

Guidelines for the first day of teaching

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1 Preparation

Coordination Before the first meeting of your class, you should have met or have email communication with the lecturer and/or course coordinator, and been given instructions as to what to do. If this does not happen, please inform Professor Kirillov and/or Professor Starr and/or Professor Chas, and ask for instructions.

Note that your recitation is "attached" to a lecture. The instructor of this lecture might or might not be the course coordinator.

Preparation for the first meeting You should have received instructions from your lecturer regarding what material to cover on the first day. If you have not received such instructions by the day before your first class, you should send your lecturer an e-mail message saying that you do not know what to do for the first class; send copies of this message to kirillov@math.sunysb.edu (Prof. Kirillov). In the worst case scenario, where you have received no guidance, look at the syllabus and, after attending to the details given below, start solving a problem from the text in the first section mentioned by the syllabus, and try to get some response from the students, to get their minds working in a mathematical track. Prepare a few problems for this purpose in advance; make sure you know how to solve these problems. Also, find the course website or ask your coordinator what you are expected to do if you find out that students submit identical problems.

Syllabus Syllabi for all courses are, or should be, posted on the web; you can find the necessary link starting at www.math.sunysb.edu. As above, if there is no syllabus posted for your course, advise Professor Kirillov as soon as possible.

Textbook You should obtain a desk copy of the textbook from Merri in the Undergraduate Office (P-143, Math Tower).

Graphing calculators **CHECK** Some courses require them; some courses permit them; some courses prohibit them. You should get a clear statement from your course coordinator as to what is the policy for your course regarding graphing calculators. If your course requires them, then you should obtain one, along with an instruction booklet, from Barbara in the Undergraduate Office; you will have to leave a \$20 deposit. If you are not familiar with the graphing calculator, and you need to use one, you should spend a couple of hours playing with it to ensure that you can do the following.

Graph elementary functions, with arbitrary ranges for both x and y -axes. Do elementary numerical calculations involving rational functions, trig functions, logs to various bases, and exponentials. Write an elementary program, such as, for example, to compute the sum of the sines of the first 25 integers.

Photo Roster **check** Print a photo roster of your students to use it during class. Try to learn their names during the semester.

Classroom Make sure you know how to get to the classroom. If you can, visit the classroom beforehand, and write down in the blackboard and see how does it look from the back of the room.

2 The first day of class

You'll find a wide range of students at Stony Brook. Some will come to class well prepared, some will be completely lost. Do not assume that they have the necessary information (even if this information can be found on-line).

The first minutes of the first day Arrive early and greet the students as they enter in the classroom.

Basic Information Write your name, the title of the class and section number on the board; also your office number and location, e-mail address and office hours (you will be required to have at least two office hours, with at least one held in the Mathematics Learning Center in the Service Level of the Mathematics Building). You can also give a short presentations about you, where you come from, what are you qualifications to teach the course. If English is not your

first language, you can also mention it (and add that you might be insecure with English but not with Math)

Syllabi Remind the class that the syllabi are available on the web; write down the link. Most people in the department have a website in the Math Department site (<http://www.math.sunysb.edu/>), some of them might use Blackboard (<https://blackboard.stonybrook.edu/webapps/login/>), or both (I personally often use Blackboard for grades and the Math website for all the rest). Read the relevant sections of the syllabus to the class (i.e., sections concerned with quizzes, homework, and other recitation material).

Voice control As you do the above, ask the students if they are comfortable with the parameters of your speech, and adjust the volume, speed and pitch of your voice so that everyone can hear you and is comfortable with your voice.

Blackboard control Write down some crucial information concerning dates of quizzes, exams, etc., including date and time of the final exam (this info should be in the syllabus, and can be found in first few pages of the class schedule booklet). Check with the class to ensure that your writing is large enough so that they can see, and check the physical characteristics of the room to see if there are blind spots on the board; i.e., portions of the blackboard which are not visible from certain seats. If possible, make certain that there are no students seated in these seats, or, if that is not possible, do not write in these blind spots.

Homework handling Explain and write down in the blackboard how the homework should be handed in (before or after class, in your office, etc) and you will return it. Also, if you are posting the grades in Blackboard (please note that you are not allowed to post the grades so that "everybody can see everybody's grade". Blackboard takes care of this automatically.

Homework grading and academic honesty Explain the policy of grading (partial grades? how many problems per week?) and the consequences of cheating.

Time control It is very important to be in control of the timing of the class: You should start on time and you should end on time. In order to do this, you should have a watch or other timepiece, so you always know what time it is, and so you can organize your class as it proceeds in such a manner that you end on time and in a good place.

Attitude It usually takes several semesters of teaching to find the right attitude for yourself as a teacher, yet it is extremely important to have a good attitude

on the very first day of class. On the one hand, you want to be reasonably friendly so that they feel comfortable asking questions in class and going to your office for help; on the other hand, you want to be reasonably distant and authoritative, so that the students treat you, and hence the class and the material you are teaching, with proper respect.

Expectations You should be prepared with a written list of expectations of the students: How much time should they spend doing homework each week? Are they required to attend your class? Are they required to attend lecture? Will they be permitted to hand in homework late? If so, how late? Must they come to class to hand in homework? Will there be unannounced quizzes? Etc. You should read this aloud at the first meeting, and, if necessary, prepare a supplementary syllabus for your section containing this information; this supplementary syllabus can be prepared anytime during the first two weeks of class.

Help for the students Tell them about your office hours; the Mathematics Learning Center (MLC); private tutors. Make sure that you know where the MLC is. Also, Merri usually has a list of undergraduates and graduate students who wish to do private tutoring. You should note that, while the Department maintains a list of possible tutors for the convenience of the students, we do not recommend anyone, and we do not encourage students to go this route.

Early exam There is a 0-level exam in the second week of class. In the fall semester, the exam is for MAT 125, 131 and 141; in the spring semester, it is for MAT 125 and 131. Students might move "up" or "down" according to their scores in this exam.

Midterm and Final You should know the dates and times of the other exams, and the final exam. You should be able to tell the students about the calculator policy on your exams (permitted?, encouraged?, discouraged?, prohibited?) You should also tell them about the calculator policy on your quizzes and in your class while doing classwork. Some students might ask you questions concerning their need to miss one or more of these exams, and/or miss the final. **DO NOT TAKE ON YOURSELF THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ANSWERING SUCH QUESTIONS!** Refer the questions to the lecturer and/or course coordinator.

On-line homework Most courses will use a web grading system to do some of the homework problems online. If so, familiarize yourself with the system and explain students how to use it.

Student information Ask the students to sign in; you will need to be prepared with paper for this. Have them write their name and whether or not they are registered for this course, and whether or not they are registered for your section. Also, their projected major or major interest. This information will be useful to you in choosing which problems to focus on in class.

Headcount Count the number of students in the class, and ask for a show of hands as to how many are registered. record this information; you may need it for the Department administration.

Academics If for any reason, you lack specific guidelines as to what to cover on the first day of classes, here are some general guidelines. If the students have already been to one lecture, go over some problems related to that lecture. If yours is the first class of the course, spend the time reviewing prerequisite material. This is especially true for MAT 125, 131 and 141, where there is a 0-level exam.

Official paperwork Some number of students will approach you asking that you sign some paper giving them permission to enter or leave your section. **DO NOT DO THIS UNLESS** you have received specific instructions to do so from the course coordinator.

Extreme versions of problems that you may have to face. **IT IS VITAL TO YOUR SUCCESS FOR THE WHOLE SEMESTER THAT YOU HANDLE PROBLEMS SUCH AS THESE IN AN APPRIATE FASHION WHEN THEY FIRST ARISE.**

- A student saunters into class half an hour late and loudly disrupts the class.
- A student tells you that s/he is a graduating senior and needs this class to graduate, and that you must sign him/her in.
- Two students loudly talk to each other while you are instructing.
- A student gets up and walks out of the class while you are instructing.
- A student is talking on a cell phone, or reading a newspaper while you are instructing.
- A student complains loudly to the rest of the class that he cannot understand your accent.

3 Miscelanea

Math Placement Exam Before taking your class, the students took the Math Placement Exam to place them the right level. This is done by taking a proctored mathematics exam or its equivalent (appropriate transfer credit, AP scores, etc.) (see <http://assess.math.sunysb.edu/>).

Website You can create a website for yourself in the Math Department, where you can post all the information about the course.

Blackboard (software) Besides using Blackboard to record grades, you can use it to send email message to your class.

Questions It is perfectly fine not to be able to answer some of the questions you are asked, math or administrative questions. In case you do not know the answer to a question, tell the student you will find out the answer for the next meeting (and do so!).