What is Math 100?

Math 100 is a general ‘survey of mathematics’ course, which conforms to the Symbolic Reasoning (FS) hallmarks. Math 100 is not a ‘computational skills’ course. In Math 100 students cover a selection of topics from ancient and modern mathematics; the actual selection depends on the instructor and their choice of text.

Isn’t Math 100 an unusual course?

Many major universities, including many of our peer and benchmark institutions, offer courses very much like Math 100. However, as mentioned above, the course we offer is designed with our FS hallmarks in mind.

Isn’t the Math 100 text too hard?

The texts we have selected are used widely. Indeed, our most recently used texts are used by over 350 schools in nearly every state (and the District of Columbia).

I’ve heard that most students fail Math 100.

This is simply false. In aggregate, of the more than 4000 students who took Math 100 between Fall 2003 and Fall 2007 fully 85% fulfilled their FS requirement by passing the course. We are collecting data on more recent semesters.

Our observation is that students who regularly do the homework assignments generally earn a C or better in Math 100. Having recently moved to online homework we will be able to carefully monitor students homework habits in Math 100 and quantify this observation.

Don’t a lot of students get Ds in Math 100? Aren’t Ds failing grades?

From Fall 2003 to Fall 2007, only 11% of the students taking Math 100 received grades of D or D+. Both by tradition and University policy these are passing grades, and indeed these students fulfilled their FS requirement by passing Math 100. If the University changes the policy on which grades are passing grades the grade distribution in Math 100 might change.

Why so many Ws? Aren’t Ws failing grades?

Again, it is not true that a lot of students taking Math 100 receive Ws. Indeed, depending on the semester only 5-8% of students withdraw from the course. Further, Ws are not failing grades. Students drop classes for many legitimate reasons. Perhaps they are shopping around for a course or instructor that they prefer, or they believe they need more preparation for the course, or they started the course badly and want to try again before it permanently mars their GPA.

Not every student likes every instructor. If we had the human resources to offer multiple small sections of Math 100 (as English does with English 100), instead of one or two huge 350 seat sections each term, then the students would have more choice and a better chance of finding a professor who suits them.

1Among our peer institutions see, for example, Math 105 at Iowa State, Math 1029 at Louisiana State, Math 105 at Oregon State, etc.
Don’t students have to take Math 100?

No, there is no ‘Math 100 requirement.’ The current FS requirements are quite broad. Other departments can and do offer FS courses, and students have a choice of which course they take. While Math 100 and Phil 110 have become the default choices for students in nonmathematical majors, there is no requirement for this.

In the past, Math 100 was closely tied to an undergraduate requirement called “Mathematics and Logical Reasoning.” That requirement was eliminated 10 years ago.

Shouldn’t Math 100 be a prerequisite for Math 135/140, or an entry into a STEM degree sequence?

We offer other courses that lead eventually to Calculus. A course like Math 100 allows non-STEM students to see topics in mathematics that might impact their lives, but also to see math that is beautiful or culturally important in and of itself, regardless of obvious concrete application.

Shouldn’t Math 100 be a ‘consumer math’ course?

Some of our sister institutions in UH teach a course numbered Math 100 as a ‘consumer math’ course. While we respect their decision, our goal is to offer our students the same university experience and education available to students at a comparable mainland university, and so our course is a standard one for such universities.