Georgia’s entertainment scene is exploding with film and television productions looking to shoot here, while the industry’s nascent infrastructure — including the number of skilled workers available for hire — does its best to keep up.

For every skilled tradesman who retires in Georgia, only one new worker takes his place, so productions currently rely on an influx of workers from other states, like North Carolina, to round out their crew. Fortunately, a smattering of schools in the metro area offer programs in the entertainment industry, be it for feature films, television productions or new media like app design and video games.

Savannah College of Art and Design offers several program students who want to pursue a career in media, including a four-year degree in television producing. The Atlanta campus focuses more on television than movies, because it works closely with Turner Broadcasting System Inc., where its students shadow professionals and take on internships to learn the tricks of the trade.

“The television producing program is designed to train and motivate students to enter the world of TV and new media,” said Bob Judson, professor of television producing at SCAD Atlanta. “That’s a category that historically includes executive producing, line producing, segment producing, coordinating producing, the whole gamut of the line of responsibility of traditional television.”

SCAD’s Savannah campus is a bit more film-focused, and students are also encouraged to consider other approaches, like on-demand films, music videos and new media such as developing films to be shown on smartphones.

In August, the school purchased Medin Studios LLC, a struggling film production studio that opened in 2009. It also hosts an annual film festival.

“As far as I know, we’re the only school in the country that has a huge film festival solely so students can network with professionals,” said Andy Meyer, professor of film and television at SCAD Savannah.

Georgia Tech’s digital media program, which is part of the School of Literature, Media and Communication, offers a number of curriculums for aspiring filmmakers and designers. These include a computational media undergraduate degree that combines digital media and computing, a two-year graduate digital media master of science program that focuses on the analysis, critique and development of digital media; a four-year digital media Ph.D. program that takes a critical approach to digital media; and a two-year master of science program in human computer interaction.

Michael Nitsche, associate professor in Georgia Tech’s digital world and image group, said all of the programs have undergone massive changes since the program was founded in 1993.

“We were founded before Facebook or Twitter,” Nitsche said. “We’re in a difficult position — [the programs] have to change because the media changes all the time.”

Well-known entertainment lawyer Joel Katz helped found a music and entertainment business program at Kennesaw State University. The program, which is a joint venture between the Coles College of Business and the College of the Arts, is a minor that can attach onto any other major.

The multidisciplinary program teaches students about music, films and television and new media in a hands-on setting. Keith Perissi, director of the Katz Music and Entertainment Program at KSU, said the school has a partnership with Raleigh Studios in Senora, where “The Walking Dead” is filmed, that allows students to shadow industry professionals.

“But they also learn management, marketing, how to really do the business side of it,” Perissi said.

This 24-credit certificate program is only open to KSU undergrads, but the school does offer executive education programs in the entertainment business and screenwriting that are available to the public for a small fee.

Clayton State University in Morrow also offers a program that benefits the public. Its Small Business Development Center (SBDC), which is part of its College of Business, offers free small business consulting for clients in the industry. These clients can be on the “creative” production side, but others are vendors and suppliers like caterers, and truck and grip rental companies.

“Once you get into the industry, it’s like an ocean,” said Juddifer Pearson, a consultant in charge of the initiative.

“Every film production, every record label, every television licensing project is not the same. You have to know who the end user is and help navigate what the next steps should be.”

The school also offers a series of non-degree courses on behind-the-scenes business aspects of entertainment. The continuing education program, which was launched in February, is designed for people both with and without prior experience in film. Its intent is to educate more Georgians to get them employed within the industry or working as general contractors.

Clayton State students can avail themselves of even more offerings. The school offers a film minor and is considering adding in the option of a major within the next few years. Students interested in a film minor must take introductory

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Video developers get their game on in metro Atlanta

BY GARY A. WITTE Contributing Writer

Compared with the destroy-or-be-destroyed arena of most video games, the world of its creators is a more cooperative kind of battlefield.

Instead of aiming to drive their fellows out of business or fight over limited resources, a firm with a successful game can help similar companies throughout the region. And every game produced in metro Atlanta raises expectations of further growth here.

“Most people buy multiple games,” Georgia Game Developers Association President Andrew Greenberg said. “The competition doesn’t have to be as cutthroat in our industry as it does in others.”

In 2013, the state video game industry saw $1.9 billion in total economic activity, according to the association. Of the approximately 80 video game companies in Georgia, three-quarters of them are located in metro Atlanta, Greenberg said.

While the state is seventh in the nation in number of video game jobs, those in the industry here want its ranking to improve and various factors are expected to help, including Georgia’s tax credit program, low housing costs and major gaming events.

Ian Bogost, founding partner of Persuasive Games LLC and a professor at Georgia Tech, said the game development presence is relatively modest in Atlanta compared with places like California, Seattle or Orlando, Fla.

What other locations have are video game companies that are large enough and established enough for talented workers to break off and form their own businesses. This, in turn, attracts top talent to the area and gives other companies a reason to locate there, he said.

“We don’t have one of those giant anchor-type companies that have been here a long time,” Bogost said. “We do have a nice modest reputation of real companies doing real work.”

Compared with a decade ago, large commercial ventures are less common than small independent creators. These smaller companies don’t need huge infrastructure to produce their products, he said. “The kind of work they do can take place anywhere,” Bogost said.

Hi-Rez Studios started in Alpharetta during 2005 because its management team during 2005 because its management team had a history with the area, said Todd Harris, co-founder and chief operating officer.

“Hi-Rez Studios creates video games, including one with Zeus,” said the cost of living is lower than the West Coast. He said a $200,000 house here would cost about $5 million in San Jose.

Hi-Rez, whose multiplayer online game "Smite" came out in March, has more than 5 million players and has sold enough to allow the company to double its staff to 150 people since its establishment in 2009, is hoping its newest game has more than 5 million players as of October.

The game’s success has led the company to plan a world championship event in January, where teams will compete for the cash prizes while the public buys tickets to watch. The event will also be broadcast online.

"That kind of spectacle and live event can help grow the industry," Harris said, noting it builds enthusiasm and public awareness that games are being created here. He noted Atlanta also has a strong gaming culture, which will help.

Woomer, who himself worked for Hi-Rez for three years before helping start his company in 2009, is hoping its newest offering, the fighting game “Brawlhalla,” releasing in January, will be a winner. “If everything goes according to plan, we’ll definitely be staffing up.”

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Courses to film and acting, but after that they can tailor their choice of electives to fit their desired career. Some choices include film history, lighting for motion pictures, film analysis and criticism, voice-over and screenwriting.

On Oct. 5 and 6, the school hosted BigPictureCon, a conference for emerging and established film and technology professionals to foster relationships and help workers find jobs. The conference began in 2005 as Georgia’s first tax incentives began.

“All of the opportunities are here, because we have such a huge infrastructure for students, and the companies that are coming here doing digital entertainment and looking for people with that experience,” said Nancy Howard, founder and executive director of The Big Picture and Video Foundation, the organization that founded the conference.

In addition to individual schools’ programs, the University System of Georgia is considering starting a Georgia Film Academy that would link its schools with film programs together with those of the Technical College System of Georgia. It is currently conducting a study to see if partnering up for a sort of “virtual academy” could better educate Georgians seeking jobs in entertainment.