

NEWS RELEASE

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PARSONS AND GAMES FOR CHANGE TO LAUNCH PETLAB

**First-of-its-Kind Initiative Will Prototype Digital Games Addressing Social Issues;
To Partner with Microsoft and MTV in First Year**

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Made Possible through a \$450,000 Grant from the MacArthur Foundation

NEW YORK, December 12, 2007 – Parsons The New School for Design, in collaboration with the non-profit organization Games for Change, has announced the launch of PETLab, the first public-interest game design and research laboratory for interactive media. The initiative was made possible by a \$450,000 grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, as part of the foundation's digital media and learning initiative established in 2006 to help determine how digital technologies are changing the way young people learn, play, socialize, and participate in civic life.

"We're encouraged by PETLab's capacity to support educational institutions in adapting to the challenges and opportunities of the digital age," says Connie Yowell, Director of Education at the MacArthur Foundation. "We look forward to seeing the research arising from young people's uses of new media tools for creative and civic activities."

In its first year, PETLab will work with Microsoft's Xbox development platform and MTV's Think.MTV.com youth-focused online activist community on the development of both learning tools and digital games that explore social issues. "PETLab marks a new level of interaction with the growing number of companies and nonprofit organizations who are interested in developing games that serve as a catalyst for learning and civic engagement," said Colleen Macklin, Parsons chair of Communication Design and Technology and director of PETLab. "While in the past we have designed games that address issues in the public interest, ranging from global warming to the electoral process, PETLab will give us the capacity to extend the reach of our efforts to new audiences and collaborators. Our goal is to create inventive intersections between the fields of game design, social issues and learning."

PETLab will focus on prototyping new games, simulations and play experiences that encourage experiential learning and investigation into social and global issues, as well as assessment and evaluation. The initiative brings together Parsons' strong reputation in game design and design education and The New School's strengths in the social sciences, with Game for Change's unparalleled network of practitioners, academics, nonprofit and governmental organizations, and companies with an interest in furthering their work in this field.

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"Games for Change was founded in 2004 to support the growing community and new movement dedicated to games in the public interest," said Suzanne Seggerman, founder of Games for Change and co-director of PETLab. "We've witnessed the field explode in the past few years, and with it a need for concerted prototyping and research. This collaboration with Parsons allows us to extend our impact in new and important ways."

In its first year, PETLab will focus on the following projects:

Xbox on Campus: PETLab will work with the Microsoft toolkit XNA Express to create a curriculum where universities nationwide can use the Xbox platform to make public interest games. Currently, 150 universities use the Xbox/XNA game development platform for introductory instruction in the computer sciences. PETLab will prototype and test a curriculum emphasizing aspects of game design and digital literacy, as well as create a series of games around real-world issues as part of a "Game Designer Kit." This will be made available as open source material for other universities to adopt and expand.

Think.MTV.com: Think is an online community where young people, their friends and some of the biggest names in pop culture come together to bring about positive change. The multimedia-driven site enables America's youth to easily learn more about the issues that impact their generation most—including the environment, sexual health and immigration—then share their opinions and connect with others to make a difference. Through collaborative programs with youth, PETLab will create game prototypes for this community as well as replicable curricula to extend their impact in the university sector.

PETLab will also develop a set of game development prototypes for the design and distribution of public interest games, with an emphasis on creating systems for remixing, modding and manipulating games for personal expression; and developing a curriculum for teaching game design at a variety of levels, including youth, undergraduates, graduate students and other professionals in both informal and formal learning environments.

In undertaking these projects, PETLab will connect to the work of scholars, educators and designers to build an overall framework for design as a learning activity. PETLab will link the research methods of the social sciences with the creative practices of design to produce new frameworks for prototyping and evaluation. PETLab's prototyping process will be interactive and iterative, testing many creative approaches quickly and involving end-users in the design process itself. To that end, it will bring together students of all ages, with those in grades 6-12 working alongside undergraduate and graduate students, educators and active practitioners. In addition, project-based collaborations will bring together students and academics from other programs of The New School, including The New School for Social Research and The New School Media Studies program, as well as from other universities.

"By tapping into the resources available within The New School as a whole, PETLab has the potential to profoundly affect public engagement regarding today's most pressing social issues, create new learning models, and directly impact the practice of game design," said Parsons Dean Tim Marshall. "This type of interdisciplinary collaboration is the focus of Parsons' and The New School's growth in the 21st century, and we are excited to have the support of the MacArthur Foundation to make this possible."

About Parsons The New School for Design

Founded in 1896, Parsons The New School for Design is one of the most prestigious and comprehensive colleges of art and design in the world. An integral part of The New School, Parsons is committed to integrating design with other disciplines such as the social sciences to create global leaders for the 21st century. Located in New York City, Parsons offers studies in game design through its BFA and MFA Design and Technology programs. Students learn to think critically about the role technology plays in the design, production, dissemination, and use of games that go beyond the traditional entertainment sector to explore games as tools for learning and social engagement. Students engage in the design of games and game-related projects with a cross-disciplinary focus, integrating content and research concerns from other programs throughout the university. For more information, visit www.parsons.newschool.edu/dt.

About Games for Change

Games for Change (G4C) provides support, visibility and shared resources to individuals and organizations using digital games for social change. G4C was formed in 2004 as part of the Serious Games Initiative and provides special assistance to foundations and non-profits entering the field. Today, G4C acts as an international hub and primary community of practice for the emerging field of games about social issues, with regional groups in San Francisco, Boston, Seoul, and Sydney, among many others. Our members represent hundreds of organizations and include partners in the games industry, academia, nonprofits, local and state governments, foundations, the UN and the arts. For more information, visit www.gamesforchange.org.

About the MacArthur Foundation

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation is a private, independent grantmaking institution helping to build a more just and sustainable world. Through the support it provides, the Foundation fosters the development of knowledge, nurtures individual creativity, strengthens institutions, helps improve public policy, and provides information to the public, primarily through support for public interest media. With assets of more than \$6.4 billion, the Foundation makes approximately \$260 million in grants annually. MacArthur’s digital media and learning initiative aims to help determine how digital technologies are changing the way young people learn, play, socialize, and participate in civic life. More information is available at www.macfound.org.

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