James Harris - Teaching Excellence

For the past 3.5 years, I have been instructing, tutoring, and teaching undergraduate, and graduate, level students game design, system design, and Unreal Engine game tech. Through the official tutor system at the Savannah College of Art and Design, I was selected by the game development faculty and tutored for 2 years, obtaining the CRLA, “College Reading and Learning Association”, certification. This certification required logged training hours with the academic resource team at SCAD alongside having taught students under supervision. The CRLA training covered things such as how to teach best to different student learning types, how to handle large and small groups, as well as how to help a student through external resources. This certification allowed me to cover larger groups and host workshops for teaching specific sections of game development, such as modular workflow, using structures and tables, and moving from prototype to player zoo. These workshops were 15+ students and not only always full, but assorted game development professors added my workshops to their syllabus as additional resources.

As an official Unreal and game tutor employed through SCAD, I helped many students through in-person and online sessions. These would range from 1 to 5 people per session and would often result in many students coming back multiple times. These students would go on to recommend my teaching style to other students, resulting in a small community built around my teaching of Unreal, Game, and System Design. After working with those students, I incorporated what they did and did not learn well to have a stronger grasp of how to teach students at any skill level. I had a student mention to me:

“After talking with you I could formulate better blueprints and you were able to help if I ever came up against any roadblocks. I wish I could have learned this way originally, think I'd be better off.” - Junior undergrad SCAD Student, post tutoring session via message.

Through the school’s tutoring system, I helped many students appreciate a different understanding of game design and development. Students were highly recommended to come to me by a variety of professors at the school and by the students themselves. These recommendations were for both newer students and those that wanted advanced instruction that the professors were unsure about. One quote from a professor, regarding a troubleshooting and problem a student ran into, was:

“Take it to James. If he doesn’t know how to fix it, then you need a different approach. He probably can give you another way to change your design if it can’t be fixed too.” - Game Professor at Savannah College of Art and Design.

Outside of the school’s official game design tutoring system, I am a game design tutor for any college level student. This gave a much needed difference in the learning styles and types of students that I am able to teach. One example, I was tutoring a graduate student on higher level skills and systems in game. This student went on to become an adjunct, then full time, professor for Samford University in Alabama for game design. When she had students who were missing core concepts or had difficulty figuring out certain game design skills, she would send those students to me specifically. At that point, I was able to tutor both SCAD and another university. That professor who recommended students reach out mentioned:

“I have an undergrad game design student at Samford University who is looking to develop her skills in blueprinting from the ground up. After having learned from you, I believe that you can help the students gain those skills.” - Game Professor, previous tutee, at Samford University via a message

After earning recognition throughout the faculty and the students, I was selected by two professors of game to be a TA for their classes, GAME 266, Core Principles of Game Tech, and GAME 356, Advanced Principles of Game Design. This required an application that was approved by the dean, who also gave me a recommendation as I have helped some students in their class. As a TA, I worked on giving some lectures, assisting students in and around the classroom, and created some tool sets that are still used. These jobs also included working on the syllabus, helping to grade, create rubrics, make assignment briefs and descriptions, and even rework a vast chunk of a syllabus to help the professor in changing the class to a new focus. Alongside the primary work, I also scheduled and ran additional help sessions for the students every weekend during the end of projects.

During GAME 266, Core Principles of Game Tech, I worked as a primarily demo based TA. I created class plans and demoed content while providing time for feedback and practice of those skills in a classroom environment. My main lectures were on game design and system while prioritizing interfaces and feedback loops that tied directly into gameplay for users. This professor stated:

"We had some of the more mechanical projects this quarter thanks to your assistance and teaching more systems" - Professor GAME 266, Savannah College of Art and Design

The students that I taught and helped with GAME 266 went on to continue to utilize me as a resource for helping learn new skills throughout their senior projects. The group of students I worked with as a TA even went on to become the lead designers and programmers of their senior studios with some winning awards at SCAD for their game designs. One of them even went on to ask me to hold mini-lectures for their teams to teach a workflow that works in both agile and team based production. I also created a 3D game tool that is still used, which helps to reinforce one of the issues students have in game development, the difference between euler and quaternion rotations.

As a TA for GAME 356, Advanced Principles of Game Design, I did lecture work and worked with the professor to rebuild the syllabus from the ground up. I worked with that professor to rework the class into a game system class instead of just a team project based class. I was selected for this position because of their recognition of my skill set for teaching, and performing, game systems at a relatively high level. Several students entered without game design or game tech knowledge. I was able to get those students on the same level as their peers while maintaining the original outcome of the class. The syllabus was rewritten and those parts included new assignments, new rubrics, and a new class outcomes and goals page. I wrote and added different lectures to match the new syllabus a little bit better. The professor stated:

"Your lectures were something that this course was missing. I would like a copy of them to add to the future runs of this class and the graduate level class. You really got the point of systems to the students." - Professor GAME 356, Savannah College of Art and Design

I have experience working with, iterating, improving, and creating syllabi for classes, such as GAME 356 at the Savannah College of Art and Design. The reworked syllabus had a rewritten class objective, rewritten goals and outcome, and the assignments have been fixed to become more of a system focused approach to game development. The assignments I worked on by writing a new description were those that needed to be added to make the class prototype or system focused. These included a paper prototype/excel assignment and a project to teach the workflow of prototype to player zoo. This rework of the syllabus continued into the future renditions of the class after I made the adjustments and had it approved.