

### **Case #3: Gina Gilbertson**

As she taught her discussion section of Engineering Dynamics, Gina Gilbertson wrote out an expression for momentum on the blackboard. Outside the window were the metal struts of the engineering building. Inside were twenty-five college students in various stages of alertness. Half of them were paying attention, and the rest seemed to be otherwise occupied.

In the third row sat a group of five students from China. They often talked with one another, but did not socialize with the rest of the class. Next semester, Gina thought, she would start the class off with an ice-breaker to get the students to step outside of their cliques.

Gina had asked each student to fill out a card with his or her name on it and set the cards out at each class period. This made it easier for her to call on people.

After she was done writing out her equations, Gina turned to the class, looking for someone to call on. Her eyes fell on a young Chinese man in a blue athletic sweatshirt. His card read, "Jay." She had not called on him yet this semester.

Gina took a deep breath. "Jay," she said, gesturing towards him, "what is an everyday life situation where momentum is important? We've talked about the equations – let's think about how to apply them."

Jay said something that she could not understand. The other four Chinese students- three men and one woman- laughed. The rest of the class remained silent.

There was an awkward pause. Gina was not sure how to handle the situation. "Could you repeat that?" she said. "I didn't hear you."

Susan, another Chinese student, spoke up. "He is just making a joke," she said, attempting to spare Gina further embarrassment.

Gina shrugged and turned to a white student who was looking out the window. "Mike, what situations can you think of in which momentum would play a role?"

Mike grinned at Gina. "What about those little silver colliding balls executives put on their desks, where you pull out one ball and the other bounces back?"

"That's a great example," said Gina, relieved to have found a cooperative student whom she could understand. She turned back to the class. "What about some other examples from everyday life?"

As the discussion continued, Jay leaned back in his chair and went to sleep. Gina noticed this and thought about calling on him again. She decided not to do so. She tried to think back to her teaching assistants' orientation the previous summer. What was she supposed to do?