

James Harris - Teaching Statement

My philosophy of teaching is that any student in a game, system, or technical class, whether is their deep love for game development or is taking a class simply for credit, leaves with the same level of skills, passion, and new approaches to game design as every other student in that class. To this extent, I aim to grow those skills in students through their independent, creative, and personalized approach to the game development process. Leaving a classroom, a student should have the knowledge of core concepts, such as modularity, scalability, and technical skills, but also have a space to discover the issues of scope, feature creep, and work speed.

While instructing, I impart important skills to a student by modeling new techniques, leading the class to utilize them, and providing a space to practice, and expand on, those skills. For games, systems, and game tech, my experience in teaching students revealed this is the most effective way. I have been taught by different styles of teaching, from Hong Kong to the US. I've implemented the positives of many global teaching styles and cultures into an approach to teaching game design to a variety of student's learning style. A new student will find classroom demos and instructional lectures something that matches, and pushes, their thinking in game design to a new level while more familiar students will have grown their repertoire. Introductory courses develop thinking as a game designer, but also develop skills that benefit the team based profession. Once skills are practiced, team centric projects further help with both the experience and learning process. In an assignment I helped design, one student creates mechanics and documentation while another uses those to design a level. This enforces students learning the workflow as a team in a non-destructive, collaborative, environment.

I believe long form projects, non-test based, give several benefits to students. It helps mitigate some of the crucial issues when learning game development, project scope, feature creep, and knowing their own work speed. I know, from both learning and teaching experiences, that projects develop a student's workflow, use of industry standards, and provide time to stumble onto roadblocks, but also time to get assistance in help sessions. By assessing a student's work using a combination of skill based rubrics, requiring a certain style or complexity of mechanics, and creativity/prowess rubrics, such as stylization and gameplay depth, allows detailed feedback towards their next project. In order to provide constructive feedback, a combination of class sessions dedicated to problem-solving or core concepts, detailed assignment feedback, and group critique is my style. If an error is constant, dedicating class time to solving that helps not only people with the error, but also any student that may encounter it in their future endeavours. I also learn from what errors students make, allowing me to develop as an instructor.

Ultimately, using the techniques I outlined above, my goal is to impart unto students the type of thinking needed to develop in game design, the technical skills to create and discuss with their peers, and guide them in the creative world of game. I have experience helping students who lacked important skill sets or were never taught them in the first place. By teaching these students, I now know what techniques they lack. I integrate those pitfalls into teaching, ensuring a rounded, successful, and meaningful transfer of skills into the students. I want to keep discovering what didn't stick, didn't make sense, and how students learn in order to impart the important skills they need. I believe that my teaching philosophy, style, and goals culminate in an environment that hones a students own style while preparing them for the game design industry as a professional.