VareseNews

“Bunga bunga” comes to university, in the form of an algorithm

Pubblicato: Venerdì 4 Febbraio 2011

“Bunga bunga”, the allegedly favourite sexual practice of Prime Minister Berlusconi, has come to University; but not without controversies.

It has been used in a problem given by a lecturer in the computer science faculty in Insubria University, which talks about mysterious “parties” that resemble greatly those that have been filling the news columns recently.

The problem is scientifically perfect, and, what is more, sufficiently complex to cause the fifty or so students on the **“Data Algorithms and Structures” course**, in the Computer Science Department in Varese, a lot of trouble. But **not everyone liked the idea**.

The problem, which was given out on 22 January by **Marco Tarini**, one of the many brilliant researchers and lecturers at the University (VareseNews wrote about him, back in 2006, as the best young researcher in computer graphics, in Europe) is very unusual. **It is entitled “Bunga-Bunga”** and it asks students to design an algorithm that resolves the coming and going of the people at the dinners given by the “**President of the free republic of Bananas**” and of his entourage.

The problem is still ongoing, the deadline is Sunday 13 February. But one participant on the course, who signs himself as “**indignant student**”, reported the problem to VareseNews, saying he was shocked after downloading the problem from the online platform dedicated to students. He wrote, “**It’s a DISGRACE that political and moral opinions are expressed at university!!**”

“Strange. When I gave it out in class, I only had positive feedback,” replied the creator of the problem, the text of which can be found on the lecturer’s website. “Only one student commented on it, saying he wanted one more day to find the solution, because he’d wasted the first day laughing,” Tarini said.

The introduction that the student complained about is only one of the parts of the problem; other variables are the **characteristics of the participants, and the attraction of the couples**. The problem also talks about the **possible spread of the phenomenon**.

“**It might just sound like a bit of fun, but in fact, it deals with a particular technical function in design**,” Tarini explained, “that of limiting, in problems that have ‘a few thousand’ cases, the maximum size that the proposed solutions should be expected to be able to resolve. The paragraph “Typical sizes of the problem”, where the phrase is found, is included in many projects.

“The algorithm finds mathematical solutions to real problems, and explaining or practising it is not so easy,” Tarini continues. “This is why, for the courses on data algorithms and structures,

I produced a number of problems that were either taken from real life, or simply invented, like the ones about **a group of piranhas** where the fish eat each other, and **Smurf Campus**, where the characters have to make friends." The humorous wording helps to make a subject that everyone regards as abstract, "real". "**To put it another way, instead of asking 'What's 2+3?', I asked 'If you've got two marbles, and you get another three for Christmas, how many marbles have you got?'** It's the **oldest teaching technique in the world.**"

Redazione VareseNews
redazione@varesenews.it