



So You're an Advisor - Now What?

Sandra O. Paur
North Carolina State University
Math Department Honors Program Coordinator





We Will Cover

- Academic Advising
- Career Advising: Job or Grad School?
- Crisis Management
- The other stuff
 - Writing a good letter of recommendation
 - Keeping records
 - Payoff



5 minute advisor

- Student pokes his head in the door and asks for whatever forms and signatures he needs to pre-register.
- Advisor asks “Who are you”, signs and hands over the forms.



10 minute advisor

- Student comes in with a course plan for next semester.
- Advisor checks to see that all courses satisfy some sort of requirement.
- Advisor signs forms and says “See you next semester”.



Who Benefits?

- **Student:** Gets info and help needed to make informed decisions about education, career, life
- **Department:** Good advising retains majors and can attract them
- **Institution:** Good advising recruits students
- **Profession:** Math majors are declining nationwide (down 23% from 1994-2001)
- **Advisor:** Won't get you tenure but does help. It's fun, satisfying and you can make a real difference.



Nuts and Bolts of Good Advising

- Be Prepared
- Know your student
 - One size does not fit all
 - You can't advise somebody you don't know
- Good planning is essential
 - First meeting is key
 - Subsequent meetings are just as important





Be Prepared

- Know the basic requirements
- Know specifics about math classes
 - Which math classes are taken when
 - Which are the tough math classes
- Know where to go to get answers
 - Math majors handbook, course catalog
 - Undergrad advising coordinator, colleague
 - Counseling Center



First Meeting is Key

- Setting it up
 - Email student, find a good time (> 20 min.)
 - Be on time
 - Make her feel welcome
- Tell her about you
- Find out about her
 - Motivation
 - Background
 - Ability level
 - Goals (education, career, life)
- Take notes



First Meeting - 2nd half

- Tell him about
 - Math program (just an overview)
 - Special opportunities
 - Career/grad school possibilities
 - Math club/contests
 - Departmental, University tutoring resources
- Ask if he has any questions or concerns



First Meeting- 3rd half

i.e. 1st Academic Advising Session

- Find out how he's doing in his classes
- Find out if anything's changed (minors, other majors, financial situation, summer school plans, career goals, etc)
- Do the Plan-of-Study



Plan-of-Study

- List: (Note prerequisites and when offered)
 - Math classes needed
 - Other courses needed or wanted
- Do a table of remaining semesters
 - Put in courses
 - Work in special opportunities
- Look at final picture
- Ask if she has any questions



Subsequent Meetings Vital

- Go over the questions again. It's essential to:
 - Ask how he's doing in his math classes.
 - Transition to 'proof' classes is tough.
 - The answer affects how you advise him.
 - Ask if any changes in majors, minors ...
 - Check post-grad plans again
- Update the Plan-of-Study
- Start career advising



Really Strong Student

- Identifiers: Lot of AP credit, getting mostly “A’s”, doing well in beginning proof classes
- Suggestions:
 - Stronger courses (honors sections, grad classes)
 - Special opportunities (REU, Budapest, MASS, etc)
 - Grad school



Really Weak Student

- Identifiers: Getting C's and D's or worse, having a really hard time in beginning proof class.
- Find out:
 - Why does he want to be a math major?
 - Does he still want to be a math major?
 - Yes. Find courses that are good for him. Identify his special skills.
 - No. Help him find another major.



Job or Grad School?

- It's HIS decision
- It's YOUR job to:
 - Provide the information
 - Give suggestions
 - Provide a reality check, if needed



Jobs

- Tell him about the possibilities
 - MAA & SIAM profiles
 - Previous grads from your school
 - Look at job descriptions
- Show him how to prepare
 - Pick useful electives
 - Add appropriate minor or major
 - Do an internship
 - Consider Co-oping



Jobs - Advising Seniors

Getting the job - Advise him on:

- Career Planning and Placement Center
 - Workshops on resume preparation, interview skills
 - Set up job interviews
- Alumni contacts
- Check out MAA, SIAM, AMS web sites



Grad School

- Tell her about the possibilities
 - Math or not math?
 - Ph.D. or MS or 5 year BS/MS?
 - Possible schools
 - Financial support including fellowships
- Show her how to prepare
 - Stronger classes, grad classes
 - Research, REU's
 - Budapest Semesters, Math in Moscow, MASS



Grad School-Senior Advising

starting in 2nd semester junior year

Tell him about:

- GRE's
- Grad school rankings
- National Fellowships
- Loan him your copy of “Assistantships and Graduate Fellowships in the Mathematical Sciences”
- Recommendations and how to get them



Grad School Decisions

- Deciding where to apply (reality check again)
 - Talk to faculty and previous grads
- Decide where to go
 - Visit the school, talk to faculty and grad students



Student in Trouble

- Math class
 - Is it just one concept or the whole class?
- I need to drop this class (after the deadline).
- I'm failing all my classes, I can't sleep at night and I'm falling asleep in the daytime.



Writing Recommendations

- Be honest with the student
 - If you can write a good letter, say so
 - If not, explain why not (tactfully) and help her find somebody else who can write a good letter
 - But realize: It all depends on what she's applying for.
- Be honest in your letter
 - Push the strong points
 - Put the weak points in perspective
 - Do comparisons



Keep Records!

- What to keep
 - Transcripts
 - Letters
 - Resumes, awards won
 - Info on post-grad career
- Why?
 - Useful for writing recommendations (remember those comparisons?)
 - Useful for department and university

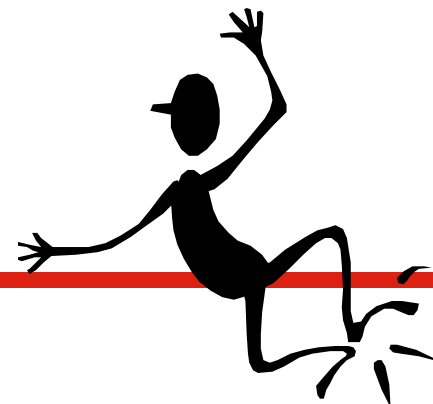


They're not all successes

- They won't always take your advice
- They will make mistakes
- You will make mistakes



The Payoff



Your advisee comes in and says:

- I got into: Budapest Semesters, ___REU, ___grad school. Thanks for telling me about it and encouraging me to do it!
- I got that job/internship! Thanks for writing a recommendation!
- I'm graduating this semester and thanks for all your help. I've really appreciated it.



Last Bit of Advice

Go to Graduation!

- Congratulate your advisees and students
- Ask them to keep in touch
- Meet their parents



email and URL

- Sandra Paur:
 - sopaur@math.ncsu.edu
 - www.math.ncsu.edu/honors
 - www4.ncsu.edu/~sopaur/