The opening of the Global Virtual Design Studio on campus was hailed as a milestone in the development of design education and Original Design Manufacturing in Hong Kong. The studio, installed with the latest interactive virtual imaging technology worth $13 million in total, offers a multi-purpose, multi-functional and multi-media facilities custom-built for research, consultancy and student use. With an Onyx2 supercomputer and other state-of-the-art equipment, users can visualize in an immersive environment and share exactly the same audio-visual experience simultaneously with their counterparts at leading design institutions around the world.

The linked-up academic institutions overseas include Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge University and the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. Their participation has made the global design revolution possible through video-conferencing and the exchange of spatial data.

Needless to say, the studio is pivotal to the training of the next generation of designers and long-term development of Original Design Manufacturing in Hong Kong.

Not only will the multi-million dollar facility benefits PolyU students, it will also be made available to commercial partners, such as those involved in the Cyberport project. Prof. Frazer, the mastermind behind the project, commented, “This vital addition to our resources will enable Hong Kong’s design community to leapfrog into the future.”

The School of Design, the sole provider of design education at tertiary level locally, has revamped its curriculum to focus more on multimedia technology. Courses offered cover the areas of visual communication, industrial and environmental design, fashion design, digital photography and multimedia design.

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“During this time more than 100 students from our department have benefited from the experience,” said Dr. Pine, Head of HTM. “The Disney recruitment teams are always very impressed by our students because they show a high level of interest and motivation towards Disney, and because they have such well developed interpersonal skills. I am very happy to see our long-term working relationship being formalized in a partnership agreement.”

Other partners of HTM include McDonald’s, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre and the Hong Kong Jockey Club, with Marriott soon to be added to the list.

“Creating firm working relationships with industry partners is one of our major objectives,” commented Dr. Pine. “These partnerships not only give our students valuable experience and career opportunities, they also enable the department as a whole to be better informed and connected so that our teaching and research is relevant and up-to-date.”

To promote the use of smart materials for industry, the PolyU held a three-day symposium on “Development Trends in Smart Materials and Devices in the 21st Century” on campus from May 17–19, 1999.

The symposium was well attended by more than 100 participants from academia and industry.

Prof. Choy Chung-Loong, Chair Professor and Head of the Department of Applied Physics said, “The innovation and development of smart materials and devices can provide impetus for our industries in the next millennium.”

“The symposium, jointly organized by our department and the Chinese Physical Society’s Dielectric Physics Committee, will probably lead to collaborative projects between our department and participants, making contributions to academia and industry,” he added.

The Department of Applied Physics has dedicated much resource to developing smart materials and devices as well as their applications in industry. In addition to various ongoing projects undertaken by the department, the recent establishment of the Centre for Smart Materials is a highlight of such effort and direction.
To strengthen the use of advanced information technology in its curriculum and inter-disciplinary research, and to expedite the adoption of digital media technologies among local industries, the University has established the Multimedia Innovation Centre.

The new Centre on campus, with an investment of $15 million, was officially opened on June 11 by Mr. Linus Cheung, Chief Executive of Cable & Wireless HKT, and President Prof. Poon Chung-kwong.

Prof. Poon said that the timely establishment of the new Centre would further enhance the use and development of multimedia and the Internet both within and outside the PolyU. With the strong ties to the industry sector in the territory, the PolyU is in a very advantageous position to develop advanced multimedia technology.

"Apart from grooming students with necessary IT knowledge and skills for the 21st century, the Centre is dedicated to developing multimedia technologies that can be widely adopted in education and industry," Prof. Poon continued.

Under the leadership of Dr. Gino Yu, Head of the Centre, who is also an Associate Professor of School of Design, the Centre has assembled a team of experts and state-of-the-art facilities to accelerate the development and deployment of multimedia and Internet applications.

The Centre’s three components, Research and Development, Outreach and Industry, and Academia, will synergistically support each other and create a fertile environment for developing new multimedia and Internet applications, training students and transferring both technologies and graduates into local industry.

The Centre will actively work on the five major focus areas of Internet technology, education technology, video games, board-level systems design and media production. Each of these areas will have an immediate impact on creating business opportunities in high technology industry with low research and development cost.

Internally the Centre will also provide strong support to the new programme of School of Design – Higher Diploma in Multimedia Design and Technology, which will admit the first intake of students in the 1999/2000 academic year.

The Centre currently organizes intensive workshops and training programmes in desktop publishing, web design and multimedia for students and staff. Hands-on training, real-world projects and various outreach programmes will be offered in order to support learning and teaching for the education sector, commerce and industry, and the community at large.

As for video game technologies, the Centre is collaborating with leading local game developers to develop the first Asian programme which covers areas of game design and development, as well as research in 3D game engines. The Centre aims to play a leading role in video game development for local industry in Hong Kong.

Supported by a number of laboratories such as Production Studio, Game Development Laboratory, Interactive Television Laboratory, and Web Development Laboratory, the Centre is equipped with an advanced 400G media server, blue screen facilities, and multimedia production software and hardware best suited for the entertainment industry.
Keeping an eye on air

The PolyU has recently entered an agreement with The Chinese Academy of Meteorological Sciences to study atmospheric environment issues of the Yangtze Delta of China as an evolving Metro-Agro-Plex.

Under the auspices of this project, PolyU and the Academy aim to address two concerns: How unprecedented combination of economic and population growth projected for China in the coming decades will affect the country’s environmental resources base and how these environmental changes will affect agriculture.

The Regional Air Monitoring and Research Group of the Department of Civil and Structural Engineering and their counterpart from the Academy will undertake the joint research activities. The purpose of the activities is to benchmark air pollution via six stations in the Yangtze basin in relation to the long-term study of crop fields. Crops are adversely affected by ozone air pollution and by the reduction of sunlight due to air pollution haze. Starting from June this year, a series of intensive field studies has already taken place.

The Lin An Weather Station in Zhejiang province is one among six involved in the project. The PolyU has provided instruments for the period June 1999 to June 2000 in Lin An for air quality measurements. In addition, PolyU scientists will be present in the field to conduct calibration and other quality assurance tests for the instruments.

PolyU’s international involvement in understanding global and regional air pollution trends can be traced back to its continuing collaboration with NASA, which began in 1992. In the project with NASA, PolyU plays a part in monitoring global pollution trends based on work at its Atmospheric Chemistry Research Laboratory in Hok Tsui, Hong Kong to compile background data for comparison and analysis.
Staging unlimited creative ideas
- Graduation Fashion Show 1999
Nineteen graduating students from School of Design displayed their flair and innovation at the Graduation Fashion Show 1999 at the Ballroom of the Grand Hyatt Hotel on May 11.

The event was sponsored by The Landmark Fashion Foundation, a charitable trust established by Hongkong Land to nurture fashion design students, Messe Frankfurt (HK) Ltd, Marks & Spencer (Hong Kong) Ltd and G2000 Apparel Limited.