

Opportunity to address the Senate: BC Equitable Placement
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Speaking on my own behalf, not on behalf of my department

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When I started college, math was a mystery to me. As a dyslexic, I had learned to decode language and became an avid reader in 3rd grade. However, in math, I had only decoded basic arithmetic. While I attempted Algebra three consecutive times in high school, I barely passed on the 3rd attempt. I have no idea how I passed Geometry on the 2nd attempt in high school, I was confused the entire second semester throughout both attempts. For some reason, they let me take high school Chemistry. The whole 2nd semester of Chemistry was based in formulas, and I failed miserably. By College, I had a solid math phobia built on a record of failure and confusion. Luckily, I took Intro to Algebra in a 6-week summer class at the end of my first year of college. The way the professor taught the course worked for me and my brain was finally ready. Everything clicked. I passed my transfer-level math course the next summer with a solid B. For the first time, formulas made sense and I understood how they worked. Math formulas and finding the right formula to solve the myriad numeric issues that are part of life became part of my day-to-day problem-solving tool kit.

When I took the CBEST 4 years later, I had retained the skills learned in that Intro to Algebra class. I was able to study efficiently for the exam on my own. With the help of the Mac Algeblaster program, I was able to progress beyond those 2 college math classes to finally understand what I had missed in my high school attempts at Geometry and even some of what I'd missed in Chemistry. I completed the math portion of the CBEST 40 minutes early, passed every portion, and ended up with a higher score in Math than in English or Writing. This confounded my expectations and made me forever grateful for the Professor whose excellent teaching provided a lifelong skill that had eluded me until I took his class.

Many of us aren't ready for formulas until our logic centers, in our frontal lobe, have grown in. The most substantial growth is completed around 17 or 18 years of age and the frontal lobe isn't fully developed until about the age of 25. If I hadn't been able to take that pre-transfer level Algebra course, at the age of 18, I may never have graduated from college. Far too many of our students are like me and they haven't yet decoded formulas. When I show some of my students how to calculate their GPAs on paper, they look at me like I'm performing a magic trick. It isn't magic. It's a simple math formula.

Understanding how basic formulas function is essential for a successful life. When we try to skip over these basic math skillsets and thrust students directly into Statistics, we leave a huge mystifying gap that reinforces past failures, confusion, and imposter syndrome.

We cannot do this to our students. We need to retain Math B72 and Math B75 and, as we enter the endemic phase of Covid, we can begin to gather data again that is more reflective of our students' learning.