- I am a fifth-year co-instructor in computer graphics technology, video game development.
- I co-designed Purdue Polytechnic's first content-driven Unreal Engine 4 game dev course.
- I have co-designed and taught intro game dev, level design, and procedural assets with UE4.
- I have developed my own lab and lecture content, prepared to teach these courses full-time.

Trust is everything in my life as a computer graphics educator, at the meeting ground between art and technology. From financially insecure part-time workers to 4.0 GPA valedictorians, most of my students enter my class as risk-averse survivalists. To transform them into open-minded game developers—problem solvers—I must be visibly vulnerable in and out of the classroom.

I act out my own past mistakes, encourage exploration over efficiency, and when the learning does not stick, I invite students personally reach out with any questions they have. Being animated in the classroom (a little too short and a little too excited to be taken fully seriously) and fast on email responses (even if it is in the syllabus) alleviates the tension. Students' anxious hesitation turns into anchored persistence, and anchored persistence into curious inspiration.

My research has confirmed for me that cooperation—social interdependence (Johnson & Johnson, 2003)—is key in classroom success. Student self-reports from my introductory game dev students indicated that they feel academically and personally supported by their instructors, and that cooperative learning was consistently accomplished, across in-lab activities, lecture discussion, and group projects (McCord, 2020).

This has enabled me to refocus on qualitative course designs which scaffold intellectual exploration: progressively doing away with competitive grading, mandatory attendance, exams, and late work deductions have not had observable negative effects to student performance; often, these changes are directly beneficial to accessibility and comfort.

I feel confident in these observations thanks to empirical evidence from my students. Using weekly surveys, every year, my students and I find some way to improve our classes. From the past year, my end of semester evaluations averaged a 95% rating or higher, detailing their satisfaction with what we create together. Seeing a student write, "I feel heard in this course" reaffirmed that my students and I have a two-way street. Whether there are concerns in class content or sensitive issues, my students consistently describe that they feel comfortable sharing.

This comfort is one of the most important things to me as an educator. I am aware of the competitive job market and arduous labor conditions enculturated in the game development industry (Schreier, 2017), as do my students. I believe in opposing that status quo from the academic level, and I always want my students to be a part of that curricular change.

In the spirit of trust, I admit that none of this is easy, for myself or my students. Game development education is a problem of scope in itself: artists, engineers, designers, and managers are all under one roof, and all deserve depth in specialized instruction and breadth in generalized teamwork. With an agile mindset, personalized learning aids, hands-on application, and cyclical feedback, such challenges will be surmounted.

References

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