

Rylie

WR 13300

Professor Clauss

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Simplify and Solve

Situation: My senior year of high school, I took AP Calculus and had Ms. Dunn as my teacher. Ms. Dunn has taught math at my high school, Pius X, for many years, but had never taught AP Calculus, the most advanced math class available, before. She usually taught Pre-Calculus and Geometry to freshman and juniors. After the man who used to teach AP Calculus transferred to another school, the Pius administration gave the position to the next most qualified teacher, Ms. Dunn. Next year, Ms. Dunn has the option of going back to teaching Geometry and Pre-Calc since the school is hiring a new math teacher that could fill either position. I am writing to Ms. Dunn to try and convince her to continue teaching AP Calculus after I had such a positive experience in her class.

Dear Ms. Dunn,

How are you? I hope you and your kids aren't too busy and that you're making lots of memories with them to share with your classes; I always looked forward to your stories in about family car rides and dinner table conversations. Occasionally I see Andrew and Jessica [two of her children] walking around campus here at Notre Dame and I always smile at them even though I don't think they know who I am! I hope this school year has gone well thus far and that you're enjoying this year's senior class. I can't imagine a group better than third period AP Calc, but hopefully the students you have now are at least half as entertaining as we were. Just a few days ago, I stumbled upon all the journals I had written for your classes, even the ones from junior year. I know what you're thinking, but yes- of course I kept them! Reading over all of them was kind of like time traveling back to high school. It reminded me of all the things you taught me in AP Calculus, both pertaining to math and life in general. I heard that next year Pius is hiring a new math teacher and that you could go back to teaching Geometry and Pre-Calc.

Knowing how much you love these classes, I'm sure this is not an easy decision with a clear cut answer. I just wanted to offer you a student's insight on how beneficial it was having you as a teacher for such an advanced math class. You are incredibly gifted at teaching AP Calculus, and I wouldn't want any student to miss out on the opportunity of having you as their teacher for this class.

As you already know, it would be a lot easier for you to teach Geometry and Pre-Calc because they are just inherently simpler subjects than AP Calc. Not only is the subject matter itself easier, but you're way more familiar with the material for these classes as well; before last year, you had taught them for over ten years straight! This would result in less time being spent preparing for class every day. Knowing how busy you are with your kids, graduate school, and volunteering, I can see how time is an important aspect of your decision. You already have so many different tests and worksheets piled up from all your years of teaching Geometry and Pre-Calc that you wouldn't have to do any extra work outside of class making new ones. Not only that, but I know how much you enjoy teaching underclassmen the basics of mathematics. I always admired how passionate you were about Geometry and the fundamentals of trig in general.

In light of these concerns, I felt compelled to remind you that you are one of the most goal-oriented and driven people I have ever encountered. No one can manage time like you, so don't let that stop you from teaching AP Calc. You probably can recall feeling slightly overwhelmed when you started teaching Geometry and Pre-Calc, but it got easier and easier over time. This is only your second year working with the AP Calc material. Every year that you stick with it, you'll get more familiar and comfortable with the material. If you don't like change, why

would you want to change back to where you were two years ago? You already pushed yourself to get to where you are now; keep moving forward!

Not only does teaching AP Calc provide you with an opportunity for personal growth, it more importantly provides you with the opportunity to positively impact hundreds of seniors' lives. As one of those seniors, I cannot thank you enough for being the type of teacher that you were. God has given some people the ability to connect with children in a way that encourages understanding; you are one of these people. I never had a problem with math, but it definitely wasn't my favorite subject until I experienced it in your classroom. You made me want to learn! I actually looked forward to math class every day. I loved watching the expression on peoples' faces when I told them AP Calculus was my favorite class.

You created an environment of mutual respect between student and teacher. You treated us as adults, and for some seniors, this was the first time a teacher had done that. Teaching seniors is a unique opportunity you would miss out on if you taught Geometry and Pre-Calculus. Not only are the students taking AP Calculus generally better behaved and eager to learn, but they are also transitioning into adulthood. You are one of their last stops on the road between high school and college, and I can't think of anyone who prepared me for the demands of college level courses better than you. The material you cover in AP Calc has direct application for students considering majors in math, science, or business. You get to teach kids things they'll use in real careers as opposed to covering math basics that are just taken by underclassmen to fill graduation requirements.

One of my best memories from AP Calc was how you made it clear that we were important to you not only as students, but as people too. At first, I was annoyed with how you made us write journals; I didn't see how it pertained to math at all. It really grew on me though. I

always looked forward to getting them back and reading your comments of suggestions for college applications, advice about problems at home, or how to improve my faith life. You made me feel like I was more than just another name in your grade book and that I mattered beyond the classroom. Senior year is a stressful and emotional time. I can't describe the relief that came from knowing at least one teacher understood the obstacles I was facing. Most teachers wouldn't dream of spending their personal time each weekend reading hundreds of journals, especially if it was something that wasn't required for the course. I wish that every senior got to experience this in one of his or her classes. If you taught AP Calc again, some of them would be able to!

When I came to college, I brought not only my journals full of your advice, but also a head full of your knowledge. As a Biology major taking 19 credit hours at a prestigious university, I was seriously worried about how I was going to manage the demands of all my classes. I can say that because of you, Calculus is my easiest class. I know that some students in my class are struggling because they had teachers who didn't prepare them adequately for college level mathematics. The opposite is true for me. I actually find myself able to relax every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in Calculus. You'll probably cringe at me telling you this, but sometimes I don't even need to take notes. I can do the online homework without much effort because of how well you engrained Calculus into my mind. I can still see the unit circle in my mind because of the games you made us play with it every day. Calculating limits is easy when I can close my eyes and picture you at the front of the class demonstrating how they are similar to airplanes landing on runways. I still hear your voice in my mind saying the phrases you repeated over and over about rules when taking derivatives. On my first Calculus test here at Notre Dame I got a 94, as opposed to the class average of 77. Even though I'm several states away, I feel like you're still my teacher.

Don't take just my word for it, though. I talked to my friend Kristin Smith, who was also in your third period class, about how Calculus was going for her in college. She's at the University of Nebraska this year and is also in Calc I. She didn't enjoy math as much as I did in high school, but your class is definitely paying off for her now. Kristin claimed that she can "barely understand her professor" and would likely be failing if she hadn't taken AP Calc and had you as a teacher (Smith). Your class has made moving onto higher-level math much less intimidating, but it has also cemented critical thinking skills necessary to succeed at any level of math. I spoke with another student of yours, Stevie Hanson, who is only required to take Math Basics for her nursing major. She stated that after going through AP Calc she leads study groups for her class and has even been able to "correct her professor several times" (Hanson). Even current students are viewing your class with the utmost regard. Maddie Densmore is in one of your sections of AP Calc now and was telling me about how confident and fluent you seemed with the material. She said that she "never would have been able to guess that this was only your second time teaching it" (Densmore).

I heard that Pius is hiring another math teacher next year and that you might go back to teaching Geometry and Pre-Calculus. While I know how great of a job you will do in either position, I can't imagine anyone being able to teach AP Calculus as completely and thoroughly as you did for me my senior year. And to think, that was your first time teaching it ever! I would feel bad if the other students at Pius got stuck with a teacher who didn't really care about the class, especially one as important and challenging as AP Calc. I know that you've probably considered all the pros and cons of this decision and will make the choice that's best for you, I just wanted to put in my two cents and recognize the outstanding job you have done thus far.

Please let me know if there's anything I can do to help make your choice easier; after all you've done for me, I definitely owe you one.

God bless,

Rylie Lastname [deleted by Clauss]

Works Cited

Densmore, Maddie. Personal interview. October 21, 2016. (xxx)-xxx-xxxx. [deleted by Clauss]

Hanson, Stevie. Personal interview. October 18, 2016. (xxx)-xxx-xxxx. [deleted by Clauss]

Smith, Kristin. Personal interview. October 18, 2016. (xxx)-xxx-xxxx. [deleted by Clauss]