



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
informatics

Dealing with challenging students

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Questions

- How many of you remember an example when you were naughty as a student?

or

- How many of you remember an example when a colleague was naughty?

Remember!

- few years (or more?) ago you were a student!



Establish a positive relationship with your students

- create a **learning environment that is relaxed** but orderly
- cultivate in students an **excitement** to learn
- encourage **confidence** to participate fully in the learning experience.

Make a good first impression

- Introduce yourself and your material in a positive way
- Get to know your students, their interests and needs

Aurora Constantin

- born in Corabia, Romania
- one sister
- grown up in a small village in Romania
- 1986 – BSc in Physics, University of Craiova
- 2000 – PhD in Physics, University of Craiova
- over 20 years of teaching experience in high school
- 2008 – MSc in IT, University of Glasgow
- 2015 – PhD in Informatics, University of Edinburgh
- over 3 years of postdocs
- 2008 – University Teacher

Hobbies: painting, literature, music, travelling



“A picture is worth a thousand words”!



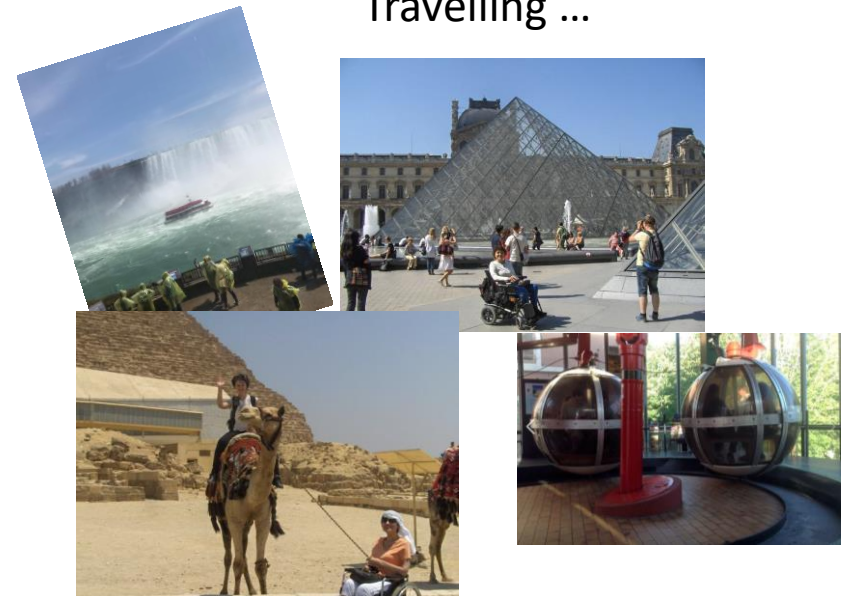
Three of the books I have enjoyed



Favourite music



Travelling ...





My Teaching Philosophy

- Everyone in the classroom contributes as a **student, teacher, and thinker**. I learn from students as much as they learn from me.



Reflect on your
own philosophy

Make your academic and behavioral expectations very clear

- Describe the **structure and purpose** of class content.
 - If appropriate, you may have planned to let your students identify key topics they want to discuss late in the semester.
- Explain **attendance policies** and **ground rules** for class interaction (see later example).
- Explain to students that you will frequently offer them **learning strategies** for your content.
 - Remember that we learn best when doing, applying or teaching content.

(Lisa Rodriguez - Planning for the First Day of Class, Retrieved from <http://www.4faculty.org/includes/104r1.jsp>)

Ground rules

- Start and end class on time
- One speaker at a time
- Everyone participates
- Keep an open mind
- Focus on "what" and not "who"
- No "zingers" or put downs
- No one dominates discussions
- Share "air time"
- Be an active listener
- Create a safe zone
- Stay on track/topic
- Agree only if it makes sense to do so

*(Lisa Rodriguez - **Planning for the First Day of Class**, Retrieved from <http://www.4faculty.org/includes/104r1.jsp>)*

Get to know your students

Activity: Introduction of the group members

- Every student interviews their neighbour for 5 minutes, then switch roles
- Suggest they start with the following questions:
 - What is your name?
 - What is your background (education, employment)?
 - Why did you pick up this MSc and specialism?
 - What is your career plan after this MSc?
- Something silly, like: 'If you could sing one song from your country, what would it be and why?' or 'If you were a bird, what type of bird would you want to be ? Would you rather be a pet or a wild bird?'
- When done: every student introduces their neighbour to the group.

Other suggestions?



Get students involved

- Ask students what they expect from your tutorial/lab at the beginning
- Ask students if their expectations were met (middle/end) and what their suggestions are for improving your activities
- Follow students' suggestions!
- Pair/group students to discuss
- Encourage questions and allow frequent opportunities for students to ask them
- Make sure that the students know how to meet you
- Personalise your content to the students' needs and interests
- ...



However, in spite of your efforts you may have ... “surprises”

Issues & Solutions

- Make three groups.
- Each group picks up one issue to discuss from the following list:
 - The “sleeping” or “bored” student
 - The “jocose” student
 - The “arrogant” student
- Brainstorm for finding solutions.
- Present your solutions with examples from your experience if you have encountered similar issues
- Add to the other group’s solutions

The “sleeping” or “bored” student

- Assume the student is not well
- Come up with ‘exciting’ activities
- Encourage students to actively participate
- Discuss with the student after the class (try to find out what caused this attitude, what would make that student engaged)

The 'jocose' student

- Smile unless the joke is completely rude or offensive
- “Thank you for relaxing the class, but now ‘Revenons à nos moutons!’ (Let’s get back to our sheep)”
- If the behaviour becomes repetitive, discuss with the student privately

The “arrogant” student

- Don't show you are annoyed by their attitude
- Answer the questions as if you don't observe their attitude
- Take a deep breath if necessary before saying or doing anything you might later regret
- “That's a great question! Did you try to find the answer yourself?”
- “I think this is a great topic for your homework next time”
- Again, if the attitude becomes irritating, try to have a discussion with your student in private

More tips

- Be confident
- Take two minutes after the class to reflect on your work
- Note down every inappropriate behaviour – think of solutions, ask your colleagues
- Start your class with a joke/quote/exciting question/something novel
 - “less is more”, “Why can’t you trust an atom? (A: They make up everything)”
 - Today we’ll apply KISS rule” (Keep It Short and Simple)
- End your class in a pleasant way
- Greet your students when they come in and out – treat them as your guests
- And again: ***you were students once, too!***