

# Video Games: A Way of Life or In Life's Way?

By: *Matt Curnan*

On a cloudy, overcast evening in the middle of last October, the last thing anyone on Penn's campus was thinking about was video games. Considering that this time in October is known best for the large number of exams most students are immersed in, very few of them would be mentally constructing a moral algebra comparing the various character classes of World of Warcraft or thinking of which dual-wielded weapon combination is best in Halo 3. Despite the busy time of year, 25 students came to a Weiss Tech House event featuring one man's struggle with video game addiction and the innovative way in which he handled it.

Michael Highland, a candidate for a degree in Digital Media Design (DMD) at the University of Pennsylvania, chronicled his struggle with video game addiction in a unique way – by implementing his expertise in computer animation to make a short film about video game usage in our society entitled “As Real as Your Life.” After producing this film over a period of several months for one of his classes at Penn, he then

proceeded to screen the film in venues ranging from colleges to coffee houses, eventually moving on to more famous destinations. Through his work, Highland has reached the heights of TED2006 (the TED conference), the Game Developers Conference, America's Video Game Expo, and even the Cannes Film Festival. By screening his film to college students and other members of younger audiences, Highland wishes to relate the consequences of his experience, sharing insight about making wise lifestyle choice.

Highland held an intimate conversation with the students, one that delved into the deeper reasons that people relegate themselves in the video game world. To most of the audience, it seemed that gamers want to find a means to escape from the dull reality that is their normal life and enter into a constantly changing, interactive one synthesized by computer code. In his film, Highland demonstrates the way in which the virtual world integrates itself into the real world, forming a separate culture that binds together the ideas and inputs of its members.