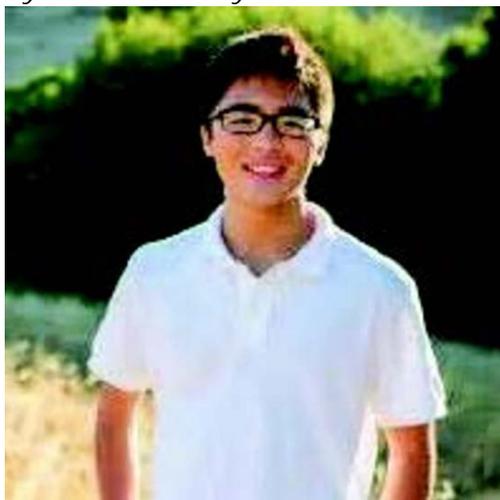


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Campo grad sees extended uses for computer gaming

By Sora O'Doherty



2015 Campolindo graduate Sam Lee Photos provided

Moraga native Sam Lee is interested in video games because, as he explains, for the longest time games were just a diversion, but now they are something more. He is using a scholarship awarded by the Entertainment Software Association Foundation to attend UC Davis where he is a third-year computer science and engineering major.

Lee was one of 30 students representing women and minorities granted \$90,000 in scholarships for degrees in video game arts by the ESA. The scholarships for the 2016-17 academic year were awarded to high school seniors and undergraduate students, who each earn \$3,000 to study subjects such as computer programming, video game design, animation, and digital graphic art at a four-year college or university. Although he hasn't had any games published, he is the president of the Games Development and Arts Club at Davis.

Lee sees potential for using games as learning tools and for therapy. Beginning last June, Lee had a summer internship at Cognivive, a Davis-based digital

neurotherapeutics startup that, according to its website, creates "evidence-based treatments in virtual and augmented reality video game form to reduce specific cognitive impairments that are experienced by the healthy aging, many stroke and brain injury patients and individuals with one of several neurogenetic disorders." Lee helped make the games that they used as therapy with a game engine called Unity and learned how performing an activity in a game, like swatting a fly, helped people focus and drew their attention.

Lee says, "It is hard to explain what I think games can do, it's not what most people think." He sees games as allowing people to connect and bond over experiences, as ways to help people, even with therapy. Games are breaking out of the stigma that they are something for slackers, he says. In his opinion, "as much harm as games can do, I also believe that they can do even more good."

A 2015 graduate of Campolindo High School, Lee developed his interest in games in the summer of his sophomore year when he attended the Cosmos program at UC Santa Cruz, which has a game design major. Lee, who had no coding until he took AP computer science as a junior, learned that Games is actually a field of study.

Making education into games makes learning fun for people of all ages and genders, he says.

Lee acknowledges that concerns about the addictive quality of video games are valid, pointing to the fact that developers recognize that they can nab children at a young age. However, he believes that the principles behind gamification can be used for good.

As president of the Games Development and Art Club, Lee organizes weekly workshops for other Davis students to learn about the different aspects of game development from programming to art. He also goes out to underserved elementary and middle schools, including a bilingual school, and teaches students basic computer science through the CS4K program, Computer Science for Kids.

Lee is still deciding whether or not to go to on graduate school, possibly for a master's in computer science or game development.

Right now he is concentrating on his studies and striving to make the game club as high quality as possible. But all work and no play wouldn't be good, so Lee also belongs to a dance club called Popping, where he enjoys a robotic style of dance similar to the performers on Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco.



Screen shot of one of Lee's video games

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