

Teaching Philosophy of *Tony Morelli*

Fundamental Concepts:

The most important piece of computer technologies is understanding the basic concepts. Game design and computer programming in general can go in many different directions. The technology is changing so fast and frequently that teaching fundamental concepts is much more important than any specific lesson or trend as that lesson or trend might be out of date soon. By understanding the fundamentals, no matter where the technology goes a student will be well prepared to adapt. Specifically in Game Design, the process, and general logic will remain constant and those need to be completely understood by all students.

Student Defined Assignments:

Students come into a programming or game design course with a wide range of interests. It is difficult to structure each lesson to the specific interests of all students, but a self-guided project at the conclusion of the class allows the students to apply the material to a subject of interest. In my Intro To Game Programming class, each student spent the last 4 weeks of the semester creating a game of their own. Developing design documents, concept art, and a final prototype were all required. It was very interesting to watch the progress of all the students. Some focused on the art with very little game play, while others focused on game play and used art from online resources. This allowed the students to focus on what piece of game design was of most interest.

Weekly assignments usually have one or more open ended questions that allow the students to answer them in their own style. This allows students who are very interested in the subject to take it the extra mile, and those who are mildly interested to successfully complete the assignment. Questions like this also allow me to gauge early on in the class the interest level, background, and preferred learning styles of the students. Getting to know the students in this way allows for course presentation modifications to keep students interested, entertained, and educated.

Assessments:

Assessments are very important to not only verify students have learned the material, but to verify I am doing my job correctly. I usually start the class off with a background survey which gives me an idea of what each student would like to get out of the class. Although it is difficult to direct an entire class to a specific student, certain popular topics can be present and incorporating them into the class will usually increase class motivation. For example, in my C++ programming class the introduction survey revealed many students having a strong interest in graphics programming. Half way through the semester I worked in 2D graphics programming and the rest of the topics were applied to the 2D graphics example. This kept the interest, and students were able to learn the concepts in a way they wanted to.

Grading is always direct and up front. Students know how assignments will be graded and the weighting of each question when the assignment is handed out. For larger projects, students are given the same grade sheet I will use and are asked to fill it out themselves when turning in the assignment. I have found this technique to be very valuable as it forces the student to ask him/herself "How good is my project?".

Finally, assessments of myself are taken very seriously. In my teaching experience, students are directed to fill out an anonymous survey on the instructor at the conclusion of the class. This feedback is invaluable to me as I prepare for the next class. Since it is not read until after the semester and completed anonymously, students can be free to honestly answer the questions without the fear of their answers affecting their grade.