

Gameplay, Connections and Contributors

In this section, Kevin Desmond describes the role of gameplay in 15.S50 Poker Theory and Analytics and offers advice for educators about actively linking concepts to real-world experience.

Gameplay was critical to each student’s development in the course. In line with MIT’s motto, *Mens et Manus*, I am a believer that practical application is the key to understanding fundamental concepts, and a robust, high volume gameplay league is the best way to provide that experience. Each lesson ends with practical “Rules of Thumb” to emphasize that all of the analytics have the end goal of aiding in the decision-making process at the table. I would recommend that other educators

facilitating a similar course place a significant emphasis on structuring the league, as it serves as a key motivator and pedagogical tool for the course.

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—Kevin Desmond

To other educators, I would also recommend that the course be actively linked to real-life poker as much as possible. There is an overwhelming amount of poker literature available to students, but a fundamental difference this course offers is the chance to see how the theory connects to the real world. The most successful lectures were ones in which we analyzed examples of live play or had guest speakers with decades-long poker careers talk about their experiences.

I was very surprised by what a positive impact outside contributions—in the form of software licenses, guest speakers, prize donations, etc.—had on the class. I was overwhelmingly impressed by the quality of guest speakers and how each one brought a completely unique life experience to the course. In addition, I owe a lot of the competitiveness of the online league to the supporters whose donations kept students interested in the league even after course credit was earned. If I were to teach the course again, I would put an even greater emphasis on outside contributions and integrate them more into the coursework. I believe there is a significant appetite for the type of audience that MIT students provide and I would like to increase the number of connections made between industry veterans and students.