

# Marcus Hunley

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## Personal Story

Marcus Hunley aspires to be a pilot. The 20-year-old loves flying and has loved it since he was a young child. Not surprisingly, Marcus is majoring in Aviation Science and Management with a concentration in flight at Middle Georgia State University (MGA). He recently completed his second year at MGA and is excited to take the core courses for his concentration, such as aviation rules and regulations, aviation safety, and crew management. Before getting to these courses, however, Marcus had to first complete the gateway math and English courses for his major.

Marcus admits that his first year at MGA was tough and that his dream of becoming a pilot was nearly crushed. When Marcus enrolled in MGA, he was placed in an English Learning Support Course, which is a corequisite course made up of the college-level class (English 1101) and a concurrent support class. The classes were taught by the same professor and were held on alternate days of the week. Because of the support class, the professor's availability during the weekly office hours, and the Writing Center at MGA, Marcus passed the course easily and went on to complete English 1102 the following semester. Gateway math, however, would not be so easy.

For math, Marcus was strong enough that he did not need a learning support course and was enrolled in Math Modeling, the gateway math course required at the time for his major. Marcus describes his experience with Math Modeling as "a complete disaster." He "struggled with graphs, memorization of formulas; it was a mess." Marcus ended up failing the course. Determined not to let that experience derail his dream of becoming a pilot, he took the course again in his second semester. This time, he went to MGA's math tutoring center early on for help, but that "didn't make a difference." He ended up dropping the course.

Right when Marcus thought he would need to reconsider his major and give up on his dream, MGA introduced an alternative math course that could satisfy the math component of his major. Marcus was ecstatic until he found out the math course was statistics. He had heard a lot of "negative things" about statistics from his friends at the university, so the thought of taking it was "a little nerve wracking." To his amazement, Marcus did well in statistics and received an "A" on the first major test. "I guess statistics just clicks with me better," he said. Marcus now needs only three more math credits for his major, so he plans on taking the next level statistics course in his junior year.

## Policy-Related Overview

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Marcus' experience in his first year at MGA is not uncommon. Many students struggle with gateway math courses that are misaligned with their declared major, which prevents them from completing gateway math courses in their first year and keeps them from gaining the needed momentum to complete their degree. For instance, the default gateway math course for most majors is college algebra. Yet, for non-STEM majors, math courses such as statistics or quantitative reasoning may suffice.

MGA is part of the University System of Georgia (USG) which has been engaged in systemwide developmental education reform since 2017. USG is working with each of its 28 institutions to ensure students successfully complete gateway math and English courses in their first year. As part of this reform, MGA refined its gateway math courses, which allowed Marcus to satisfy his gateway math requirement with statistics - instead of Math Modeling. This moved him one step closer to becoming a pilot.

Like MGA, other colleges and universities are examining their gateway math courses to determine if they are aligned with the student's course of study. One such university is the University of Cincinnati in Ohio (UC). In 2017, UC created an alternative math course called the Foundations of Quantitative Reasoning (FQR), which is proving to be highly successful for their non-STEM students. (Moena & Marshall, 2020). Since the creation of the course, students in most racial and ethnic groups have passed the FQR course at higher rates than students in the traditional college algebra course. (Moena & Marshall, 2020).

As for Marcus, he is "very proud" of himself for having pushed through his initial negative experience with the gateway math course at the school. When asked what advice he would give to incoming MGA students who might struggle like he did, Marcus said "If you need help, get it. Get help as soon as you figure out you are not getting it."

### References:

Moena, R. & Marshall, A. (2020, April). A new approach to mathematics: Increased success rates for ALL students at the University of Cincinnati (Steps to Success series). Denver, CO: Strong Start to Finish, Education Commission of the States.

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