

Instructor Background and Motivation for Teaching the Course

In this section, Kevin Desmond describes his motivation for teaching 15.S50 Poker Theory and Analytics and how the course intersects with his professional and academic experiences.

Using Poker to Teach Key Business Concepts

I spent several years playing poker professionally while studying finance as an undergraduate at Villanova University. I chose to join Morgan Stanley as a trader rather than pursue poker as a career. My transition into trading was very seamless as a result of my experience playing poker and interest in game theory concepts. I would like MIT students to have the same opportunity.

For students entering the business world, I believe the key concepts of poker that transfer well to management positions are decision making with incomplete information, reading the actions of others, and being comfortable with self-assessment. I believe these skills can benefit students in many aspects of life, not just their careers.

For those entering the trading field, in particular, experience with taking calculated risks, participating in a competitive global market, and familiarity with making decisions under pressure are concepts that are very difficult to teach new traders but are fundamental concepts covered throughout this type of poker education. I believe there are few activities that would prepare students for a career in finance better than poker.

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—Kevin Desmond

Creating an Opportunity for Students to Engage with Poker Conceptually, as Opposed to Gambling

This class serves as an opportunity for students interested in trading and other careers to enjoy some of the benefits of learning and mastering poker without the need to risk money.

In fact, one of the primary motivators of the course was that it is difficult for students to engage with poker conceptually without the connection to gambling. This course allowed students to play poker competitively in a learning environment among those who have the same educational end goal. I think there are a lot of ways for students to extract the benefits from poker without the need for risking money and one of the core pillars of the course is encouraging students to avoid gambling when possible.

From Wall Street to Sloan

I enjoyed my time on Wall Street and I think it was a great opportunity to start my career in that type of environment. I found that at the end of the day, my greatest interest was in financial innovation and the opportunity to come to Sloan to learn among the most dedicated academics in the world was not one I could pass up.

I am excited for the opportunity to continue MIT's effort to be on the forefront of the effort to solve complex casino games. I was inspired by the MIT Blackjack team's ability to identify an opportunity and execute a sophisticated strategy so effectively, as depicted in the film *21*. I particularly enjoyed the emphasis they put on discovering a practical implementation of their analytical solution. I am a firm believer that an idea is only as valuable as its real-world viability and I am fortunate to be part of a university that encourages students to innovate with a practical end goal in mind.