

Arts, technology converge

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By **ROBERT MILLER** / The Dallas Morning News

Dr. **Thomas E. Linehan** is officiating at the wedding of technology and humanities.

He's director of the **Institute for Arts and Technology** in the School of Arts and Humanities at the **University of Texas at Dallas**, which is offering its students three new majors with an emphasis on technology.

Dr. Linehan said these seemingly disparate disciplines form a natural partnership and give graduates more flexibility in their job choices after graduation.

The students explore the synergies between arts and technology, and also take digital arts, game and interactive classes that complement their arts studies.

The majors are the brainchild of Dr. **Dennis Kratz**, dean of the School of Arts and Humanities, and Dr. Linehan, who came to UTD in 2001 after 20 years directing the animation program at **Ohio State University**. He also founded the Visualization Laboratory at **Texas A&M University's College of Architecture**.

During his peregrinations, Dr. Linehan even served as president of the **Ringling School of Art and Design** in Sarasota, Fla., the circus' winter home, where he helped to create an undergraduate program in computer animation.

Dr. Linehan said that about 350 students out of the 14,000 or so at UTD are majoring in these areas, although that number keeps growing as word gets around.

The three programs – bachelor's, master's and master of fine arts degrees in Arts and Technology – were put into effect this semester, and Dr. Kratz said he hopes to offer a doctoral program in two or three years.

Though administered by Dr. Kratz, the programs are a collaboration of the School of Arts and Humanities and the **Erik Jonsson School of Engineering and Computer Science**.

There are only a handful of programs and institutes nationwide dedicated to arts and technology, Dr. Kratz said, and none that

he knows of at major universities that combine arts and technology the way UTD does.

"UTD's new interdisciplinary arts and technology tracks will include a strong course foundation in such areas as contemporary art, writing, design, game development, animation, computer science and photography," Dr. Kratz said.

"It will also offer classes for students wishing to teach in the field or to students who want to pursue careers outside of games and entertainment in such areas as the military or medicine, among others."

'Luby's Cafeteria'

Digital content plays a significant role in many fields, such as entertainment, education and communities, Dr. Linehan said, and that role "will grow ever more important in the next 10 years."

But, he said, most current educational programs "deal inadequately with this vital development."

With this "fusion of engineering and the arts ... graduates will be prepared for a wide range of current and future, as yet unimagined, careers that demand the ability to fuse visual images, verbal communications, creative thinking and technological expertise."

Both Dr. Kratz and Dr. Linehan encourage a sky's-the-limit approach among the students. Excitement and creativity are the order of the day.

"We have a huge pool of bright students who want to enter the program, and our 'Luby's Cafeteria' approach allows those already in the program to put together their own curriculum," Dr. Kratz said.

Talking the talk

Both UTD faculty members say that **Dallas County Community College District** and **Collin County Community College District** are strong in this field.

"Here in Texas, many of our community colleges offer new media courses, computer graphics, computer printing, Web design, etc.," Dr. Linehan said.

And **Richland, North Lake** and Collin County all have excellent entry-level courses, he said.

The beauty of merging arts and humanities with the technology field, Dr. Linehan emphasized, is that "UTD graduates can talk

the arts with the best of them and do technology talk with the best of them.

"And especially in the world of entertainment, where there is a team approach, one might be the writing lead on one project, the tech lead or the business lead on another," he said.

"With the built-in flexibility of this curriculum, you are trained across the board," Dr. Linehan said. "Employers like that because they can move you from one project to another when one is completed and a new one begins."

If you're interested in the programs, call Dr. Kratz at 972-883-2984 or Dr. Linehan at 972-883-4379.

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