

# The Math ConneXion

NEWSLETTER OF THE ILLINOIS MATHEMATICS ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

<http://www.imacc.org>

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Fall 2011

Number 1

## *President's Message*



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Fall semester is well underway. In fact, it is more than half over. In the flurry of staying caught up in day-to-day tasks, we sometimes forget to take a step back and look at the bigger picture. In doing so, these are some questions that we might consider worthy of thought.

Were your students placed correctly this semester? How many of them will complete your course this semester with a C or better? How many will succeed in their next math course? Are students learning math at a conceptual level? How can your program improve?

These are all important issues that we care about, yet they can get pushed to the back burner in the struggle to manage the constant demands of teaching. These are also issues that powers in the state are interested in addressing. Change is coming in several areas. I would like members of IMACC to have a voice at the table.

At the moment, ICCB is trying to stay ahead of pressure from above on two issues: correctly placing students and developmental math programs. Our own survey, headed by Beth Beno, showed there is no uniformity at community colleges in Illinois in any area for student placement. Let me state very clearly that we are not saying there should be. But it does raise some interesting questions. Should students have to be placed by a test? Which placement test is used? How many times should students be allowed to take the test? Should they have to wait to retake the test? How long are the results used? (i.e., If the test was taken 5 years ago, will it still place them?)

Can they use calculators? Can they use graphing calculators? And then there is the very interesting question of cut scores determining college readiness.

*(continued on page 2)*

## **Deadline for Submissions:**

Winter 2012-January 15  
Summer 2012-April 15  
Fall 2012-October 15

Submit items to:  
Diane Koenig, Editor  
The Math ConneXion  
d.koenig@rockvalleycollege.edu

## **Online Math ConneXion**

The online version can be found at  
<http://www.imacc.org>

## **Is Your Membership Current?**

Be sure to check the membership expiration date listed in your address label. If your membership has expired or is about to expire, you can use the form on page 11 to renew. In addition, if there are mathematics faculty at your college who are not members of IMACC, please invite them to join. Please take time to also check the Institutional Membership for your school.

*(President's Message continued from page 1)*

There has been a movement around the state to improve developmental programs. "One size fits all" is definitely under question. It is highly likely that there will be two tracks for developmental programs: one for STEM students and another for humanities majors. On one hand, people are concerned that students will not be held to the same level. On the other hand, there is concern that courses will focus only on skills and not concepts. Can a class using only computers for individual instruction teach anything other than skills? Can a class that focuses on concepts over skills reach the same level of abstraction as a traditional course?

These are issues that our conference in March will be addressing in some of the sessions. It is an exciting, yet frustrating time to be in mathematics education. We need to improve, but there is fear that in trying to make things better, they will get worse. Mostly, we need to take some time to step back and look at the bigger picture so strong long-term decisions can be made. That is one reason I have asked Underwood (Woody) Dudley to be our first speaker at Allerton in March. He has a wonderful grasp of what I consider the largest issue: Why do we teach mathematics?

If you have been lucky enough to have heard Woody speak in the past, you know you are in for a treat. If you have never heard him speak, it is reason enough to attend the conference. I would like to remind you that the conference is March 30-31, and I still have a few spots open if you are interested in presenting. My contact information is [robertac@shawneecc.edu](mailto:robertac@shawneecc.edu). I hope you have a wonderful rest semester.

**Roberta Christie**  
**IMACC President**

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Waubonsee Community College	2011

## Letter From the Editor

While putting together this edition of the *ConneXion* my anticipation for our annual Allerton conference has grown. The IMACC conference has always been packed with great ideas that can be easily implemented in the classroom as well as having sessions and speakers addressing a current issue in math education. This year's conference is no exception. The topics being covered are issues that are being discussed not only at the state level but also nationally. At Rock Valley College we have implemented two tracks of our developmental math one semester 6 credit hour course. One track is specifically for students who are not in a STEM major and the other a more traditional offering geared to prepare students who are pursuing majors that require more math and science. You can read more about our new offering in an article on page 5.

The first speaker for our annual conference will address the fundamental question we need to keep in our focus "Why we teach math". I have not had the opportunity to hear Woody speak before and I am looking forward to hearing his insight.

In closing, please consider sending updates from your school to be included in the next *ConneXion* newsletter. Let us know about new hires, retirements or other news you would like to share. Note the deadlines for submitting articles in the future issues of *The Math ConneXion* found in the left margin of the second page.

Sincerely,  
Diane Koenig  
Rock Valley College  
The ConneXion Editor

## Upcoming Conferences

Dates	Organization	Location
November 10-13, 2011	AMATYC	Austin, TX
January 4-7, 2012	AMS/MAA	Boston, MA
March 29-31, 2012	IMACC	Monticello, IL
August 2-4, 2012	MAA Math Fest	Madison, WI
November 8-11, 2012	AMATYC	Jacksonville, FL

### IMACC Memorial Fund Scholarship

Please consider encouraging deserving students from your institution to apply for the IMACC Memorial Fund Scholarship. Though the faculty's responsibility in the application process is deemed recommender rather than nominator, it is still very much the hope that faculty initiate the scholarship application process by making their qualified students aware of the award, by writing those recommendation letters, and by encouraging and helping the qualified students with the application process. Complete information about the IMACC Memorial Fund Scholarship, including the Faculty Recommendation Form, Student Application Form, and an informational flyer to post on your campus, is provided by clicking on "Memorial Fund Scholarship" at the IMACC website, [www.imacc.org](http://www.imacc.org).

A total of \$2500 is available to award this spring. For the applicant to be considered, the faculty recommendation form, the student application form, and the student's supporting materials must be completed and received by the IMACC Memorial Fund Scholarship Committee Chairperson Angie Gum no later than March 2, 2012.

### Tenure-track Math Faculty Opening

The College of Lake County has two tenure-track mathematics faculty positions available for August 2012. The full job description and application information can be found at <http://jobs.clcillinois.edu>. Applications will be accepted until January 6, 2012.

### SWIC Welcome New Faculty

**Southwestern Illinois College** is pleased to announce the addition of two new math faculty members at its Red Bud Campus. **Robert Wachtel** and **Dr. Philip Huling** both previously worked as adjunct faculty at SWIC; Bob joins the full-time faculty after many years teaching at Gibault HS and Freeburg HS, while "Dr. Phil" recently completed his PhD at St. Louis University. One position fills a vacancy left by the recent retirement of Vanessa Miller (whom we will miss), and the other fills a slot that has sat open for several semesters. The math department is happy to be growing again, particularly with such great additions!

## **MLCS: A Different Kind of Developmental Math Redesign**

By: Kathleen Almy

At Rock Valley College, we began the process of redesigning our entire developmental sequence a few years ago. And it has been successful in terms of improving the state of traditional algebra and geometry. Our pass rates now average 65-70% and students are doing better in college level courses than they did under our old courses.

Unfortunately, the traditional courses didn't seem to address the issue of students who aren't STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) majors. They received a tremendous amount of algebraic skill knowledge that they didn't use much of in their subsequent courses like statistics and general education math. They also weren't receiving the necessary critical thinking and problem solving skills they were going to need. We wondered...could we reduce the algebra a little in favor of adding in more connections, critical thinking, and problem solving?

This question is one that has been coming up often across the country. For the past few years, I've worked with AMATYC and the Carnegie Foundation on this issue. As a member of a team of faculty from across the country, we developed the objectives and instructional outline for a new course that is now known as Mathematical Literacy for College Students, MLCS for short. This course is a part of Carnegie's Quantway Pathway. They are also developing a Statway Pathway. For more information, check out this site: [www.carnegiefoundation.org/developmental-math](http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/developmental-math).

MLCS has a prerequisite of prealgebra. In one semester, the goal is to give students the numeracy, proportional reasoning, algebraic reasoning, function sense, as well as some geometry and statistics, to be successful in a college level statistics or general education math class. I've been working for the last two years to bring the objectives to Illinois in a way that would be acceptable. Intermediate algebra and geometry are our current measures for college level math readiness. If we propose an alternative, it must be as rigorous. Our goal is not to lower standards which could possibly put unprepared students in college level math classes. Our goal is to make the prerequisites for college level math classes more in line with the subsequent content.

I'm working with a colleague, Heather Foes, to write materials which we are currently piloting. We are taking surveys, pictures, videos, and copies of student work to show at a later date.

(continued on the next page)

(MLCS continued from page 5)

How is the pilot progressing? To put it mildly, it's been an interesting ride. Lessons don't look like a traditional algebra lesson. They start with a rich scenario, pull the mathematics from it, develop any needed skills, and apply and connect all knowledge gained. Upon first glance of the course content, it seems that this will automatically be easier for students since some algebra skills are omitted. However, that is an incorrect conclusion. Students find the course much harder than an algebra class since they are learning most of the algebra they would have learned anyway along with many more topics and approaches. Whatever they learn, they apply. It's not "solve this equation" or "simplify this expression." Instead, we analyze a problem, write the equation, solve it, and then interpret the result. The algebra is present, but the students are the ones writing the functions, expressions, and equations that they will work with. In short, every problem in the course is a word problem.

A common reaction from students at the beginning of the course is, "I want to take an algebra class. Just teach me the rules." This course is certainly more work for students and us, but it's becoming clear that there are real rewards in it.

We'll be sharing more updates about the pilot and how students do in their college level math courses in the upcoming year. Here are some ways to learn more now and in the future:

- Blog: <http://almydoesmath.blogspot.com>  
See video of a sample lesson and read weekly updates about the pilot.
- 2011 AMATYC Conference at Austin, TX  
Participate in a 2 hour workshop on Saturday November 12. The course will be explained and you can take part in a sample lesson. The lesson will be different than the one shown at the 2011 IMACC conference.
- 2012 IMACC conference at Allerton Park  
Hear about the pilot and findings to date.

If you have questions or would like to review materials, please contact me at [k.almy@rockvalleycollege.edu](mailto:k.almy@rockvalleycollege.edu).

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Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ ext. \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

To which address would you like correspondence sent?  Home  School

Do you wish your name distributed with the IMACC database?  Yes  No

Would you like to receive *The Math ConneXion* electronically?  Yes  No

An email will be sent to you notifying you when the *ConneXion* is available.  
You may then visit the IMACC website and read or print the latest issue.

**Membership Fees:**  1 Year: \$15.00  3 Years: \$40.00  5 Years: \$65.00

Membership Fee	+	Scholarship Contribution	=	Total Enclosed
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IMACC's membership year begins July 1 and ends June 30. You may check your current membership status at the IMACC website <http://www.imacc.org/> or by looking at the printed label on your *The Math ConneXion*.

The Math ConneXion

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