

# 21ST-CENTURY EDUCATION



Enquirer photos by Cara Owsley

Watching a 3-D demonstration with LCD shutter glasses are Rachael Baldwin of Toledo (left) and Nancy Valentine of Cleveland, both seniors. The glasses enhance a graphics demonstration.

## Miami U. teaches with tech

### Large gifts enable university to use computer games, 3-D

By Cliff Peale  
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OXFORD — With the shades tightly drawn in the darkened Miami University classroom and a \$200 pair of funny-looking 3-D glasses covering your eyes, you can see the future of American higher education.

You can go inside a jet engine or a molecule, simulate a firefight in Baghdad or study a 10-year stock chart, all in three dimensions.

It's part of the Armstrong Interactive Media Studies program at Miami, which spans academic departments all over campus with about 300



Glenn Platt explains a 3-D graphic to his class. He's a professor of interactive media.

spots. Most of the classes are filled within seconds after online registration opens.

One group of Miami

students is about to start an Internet site called Goodzuma.com, a networking site to link college students to organiza-

tions that promote social responsibility.

Students in psychology are using the virtual-reality equipment to simulate how people respond to different stressful situations and sports medicine students are using it to study body movements.

In another project, Brittany Moncrease, a senior from Hawaii majoring in international studies with a minor in interactive media studies, is helping to create a Web site that preserves the Tibetan language.

"We have an opportunity to preserve this culture through technology."

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# Interactive: MU use grows

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Moncrease said. "To learn a new language, you have to see it, you have to hear it, and you have to have some sort of interactivity.

"I feel excited by just being in the program," she added. "You can work with real-world clients and produce something valuable. I can say that I did something and that it matters."

Miami has offered media studies for more than a decade, but it vaulted into the big time last year with a \$15 million gift from Mike Armstrong, former chief executive officer of AT&T and a Miami graduate (Class of 1961). It also has received \$1.75 million from former Procter & Gamble Co. CEO John Smale (Class of '49).

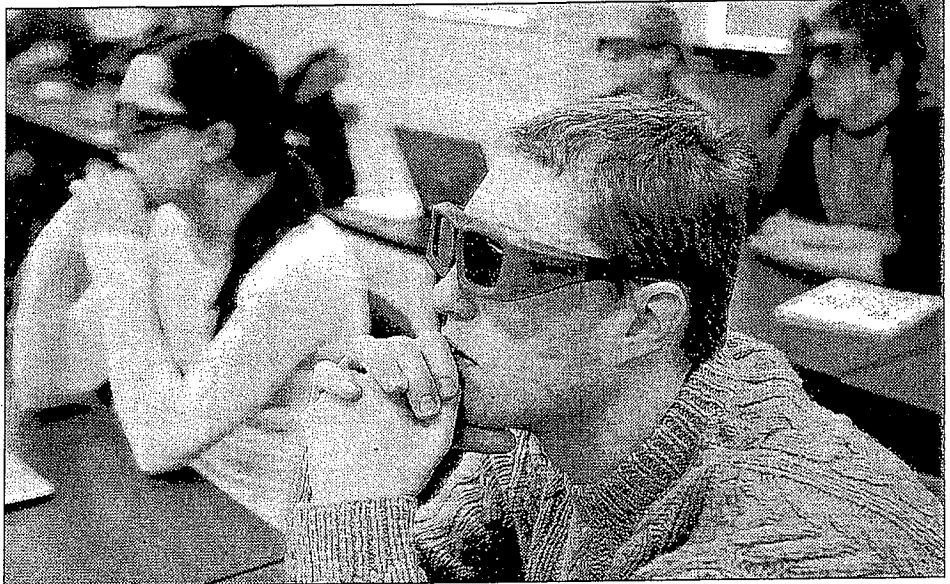
Students are just starting to reap the benefits of Armstrong's gift.

"We want to use advanced digital technology to basically change the liturgy of curriculum, faculty and students," Armstrong said. "We want them to get results from the technology, because that's the way the world is going to work."

Not many colleges have millions of dollars to buy high-tech equipment, such as a \$50,000 motion-sensor suit or a gymnasium-sized virtual-reality chamber located in Phillips Hall.

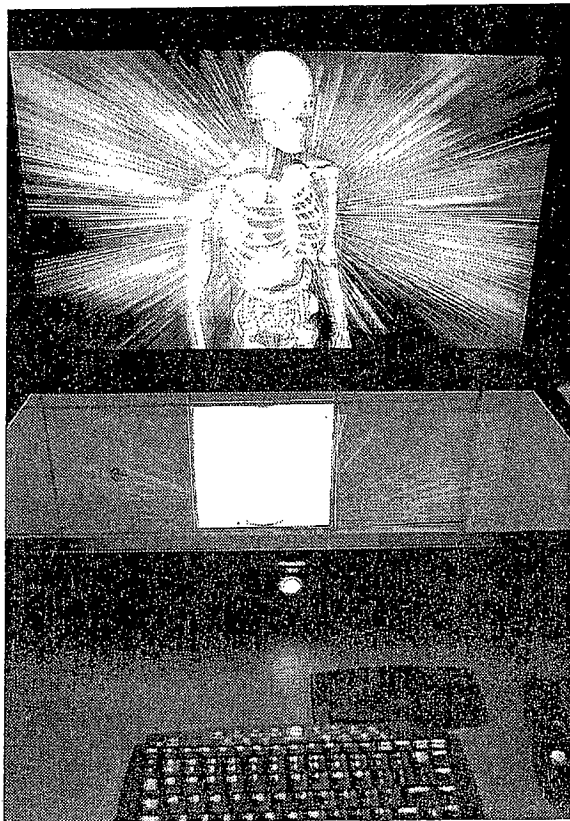
But the media studies program is critical for Miami's future, one of the programs it will rely on to compete with other colleges, all attempting to draw the most talented students and train them to fill 21st-century jobs.

Even as Miami is laying off dozens of employees and cutting millions of dollars out of its annual budget, nearly \$20 million in private funds has enabled the interactive media studies program to hire professors and buy equipment that only the world's biggest corporations can afford.



Enquirer photos by Cara Owsley

Classes offered through interactive media fill up as soon as they open online. James Arnold of Cleveland, a senior, watches a demonstration in 3-D using LCD shutter glasses. Donations bought the equipment and funded the program.



## About Armstrong Interactive Media

■ About 300 students are involved in the program, which spans all academic departments.

■ The program includes an interactive media studies co-major, an IMS minor, an IMS thematic sequence and a minor in game design.

■ Facilities include a 3-D visualization lab in the Farmer School of Business, a virtual-reality unit under construction in Laws Hall, a prototyping lab in the Engineering building and a separate gymnasium-sized virtual-reality unit, one of the biggest in the world, in Phillips Hall.

■ The program was started in the mid-1990s with a Procter & Gamble Co. gift to create a communications center.

At Miami, this 3-dimensional desktop computer can simulate an autopsy. The interactive media use technology that many schools lack.

The program symbolizes how a multimillion-dollar gift can be used to transform an entire curriculum through cutting-edge equipment, new professors and an energized student body.

"The only way something like this can rise to the top is if you have some external engine pushing it," says Glenn Platt, co-director of the program.

One example is a new game studies minor.

Armstrong's gift also will

fund five new teaching positions, including Lindsay Grace, who came to Oxford from the Illinois Institute of Art-Chicago and teaches a variety of new classes, including one called the Design of Play. Miami also hosted a "Global Game Jam" in January featuring students on campus designing new games.

"It's not only the equipment, it's the commitment to offering it to undergraduates," Grace says. "That doesn't happen everywhere."

Grace says college students often expect to have fun built into their new

technology.

"When I first got into it I thought, 'Hey, I like video games. Maybe I'll like making video games,'" said Tommy DeSalvo of New Richmond, a junior theater major who is taking some of the gaming classes.

"I'm really interested in game design. But it's much harder than I thought."

The program already has sparked partnerships with corporations, including P&G and Cintas Corp., as well as out-of-town companies such as Hewlett-Packard and Cardinal Health.

Next fall, Platt plans to

start a Miami program in California's high-tech haven of Silicon Valley that would allow students to connect with companies there.

"We want to create students who can get the jobs that can't be outsourced," he said.

Miami seniors Ben Weisel and Liz Chmela helped lead student teams that created and designed Goodzuma as part of a capstone class. They're still planning who will run the Internet site going forward.

"I think it has the potential to go nationwide," Chmela said.