

Goldsmiths' Foundation Year in Computing: Laying the Foundation for successful careers in computing

Anyone harbouring a passion for computing and an inkling they'd like to explore this further, may well be interested in the Foundation Year in Computing at Goldsmiths, University of London.

The course offers an alternative entry route for those who may not necessarily have the ideal qualifications for entry into degree level study. Indeed, the only prerequisites for prospective students are drive and a genuine curiosity for the subject.

As Mark d'Inverno, the Head of Department of Computing explains:

“An ideal student for the Foundation Year is one who is genuinely curious, willing to learn and keen to develop their computing skills in order to use them in their professional life.”

The course is particularly suitable for anyone who has been out of the education system for a while or has had some previous bad experiences in education. Mark says: “We really do understand that some of our foundation students haven't been in a learning environment for a while and may be nervous and apprehensive, so we offer a lot of support and help when they first come here.”

The foundation course is designed to assist students in getting up to speed for a degree course at Goldsmiths. It gives students a broad training on how a computer works at its most fundamental level and an understanding of how to use software and mathematics to problem-solve, as well as providing the opportunity for students to design and implement their own software . Students who pass the Foundation Year are automatically offered a place onto an undergraduate degree in the department.

Kyron Rogers, who completed the Foundation last year and is now in the first year of his BSc computer science degree, says: “I wasn’t that confident about going back into education but they [the department] were very helpful and the foundation year seemed like a good stepping stone to a degree.”

Students on the course often come from a variety of different backgrounds and the department has a friendly and inclusive atmosphere. Jayanthi Suhamar, 18, who is currently on the course, was particularly surprised by this: “I’ve made a really good bunch of friends here, and we all help each other out if we get confused at points.”

Jayanthi completed a GNVQ in IT before studying at Goldsmiths and knew that she liked computing but wasn’t prepared for how much she’d enjoy it: “It’s so different from how I imagined. I expected a lot of people just typing away in front of a computer, but it’s much more in-depth and interactive than that.”

Jayanthi, like many other students was initially worried about programming, which she found hard at first. “I didn’t like it to begin with, but I now love it and actually take extra books out of the library on Java.” She also enjoys the maths, in particular the binary coding.

Although the course may sound very technical and mathematical there is a very strong emphasis on using computers creatively. Jayanthi is particularly fascinated by media graphics and visuals and is considering the Creative Computing Degree, the only one of its kind in the UK, at Goldsmiths next year.

Mark d’Inverno says: “Goldsmiths Computing Department is one of Europe’s leading research centres for using technology in a creative and innovative way”.

This is reflected in the large amount of money the department has attracted for its research programmes – well over £5 million - which focus on

interdisciplinary projects that explore how computing can be applied in an artistic and musical as well as a purely scientific way.

As Mark notes: “Traditionally, computing has been seen as rather uncreative and geeky, but actually to build good software is highly creative and if our students have the technological training and the confidence to apply their ideas in innovative ways they can have a huge impact on society.

“We also know there’s a shortage of skilled IT professionals who can think creatively in the industry – so there really is a job market out there for the kinds of graduates we are aiming to produce.”

Therefore, there are many opportunities available for students after finishing their degrees. As well as more traditional job roles associated with computing in the software industry, there is plenty of scope for careers in the creative industries such as post production, video, media and film.

In the future, Kyron hopes to work on system analysis in businesses and would eventually like to combine his passion for aviation with computing while Jayanthi is looking forward to starting her degree in the autumn.

Mark adds: “Ultimately we hope the foundation course will give the students the skills, self-confidence and self-belief to develop their technological and creative skills and feel confident about studying at degree level. What’s great is that the majority of my students are looking forward to their degree next year – that has to be the best signal that the foundation year really does work.”

There are still places available for the foundation course starting this September. To find out more or to apply, please contact the admissions tutor at computing@gold.ac.uk or call 020 7919 7850.