

## Visual appeal

Students in A&M's Viz Lab amaze peers by mixing computers, art

By BETH MULDOON  
THE BATTALION

For graduate student Barbara Ellison, the best part about working with the Texas A&M Visualization Lab, or Viz Lab, is the valuable experience she gains to prepare her for the job market.

"Getting to discuss techniques and getting critiques on my work both from my adviser and from other students is really helpful," Ellison said. "It's nice to have feedback and guidance."

While there are numerous topics in the Viz Lab, Ellison chose to work on a single idea. She is writing her thesis on computer software that creates lifelike clothing for digital characters.

"Any clothing that isn't simple clothing is very difficult to make on the computer," Ellison said. "So I am working with the A&M theater department for perspective on how to make what the computer does with clothing look more real."

The Viz Lab is a graduate school program at A&M that focuses on modeling, animation, graphics, design and hyper-media networking. In layman's terms, they work on creating software and animations like those from Pixar Animation Studios and Dreamworks Pictures.

As with any graduate student, classes consume most of her time in a given day. Ellison said some students work up to 80 hours per week in the Viz Lab to complete their thesis.

"I am nearing the end of my schooling, so I am only taking five hours of classes right now," Ellison said. "But I put in about 40 hours per week just working in the Viz Lab on my thesis project."

Ellison added that near the end of each semester, it is not uncommon to find students sleeping in the Viz Lab, trying to catch up on their work.

"People bring their own bedding to sleep down there," Ellison said. "Especially when it's late in the semester."

Dr. Donald House is a professor, coordinator and graduate adviser for the Viz Lab.

"I like working with the students one on one," House said. "It's fun to help both the older and brand new students because they are such different stages in the process for Viz Lab."

House said there are four different areas for Viz Lab students to focus, including animation (the most popular), technical work, video graphics and multimedia.

"Everyone gets involved in the animation aspect because students are required to take at least one animation class," House said. "But aside from that, it's a very compelling area to work in, and it's also the most visible."

Many students who graduate from the Viz Lab obtain jobs at companies like Pixar, Blue Sky, Industrial Light and Magic, and Dreamworks.

"One of my current students works for Pixar in California and is working on his thesis here at the Viz Lab at the same time," House

said. "He is working on a computer program for crayon writing in animated films."

House said each student will take from six months to a year to complete his or her thesis.

As a professor, Dr. Carol La Fayette teaches introductory art, videography and advanced video courses.

"I joined the Viz faculty in 1999 because of the combination of art and computers," La Fayette said. "I teach art courses for technical folks."

Many educators join the Viz Lab faculty because of the vast opportunities. For La Fayette, the interaction of student and teacher pulled her into the program.

"The level of intelligence, motivation and drive of the students is particularly wonderful to interact with," La Fayette said. "It is always a challenge."

La Fayette said the unique combination of computer science and fine art courses is rare in an educational program; most universities house these programs in separate departments. This was one of the things that compelled her to work in the Viz Lab.

Like many educators and undergraduates, countless graduate students are drawn from across the country to come to the Viz Lab.

"I went to the University of Texas to get my undergraduate degree in architecture," Ellison said. "I came to A&M because it was one of the top programs on Pixar's list of schools; also because the program here gives a balanced education with both programming and art classes."

For those students who are admitted into the Viz Lab program, which House said, is 16 to 20 students per year, the possibilities are endless.

"My ultimate goal for my students would be to have them discover what is really unique in themselves," House said.

"We love to tap into what makes them tick and what interests them."

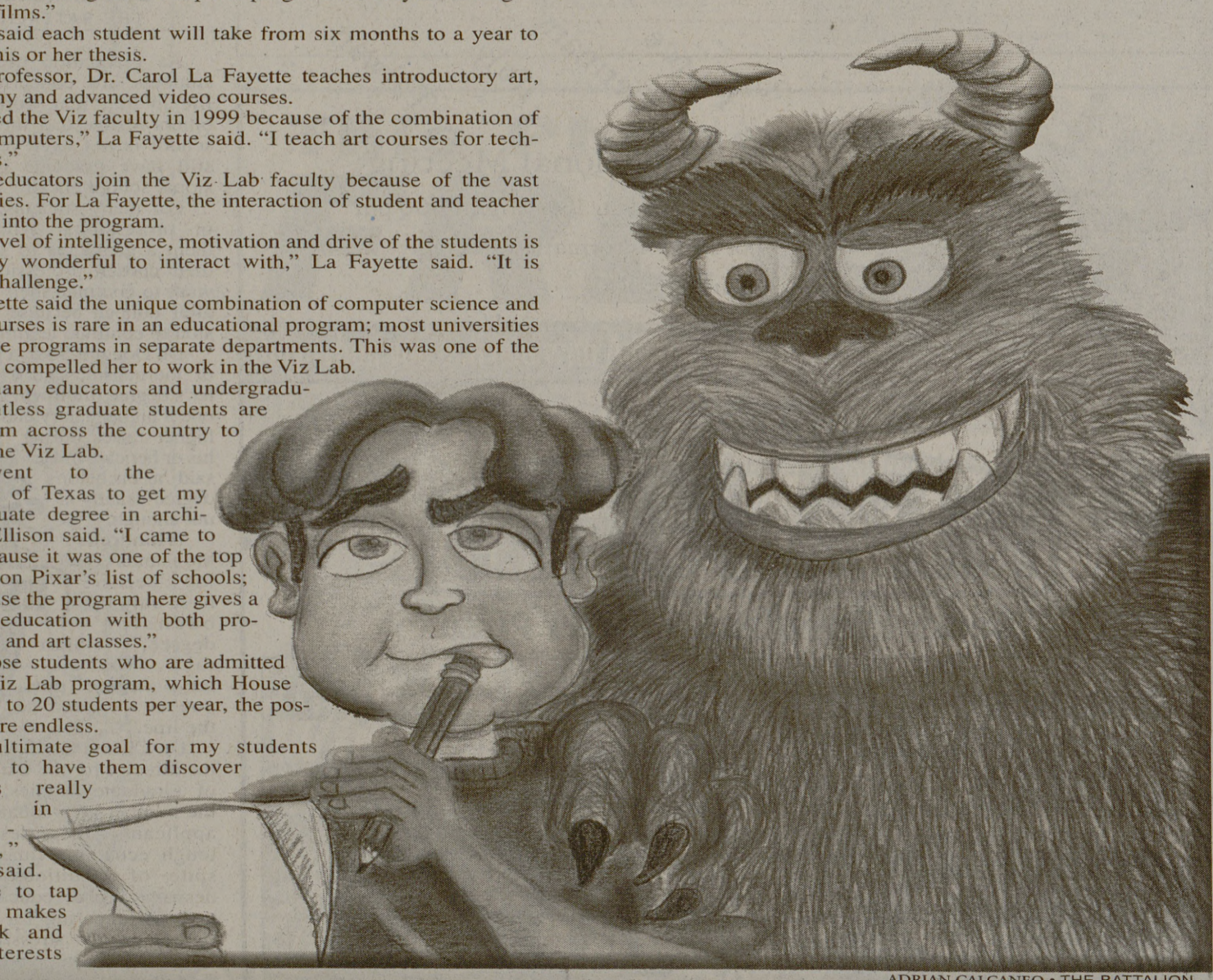
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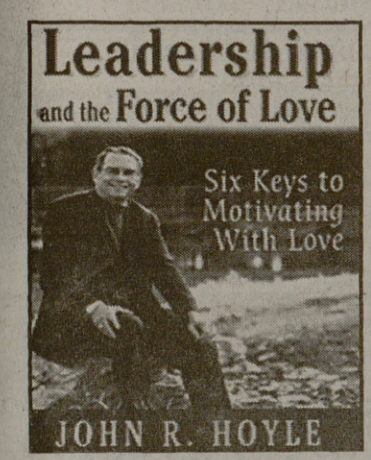


ADRIAN CALCANEO • THE BATTALION

Tuesday, November 27th at 11:30a.m.

# John R. Hoyle

Signing copies of his book —  
*Leadership and the Force of Love: Six Keys to Motivating with Love*



John R. Hoyle is a Professor in the Department of Educational Administration at Texas A&M University and visionary author of the bestselling book *Leadership and Futuring: Making Visions Happen*. His inspirational new book, *Leadership and the Force of Love: Six Keys to Motivating With Love* masterfully illustrates that love is the key to success in any industry, from classrooms to boardrooms.

Hoyle explains how leaders in any field can inspire others to greatness by enacting six important principles all based on love. He shows how using love in visioning, communicating, teamworking, empowering, mentoring, and evaluating are necessary factors for any leader to be successful.

As part of our Author Series at The Texas A&M Bookstore, John R. Hoyle will sign copies of his book *Leadership and the Force of Love* on Tuesday, November 27th from 11:30a.m. to 1:30p.m. This event is open to the public.

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