

RICHARD EBERHARDT: One really great thing that we're finding this year is we've got a large number of women who are taking the course. We really try to focus on getting a good balance of diversity of voices in the course. Of, I think, 65, we're going to have 25 women first day. And we're doing basically this first day is to see what we can do to keep them engaged and keep them as part of the course.

SARA VERRILI: We have had, in the last couple of years, we've had almost twice as many or three times as many women on our first day. And by our second week, we will be down to only four or five women in the class out of 30 odd people. So we're really hoping we can do a better job at keeping them this year.

PHILIP TAN: And we're trying a couple of new techniques this year. We put a harassment policy into our syllabus-- as well as an initial email that went out to all of the students-- just making it clear that no, it's not OK to harass or to make your classmates feeling uncomfortable. And if you are in a position where you feel uncomfortable, you can always speak to the instructors. A lot of this is just standard MIT policy, but it's not normal practice for classes to actually state it upfront.

Still, we want the students to understand that they have these options. What we also try to do is make sure that we have a lot of women speaking in our classes, so lecturers, for instance, or guests. We try to make sure that it's very easy to be able to see yourself as a professional because all of our speakers work in games in some manner or other.

SARA VERRILI: I mean, we're not entirely sure why we're losing so many women. Because it's all in the beginning. It's not that we lose them later on. The women who go through our class, we get a very high percentage of them coming back for 617, The Advanced Game Studio Course. Once we've got them in the class, once they decide it's going to be an interesting class to take, we seem to keep them.

The question is how can we keep from scattering them off in that first week? Which is when MIT students can say, oh, you know what? This class looks like, I think I'll

go take some other class. So I think we've put more of our work into focusing our upfront making it clear what the course is about and trying to make sure that we are, in fact, being welcoming.

RICHARD

EBERHARDT:

A lot of it has to do with being welcoming but also providing challenges that more people might be interested in. So in this case, it's not necessarily targeting women, but really just targeting a diverse group of voices in the class. So for this semester, the design challenge, we're really focusing on what the design challenge is in the class from day one. Where, in previous semesters, we talked about a little bit in the first couple weeks, and then we didn't get into it deeper until midway through.

So in this case, this semester it's about decision-making in games. We're talking about the types of games many different kinds of students would want to play and have played. So it's not just that you're coming to a game course because you play all sorts of games, and then you find out, well this one's just going to be about war games. So talking about narrative, talking about fiction, also talking about strategy, talking about chance, and talking about all of the different elements they're going to explore the next semester in the beginning, hopefully, we'll keep them interested.

And then also having a client in the class where they're actually making a game where it's going to do some good to somebody else. They're not just making a game to make a game. In this case, the games they're making are going to be used by the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, particularly to help policymakers to better understand the need to devote resources, time, and money to disaster preparedness. So it's a big topic. It's a timely topic.

Climate change is being talked about a lot right now. MIT students like those kinds of MIT-styled engineering problems. So hopefully that also keeps a good number of the students keeping in the course after the first week. We never have a problem keeping our number high. Our numbers are always high. It's keeping the diverse number of voices high from the get-go.