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The Kellogg School of Management launched a new class using poker to teach women crucial leadership skills. A student shares what it's like.

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First-year MBA student Marilia Teixeira took Kellogg's new poker-driven course. Marilia Teixeira.

- **The Kellogg School of Management and Poker Power teamed up to create a new program.**
- **The six-week pilot is designed to help women build indispensable leadership skills through poker.**
- **First-year student Marilia Teixeira said talking with a professional player was her favorite part.**
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In mid-April, Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University teamed up with Poker Powher — a community that teaches women "game-changing skills" like strategy, confidence, and capital allocation — to create a new extracurricular pilot program.

"Many top business schools, including the Kellogg School of Management, have more than 40% female students — yet only a fraction of C-suite roles are held by women," Gail Berger, deputy director of the Kellogg Center for Executive Women, told Insider. "Additionally, COVID-19 presented a set of unprecedented professional setbacks for women across the United States."

The six-week pilot is designed to help female-identifying students from Kellogg's full-time, evening and weekend, and executive MBA programs build indispensable leadership skills in negotiation, emotional intelligence (EI), and decision-making by learning the art of poker.

Participants engage in a weekly lecture with a Kellogg professor, followed by small-group discussions and a poker lesson that applies the leadership insights learned.

Berger and negotiation and decision expert Victoria Medvec teach the program, along with professional poker player Melanie Weisner. The pilot also features a guest lecture from psychologist and New York Times bestselling author Maria Konnikova.

Before coming to Kellogg, Marilia Teixeira, a first-year, full-time MBA student and tech-industry veteran with over a decade of experience at IBM Peru, had many friends who played poker — most of them male.

"I felt insecure playing with them because the game made me feel very anxious and embarrassed," she said.

So when the school announced the pilot, Teixeira was immediately intrigued by the possibility of getting better at taking risks, being aggressive, recognizing biases, conquering fear, and saying no.

"I believe that if you want to be part of the strategic conversations, or as the program is called, 'taking a seat at the table,' these skills are very relevant," she said.

Teixeira shared what the new class is like with Insider.

Getting rid of 'outcome bias'

Teixeira said many of the things she learned can be applied to life as well as to business.

Each week focuses on a specific topic and features a Kellogg faculty expert. For example, the first week honed in on being courageous and taking risks, and the second week was about aggression and position.

"One of the insights that stuck with me was how many of us judge if a decision was a good or bad decision depending on the results we get," she said. "But the reality is that when we are making decisions under uncertainty, good decisions can lead to bad results and bad decisions can lead to good results."

She learned that focusing on the results instead of the process results in "outcome bias," which she said limits you from taking risks or making decisions when you're afraid of the results it may entail. Understanding this was a game-changer for her.

One of the coaches told Teixeira's class about a time when she was playing poker and lost an important game.

"So she went to her coach, very upset and frustrated about her loss," Teixeira said. "The coach then stopped her before she could say anything, and asked her if she could have played differently. She had played as good as she could and would not change anything. This is an example of playing poker, but this could be translated into each of our professional and personal lives."

Inside the mind of a poker expert

Teixeira said it was fascinating to hear from Weisner about her experience playing poker professionally and what motivates her.

"She is such an inspiration, bright and strategic, and charismatic — you could never get bored when she is explaining something," she said.

The most exciting part of the course for Teixeira was when they reviewed hypothetical plays and heard the poker guru's insights.

"Each session takes two hours, but the last session was so interesting that the whole class stayed 30 minutes after just to get the chance to keep learning about Melanie's train of thought in different plays," she said.

At the end of each session, students spend time in breakout rooms with seven other players and a poker coach to put these strategies into practice using the app Pokerrrr 2.

"Because we explore a new topic each session, the way everyone plays in each session is different, and we try to put into practice the topic of the day," she said. "So, you might guess that when we learned about being aggressive, everyone decided to play 'all in.' That session was very fun."

Outside the class, students can also join in on games hosted by the program in the app and gain more practice time. A poker tournament is scheduled at the end of the program.

"At this point, I can say I know how to play poker, and just last week playing with some friends I did pretty well," Teixeira said.