BRIGHT FUTURE 3D

SCAD VSFX

VS

The VFX Industry

From my personal experience from 2019-2022, from high expectations to experiencing massive learning gaps and misleading outcomes, to providing guidance and advice to other aspiring artists on how to navigate the VFX industry.

Chase Baker

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Learning gaps, advice, and guidance

By Chase Baker

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About this guide:

This is a guide to give you some helpful tips and advice when creating or updating your portfolio and what to expect when applying for jobs, having interviews, and more. In this guide I provide examples of my resume, work, etc. and show how they helped me get started in the visual effects industry. The information may be biased and may or may not be accurate or helpful to everyone, but I wanted to share my thoughts, opinions, and experiences so far. I will probably add more to this document with more experience over time.

Reality of the VFX industry:

Breaking into the visual effects industry can be tough. You have to present yourself well and prove that you can get the job done. At times you apply to dozens of jobs and get rejected by most of them, other times you contact many recruiters on LinkedIn and get nothing back. It's not easy, and can be frustrating. I encourage you to keep learning more about visual effects, creating more work, expanding your network, and being persistent in your job search.

Advice for college students:

For college students, I encourage you to learn as much as you can in school about your field, not necessarily all in class, but also by yourself. Do what makes you happy, and keep striving to become a better version of yourself.

College can sometimes feel long and may limit you on projects, software, hardware, etc. Being self taught can open up a lot of doors for learning, future opportunities, and problem solving. From my experience getting my BFA (Bachelor's in Fine Arts) in VSFX at SCAD (Savannah College of Art and Design) Savannah campus and virtual in June 2022, I feel that they teach students only a sliver of what the industry expects you to know for an entry level artist, and it's a lot of money. Yes you are going to a good school with a great reputation, but do you have the necessary skills to get the job done in the industry when you graduate?

I encourage you to keep learning, keep working, be persistent, be confident, and keep going.

Tips and Advice for Your Work and Reel

Work that stands out: I feel that students and VFX artists should create work that is unique, stands out, and something that people and recruiters haven't seen a lot of before. This work can be personal, or for a studio class. Having this kind of work can keep a recruiter's attention, shows your passion, and shows that you're willing to try new things and overcome challenges.

School projects and limitations: From my experience at SCAD, there is some creative freedom for school projects, but there may be limitations and constraints that limit the students' creativity and prevent them from doing something that could make it a great portfolio piece. A student may have a great idea for a project, but due to the project requirements they have to dial back the project scope and do what the project rules say, limiting their creativity.

Don't feel limited: Don't feel limited by what people say. Don't feel limited by the class curriculum or project rules. If you have a cool idea for something, go for it. Sometimes those ideas include big simulations and require a lot of computing power. I understand not everyone has a powerful computer, but see what you can do with what you have. This project can be outside of class too.

What recruiters look for: Recruiters look for talent, professionalism, willingness to learn, and experience. Having strong portfolio pieces can show that you love what you do and that you have a good skill set. Having prior experience with an internship or something else is also helpful.

Style focused work: It's also a good thing to show projects that you're passionate about, that align with the work you want to do more of, and that are closely related to the company(s) work that you're wanting to work for. If you want to work at a specific company, I suggest you create work that aligns with their work or reel. Do you like doing photo realistic work or stylized work? Are you a 3D modeler or a compositor? It's good to know these things so that you can create work that aligns with that specialty and helps recruiters know what you do best.

Be comfortable with contract instead of full-time when starting out:
Some VFX studios and recruiters want to hire you as a "contract" or "freelance" employee. They do this to test you out, see how much you know, how you adapt to their schedule and workflows, and if you're a good fit. They may extend your contract if you're doing well, or even hire you full time with benefits.

I was not very familiar with contract VFX positions during my senior VFX classes at SCAD (First half of 2022) as I was taught to look mainly for full-time staff positions. It wasn't until after graduation that a recruiter at a VFX studio told me about how they and other studios were hiring at the time (contract), which then led to my first job. Knowing industry hiring trends outside of school can be helpful when job searching.

The Journey of Applying for Jobs

***The visual effects industry is difficult to break into and work in, with all the work and deadlines involved. It is extremely competitive. You can be going up against hundreds or thousands of artists applying for jobs with a variety of skill levels and talent.

Recruiters are going through dozens if not hundreds of emails, resumes and applications per day so it can take some time for them to get back to you.

It can take **hours, days, weeks, or months** for you to get a rejection email, a response, or nothing from the recruiting team, **so don't wait** but **keep going by applying and reaching out**.

Recruiters/hiring team may reject your application early without letting you know, keeping you waiting for a response, and narrowing down the right candidate for the position. Then they may send it far after you applied when the job is filled or something else. Recruiters are messengers. They just let you know the decision. The hiring and VFX teams look and decide who would be the best fit for a position.

Some important words I want to say for anyone trying to find a job is to have **patience, passion, and perseverance**.

- Be patient when applying for jobs, waiting for responses, going through the interview processes, etc. It can be exhausting.
- Have passion for the work that you do. Strive to keep improving your skills and talent, and **love what you do**.
- Have perseverance, keep learning and working while applying for jobs, show that you're willing to learn more and add to your skill set. It's ok to reach back out to recruiters every once in a while, don't be annoying, but just to see if they have any open positions.

Advice for Junior Entry-Level Artists who are searching for jobs/work:

- Keep doing personal work that stands out, or team up with some friends and do a group project (personal creativity to learn new things, shows team collaboration).
- Do freelance work for clients with Freelancer, Fiverr, Upwork, or LinkedIn connections
- Connect with recruiters, supervisors, and artists on LinkedIn to grow your network
- Post your work on LinkedIn, add some hashtags, and show your passion (This can open up some opportunities)

These will help you to build a portfolio, network with people, and gain some experience.

Resumes, Reels, and Websites

Resume

Style:

Contact Info:
email
location (City/State)
phone number,
other media with portfolio links

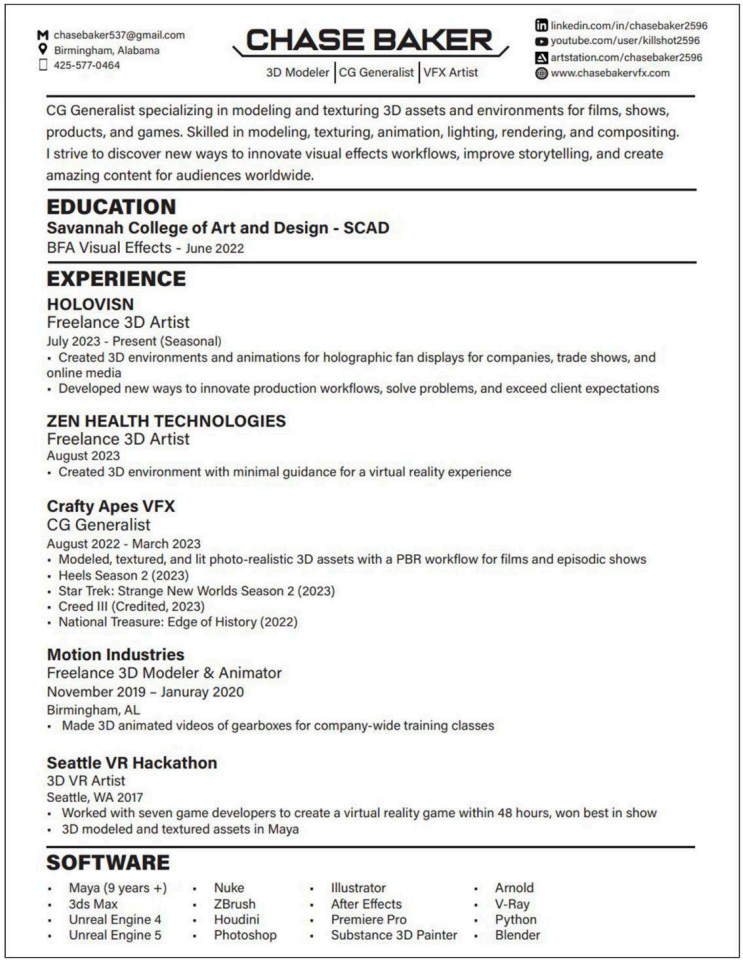
Name and Position/Role

About Me:
Brief overview of what I do, my skill set, and aspirations or goals.

Structure: Providing relevant info about my education and degree, experience, software, etc.

Easy To Read Text/Format:
Having a good format and text font helps the viewer look through your resume faster.

Printable:
By not having large color graphics, it makes it easier to print using less ink.



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CHASE BAKER

3D Modeler | CG Generalist | VFX Artist

linkedin.com/in/chasebaker2596
youtube.com/user/killshot2596
artstation.com/chasebaker2596
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CG Generalist specializing in modeling and texturing 3D assets and environments for films, shows, products, and games. Skilled in modeling, texturing, animation, lighting, rendering, and compositing. I strive to discover new ways to innovate visual effects workflows, improve storytelling, and create amazing content for audiences worldwide.

EDUCATION

Savannah College of Art and Design - SCAD
BFA Visual Effects - June 2022

EXPERIENCE

HOLOVISN
Freelance 3D Artist
July 2023 - Present (Seasonal)
- Created 3D environments and animations for holographic fan displays for companies, trade shows, and online media
- Developed new ways to innovate production workflows, solve problems, and exceed client expectations

ZEN HEALTH TECHNOLOGIES
Freelance 3D Artist
August 2023
- Created 3D environment with minimal guidance for a virtual reality experience

Crafty Apes VFX
CG Generalist
August 2022 - March 2023
- Modeled, textured, and lit photo-realistic 3D assets with a PBR workflow for films and episodic shows
- Heels Season 2 (2023)
- Star Trek: Strange New Worlds Season 2 (2023)
- Creed III (Credited, 2023)
- National Treasure: Edge of History (2022)

Motion Industries
Freelance 3D Modeler & Animator
November 2019 – January 2020
Birmingham, AL
- Made 3D animated videos of gearboxes for company-wide training classes

Seattle VR Hackathon
3D VR Artist
Seattle, WA 2017
- Worked with seven game developers to create a virtual reality game within 48 hours, won best in show
- 3D modeled and textured assets in Maya

SOFTWARE

Maya (9 years +)	Nuke	Illustrator	Arnold
3ds Max	ZBrush	After Effects	V-Ray
Unreal Engine 4	Houdini	Premiere Pro	Python
Unreal Engine 5	Photoshop	Substance 3D Painter	Blender

Avoid:

Home address

Profile picture

Distracting large colorful logos

hard to read fonts

Ratings, progress bars on skills

Two or more pages (Junior artists)

Grammar and spelling issues

Dark or gradient background (uses more ink when printed)

Rotated/slanted style and text formats

Tips and Advice:

Keep it easy to read (legible) . Try to avoid stylized fonts that have sci-fi, abstract, cursive elements ***such as this***, and *this that could make it harder to read*. Having these types of fonts can easily turn away a recruiter.

Well Organized and Formatted. Having a good structure with multiple sections, clean and aligned formatting can help a recruiter look through your resume easier and more efficiently.

Minimal to no logos or graphics. Keep it simple, and to the point. Having a large logo and graphics can distract from the rest of the resume. I've heard from people that recruiters and hiring managers hire a name, not a logo. Put software as text, not logos.

Use good strong words and expand your experience. Using good vocabulary in your resume can make it sound better and more professional. Expanding your descriptions with more detail can help describe a role better. You can also talk about your accomplishments and anything that you achieved from a prior experience. **I also highly recommend tailoring your resume to every job you apply for with relevant experience.**

VFX Reel

Style:

Title Screen: Have the first thing be your name, role, and 'reel' (optional). You can put a date on it as well (Should be short, about 2-5 seconds). You can also make it look a little fancy with graphics but keep it easy to read.

Your work: Put your best work first. If you're a generalist, consider putting what you specialize in at the front. You can also think about what stands out the most, what is most visually appealing to the eye. You want to capture and "Wow" the audience and keep their attention. If you have industry work, you should put that first. Putting in breakdowns are also helpful.

Caption: What I did on the project

Title of Project

Software used: Logo or text

Avoid:

Long extensive intro

Intense distracting loud music, also with vocals

Over 3 minutes

No contact information

Too much words in title, caption

Showing work that you're not proud of.

Every piece of student work (good and bad).

Really noisy renders

Bad inappropriate language

Tips and Advice:

Keep it short (Less than 2 min): Having your reel this length can help narrow down your work into what works best and shows your talent.

Quality over quantity: Showing just a few great pieces of work can be enough to get you the job. It can be better than having more pieces that may look incomplete or lack the quality recruiters are looking for.

Labeling: You can title each piece, and say what you did. If you did everything, it's ok to say 'All Aspects', but if you downloaded something from other websites, you can mention that as well. Putting the software you used as logos or words is also helpful and lets the recruiter know your skillset.

Breakdowns: Including breakdowns help the recruiter and team have a better understanding of your process for the project. These include turntables, wireframes, simulations, node trees, etc.

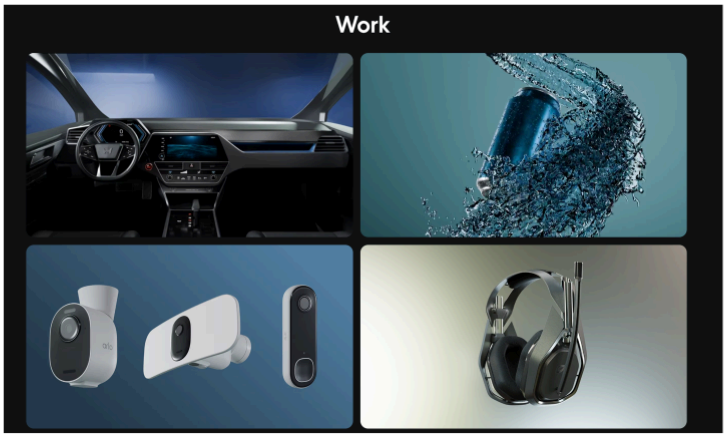
Multiple Reels: It's also ok to have more than one reel. You can have a 3D modeling reel, and the other for FX, or one for photorealistic work, and one for stylized work, etc. You can share these reels with specific job postings as well.

Website

Style:

Format: Have your website work, be easy to navigate, and load fast. You can share media links, and add pages with different content.

Mobile: It's good to optimize your website for viewing on your phone. It helps to keep the viewer's attention, rather than taking time to switch to a desktop for a better viewing experience.



Avoid:

Broken links

Confusing website design

Slow loading of content

Difficulty navigating pages

No contact information

No mobile optimization

Not having links to reel and resume

Really noisy renders

Bad inappropriate language

Tips and Advice:

You can have a custom Wix website, a Behance, or an ArtStation website.

Have a working website: If your link is broken, it could turn away a recruiter. You can also have your own domain.

Easy to navigate: Have pages easily readable and have a good layout. Try it on your phone too.

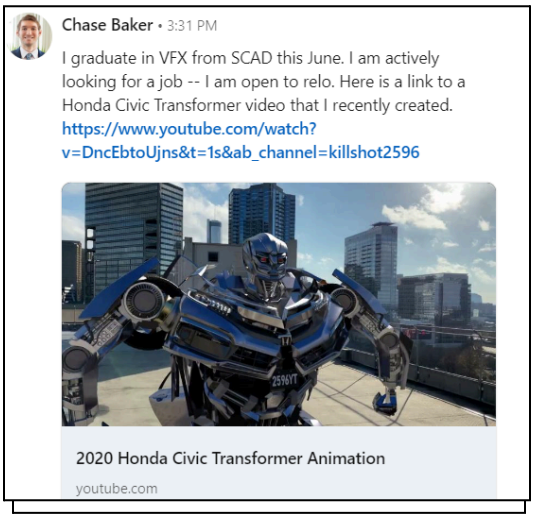
Keep it up to date: Updating your website can show that you're active and working on more content.

Platform: You can choose between Wix, Squarespace, or another platform, and test it out on both a PC and phone.

(At this time, my website is www.brightfuture3d.com, it's the website for my company called Bright Future 3D LLC)

LinkedIn/Indeed/Applying for Jobs

LinkedIn:



Connections: Try to connect with as many recruiters/talent acquisition, VFX supervisors and artists as you can to grow your network. If you're looking for a job and connect with a recruiter, you can add a note saying something short and nice letting them know who you are and what position you're looking for. You can also add a link to your work.

This may lead to:
-no response
-'thanks for reaching out, let's keep in touch',
-'I'll send this to our team and see if you'd be a good fit'
-'send me your reel and resume to my email'
-something else

This conversation can be continued through an email and go on from there. Be nice, confident, and professional with your approach.

Jobs: Apply for jobs on LinkedIn, some that may look interesting, and some that match closely to what you're looking for. There may be hundreds of applicants, but you could apply anyway. Some jobs redirect you to their company website, and others are an 'Easy Apply', letting you go through a few steps to submit your application. You can also add job alerts and put in key words such as 'vfx artist' and '3d artist' to narrow your search.

Posts: You can also post your work on LinkedIn with a good description, images, links, and hashtags. The more people you connect with, and the hashtags you put in can bring in a lot of views, connection requests, reactions, comments, reposts and more. Try to post content, comment, and react to posts frequently, showing that you're active and staying connected.

Indeed Jobs: Although I do not have much experience with Indeed, it can also be a good place to apply for jobs based in the United States.

What to Look For in Job Descriptions:

Description/Summary: Look through the description thoroughly and see if what they are describing matches closely to what you want to do.

This is a job description from LinkedIn posted by Sony Pictures Animation for the CG Generalist (FX) position.

I have heard before that these
-Can be seen as a wishlist
-If you have at least half of the qualifications or requirements, you should apply for it.

Responsibilities:

- Report to the VFX Supervisor
- Design, animate, light, and composite high quality effects
- Modeling, Surface, and some Rigging
- Research, Develop and implement New Techniques

Qualifications:

- Good understanding of a wide range of skills in Maya
- General skills in FX sims
- Knowledge of Houdini and Mash
- Experience in various areas of the pipeline including assets and effects
- Python scripting abilities are a bonus
- USD knowledge (willingness to learn is a bonus as well)
- Unreal Engine skills (willingness to learn is a bonus as well)

If you're a generalist, they may have jobs such as 'FX Generalist', or 'Lighting Generalist', and those are ok to apply to as well. Sometimes, recruiters look at your resume and or reel and think you might be a better fit for another role in the company.

It's also good to keep a spreadsheet of all the companies you've applied to, the rejections, responses, interviews, etc. to keep track of how you're doing.

Salary/Pay: Consider the amount and see what works for you. Keep in mind where the job is located if onsite, hybrid, or remote as the cost of living in that area might be more or less expensive.

Relevancy of Cover Letters and Business Cards

Some companies require and read cover letters for job applications, while others may just want to see your resume and reel. I recommend that you should have a short intro on your resume explaining your skill set and what you can do.

They may be more common with various companies in different parts of the world. They also may require a CV (Curriculum vitae).

I feel that business cards are good to have if you go to meetings, conferences, etc. in person. If you're meeting with people, connecting with different companies, I think it's a good way for them to have something physically to remember and contact you in the future. You can also share your website with them or a QR code.

Career Fairs

Career fairs can be fun, but can also feel competitive and intimidating. You may be a student, you're looking for opportunities, and want to present yourself well in interviews. If it's onsite, the process of navigating through large crowds, waiting in long lines, and preparing for interviews can be stressful.

I think the same goes with a virtual career fair as well. Trying to schedule a time to meet with an industry professional, and presenting your work can make you feel very nervous.

Career fairs are meant to have you learn more about the companies and industries you're interested in, not necessarily getting a job from it, although if you get a job, then that's great. Industry professionals that attend these career fairs can give you great feedback about your work, talk about their company, and give great advice for how to prepare for the industry.

Don't feel bad if you didn't get an internship or job offer after a career fair, rather it's about learning about different opportunities, and getting feedback from industry professionals. It can be great interview practice as well.

Interviews

Attire and Background: You can wear something casual, professional, but you shouldn't wear anything inappropriate. For video calls, the background should not be distracting. If it is, you could blur it with a built-in tool. Have a good microphone as well. Wearing large headphones is also ok.

Interviews and answering questions (My ideas and experience):

- Have a good attitude, and it's ok to be nervous. Just be calm.
- Practice common interview questions before the interview and have your answers ready.
- Getting an interview means you're qualified. They're just seeing if you're a good fit.
- Change your perspective: If you feel intimidated and super nervous, instead say to yourself *"These could potentially be the people that I work with if I get the job"*.
- Try to match the interviewer's level in terms of calmness. You may feel more comfortable and relaxed. It's just a conversation.
- Look for signs of a good healthy culture. Do they seem happy or worn out? Ask them what a work day looks like? Work hours? Flexible time? Ask yourself if these are the people that you would want to work with.
- They want to learn more about you and what you can do, they're interested in you, so I encourage you to share your passion and experiences related to your field.
- Don't speak too fast and keep most of your answers concise and the point.
- When answering questions, I prefer quality over quantity: it's better to answer a question well and to the point, than to say somewhat related answers for a longer time. It's ok to talk about an experience for a longer time if it matches the role responsibilities well.
- They also may ask questions related to the job description. They're checking to see if you're qualified and a good fit. Be honest if you're not familiar with something, but you can say you're willing to learn it for the role.
- If you've had some experience in the past, consider talking about not just your responsibilities at your previous role, but also what you accomplished, built, invented or innovated upon, etc. It's more powerful to say and it shows you were diligent, successful, overcame challenges, or went above and beyond.
- They may ask about your reel and want you to explain your work, so be prepared.
- The interviewers that I've talked to before have been nice, relaxed, chill, cool, and open to answer any questions.
- End with a couple good questions that relate to the company or role you're applying to. It's ok to write down their answers.
- **Important:** After the interview, within 24 hours, send them a message, either an email, or through LinkedIn, thanking them for their time. You should personalize it as well. It's classy, respectful, and shows professionalism.

Ways to answer interview questions:

Q: “Tell me a little bit about yourself.” Or “Would you like to introduce yourself?”

(I’ve answered this in a few stages: 1. Your name, 2. Current location, 3. Student or recent grad, 4. Passion for your field, 5. What you’re looking for)

A1 (Recent grad): “Hi, I’m Chase Baker, I’m currently in Birmingham, Alabama. I graduated from the Savannah College of Art and Design or SCAD with a bachelor’s degree in visual effects last year. I absolutely love what I do, I have a huge passion for visual effects, and I’m looking for opportunities in VFX.”

A2 (Student): “Hi, I’m Chase Baker, I’m currently a Senior at the Savannah College of Art and Design or SCAD in Savannah. I graduate in June with a bachelor’s degree in VFX. I absolutely love what I do, I have a huge passion for visual effects, and I’m currently looking for opportunities (full-time, part-time, contract/freelance).

Q: “What is your pay rate, or salary expectations?”

(1. It’s good to be mindful that if you’re probably an entry level junior artist with little to no experience, that you should say a fair rate. This depends on the state you live in as well. If you’ve had a prior job or experience, it’s ok to say what your rate was, as that acts as an average or starting point. 2. You don’t want to say a high rate as it may be outside of their range and they may move on with another candidate. You also don’t want a low rate as you may not live comfortably.)
(I talk more about this on the next page.)

A1: “My minimum hourly rate is $22 an hour, but I would like to be paid fairly.”

(It’s ok to ask about the pay range as you probably want to know if the minimum and maximum will be enough to live comfortably with taxes taken out)

A2(Prior experience): “At ‘Company name’, I made ‘$X’ an hour (or year), and so for this position, I’m flexible but I would like to be paid fairly.”

(For A2: You can say a reasonably higher rate than your previous role, but just confirm that it’s still in range for that role. Sometimes you can say a higher rate than their range and negotiate as well.)

Pay Rates, Salaries, and Locations

Pay is important when looking for a job in the industry. You want to keep a few things in mind.

- Location of where you're working (remote or onsite/hybrid)
- Living expenses (housing, food, utility bills, transportation, etc.)
- Savings (How much you want to save from each paycheck)
- Taxes (Usually at least 20% of your income)
- Inflation and interest rates

With all of this in mind, you want to think carefully about pay rates for the job. You probably shouldn't request too high pay or else the recruiter may skip you and move onto the next candidate. You also shouldn't request too low as you may not make enough to pay for housing, food, etc.

A good starting value for junior entry level artists in the industry in an **inexpensive state** would be about **$35-45/hr or $72.8K-93.6K/year** (estimating $56.7K-73K after 22% taxes).

If you were living in an **expensive state** like California or New York (28% tax example), it would be reasonable to make at least **$45-60/hr or $93.6K-124K/year** (estimating $67.3K-82.9K after taxes). This may change due to inflation, taxes, etc.

*Good to Know:

- **Sometimes, recruiters, HR, and hiring managers want to hire the best talent at the lowest price possible**.
- If you're just starting out, they will probably go with the lower ranges because of your limited experience.
- Sometimes if you have a strong reel and did well in the interview(s) and they really want you, then you can negotiate a higher rate even with limited experience.

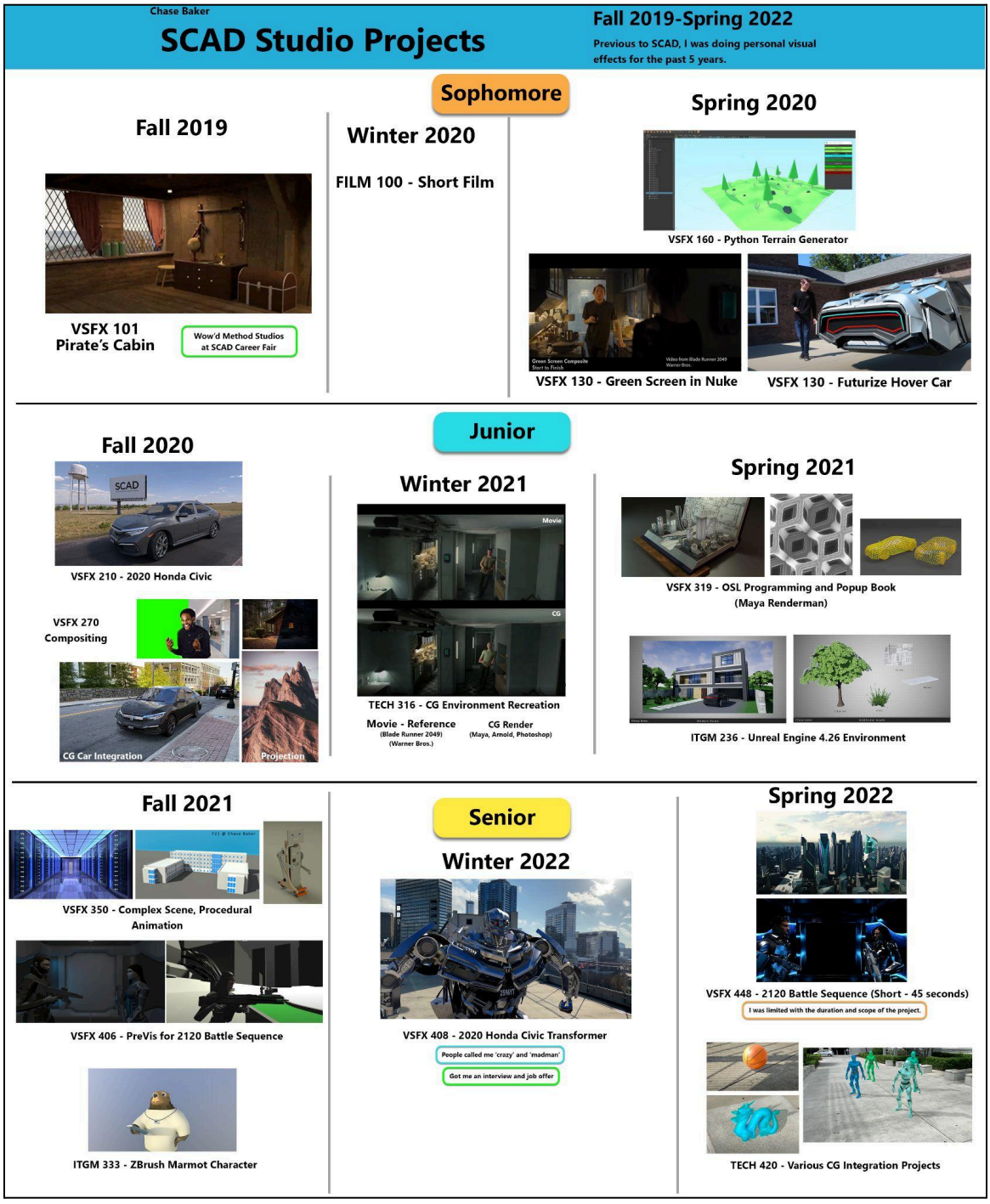
Budgeting: You can also make a spreadsheet of some pay rates, and calculate how much everything would cost. This may be a good idea depending on where the job is located and how much the cost of living is there if it's an onsite or hybrid position. It's still good to budget even for a remote position.

Salaries and Benefits: If you are or get hired as a full time employee, then they may give you a salary (which may be higher than a previous hourly pay rate) with benefits. This means you may work on projects for longer because you're not getting paid per hour, but is more like a fixed paycheck, usually biweekly. You also may get company benefits, insurance, and other perks.

Student Work from SCAD - What I Learned:

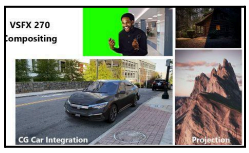
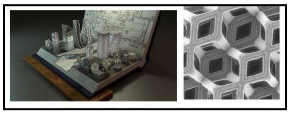
Below are graphic charts showing the studio classes I took at SCAD, what I learned and did from each class, and what helped me get my first job in the VFX industry.

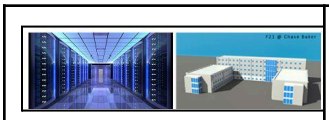
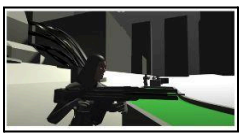
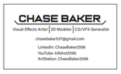
Video Version Here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99JCJv4WvYM&ab_channel=killshot2596



SCAD VSFX Curriculum 2019-2022

This chart shows the main things that I learned from each VSFX class I took at SCAD, as well as my opinions and concerns.

	**VSFX 101 - Survey of Visual Effects:** VFX vocab terms, watched documentaries, first VFX Supervision opportunity for final project.
	**VSFX 130 - VFX-based Cinematography:** Watched videos of camera equipment, went over basic Maya and Nuke skills (modeling, tracking, green screen). I was limited with project requirements and unnecessary aspects from project rules.
	**VSFX 160 - Intro to VFX Programming:** Basic Python programming. Created a UI that creates a procedural low poly terrain. Great professor. I feel this class should have been optional. Programming in VFX isn't always required.
	**VSFX 210 - Digital Visual Effects:** Basic box modeling in Maya (I did patch modeling), basic NURBS modeling, little bit of Arnold and Maya Software renderers. I wanted to learn about UVs, PBR texturing, high poly SubD workflows, animation, and ways to clean/optimize topology by avoiding Ngons, and non-manifold geometry, which we didn't learn, but are essential in the industry.
	**VSFX 270 - Compositing:** Beginner Nuke skills, many different nodes, workflows, day for night, green screen, projection, and 3D camera tracking. I wanted to learn how to rotoscope or rotopaint objects out of a shot (wires, props) as well as compositing multiple layers of subjects into a shot.
	**TECH 316 - Digital Lighting and Rendering (1 of 2 Classes):** More Arnold lighting and rendering skills, CG environment modeling and texturing. Briefly learned about color tones, perspectives, shot composition, and mood alterations. I was limited and wanted to have the ability to pick from other movies (not just Roger Deakins), and wanted to learn more about PBR texturing and materials.
 	**VSFX 319 - Programming Models and Shaders I:** Beginner level OSL coding, Renderman, and SEM rendering. Renderman was interesting to learn about. I was confused with the purpose of each assignment. Why learn OSL? Why do SEM renders? Why should we learn this for the industry?

 	**VSFX 350 - Procedural Modeling and Animation Techniques:** Good amount of Houdini skills. Learned different nodes, HScript, Mantra, parameters, and procedural animation. I wanted to learn about particles, explosions (FX), do keyframe animation, and focus on projects that align with industry uses. I wanted to choose what I wanted to learn in Houdini and not have to take a prerequisite.
 	**VSFX 406 - Concept Development of VFX:** Created a previsualization (PreVis). Decent amount of project pitch skills, storyboards, mood boards, etc. for senior project(s). I feel that the content taught in this class could be integrated with a Studio I or II class. I understand the development process, but maybe have it be more collaborative, focusing on budgeting, resources, etc.
	**VSFX 408 - Visual Effects Studio I:** Created a Honda Civic Transformer Animation. I had lots of creative freedom in this project and learned a lot "by myself". I received good feedback from the professor and classmates. This class and Studio II are very similar in terms of structure. The professor was great. Although I had fun working on this project, I thought that studio classes meant you would be learning a lot more advanced aspects of visual effects, such as integrating FX with Maya, learning another renderer, or learning more about a field/specialty. I feel like this was more of a personal project that could have been done at home, and again, paying a lot of money for this class. People thought I was crazy, but this got me an interview and an offer.
  	**VSFX 409 - Professional Development for Visual Effects:** Improved my resume, made business cards, a website, cover letter, thank you letter, and a demo reel. Learned more about interviewing, professional skills, budgeting, searching for jobs, etc. Very good class. I wanted to learn more about current hiring trends, what to do when laid off/furloughed, struggling to find jobs, etc. I was not familiar with "contract" positions. I'm also not sure if business cards or cover letters should be taught as much. Logos should be optional on resumes and websites.
 	**VSFX 448 - Visual Effects Studio 2:** Created a 45 second video of the 2120 Battle Sequence. I learned a lot more about Houdini FX sims, character creation, V-Ray, rigging, compositing, and more "by myself", and enjoyed the project. I was extremely limited on this project. I could only do 45 seconds, not the full version (over 5 minutes). Two weeks after graduation, I completed the full project by myself. This is another project that could have been done at home. This project got me a better offer and I was hired in the industry.

Chase Baker

Before & After SCAD Learning Comparison

Previous to SCAD, I was doing personal visual effects for the past 5 years.

This graphic chart shows what I had learned before coming to SCAD, during my time at SCAD, and what the industry uses and expects from candidates and employees (as far as I know)

Beginner (Basics)
Intermediate (Comfortable, More Complex Projects)
Advanced (Very Complex Projects)

Self Taught
SCAD Taught

Before SCAD

Modeling/Animation Software

Intermediate/Self Taught (Comfortable, More Complex Projects)

Adobe Apps

Intermediate (Comfortable, More Complex Projects), learned from past Graphic Design classes.

Sculpting

Beginner/Self Taught (Basics)

Renderers

Intermediate/Self Taught (Comfortable, More Complex Projects)

Beginner/Self Taught (Basics)

Professional Skills

Beginner - Basic interview skills, professional, basic resume

During SCAD
BFA VSFX

Modeling/Animation Software

Intermediate - I learned about UVs, basic python programming, basic PBR material workflows.

NEW Beginner - Great professor, learned procedural modeling and animatin workflows.

Adobe Apps

Intermediate - Did not learn much more. Taught myself more about Premiere Pro and Substance Painter.

NEW

Sculpting

Beginner - Great class/professor, but not my primary software.

Renderers

Intermediate - I learned about PBR materials, lighting, refractions.

Beginner/Self Taught - I don't think SCAD taught V-Ray, so I taught myself how to use it for my senior projects.

NEW Beginner - Learned basic materials, lighting, and OSL programming.

NEW Beginner (UE4) - Learned basic world creation, lighting, materials, camera sequencer.

Compositing

NEW Beginner - Great professor, Learned basic roto, projection, green screen keying, and 3D tracking.

Professional Skills

Intermediate - Good interview skills, professional, better resume, website.

I wish SCAD taught me more about hiring trends, applying for jobs, competition.

After SCAD

Advanced/Self Taught

Beginner/Self Taught

Advanced/Self Taught

Intermediate/Self Taught

Beginner/Intermediate/Self Taught
Unreal Engine 5/5.1

I wish SCAD taught me more.

Industry Expectations

Overall Intermediate/Advanced

Average: at least 3+ years experience
Entry level/Juniors

Arnold
Flame
V-Ray
Renderman
Redshift
Clarisse
Marvelous Designer
Cinema 4D (Motion Graphics)

Experience so far in the VFX industry:

Work Schedule: When I started my first job in the VFX industry, it was a lot. I had to get comfortable with the work schedule being 9 to 5, 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, being remote. It can be tiring and difficult, but I persevered. It was much different from a normal day at school (SCAD). Be comfortable with minimal to no training when starting your job. They are testing your ability to get used to the company's workflow, and your ability to learn fast.

Problem Solving: A big part of my job is problem solving, and figuring stuff out. If I get stuck on something, I Google it, go on YouTube for some tutorials, or ask a colleague for help. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

Project Iterations: Prepare to make some mistakes and do a lot of iterations on projects. You're doing the work for your supervisor or client, not yourself. It's interesting because at school, you do what you want to do according to the project rules and do it to your liking (or the professor's), but in the industry you keep working on a project until they are happy with it or there's a deadline.

Good Understanding of Software: Be well rounded with your skills and know the software. Having a good solid understanding of how the software works can help speed up your workflow, solve problems quicker, and achieve better results. Practice a lot and learn new tools and techniques.

Be Okay with Work Getting Cut: Let's say you're working on a project, asset, or shot for weeks, months, or longer. You then discover later that it was cut from the movie or show. The studio decides to go a different route and cut out your shot(s). This can happen. It can happen a lot. It's important to remain calm, professional, understand the decision that's made, and move on.

Extra Notes: Be prepared to learn a lot. Don't think or assume you know everything about visual effects. We are all learning. It is also important to have a willingness to learn about new software and technologies to expand your skill set.

Having a thick skin while receiving feedback and criticism

When you're creating work for a school project, personal project, or an industry project, you'll probably receive either written or verbal feedback about your work. When receiving this feedback and criticism, it's **extremely important to stay professional** and have a thick skin. Some people will judge your work, say horrible things, and criticize it, others will be more

helpful and kind. Whatever it is, stay strong and don't take it personally. Good feedback is meant to help you improve your work. It's someone viewing your work and providing valuable feedback that you can use to improve your portfolio. Feedback is part of creating artwork in the industry, and if taken the wrong way with your reaction, it may tell them you're not easy to work with. You want to be easy and fun to work with.

Industry notes:

- Learn more about rendering engines (blend materials, shaders, etc.)
- They look for nice, talented people (entry level)
- They also like people who are easy to work with

Furloughs, Layoffs, and Strikes

What is a writer's strike: In early 2023, there were mentions of a "writer's strike" in the film industry. What that means is that writers choose not to write the scripts for productions because of disagreements with payments, royalties, etc. with publishers and studios, thus resulting in nothing being produced. If nothing gets produced, then the VFX studios don't have a lot of production work or money coming in, leading to lower revenue and higher expenses for all their employees and services. Therefore, the studios decide to furlough or lay off many employees in an attempt to decrease expenses.

There's also a Director's Guild and Screen Actors Guild strikes that can also affect the productions as much as completely shutting down the industry.

These furloughs and layoffs are not necessarily due to employee talent or performance, but to decrease the company's expenses because they're not making enough money. This will likely happen first to contract or freelance employees. It can also affect full time artists, HR, and supervisors regardless of how long they've stayed with the company. The longer these strikes are, the more likely these will occur.

Furlough: You are still employed at the company, but you are not working nor getting paid (or reduced hours). This can be for weeks, months, or an indefinite amount of time. You are also expected to return to work.

Layoff: You have been let go by the company and are not expected to come back.

My experience: When I got furloughed from my first VFX job in March 2023, it was a lot to process. I was on vacation when it happened. The day before, I saw other colleagues' posts on LinkedIn and thought I may have been affected as well. The next day I got the call confirming that I was furloughed indefinitely. It was a good experience and opportunity to work

on some cool projects with them and I was thinking about what would happen next, another job, freelance, or something else.

It's ok to rest and have a little break during these circumstances, but I encourage you to keep reaching out to people and applying for jobs on LinkedIn, keeping a good attitude, staying professional, and persevering through these difficult times. I understand there may be little to no paychecks for this time and you're trying to figure something out quickly.

Referrals: Being referred to by someone can go a long way, and open up some doors. It can lead to your next job, freelance project(s), etc. It's important to stay connected and keep in touch with school classmates and friends as they may know someone who might need an artist with a good skill set for a project.

Preparing for the Industry:

I thought this may be helpful for students, recent grads, or anybody else that wants to know an overview of the skills that are commonly used in the VFX industry so they can be prepared, based on my experience so far.

Personally, I specialize in 3D modeling, specifically hard surface modeling with a good understanding of 3D texturing. The other roles may be limited but maybe someone within that field could give an overview based on their experience.

Below are various VFX roles that I will go over with the skills you should acquire:

- 3D Modeler
- LookDev Texture Artist
- Rigger
- Animator
- FX Artist
- Lighting Artist
- Compositor

3D Modeler

Modeling Skills I was **taught at SCAD** (VSFX curriculum):

- Maya (primary software)
- Basic polygon modeling (No high poly SubD modeling)
- Little to no guidance for good topology
- Basic NURBS modeling
- Modeling from reference

More Modeling Skills **You Should Learn for the Industry** (**Not Learned in SCAD** VSFX curriculum):

- SubD modeling (High poly, both organic and hard surface)
- Good understanding of topology (avoiding Ngons, non-manifold geometry, poly count optimization, edge flow, etc.)
- Modeling from image reference and concept art
- Great understanding of proportions
- Adding details to show the asset's functionality or structural foundation
- Knowing what edge flow types work best for different shapes and deformations
- UV unwrapping skills
- UV optimization for texturing (layout, shell padding, texel density, UDIMS)
- Uses of creases
- Manual retopology (when necessary)
- Beveling options (when to use chamfering)
- Modeling complex shapes and details (panels, insets, etc.)
- Good understanding of modeling toolkit
- Good understanding of booleans and cleaning up topology
- Maybe a good understanding of some 3Ds Max or Blender tools

LookDev Texture Artist

Texturing Skills I was **taught at SCAD** (VSFX curriculum):

- Maya materials
- Basic Arnold materials
- OSL Programmed materials
- Basic image texturing techniques with Photoshop (not PBR)

More Texturing Skills **You Should Learn for the Industry** (**Not Learned in SCAD** VSFX curriculum):

- Great understanding of PBR (Physically Based Rendered) materials (diffuse, metallic, roughness, normal, height/displacement, etc.)
- Texture sizes and optimizations (based on asset size, screen size, texel density, and RAM/VRAM usage)
- Knowledge of Substance Painter (UV Chunk fill tool, how to work with UDIMS, layering with masks, etc.)
- Adding surface imperfections to show realism (scratches, grunge, wear and tear, aging)
- Adding decals and small details to tell a story as well as to show the asset's functionality
- Avoiding super saturated colors for realism (depending on project)
- Great understanding of project's art style (realistic, stylized)
- Understanding of subsurface scattering, material translucency, glass and water refractions, etc.

- Knowledge of height and displacement maps, and optimizing texture detail with mesh density
- Knowledge of how different rendering engines work and how they render various materials (Arnold, VRay, Redshift, Renderman, etc.)
- Texture baking, ambient occlusion, etc.
- Understanding of how light interacts with different materials
- Blending materials
- Efficient workflows between Maya and Substance Painter (Substance for Maya Plugin)
- Could also learn Substance Designer and Stager

Lighting

Lighting Skills I was **taught at SCAD** (VSFX curriculum):

- Maya Lights (Spot, Point, Directional, etc.)
- Arnold Lights (including Skydome)
- Basic Volumetric Fog and God Rays
- Some render settings for Arnold
- Render passes
- Basic rendering optimizations (noise, render times)

More Lighting Skills **You Should Learn for the Industry** (**Not Learned in SCAD** VSFX curriculum):

- Telling a story through lighting (focal points, subject, colors and contrast, how different materials react to light)
- When lighting products, characters, or other subjects, it's good to have a three point lighting setup. A key light, a fill light, and a rim light.
- It's good to have hard shadows taper to soft shadows when lighting a subject.
- Have a good understanding of bounce lighting and global illumination, as it adds realism to the scene.
- Be able to optimize scene render times based on number of lights, light settings, etc.
- Adding gobos (objects and or textures in front of light causing light patterns on scene) can help with realism, can create a dramatic look, etc.
- Consider the camera position, focal length, and composition when lighting a scene.
- Advanced lighting setups
- Arnold (and other renderers') Utility Shaders

Compositor

Compositing Skills I was **taught at SCAD** (VSFX curriculum):

- Image color correction with masks and different nodes (Day for Night)

- Basic green screen keying
- 3D parallax projection from environment
- 3D camera tracking for CG integration

More Compositing Skills **You Should Learn for the Industry** (**Not Learned in SCAD** VSFX curriculum):

- Wire removal (Static and moving shot)
- Object removal (Static and moving shot)
- Advanced green and blue screen keying under different lighting setups
- Advanced techniques: stitch multiple plates and layers together

What to avoid and fix in your 3D projects and renders

What to avoid in your 3D projects and renders that will make them look realistic and professional. I sometimes see really cool pieces of work from students or professionals, but see a few things that could be adjusted to make it a great final product.

What to avoid in your renders and how to fix them:

- Avoid polygon faceting on models with a realistic and or stylized art direction (depending on project). Faceting can make the object or environment look CG because you see the individual edges and vertices that make up the model. To fix it, subdivide the mesh as well as adding supporting edge loops for harder edges. It won't mess up UV's too much either.

- Don't use low res textures, use high resolution PBR textures for your assets. Depending on the size of the asset in your project and in the render, use at least 2K textures probably. 4K is the standard for industry assets. Also make sure the texel density of UV islands are accurate. Working with UDIMs on assets works great as well. Having blurry or pixelated textures can take away from the quality and realism. Keep PC resources and render times in mind as well.

- Lighting is HUGE. Try to avoid lighting with just direct and indirect lighting, as well as having your subject mostly in shadows, depending on the project. Some classes and schools teach Maya and Arnold, others may be different. I would strongly recommend trying other software such as VRay, Unreal Engine 5, Keyshot, etc. for your projects. It may make your project "pop". It's nice to have a balance between highlights, midtones, and shadows, with ray tracing and path tracing. UE5 is great at global illumination with Lumen and renders materials very nicely, and it's in real-time.

- Avoid hard edges when rendering your project. Bevel the edges of your mesh when you're finished with modeling. It shouldn't be a lot, but it gives a sense of realism. Subdividing it can help as well.

- Avoid unusual camera positioning. Having good composition for your renders can make it look more professional. Think about having leading lines, rule of thirds, etc. Maybe have a rule of thirds composition for a CG environment, or maybe tilt the camera for a close-up of a detailed asset. Keep lighting and story in mind as well.

- Avoid visible UV seams for 3D models. You may have a textured model and you see this line where the texture or pattern may break and continue in a different way. Be sure to have good projections and unwrapped UVs so the texture is rendered correctly across your mesh.

Expectations from SCAD going into the industry

As a student, you may or may not think to yourself that just because you go to SCAD or college, you will get a job when you graduate.

The thoughts may sound like "Well, SCAD or this college has a great reputation, is well known throughout the industry, and has a high employment rate after graduation…", which is relatively accurate, and yes, students do get hired after graduation.

Then if you think "Therefore if I just go through the classes, do the work and do what they say, I'll get a job", then you may need to change your perspective. What I'm saying is that just because you go to SCAD or college, you also still need to prove you're professional, skilled and knowledgeable, **can get the job done**, have humility and a willingness to learn, and stand out from the crowd so that recruiters and studios can see your passion and want to hire you when you graduate. There is competition, and yes it's a journey, but it's not just going to college, it's also showing your passion and loving what you do.

IT COSTS A LOT OF MONEY FOR EDUCATION

The school teaches you what they want to teach you. They teach you what they think is enough to get you into the industry. You can pick electives, but you may still learn a limited amount. The curriculum may be outdated and may only go so deep when you want to go WAY deeper but have to move on, or realize you have to take a graduate class in the master's degree program just to learn it but you don't really know how much they will teach you. The

class descriptions can be a few sentences, unclear, and leave you with lots of questions about what you will learn. Overall, it's still a lot of money for all of it.

Before art school, I find it interesting that when you watch a VFX reel from a college such as SCAD, and think about the work shown, you don't really know how much each student really learned. You see various projects with different styles, and you think how much time it took someone or a team to make it, what inspired them, what their limitations were if they had any, if they were self taught, and you ask yourself if you want to go to this college for a **few years** and discover what they teach you for a lot of money.

-You can look at all the classes in the VFX BFA curriculum, but not the syllabus for each class.
-You can read all the class titles, but you can't read their descriptions, which are unclear.
-I wish there was a short PDF or reel that gave you a detailed overview of each class.
-I understand that everyone has different goals for what they want to learn in college.
-You don't really know what you're going to learn, so you may trust their reputation and popularity.
-You may go through all the classes and graduate, but there's still competition, not only from SCAD, but other schools as well.
-You may be trying to get a job in VFX, but there's no guarantee and you may get a job **outside of your field** when you graduate or later on, which can be ok, but maybe not ideal.
-You can get your degree, but be sure to have a strong reel and have professionalism.
-You can go through it, but it will cost you a lot of money.

I encourage you to learn some things on your own as well and be self taught. If you go through a class in college and still want to learn more, I recommend watching some YouTube tutorials, reading some articles, or getting an online course to help you learn more about it.

For example, I feel that college, especially SCAD, will have one main class that introduces you to a specialty in VFX. For example, 3D modeling in Maya is taught in VSFX 210, and they don't teach much more of it in any other VSFX class (unless you take a graduate class), so if you want to learn more, you could try another class/elective in a different field such as ITGM, or look on the web for a course or more information.

Personally, I expected and was extremely excited to learn more about "high poly SubD hard surface 3D modeling" in Maya. I expected to learn it in VSFX 210. The professor only taught us how to do basic box modeling (no SubD) in Maya. There was nothing about topology, clean geometry, UVs, etc. I was extremely disappointed because the class didn't teach it, and didn't want to take the graduate class because I had no idea what they taught in it. I didn't want to spend another $3000 on a class I didn't know what I would learn. I could've asked about it, but I didn't. I then watched some 3D modeling tutorials online and learned more from there.

Doing Bare-Minimum VS Going Above and Beyond

Some students have an interest in a field, but don't necessarily have a burning passion for it, or absolutely love what they do. They go through the classes, do the work, but aren't willing to try many new things and make a better looking final product. They send out their demo reel, apply for some jobs, and they may get a few responses, but don't get a job. Then they may lose motivation, passion, and try something different whether it be a different approach, or another field entirely. Again, it's a lot of money for all these classes.

Those that really put the work in, love to learn, have a strong passion, and go above and beyond can create work that really stands out and increase the chances of landing a job or an opportunity.

At the end of your school journey, your reel, skills, professionalism, attitude, and network are the key aspects that help get you into the industry as an entry-level artist.

What I'm saying is that whatever field you're majoring in, you should have a strong passion for it. The industries are constantly changing and advancing, and you should be familiar with new technologies, and strive to create quality content that will make you stand out from the crowd. It may be hard work, but with a passion you can persevere and learn a lot. It's competitive out there, and again, don't just assume going to college, getting education, and a **degree** is going to get you a job, it's more than that.

IT'S YOUR RESPONSIBILITY:

As I said before, the industries are constantly changing and advancing. SCAD and other art schools may be extremely slow at updating their curriculums and staying up to date with industry trends and technologies. It's YOUR RESPONSIBILITY to learn what you think you will need to know for the industry. You may have to learn a lot outside of school to be better prepared for the industry. SCAD will teach you what they think is enough, but you should peak your head up and see where the industry is headed and learn the skills necessary to be better prepared. SCAD will hold your hand for a short amount of time, but when you're a junior or a senior, it's up to you to have that strong portfolio, professionalism, and network that gets you in the industry.

School Grades VS Your Work and Reel

To put it simply, HR and recruiters **don't care** about your **grades**, they care about your **work** and **professionalism**. They don't see your grades. What they may or may not see on your resume is a small number, your GPA, and if it's good, then I think you're ok. **I'm not saying**

you should get B's and C's in art school. Yes, you should **work hard**, do the project well, and aim for a good grade. But don't always focus on the grades, **focus on your work**, because that is what the **recruiters mostly see**. From my experience, they just make sure you're graduated or about to graduate by a certain date **with a degree**, have a **strong reel**, **are talented**, **can get the job done** and are **professional**.

In the industry, you don't get grades or ratings for your work, maybe annual employee reviews though. **In the industry, you get paid for your work**. **They hired you because of your talent and professionalism, not your grades**.

You can have a 3.8-4.0, almost all A's, and still not be able to land a job if your work and reel are weak, or not professional.

I think I have heard that professors grade students based on how well you do the project according to the project rules, and if the end result looks like you put in some good effort. They don't compare you to other students and grade based on skill and talent. Everybody is at a different skill level. Grades just tell you if you've passed the class and learned what they wanted to teach you. Your work shows your passion, talent, and ability to get the job done.

Everybody also learns at a different pace. Therefore, even if you get A's on projects, ask yourself if the work truly resembles your specialty and really shows you put effort into it.

If you're inspired by another artist that got a job that you'd love, you can look at their work and see what may have gotten them into that job. You can use that **inspiration** to create better work and increase your chances of landing a similar job.

I encourage you to work hard, learn a lot, and try to create unique pieces of work that stand out.

SCAD VFX Classes Don't Teach Much About Money and Entrepreneurship

Most of the teaching about money and budgeting is taught in the "VSFX 409: Professional Development for Visual Effects" class. After taking the class, I thought it was a good amount of info, but then when I entered the industry, I had to think again. They teach you a little bit of the following:

- Budgeting for having a job, living expenses, etc (1 class)
- Budgeting for a visual effects shot (1 class)

- Credit scores, paying off student loans (1 class with guest speaker)
- Interviewing and communication skills (a few classes)
- Portfolios, reels, resumes, business cards, website (most of the quarter)

I feel that they still just teach you a sliver of what you should expect in the industry. When you graduate, these things are extremely important to have a good understanding about. They teach you some things here and there, and then put you out into the industry to figure it out.

If you're wanting to start your own business or be an entrepreneur, whether it be freelance, VFX, or anything else, the SCAD VFX classes don't teach you any of that. Their job is to prepare you to be a junior entry-level VFX artist fresh out of college. When you consider taking a job in an industry, you should really understand where you're going to be located, the cost of living, and budgeting.

Colleges and Specialties

Some colleges only focus and specialize in a few fields, while others offer dozens of fields to major in.

SCAD offers many different fields, whereas Gnomon only focuses on VFX, Games, and Animation. SCAD supports VFX, but doesn't necessarily specialize in it. They will teach you what they think is enough to get you into the industry as a junior entry-level professional.

On the other hand, Gnomon specializes in those fields and may offer deeper and more extensive courses. Both SCAD and Gnomons' student reels look dramatically different.

The tuition for both colleges differ, but it's good to have an understanding of what they teach, whether you want a general overview of VFX at SCAD, or if you want a maybe deeper and more specialized understanding of it at Gnomon. I have not been to Gnomon before, but seeing their reel and curriculum for VFX is impressive. I'm not saying that one college is better than the other, it's just good to know how much information about a field is taught by a specific college and what you feel comfortable with.

SCAD's Portfolio Aesthetic VS Other Art Schools

I think SCAD likes to teach digital media students how to create small and elegant scenes. It's usually either created in Maya, textured in Substance, and rendered with Arnold, or created in Houdini and rendered with Mantra. It also may have some compositing in Nuke. The work also looks artistic, realistic, and sometimes stylized. When I see other students' reels and portfolios, I can almost immediately tell if they're from SCAD or even Ringling College of Art and Design as well. I'm not saying that type of work is bad, but it's the common type of work that SCAD

teaches and students create. If all students do similar work, they may all have a similar reel, depending on how far they go on each project.
You may see these trends in a SCAD student reel:

- 3D vehicle model render and turntable (beauty, wireframe) (possibly VSFX 210)
- Scene with an assortment of assets (possibly VSFX 350)
- Two objects in a shot, one is real, one is CG (possibly TECH 316)
- Green screen key or compositing shot (possibly VSFX 270 or Studio)
- Character or prop asset turntable (beauty, wireframe) (possibly ITGM 333 or Studio)
- Movie environment CGI recreation (render, wireframe) (possibly TECH 316)

SCAD has been teaching students these classes for YEARS. Yes the work may look very good on a reel, but it sometimes feels cliche and overused. Again, focus on creating more industry level work for your reel. These classes and projects sometimes make you feel locked in because of the rules and scope. I encourage you to do your best on them, and then maybe improve it in your own creative way after the class. That way you can learn more, experiment with new tools, without much limitations, and create higher quality work.

Other art schools such as Gnomon, Lost Boys, and Think Tank may be more specialized at teaching students the important up-to-date aspects of visual effects and CGI. I see student portfolios from those schools and can definitely tell a difference in scale and quality. The projects look unique and more creative.

It's totally your decision about what school you want to go to, or be self taught, how much you want to learn, and how much you're willing to pay for the education.

Different fields of VFX for learning at SCAD

It's ok to specialize in a specific field of visual effects at SCAD. There may be students wanting to learn more about advanced visual effects for live-action films, episodic shows, or something else. There also may be students that want to learn more about video game effects, whether it be creating game-optimized assets, or real-time VFX such as explosions, particle systems, etc. Depending on which field you're pursuing, I recommend taking elective classes that teach more on that subject. If it's for film and TV, maybe take a more advanced class at SCAD, or take an online class or watch YouTube tutorials outside of school. If it's for game development and real-time purposes, maybe take an ITGM class or watch some YouTube tutorials. I encourage you to explore different ways of learning more about the specialty you want to pursue. The more relevant skills you learn, the more valuable you'll be for the industry.

What I enjoyed, and what I expected more of at SCAD

I enjoyed some of the classes, but I really enjoyed connecting with and talking to students and professors at SCAD. Having a good friendly relationship with those people was a true highlight from my experience. I really wish SCAD went more in-depth on certain aspects such as 3D modeling, texturing, and compositing. I feel that they just scratched the surface of certain aspects of VFX, and that they could maybe teach more advanced aspects in the BFA curriculum. It may have felt like they taught the students “just enough” in classes, without going too deep, and sometimes that’s what limits some students from having a stronger reel and landing a job. We’re all paying A LOT of money for these classes and I personally was not impressed with what I learned.

When I got hired, the amount of work and knowledge that they expected from me was WAY MORE than what SCAD had taught me. SCAD DID NOT prepare me well for the industry. It was a night and day difference. I was SO GLAD I learned relevant skills outside of school as that prepared me better for the industry.

When I was working everyday full-time after graduation, I thought about my friends and other classmates and imagined putting myself in their shoes with what they learned, and I’m not sure if they would be able to bear the work and intensity that the industry would expect from them.

Aspects from SCAD that led me to where I am today

By having a strong passion, pushing myself hard, and challenging myself to create bigger and more complex projects such as my Honda Civic Transformer and the 2120 Battle Sequence, which I was limited on, these helped me get a job in the industry. **I was limited** with several projects based on project rules and scope, but I chose not to listen and achieve my dreams, resulting in multiple offers from different companies.

The connections I made at SCAD also helped me find new opportunities in freelance. It’s cool to see where colleagues go after graduation, and with networking, a referral can lead you to the next step in your career.

Industry level work should be your focus in school

When working on projects in school, try to do industry or production level work as that will likely stand out in your reel and increase your chances of landing a job. The reason is to show that you can either create production ready assets for shots, and or be able to composite movie and episodic shots from start to finish. You’re not necessarily showing projects you did in

classes that do not reflect industry quality nor align with your specialty. Although, I will say it's ok to show student level work if it's done extremely well and aligns with your specialty.

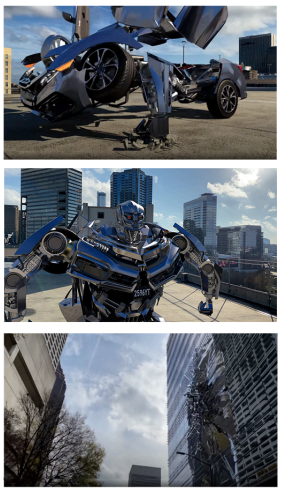
SCAD teaches you how to use different visual effects software such as Maya, Nuke, and Houdini, but they don't always encourage you or tell you to apply previous work to a larger project, maybe sometimes. In VFX classes, they teach you how to create 3D models in Maya, composite shots in Nuke, and make procedural scenes in Houdini. Now in the senior studio classes, you should be working on industry level work, or work that is similar to the things you see at the studio(s) you want to work for.

Here's an example: I don't mean you should go as far as I did in terms of project scope and complexity, but I feel this is a great example between doing student work and industry work.

This project was the 2020 Honda Civic Transformer Animation I did solo at SCAD in the VSFX "Studio I" senior class in Winter 2022.

VSFX 210: 2020 Honda Civic Car Model
(Student Level Work)

VSFX 408: 2020 Honda Civic Transformer Animation
(Industry Level Work)



(The transformer project got me multiple offers at VFX studios)

After I had patch modeled the Honda Civic in Maya in VSFX 210, I wanted to see what it would look like as a transformer in Atlanta, as I was living in Atlanta at the time before "Studio I" and I love Transformers. Yes it was a crazy idea, but I wanted to try it, I had a vision and passion for it. I went out with my Dad, filmed it, and did the VFX integration at SCAD. It took me 8 weeks to model the Civic in VSFX 210, and another 8 weeks to make it into a transformer and do the whole project from start to finish in VSFX 408. Remember that I've had 5 years of previous experience in Maya and VFX before SCAD. I wasn't new to 3D modeling and VFX integration.

If I had just shown the Civic from VSFX 210, I think my reel would have been similar to other classmates who also did a vehicle in that class if a recruiter looked at it. When I did the

transformer animation, it looked like a bigger budget industry level project, and that's what caught the recruiter's attention. It was the production quality work and going above and beyond that made me stand out.

I encourage you to maybe take an older project that you worked on and are proud of, and improve it to look like a production level project. You're turning student work (what they taught you with possible limitations) into industry level work (your creativity on a higher level). That may significantly increase your chances of landing a job.

More on industry-level work (student work VS live action VFX work)

To elaborate on industry level work, your work in school should clearly reflect the field and specialty you want to be hired in.

Most of the classes at SCAD are meant to teach you how to use a specific software to create a full CG scene that can have a similar artistic look as other SCAD projects, possibly diminishing students' artistic creativity.

The industry is **NOT** wanting to see the **same project** from every student at SCAD, they want pieces of work that are **DIFFERENT**, that **STAND OUT**, that are **INDUSTRY LEVEL** work. Doing this work will tell the recruiter that you are capable of getting the job done. It tells the recruiter that if they hire you and give you a shot from one of their projects, you understand what to do and how to get the VFX done for that shot. At SCAD there's a lot of the same repetitive projects, with little room for creative industry level work.

In your **senior Studio I and II classes**, your work should be **industry level**. You should not only be **applying** your skills from classes, but also **learning new ones** as well. **Don't be discouraged** if the professor or classmates think your idea is too big, or if they reject it, it's **YOUR** project, **YOUR** work, **not theirs**. Now, **please respect** school computers, I don't recommend doing massive simulations or renders that crash a SCAD PC and make it unusable. **Respect the hardware**, do what you can, and use what you have. This is college, not a massive VFX studio.

This is one of the reasons why **I want the SCAD VFX curriculum to improve**. **So many classes teach students the same thing every quarter,** and a good amount of SCAD student portfolios I see these days have projects I instantly recognize, which isn't necessarily a bad thing, but I'm wanting to see more work that represents what they want to get hired in. I'll be talking more about a revamped curriculum later in this document.

Here's some examples of what projects to focus on for doing industry level work for your portfolio (Job role - Specialty - Field):

- 3D Generalist - props and environments - Movies/TV:
    - Production ready photo-realistic 3D assets, SubD modeling, UVs, 4K PBR materials
    - 3D asset turntables, breakdowns with textures, wireframe
    - Use in live action shots (Student film), or fully CG environment with a story
    - Projects use multiple renderers (VRay, Redshift, Unreal Engine 5)

- Environment artist and compositing - digital set extensions - Movies/TV:
    - Production ready photo-realistic 3D environments, standard and SubD modeling, UVs, 4K PBR materials, modular components and randomization with layout
    - Excellent CG implementation in Maya and Nuke with live action shot (Personal shot, student film, or **Action VFX practice footage**)

- 3D Generalist - products and motion graphics - Advertising:
    - Incredibly proportionally accurate photo-realistic 3D product assets, SubD modeling, UVs, 4K-8K PBR materials (for close up shots)
    - Great product and camera animation skills to show energy and style
    - Great cinematography and lighting skills to tell the story of the product and brand

- Compositor - green screens, multi-layer compositing - Movies/TV/Advertising
    - Deep understanding of Nuke and industry expectations for workflows, node graphs, Nuke scripts, etc.
    - One or two great green screen composited shots (retaining subject detail, good despill, and great implementation to background)
    - One or two great shots of implementing CG into industry level live action shots (color matching, depth of field, contact shadows, roto work, lighting, etc.)
    - Any other pieces of work showing beauty work/cleanup, a deeply composited shot, or roto work that **matches quality** of other work

Companies Looking on the Outside Rather Than the Inside

I find it frustrating when you see a job you're interested in on LinkedIn, Indeed, a company website, or somewhere else and you see the job duties, qualifications, and maybe the amount of applicants for that position, and something about it makes you feel unqualified, but also sometimes you feel that you can probably do the work. They might be asking for 5+ years experience and or shipped titles or movies. You see it has over 200 applicants and you feel you have no chance at getting it. At the same time, you look at the software skills and job duties and think you can do it.

It’s hard because when you apply for it, you feel like you’re going up against so many applicants and or you’re not sure if your resume is going through a system to check for keywords and reject you when you can actually do the work well.

Maybe your work or reel may not show that particular type of work they’re looking for, but you think you can still do it. It’s like you’re trying to convince them that you can do the job by showing them other work you did.

Sometimes people from companies will try to find potential candidates simply by looking at who’s Open to Work on LinkedIn, reach out to a few people including you, talk to you and ask you if you can do what they need. They may or may not look at your reel or resume, but they want to see if they can find a nice professional person who can get the job done. It’s nice because it feels like you skipped the job posts with tons of applicants and all that stuff, and you’re talking to the person who needs somebody like you, allowing you to talk about yourself, your work, skills, and abilities to do the work. This is a great way to potentially get more work, although it’s not always common or likely to happen. Although, a connection request with a nice short message can be the start of something.

Quiet Rejections After Emails or Interviews

You may have had an interview or email conversation with a company that you are interested in and want to work for. You explain your skills and software expertise, and they ask you if you know about a particular software, skill, or field you’re not very familiar with. You answer respectfully and may say “I’m willing to learn more about it for the role”. For example, you may be really good at Maya, but they want 3Ds Max experience. You may be able to do the work well in Maya, but they want you to know 3Ds Max, which you may not know. The interview overall goes well, but you may not hear back from them. This could mean that because of your limited experience in that skill, they move on without following up, leaving you waiting, or ghosting you. It’s unfortunate as you may be willing to learn it or in the process of learning it, but don’t get any further communication from them. It feels like you need to know that skill or field well to be potentially qualified for that role. This can happen, but I encourage you to keep going, and keep learning.

Throughout the process, you can think of it like this. You’re like a book you’re the author of. You have a front cover (name, title, work or reel), a back cover (resume), and maybe an inside info page (LinkedIn profile). The people that are hiring just look at the covers, and see if it interests them, if not, they move on. If they’re interested, they read the sample of your book (interview), and if they like it, they buy it (hire you). They mostly see you from the outside, but not always from the inside. You should have a strong reel and resume to attract them, but also have more on the inside that gets you hired.

What Companies See VS Your True Potential

Corporate Companies with Limited Employee Growth
This may or may not be true, but working for a larger corporate company **or** a team that doesn't have good leadership and doesn't value employee growth will be **more difficult** to show your **true potential** in what you do and **get promoted**. In those larger teams, you will probably have a more specialized role. You'll be doing the same stuff over and over again, and may not have much time to learn other skills. You may enjoy or want to learn more skills but might find that **you're stuck in your current role**. You might tell your boss that you would love to learn more about lighting, or compositing, but still do modeling and texturing all the time. I've been in this position, wanting to do more and learn more in a role at a company. Sometimes I felt that because I was a junior artist or inexperienced on my resume, that I had to do the job longer until a promotion, or something else. **The point is**, companies should allow their employees to practice, experiment, and learn more aspects of what they want to learn more about. This could result in them either realizing their weaknesses, or **discovering incredible talent** towards what they're interested in. Upon that discovery, that could lead to promotions, raises, and employee growth at the company.

Companies with Great Leadership and Employee Growth
I love it when you join a team at a small or large company with great pay, communication, leadership, and a clear path to employee growth. It's good when that team wants to test your skills and see your true potential as that can open up doors and lead to faster promotions. You can **learn way more** that way, work on a variety of projects, and gain more experience.

Some companies see your experience, resume, and reel, and decide from that what you're good at and lock you in a role for a while with occasional promotions. **They don't see** what's really on the inside and other skills you may be great at that reveal **your true potential**.

Another perspective: Let's say you have some prior experience like me in VFX. Some companies see your resume and experience, and may put you in a junior position because you just graduated college, regardless of your past experience. Other companies with great leadership, allow you to try different things, ask you to solve complex problems, and give you more responsibility, which may show them your hidden great potential. To them, you may be in a senior position just because of your hidden skill set and experience, regardless of education and your degree.

Don't Be Too Nice, But be Firm

You may be in a freelance contract position or a full-time job, you may be learning a lot and having a great time with projects, or you're very stressed out but want to keep a good attitude. In these situations, from the employer, coworker, or company perspective, they may see you

as a person to use and take advantage of because of your ‘very friendly’ attitude and ‘adaptable’ work ethic.

Therefore, whatever happens or comes your way, you’ll do it or go with it without negativity because you may fear being fired or let go. Coworkers may be laid off and their work is now on your plate. You’re now doing the work of three people but with the SAME pay. Or it gets time for your paycheck, but they can’t pay you yet for some reason, or they say they will but they lie and don’t pay you. You’re being very nice, understanding and patient about it, which may make the company feel that they can wait as long as they want and be in control of it.

It’s good to be nice, friendly, and professional, but don’t do it too much. If you do, others may think that they can use you and take advantage of you, thinking they have a lot of control over you without you being firm with further discussion and negotiation.

Being firm with your work, pay, etc. allows you to be respected more, and more professional. You should care about yourself in the workplace, your physical and mental health. You’re not threatening them by being firm, you’re showing strength, respect, and power.

What SCAD teaches you VS Industry Expectations: Extended

I may be repeating myself with things I said earlier, but I wanted to elaborate on VFX skills learned at SCAD and how that translates into the industry.

At SCAD, you only learn a certain amount of VFX, and are expected to get hired when you graduate. When you enter the industry and get a job, a supervisor asks you to do something, or make changes to a model, texture, composited shot, etc. They are expecting you to be well rounded and know how to get it done or solve the problem.

When I worked at Crafty Apes, I was so glad I had learned a lot on my own being mostly self taught. This was because a good amount of what the supervisors asked me to do I had learned outside of school. These are a number of things I was asked to do that consisted of skills I had not learned much or at all at SCAD:

- Procedurally generated assortment of assets in a large scale scene: Solved with Maya’s MASH motion graphics plugin (not taught at SCAD, I wasn’t comfortable enough in Houdini)
- Several masked materials and texture layering in Substance 3D Painter (Taught at SCAD, but not much)
- High poly SubD modeling with good topology and UV layouts (not taught at SCAD)
- Isolating subjects in Photoshop using Select Color Range, other keying techniques for alpha texture use (not learned at SCAD)

- Able to use Photoshop to create diffuse, roughness, and normal PBR maps (Learned some at SCAD)
- Able to create custom textures for specific assets using Substance 3D Painter or Photoshop (Not learned much at SCAD, wasn't comfortable in Substance 3D Designer)
- STRONG attention to detail for texturing, such as adding grunge, surface imperfections, roughness, etc., making the asset look realistic and used/worn rather than brand new in most cases (Not learned much at SCAD)
- Be comfortable/familiar with versioning your files, file management, etc.
- Be comfortable learning different renderers such as V-Ray, Redshift, etc., and learning about Shotgrid for pipeline

Art School Projects VS Industry Projects

Remember that in art school (SCAD), when doing projects in class, some of them are for yourself, and some of them are for your professor. The ones that are for yourself are likely in the senior studio classes. You may receive feedback from classmates and the professor, but it's probably **your decision** whether **you want** to implement those changes into your project. **In the industry**, you work on projects for the supervisor or client, and when they say to change something, you **should** know how to **figure it out**. Yes you can ask questions, but they expect you to be well rounded in your field and be able to make those changes. SCAD doesn't enforce changes. You may be doing dozens of iterations in the industry, so it's important to know your software well, be patient, learn, and persevere. **For students, your work and reel reflects your talent and passion** for what you do. **Be open to critique, correction, and feedback** so you can continue learning and improving your work. It's important to have **thick skin** when taking criticism for your work. That's something I think **SCAD can improve, by challenging the students more to make improvements** and implement feedback changes into their project, possibly resulting in higher quality work for their reel. That would help them better prepare for the industry.

What 3D Software to Learn for Different Industries

There are a few different fields in the entertainment industry. Each industry may like to use a certain 3D software as their primary software. It's important to know this because whatever field you want to go into, you should learn more about that software to prepare for that field. Here's a list of some fields and their desired software (Some companies prefer different software):

- Film/TV: Autodesk Maya, Autodesk 3ds Max, Substance 3D Painter, Nuke
- Advertising: Cinema 4D, Blender, After Effects, Davinci Resolve
- Motion Graphics/Design: Cinema 4D, Blender, After Effects
- Gaming: Autodesk Maya, Autodesk 3ds Max, Blender, Substance 3D Painter, Marmoset Toolbag, Unity, Unreal Engine

The Rise of AI in the Entertainment Industry

AI is like a massive tsunami headed for the industries. Some will use it and get ahead, and some might stay back and potentially lose jobs.

I feel that there's two ways of looking at AI in the 3D field. One is using it to generate imagery for projects, work, etc. The other is using it to speed up workflows and or use it as inspiration, which is great.

For the video and image generation software, you might have heard of Midjourney, Stable Diffusion, Runway, Sora, Luma AI, and more. All of these generate AI images and videos. But how do they work?

How Generative AI works:

Database of references: Each AI model pulls from a database of information, images, and videos of various subjects.

Training the model from references: The AI model is trained with code to identify certain aspects from each piece of data and information from the database. I think the more code the developers use, it helps to train the model, thus getting better results because of the precision of the code telling the model what to look for in the data.

AI Model from trained data to generate imagery: After some time of training, a version of the model is complete and is sent out to the public to try. People download the model software, type a prompt, adjust settings, and then get AI generated images or videos.

Here's the catch:

I think all generative AI models are trained off of some form of database of information. That may include people's original work on ArtStation, YouTube, Behance, Pinterest, Instagram, Reddit, or any other website or source containing that imagery. It could even be using work under NDA (Non Disclosure Agreement) and other sensitive information. **This is THEFT**. They are using people's work without permission to train their AI model to generate imagery that may replace jobs. People are switching and transitioning to this AI movement, but what they're generating with the AI model is imitating existing work, the AI artists calling it their own, and doing it in order to potentially make money. It's a sad reality. And companies that use these models, I don't know for sure, but it seems like they don't care about the theft, but about the money they can save with AI. They might be saying "AI is the future, we're hopping on the AI wave regardless of what people's opinions are, even if it's theft, and we're doing it because we think it's faster and that we'd save money." They can also say "Now that we have AI, we don't have to hire a production crew to go out on site and film it, we can do it in seconds (or minutes) with AI." On the other hand, will companies use AI to innovate and improve workflows, keep their artists, and keep creating original work, but made efficiently with AI?

As of now, AI is considered the cheap and fast way to generate work, and while getting increasingly stable results, it's not necessarily the most controllable. With human artistry, the work may take longer, but it may have better quality and you have much more control over the work.

I'm not sure, but there seems to be big divisions in the industries between human artistry and AI work. Some people may stand strong and not switch to AI, and try to keep their jobs, while others switch to AI and potentially cause a major shift in the workforce.

I'm seeing jobs saying "Gen AI Artist" wanting experience with 3D software as well as generative AI skills. I understand that it can be viewed as an insult to us as artists. Companies would rather jump on the AI wave realizing it's fast and cheap, not completely respecting the time and hard work human artists contribute when creating work.

AI should be regulated. It may be stealing and infringing copyrighted work. It can create images, videos, 3D art, and more that look photo realistic and could take people's jobs. It's not perfect, but this can escalate quickly. AI is here and it's gonna get better. It'll be interesting to see where it goes in the future.

Update on AI - August 2025:

At this point in August 2025, there is so much going on with AI it's hard to keep up. You can now type a prompt to create an app, website, or hundreds of lines of code for software. I can already think back to the classes I took at SCAD and what I see being automated in seconds with AI took months for me to learn in college. This should be a **MASSIVE** wake up call to colleges, universities, students, graduates, and freelancers. I'm hearing more people are questioning going to college, paying the tuition, getting their degree, only to find themselves unemployed and falling behind. I've seen graduates with **TWO** masters degrees unemployed. This is a big deal.

"The line is blurring between what you can learn in college to be employed and stay employed in the industry and what AI is taking over that you don't need to go to college anymore to learn."

"More of the skills that are learned from paying hundreds of thousands of dollars for a degree are being automated in minutes with AI for free."

SCAD VSFX BFA Curriculum Breakdown Chart

These learning classes introduce you to industry standard software at a BASIC/BEGINNER level. The projects are strict and focused. Your project idea may be rejected if it is too big, possibly limiting your creativity on them.

These applied classes are meant to have you or a team create a project that applies the skills learned from the learning classes. Again, if it's too big, you may be rejected.

Learning classes

VSFX 101
Survey of Visual Effects

Learn Maya

VSFX 210
Digital Visual Effects

Learn Arnold

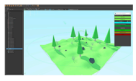
TECH 316
Digital Lighting and Rendering

Learn Houdini

VSFX 350
Procedural Modeling and Animation Techniques

VSFX 130
VFX-based Cinematography

Some Nuke

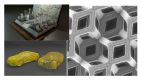


VSFX 160
Intro to VFX Programming

Learn Python

VSFX 270
Compositing

Learn Nuke



VSFX 319
Programming Models and Shaders I

Learn Renderman and OSL

VSFX 406
Concept Development of VFX

Applied classes

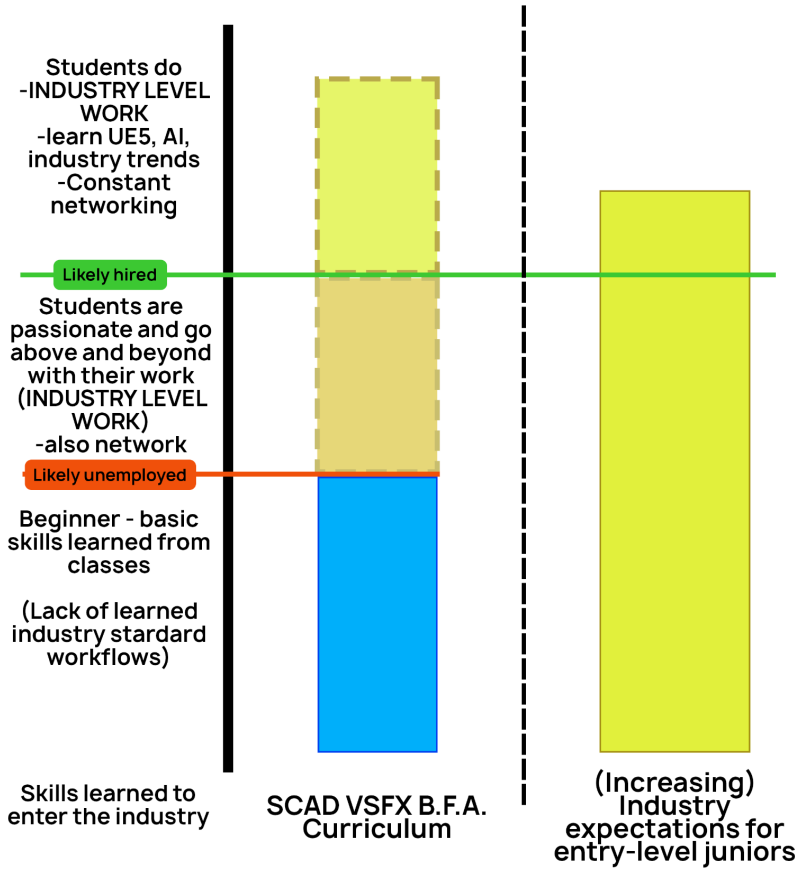
VSFX 408
Visual Effects Studio I

VSFX 409
Professional Development for Visual Effects

VSFX 448
Visual Effects Studio 2

SCAD VSFX Curriculum VS Industry Hiring Expectations

Based on 2022 - 2024 experience and trends
UPON GRADUATION



Thoughts, insights, and advice for the SCAD VSFX Curriculum

When it comes to the SCAD VSFX BFA curriculum, I feel that there are several classes and various aspects that can be improved. When I went to SCAD from Fall 2019 - Spring 2022, the curriculum didn't seem to have changed since the past five years or so.

I felt I was going through the same **assembly line** of classes students went through **years ago**, doing the **same project** as everyone else, creating work that would **look very similar**, with **limited creativity**. It seemed **so strict**, like I had to do it one way or else my grade would go down for breaking the project rules. I not only think that the content taught in each class should be improved, but also the type of classes students should take, possibly a choice of which curriculums, such as generalizing in VFX or specializing in a particular role that students want to take.

The curriculum now is designed by SCAD and what they think we need to learn in order to be a successful **entry-level junior professional**. **The industry now is not hiring as many junior artists, more mid-senior level artists instead.** It's designed to teach every student the same thing. It may be designed against creativity, and can limit the students on what they can accomplish due to project rules and workflows taught.

Instead, **the curriculum should be designed for the student based on industry trends**. The student would be able to choose to specialize or generalize in a particular role. The **classes favor creativity, exploration**, and allow the students to **really focus on what interests them the most**, **rather than forcing them** to take **certain classes** and learn skills **they won't use** in the industry. It would be redesigned to help them feel confident in their work, specialize in their interests, and create an amazing portfolio, significantly increasing their chances of getting hired.

The students are paying for these classes. The students are paying for this **expensive education.** What we are getting is a **slightly changed curriculum** that has been **taught for years, rarely updated or improved**, even though the industry is constantly changing, hoping that we get hired like other graduates that graduated years ago. We may not be pushed to improve our skills, **we may not be learning great industry standard workflows**, or what a day in the life looks like in the industry working 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, having to do everything the Supervisor says.

I think it would be good if we revamped the curriculum and gave the students the option to choose what classes they want to take. The students could either generalize in VFX, or specialize in a particular VFX role, such as 3D modeling, texturing, or compositing. For students, that would significantly help them choose which works best for what they enjoy and want to learn about, **not being required to pay for classes and not use those skills in the**

industry. I understand SCAD wants their graduates to be well rounded, but **giving them more choice** over what classes they want to take **with no prerequisites** may help them narrow down their specialty and passion for what they enjoy doing the most. The point is, this curriculum revamp is designed specifically for the STUDENT based on industry trends and workflows and what THEY want to learn, not what SCAD thinks the student needs to learn.

Revamped VSFX BFA curriculum

Here is a revamped curriculum that includes all the classes a student can take to either generalize in VFX, or specialize in a particular role. I renamed and renumbered all the classes to organize them into levels or hierarchy as the student progresses through them each year.

VSFX Curriculum	Specialized (CG Generalist - Wanting to learn post-production workflows)
VSFX 101 - Principles of Visual Effects (1st half VFX history, 2nd half roles and specialties) - *(Choose one/two of the following)* - **VSFX 150** - 3D Visual Effects (Maya introduction) - **VSFX 155** - Simulations for Visual Effects I (Houdini and or EmberGen Suite) - **VSFX 170** - Compositing (Nuke Introduction) - *(Choose one/two of the following)* - **VSFX 230** - Texturing for Visual Effects (Substance Painter introduction, more Maya) - **VSFX 250** - Visual Effects Environments (Maya, Arnold/VRay/Redshift, Nuke) - **VSFX 280** - Compositing II (More Nuke) - - *(Required)* - **VSFX 290** - Using AI for Visual Effects (AI tools to speed up workflows) - - *(Choose two of the following)* - **VSFX 360** - Procedural Visual Effects	**VSFX 101** - Principles of Visual Effects (1st half history, 2nd half roles) - *(Choose one/two of the following)* - **VSFX 150** - 3D Visual Effects (Maya introduction) - **VSFX 170** - Compositing (Nuke Introduction) - *(Choose one/two of the following)* - **VSFX 230** - Texturing for Visual Effects (Substance Painter introduction) - **VSFX 250** - Visual Effects Environments (Maya, Arnold/VRay/Redshift, Nuke) - *(Choose one/two of the following)* - **VSFX 360** - Procedural Visual Effects (Houdini - FX sims, motion graphics, etc) - **VSFX 375** - Animation for Visual Effects (Maya animation) - **VSFX 410** - Capstone for Visual Effects I (Big senior project) - **VSFX 430** - Preparing for Visual Effects Industry (Resume, portfolio, etc)

(Houdini - Environment creation, motion graphics, etc) - **VSFX 365** - Simulations for Visual Effects II (Houdini and or EmberGen Suite) - **VSFX 375** - Animation for Visual Effects (Maya animation) - **VSFX 380** - Compositing III (Even more Nuke) - **VSFX 410** - Capstone for Visual Effects I (Big senior project) - **VSFX 430** - Preparing for Visual Effects Industry (Resume, portfolio, etc) - **VSFX 480** - Capstone for Visual Effects II (Big senior project) - (Extra electives) - **VSFX 160** - Visual Effects Programming (Python introduction) - **VSFX 215** - Blender for Visual Effects (Learn Blender) - **VSFX 225** - Cinema 4D for Visual Effects (Motion graphics, Redshift) - **VSFX 235** - Advanced 3D Visual Effects (Learn more about Maya) - **VSFX 245** - Character FX (Marvelous Designer, Houdini, etc.) - **VSFX 255** - Advanced VFX Programming and Scripting (Python, languages, tools) - **VSFX 265** - Filming for Visual Effects (Cameras, green screen, supervision) - **VSFX 370** - Real-time Visual Effects (Unreal Engine 5) - **VSFX 380** - Using AI for Visual Effects (AI tools to speed up workflows)	- **VSFX 480** - Capstone for Visual Effects I (Big senior project) - (Extra electives taken) - **VSFX 215** - Blender for Visual Effects (Learn Blender) - **VSFX 235** - Advanced 3D Visual Effects (Learn more about Maya) - **VSFX 370** - Real-time Visual Effects (Unreal Engine 5)

Quick Breakdown of each class:

- Class: Principles of Visual Effects

    - Description: In the first 10 classes, students learn about the history of visual and special effects, common terms, vocabulary, and techniques used in various projects (also watch VFX Artists React from CorridorCrew). The last 10 classes, the students learn about each role in the visual effects industry. The students gain an understanding of each role and decide if they want to generalize or specialize in a specific role throughout the curriculum.
    - Top 5 skills learned:
        - History of visual/special effects
        - Common VFX terms
        - How different VFX techniques are used for various projects
        - What each VFX role does
        - Watch videos, behind the scenes, getting familiar with VFX

- Class: 3D Visual Effects
    - Description: Students learn how to use Maya to model with standard and high poly SubD modeling, as well as UV unwrapping and lighting with a renderer of their choice. The first projects would include small props, and the final project would be to model and UV any appropriate complex model (robot, vehicle, product, etc). Texturing assets is optional. Students practice industry workflows, avoiding geometry errors, but getting familiar with Maya.
    - Top 10 skills learned:
        - SubD modeling (High poly, both organic and hard surface)
        - Good understanding of topology (avoiding Ngons, non-manifold geometry, poly count optimization, edge flow, etc.)
        - Modeling from image reference and concept art
        - Great understanding of proportions
        - Learn a renderer of their choice
        - UV unwrapping skills
        - UV optimization for texturing (layout, shell padding, texel density, UDIMS)
        - Manual retopology
        - Good understanding of modeling toolkit
        - Good understanding of booleans

- Class: Visual Effects Programming
    - Description: This class teaches students Python programming in Maya and how to use it to speed up workflows, create UI interfaces, and develop innovative tools.
    - Top 3 skills learned:
        - Python language
        - Tools and scripts to help improve workflows
        - Create windows and user interfaces

- Class: Compositing
    - Description: Students learn how to composite a variety of different projects in Nuke. This is an introductory class, but it will focus on common industry standard workflows.
    - Top 5 skills learned:
        - Mood changes (adding fog, color grading, depth, etc)
        - Green screen compositing
        - B-Pipe down workflow, backdrops, script organization
        - 2D and 3D tracking
        - Roto work

- Class: Texturing for Visual Effects
    - Description: This class teaches students how to texture 3D assets with physically based rendered (PBR) textures and materials in Substance Painter. They will learn how to layer multiple materials, apply layer masks, and use efficient tools to achieve the best results. Learning Substance Designer is optional. Projects include texturing props. Students choose which renderer they want to use.
    - Top 5 skills learned:
        - Substance 3D Painter
        - Texture 3D assets with PBR materials
        - Layer masks, blending, and texture optimizations
        - Efficient workflow between Maya and Substance
        - Lighting the scene or prop to show how materials react to light (telling a story)

- Class: Visual Effects Environments
    - Description: Students will use Maya, Substance Painter, and a renderer of their choice to 3D model, texture, light, and render an environment from a live-action movie of their choice. They will produce production ready 3D assets with turntables and render passes of specific props and the environment.
    - Top 5 skills learned:
        - Learn more about modeling in SubD and UV unwrapping
        - Learn more about PBR materials
        - Create a proportionally accurate CG environment from a reference
        - Advanced lighting techniques, shadows, indirect lighting, render optimizations
        - Potentially learn MASH to scatter objects, and learn more tools in Maya

- Class: Compositing II
  - Description: Students will learn more about compositing in Nuke. This is an intermediate level Nuke class with more industry skills learned.
  - Top 5 skills learned:
    - Wire removal
    - Working with ActionVFX practice footage (tracking, roto)
    - Explore more about compositing CG elements with live action footage
    - Layering multiple plates and CG elements seamlessly into a shot
    - Possible scripting in Nuke

- Class: Using AI for Visual Effects
  - Description: Students will learn more about the use of AI to improve and make VFX workflows more efficient. This class is for exploration. Students are not limited to specific projects but can decide what aspect or tool AI they want to learn more about and work on their own projects in the class.
  - Top 5 skills learned:
    - How to engineer prompts to create code and scripts with ChatGPT, Claude, Google Gemini, or other platforms for Maya, Nuke, and other software.
    - Have a deep understanding of how Generative AI works, training models, Machine Learning, Deep Learning, etc.
    - Use various AI tools to assist them with various aspects of VFX (Krea.ai for concepts and inspiration)
    - Practice with the latest AI tools for projects, exploring its functionality and use cases.
    - Students could potentially learn how to make their own AI model.

- Class: Procedural Visual Effects (Houdini - Environment creation, motion graphics, etc)
  - Description:
  - Top 5 skills learned:
    - Create new or use existing assets to procedurally generate an environment, wither with nodes, or code
    - Motion graphics and keyframe animation
    - Exploration of any aspect of Houdini (Creative freedom)
    - Learn Mantra and high quality (PBR) materials
    - Powerful efficient ways to utilize Houdini for a project

- Class: Simulations for Visual Effects II (Houdini and or EmberGen Suite)
  - Description:
  - Top 5 skills learned:

        - Create high quality, industry level simulations (water FLIP sims, fire, smoke, explosion, rigid bodies, destruction, power effects, etc)
        - Students choice to learn EmberGen, LiquiGen, or Houdini for projects
        - Simulation workflows and optimization for production use
        - Repetitive testing to ensure simulation meets project needs by professor (industry-like environment)
        - Strong understanding of various types of FX simulations to prepare for most case industry scenarios

- Class: Animation for Visual Effects (Maya animation)
    - Description:
    - Top 5 skills learned:
        - Learn keyframe animation, interpolation
        - Graph editor, dope sheet
        - Mesh deformations, basic rigging
        - Grouping, hierarchies
        - Prop and character animation

- Class: Compositing III
    - Description: Students will learn a deep understanding about compositing in Nuke.
    - Top 5 skills learned:
        - Large VFX shot compositing (multiple green screens, different lighting)
        - Given shots (or working with film team) to composite and train in an industry-like environment (tight deadlines, notes from professor/peers)
        - Beauty work
        - Retiming actors
        - Deep compositing (Other advanced features of Nuke)

- Class: Preparing for Visual Effects Industry
    - Description: Students will create their own online portfolio with any website, create and optimize their resume, make a short reel of their best work, network with industry professionals, and practice interviews extensively.
    - Top 5 skills learned:
        - Create a clean portfolio of work on a website (easy to navigate)
        - Create a resume that is legible, clean, well formatted, and professional (Avoiding pictures, addresses, bad fonts, anything unnecessary)
        - Learn and practice answering common interview questions
        - Learn to network via LinkedIn and other platforms to find a variety of jobs based on hiring trends (contract, freelance, full-time, part-time)

        - Have a deep understanding of pay ranges, budgets, salaries, negotiation, and current industry trends

- Class: Capstone for Visual Effects I and II
    - Description: Students will apply their skills and create a project either on their own, or within a team. The class and professor should enforce the need to create industry level work. Students should take feedback and implement it into their projects, resulting in rewards such as extra credit, higher grades. This helps them prepare for doing high quality work in an industry environment, meeting tight deadlines, implementing feedback from the class and professor, practicing problem solving and showing perseverance for projects.
    - Top 5 skills learned:
        - Working in an industry-like environment with tight deadlines
        - Informative dailies and critique sessions every five classes
        - Wide variety of skills and problem solving
        - Perseverance and professionalism
        - What it takes to do industry level work in a professional environment

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Why change and update the curriculum?

As the VFX industry is dramatically increasing expectations for college graduates and artists, and the rise of AI, the BFA and or MFA VSFX curriculum for SCAD should improve and adapt to it as well. It should reflect the changes happening in the industry. The students should be learning the skills to be considered at least **mid level roles, not junior entry-level. The industry in 2025 is hiring more seniors, a good amount of mids, but rarely any juniors. And SCAD right now is training students to be junior entry-level artists.** If students choose to go above and beyond the current curriculum, they could probably be at least mid level, not in terms of work experience, but knowledge learned from the classes and or being self taught. Every student learns at a different pace, but teaching the right skills during this significant time in the industry is only going to help them better prepare for their future, and improve SCAD's reputation.

I would also love to see a **complete redesign or overhaul to the VSFX page** on the SCAD website. It still shows work from 2014-2018, success stories from the 2000s, and 2010s, with only recent updates being newer video reels from the digital media classes. **It's August 2025**, **AI is here, advancing fast, causing layoffs**, and there's no indication, posts, hints, or anything that shows they're teaching relevant skills and really know the harsh state of the industry, and are preparing students well for it. I strongly recommend keeping it **up-to-date** and being **VERY** transparent as to what students will learn, such as showing the syllabus for each class, and success stories within the past 3-5 years to show aspiring artists that SCAD cares about teaching them and preparing them for the industry at this extremely tough time.

At this time in 2025, If an artist is considering going to SCAD for VFX **KNOWING** the harsh state of the industry, **KNOWING** the incredibly **expensive** tuition they have to pay, **KNOWING** it will take **4 years** to learn potentially irrelevant skills, **HEARING** stories from other graduates that have **masters degrees NOT BEING ABLE to find a job**, how do you think **all this will impact their decision?** Will they still go because of their reputation, or cause them to not go to SCAD?

"SCAD VSFX teaches every student mostly the same thing, showing how to use different visual effects software to create pretty pictures at a beginner level. It's old, outdated, and doesn't reflect the value, knowledge, and skills students expect to learn with the tuition they pay, causing them to be unprepared for the industry. They don't teach students how to create industry-level production ready work with industry standard workflows as they should be doing, as these are the skills studios are looking for when hiring them.**"**

Who is SCAD VSFX BFA mainly for? - My experience

The SCAD VSFX BFA curriculum is mainly designed for students who may have limited experience, or no experience at all in the field, but have an interest in learning more about it, and potentially pursuing a career in it. Some students switch majors, and that's okay.

For me, coming in with five years of prior visual effects experience, a lot of the classes felt like review. I had known the Adobe CC suite and Maya, and the classes felt a bit repetitive. I was not able to skip forward because I would've had to take different classes to replace the class credits of the main ones to get my degree, and it probably would've gotten messy. I had **lots of high expectations** from what **I wanted to learn** and **what I heard about SCAD and their reputation before I was accepted**. The reel they showed on their website at the time looked cool, and I was excited. But again, I had to **discover** what I would learn. **There wasn't a list of skills** written of everything you'd learn in the classes, except the syllabus at the time you registered for the class each quarter. When it came to the end of junior year (Spring 2021), I felt like **I had to go self taught the rest of the way because I had not learned what I wanted to learn at SCAD, knowing what I needed to learn, but had no guarantee that I**

would learn it senior year, which I didn't. I learned ZBrush, SubD high poly 3D modeling, and more skills by myself and with my passion and willingness to go above and beyond because I loved what I did, I created the Honda Civic Transformer and the 2120 Battle Sequence solo and got hired in the industry. I did get some good scholarships when I went to SCAD, but it still felt like a long journey of repetition, learning outdated unwanted skills, knowing I couldn't do much about it.

I want SCAD VSFX to be better

Although the VSFX BFA curriculum could have some major improvements, I do want SCAD to teach the students more about VFX. I want SCAD to keep innovating and investing in the VFX field. I want them to be more transparent with people about **what** they will learn, and **why** they should choose SCAD for VFX. I want them to keep their computers updated with high-end NVIDIA RTX 30, 40, or 50 Series GPUs and Intel i9 (or Xeon) CPUs, and want the students to create amazing work with minimal boundaries. Also, I want SCAD to offer a wider variety of classes to stay up to date with the latest industry trends, especially with AI. I would love to see students learning the right skills, having significantly more creativity on projects, and having the passion and willingness to be a better artist and create better work. At the time of writing this (Aug. 2024, edited Aug. 2025) the industry is seeing a major shift in the workforce with layoffs, strikes, bad management, leadership, etc. If the industry comes back in the next few years and hires a lot of artists, it would be nice to see SCAD grads more prepared, more knowledgeable, professional, and creating work that gets them hired, even before they graduate. It would be amazing to see the phrase "Fresh out of college, entry-level junior VFX artist from SCAD" switch to "Amazing VFX wiz from SCAD who knows how to get the job done." **Students are spending A LOT of money, hundreds of thousands** for this education, and I would love to see a curriculum that reflects the amount they're paying, and shows the value of what SCAD offers, not only significantly increasing the number of new students enrolling, but also students hired upon graduation, and having a brighter future.

Final Thoughts

This document informed you about my experience from SCAD, and my advice to those that are either looking to go to an art school or college, currently in college, or recent graduates. I understand that the comments I made may seem very biased, and that some people may disagree, and that's ok. I did go to SCAD with five years of prior experience in VFX, and my perspectives and goals were based on that. You don't have to take my advice, but I do hope that you may have learned something from my experience. I may continue this document with more experience as time goes on. Thank you for reading, and I hope you have a bright future.