

# A new approach to the old math offered by new algebra sections

By MARILYN SANCHEZ  
Battalion Reporter

If you're a whiz at working out algebra problems and you don't feel like spending a whole semester sitting through the same old Math 102, then there may be something new for you.

On the other hand, if you hate math so much you keep putting it off until later, or if you just don't want to see another algebra problem again in your life, this something new could also be for you.

Math 102, sections 507 and 515, is offering students an alternate method to learning basic algebraic skills.

The course, which is offered on an experimental basis this fall, lets a student progress at his own pace and at the same time provides help from the class instructor and several out-of-class help sessions.

Associate Professor Norman W. Naugle, who is teaching the course, said students must expect to do most of the work on their own.

"I am concerned about the increasing number of students that are unable to cope with mathematics," said Dr. Edgar R. Guthrie, assistant director of academic services. "I believe that students are equating mathematics with institutionalized intimidation."

"I would not advise any student to take this course unless he is motivated and willing to do math outside of class time," Naugle said.

The course, as taught in the two sections, is unique in that grades are not evaluated from three major quizzes, a final exam and homework assignments. There are no large lecture classes, no uniform exams and there is no uniform grading system.

Instead of major exams, students take unit tests after each of 10 chapters. If the test score is at least 80, then the student may proceed to the next chapter. Otherwise he must review the current unit for retesting. The unit tests may be taken until they are passed, with the best grade being recorded.

The final exam is comprehensive and is done in the same manner. The student may also take the final exam as many times as needed to pass.

The semester grade is computed with the average of the best of the 10 unit tests counting two-thirds and the best score of the final exam counting one-third. There are no daily homework assignments.

This pilot program intends to encourage maximal learning of mathematics by allowing students sufficient time to master the material.

Some objectives of the course include helping the students to make good grades in Math 102, helping the students become proficient in

college algebra, and teaching students how to study math in general.

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Guthrie, who is with the General Studies Program, worked with Naugle and helped to get the approval from the deans for this Personalized System Instruction mode of teaching.

"The students' negative feelings indicate an anxiety, causing them to avoid mathematics whenever possible," Guthrie said. "This math avoidance may be a motive for students' changing their majors or declaring a major perhaps not to their liking."

"The math anxiety-avoidance syndrome may be caused by several factors that are currently being studied," he continued. "My concern is with one factor that has been identified; namely, the students' lack of arithmetic and algebraic skills."

Low math scores on entrance exams at Texas A&M University show that most students coming out of public schools just don't have the potential to do algebra at the Math 102 level.

"Undoubtedly, part of the problem lies with the quality of teaching in public schools," said Guthrie. "It is false to assume that these skills can be mastered by students enrolling in Math 102, or any entry level mathematics course, as it is currently taught."

"Professors neither feel obligated nor does the syllabus allow adequate time to teach elementary or secondary level mathematics at the university level," said Guthrie.

Hence, regular Math 102 succeeds in only magnifying the anxiety, and fails in allowing students the time to learn as it is now taught, he said.

Through the PSI program, most students will finish the course within one semester, but one additional semester may be given for those students making satisfactory progress, but who fail to complete the course objective. If Naugle recommends it, an Incomplete will

be given and then the student will have the opportunity to remove the Incomplete the following semester.

Freshman Steve Brown, a health education major, said that help is always available, either in class or out.

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"One thing that really sticks out to me is that there is no pressure on tests. . . when we have to take them and stuff like that," he said. "This makes it easier on me."

Donna Welborn, sophomore, said she took Math 102 before and didn't learn it. "They would go so fast that I would get behind and they'd go on and I would have to keep going back

to understand," she said. "Here, we can go at our own pace and we can get help if we need it."

The students are encouraged by Naugle to work together in class, although class attendance is not mandatory.

"It's small in size," said Mike Henson, freshman, industrial engineering major. "And if we have personalmath problems, it's on a one-to-one basis."

There are approximately 140 students in the sections, and the PSI program could be expanded to include more sections of Math 102 as well as additional undergraduate math courses.

It is anticipated that once a student is given adequate time to master algebraic skills, an attitudinal change towards mathematics will result," said Guthrie. "Perhaps fewer students will tend to avoid courses and careers related to mathematics."



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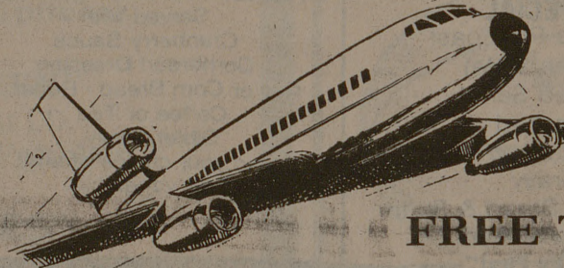
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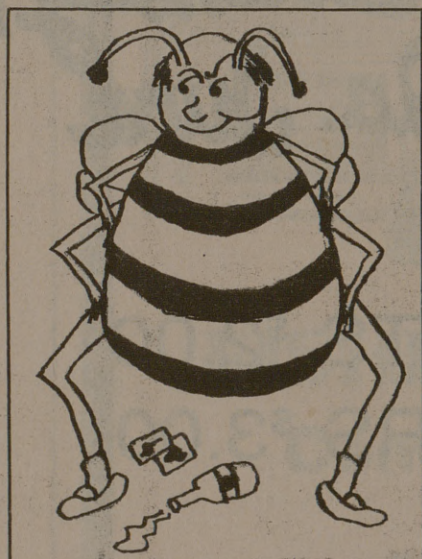
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