RE: Mathematics Placement Examination

Dear Cadet Recruit:

This letter contains important information concerning the online mathematics placement exam that will be administered during the summer. Not every incoming freshman is required to take this exam, so please read this letter carefully to determine if you need to take the exam, and if so, the steps you must complete prior to your reporting to The Citadel in August. The information below should answer most of your questions, but please feel free to contact either Professor Mei Chen, the administrator for the online placement exam, or me if you have any additional questions. Our contact information is provided at the end of this letter.

What is the purpose of the placement exam? Most students pursuing technical majors such as engineering or physics will want to start their college mathematics experience with the first semester of calculus. However, our experience shows that many students entering college for the first time are not sufficiently prepared for the rigors of freshman calculus and require a semester of precalculus. Our first semester of calculus for technical majors is MATH 131, and our precalculus (college algebra and trigonometry) course is MATH 119. In order to help us determine the appropriate course for entering freshmen, we have a placement process that includes a review of SAT and/or ACT scores, a review of all mathematics courses taken, both at the secondary school level and at the college level, an evaluation of any AP, IB, or transfer credit, and an online placement exam covering the basics of algebra and trigonometry. The purpose of this exam is to help us place you in the appropriate mathematics course, either MATH 119 or MATH 131.

Who should take the exam? Any student who wishes to register for MATH 131 in the fall semester is required to take the placement exam. This includes almost all entering freshmen who elect to major in Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Physics, Mathematics, or Computer Science. Other students may also elect to take MATH 131, for example, if they are considering the pursuit of a minor in applied mathematics, if they elect to major in Chemistry and want to earn an American Chemical Society certificate, or if they are attending The Citadel on a Navy scholarship. If you do not need to take MATH 131 in the fall, then you are not required to take the online placement exam. Most students electing majors other than those listed above will not normally need to take MATH 131, but of course they are certainly welcome to if they so desire.

What if I already have transfer credit for MATH 119? If you already have transfer credit for MATH 119, then you will be placed in MATH 131. You are not required to take the online placement exam. However, you may elect to take the exam to gauge the level of your preparation. If you perform poorly on the exam, you may want to spend some time over the summer reviewing this material in preparation for your calculus course in the fall.

What if I already have transfer credit for MATH 131? If you already have transfer credit for MATH 131, then you do not need to take the exam. In this case, however, you have several options for the fall. You may elect to start in MATH 132 in the fall, you may elect to skip mathematics in the fall and start in MATH 132 in the spring, or you may elect to take MATH 131 in the fall to ensure a strong foundation in beginning calculus, thereby foregoing the transfer credit. Of the three options, we strongly recommend either the first, MATH 132 in the fall, or third, MATH 131 in the fall. Not taking a mathematics course in the fall semester means that you will be somewhat out of practice when you start again in the spring.
What if I already know that I need additional preparation for MATH 131 and I want to register for MATH 119 in the fall without taking the online exam? In this case, you should simply complete the survey (see summary of steps below) stating your preference to take MATH 119. You do not need to take the online placement exam – you will be placed in MATH 119 if that is your desire.

What are the steps that I need to take before reporting in August?

1. Using a relatively up-to-date version of an internet browser such as Internet Explorer 7.0 or Firefox 2.0, go to the following web site: http://macs.citadel.edu/chenm/math_placement.html. This page contains detailed information about the online placement exam, including review notes, practice problems, and a copy of an exam from a previous year. Be sure to open and print the Microsoft Word document at the link labeled “WebCT Instructions.” This document contains detailed instructions for the remaining steps.

2. Login to WebCT and complete the online survey. This survey provides us with information about your preparation for calculus and is an important step in the overall process. Please do not omit this step.

3. Prepare for the exam. Review the material covered in your algebra and trigonometry or precalculus courses, and study the review materials available online.

4. Take the online practice exam. This step is optional, but taking the practice test will help you uncover any problems or questions that might arise when taking the actual exam. We strongly recommend that you not omit this step.

5. Take the online placement exam. The exam will be available online from June 2-August 4, 2008. You will have 50 minutes to answer 32 multiple-choice questions. Please be sure to allow sufficient time for completing the exam. Please read the instructions carefully before you begin. After completing the exam, be sure that you have saved your answers before submitting the exam for grading.

Helpful hints

• Be sure popup blockers are disabled. Note that some installed task bars will also block popups, so you may need to disable more than one popup blocker.

• Do not use AOL or Comcast internet providers. Experience has taught us that there are conflicts between those providers and WebCT.

• If you experience difficulties from your home computer, you may use a computer in the public library, or, if you are within easy driving distance of The Citadel, you may use the computers in the computer labs in Bond Hall. These computers are available from 9:00 am-5:00 pm, Monday-Friday.

• If you have difficulty downloading WebCT, refresh the page and try again.

• Do your very best! It is to your advantage to start in the course most appropriate for your mathematics background.

If you have questions about the online placement exam or the placement process in general, please use email to contact either Professor Mei Chen (mathplacement@citadel.edu) or me (john.moore@citadel.edu). Professor Chen is the administrator for the online placement exam and should be your first point of contact if you have any difficulties taking the exam. You may also call the department office at 843-953-5048 and speak with our department secretary, Mrs. Elaine Singletary. She will usually know how to contact us in case of emergency or special needs.

After completing the exam, relax and enjoy the rest of your summer. We look forward to seeing you in August.

Sincerely,

John I. Moore, Jr., Ph.D.
Professor and Head
Department of Mathematics and Computer Science