

Cutting a Competitive Edge:

Bridging Disciplines to Strengthen Business Education

“When the program was under development, Finance Department Head Chris Lamoureux walked across campus three times a week for an entire year to team-teach with me.” Writing for Mathematics Association of America (MAA) colleagues, Richard

Thompson, UA mathematics professor and director of the 100-level math requirement for business majors, urged them to “break the barriers, reach out.” He calls Eller College support for “our interdisciplinary relationship,” the reason behind dramatically increased student motivation and much improved faculty experience in his department. College of Science Dean Joaquin Ruiz calls the collaboration “a national model.” Eller faculty say it means students begin their major with tools applicable to their business education.

While the developing industries of tomorrow require quantitative expertise more than ever, entry-level courses in mathematics are under fire for emphasizing arcane, theoretical concepts that dull student interest. The course Lamoureux fostered at UA tells students in its syllabus that content, teaching methods and computer software have all been “carefully selected

to prepare you for the job market and your business career.” After a kick-off event in McClelland Hall to meet faculty and build teams, the two-semester course centers on four business problems: loan work outs, option pricing, technology marketing, and lease bidding. Probability, optimization, differentiation, etc. replace finite mathematics and calculus. Student teams work the problems, report preliminary findings throughout the semester and compete before industry judges at its end. They say, “Finally...a math course useful for the future.” Mathematics faculty call the “...unique blend of communication, quantitative and business concepts... the most interesting course I've ever taught.”

Embraced by the MAA, which markets its electronic texts and showcases the course in national and regional workshops, Business Mathematics I & II received developmental funding from the National Science Foundation. □



Richard Thompson (left) and Chris Lamoureux work together on business mathematics.