On-Line Calculus Placement Test

Dear Member of the Class of 2009,

Your curriculum as a freshman entering Carnegie Mellon indicates that you will be taking a calculus course next fall. On behalf of the Mathematical Sciences Department, I am writing to welcome you to the university and to share some observations on the relationship between prior courses and a university level calculus course.

Your high school courses probably qualify you to start calculus, and many students will earn advanced placement. In order for us to more accurately place students, we are requiring that all candidates take an On-line Calculus Placement Test.

When you left arithmetic and started algebra and geometry, you were able to consider far more complicated problems, but you still needed to do arithmetic occasionally. The solution of a quadratic equation or the use of similar triangles are clearly beyond arithmetic, but cannot be completed without it. Algebra and geometry simply assume arithmetic, and go on to develop other ideas relying on it.

So it is with the transition to calculus. Algebra, geometry, much of trigonometry, some analytic geometry, and an exposure to logarithmic and exponential functions are assumed. We start with the critical topics of functions and limits and build from there.

In my experience, most students who have difficulty with calculus do so because they are trying to build on a shaky foundation. Such students are forced to try to master calculus while shoring up their precalculus background. We use the placement test to try to identify the students for whom this is a problem. For the students who seem to be at greatest risk of experiencing difficulty in calculus, we will offer a Co-Calculus course during the first half of the fall semester to assist them in strengthening their background.

Please take the on-line test, following the directions on the enclosed information sheet, no latter than July 6. We will not consider you for advanced placement without receiving your placement test scores.

The test might also be helpful by indicating the most crucial topics involved with beginning the study of calculus or moving directly into the second semester of the course. Any problems that cause difficulty could suggest areas to review before fall to smooth the transition.

Have a good summer, and I look forward to meeting you!

Sincerely,

Russell C. Walker
Teaching Professor and Associate Head
Instructions for taking the Fall 2005 Calculus Placement Test

1. Get your andrew user-id and password
2. Log into Blackboard
3. Read the information about the test.
4. Take the test.

The Fall 2005 calculus placement test will be administered through Blackboard, an on-line system for managing University course information.

When you paid your deposit to secure your place at Carnegie Mellon, you were assigned an andrew user-id and password. For most of you, this was done during the month of May. You will need this user-id and password to log into Blackboard as well as to access information about your schedule, AP and transfer credit later in the summer.

1. Get your andrew user-id and password
If you do not know your Andrew user-id, you can look it up through the Carnegie Mellon directory, found at:

http://www.cmu.edu/directory

Simply type your name in the form field and click on Search.

Your password is initially set to the first 8 digits of your Social Security Number or Student ID (if you do not have a Social Security Number). Your Student ID was also printed on your deposit receipt letter. Also the welcome packet you received contains information on how to access your on-line services. It is a good idea to change your password as soon as you can. To do this, go to:

http://www.cmu.edu/myandrew/

You will be prompted to log in with your andrew id and password to get to this page. Once you have logged in, click on Change Your Password under Account Management on the left side of the screen. The Change Andrew Password screen will appear on the right and you will need to enter your user-id, current password (the first 8 digits of your ssn or student ID), new password, and confirmation of the new password. It’s a good idea to read the link on “Selecting a Secure Password”.

2. Log into Blackboard
To get to Blackboard, go to:

http://www.cmu.edu/blackboard

This will take you to Carnegie Mellon’s Blackboard home page. In the upper left corner of the screen, you will see a box that says “Login to Blackboard”.

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Click on “Carnegie Mellon Users” and you will be prompted to log in with your andrew user-id and password.

Once you are logged in, you will see a screen that says “Welcome, <Your Name>” and lists any courses with Blackboard sites that you are registered for listed under “My Courses”. At this point the only thing you will probably see listed is “Calculus Placement Exam”.

3. Read the Information about the Test
Click on the link for **Calculus Placement Exam** under “My Courses”. You will see an announcement displayed.

**PLEASE READ** the announcement very carefully. Specifically, it is **very important** that you complete the five sections of the exam in one sitting. This is because we will periodically download scores from Blackboard and merge them with other information we have for you. If you complete additional sections after our initial download of your scores, it will delay processing and make it difficult to schedule you for a course.

4. Take the Test
When you are ready to take the test, click on **Placement Test** in the list of links on the left side of the screen. You will see six links displayed on the right side of the screen:

**Background Questions** is simply a list of questions that we would like you to answer about your background in mathematics. These have no point values and will not affect your score on the test. There are five sections of the test that are scored to determine your placement.
You may take the sections of the test in any order, but make sure you take them all in one sitting. If there is a section that you do not wish to take – for example, if you have not had any experience with differential equations and wish to leave that section blank – that is fine.

To begin taking a section of the test, simply click on its link. You will see a series of questions with multiple-choice answers. Each question has one correct answer. Click on the radio button next to the answer you wish to select. When you have completed the section and are satisfied with your answers, click on submit at the very bottom of the page. You can only take each section once, so once you have clicked on submit, your score is final.

You will get a message letting you know your score after you click on submit. Continue to complete the remaining sections of the test.

Thank you for your time and good luck with the placement test!