So You’re an Advisor - Now What?

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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
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.
Go to Graduation!

• Congratulate your advisees and students
• Ask them to keep in touch
• Meet their parents
email and URL

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