

## The Truth About Math Remediation at the UW

There is considerable debate on the amount of math remediation at the UW. Recently, Brian Jeffries, a representative from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, claimed that two (2) percent of the Washington public high school students who enter the University of Washington end up taking remedial math courses some time during their career. A careful examination of the actual course enrollment numbers does not support this OSPI assertion.

The entering freshman class in 2007 was 5475, so 2% would be 110 students. There are four identified remedial algebra math classes at the UW: Math 098, 100, 102, and 103. The number of students who took these courses in autumn 2007 and winter 2008, and who have signed up to take these courses in spring 2008 totals 387. Another high school algebra course is Math 111 and last year it was taken by 738 students. These numbers do not include summer classes for the four lower-level math remediation courses, and surely some students would take remedial math classes during the summer. Mr. Jeffries seems to have missed another major issue: roughly 30 percent of UW admissions are transfers, which generally takes place after their sophomore years. For these students, math remediation would have occurred prior to their entrance into the UW. According to the Washington State Board of Education, approximately 45% of students entering Washington State community colleges take math remediation. Assuming there are approximately 2500 transfers a year, roughly 1125 would have taken math remediation classes at the community college level.

The clear implication of the above numbers is that any suggestion that only 2% of UW students have experienced math remediation classes before they graduate is wildly inaccurate. Based on these numbers, one could easily argue that the math remediation rate for UW students is 20-30%. For example, if one started with the total of those taking Math 098, 100, 102, 103, and 111 one would have 1125 students per year, then adding a similar number 1125 (coincidentally the same) for the community college students, there would be 2250 of the approximately 7975 in each class taking remediation (28%). Even if we cut this number down substantially by assuming some students might have taken multiple algebra classes for some reason, the total is surely several times higher than that assumed by OSPI.

The statistics regarding math remediation leave out one important issue: a number of students who come to the UW decide not to go into mathematical and technical fields that require higher level math because their entering math background is so weak. Rather than take a long series of math remediation courses they move into mathematically less challenging fields.