

THE GI JANES

Department:

English Language and Literature

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In 2012, Vossen, Vist, and Ehrentraut created a feminist advocacy group for women in games called The Games Institute Janes or “GI Janes” for short. They noticed increasing hostility to female gamers online in the years directly preceding gamergate and felt the desire to do something within their community to address this sexism directly.

The three graduate students wanted to ensure there was a space for women, including themselves, to comfortably play and talk about games as part of the Games Institute and at the University of Waterloo. During this time, the GI Janes spoke to the media, published articles and podcasts, presented and tabled local festivals, conferences, and conventions, and hosted workshops to spread awareness about the issues present in games culture and the games industry.

A widespread problem that women spoke to Vossen, Vist, and Ehrentraut about was fear and anxiety around playing games with others because of harassment and ridicule. The three grad students decided they wanted to create events where women could come together and play games. They designed these events to be places where women would not feel nervous playing games, where they could discuss the issues they encountered as women, and where they could feel like welcomed participants in games culture.

The GI Janes hosted monthly gaming events in Kitchener and Waterloo from 2013-2016. These included “101 nights” in which they would introduce the basics of a multiplayer game to make it more accessible and less intimidating to inexperienced players.

Interesting fact: The first GI Janes gaming event was held in a basement bar called The Rum Runner in downtown Kitchener. The bar made a custom cocktail called “the GI Jane” and the team set up consoles, televisions, and board games for attendees to play.