

Bellevue Community College Creates New Review Course Through Flexibility of Interactive Mathematics



Overview—Bellevue Community College, Bellevue, Washington

- Interactive Mathematics has enabled Bellevue Community College to create an innovative, flexible review course.
- Students have individualized program learning alternatives.
- It has enabled the math department to go online.

Since 1996, Bellevue Community College (BCC) has utilized Interactive Mathematics courses (formerly delivered by Academic Systems) to offer students alternatives to traditional courses. The program (now available from PLATO Learning) has enabled the campus to meet students' needs with a highly flexible review course that would have been impossible to provide without the computer-mediated program.

BCC's algebra review course is an individualized program that gives students the ability to work through topics at their own pace. Students do not attend a formal class but instead work on the computer on their own, meeting with an instructor periodically for assistance.

"Interactive Mathematics has allowed us to do some things we wouldn't have been able to do before, helping us plug in some holes for students who feel like they're caught between sections and have some things they need to work on or review," said Lynne Sage, mathematics program chair and a mathematics instructor. "This is not a course we could do any other way but through PLATO Learning."

Interactive Mathematics has also been instrumental in enabling Bellevue's mathematics department to go online and offer distance learning opportunities. Although the college as a whole is extremely committed to distance education, with more than 400 classes available online, the math department was initially reluctant to become involved because of the technology issues.

Effective Expansion of Distance Learning

"Math has been one of the last departments to participate in the online program because it's one of the hardest to do online," Sage said. "Now that we can use Interactive Mathematics, we are expanding our distance capabilities in an effective way for students and meeting the technology goals of the campus, as well as offering students more options."

Overall, BCC now runs two sections of Interactive Mathematics in courses ranging from Basic Math through College Algebra, with approximately 300

INSTITUTION: Bellevue Community College opened in 1966 and is now the third largest higher education institution in Washington, sending more transfer students to four-year schools than any other community college in the state. BCC also has the largest continuing education program in Washington. In 1998, BCC opened its doors to an innovative new facility, the National Workforce Center for Emerging Technologies, which houses specialized and general computer labs, a faculty training facility, and an in-house IT curriculum standards development staff.

SIZE: The 1990s have been a time of explosive growth at BCC with enrollment soaring to more than 20,000 students per quarter.

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"We are expanding distance capabilities in an effective way."

LYNNE SAGE, MATHEMATICS
PROGRAM CHAIR AND
MATHEMATICS INSTRUCTOR

students using the materials each quarter. Two of the department's four distance learning courses use the program—one in Intermediate Algebra and the other in College Algebra. Instructors say Interactive Mathematics gives their online students quality instruction in terms of curriculum and content.

The department has conducted some preliminary studies that show that students in PLATO Learning courses perform equally as well as their peers in traditional courses.

And, in one limited study on performance in subsequent courses, students who took Interactive Mathematics outperformed their peers who had taken a traditional Introductory Algebra II course.

“We’ll continue to do such studies, but we’ve already accomplished what we sought to in implementing this program; we were looking for an alternative mode of instruction, and that’s how we’ve ultimately used it, as a different way for students to look at the math,” Sage said.