The energy level is high.
Nine two-person teams are scattered around the room: talking, sketching, solving problems, and, most of all, working together.

The 18 students — half majoring in architecture, half in art and design — are part of an innovative class that combines the strengths of both disciplines, provides opportunities for real-life teamwork, and fills an industry need for digital artists, all at the same time. Adding to the uniqueness of the lab is that two art and design students lead the software instruction.

The collaborative studio class is centered around RAML, a Rendering, Animation and Modeling Lab, that provides state-of-the-art software for three-dimensional design. The lab uses ElectricImage software, which was used to create special effects in the recently re-released Star Wars Trilogy.

"It's like having an eyeball moving through space," says Eric Johnson, chairperson of the Art and Design Department in the College of Liberal Arts, as he describes the software, which can create images so realistic it's difficult to believe they don't exist outside of the computer.

"We are asking students to explore the possibilities of creativity and imagination," says Johnson, who, with Architecture Professor John Cotton, oversaw the class. And the students are clearly exploring. Each student team in a class last spring produced a 30- to 45-second video using 3-D modeling and animation. Various wall storyboards showed a futuristic room, a blooming desert house, a high-speed race car, and a robot being chased through changing landscapes.

These "visual explorations" have proved valuable in another way. "Some of the students are finding employment in entertainment fields that are completely new to them," says Richard Zweifel, associate dean of the College of Architecture and Environmental Design. One of these emerging areas is the digital effects industry, which has been hampered by a lack of qualified applicants trained in the visual arts as well as computer animation, set design, interactive games, CD-ROM graphics, and special effects.

According to industry estimates, more than 80,000 jobs in this field have been created in the last two years. Many of them have been filled with people from other countries. So prevalent is the problem that Gov. Pete Wilson proposed that a $1.2 million Cal Grant Digital Arts Scholarship program be adopted for California students studying a combination of visual and computer arts.

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assistant and data entry clerk, which provided me with professional office experience.

I suppose one of the most important things I gained while interning at the White House was a better understanding of how government and the White House work, and specifically, how my department worked and connected with the President’s office. I used to think the President chose all of the presidential appointees, when, in fact, our department researched and assigned the presidential appointee candidates.

Another thing I learned was that my party affiliation didn’t matter. I was dedicated to performing my job and duties to the best of my ability. It was important for me just to be there and make the best of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

As for my immediate future, I’ve been accepted to Franklin College in Switzerland to study

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A conversation between Johnson and Zweifel about the many similarities in the basic skills being taught to students in both art and architecture started the idea for a RAML rolling. Both agree the use of RAML for the new class last spring was the beginning of “spectacular growth” for their students.

Mike Romey and Mike Rosenbrock, the class’s student leaders, were instrumental in encouraging the development of the 3-D and animation class, and in suggesting the most effective hardware and software. Their goals were to have each student understand how the software works and how to be an effective team member.

Cal Poly Plan funds were used to develop the spring course and refurbish the lab spaces. Corporate donations and discounts made it possible to obtain the expensive high-tech software and computers.

The Cal Poly Alumni Association sponsors a variety of educational trips and travel throughout the year.

For details, contact the Alumni Relations office at 805/756-2586; fax 805/756-5413; e-mail alumni@oboecalpoly.edu.

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