

Gentle Reminders for the Applied Music Professor on the First day of Classes

1. We are here for the students. They are not here for us. Let me say that again louder for the people in back- We are here to serve the students, they are not here to satisfy our whims.
2. We have the rare opportunity to see a student at our institution every single semester, from cradle to grave. This is an opportunity to mentor, so don't be afraid to talk about professional courtesy, books they're reading, pros and cons of pet ownership as a college student. Teach the whole person, not just the instrument.
3. Lead by example, part 1. Our goal is always to get our students playing better than we do, but don't let that become a laughably easy pursuit on their part. In my limited experience, students tend to respect the professors that they hear practicing.
4. Lead by example, part 2. Be a good colleague to both your friends and your "foes" in the School of Music. Try to eliminate your "foes" (No, I am not suggesting that you have them killed) by mending fences. Guidelines to live by to de-escalate departmental spats: Is it true? Is it nice? Is it necessary?
5. We have an obligation to help our students along to be the most complete musician that they can be, in both the traditional sense and in the most creative sense. If your "research" specialty is Post-Modern Step Dance Music by Composers from Suburban Reykjavik, or The Nuances of Auditory Perception Between 105-108 dB, let your freak flag fly, but there is no need to recruit your students into the fold. Help them.
6. Be honest. If a student is doing something well, let them know. If a student is falling short of expectations, let them know. Nobody is helped by the "It's all good" approach, nor the "everything sucks" approach.
7. Keep your standards high. I couldn't win an audition against this crop of wunderkinds with all the multi-vitamins and Inderal in the world. Make kids understand that if they want to win a performance job, they need to play better than you. A lot better.
8. Stay curious. Try to keep up with current trends, both in the concert hall, on your instrument's literature, and on how your students interact with one another. Music History is still evolving and didn't stop on the edition of Grout that you were on when you left school.
9. Remember that every student's experience is unique. Every student's goals are unique. Every student's strengths and weaknesses are unique. You already know this, but there is no cookie cutter approach in applied that works. Know your students and teach them where they are.
10. Count your blessings. You have about the best job in the world. Remember, you are working in music. You worked hard for this. Don't let that faculty meeting make you dark. I know that I count myself lucky to be working, and I'm going to run with that.

Have a great semester!