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## Immediate Release : George Polites

Ed Alsene  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Professor George Polites was simply searching for more effective methods when he made some radical changes in the way he was teaching a freshman-level mathematics course at Illinois Wesleyan University in January of 1972.

Eight years and many revisions later the success of his experiment has been so well established that Polites has his second textbook on the market. His first book, "An Introduction to the Theory of Groups," was published in 1968.

His new book, "Precalculus Mathematics: A Study of Functions," was published recently by Harper and Row in San Francisco. He has also signed a contract to write another textbook on college-level algebra and trigonometry.

The new contract stems at least partially from good reviews given Polites' first book.

"This is one of the most polished, carefully crafted manuscripts that I have seen in some time," wrote David Cohen of the University of California at Los Angeles faculty. "Overall, the presentation and choice of topics are excellent."

Dr. Efraim Armendariz of the University of Texas compared Polites' book to three widely used textbooks, then said, "I consider it better than any of these three because of its extreme readability and relaxed approach. More important to me is that Polites has avoided getting trapped in mathematical machinery, especially in dealing with trigonometric functions."

A luncheon conversation with Dr. Wendell Hess, then Director of Science Programs and now Dean of the University, started Polites on the path to publishing.

"I mentioned some ideas I had about how to teach the course without giving lectures, using a test-retest format, and said that some day I hoped to put these ideas through a trial run," Polites recalled.

Shortly thereafter, Hess continued the discussion and Polites initiated the changes on an experimental basis for a January Short Term course in 1972. The January Short Term, which permits students and faculty to concentrate on one course for 3½ weeks, lends itself to such experimentation.

The experiment worked so well that it was incorporated into the program for the regular school year.

"The main idea behind my new format is to have the students read the lectures at their leisure rather than listen to me deliver them several times a week in the classroom," Polites said.

So, the book is really 14 lectures, each of which covers a week of classroom work.

The weekly classroom procedure opens on Monday. Each student is to have read and studied the chapter before class. During class, Polites covers the highlights of the chapter and answers questions. Polites also has "help sessions" on Tuesday evenings.

Wednesday is the only day students must attend class, for that is when a 30-minute quiz is given. On Friday, another quiz is given for those not passing the Wednesday quiz.

He estimates that about 75 percent of the students attend the Monday class session and that from 25 to 35 percent don't pass the first test and must take another quiz on Friday.

Polites believes the new format results in students understanding the subject better than under the traditional system. "Our emphasis is on understanding the material. I find the class morale quite high. The better students can get most of what they need on their own and I'm available to help those who really need it," he said.

The format has had other benefits. It permits larger classes because the students are able to work on their own.

"We used to have seven sections for a year with 30-40 students in each class.

We were chewing up valuable time teaching the same thing over and over. Now we have three sections. Because of the staff time saved we have been able to institute several new courses without adding to our staff," he said.

One such course, started in 1974, is Number Theory and Computer Programming, which also has been incorporated in IWU's College Credit in Escrow program, which permits talented high school students to earn college credit during the summer. Polites is the co-ordinator of the CCIW program.

The 48-year-old Polites, who joined the IWU faculty in 1967 after previously teaching at Florida State University and Madison College, said he had no idea that the new course would lead to a textbook.

However, textbook company representatives regularly call on college teachers and ask them if they are doing any writing. So publishers learned in that way of Polites' work.

Oddly enough, the Harper and Row representative was an IWU graduate, Sharmon Hilfinger, who graduated summa cum laude in 1972 as a drama major. She was able to interest her superiors in the book, a contract was signed in 1976 and the process of rewriting, adding and deleting, which was already in progress, speeded up even more.

To add the final twist, Miss Hilfinger, later was promoted to the position of editor of arts and mathematics books for Harper and Row. She is listed as the sponsoring editor of Polites' book, her first such credit.