



**Amy Wells gets an early start on her day teaching a 6 a.m. math class at Bainbridge College.**

### **Instructor Amy Wells Creates Innovative Opportunity**

## **6 A.M. Math Class Changes Students' Days and Nights**

**Students scoffed at the idea of a math class at 6 a.m. when Bainbridge College Instructor Amy Wells first suggested it to her 6 p.m. Math 97 class. But by the end of that class period, as bodies and minds were very tired from a full day at work followed by class, the students asked serious questions about the possibility and how quickly they could sign up for an early class for the next level course, Math 99.**

Since most were parents with full-time work in addition to school, they realized that they could be through with class before work and be home right after work like other parents. They would be there with quality family time, helping with dinner, homework and bedtime instead of worrying in class if their children were doing what they needed to do at home.

Creating the class did not happen immediately, Mrs. Wells was quick to note. The discussion took place in Spring Semester 2007 after the summer and the fall courses had been scheduled. However, she wasted no time talking with Learning Support Division Chair Dr. Tonya Strickland about the possibility.

"It had never been done, but Dr. Strickland said it was very innovative," Mrs. Wells said. The rest of the college administration was quickly in agreement about offering the service to address individual optimum learning times.

Soon the class in learning support math, which helps prepare students for college algebra, was a reality for Spring 2008. In addition to the advantages to the students' personal lives, Mrs. Wells noted that 80 percent of the students completed the course. Although not all scored high enough to move to the next level of mathematics, to have 80 percent of the students who started the course finish it was an excellent retention rate.

Part of their staying with the class she attributed to the fact that students who would register for a 6 a.m. class were very motivated. Some students from the previous year's Math 97 waited the entire year until they could take the early session.

Among the students was Cairo native Rebecca Green, who had just completed four years of active duty in the U.S. Navy and was living in Grady County to be near family. After high school graduation in Pennsylvania, she attended college briefly in Chicago, IL, and realized she was not ready for it. Now the Naval Reservist is working on an associate's degree in criminal justice with plans to earn a bachelor's degree in international relations.

Ms. Green decided the 6 a.m. class would help “book-end” her day. She finished morning classes by 9 a.m. to be at her 9:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. job, then attended criminal justice classes from 6 p.m.-8:45 p.m.

“I probably never would have done it without Mrs. Wells,” Ms. Green said. “I had her for Math 97 and she is so enthusiastic that she made you want to be there. I enjoyed it. She really taught me a lot. Math is not a good subject for me and I had not had math in 15 years. For me to come out with an A, she must have done something right!”

Although there were other single students in the class, most were parents who had to take their children to family members or arrange for sitters before 6 a.m. Some lived outside of Decatur County and had to be up at 4:30 a.m. to get the children settled and leave in time to be at class. One man who works in a nearby mill had wonderful support from his company that allowed him to start his work 15 minutes later and make up the time at the end of the day in order to encourage his educational pursuits.

The class met 6 a.m.-7:40 a.m. Mondays and Wednesdays. Mrs. Wells used the first 15 minutes for review and found that after about 20 minutes students’ responses and questions increased as they came more fully awake. Their productivity was the reverse of the evening class when they grew increasingly tired. The instructor accommodated the new rhythm by giving tests after that initial 15-20 minutes, whereas in the evenings she had given tests earlier in the class.

“So many of our students have full-time jobs and families, and we have to work with them,” said Mrs. Wells, who adjusts her schedule to accommodate students who need extra help but cannot see her during her regular office hours.

Although she has taught in all three divisions at BC, Arts and Sciences, Learning Support and Technical Studies, Mrs. Wells is especially partial to learning support classes and finds them a very rewarding experience.

“To have students come in afraid, weak, with no confidence in their math abilities and turn them out after two semesters believing that they can do college algebra is so rewarding,” she said. And she has had many like Ms. Green who have not had a math class in 15 years.

“I love teaching at BC. I love helping people help themselves...especially since some are the first in their family to be the one to have any college experience,” said Mrs. Wells, who began her teaching career in public education.

She came to BC in 2004, having taught part-time since 2000. She taught 17 years in public schools, including in special education in Seminole County before coming to Decatur County Schools in 1988.

She has a bachelor’s degree in theoretical mathematics from Auburn University and a master’s of education from Valdosta State University. She did additional coursework in graduate level mathematics at Albany State University.

In addition to her help with a creative class schedule and flexible office hours, Mrs. Wells serves the BC community and the larger community in many other ways. She has co-chaired the International Education Week, serves on the International Education Committee and traveled to Belize for one of its initiatives, and serves on the Multi-cultural Awareness Committee.

She serves on the boards of directors for both Stepping Stone and Bainbridge Little Theatre. She is active at First Presbyterian Church in the choir and the hand bell choir.

