

PHILIP TAN: So when students come into class on their first day, I think they usually expect to walk in and start working on their dream game right away, and that's just not going to happen. They have a lot to learn. Simply to learn about working with their teammates-- figure out who else is in the class and what skills they bring to bear. And chances are they haven't really thought all that much about the game design that they want to make. And usually the very first idea, the idea that you've been nursing ever since high school or something, isn't the best idea for a single semester project.

**RICHARD
EBERHARDT:** Students often want to make the big expansive epic RPG. We get a lot of students who want to make the next Legend of Zelda-- maybe trying to remake Sky Run, but in 2D, and they think they're scoping it down, but they're not. So it's one of the first things we're doing-- especially the first couple weeks of the class-- are just getting them to understand what is the scope of the game development project, but also just getting them to understand how difficult it is to work in a team.

How much effort an individual needs to put forward in order to work efficiently as part of a team, especially when it comes to a creative thing like game development and game design. A lot of students want to make their personal project. And the first thing they need to do is realize that there are other opinions on the team that should be respected. And there are some opinions that are going to be stronger because there's more design experience there. So figuring out how to balance those teams is a big, big step for them to take when they start.

SARA VERRILLI: The biggest thing we want them to learn when they come in and take the course is how to work as a group on a creative project. Almost everybody's worked on creative project before. People have worked in groups before, but working on a project where the group together is setting the goal and the goal is fluid.

Because, with a creative project, with a game design project, what you're making is always evolving as you keep working on it. And so being able to, as a group,

discuss those changes, acknowledge those changes, work together to get to something that everybody wants to work on and everybody is capable of working on, and you are all capable of getting done in the very short amount of time you have to work on these complex projects. That's actually one of our biggest goals.

PHILIP TAN: One thing about creative projects is there aren't right answers. There are a lot of different ways that a project can go when you are basically just trying to create an aesthetic experience for the players. And so multiple people with different viewpoints can all be right at the same time.

And it's not like you're designing a machine to solve a specific problem, and if the problem is solved, you know that you've done your job. And this can lead to a lot of ego and clashes and arguments over basically something that is already difficult to implement. And every time you get into those arguments, you are actually taking time away from the actual development of the game.

**RICHARD
EBERHARDT:** We try to give the students the tools and methods they can use if they have an argument to provide evidence for the argument. And often it comes down to testing out ideas, rather than having those discussions as a team. Using prototyping methods, using either paper-- if they just got the paper right there before they've even written code.

Just throw something on paper, get another person look at it, and then to see, did it work or not? Getting away from having the personalities involved, getting away from having ego involved in all this. For first-time designers, for the students that we have, if they don't have the evidence, the first thing they're going to go back to it is personal ego, which is not the way to do these things. It will just cause further problems down the line.

SARA VERRILLI: So the course is overall organized with four projects. All of our work is group work because we are emphasizing how do you work together on a team to solve a creative problem. All of our projects are group projects. And we grade primarily as a group. Our projects start from very small and scale up to big.

So we have our opening project, which is just doing a paper prototype-- even a fraction of a paper prototype-- not a full game. It's just what are the main actions in the game? And that's about a two-week project. And then we build up to, OK, you've got a prototype. Form a new group, a bigger group this time, about double our group in size from three to six, and turn that into a digital game.

For the third project, you, once again, have that two-week time period, but during the second project, we taught you our basic project management schemes and some project management skills-- using that second project as an example of how to do that. And on the third project we're asking you to come up with your own game design idea, prototype it out, and finish it as a group using all those project management techniques that we taught. It's sort of our test run project for the fourth project, which is the final project. It lasts, I think, seven and a half weeks, and we double the group size again up to eight.

We are actually intentionally giving the students large groups that are harder to work with. And their first thought is we've got all these people, we can make a huge project. And our response is you've got all these people. You're going to have to figure out how you're all going to communicate well together, so you can actually get something done.

And that's sort of the final capstone project where we give them a fairly tight set of constraints. But other than that, they are designing the design. They're planning out the project management. They're in charge of planning their testing sessions and their polishing sessions. And we use that time to check in with them and give them feedback along the way. But it really is like, OK, we've given you the tools, time to really practice using them.