

Fall 2011 MATYCONN meeting – October 21, 2011

Herb Gross

Presentation #1 - “The Calculus of Everyday Living” or
“Today is the Tomorrow We Worried About Yesterday”

Imagine a reel of movie film being unraveled and we are looking at it frame-by-frame. Without a powerful magnifying glass we see that the first frame and the second frame appear to look exactly the same; the same is true about the second frame and the third frame and so on up to, say the 50,000th frame. Yet even though the change from frame to frame seems to be unnoticeable, the 1st frame and the 50,000th frame do not look at all alike.

More generally, in a real life situation by the time we notice that there is a change, the change has been occurring for a long time. In today’s presentation I will try to compare the problems that the community colleges faced when I first became involved with them in 1958 and the problems that exist today. The changes are enormous but have taken place so gradually that we might not have noticed what has been happening on a continual basis. In particular we have gone from an era when students would ask such questions as “How do you derive the quadratic formula?” to an era when students now ask “Why do I have to know the quadratic formula?”

The point is that it is far more difficult and far more subtle to have to address answering the question of “why?” than it is to answer the question of “how”; and what this means to us as community college instructors will be discussed in this presentation.