# Context of Math in Context

Intermediate Algebra at NCC is the typical starting point for students interested in STEM, so reworking the delivery of this course became part of our NSF-ATE grant proposal to peak students’ interest in a field they may not have considered previously. We all know that students are more likely to engage with topics if they can see some context or connection to their lives and the world around them. With female students more than twice as likely as males to indicate that they would want to take science if it was made more relevant to their lives, we decided to start here – a focus on attracting women students to STEM would open the option to all students.

The reasons women cite for failing to consider a career in STEM or quitting once they have started include:

* a feeling of isolation and lack of connection to peers;
* roadblocks along the way, the first being underprepared when they get to college because they were discouraged from taking more advanced STEM courses in high school;
* being underappreciated, often relegated to taking notes and having contributions unheard or undervalued;
* a lack of encouragement from parents and teachers.

Delivering Intermediate Algebra with context is meant to give the study of STEM the meaning and worth it deserves and address the feelings of not being capable and not fitting in. Group activities are designed to bring a sense of discovery as well as cooperation rather than competition. The idea is to spark curiosity and perhaps a willingness to try something new, all at a time when students are deciding what direction to take their studies and careers.