



## Breaking News:

# Class of 1<sup>tm</sup> means success for developmental math students

Roy is 19 years old, working 20 hours a week and trying to earn an AA degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management. But he's failed college algebra two times and can't graduate. Dream shattered.

Sylvia is 42 and wants to retrain to become a nurse. She hasn't been in school in many years and scored poorly on her math placement test. Now she's thinking about withdrawing.

These two examples are typical of the growing number of non-traditional students who now attend a community college in the U.S. Unlike previous generations of college students, they possess a wider range of academic skills, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, and life experiences. Seventy-five percent have to combine work with studying. Twenty-three percent have children. And an astonishing 60 percent must take at least one remedial class before moving on to college-level courses. More than half will drop out before their second year and only 25 percent will finish community college in three years.

These are worrisome statistics to President Obama, who considers the downward trend a "prescription for economic decline." He challenged the nation's schools to improve the graduation rate by 2020 and pledged government support to help make it a reality. One of his national goals is to produce five million more graduates from 2-year institutions by the end of this decade.

At a recent American Association of Community Colleges conference, six national organizations representing all the community colleges in the country acknowledged the problem and signed a statement of commitment to increase student completion rates by 50 percent in the next decade.

To reach that goal, community colleges must do things differently, particularly with students who need remedial help. For example, students with varying math abilities are usually enrolled in a developmental class with an instructor, a textbook and maybe some technology. Statistics bear out that this approach is ineffective and frustrating for many students. In addition, these standard developmental classes are a huge drain on community college budgets, costing an estimated \$2 billion a year nationwide.

One new, innovative approach to helping these unprepared students was recently developed by an education think-tank company, *iLearn*. Dr. Robert Collins, Founder and CEO, has spent his working life in the field of education researching how learning takes place. He has turned his knowledge into practical methods for providing individualized, online instruction that is targeted to each student's weaknesses with pinpoint accuracy. Previously *iLearn*'s focus has been on remedial math instruction for grades 6-12. The company just released its latest instructional system, *Class of 1*, designed for developmental college math. Dr. Collins describes it as "personal tutoring at its finest."

In *Class of 1*, the students are in complete control of their learning process as they can progress at their own speed, in their own time. Instructors are free to do what they do best – provide guidance and answers to questions when needed. The computer handles ongoing assessment, saving the instructor's time, and if a particular topic is already mastered by the student, it is skipped, saving the student's time. If the skill needs to be taught, it's delivered in carefully designed steps that are easy to follow, so the student doesn't feel overwhelmed or frustrated. Errors are prevented.

"This tool provides new help for students and colleges in getting to the national goal established by President Obama faster, easier and less costly than any other existing alternative," Collins said. "After ten years of experience in K-12 schools we know it works. Colleges can expect at least a 50 percent gain in one year in developmental math students' success. And colleges can offer this course at no cost to them."

How is that possible? Students pay normal registration fees to enroll in the class and purchase an access code to all the online course materials instead of purchasing a textbook. The school pays nothing; the student pays, in most cases, less than they would on a traditional course with textbook and/or workbook.

It turns the traditional model upside down. Instead of teacher-led instruction with computer assistance, *Class of 1* provides computer-led instruction with teacher assistance. However, it's not designed to replace instructors, but to give them better tools using technology. Collins notes that, "the answers to how to improve instruction have been available from high-quality research for years. Thus far, no one has succeeded in bringing the solution to market in a practical way that can be easily implemented across all schools. Class of 1 is designed to do this."

Ms. Janet Winkler, Executive Director for the Center of Continuing Education at Georgia's Clayton State University, is a believer in this approach. About 10 years ago at another college, she conducted a summer outreach program for disadvantaged high school students who fell behind in math. They had poor study skills and even poorer self-images. The students attended 30 minutes a day, five days a week for seven weeks. After only the first week, there was a total transformation in demeanor, self-esteem and behavior in all the students. Every day, they entered the classroom with enthusiasm and made a beeline to the computer. Some even begged to work longer at the end of the daily session.

Winkler remembers one young man, Amos, who hated math, was frustrated with school and wanted to drop out. By the end of the summer course, he showed 90 percent improvement. Feeling confident in his studies for the first time in his life, he asked Winkler for assistance in getting into college.

Improving the passing rate in developmental classes will lead to improved college graduation rates — a necessity for the nation's future economic growth. According to the Lumina Foundation, "the United States is one of only two nations in which the current generation has attained less education than their parents' generation. In the next decade, the United States must produce at least 15 million more postsecondary degree holders to fill new jobs and replace those that will become available as the baby boomers retire."

The U.S. has always been a world leader in "educational capital" but that position is eroding quickly. In a series of recent reports, titled *Measuring Up 2008*, the researchers found that the U. S. "ranks 15<sup>th</sup> among 29 countries in college completion." Countries like Australia, Ireland, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada, Czech Republic and Korea have higher graduation rates. The U.S. needs 800,000 more college graduates each year to compete with these top-performing nations.

The Gates Foundation understands the urgency and supports efforts toward the solution. Melinda French Gates, Co-chair and Trustee of the Foundation, stated in a recent speech, "community colleges led the way on college access. Now, it is time to lead the way on college completion." She challenged community colleges to become innovative in the way students are taught so that in these tough economic times the results can improve at a fraction of the cost.

"The area where the need for innovation is most urgent is remedial education. Our research indicates that improving remediation is the single most important thing community colleges can do to increase the number of students who graduate," she remarked.

And graduation is a sure way to help dreams of success come true.