Recent Changes in the Placement Criteria

Based on the results of two studies, the Mathematics Department made some changes in the placement criteria that will be effective for Fall 2009 students. These include

- a new placement tool available for students planning on a major that requires calculus,
- revised eligibility scores for the various placement options, and
- a one-year time limit on the validity of scores used for placement purposes.

More detail on the new placement tool is given below under the “which test to take” heading and the revised eligibility scores and eligibility scores for the new placement tool are summarized in the table at the end of this document. The time limit was adopted in order to help us place students according to their current mathematical knowledge.

When placement letters are generated

The Math Placement Committee currently checks prerequisites for the following math courses:


Each semester three automated data checks are completed by Information Technology. These are the lists that we use to notify students that we were unable to verify their prerequisites.

The first run is done before the end of the previous semester and the students are notified through their My WSU message system. The second run is done the Saturday night before the semester begins and the students before the first day of class. The third run is done the weekend before the second week, after students can no longer register online.

What can be checked in the automated process

The automated data run done by I.T. checks SAT scores, math placement scores, and official prerequisite courses. Prerequisite courses can be checked whether taken at WSU or as transfer courses, as long as the courses transfer in a clear way. If a student does not meet the prerequisite for their selected course in at least one of these ways, their name is included in the list that is sent to the placement committee.
What can not be checked in the automated process

Many of the students on the placement list actually do meet the prerequisite, but there are several situations that will not show to the computer. The most straightforward of these situations are:

- AP Calculus scores (unless those scores result in transfer credit)
- ACT math scores, since only the composite shows in the electronic record
- International Baccalaureate scores
- Transferable courses that have not yet shown up on the degree audit report
- Courses that are not “officially” a prerequisite but will be accepted as such. These include:
  - Courses that are equivalent, such as the precalculus courses: for example, Math 107 would be accepted as a prerequisite for Math 201 and vice-versa.
  - Courses that are higher-level than the course the student wishes to take. For example, Math 202 certainly meets the prerequisite for Math 201, but the automated system will not recognize it as such.
  - Transfer courses that are equivalent to a portion of the desired course. This is seen most often with Math 107 (precalculus); students may have taken the function portion of precalculus but not the trigonometry portion. This may transfer as a just a “Math Elective” but certainly meets the prerequisite for Math 107. These can be verified using the Transfer Equivalency page.

In any of the above cases, the placement committee will need a score report, grade report, unofficial transcript, etc to clear the student to remain enrolled in the course they desire.

Borderline cases

A student is considered to be borderline if his or her score is within two points of the cutoff for the math placement exam, or within twenty points of the SAT cutoff. In this case the placement committee will look at high school transcripts, and the student will be allowed to enroll if he or she shows a strong high school math background (math in all four years of high school with grades no lower than B).

Some things that we can’t use

- Math 105 (formerly 210), 205, and 212 cannot be used as a prerequisite for any WSU math course. Even though these have the same course prerequisite as the precalculus courses, they have a lower placement score cutoff and (most importantly) they do not prepare students for precalculus. In the past this was used as a loophole to get into precalculus with a lower placement score, but students who did that did not generally succeed in precalculus.

- Compass and Asset tests at the community colleges do not correspond well to the statewide placement tests used for the universities, and so the math placement committee does not use those scores or their recommendations to place students at WSU.
Helping your students clear the placement process

If your student clearly meets the prerequisite for his or her math course based on a placement score, SAT score or a grade of C or better on the prerequisite course, ask about the other situations listed above. If your student has documentation for, say, an AP score or an ACT math score that meets the prerequisite, send a copy along to the math department (mailstop 3113) and we will pre-approve that student for the selected course. Pre-approved students are removed from the list before students are notified.

If there is nothing to indicate placement (or if what they have doesn’t place them where they would like to start) then recommend the placement test.

Which test to take

There is a new placement tool available starting in Summer 2009 for students who are planning on a major that requires calculus- it is an on-line assessment called Preparedness for Calculus, developed by ALEKS Corporation. It uses an adaptive questioning technique that is unique to each student taking the assessment. In roughly 25 questions, the tool accurately assesses a student’s current knowledge state in precalculus. It will be given in designated computer labs here on campus during Summer Alive sessions, the Week of Welcome, and the first week of classes for the fall semester.

We will also continue to accept the WA State Placement exam. Students only need to take the Advanced Math Placement Test if they plan to start with a calculus course. If they feel they will need precalculus anyway, they would be better off taking the Intermediate Math Placement Test.

Contact us if you need us!

If you encounter a strange situation or just have questions, we’re happy to help.

- Penny Pannell (placement secretary) 335-3169 or ppannell@math.wsu.edu
- Jeanette Martin (100-level courses) 335-4308 or martin@math.wsu.edu
- Eric Remaley (courses numbered 200 and above) 335-2134 or remaley@math.wsu.edu
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WSU Math Course Eligibility&lt;sup&gt;(1)&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>ALEKS Preparedness for Calculus</th>
<th>Math Placement Test</th>
<th>SAT Math</th>
<th>ACT Math&lt;sup&gt;(2)&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>College Board A.P. AB Test&lt;sup&gt;(3)&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Prerequisite Course Completion (minimum grade of C required)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>101 Intermediate Algebra (Not offered at WSU)&lt;sup&gt;(4)&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0-39</td>
<td>0-19</td>
<td>0-11</td>
<td>200-490</td>
<td>0-17</td>
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<td>105 Exploring Math&lt;sup&gt;(5)&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>NA 99/101/103</td>
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<td>205 Basic Stat 212 Stat Intro</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>530</td>
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<td>106 College Algebra</td>
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<td>2 106, 107, or 201</td>
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<td>2 107 or 106 &amp; 108</td>
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<td>680</td>
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<td>3-5 171</td>
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<td>NA</td>
<td>NA 273 and 220</td>
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</table>

NA- Not Applicable

<sup>(1)</sup>- Scores used for placement purposes are only valid for 12 months
<sup>(2)</sup>- A copy of the ACT score report must be provided to the Department of Mathematics in order to use the ACT scores for placement.
<sup>(3)</sup>- Listed are criteria for entry into the class, not class credit. Student must provide documentation to the Department of Mathematics.
<sup>(4)</sup>- The equivalent of Math 101 is offered on the Pullman campus through Spokane Falls Community College. For more information visit <http://www.iel.spokane.edu/mla>.
<sup>(5)</sup>- Course number changed from Math 210 to Math 105, effective Fall 2008.