discord to time things correctly.

Event

Setup

After learning from our time-related issues during the Alphafest setup, we decided to start the event setup at 12PM on Friday, which gave us nearly 5 hours to test our hardware (especially audio devices), put up sandwich boards around campus, and arrange the tables in the rooms. The sandwich boards were borrowed from the campus center, and we put posters on them around the Innovation Studio & near the parking lot in order to lead students, interviewers and visitors to the event. Before the event, we were also able to get help from Vinny, the WPI facilities member who works at the Innovation Studio. He was extremely helpful when it came to moving the garage doors in IS 203/205, setting up tables, breaking down tables and cleaning things up which saved us a lot of time and extra effort and made us more prepared for the event itself. The only issue we ran into in terms of setup was that some MQP teams were confused about using the projectors.

Overall

Overall, the event itself had a great amount of engagement. According to our check-in form, we had a total of 171 checked-in attendees including our interviewers. Engagement was also increased because a few presenters had things like cardboard cutouts, pins and prizes for people who dropped by and played their games. However, the IQP team itself wasn't able to be as involved in the process of helping the teams out individually for table decorations.

Conclusion

In a lot of ways, Showfest is a thematically fitting conclusion to the events run by the Fest IQP. While it shares a similar foundation to Alphafest, sharing the underlying idea of being an internal showcase for the capstone projects of WPI IMGD, it builds upon this by adding live streaming, industry guests, and interviews. By utilizing the team's newfound experience with

managing event logistics and maintaining correspondence with industry contacts, Showfest 2023 was able to run successfully as an event despite the large technical and organizational challenges to be expected from an event with so many moving parts and pieces compared to its rather simplistic counterpart of Alphafest. The fact that Showfest 2023 was able to go as well as it did, without suffering from any of the major hiccups that previous events had, speaks to the team's growth throughout the year.

Conclusion

At the end of this report, it becomes necessary to assess the goals of this year's Fest IQP and their success after the completion of their events.

In terms of encouraging student engagement amongst WPI IMGD, the team feels confident that it has contributed well. Having successfully organized and ran each of its previous commitments made to major events and increased the opportunities for student involvement and interaction with JoyArt, the Fest IQP provided numerous opportunities for the broader community to engage, and received positive reception and record attendance for most events.

As for working with teams to best showcase student projects: while the interviews preceding Alphafest and the communications maintained with MQP team representatives were a strong start to building a lasting relationship with project teams, they ultimately didn't receive as much focus from the team as desired. The disconnect of Alphafest and Showfest, bookending otherwise unrelated events in the Fest IQP's list of responsibilities, meant these events and the opportunity to work directly with project teams felt otherwise disconnected from the remainder of the team's responsibilities, and ultimately took a backseat to the many logistics behind events planning.

The team did, however, have many opportunities to improve the showcase of student projects outside of the originally planned relationship with MQP teams. JoyArt was an opportunity to showcase game artists from across New England and their work in a variety of mediums at a game art showcase event that otherwise, wouldn't have occurred. The PAX East booth was expanded to showcase more projects, inviting unselected projects to submit trailers, and attempting to showcase WPI artists in another capacity. Submission numbers for voluntary project showcases at Alphafest and Showfest were on a rise from the IQP's past iterations — indicating more people than usual were looking forward to exhibiting their projects at the IQP's events.

The final goal of the Fest IQP is one that the team otherwise failed to accomplish: allowing its team members to breathe under the otherwise ballooning scope this IQP entails. With four events scattered across three terms, and informal work done throughout A-term in

preparation for the IQP, it is impossible to suggest anything otherwise: at the end of this project, its individual team members are completely burnt out.

It's tough to formulate an exact solution to this dilemma, because the Fest IQP team, and presumably the PAX IQP teams of the past, are made up of individuals looking to improve the program by delivering its community events and upholding traditions in the best possible light. After all, it is more than fair to suggest that people willing to work beyond the bounds of a traditional IQP care about giving the WPI IMGD program and its students the experience they deserve.

Yet the ballooning scope of this project is an issue that has continued to go unaddressed. More has been continually moved to the project team in the place of lasting solutions, decisions admittedly made due to the extenuating circumstances of the past several years.

The 2023 Fest IQP team hopes this report serves two purposes. Firstly as a cautionary tale, documenting the amount of work crammed onto this IQP in its current form. Hopefully, significant work is done to restructure the project for future IQPs, allowing project teams to take more liberty with what they hope to accomplish outside of logistics planning for the events they are responsible for; in the case that it is not, the team wishes to warning against future additions, as the groundwork laid by this year should make future years sustainable without the addition of any new requirements.

But secondly, the team hopes this report could serve as something a little more encouraging. By documenting the ability of a student team to use their IQP to do great things among their own community, we hope future teams find innumerable possibilities for future growth and further community engagement. Putting together events like JoyArt and Showfest are irreplaceable opportunities for project members to engage with their peers and the greater game development community, building a foundation of confidence and competence that cannot be found in a classroom setting.

It's not perfect. The amount of work behind organizing events like these is overwhelming at times, and there are parts of the process so frustrating you'll want to tear your hair out. Yet this IQP presents the uniquely perfect opportunity for WPI IMGD students to grow in their community, in their skills, and — as cheesy as it sounds — in themselves.

Appendices

Appendix A (Alphafest)

Promotional Materials

Figure A1 - Poster used for on-campus marketing on digital displays.

Figure A2 - Poster used for physical on-campus marketing.
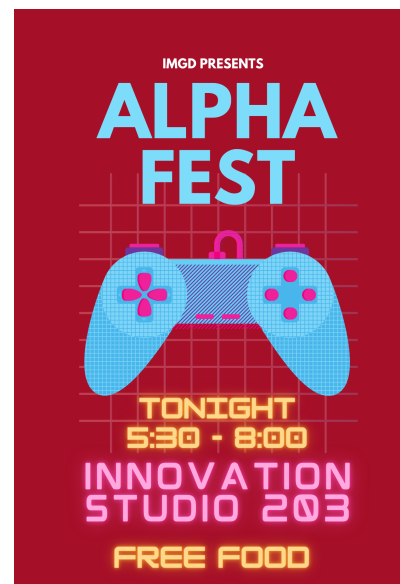

Figure A3 - Poster used for sandwich boards marketing on-campus day of the event.
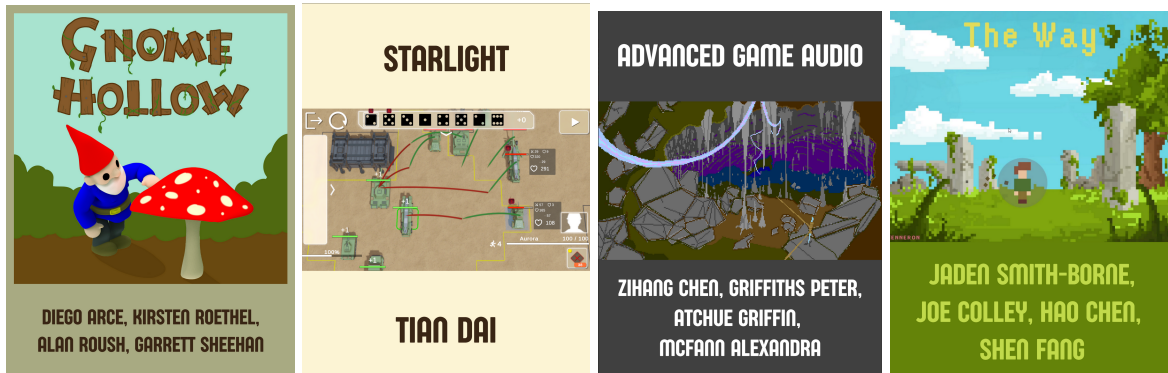
Event Signage

Figure A4 - Posters used to designate team names, members, and provided images for the event.
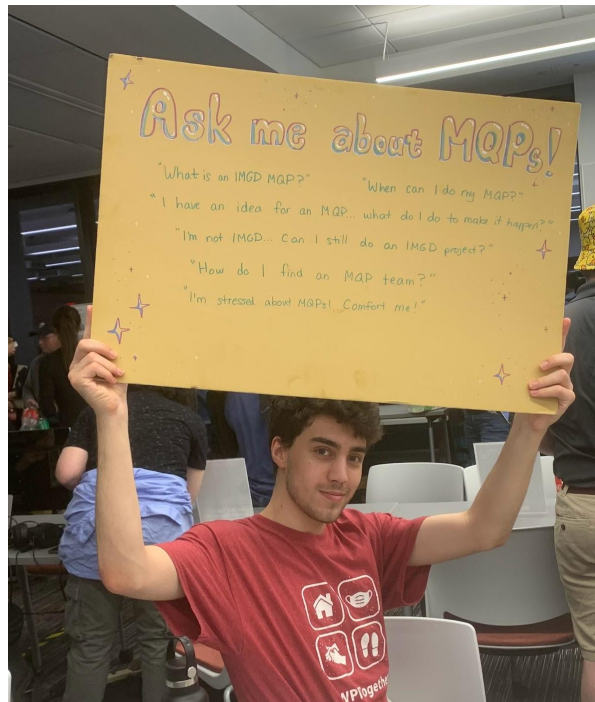

Figure A5 - Fest IQP member Jack McEvoy, holding up our "Ask me about MQPs" sign during the Alphafest event.

Check-in Analytics

How are you affiliated with IMGD
137 responses

- Major
- Minor
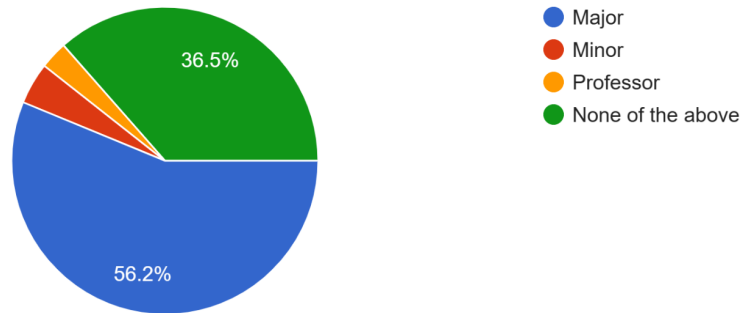- Professor
- None of the above

56.2%
36.5%

Figure A6 - Check-in Survey responses for Alphafest breaking down attendee affiliation with IMGD.

Who are you?
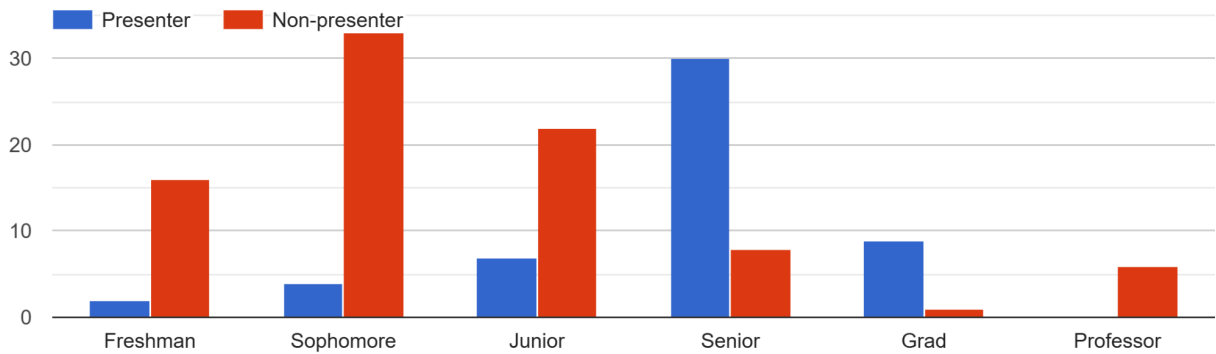
Figure A7 - Check-in Survey responses for Alphafest breaking down attendee type.

Financials

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	**Line Item**	**Amount**	**Total**	**Previous Year**	**Status (Paid/Unpaid)**	**Notes**
2	Alphafest Flyers	40	$ 10.00	N/A	**Paid (Tate), Needs Reimbursement**	
3	Sandwich Board Posters	2	$ 18.00	N/A	Paid (Allison)	
4	Project Posters	22	$ 5.50	N/A	**Paid (Tate), Needs Reimbursement**	
5	Sign-In Sheets	5	$ 0.50	N/A	**Paid (Tate), Needs Reimbursement**	
6	Catering	-	$ -	N/A	Paid (Allison)	Ordered through IMGD, not taken from operating budget
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13	**Event Total**		$ 34.00			

Figure A8 - Financial spreadsheet for the Alphafest event.

Appendix B (JoyArt)

Promotional Materials

Figure B1 - Posters made by the team to be distributed online, on WPI campus, and through the Advisory Board to partnered schools.
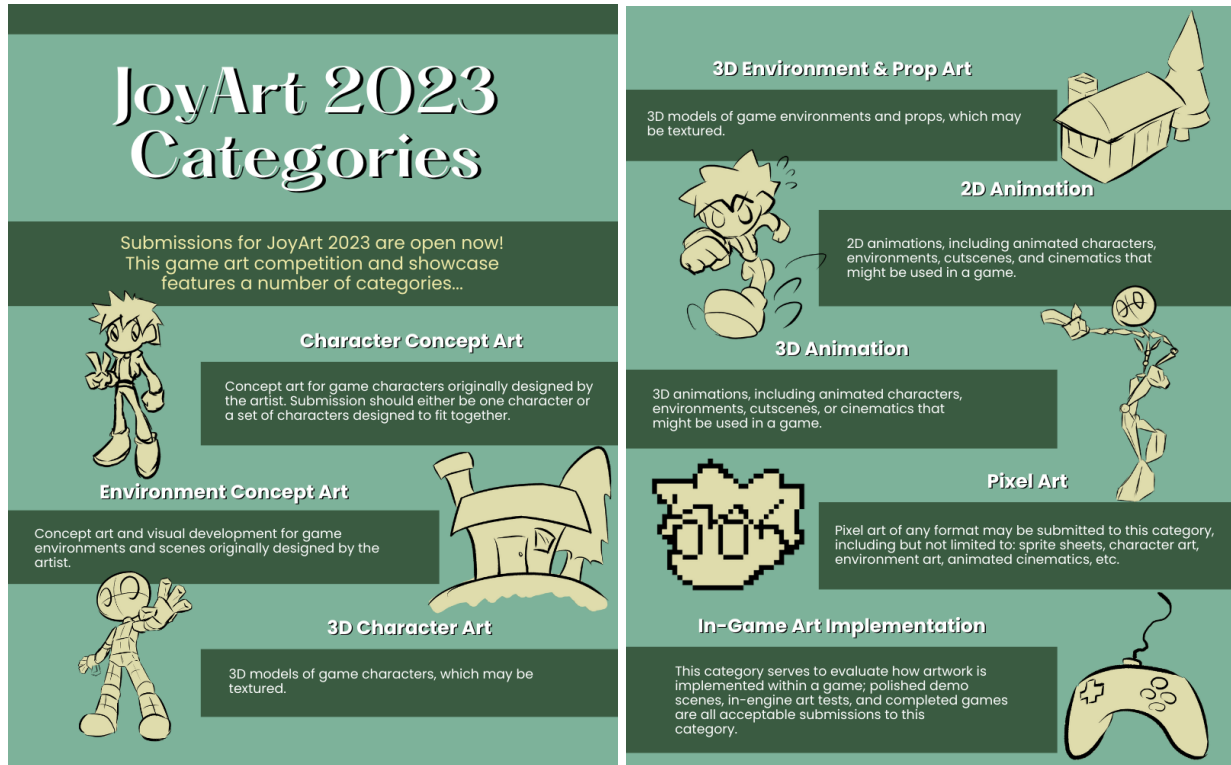
Figure B2 - Infographic designed to provide more info about category rules. Distributed online.
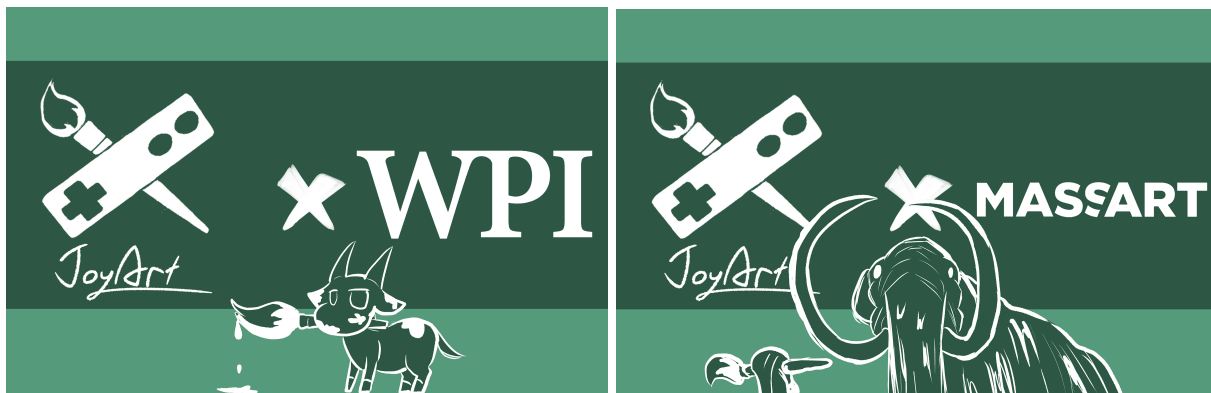

Figure B3 - Examples of the JoyArt officially partnered school announcement adverts posted by the team via Twitter.

Event Signage

Figure B4 - JoyArt Award certificate template, to be awarded to each winner at event end.
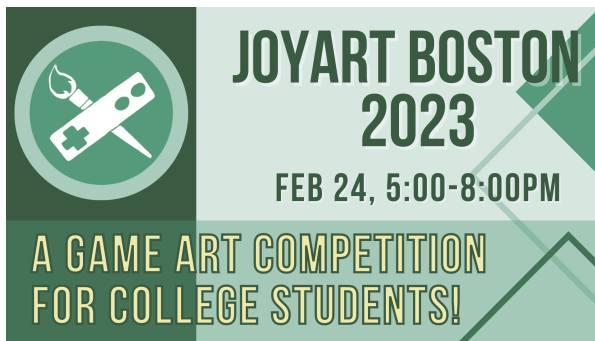

Figure B5 - JoyArt Event Advert displayed at the WPI Seaport location for event leadup.

Figure B6 - JoyArt sponsors wall, distributed online and displayed at JoyArt.

Figure B7 - Concept Art Collages for finalist entries in the Character Concept Art (left) and Environment Concept Art (right) categories.

Financials

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	**Line Item**	**Amount**	**Total**	**Previous Year**	**Status (Paid/Unpaid)**	**Notes**
2	Prizes (Overall)	1	$ 250.00	N/A	Paid (Allison)	Delivered through Workday
3	Prizes (Category)	8	$ 600.00	N/A	Paid (Allison)	Delivered through Workday
4	Gas	-	$ 36.02	N/A	Paid (Nick), Reimbursed	*Receipts*
5	Parking	-	$ 40.00	N/A	Paid (Nick), Reimbursed	*Receipts*
6	Catering	-	$ 810.71	N/A	Paid (Allison)	*JoyArt Itemized List*
7	Printing (Park Place)	-	$ 53.40	N/A	Paid (Nick), Reimbursed	*Receipts*, *Invoice*
8	Miscellaneous Items	-	$ 188.49	N/A	Paid (Team), Reimbursed	*JoyArt Itemized List*
9						
10						
11	**Event Total**		$ 1,978.62			
12	**Event Budget**		$ 2,850.00			
13	**Event Remaining**		$ 871.38			

Figure B8 - Financial spreadsheet for the JoyArt event.

Appendix C (PAX East)

Merchandise Materials

Figure C1 - Designs for WPI IMGD PAX 2023 exhibitor shirts, front and back.

Figure C2 - Designs for the WPI IMGD PAX 2023 pins.

Event Signage

To Reap and Sow is an art demo by WPI student Kirsten Roethel. This project is the culmination of a seven-week art class that serves as an important capstone in the education of all 3D art students in the IMGD major.

All parts of this level's creation, from conception to modeling to texturing to in-engine implementation, were done by Kirsten within the 7-week period. The skills she learned in this class will be applied in the class' next level up, in which she will team up with other talented WPI students in both Art and Tech concentrations to make a game under the guidance of her professors.

Check out Kirsten's portfolio by scanning the following QR code!

Comet Tail Inn is an Independent Study Project (ISP) game created as a collaboration between undergrad and grad students at WPI. It has only been in production since January of this year, and you can play through an early version of its first quest here!

In the IMGD department, a student can do an ISP under the guidance of a willing professor for class credit. These independent projects can be anything from creating mini figures for tabletop games, to helping a CS professor with a tech project, to making a game with your peers.

Be sure to check out the Comet Tail Inn social media pages by scanning the following QR code, and follow their progress as they develop the game!

Scoops and Social Ice-olation was created by two WPI students independently, without the structure of classes or course credit. The game was created for MassDigi's game challenge, for which it won an award. The artwork for the game also won the Game Implementation category at JoyArt 2023.

MassDigi is a game company housed at WPI that focuses on providing industry experience and connections to game students across New England. Though its game challenge is no longer running, the company provides a host of life-changing experiences such as the Summer Innovation Program, in which students are put on teams of six and make a mobile game from conception to publication over the course of twelve weeks.

Be sure to check out the MassDigi booth here at pax, and scan the following QR code to check out the Scoops itch page and look out for updates!

Figure C3 - Example posters made at PAX to explain the context of each project.

Financials

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	**Line Item**	**Amount**	**Total**	**Previous Year**	**Status (Paid/Unpaid)**	**Notes**
2	Booth (10' x 20') + 5 Exhibitor Badges	1	$ 4,200.00	$4,200.00	Paid (Allison)	
3	Volunteer Exhibitor Badges ($135 each)	5	$ 675.00	$1,053.00	Paid (Allison)	
4	Additional Volunteer Exhibitor Badges*	5	$ -	$405.00	Comped	ReedPop mistake led to comped tickets
5	Shirts	40	$ 511.00	$651.04	Paid (Allison)	
6	Buttons	200	$ 64.00	$193.00	Paid (Allison)	
7	Gas	-	$ 43.42	$117.00	**Paid (Team), Needs Reimbursement**	Look at PAX Itemized Budget for more info
8	Parking	-	$ 220.00	$396.00	**Paid (Team), Needs Reimbursement**	Look at PAX Itemized Budget for more info
9	Team Hotel (2 Rooms)	-	$ 2,028.05	$3,935.96	Paid (Allison)	*Reservation Receipt*
10	500 Watt Box	-	$ 145.00	$140.00	Paid (Allison)	
11	Supplies (Water, Snacks)	-	$ 56.18	$97.00	**Paid (Team), Needs Reimbursement**	
12						
13	**Event Total**		$ 7,942.65			

Figure C4 - Financial spreadsheet for PAX East.

Appendix D (Showfest)

Promotional Materials

Figure D1 - Some posters used for the Showfest Phase 1 Marketing Campaign.

Figure D2 - Some posters used for the Showfest Phase 2 Marketing Campaign.

Figure D3 - Poster used for on-campus marketing on digital displays for Marketing Phase 3.

Figure D4 - Poster used for physical on-campus marketing for Marketing Phase 3.

Figure D5 - Poster used for sandwich boards marketing on-campus day of the event.
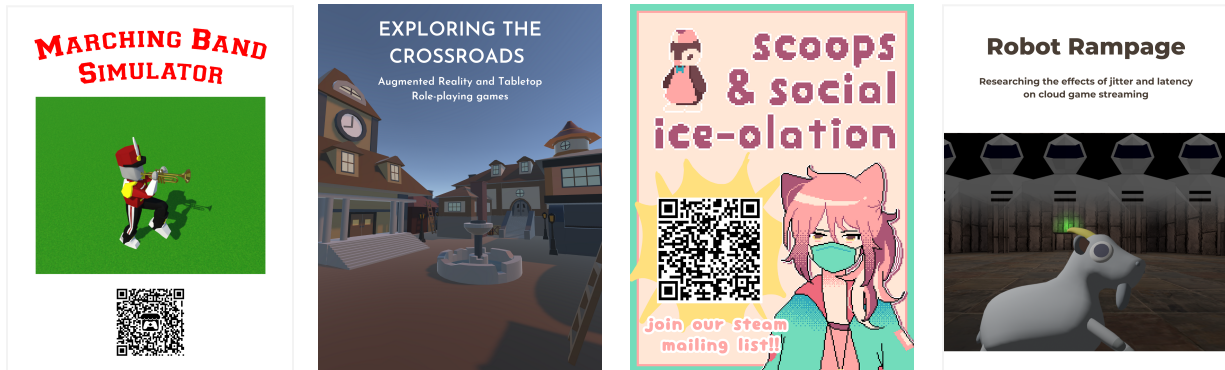
Event Signage

Figure D6 - Posters used to designate team names and provided images for the event.
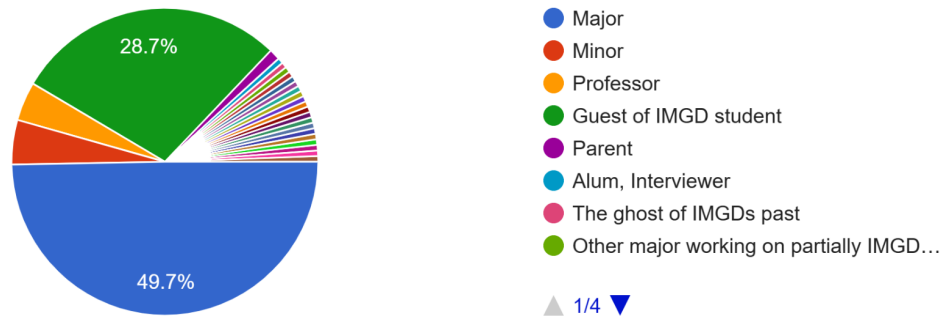
Check-In Analytics

Figure D7 - Check-in Survey responses for Showfest breaking down attendee affiliation with IMGD.
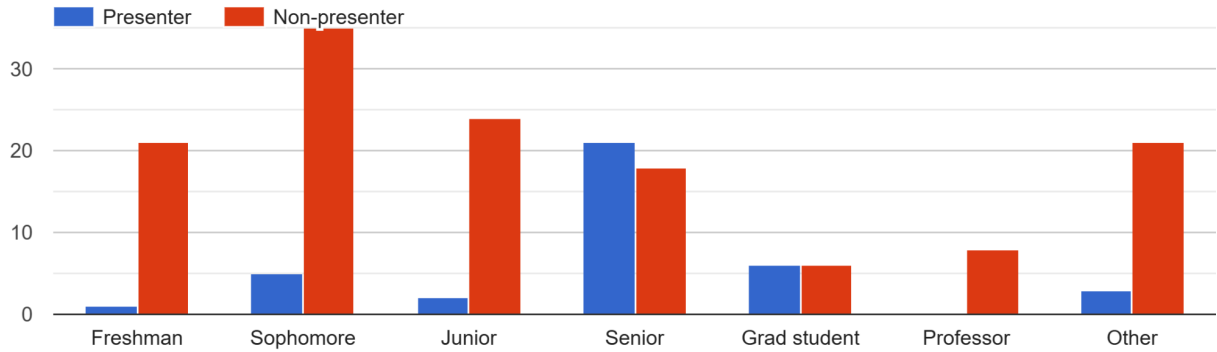
Who are you?

Figure D8 - Check-in Survey responses for Showfest breaking down attendee type.

Financials

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Line Item	Amount	Total	Previous Year	Status (Paid/Unpaid)	Notes
2	Sandwich Board Posters + Big Poster	5	$ 96.75	N/A	**Paid (Skye), Needs Reimbursement**	
3	Showfest Flyers	60	$ 15.80	N/A	**Paid (Skye), Needs Reimbursement**	
4	Catering	-	$ -	N/A	Paid (Allison)	Ordered through IMGD, not taken from operating budget
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13	**Event Total**		$ 112.55			

Figure D9 - Financial spreadsheet for the Showfest event.

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