

# Bill Gates visits Foothill to observe math program



Written by Town Crier Report  
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Photo Courtesy Of Foothill College

Bill Gates, right, works with a Math My Way student at Foothill College April 20.

observe instructors Nicole Gray of Sunnyvale, Rachel Mudge of Mountain View and Kathy Perino of Campbell, to gain a better understanding of how they teach developmental math. Students were surprised when Gates and members of his foundation walked into the classroom, but quickly got to work on the math problems at hand. Later, the students had an opportunity to talk with Gates about how the methods used in the class are making a difference for them.

Gates and his team are reviewing models and best practices in developmental mathematics education. They heard about Math My Way during a meeting at the Gates Foundation offices in Seattle with Foothill-De Anza Chancellor Linda Thor, who was invited to discuss her experiences with online learning programs.

Thor said having Gates visit Foothill "presented a wonderful opportunity for us to share a successful program that could be used in any high school or community college to give math-averse students a solid foundation that will carry them into college-level mathematics and science with confidence."

Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft Corp. and co-chairman of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, attended math class at Foothill College April 20.

The software pioneer visited the Los Altos Hills campus to do some homework on Foothill's Math My Way program, designed to help students grasp basic math concepts, outperform their peers and advance faster to college-level math classes.

Nineteen Math My Way students were told in advance that a special guest wanted to



The goal of Math My Way is to increase the number of science, math and engineering graduates at Foothill College and expand opportunities for students from historically underserved groups, such as Latinos and African Americans, to earn advanced degrees in such subject areas. The Math My Way program is instrumental in preparing students with poor math skills to advance into college-level mathematics, a gateway class for transfer to a four-year university.

Concerned that so many students arrived at the college unprepared and were not progressing in mathematics, Gray, Mudge and Perino teamed up three years ago to create a new approach to developmental math, which they dubbed Math My Way.

Math My Way groups cohorts of students with similar math skill levels. Through small-group interaction and one-to-one attention from math instructors, students are challenged with computer drills, paper drills and computer games that reinforce mathematical concepts. Math My Way is offered on a pass/no pass basis and often allows students to complete in one quarter what originally took two quarters.

Students must master each conceptual building block before progressing to the next level, and they can move quickly through the program to more advanced coursework. Students work at their own pace, so they can focus on the concepts that are most challenging for them. Instructors use live lectures and specialized software to help students build confidence and master essential concepts that build on each other. Math My Way comprises two courses – Math 230: Preparing for Algebra (5 units) and Math 231: Math-Specific Study Skills (2 units).

“If we are to increase the number of math, science and engineering degrees, we must improve our student success in precollegiate-level math classes,” said Foothill College President Judy C. Miner. “We were honored to host Mr. Gates and to introduce him to the outstanding work going on in our Math My Way program.”

Foothill instructors developed the Math My Way program in response to institutional research demonstrating relatively low rates of progression from the bottom levels of developmental math to college-level math success. Math My Way reimagines the typical one-instructor, one-classroom model as a flexible design centered on a series of self-paced, hands-on math learning modules.

The creativity and innovation by Foothill faculty to improve developmental

education has been recognized nationally, with two Foothill instructors invited to participate in national projects in this area. In December 2009, the Gates Foundation awarded \$3.6 million to the Global Skills for College Completion Project, a developmental math and writing project, for which Perino and English instructor Rosemary Arca of Los Altos were selected to participate.

For more information, visit [www.foothill.edu/transfer/Math\\_My\\_Way.pdf](http://www.foothill.edu/transfer/Math_My_Way.pdf).

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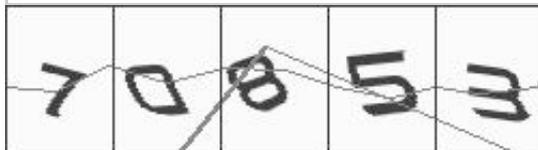
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