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Placement Made Personal. Preliminary report.

Undergraduate mathematics programs are regularly faced with the task of placing incoming students in the appropriate mathematics class for their abilities. Until Fall 2006, our placement test was administered as a multiple-choice, computer-based exam with a binding recommendation. Student dissatisfaction and faculty disillusionment with both the process and the outcomes led us to search for methods that better fit our school size (approximately 1000 undergraduates) and liberal arts curriculum. Beginning in Fall 2006, we piloted a new placement system which was tailored to specific courses and skills; the open-ended questions prompted students to utilize multiple solution methods. This initial assessment was followed by a personal conference and recommendation from a mathematics faculty member. Recommendations were also non-binding which left the final decision in the hands of the student. Initial results indicate that students were less likely on the new placement exam to randomly guess and were therefore less likely to externally attribute their placement to luck. We will also discuss individual cases of placement decisions as well as recommendations for improvement to the placement process in the future. (Received September 20, 2006)