Film Schools as Pre-Industry: Fostering Creative Collaboration and Equity in Media Production Programs

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Abstract

Since the 1970s, the percentage of students in the United States majoring in film and media has increased almost 300 percent, a number ten times more than the overall increase in college degrees. Media production as practiced in university settings is generally more equitable than the media industries, but that does not mean that these pre-industry spaces exist without deep-seated biases, power dynamics, and privileges. This article identifies challenges and opportunities facing media production education around issues of equity and access. The author argues that these pre-industry programs are uniquely positioned to educate the next generation of media makers about creative collaboration across differences and challenge the industry's status quo. The author posits four interventions to make media education more equitable and offers a case study of a pedagogical intervention, Room at the Top, a massively multiplayer card game that addresses bias and power in creative collaboration.

Keywords: Race, Gender, Film School, Pedagogy, Diversity, Labor, Production, Games

University students today are not just captivated by entertainment media as a leisure activity, but increasingly as a career trajectory. Since the 1970s, the percentage of students majoring in film and media has increased almost 300 percent, a number ten times higher than the overall increase in undergraduate degrees.² A media production education is by no means a requirement for work within the media industries, but for young aspirants eager to hone their skills and build their resumes, film schools, or what I'm referring to here as pre-industry programs, provide a pathway into gaining experience, building a resume, and making contacts.³ Pre-industry programs promise students hands-on practice-based learning

experiences, mentorship from industry professionals, and a cohort of ambitious peers. Some institutions might offer a conservatory-model curriculum, the option to make a thesis film, or co-curricular credits for creative productions on campus but outside the classroom. Where pre-med or pre-law programs are more common undergraduate curricula, pre-media industry programs are designed to educate, train, and professionalize students for careers in media production. These academic programs are increasingly more accessible and more interested in being equitable than many employment spaces within media industries, but historically both academia and the media industries are spaces rife with bias, prejudice, and privilege.

The appeal for students of a career in entertainment media (whether film, television, games, or social media) include the opportunity to combine creative labor with financial gain. Others are enticed by extra-professional perks, including fame, recognition, potential celebrity (or connection to celebrities and building of one's own brand), and a "Hollywood" lifestyle (access to parties, events). In on-screen interviews and audience talk-backs at screenings, events, and classroom conversations, successful industry practitioners regularly give the same advice to those looking for their big break: one needs a combination of talent, determination, opportunity, timing, luck, and—often most important—good contacts. Professional success in the US entertainment industries has not only come to able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgendered, white men from middle-class to upper-middle-class backgrounds but historically they have been the perpetual benefactors of three things from this list, often in combination: contacts and opportunity—and because of these two, more chances to cross into the path of good luck.⁴ A vital concern for faculty in pre-industry programs is not just about the limited number of viable jobs available to entrants in the industry, but also who has access to these most coveted core industry jobs.⁵ The games industry, which directly employs 65,000 people in the United States to develop and publish entertainment-based software, had a gross annual payroll of US\$60.2 billion in 2015.⁶ The US film and television industries employ over 2.1 million people with wages of US\$139 billion.⁷ Core industry employment (work that is directly tied to the producing, marketing, manufacturing, and distribution of film and television) has an average salary of US\$90,000, 68 percent higher than the average national salary.⁸ Those numbers, though, are somewhat misleading; coveted core employment positions are limited to only 342,000, or 6 percent, of those film and television jobs.⁹

In a Post-Weinstein era of #MeToo, #OscarsSoWhite, and #TimesUp, acknowledgment in the American entertainment industries about the inequities of power, privilege, and opportunity are at least part of a conversation, if not yet a part of a plan of transformational action. Individual women and people of color have become successful in the media industries—but just because their numbers are growing, it does not mean that deep-seated discriminatory practices or injustices have been quashed. When we talk beyond the personal experience of trailblazers to think about institutional structures, systemic bigotry, and collective practice, the American media industry remains an exclusive industry.¹⁰ The work needed to change culture within these industries must also happen at the level of the pipelines—the problem is not the industry's alone to solve. As a feminist scholar who teaches graduates and undergraduates in a pre-industry program in the United States, I know that we as faculty have much work to do to make teaching and learning more equitable and more inclusive within our classrooms, across our curricula, and in our teaching of history, aesthetics, and

collaborative production. Transformational changes must happen personally, departmentally, and institutionally. The deep-seated discriminatory and exclusionary nature of educational systems makes this work arduous, complex, and often professionally dangerous. There are no easy solutions, but in my research, I have found compelling examples of individuals and institutions working toward meaningful change.

Pre-industry programs are uniquely positioned to educate the next generation of media makers in creative collaboration across differences in order to counter the industry's status quo. This article begins by historicizing few key factors that have determined institutional bias within the pre-industry educational space. I then identify challenges specific to pre-industry production programs around issues of equity and access for students. I argue for the adoption of strategies, tools, and processes to enhance the work of faculty, looking at four points of intervention adopted by faculty to change cultures of production within film schools. Each point details how faculty are finding methods to engage both media production faculty and students in conversations around power and bias across differences within creative collaborations. These are not solutions but rather pathways toward change that need regular iteration, contemplation, and assessment by faculty, students, and institutions.

While this article pulls from the work of international researchers, my decision to focus on US based-education is based on the uniqueness of the American educational system as well as the commercially based entertainment corporations that dominate the industry. Because of strong government ties in so many other countries between film production and film education, each national system works differently. Not only are identity politics unique by region, but also different national ecologies and economies of film and media production produce different structures and pipelines of talent development. I hope that there are aspects of this research that resonate for educators globally, and there is great opportunity in connecting communities of global educators and institutions interested in building equitable pipelines.

Currently, most American universities and colleges employ anywhere from one to a handful of administrators, staff, and/or staff members as diversity experts on campus tasked with identifying discriminatory practices and establishing more equitable standards and policies. While most faculty are not also employed as official diversity administrators, we as faculty and scholars must make this part of our work if we believe in education as a form of cultural and intellectual advancement and in the need to disrupt the discriminatory, biased, and prejudicial practices that have become status quo on our campuses.¹¹ If the only people who embrace this work on our campuses are those who are specifically hired to change our institutions to be more inclusive, the work will fail. Change must take hold throughout the system. Our work as faculty is necessary to support, enhance, or compliment the efforts of those tasked on campuses to address racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and ableism on our campuses. As Sara Ahmed has powerfully argued, as a “diversity practitioner” within an institution, these people are being asked to push back against the status quo—work that is not only difficult, but often professionally precarious. As she states,

Being a diversity practitioner means you are in effect appointed by an employer to transform the employer . . . Even if you are appointed by an institution to transform the institution, it does not

mean the institution is willing to be transformed. In fact, many practitioners encounter resistance to their work; diversity is work because of that resistance. You have to find ways to get through because you are blocked. This is why I called diversity workers *institutional plumbers*; they have to work out where the blockage is or what stops something (for example a new policy) from moving through the system.¹²

In Ahmed's analogy, we cannot clog our system with the problems of our industries and expect the plumbers to swoop in and simply solve these blockages. There is much work that administrators and staff can and must do, but without transformational work in classrooms, institutions will forever remain blocked. Though we as faculty cannot change the culture of the media industries, our students wish to enter, we have the power to alter production cultures in our classrooms and give our students practice honing these skills that they can bring to their future careers.

Defining the Pre-industries

Scholars and practitioners have mapped the varying histories of film and media education across the globe and each of these stories helps us make better sense of the current concerns facing educators within these institutions.¹³ Within the US context, the education and training of future practitioners with an emphasis on media production was from its very origins designed as an educational pipeline into Hollywood. Film school education began at the collegiate level in 1929 with the University of Southern California's (USC) bachelor's degree program in film, which was organized in conjunction with the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences (AMPAS). Conceived as a structured series of courses in professional instruction, the USC/AMPAS program was a specialized degree created specifically for industry practitioners and aspirants.¹⁴ In the coming years, other programs developed with the same objective of teaching creative classes and hands-on learning, including at Columbia University and University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). While UCLA started instruction in film in 1947, it was in 1961 that the institution established a College of Fine Arts. The College of Fine Arts was developed in cooperation with the AMPAS, the four major radio broadcasting networks in Hollywood, and an organization called the Associated Committee on Television.¹⁵ This synergistic relationship between an educational institution and multiple media industries (film, radio, and television) marked a new level of development of a higher education program designed for the professional instruction of students in media production. In 1955, CILECT, the International Association of Film and Television Schools, was founded. A number of four-year universities that had been teaching courses in film and media established degree-granting majors in the early 1960s. UCLA and California Institute of the Arts created majors in 1961, and formal degrees at New York University, University of Texas at Austin, and Columbia University were established by 1965.

Many of these programs were intended to blend creative and commercial production skills within the study of media as art, craft, and language. Some programs emphasized media making as either an art or a commercial practice. At Columbia, instructor Frances Taylor Patterson taught a skills-based course on photoplay composition designed "to inculcate in her students a useful industriousness, whether or not they would end up in the film

industry.”¹⁶ In this context, Dana Polan notes, the focus is on Raymond William’s study of industry as something personal—instruction focused on the individual’s capacity and drive to work and to create. In 1981, John Ellis discusses the difference between the art school students and those with a professional drive toward Hollywood. Ellis details the emphatic anti-capitalist politics among arts students:

A facile anti-capitalism is a stock-in-trade of most arts undergraduates, who are quite willing to be cynical about the “men with the money.” Indeed, this is precisely the basis of the division between the film producer (always hated) and the artist-director (always loved).¹⁷

With the rise of film schools, an increased number of courses on television in universities, and the success of the American film school generation of the 1970s and 1980s, young people increasingly saw filmmaking (writing, directing, producing, and editing) as field of study, and film schools as ideal sites to hone one’s craft and gain transferrable skills. As American higher education has become increasingly corporatized, institutions have encouraged departments and schools to enhance connections to industry, business, and powerful alumni.¹⁸ With this has come the rise of what film educator Alan Taylor called the rise of the “corporate auteur.” Taylor sees institutions encouraging students’ entrepreneurial dreams of following their own creative vision while setting goals of making millions in studio dollars—an “untrammeled return to a utopian but unliveable Hollywood imaginary.”¹⁹ As one film school graduate-turned-instructor said in John Boorman’s *Projections* series, “Film schools do not produce film-makers; film-makers go to film school.”²⁰ Students who go into these programs already have an idea of who they are and what they want to be.

Students are enticed by pre-industry programs with promises that they will get hands-on technical experience starting their first week of university. With the corporatization of the American educational system, the way that universities and colleges are sold to students and their families include a narrative of success. Because of this, students come in with expectations.²¹ With little attention to how much the industry (and therefore careers working in media) is changing, they look at the alumni of an institution as a guide for what kind of a career is possible after graduation.²² Today’s pre-industry programs walk a careful line between providing a well-rounded historical, critical, and theoretical education for students, while also giving them practical skills-based, technology-based knowledge to more easily enter the media industries. These students are a unique group: as teenagers (primarily, but not exclusively), they applied to enter an undergraduate film and media major before most of them even stepped one foot onto the campus. In each case, an admissions officer, or staff or faculty member within the university saw something in these students that showed that they were already honing or expressing particular skills or talents applicable to the practice of media making. Nowadays students will regularly apply as an undergraduate with a creative film reel or short screenplay sample. While some students enter these departments after community college or as adult learners, the majority of American and international undergraduates matriculating are between eighteen and twenty years old. One of the ways film schools prepare students is through selective internships. Students regularly get credit for internships working at studios, networks, talent agencies, and post production houses. All of them take media studies classes, but the vast majority of them are interested in production: directing, producing, writing, cinematography, documentary, game design, and interactive

media. Teaching at USC, Carroll Hodge saw students enter with expectations of creative control only to realize that much of what they needed to learn was mastering teamwork:

Many of them come to a film program focused on the role of a director as the controlling creative voice and struggle to find ways to have creative influence in any other crew position. As inexperienced young adults, they are too often expected to master collaboration on their own, as if it were an innate skill, not a learned one. Our students need access to the best creative collaboration experiences we can design for them at the beginning of and throughout their program, not at the end.²³

That teamwork is only made more challenging when students are tasked with working with peers whose backgrounds, experiences, and skillsets might be quite different from their own.

In an era when the price of education has skyrocketed and the possibilities of employment after graduation are precarious, preparing graduates to successfully navigate the industry is of vital importance for institutions, for students, and for students' families. That is of particular concern for female students, students of color, and/or students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, and queer (LGBTQ) who often see their prospects within the industry as more limited than those of some of their straight, cisgender, white, and/or male peers.²⁴ Though regularly in the minority, these students have long histories on some campuses. For example, Ike Jones, who became an A-list Hollywood producer, was the first African-American to graduate from UCLA in the early 1950s. As with any academic group, some students will need different types of educational support: arriving to campus without a socioeconomic safety net, as first generation students, as veterans, and/or with specific accessibility or mental health needs. But if a student is afforded an equitable and inclusive education, the impact of film school on a budding talent can be profound.²⁵

Although individual experiences as an instructor are not statistically significant on their own, my experiences working at three top ten pre-industry institutions have provided some valuable insight. While I spent a number of years teaching media studies at a wide variety of institutions (state-run universities, art colleges, private liberal arts universities), for the past twelve years, I have taught full-time solely at institutions that specialize in teaching students interested in media production.²⁶ I teach introductory courses in the major, so regularly I meet students on their first day of college. A few years later, I would see some of the same students again in advanced undergraduate seminars in the halls of the department. Over the years, I have started to notice patterns. Many of my best female students who had been passionate about making media in their first years were going into producing or were working solo on a digital or animation projects. Male students—especially white male students—regularly dominated the higher-level sound design and cinematography classes. Women who were succeeding in cinematography often crewed for each other on projects. Students of color commonly found success by teaming together early in their college careers. More women and students of color were taking advanced classes in areas outside the Hollywood mainstream (experimental, documentary) than were white men.

In the first semester of college, I have heard a number of women say to me that they were already so far behind technically from their peers that they believed their best bet was to focusing on writing or producing in college. In parsing out the situations that were making

these young women feel so behind, we found the same conclusion: all summer, men—mostly white men—were posting on the new student Facebook group page links to their films and videos. These students, who already knew they wanted to be directors or cinematographers or sound designers, were showing off their skills and seeking collaborators before they even got to campus. It wasn't that these students were doing something inherently wrong—but the impact these posts had on other students was profound. Their bravado felt competitive and off-putting to these women, giving them a sense that media production at the college was about individual pre-professional achievement rather than collaboration and education.

My interest in this situation led to a series of interviews and surveys that I started conducting with first-year students. For women and students of color, I would see their passion tempered by personal doubts or the external opinions of others who doubted whether they would succeed given their racial or gender identity. While many programs boast gender parity and increasing diversity numbers, the problem is not just about matriculation and graduation rates. It's about choices of classes and specializations. Mary Kearney and twenty of her female students together address this concern in “Melting the Celluloid Ceiling”:

Film school administrators who report students' 50/50 gender split likely do so to encourage more aspiring female filmmakers to apply. Nevertheless, journalists who deploy such enrollment figures in discussions about Hollywood's labor practices reproduce the notion that gender equity in the film and television industries is best defined via quantitative means. In other words, by dividing film students by gender into two groups, the different identities, interests, and experiences among such students are rendered invisible and the issue of qualitative gender equity is ignored . . . Moreover, by representing male and female film students' enrollments as equivalent and thus *fait accompli*, journalists have overlooked film schools as crucial sites for the development of sexist and patriarchal attitudes among young men intent on professional careers in filmmaking.²⁷

Kearney's current research, working with her students to build self-studies of their experiences in media production programs, is paving the way for increased action by faculty and students to address these structural problems. In *The Education of the Filmmaker in Europe, Australia, and Asia*, Mette Hjort encourages faculty and departments to turn toward practice-based agency—building in critical reasoning and reflection into production practices.²⁸ By questioning artistic norms, establishing creative constraints, and teaching ethical filmmaking, she makes a case that this type of education ideally suits the logics and goals of university practice-based instruction.²⁹

As I began to research this problem, I turned to industry and educational data and compared numbers. Some undergraduate programs are mirroring professional patterns that we are seeing within the media industries. For example, of the over 4,600 people employed behind-the-scenes on the top 500 domestic grossing US films, women represented 28 percent of producers, followed by executive producers (21 percent), but only 18 percent of directors and 6 percent of cinematographers.³⁰ Among the top genres, two of the highest percentages for women relative to men working was in documentary (30 percent) and animated features (23 percent).³¹ For the 2015–2016 season television (including broadcast, cable, and streaming) women represented 39 percent of producers and 28 percent of executive producers, but only 3 percent of directors of photography.³² Demographic data on over 1,500 undergraduate students majoring in Visual and Media Arts at Emerson College over five years (2013–2017)

shows telling patterns. Women overall represented 48 percent of the department but accounted for 78 percent of the students specializing in producing and 70 percent of those specializing in interactive media, but only 35 percent of those in cinematography and 32 percent of those specializing in sound and audio. White women, who made up 28.51 percent of the student body during those years, attributed for 60.71 percent of the students specializing in producing but only 18.46 percent of those specializing in cinematography. Double the number of domestic students of color were choosing interactive, animation, and documentary production than their peers. While sharing these numbers shows the extent to which our department is complicit in these inequities and makes my own campus vulnerable, the sharing of these data (much like the historical data that emerged in these industry studies) is a powerful way for organizations to realize how significant these problems are and to be moved to action. From conversations and interviews with faculty at other pre-industry institutions, it is clear that the trends within our department are not unique. The department has since decided to do away with students declaring specializations. We are beginning to track data on which students enroll in advanced classes within particular production areas, and these data might help us assess and counter these trends. The problem now is to continue to assess and address any patterns.

Many faculty writing about inequities in the production classroom have focused solely on gender, rather than on an intersectional approach, to understanding the problem. Most of the research is solely about gender bias. While there have never been explicit restrictions on women taking production classes, researchers have documented how gender stereotypes have long prevailed in film schools. Gendered biases impact who enters the classroom and what their experiences, once there, are like. Filmmaker, writer, and professor, Joan Braderman recalled her undergraduate media production class experiences for *Camera Obscura*:

My first undergraduate filmmaking class circa 1968 at Harvard had fifteen students; fourteen of them were men—boys, really—and I was the one female . . . Though hardly shy, I barely spoke, so sure was I that a mere question of mine would reveal the depth of my stupidity when it came to cameras. At the time, I probably thought that the gap in my comfort zone in the world—the mechanical and electronic—was genetic: women were inherent Luddites.³³

While she was welcome to take the course, a combination of her own trepidation, an unenlightened professor, and a group of eager men anxious to get their hands on the technology, hindered her self-confidence and her advancement in an area of learning she would come to not only excel at, but teach, as well.

Co-written in 1981 by Michelle Citron and Ellen Seiter while they were both teaching media production at Northwestern University, “The Woman with the Movie Camera” powerfully documents the gendering of media production within the pre-industry classroom:

The production class’s reputation may discourage women who believe their talents are verbal and visual but not mechanical from entering the field. Women’s hesitation is further aggravated by the widespread belief that women cannot handle heavy and often clumsy equipment.³⁴

Even with increasing technological advances of smaller cameras and lighter equipment, women in the classroom still report that their peers—and sometimes even instructors—question their physical capacity to succeed on camera crews. Kearney highlights stories of undergraduate

women in production classes: “Examples of sexism on the part of male instructors include not believing women are knowledgeable or strong enough to use filmmaking equipment; dismissing female-authored or female-centered stories; and engaging in harassing comments or behavior.”³⁵

Some of these students will experience a level of isolation—not just in their classes, but also in their productions. Women and/or students of color will often choose to partner on productions. Independent filmmaker Charles Burnett, a major figure in what is known as the L.A. Rebellion, describes his own university experience as collaborative filmmaking among like-minded cohort of students of color:

When we all went to UCLA, we tried to form groups at different times to facilitate filmmaking. But it wasn't a “school” of Black filmmakers, or a consciousness effort. Things just happened. Of course, everybody was more or less rebellious at that time. It was the late sixties, early seventies. The Viet Nam War was still being fought, and people were disillusioned. What UCLA did was to inspire a certain amount of dissent and critical analysis, a certain desire to be original.³⁶

Anne Orwin and Adrianne Carageorge's study reinforces the importance of women working together:

Crews are composed of friend groups. If women are not perceived as part of the group, they may not be chosen to be on a crew, therefore limiting the very experiential part of learning that is most valuable to them . . . as a result women often work in all-women productions and lack the broader experience available to their male counterpart.³⁷

Three women in focus groups I have run have mentioned the importance of working with other women, who give each other opportunities to crew their projects. One student declared her senior thesis “an all-feminist production,” and included being a feminist in her crew call. As colleges are striving toward gender equity and racial and ethnic diversity in their majors, it is vital for institutions and faculty to build in systems of support that ensure equity and inclusivity for students of color, for women, and other students within protected identity groups.

Enabling Institutional Change

We as instructors must do all we can to create a safe, inclusive space for all of our students to be challenged and to have the resources to learn equally, no matter their gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation, or accessibility needs. Equity and inclusivity in teaching is not just about access to higher education but equal opportunity to success.³⁸ I have started a long-term research project, seeking out faculty who are applying pedagogical strategies for teaching television production classes, in ways that are supporting *all* student learning in thoughtful and inclusive ways. From this research, I have been a part of designing pedagogical resources, mapping out key areas for faculty and departments to focus their attention, and on building creative interventions.

Some of this research has been part of the faculty-led research and pedagogical initiative EDIT Media, directed by Jennifer Proctor.³⁹ Together with faculty across the nationally and

internationally, we are building teaching resources for faculty, students, and administrators who work in media production programs. With the insight of hundreds of faculty and students through surveys and focus groups, Proctor and I were lead authors of the “EDIT 10: Best Practices For Inclusive Teaching In Media Production” and the “EDIT 5: Advice From Faculty To Administrators On Leadership For Inclusive Media Production Programs.”⁴⁰

While my own research on the pre-industry pipelines is still ongoing, I want to articulate four early findings. Although none are revolutionary, the sharing of knowledge and the building of intentionality is integral to building systems within our classrooms and within our colleges to ensure that we are changing the way young people are experiencing this field of study and encouraging all students toward success. The first is quite obvious and many scholars who have looked at these problems mention this intervention: all students are challenged when faculty diversify the curriculum. From the introductory level onward, all students need to see the work of women, of people of color, of people working outside the mainstream, of artists and creatives working globally. This does not just need to happen in studies classes—and it shouldn’t happen in just one or two very special weeks where the topic is generalized under a particular identity group. Nick Manley at University of Texas Corpus Christi decided one semester to use only media created by women for every example of basic cinematographic techniques in his introductory-level film production course. Kathryn Ramey, who teaches media production at Emerson College retooled her analogies, comparing the punch-and-advance mechanics of the motion picture camera to that of the sewing machine. But the issues of diversifying the curriculum also means that faculty who determine the goals and priorities of the curriculum need to come from a diversity of experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives. The hiring and retention of diverse faculty contributes to students integrating the value of having experts from diverse backgrounds as media makers, as writers of the books they are assigned to read, and the creative, scholarly, and professional expertise.⁴¹ As well, studies show that students from diverse populations themselves feel an increased sense of self-efficacy if they are in classrooms run by faculty who look like themselves.⁴²

Second, students need to learn the skills to become expert collaborators. This is relevant within the context of racial, gender, and class differences among students, as well. Much like Felicia Henderson’s study on homogeneity in the writers’ room,⁴³ there is often homogeneity among student collaborators. A desire for sameness is a key component in conversations about implicit bias. Students need to be attuned to the ways in which gender and racial bias disrupt and hinder creative collaboration. Alison Wotherspoon argues that faculty need to model “healthy and respectful” relationships between collaborators. “You can’t expect students to have functional crews if there are tensions in the different departments and staff model bad behavior to their students.”⁴⁴ She suggests faculty determine the design of classroom and project-based collaborations, providing policies and guidance around on-set behavior. Though students might come from a wide variety of backgrounds, they can learn shared models of collaborative production.⁴⁵ Separately, both Carroll Hodge and Kath Dooley make strong cases for class time to be balanced between building teamwork skills and navigating conflict resolutions on one side and developing aesthetics and mastering technique on the other.⁴⁶

Third, research shows that for students to succeed, they need an equal opportunity education. Anne Orwin and Adrienne Carageorge noted in their study of media production classrooms that “there is a pervasive attitude that men come to the school already knowing how

to use the equipment, while women feel they have less experience or that they have been given less encouragement in this area.”⁴⁷ Many students, especially those interested in media production, are accessing tools of video production, digital photography, and sound mixing even before they get to university. At the top public schools, high schoolers sometimes have the option of taking a film class now. We see in admissions submissions hundreds of films made as projects for a high school class. But there are other students who have not had the opportunities to work with media technology. For Orwin and Carageorge, in a classroom setting, when a faculty member asks for a volunteer to demonstrate, men will be more likely to raise their hand to do demonstrations in class. In my research, I have found economic factors at play: those from more affluent backgrounds may already have previous experience working with media equipment either at home or in school. Students from more socio-economically advantaged backgrounds might be more willing to demonstrate equipment because of this experience. To counter this, as Orwin and Carageorge and others recommend, faculty are determining roles for crews beforehand, thereby assuring that every student has equal time practicing operating various technologies, and that there is a more level playing field. This is emphasized by Rob Sabal, who encourages faculty to question the industrial model of film production that is so often mirrored within film schools and uncritically reproduced. Sabal sees that teaching collaboration skills provides an opportunity to interrogate the stereotyping of particular roles and “argue for a new kind of cooperative and reciprocal set of relationships between each of the roles in the group.”⁴⁸ Returning to Joan Braderman’s experience, the focus should be on mastery of concepts first before than mastery technology. Ted Hardin pointedly asks, “Are we teaching students to make films, or are we teaching them how to become the people who make films?”⁴⁹ Ideally, faculty do both.

Fourthly and finally, students have been accepted into an institution and it is the responsibility of departments and educators to ensure that every student is provided a safe place to learn. Discomfort, challenge, and rigor are vital to learning—but feeling unsafe is not. Teaching in the #MeToo moment offers important opportunities to think holistically about ways to ensure that the current generation of students—who will be the next generation of the nation’s workforce—understands and adheres to national legal policy against sexual harassment and sexual violence in the workplace. While the current US Education Secretary, Betsy DeVos, has withdrawn Obama-era guidance on educational policy around sexual harassment and sexual assault and Title IX, many college and university campuses receiving federal funding must still comply with the directive that all students be provided “an educational environment free from discrimination.”⁵⁰ Within the context of hands-on performance-based curriculum there are particular issues and opportunities at play. One idea is to refresh the policies around production safety to include not just protocols around rigging and lighting, but also around on-set behavior. Here the industry can be useful in providing models. The Producers Guild of America has created new rules including anti-sexual harassment training, determining and announcing reporting procedures that provide anyone on set access to at least two different points-of-contact for reporting, and that any report of harassment be listened to with “attention and empathy.”⁵¹ One of the most forward-thinking trends has been the hiring of intimacy coordinators to work with cast and crew. It is their job to ensure that any acts of intimacy represented on screen are rehearsed and performed so that “the choreography of these scenes [accurately tells] the characters’ stories, as intended by the writer through the interpretation of the director and the actors involved, while

respecting the physical and psychological safety of all involved.”⁵² Conversations with cast and crew should clarify rules and guidelines for planning, preparing for, and filming scenes of intimacy. What these three levers for change offer is a better chance that matriculating students see the value of the education being offered to them, the possibility of living up to the challenges of coursework, and a sense of institutional belonging.

Case Study: Game Play as Intervention

Conversations about the demographics of classrooms and the balancing of student bodies are important to the health of departments and programs over time. In the neoliberal economy, some faculty might feel a need to question, conform, or push back against changing standards or goals for admissions officers. No matter the issues (and they are dramatically different depending on the institution), students who are entering universities are changing.⁵³ A key way for institutions to stay competitive is to focus on retention—which, especially for students of color and other vulnerable and protected groups on campuses, means both thinking about how to ensure an equitable and inclusive education and fostering a sense of self-efficacy and belonging.⁵⁴ Independent of issues for admissions offices, departments must address how the demographics of classrooms play a role in determine how we design our courses, our curriculum, and our majors. As the demographics of higher education are changing, the education our institutions are offering must be designed to ensure or increase not just educational standards but levels of retention.

Over the last three years, I have focused on diagnosing the nature of the problem of collaboration in pre-industry programs and building an intervention. With the help of collaborators at The Engagement Lab, I used findings from my research to design a massively multiplayer game-based intervention that challenges players’ preconceived notions about collaborating with people different from themselves. This card-based game, *Room at the Top*, has been play-tested with people from film, media, and games industries and pre-industries; it was an official selection the 2017 IndieCade Festival and is now being used in our New Student Orientation programming at Emerson College. It has also been played at the University of Texas Corpus Christi, Northeastern University, Occidental College, and the University of South Carolina.⁵⁵

Room at the Top was incubated at The Engagement Lab at Emerson College, an applied research and design lab dedicated to reimagining civic engagement for a mediated culture. At The Engagement Lab, we work with partners to co-design solutions to the most pressing problems in democracy and governance, including participation gaps, gender, or racial discrimination, lack of basic media literacies, youth exclusion, and gaps in public health practices. Our research and practice are influenced by the fields of media studies, communications, human-centered design, and cultural studies. Our research ranges from basic research about play and learning to specific program evaluations. *Room at the Top* was developed through years of extensive research with media professionals and young people who aspire to join these industries. Our aim was to understand the ways in which biases disrupt and hinder creative collaboration. This research directly informed the game mechanics, and we used a participatory design method for creating the game. The goal was to build a tool that

encouraged conversations about difference, creativity, and collaboration where players could find common ground and speak about difficult topics from a shared experience.

This game was designed to find a new approach to tackling a topic most people find difficult to talk about: inclusion and implicit bias within creative communities. People from under-represented or minority groups (women, people of color, LGBTQ, socio-economically disadvantaged groups) don't need to be told again that they deserve a chance—and people who do have privilege often get defensive before the conversation can even start. Players can have a better chance to step outside their personal experiences (and their privilege—or lack thereof) and inhabit their assigned role. The game addresses charged topics within a safe place of gameplay, positioning players in randomized positions of privilege or with different levels of bias. During the post-game discussion, conversations about the impact of implicit bias on gameplay emerge that allow players to talk about their experiences first in relation to the game and then, as the discussion develops, into real-life experiences.

Room at the Top is a massively multiplayer card game for groups with 12–200 people run by a facilitator. Players take on the role of interplanetary media-makers and compete both as individuals and groups to win the top prize in an intergalactic media festival. Over the course of the game, players hailing from four different planets are challenged to collaborate to create the best creative work, but must pit their individual goals against that of the group. These goals are designed to highlight real-world biases, so players are motivated to work with people similar to them (from the same planet, wearing the same shoes, etc.) to achieve a personal victory. As in the real world, some players are more powerful than others because of the resources they (and their home planet) bring to the table. Players must balance power and influence, personalities, and creative output to win. The game provokes players to weigh their own motivations against the creative goals of their group, but provides a safe space for players to test, experiment, and challenge their notions of what it means to collaborate with people who the player might deem different from them. The game period ends with a rich facilitated discussion that prompts players into important conversations about competition, team-building, community, creativity, bias, and knowing oneself as a way to prepare to work best with others.⁵⁶ *Room at the Top* builds a foundation for self-reflection about creative practice and generates a safe place dialogue about how to promote a culture of open communication about implicit bias, inclusivity, and collaboration.

Conclusion

An intervention is not a solution. There are deeply seeded discriminatory and exclusionary policies, procedures, and practices embedded in educational systems. Solutions will be hard to reach. But the impact change can have on faculty, students, and someday on industries, will be profound. If pre-industry programs continue to be popular majors at universities, then the opportunity is there to build on pedagogical innovation for inclusion and help establish more equitable pipelines into the media industries and change subsequent industry behaviors and expectations. And if our students find other professional pathways, then the skills they learn in a more inclusive and equitable department will doubtless serve them well no matter their given field.

All students should have a safe place to learn and feel that success is achievable. Faculty are gatekeepers, and the classroom needs to be reimagined not as a mirror of the industry but rather as a living experiment in reshaping the media industries' ideas about equity and access. Both quantitative and qualitative data are vital to determining what is working and where interventions are needed, and to better understand the structural and professional nuances students face as they enter professional spaces. Institutions learn more about equity when they track demographic and educational data together: looking for patterns or absences in enrollment, satisfaction, and success. Of particular interest, for example, is the question of whether there are any demographic factors that define the group of students taking advanced courses within particular areas of study. While individual students should never be discouraged from certain following their passion, if aggregate numbers make it clear that there are structural problems of inequity, then they need to be examined and resolved at the departmental level. In the testing ground of a university campus, faculty and departments need to experiment, iterate, and develop new systems to tackle the problems of bias in pre-industry programs that current media industries cannot.

¹ Miranda Banks is Associate Professor of Film and Media Studies at Emerson College and serves on the Board of Directors of the Society of Cinema and Media Studies. She is author of *The Writers: A History of American Screenwriters and their Guild* (Rutgers UP, 2015) and co-editor of *Production Studies* (Routledge, 2009) and *Production Studies: The Sequel!* (Routledge, 2015).

² B. Denise Hawkins, "Flocking to Film School—Minorities and the Film Industry," *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, June 16, 2007, <http://diverseeducation.com/article/7441/>. I use the term college and at other times speak about universities, or I will mention both. There are important distinctions at times. Within the US context, colleges are traditionally focused on undergraduate and master's degree programs, whereas universities will offer both graduate terminal degrees and undergraduate degrees.

³ For an interesting study of pathway programs, though their focus is more on Communication degrees solely in the Australian context, see Stuart Cunningham and Ruth Bridgstock, "Say Goodbye to the Fries: Graduate Careers in Media, Cultural and Communication Studies," *Media International Australia* 145 (1, 2012): 6–17. doi:10.1177/1329878X1214500103. NB: I will sometimes use the vernacular "film school" to describe these pre-professional film and media production programs that serve as pipelines into the media industries.

⁴ Kristin J. Warner's insightful work on the precarity of talent pipelines for marginalized women and men of color disrupts the common narrative that opportunity is equitable for all by showing the inequities of access. Kristen J. Warner, "Strategies for Success? Navigating Hollywood's 'Postracial' Labor Practices," in *Precarious Creativity*, ed. Michael Curtain and Kevin Sanson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 172–85, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ffjn40.17>.

⁵ Toby Miller harshly questions the value—economic and thereby, otherwise—of film and media production programs in "Goodbye to Film School: Please Close the Door on Your Way Out," in *The Education of the Filmmaker in Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas*, ed. Mette Hjort (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 153–68.

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- ⁶ Stephen E. Siwek, "Video Games in the 21st Century," Entertainment Software Association, 2017 report, 2 and 7, http://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ESA_EconomicImpactReport_Design_V3.pdf. Also see Entertainment Software Association, "Analyzing the American Game Industry 2016," February 2017, 4. <http://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ESA-VG-Industry-Report-2016-FINAL-Report.pdf>.
- ⁷ Motion Picture Association of America, "The American Motion Picture and Television Industry: Creating Jobs, Trading Around the World," The Economic Contribution of the Motion Picture & Television Industry to the United States, November 2017, https://www.mpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/MPAA-Industry-Economic-ContributionFactsheet_2016-FINAL-2.pdf.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ For statistical data on the current state of these inequities within the US film and television context, see Martha Lauzen annual "Celluloid Ceiling" and "Boxed In" reports, Darnell Hunt's annual "Hollywood Diversity Report," or research coming out of IDEA through Stacy Smith. Most reports are Martha D. Lauzen, "The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women on the Top 100, 250, and 500 Films of 2017," Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, San Diego State University, 2018, https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2017_Celluloid_Ceiling_Report.pdf; Darnell Hunt's annual "Hollywood Diversity Report," most recently Hunt, Darnell, Ana-Christina Ramón, Michael Tran, Amberia Sargent, and Debanjan Roychoudhury, "Hollywood Diversity Report 2018: Five Years of Progress and Missed Opportunities," UCLA College of Social Sciences, February 2018, <https://socialsciences.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/UCLA-Hollywood-Diversity-Report-2018-2-27-18.pdf>; and Stacy L. Smith, Marc Choueiti, and Katherine Pieper, "Inclusion or Invisibility? Comprehensive Annenberg Report on Diversity in Entertainment," Institute for Diversity and Empowerment at Annenberg (IDEA), USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, https://annenberg.usc.edu/sites/default/files/CARDReport_FINAL.pdf.
- ¹¹ Yvonne Fritze, Geir Haugsbakk, and Yngve Nordkvelle argue that part of the problem of film production programs that they examined in their study was, in fact, an inherent anti-intellectualism that splits apart the practical education from theoretical enquiry. Yvonne Fritze, Geir Haugsbakk, and Yngve Nordkvelle, "Why a Formal Training for TV and Filmmaking?" in *Medien—Wissen—Bildung: Medienbildung Wozu?* ed. Theo Hug, Tanja Kohn, Petra Missomelius (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2016), 268.
- ¹² Sara Ahmed, "Complaint as Diversity Work," *Feminist Killjoys*, November 10, 2017, <https://feministkilljoys.com/2017/11/10/complaint-as-diversity-work/>.
- ¹³ Mette Hjort's edited collection, *The Education of the Filmmaker in Europe, Australia, and Asia* is an invaluable resource in understanding the unique diversity of issues facing global film school education. Mette Hjort, ed., *The Education of the Filmmaker in Europe, Australia, and Asia* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Also see Dana Polan, *Scenes of Instruction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Maria Dora

- Mourão, Cecília Mello, Alan Taylor, and Stanislav Semerdjiev, eds, *The 21st Century Film, TV and Media School: Challenges, Clashes, Changes* (Sofia: Center International de Liaison des Ecoles de Cinema et de Television [CILECT], 2018); and Duncan Petrie's "Theory, Practice, and the Significance of Film Schools," *Scandia: Tidskrift för historisk forskning* 76 (2, 2010): 31–46.
- ¹⁴ Dana Polan, "Young Art, Old Colleges: Early Episodes in the American Study of Film," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 97.
- ¹⁵ Little data is available on the organization referred to in this document, the Associated Committee on Television History. UCLA, "History of TFT," <http://www.tft.ucla.edu/about/history/>.
- ¹⁶ Polan, 105.
- ¹⁷ John Ellis, "Film in Higher Education," *Screen Education* 38 (Spring 1981), 89. Reprinted in *Screen Education Reader*, 89.
- ¹⁸ Mark Olssen and Michael A. Peters, "Neoliberalism, Higher Education and the Knowledge Economy: From the Free Market to Knowledge Capitalism," *Journal of Education Policy* 20 (3, 2005), 313–45.
- ¹⁹ Alan Taylor, "Film School, and How It Could Save Us," in *The 21st Century Film, TV and Media School: Challenges, Clashes, Changes*, ed. Maria Dora Mourão, Cecília Mello, Alan Taylor, and Stanislav Semerdjiev (Sofia: Center International de Liaison des Ecoles de Cinema et de Television [CILECT], 2018), 20.
- ²⁰ "Lodge Kerrigan: Writer-Director Graduate of NYU Graduate Program," *Projections* 12: *Filmmakers on Film Schools*, ed. John Boorman, Walter Donohue, and Fraser MacDonald (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 186.
- ²¹ This is true for public, private, and especially for the increasing number of for-profit pre-industry institutions.
- ²² Common advice giving to prospective students is to looking at a college or university's list of alumni and their careers. For example, see, Ernest Pintoff, *The Complete Guide to American Film Schools and Cinema and Television Courses* (NY: Penguin, 1994), xii.
- ²³ Carroll Hodge, "Film Collaboration and Creative Conflict," *Journal of Film and Video* 61 (1, Spring 2009): 19.
- ²⁴ While statistics vary year to year, many film and media production schools are within 10–15 percent of a 50/50 split between male and female students. That said, that number is deceiving, as I will address later in this article.
- ²⁵ Pieter Aquilia offers a case study of this within the Australian context—and it is a study that would be great for other researchers to investigate within their own national context for particular identity groups. She tracks the extraordinary success of the first cohort of twelve women accepted into the Australian Film and Television School in the 1970s. (AFTS was renamed the Australian Film Television and Radio School, AFTRS, in 1981.) The group included Jane Campion, Gillian Armstrong, Jocelyn Moorehouse, and Shirely Barrett, among others. Pieter Aquilia, "The Value of Film School in the Success of Female Filmmakers in Australia," *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 9 (2, 2015): 140–51.
- ²⁶ Before I started the tenure track at Emerson College, I was a visiting assistant professor at University of California, Los Angeles and at the University of Southern California.

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- ²⁷ Mary Kearney and Twenty Female Film Students, "Melting the Celluloid Ceiling: Training Girl Filmmakers, Revolutionizing Media Culture," in *Mediated Girlhoods*, vol. 2, ed. Morgan Genevieve Blue and Mary Celeste Kearney (Bern: Peter Lang, 2018), 215.
- ²⁸ Hjort, *The Education of the Filmmaker in Europe, Australia, and Asia*, 16–17.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ³⁰ Martha D. Lauzen, "The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women on the Top 100, 250, and 500 Films of 2017," 5–6, https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2017_Celluloid_Ceiling_Report.pdf.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ³² Martha D. Lauzen, "Boxed in 2016-17: Women on Screen and Behind the Scenes in Television," Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, San Diego State University (September 2017), 3, https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2016-17_Boxed_In_Report.pdf.
- ³³ Joan Braderman, "Feminism and Video: A View from the Village," *Camera Obscura* 22 (1 64, 2007): 197.
- ³⁴ Michelle Citron and Ellen Seiter, "The Woman with the Movie Camera," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 26 (1981): 61–62.
- ³⁵ Mary Celeste Kearney, "How Film Schools Lead to Pipelines Full of Weinsteins," *Women and Hollywood*, November 17, 2017, <https://womenandhollywood.com/guest-post-how-film-schools-lead-to-pipelines-full-of-weinsteins-f49f4c69d78/>.
- ³⁶ Charles Burnett cited in Bérénice Reynaud, "An interview with Charles Burnett," *Black American Literature Forum* 25 (2, Summer 1991): 323–34, reprinted in Erich Leon Harris, *African-American Screenwriters Now: Conversations with Hollywood's Black Pack* (Los Angeles, CA: Silman-James, 1996), 57. Aquilia's research is important here, as well. Aquilia, "The Value of Film School."
- ³⁷ Anne Orwin and Adrienne Carageorge, "The Education of Women in Film Production," *Journal of Film and Video* 53 (1, 2001): 45.
- ³⁸ Daryl G. Smith, "The Diversity Imperative: Moving to the Next Generation," *American Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Social, Political, and Economic Challenges*, 4th ed., eds Michael N. Bastedo, Philip G. Altbach, and Patricia J. Gumpert (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 378.
- ³⁹ EDIT Media (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity in Teaching Media). Ed. Jennifer Proctor, www.editmedia.org.
- ⁴⁰ Jennifer Proctor and Miranda Banks, "EDIT 10: Best Practices For Inclusive Teaching In Media Production," EDIT Media, <http://www.editmedia.org/best-practices/> and Jennifer Proctor and Miranda Banks, "EDIT 5: Advice From Faculty To Administrators on Leadership for Inclusive Media Production Programs," EDIT Media, <http://www.editmedia.org/the-edit-5/>.
- ⁴¹ Octavio Villalpando, "The Impact of Diversity and Multiculturalism on All Students: Findings from a National Study," *NASPA Journal* 40 (1, 2002): 124–44.
- ⁴² Smith, "The Diversity Imperative," 383–84.
- ⁴³ Felicia D. Henderson, "The Culture Behind Closed Doors: Issues of Gender and Race in the Writers' Room," *Cinema Journal* 50 (2, 2011): 145–52.
- ⁴⁴ Alison Wotherspoon, "Creating a Film School Environment that Fosters and Encourages Creativity," in *The 21st Century Film, TV and Media School: Challenges*,

- Clashes, Changes*, ed. Maria Dora Mourão, Cecília Mello, Alan Taylor, and Stanislav Semerdjiev (Sofia: Center International de Liaison des Ecoles de Cinema et de Television (CILECT), 2018), 67. While Wotherspoon is Australian, she is writing this article for a global audience of film educators and this argument works well within a US film school context.
- ⁴⁵ Susan Kerrigan and Pieter Aquilia conducted a study of students in Australia and Singapore looking at their responses to ideas of creativity. They then assessed students' understanding of in collaboration-based curriculum in. Their findings showed that student collaboration styles were not significantly different between the two countries. Susan Kerrigan and Pieter Aquilia, "Student Film Collaboration: The East-West Dilemma," *Journal of International Communication* 19 (2, 2013): 147–66. doi:10.1080/13216597.2013.784209.
- ⁴⁶ Hodge, "Film Collaboration and Creative Conflict," 21. Kath Dooley, "Fostering Students' Collaboration Skills in University-based Screen Production Courses," Proceedings of the 2015 ASPERA Annual Conference, Adelaide, July 2015.
- ⁴⁷ Orwin and Carageorge, "The Education of Women in Film Production," 45.
- ⁴⁸ Rob Sabal, "The Individual in Collaborative Media Production," *Journal of Film and Video* 61 (1, 2009): 8. Kath Dooley warns that a lack of understanding of specific roles and responsibilities within the production crew, or a "mismatch between student abilities and expectations, can lead to conflict and group collapse, a situation that most screen production educators have witnessed firsthand at one point or another." Dooley, "Fostering Students' Collaboration Skills," 3.
- ⁴⁹ Ted Hardin, "Notes on Collaboration: Assessing Student Behaviors," *Journal of Film and Video* 61 (1, 2009): 32.
- ⁵⁰ "Dear Colleague," US Department of Education and the Office of Civil Rights, April 4, 2011, 1, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201104.pdf>.
- ⁵¹ Dave McNary, "Producers Guild of America Sets Sexual Harassment Guidelines," *Variety*, January 19, 2018, <https://variety.com/2018/film/news/producers-guild-anti-sexual-harassment-guidelines-1202669226/>.
- ⁵² "About Intimacy Directors International," Intimacy Directors International, <http://www.teamidi.org/about-idi>. This movement started in the theater with the rise of intimacy choreographers and directors. As it has moved into film and media production, the term most regularly used is intimacy coordinator.
- ⁵³ Nathan Grewe projects a dip in overall student rates but a rise in the ratio of Asian-American and Latinx students. Nathan D. Grawe, *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 17.
- ⁵⁴ See Beverly Daniel Tatum, "Why Are All the Black Kids Still Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race in the Twenty-First Century," *Liberal Education* 103 (3/4, Summer/Fall 2017): 46–55. And see Vincent Tinto, "From Retention to Persistence," *Inside Higher Ed*, September 26, 2016, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/09/26/how-improve-student-persistence-and-completion-essay>.
- ⁵⁵ For more about *Room at the Top*, visit <https://elab.emerson.edu/projects/room-at-the-top>.

⁵⁶ In post-game surveys, students indicate that the game is successful in accomplishing its objectives. Players reported that they understood the game's core messages and how they could be applied in practice. In their survey responses, they discussed notions of privilege and power, and how bias impacts group and individual behavior in the creative industries. Most players enjoyed the challenge of collaborative creativity, and found the systems the game represented to be accurate to real life. We plan to publish more about the game, its objectives, and an evaluation of its usefulness next year.

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