

Changing Sections

Date: Mon, 23 Aug 1999 09:11:04 -0700 <MST>
From: Otto Vorsky <ottov@math.state.edu>
To: wgm@math.state.edu
Subject: My Math 125 class

Dear Professor Maddox,

I just finished giving my students in Math 125 a quiz on precalculus material. Some of them are really weak; they couldn't even solve $\ln(x + 5) = 10$ (one of them thought that $\ln(x + 5) = \ln(x) + \ln(5)!$). I told them they should drop the class and take precalculus instead. O.K.?

Otto

Date: Tue, 24 Aug 1999 16:50:23 -0700 <MST>
From: Felicia Lopez <flopez@math.state.edu>
To: Walter Maddox <wgmm@math.state.edu>
Subject: student wanting transfer into my Math 125 section

Dear Professor Maddox,

I just had a long conversation with a student wanting to transfer into my section of Math 125. He was very upset; apparently he was advised by his TA to drop 125 and take precalculus instead. He says that he did very well in precalculus in high school, but wasn't prepared for the pop quiz the TA gave them on the first day of classes, and made a lot of mistakes. He thinks he could catch up. I tested him on a few things. He isn't too bad on basic algebraic manipulations, but has a lot of trouble with logs and trig.

I'd be willing to take him in my section and work with him to help him catch up, but I'm at the upper limit of 35 (I've had a whole rash of transfers over the last couple of days for some strange reason). I talked to one of the secretaries, and she says I need your permission to raise the maximum enrollment. The student is returning on Friday to find out what he should do.

Yours sincerely,

Felicia Lopez

Date: Wed, 25 Aug 1999 10:10:03 -0700 <MST>
From: Felicia Lopez <flopez@math.state.edu>
To: Otto Vorsky <ottov@math.state.edu>
Subject: thanks (not)

Hey Otto,

I've had four students switch from your section to mine. What are you doing to them? I can't take any more; I'm at my maximum enrollment already and had to ask Professor Maddox for permission to add the last one. (I didn't let on that all the other ones came from your section ... thank me.)

Felicia

Date: Wed, 25 Aug 1999 11:37:28 -0700 <MST>
From: Otto Vorsky <ottov@math.state.edu>
To: flopez@math.state.edu
Subject: Re: thanks (not)

Dear Felicia,

I gave my students a pre-calculus test the first day of classes, as I usually do. Some of them did quite poorly. One thought that $\ln(x+5) = \ln(x) + \ln(5)$. When I told him that the rule was $\ln(xy) = \ln(x) + \ln(y)$, he seemed to think the difference was trivial, and I shouldn't penalize him for such a small error. I really felt obliged to let him know now that with his weak background he wouldn't be able to survive in my class.

I'm sorry that they are all running to you; it's because you're known as such a good teacher. You really don't have to accept them; I think it would be best for them in the long run if they took the prerequisite courses again and learned the material properly.

Regards,

Otto

Date: Wed, 25 Aug 1999 13:42:59 -0700 <MST>
From: Felicia Lopez <flopez@math.state.edu>
To: Otto Vorsky <ottov@math.state.edu>
Subject: Re: thanks (not)

I think the student you're talking about (who had trouble with the logs) is the one who came to see me yesterday afternoon. You know, he was really upset. I agree that he ought to be better prepared, but now that he's here shouldn't we try to help him? Besides, he's not as bad as you make out; we went through your quiz together and he recognized a lot of his mistakes.

I think he's like a lot of our students; he's capable of doing the algebra, but it doesn't seem to stick in his head for very long. I don't see the point in sending him back to a course that has already failed him once. I usually do a bit of precalculus review throughout the semester; I'll just give him some extra worksheets.

Felicia

Date: Thur, 26 Aug 1999 07:36:45 -0700 <MST>
From: Otto Vorsky <ottov@math.state.edu>
To: flopez@math.state.edu
Subject: student

Dear Felicia,

Maybe the course failed him, maybe he had a poor teacher, maybe he didn't work hard enough, or maybe he just needs to see the material twice for it to sink in. I don't know. All I know is that he can't proceed any further without knowing the prerequisites.

I don't do any remedial work in my section—I make the prerequisites clear and emphasize that if they don't know something from precalculus then it is their responsibility to learn it. This gives me more time to talk about calculus, which is what the rest of the class is there to learn. Last year my section had the highest average on the final.

ERROR - UNABLE TO FIND SERVER - THE PREVIOUS MESSAGE
WAS NOT DELIVERED

Date: Thur, 26 Aug 1999 08:07:00 -0700 <MST>
From: Walter Maddox <wgm@math.state.edu>
To: Felicia Lopez <flopez@math.state.edu>
Subject: enrollments

Dear Felicia,

I think 36 is too large for your section (35 is too large, but that seems to be a fait accompli). So I think you should tell this student that he cannot switch to your section.

You are being diplomatic but this student must be switching from Otto's section. Otto seems to have this effect on students in the first week or so. I'll write to him and tell him to ease off.

Walter

Date: Thur, 26 Aug 1999 12:27:06 -0700 <MST>
From: Otto Vorsky <ottov@math.state.edu>
To: Felicia Lopez <flopez@math.state.edu>
Subject: Your student

Dear Felicia,

I tried to reply earlier but was having trouble with my email. You shouldn't necessarily blame the student's previous math courses; he has to take some of the responsibility himself. There's a tendency in the U.S. to go too far in accommodating unprepared students. I don't think this is doing them any favors; if we don't enforce the prerequisites now it will just hurt them later.

I agree that this particular student is not as bad as I had originally thought, however ... it turns out that he's the guy from the computing center who came round to fix the computer in our office!

I had tried to reconstruct my internet configuration after a hard disk crash last night. Apparently I mixed up the names of the outgoing and incoming mail servers, whatever they are. (It seems like a pretty silly system). I was pretty impressed with his computer expertise ... but his mathematical abilities are lacking, and I still think that he should go back and learn the material right.

Regards,

Otto

Date: Thur, 26 Aug 1999 14:12:06 -0700 <MST>
From: Walter Maddox <maddox@math.state.edu>
To: Otto Vorsky <ottov@math.state.edu>
Subject: Re: My Math 125 class

Dear Otto,

Sorry to be so long in replying to your message—I've been swamped. It's OK with me if you want to give the students a quiz on precalc material but you shouldn't scare them into dropping your course. They switch to Felicia's section and it isn't fair to her. Just do the best you can with the students you've got.

Walter

Date: Fri, 27 Aug 1999 10:00:21 -0700 <MST>
From: Gil Roberts <groberts@u.state.edu>
To: Felicia Lopez <flopez@math.state.edu>
Subject: Our meeting today

Dear Ms. Lopez,

I'm sorry there's not room in your section. I guess I'll have to consider whether I want to deal with Mr. Vorsky, or just drop Calc and take it next semester.

Gil
