Multimedia students impress Hollywood actors and producers

Since the Department of Information Science at UP started to encourage its Multimedia students to take part in international competitions, four of them have already beaten contestants from across the globe to win their respective categories in these competitions. The latest winners from UP are Rudo Martin and Eleanor Harding, who won first and second place in the 30 Spot category of the Firefox Flicks video contest.

To win a large international competition like Firefox Flicks in North America, Latin America, Asia, Europe, Africa, New Zealand and Australia, takes exceptional filming, editing, production and creative skills. It takes large amounts of creativity, as well as a good understanding of the technical aspects needed to make a good production.

Providing students with an excellent combination of these and numerous other skills that the IT world requires from graduates, is exactly what the University's Department of Information Science aims to do through its relatively new Multimedia degree.

To have a student win an international competition is always a good reflection on the course and the University, but to have four students in a fairly young degree win such competitions within a timeframe of less than two years, is remarkable. In 2011, the Department started to encourage its students to enter some of the top competitions to put their skills to the test.

Joshua Goodman, a second-year Multimedia student, won first prize in the Best Live Action category at the fourth annual international Sparky Awards for his video depicting the possibilities of free access to information. Johann Botha (a final-year student) won first prize in Microsoft's Imagine Cup in the Game Design and Development category. He entered his final-year project, a computer game called *Purgatory*.

In 2012, second-year students Rudo Martin and Eleanor Harding surprised everyone, including themselves, by winning a category in Mozilla's Firefox Flicks international competition. Over 400 entries were received from across the globe. Contestants could enter videos for four different categories. Their work was judged on the quality of shooting and editing, and how closely they were aligned with the creative brief to "tell the Firefox story".

Martin won the 30 Spot category and Harding was the runner-up in the same category. Martin received $5 000 prize money and Harding $1 000.

What makes these two students' achievements so remarkable and special for them, is that big names in the entertainment industry judged their work.

"The realisation that Edward Norton and Shauna Robertson judged my video and actually liked it, is incredible! Winning this competition made me realise that all the hopes and dreams I have for the future are realistic."

The actor, director and producer Edward Norton, who starred in, among others, *Primal Fear*, *The Italian Job* and *Keeping the Faith*; Shauna Robertson, who has produced some of the best comedies, like *Meet the Parents*, *Elf*, *Anchorman*, and *Knocked Up*; and executive producer Ben Silverman, the man behind the shows *Ugly Betty*, *The Office* and *The Biggest Loser*, are just some of the celebrity judges of the Mozilla Firefox Flicks competition.

Martin made a video about "living in colour" and enjoying every moment in life. "No one wants to live in a grey society, so I showed that Firefox can open up a new colourful world that you haven't experienced.

It is a window into a brighter, more colourful future. My inspiration came from just being young and picturing those happy moments where everyone is just laughing and enjoying life. Those are colourful and memorable moments."

Harding's video portrayed Firefox as moving forward in a world that appears to be going backwards. "I was inspired by how often Firefox updates and how it is one of the few browsers that embrace and support new technologies where other browsers don't. The video further plays on how Firefox focuses on and empowers the user by putting the power into their hands. I personified the browser through my red hair and a blue dress and reversed the footage to give the effect of a backwards-moving world," she says.

UP Multimedia programme sets the trend

Modern information technology offers the design and creation of an almost endless possibility of different information products. We are creating more information products than ever before in human history. There is also no longer a single discipline that handles the combination of information products. These issues, the explosion of the web, as well as the exponential growth and power of information technology, require tertiary qualifications that train graduates in all aspects of IT and that follow international trends.

The UP Multimedia qualification addresses these shortcomings by exposing students to a wide range of skill sets that cover information science, visual design, computer science and digital media, which will make them employable in any field in IT – including the media, software development and industries. With South Africa's ICT infrastructure growing at a fast pace, so does the need for professionals in this field.

The BIS (Multimedia) qualification at UP is a new field of study not offered at other local universities. It is aimed at students who are gifted both creatively and analytically, and who want to combine these skills with the use of technology. Students receive training in computer science, as well as visual design during their undergraduate studies. The practical knowledge is supported by a theoretical framework centred on the information society, with applications in online, entertainment and mobile computing areas.

Both winning students are in agreement that the diversity that the programme offers them played a big role in their winning these awards. "It doesn't matter whether you are interested in gaming, web design, application design, animation, films or even programming, the course creates opportunities for all platforms," says Martin.

"The Multimedia programme is so multifaceted and includes so many skills and opportunities to cultivate creativity. I find that all of the modules are engaging and relevant and all provide skills and knowledge that are applicable to other modules and also in real-world applications," says Harding.

Tina van der Vyver, Multimedia lecturer, says the Department will continue to encourage its students to participate in these competitions, as it enables them to stay up to date with technologies and lecturers can incorporate the newest technologies into their teaching, while it opens up doors for the winning students. ●