The rise of film schools in the mid-1960s led to an explosion of highly regarded American films in the 1970s: "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore" and "Taxi Driver" by Martin Scorsese; "The Godfather" and "Apocalypse Now" by Francis Ford Coppola; "American Graffiti" and "Star Wars" by George Lucas.

There's no guarantee that the video game industry will find its Scorsese, Coppola or Lucas, but as video games come into their own as a storytelling medium, the wave of video game courses across the United States could lead to a golden age of video games.

"As games get more progressive in technology, you'll see more movielike aspects and game play," said Dan Brick, an instructor at the Art Institute of Portland in Oregon.

"Students want to create illusion that this isn't a game; you're walking into a movie," added Vickki Hrody, an instructor at Illinois Institute of Art-Chicago. So schools are teaching students not just how to make characters fire a gun or blow up a car but how to walk, gesture and move. The Illinois Institute of Art-Chicago offers instruction on acting for animation, storyboarding, materials and lighting.

"But beauty alone is not going to do it," Hrody said. "We get students to think about: Who is this character? Did he have a broken leg once? Is he hunched over? Did he shave his head because he's losing hair? From that we build storyline: Where does he live? Where is he going? That all adds depth to the game. Makes you want more from the character. Whether you hate the character, create some emotion or does it make you want to protect the character? It's about more than just plotting out a story line."

Just as film schools sprouted out of English-lit classes, video game design courses are rising out of computer science departments. As a result, students are learning things they may have avoided otherwise.

"Most students today are not receptive to the old ways of learning computer science but are receptive to video games," said Jason Leigh, a computer science professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "Ironically, learning to make computer games covers the most difficult part of computer science."

To make an online multiplayer game work, for instance, UIC students are getting tastes of advanced networking, database management, computer graphics and artificial intelligence. "We teach physics as well, and about psychoacoustics and sound," Leigh added.

Schools are slowly getting over the notion that video games are not worthy collegiate pursuits. They're convinced, in part, by the $10 billion the industry hauled in last year in North America and the fact that gaming provides sociologists and cultural anthropologists an environment to study human behavior.