

# Stress-relief aids math education

BY CASSANDRA MCCARTY  
Staff Reporter

The feeling is familiar: the sweat gathering on your palms, the panic throughout your entire body as the teacher hands you an empty test. It's math anxiety, and although common within the walls of Violette Hall, three professors have studied its effects at Moberly Area Community College.

Calm: Calming Anxiety to Learn Mathematics is a faculty forum that took place last Thursday night in Magruder Hall. With a grant from the Students Together Educating Peers program, Scott Alberts, associate professor of mathematics, has researched the anxiety math causes for students.

"Some students are afraid of math the way some people are afraid of spiders," Alberts said. "The math classes here at Truman would freak out the students at Moberly — we aren't designed for them, so what can we do about it, how can we help the students?"

Although Alberts' goal is to help relieve students' anxiety in math classes at any school, he and his colleagues have done their research using controlled math sections at MACC.

"At first it was me and some students measuring math anxiety, and that's what we did, but anyone at Truman is fine because of their high school classes," Alberts said. "Community college students have actual anxiety about the math. Our students are much more worried about public embarrassment."

Alberts said MACC's math classes are set up with four sections before entering college algebra for the wider distribution of the students and that many of those students are in need of basic review. Alberts has developed techniques to benefit those who suffer anxiety from math.

"Visualizing success is another part of the anxiety," Alberts said. "If you think about that anxiety when you go into the room, you are going to have that feeling of dread. The other thing we talk about is the model of striving. Most anything you think about works the same. You build up over time, which is the model of learning."

Steven Voss, associate professor of psychology, developed further techniques to overcome math anxiety. Voss said modifying Cognitive Behavior Therapy is his main focus. Cognitive Behavior Therapy involves reorganizing debilitating behaviors and learning how to replace destructive thoughts with beneficial ones.

"We are taking techniques designed for one-on-one situations and transferring them into classrooms," Voss said. "We want to find some treatment non-physiologists could implant in their classrooms that would treat math anxiety and improve the performance of the students."

Students at Truman also might carry a fear of math into the classroom environment. Sophomore Andrea Jones is taking trigonometry but said she is affected by anxiety she feels toward the subject.

"Yeah, I definitely have trouble taking tests," Jones said. "I can understand the stuff, but when it's put in front of me, I have no idea what to do or where to start."

Jones said she could try to start using a technique Voss developed such as daily journaling.

"Journaling probably would help me because then I could get all of those frustrations out, and then I could have them all out of the way so I could start my homework," Jones said. "Get it all out before I do it and then try to focus on doing it and not complaining."

Although the causes of math anxiety have not been fully determined, all three professors involved in the research recognized anxiety and the problems that occur because of its debilitating effects.

Jones said learning to work past her difficulties with math is more important than getting a good grade.

"I am really bad at math," Jones said. "I was never good with math to begin with and so the basic stuff you need to know, I am not really good at. So I can't even recognize to do that with the problems and then work my way through them. Obviously grades matter, but I just want to be able to do it."



Amy Gleaves/Index  
Senior Lindsay Blair (left) leads a math tutoring session Nov. 3 as freshman Miles Wegner (in foreground) takes notes.

# Non-traditional students embrace education

BY MICHELLE MARTIN  
Staff Reporter

Coming back to college at age 42 seems intimidating for many, but junior Susan Presley said her second round of higher education has been "cool."

"I think it's really an advantage being in school at this age," Presley said. "I have all of the advantages of being a professor because people assume I am, and so they treat me respectfully that way because of my age. However, I have none of the responsibilities of a professor ... and all of the advantages of being a student."

After first attending Truman from 1982 until 1984, Presley said she dropped out and moved to Texas, where she began a medical transcription business, married and had a baby. After a divorce and the downfall of the medical transcription industry, she decided to move back in with her parents and give Truman another try, she said.

"I am so glad I came back," Presley said. "One of the best things about being back is the acceptance level of the students."

Although Presley is about twice the age of most Truman students, no one had a problem when she wanted to become more involved in student activities, she said. Presley said she is on the debate team and leads or co-chairs three other student organizations.

"I have wonderful support with that from other students," she said. "And my age never really gets mentioned unless I bring it up."



Krista Goodman/Index  
Junior Susan Presley (far right) speaks at a debate meeting Tuesday night. Presley also is Vice President of the Society of Professional Journalists. She previously attended the University in the early 1980s.

However, interacting primarily with the Truman community does pose the problem of whom Presley can mix with outside of classes, she said.

"[Interacting with professors] gets tricky when other students are around because they shouldn't treat me any differently than other students," she said. "... It's probably better if I sit with the students and act like a student."

Thus, Presley finds herself socializing with more students than teachers outside of school, she said. Presley said the accepting nature of today's students has astounded her.

"When my mother went back to school at 42, it was a lot different for her than it's been for me," she said. "When I show up it's like, 'There's a poker game tonight?' They're like, 'Yeah, are you in?'"

Meanwhile, senior Misty Brombaugh has experienced a slightly different return to college. Brombaugh has two children to care for at her home in Brookfield, Mo., an hour away from campus.

"There's a lot more responsibilities that I have that general students just don't have," Brombaugh said. "... You have your priorities more in order when you have children and you're coming back for a second time."

However, Brombaugh said she has found that planning ahead solves a lot of these problems.

"You just have to prioritize, and you usually have to make schedules," she said. "... You come home and there's not a whole lot of messing around. You do your homework. You help your children with their homework. You make dinner. You get

them organized, get them in bed."

Brombaugh's hour-long commute to campus also poses problems for her because many student activities take place in the evenings, she said.

"I think there's a lot of things on campus that are only geared toward traditional students," she said. "A lot of times they'll have study sessions for exams that are usually in the evenings during the week — and there's different groups and clubs that I would like to be involved in, but the meeting times will not work for my schedule."

But Brombaugh's real-world experience also has motivated her to excel more in her studies than the average student, she said.

"I think I take things a lot more seriously now than when I was 18 or 19," she said. "... You tend to see things more as, I'm paying X amount of dollars for this class, I'm going to make sure I learn things from this class."

Susan Guffey, assistant professor of biology, said she has had many non-traditional-aged students in her classes over the years. She has noticed that returning students tend to have a lot of drive, she said.

"When they've been out of school for a period of time and returned, their motivation is very, very, very strong," she said. "It really shows in their work ethic."

Guffey said she thinks these students can act as positive role models for other Truman students, and used as an example a particular older student whom she currently has in class.

"[She] blends in extremely well, and I also think it's very good for the younger students because they see a very positive role model and someone to look up to," she said.

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