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Electrical and computer engineering students hold their second annual video game showcase

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It’s an advanced software development course disguised as an introductory video game creation class. Undergraduate students of UC Santa Barbara electrical and computer engineering professor Pradeep Sen’s Gaucho Game Lab have been learning the ins and outs of graphics and game play, and now they’re ready to show off their final projects. They will host a video game showcase Wednesday, Jan. 25 from 12 - 5 p.m. at the campus’s University Center. The event is free and open to the public.

The lab’s second annual showcase features open-world adventures, post-apocalyptic zombie outbreaks, cooperative puzzle games, fast reflex action, even horror puzzle games.

“The video game industry is larger than movies and music combined,” Sen said. “This class helps the students get their feet wet in areas with tremendous public interest, with skills that apply to the wider field of software development in general.”

Indeed, with the rise of esports and the Metaverse, digital gaming is fast becoming the world's way to connect and recreate, and Sen's Gaucho Game Lab seeks to replicate the game development process to prepare its students for future software and game-development careers.

Part of the video game development environment involves playtesting and providing comments and suggestions on early versions of video games, and that's what the lab is inviting the public to do at their event as students roll out their creations.

"Playtesting is quality control, and the biggest game developers rely on feedback from the public that eventually results in improvements to the game play before bringing the game to the market," Sen said. That is one of the purposes of this showcase: to elicit feedback on the games and spark conversations with the students who developed them. The games being highlighted are all maiden voyages for beginner developers, so while they may not have the mind-blowing complexity of leading console and PC games, Sen added, the talent creativity of first-time developers is on full display in their games.

As fun as playing games is, Sen claims that making them is even more fun because game developers have the opportunity to create new worlds. He expects the number and quality of the games to improve as the program grows.

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