WILLIAM LI: My name is William Li. I'm a Ph.D. Student in computer science at MIT. And for this course, I was a graduate instructor for 6.811, principles and practice of assistive technology. And that meant I was one of the c-instructors of the class.

GRACE TEO: Cool. And my name is Grace Teo. I am a lecturer for 6.811. And basically our class is about pairing students up with clients with disabilities to create a customized piece of assistive technology for them over the course of the semester. So the reason why I got into teaching this course is partly because of William, because William invited me. But also the background to that was that over the summer at MIT, I had founded a very similar class called Open Style Lab, where we teamed up students with clients with disabilities as well. Except that in that case, we were asking the students to create clothing for them.

So this entire area of designing around a constraints of disability is very interesting to me because, first of all, there's very immediate community impact. I think because of that too, then the students have a lot of motivation to try their best to learn because they see that they're really impacting a real person and helping to solve a real problem instead of just doing problem sets or solving kind of abstract challenges.

And I think, to be honest, one of the things I love is seeing the students get comfortable talking to and talking about people with disabilities over time as well. Because I think very often in society there's a huge amount of discomfort surrounding disability. And it's not that people don't care it's just that they don't want to say the wrong things, you don't want to be offensive, and so equipping our students with the skills to be able to engage with the community is really important.

WILLIAM LI: So I was fortunate as an undergrad to work at a children's rehabilitation hospital one summer and learn about the space of assistive technology. And I ended up doing that in my undergraduate thesis. And so when I went to grad school, I wanted to continue working in assistive technology. And I was fortunate to be able to do that here at MIT.

So my master's thesis was working a lot in speech recognition for people with different speech challenges with multiple sclerosis that maybe affects their speech. So I think it's a really-- similar to Grace, I think it's a really fascinating area to work in, very personally meaningful, but also very interesting design constraints and challenges in working in this space.

And so with respect to the class, my master's thesis adviser Seth Teller started this class back in 2011. I was fortunate to be the first teaching assistant in the class. And then to get involved in it with a big team, including Grace for sure, over the past semester.