Art O’Leary (CDM ’07), far right, jumps for joy after receiving a Creative Arts Emmy Award. Read about O’Leary’s success and discover what other alumni are accomplishing in Hollywood on page 4.
CDM’s new school puts design front and center

By Kelsey Schagemann

In January, the College of Computing and Digital Media (CDM) launched the School of Design (SoD). The new school, which joins the School of Computing (SoC) and the School of Cinematic Arts (SCA) within the college, further enhances and defines CDM’s priorities for the years ahead. “Creating a separate School of Design indicates the depth of dedication and expertise CDM offers on the subject,” says David Miller, dean and interim provost. “It also gives our faculty the resources and opportunity to create new design-related programs to meet industry need.”

The impetus for the new school developed in part out of the successful growth of the School of Cinematic Arts (formerly the School of Cinema and Interactive Media). During the past several years, the school expanded beyond its film and animation offerings and its environment, users and interfaces, and the personal and technical aspects of the medium. Pinkard also anticipates a greater focus on learning how to collaborate with clients. “The reality is that with design, you’re normally dealing with a client and a problem that you’re trying to solve,” she explains. “That requires a different set of processes and classes than if you’re making a film or other work of art for an audience.” To that end, the School of Design faculty plan to implement more client-focused projects, invite industry professionals as guest speakers, and design hands-on opportunities like internships and grant projects.

These component elements serve a greater purpose than simply supplementing coursework. “We’re hoping to create a culture within the school,” Pinkard says. “The idea is to build a community and environment that supports complete growth.” That way, students will not only be supported in their ambitions at DePaul, but also feel confident in their overall understanding of technology and design once they graduate. “Given the context of where society is going and how technology is so embedded in everything we do, this school is an attempt to answer that need,” Pinkard asserts. “We can say that DePaul is truly a place where students think about how technology is designed and used.”

CDM’s new school (offered in conjunction with the College of Communication) will continue to be joint programs with the School of Computing. CDM plans to offer new degree programs at the school in the coming years, with technology and design as a unifying theme. “The school is already a place where students think about how technology is designed and used,” Pinkard notes. “Over the next couple of years, I think you’ll see more universitites across the country paying attention to technology from a usability standpoint, and we want to be at the forefront of that.” In the School of Design, faculty will encourage students to tackle tough questions about the context of technology and its environment, users and interfaces, and the personal and technical aspects of the medium.

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"I like having the option of taking courses and reviewing lectures online. This is really helpful when you're balancing work with studies. Another highlight has been meeting industry professionals and people with the same interests as me. They've helped grow my professional circle, and I know it will be useful in the future." -Tushar Jain, India, graduate student, computer science

"The mindset I have developed during my time at CDM has definitely shaped me, because I'm more motivated now to finish my tasks and responsibilities. Looking to my future, I hope to be among those who transform Saudi Arabia into a more modern and cutting-edge country." -Waled Mohammed AlTwail, Saudi Arabia, undergraduate student, computer science

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"I have always been interested in film, and it was my interest in film editing in particular that led me to DePaul. One thing I noticed here is that greater importance is given to hands-on learning. My favorite part so far has been the opportunity to meet and work with people of varying backgrounds and experiences. Also, the facilities and equipment made available to us are great!" -Teresa Mathew, India, graduate student, cinema production

"My major in undergraduate school was TV production, but when I began my internship at a TV station [in China], I found my training to be insufficient. I decided I needed to learn more about media and cinema. I like American TV shows and movies, so that was part of the reason I came to America. Here at DePaul, I was happy to learn I can easily borrow equipment for projects!" -Na Shan, China, graduate student, cinema production

"The CDM program is different from programs in my home country in one main respect: the faculty here at CDM have years of experience working in their fields. I think DePaul is the right place for me, because DePaul prepares future leaders and I want to be one." -Fahd Nassir Abedn, Saudi Arabia, undergraduate student, information assurance and security engineering

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Less than a decade after the launch of the School of Cinematic Arts, graduates from its programs are walking red carpets, lunching with top studio executives, brokering million-dollar deals and even setting sail on the yachts of the rich and famous. But it’s not bright lights and glamour all the time. Here, four alumni discuss the hard work and dedication that happens behind the scenes in Hollywood.

The Editor
Last summer, Art O’Leary (CDM ’07), an editor at Original Productions, stood onstage at the Nokia Theater in Los Angeles clutching his new Creative Arts Emmy Award. “I looked out into the audience, and Morgan Freeman was in the front row,” he recalls. “It was a very surreal night!” Along with two colleagues, O’Leary won the Prime-Time Emmy Award for Outstanding Picture Editing in a Reality Series for his work on the Discovery Channel’s “Deadliest Catch.” Now in its 11th season, the show depicts the story producer and the associate producers in crafting the raw footage into episodes, “It’s easy to get comfortable or caught up in a job, but you have to keep your head down and stay focused.”

The Screenwriter
It wasn’t so long ago that Josh Golden (CDM ’12) was writing at coffee shops in the morning, leading youth programs in the afternoon and crashing on friends’ couches at night. Fast-forward a year, and Golden is a bona fide screenwriter, having recently sold his spec script “Road to Oz” to New Line Cinema. He was also one of 10 finalists in the 2014 Academy Nicholl Fellowships in Screenwriting, an international screenwriting competition, and was named to the 2014 Young & Hungry list, The Tracking Board’s annual compilation of the top 100 writers “on the verge.”

Golden notes that this acclaim didn’t come without a great deal of focus, assistance and luck. “For one thing, I sent the script to DePaul people before I showed it to anyone else,” he says, adding that feedback from former professors and classmates helped give him the confidence to contact an agent and a producer he admired. “There’s a taboo about sending unsolicited material, but I wouldn’t be in this situation if I hadn’t done that.”

The Vice President of International
Katie Irwin (CDM ’06) is always on the move. In her position as vice president of international at Fortitude International, a film financing and sales start-up, she travels the globe meeting with potential buyers, closing deals and developing marketing strategy. “I never thought I’d be working in film financing and distribution,” she says. “But it’s actually such an important part of the business.”

To get launched in her career, Irwin put in time as an executive assistant at Hollywood Gang Productions and Myriad Pictures. “Being an assistant is a great way to build your network and learn the basics of the business,” she notes. “I saw firsthand the steps that go into producing a film.” In fact, at Myriad, Irwin started accidentally making small sales to clients who came into the office. “I would talk to them about the films, the cast, availability for their country and show them the promos—and then people started making offers!”

Those experiences helped prepare her to become Myriad’s director of distribution, where she focused on selling distribution rights in different countries. “As independent films have become a more significant part of the industry, their anticipated value in foreign markets is an important aspect of how financing comes together,” she explains. At Fortitude, which she joined last year, Irwin relies on a deep understanding of the financial side of the business as she assesses the value of incoming projects and helps decide which ones to pursue. “We’re still new, but it’s an incredible team,” she notes. “I’m excited to see how we’ll grow.”

The Writers’ PA
As one of two writers’ production assistants for ABC’s “Grey’s Anatomy,” Daniel Willis (CDM MS ’12) never knows quite what each day will bring. “Recently, there was a reference in the script to ‘The Odyssey,’” he says. “I had to do some fact-checking.” Willis recalls. “My job is to meet the staff writers’ administrative needs, research needs or whatever comes up.”

While his responsibilities can run toward the mundane, such as coffee runs, Willis doesn’t mind. “This is still an apprenticeship business in many ways,” he notes. “It can be humbling to start at the bottom, but I think it prepares you in the long run.” He adds that he obtained his current position through a writer he contacted when he first moved to Los Angeles. When the PA position became available three years later, she remembered him. “This industry is about building genuine relationships,” he asserts. “You never know where a door will open.”

In the meantime, Willis is learning as much as he can, both on set and in the writers’ room. “My ultimate goal is to write and direct for television, so it’s pretty great that I get to see the entire process from the first pitches to the final cut of each week’s episode.”
School of Computing launches freshman learning community

By Jamie Sokolik

It is critical that computer science degree programs stay abreast of constantly evolving technology, but top-notch programs like DePaul’s also look beyond the technical aspects in their design and delivery of high-quality courses. To that end, Associate Professor Amber Settle and Theresa Steinbach (CDS ’88, MBA ’90, CDM MS ’99, PhD ’08) recently created a learning community—a group of students who take classes together and participate in social activities outside the classroom. “Learning communities have a long history of success, but these groups are still pretty rare in computing programs,” Settle says. “I don’t know of any other schools that have executed their learning communities in the way that we have.”

Studies show that effective learning communities improve student retention by promoting positive interactions among participants, who often develop deeper and more immediate friendships and show an increased willingness to seek help. These goals struck a chord for Steinbach, who teaches first-year students through the Explore Chicago program. “We pitched the students this idea of promoting a strong support system during their initial year at DePaul,” she says. “We explained that we wanted to provide additional opportunities not only to succeed in their coursework, but also socially, and that’s what a learning community can achieve.”

The cohort of students in Steinbach’s Explore Chicago course last fall also enrolled in Settle’s Introduction to Computer Science course. To find the right mix of students, the professors worked closely with Enrollment Management and Marketing during the 2013-14 admissions period to identify students interested in their courses and community. They also kept their eyes open for female and minority applicants in an effort to balance the field’s predominately white, male workforce.

Nineteen students participated in the inaugural learning community, spending at least six hours together each week. Steinbach and Settle also offered study sessions before midterms and finals and hosted several social gatherings at their homes. “It’s not always easy to meet people when you’re a freshman,” says participant Carrie Munguia, a computer science major. “But having these two classes back-to-back with the same people helped me get to know them quickly. I met some of my first classmates at DePaul through the learning community.”

Fellow student Kien Huynh, a computer game development major, agrees with Munguia’s assessment. He believes it’s easier to ask for help when you have a certain level of comfort with your classmates and professors. “You’re not worried about offending someone or if they think you should already know the answer,” Huynh says. “That’s really helpful—especially for freshmen.”

Steinbach and Settle will offer the learning community again this fall. The second run will look very similar to the first, but they hope to recruit juniors and seniors to serve as mentors. They also plan to conduct further research into the effects of the learning community on student success and retention.

“Our students come from different experiences and backgrounds when they first set foot on campus,” Steinbach says. “The learning community brought them together and gave them common ground from which to start. They met new people and they learned in a familiar, comfortable environment. That’s what I call success.”

As the special agent in charge of the FBI’s Milwaukee division, Robert Shields Jr. (CDM MS ’88) holds one of the top positions at the bureau, but he insists that certain aspects of his work aren’t very different from the responsibilities of a DePaul student. “When you’re faced with a project at DePaul, you have to work with your classmates to come up with a successful result,” he explains. “This job is similar in that I build relationships and collaborate with partners in the community, with an end goal of making Wisconsin as safe as possible.”

Shields oversees the federal agents and professional support staff who manage the state’s investigations. Whether the focus is counterterrorism, cybercrime or white-collar offenses, Shields’ background in computer science comes in handy. “Pretty much every investigation today involves some form of digital media forensics,” he says, pointing to the wealth of often-critical information contained on personal media devices, such as phones, iPads and laptops.

This wasn’t the case when he first joined the FBI nearly 20 years ago, but even then, Shields believed a master’s degree in computer science could give him an edge. He remembers Helenut Epp, former provost and founding dean of CDM, calling computer science the degree of the future. “It took me about five years to graduate, but that was a really proud moment,” Shields says. “I still have my diploma on the wall.” After working in the insurance field for a few years, Shields decided to apply for a job at the FBI. “I wanted to get into an organization where I could really see the highest levels of computing,” he explains. With a father and two brothers in law enforcement, Shields was also upholding family tradition.

The rigorous acceptance process entailed interviews, testing and extensive background checks, followed by a 17-week course at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Va. Upon completion, Shields received his first office assignment in Chicago, where he worked for the next 15 years. As the landscape of technology changed, the FBI established a Cyber Squad unit in Chicago; Shields was one of the squad’s first agents. “The bureau was in its infancy in terms of assessing cybercrime,” Shields says. “Back then, it was more about copyright infringement and credit card fraud.”

Now, he notes that many cybercrimes involve intrusion, where someone tries to harm or infiltrate an entire computer network. After being promoted to supervisor of the Cyber Squad in 2001, Shields oversaw the launch of the Chicago Regional Computer Forensics Laboratory. This full-service lab provides training and technical assistance on the use, examination and processing of digital evidence. “When you look at the amount of data out there, it’s exponential,” Shields says. “It’s a lot to get through during an investigation.”

Subsequent positions in Chicago and at FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C., paved the way for Shields’ current appointment in Milwaukee. “To make it to the level of agent in charge is truly amazing,” he says. “I’m humbled that the FBI gave me this opportunity.” One of Shields’ favorite aspects of his job is mentoring younger agents who are just beginning their careers.

“People took the time to give me encouragement over the years, including my professors at DePaul,” Shields recalls. “I try to provide that same kind of leadership to my team.”

For those coming up the ranks, Shields emphasizes the importance of teamwork. “It may surprise some individuals, but you need to be people-oriented in this position,” he explains. “You need to be able to get out and liaise with law enforcement departments, Our Sherrifs, with partners, you need to actually go out and make people understand the importance of the computer science degree. Our Sherrifs, with partners, you need to actually go out and make people understand the importance of the computer science degree. It’s a difficult position, but it’s a rewarding position.”

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1 Around the college

In October, CDM celebrated its new game production lab with an open house and reception. The Play for Change lab is dedicated to the creation and evaluation of games and interactive experiences that promote personal and social change. As a space for cross-disciplinary design, research, development and assessment, the lab encourages collaboration among students, faculty, departments and schools; builds connections between academia and industry; and enhances the relationship between game producers and users. Visit playforchange.cdm.depaul.edu to learn more.

2 Students from the MS in predictive analytics program recently formed a new student organization, the DePaul Predictive Analytics Group. This group, which connects students, faculty, alumni and industry professionals who share an interest in data science, has already sponsored events on marketing, crime analytics and big data, as well as a Kaggle Workshop. Additional opportunities for networking, education, professional development and career exploration will be offered in the coming months.

3 A partnership between Visiting Associate Professor Jose Soto and the Asylum & Immigration Law Clinic at DePaul’s College of Law led to the production of four public service announcements (PSAs) on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The PSAs encourage undocumented immigrants who may qualify for DACA to learn more from the Asylum & Immigration Law Clinic and other reliable sources. Students from the law school and the School of Cinematic Arts (SCA) worked on the collaborative project, with digital media major Helen Albrecht (middle) serving as producer. Photo credit: DePaul University/College of Law.

4 During the winter intercession, SCA faculty members and students worked on several three-minute films for Project Bluelight, the professional motion picture production company housed in CDM. Assistant Professor Kristyn Benedyk, Associate Professor Matt Irvine and Assistant Professor Brad Ridell each contributed scripts, and the shorts were filmed at the college’s soundstage at Cinespac.

5 “Three films in 10 days is an almost impossible task, but we were excited by the challenge,” said Ridell. “Almost half of the 40 students had never been on a movie set before, so it was a great chance for them to see how three very different films are put together from the inside out.” The films included Benedyk’s “Pillow Talk,” about a 1960s couple facing communication difficulties; Irvine’s “Dawn,” about a woman trying to end an affair; and Ridell’s “Failure to Yield,” a comedy that Ridell describes as “a quirky ‘Reservoir Dogs’ set in the bedroom of a diehard World of Warcraft player.” Learn more at bit.ly/digitalcinemacla.

6 In December, CDM served as one of the cohosts of an inaugural conference on cybersecurity. “After the Breach,” which was held at the Driehaus College of Business in collaboration with DePaul’s Arditti Center for Risk Management and the College of Law, featured keynote speaker Peter W. Singer, the author of “Cybersecurity and Cyberwar: What Everyone Needs to Know.” Additionally, panelists from the military, public and private sectors discussed the steps to take following a cybersecurity breach.

7 An influx of grant awards showcases the wide variety of research projects undertaken by CDM professors. Recent grants from the National Science Foundation (NSF) include:

- Assistant Professor Shauna Erete and Associate Professor Nichole Pinkard received a grant of more than $1,210,000 over three years for “Engaging Middle School Girls in Computational Electronic Design.”
- Pinkard also secured a grant of more than $598,000 over two years for “Broadening Participation in Computing Through a Community Approach to Learning.”
- Professors Robin Burke and Bamshad Mobasher were awarded nearly $500,000 for their project “Multi-dimensional Recommendation in Complex Heterogeneous Networks.”
- Professors Daniela Stan Rau and Jacob Furst received $306,000 over three years for “Research Experiences for Undergraduate Students in Medical Informatics.”

Additionally, several faculty members have been awarded grants to support collaboration between DePaul and Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science (RFUMS). Recipients of the DePaul-RFUMS research grants include:

- Rau and Furst received more than $89,000 for “Application of Image Analytics in Understanding C. elegans Neural Circuits and Behavior.”
- Associate Professor Olayele Adelakun was awarded more than $86,000 for “Telemedicine—A Global Solution for Medical Education: An Initiative for Haiti and the United States.”
- Assistant Professor Cynthia Putnam secured more than $80,000 for “Quantitative Outcome Assessment of Motion-based Video Games for Brain Injury Rehabilitation.”
CDM was well represented at the Chicago International Film Festival, with graduate student and lecturer Joel Benjamin (pictured) winning the silver plaque in the Short Film Competition: Animation category for “Drifting,” which he directed and produced. The festival also featured “Una Mujer Sin Precio (1961),” directed by Lecturer Alaric Rocha (CDM MFA ’14) and produced by graduate student Elliott Lonsdale; “Lucy,” directed and produced by graduate student Zoe Lublak (LAS ’14); and “Speed Dating,” directed by Assistant Professor Meghan Artes and produced by Artes, Assistant Professor Kristyn Benedyk, Lecturer Nick Schmidt and student Joe Lyons. Photo credit: Timothy M. Schmidt.

Another Project Bluelight film, “The King of URLs,” produced by Assistant Professor Jonah Zeiger, won the Best Short Film award and the Audience Choice Award for Best Drama at the 11th Annual Chicago International REEL Shorts Film Festival. The film also garnered a Best Supporting Actor award for Adam Poss (THE ’07), as well as nominations for Lea Coco in the Best Actor category and former lecturer Daniel Klein in the Best Director category.

InformationWeek included the MS in predictive analytics program in its list of the 20 top programs for big data analytics as applied to marketing and also stated that “graduates of [the schools on the list] tend to have their pick of future employers.”

During the Academic Convocation this past fall, Associate Professor James Riely (pictured) was recognized with a Spirit of Inquiry award, while Instructor Ed Keenan received an Excellence in Teaching Award for 2013-14. Riely, a member of the faculty since 1999, focuses on programming languages and security in his research and instruction. His colleague Keenan brings 16 years of experience in the game industry to his courses on game development, software engineering and OO programming.

The Project Bluelight film “Nostalgic,” written and directed by Associate Professor Ron Elman, won an honorable mention in the Fiction Short category at the 2014 University Film and Video Association Conference. The film has also won awards at the Canton Film Festival, the Accolade Global Film Competition and the Best Shorts Competition, and was screened at 14 other film festivals around the world. Watch a video about the making of “Nostalgic” at bit.ly/nostalgicdoc. Photo credit: Lauren Major.

The Forbes list of 30 Under 30 2015 in Games highlighting “rising stars who are leading a technological and artistic revolution in the industry” included Philipp Tibitski (CDM ’12), CBO and community manager of Young Horses Inc. The company recently released “Octodad: Dadliest Catch,” a sequel to the award-winning “Octodad” game, which Tibitski helped create as a DePaul student.

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THANK YOU FOR...

... helping me get a chance at my dream! Thank you so much.
–Tony Wojnar
Computer game development

... giving us all an opportunity to have the best educational experience.
–Nicole Beverlain
Graphic design

... your contributions and help. Without you, we wouldn’t have all the amazing resources we do. Keep being awesome!
–Manuel Rodriguez (CDM ’14)
Animation

... your support through these past two and a half years. As a veteran, I know that nothing can ever be accomplished unless someone believes in supporting the mission. You made my education possible.
–Daniel Williams (CDM ’14)
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