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Behind-the-animation-scenes: CU grad inspires teenagers

University hosting computer camp for Denver students

By **Brittany Anas** Camera Staff Writer

Posted: 06/18/2010 10:12:01 PM MDT



Jacob Melvin, a University of Colorado graduate who is a technical director for DreamWorks, talks to a group of high school students attending a technology camp at CU on Friday. (MARK LEFFINGWELL)

Jacob Melvin was settled into his theater seat to watch the screening of "How to Train Your Dragon," a 3-D production he'd worked on for 2 1/2 years.

That's when he noticed that sitting behind him was famed producer Steven Spielberg.

Melvin, a University of Colorado computer science graduate, talked to a group of teenagers Friday about what it's like in the real world. In his case, that's working for DreamWorks -- a workplace that turns everything green, from its cafeteria food to the water flowing from its decorative fountain, to celebrate the release of the latest Shrek movie.

Every summer, CU plays host to a group of Denver high school students, mostly minorities, for a three-week-long computer camp called "DigitalCurrents."

The 15 students this year are working on a 100-year anniversary documentary that examines the history of their school, North High School. But supplementing their own technical work -- learning to use programs such as the Google SketchUp modeling program -- the high-schoolers also get exposed to what life is like on a college campus. The goal is to get them hooked and inspire them to pursue their own college degrees, even if it's not at CU.

The camp is intended to show students that technology can be blended with creativity, and science classes can be fun.

"College is attainable for you," Anthea Johnson Rooen, outreach director for CU's Alliance for Technology, Learning and Society, told the students at a workshop Friday afternoon.

The computer camp takes place in ATLAS -- an interdisciplinary hub on CU's campus -- and it brings together high school students who want to pursue a variety of careers, including journalism, engineering and medicine.

Meredith Arriaga will be a junior next year at North High School and said she's planning to attend college at CU, Colorado State University or the Auraria campus in Denver. Eventually she wants to become a pediatrician, she said.

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She said she's attending the computer camp to sharpen her computer and technology skills.

Melvin graduated from CU in 2007 and is now a technical director for Dreamworks. He has also worked on the company's production "Kung Fu Panda."

"When you love what you're doing, you never look at the clock," he told students.

Melvin told the high-schoolers that they need to attend college and earn a degree because that can serve as a foundation. But he encouraged them to be inspired by their own drive, and seek out opportunities and internships.

While at CU, Melvin was part of the Multicultural Engineering Program and the National Society of Black Engineers.

Contact Camera Staff Writer Brittany Anas at 303-473-1132 or anasb@dailycamera.com.

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