Alternative Spreadsheet Programs (if you don't have Excel available)

Highly recommended:
Open Office. http://www.openoffice.org   Free office suite applications. These seem to have almost the same functionality as Microsoft Office. Not all the interface is the same, but it is not hard to use.
This is a program you download and install on your own computer.
Difficulties:
To create a graph use Insert > Chart.   The dialog boxes have the same kinds of options that Excel has, but are not organized in the same way.   This program is available on the computers in the math labs, so we can look at it there and practice there: RVS 8131, NRG 2244, NRG 2245.

Somewhat recommended. (Use this if you want an application that runs on the web rather than on your computer.)
Thinkfree   http://www.thinkfree.com/ Free office suite applications. The interface for these programs is described as looking almost exactly like Microsoft Office, including Excel.
This is a web application, meaning that the whole program runs on the web rather than being downloaded to your computer. You store your files on the web too, in a folder they provide for you.
You must register and wait for an email confirmation before you can start using it. The first time you use it, it's rather slow, but it isn't as slow later.
When you use the spreadsheet program, you will want to chose "Power use" since that's needed for graphs.
Difficulties:
While the Insert > Chart part looks almost exactly like Excel, it doesn't work exactly like it. I think that's a bug, and I've reported it, so it may be corrected at some point. The difficulty is that it doesn't automatically consider the data in the left-hand column the input variable.   You have to specifically tell it to do that in the second step of the dialog boxes. Ask for a demonstration of that.
Another bug: When I changed the values of the parameters, it did not always automatically update the graph, and, in fact, might be continually one step behind in updating.

Not adequate for this course:
Microsoft Works. Not free, but some new computers come with MS Works already installed.   There is a spreadsheet in this suite of programs, but I don't believe it supports drawing graphs. That is not adequate for most of our work.

Not adequate for this course:
Google http://www.google.com/ This is a web application. You must register and wait for an email confirmation before using it.   It does not support drawing graphs. That is not adequate for most of our work.
Note: Industry speculation is that Google will purchase Thinkfree and so then it will have a good spreadsheet program.   But that hasn't happened as of 1/19/07.