

ALGEBRA FOR ALL?

MAT 322-01, FALL 2012

1. WHAT IS TO BE DONE

Last summer, after reading Andrew Hacker's opinion piece, "Is Algebra Necessary?" in the *New York Times*, my brother (SIUC class of 2002) sent the following e-mail to me and to several other people:

I don't think I'm an idiot. But the worst academic experience in my 20 years of school was taking the "college algebra" class at John A. Logan Community College the summer after I graduated from high school. My mathematician brother diligently tutored me through; without him, I might have failed. No kidding. But I still could perform no better than, if memory serves, a low B. And it discouraged me, making me feel as though I would be unable to perform at the college level - even the community college level. Was it worthwhile, in the long run, for the "system" to force me to take that course? What did I learn? How did it make me a more thoughtful person? What was the opportunity cost in time and energy? How am I a better person or better citizen of the world?

Armstrong Teasdale LLP
Winston Calvert | Attorney

How should he (and Hacker) be answered?

You are to write a response to my brother — a highly educated and intelligent person with no expertise in education or mathematics. It should respond to the newspaper article and his e-mail, in light of one another. That is, you need not address his questions specifically (although you may). You need not directly address points in the newspaper article (although you may). Sometimes the best answer requires some reformulation of the question. Still, what you write should respond to those two documents.

The response by Lynn Steen may help you as you begin your thinking.

2. DUE DATE

Your response should be submitted to me by November 20.

3. GRADING

In addition to the usual criteria, I will assess the following content question:

- (1) Do you give a compelling response to the documents under review?