1. This assignment should be completed by by **Wednesday, September 8, 2004**. You have one of two choices depending upon whether or not I have had you as a student in one of my classes previous to this Semester.

   (a) If I have not had you in class before, then

   I would like for you to write your “Math Autobiographies”. The length should not be more than two pages. Your “Math Autobiography” should include a description of at least one successful episode from your mathematical careers and one not-so-successful episode as well as a brief statement about why you are taking this course. This will help me get to know a little more about each of you and your mathematical experiences. This assignment should be typed. My “Math Autobiography” is included so you will get to know me a little better (sort of).

   (b) If I have had you before, then

   I would like for you to reflect on the previous course you took with me. This need not be lengthy, I am sure this assignment should be completed in a paragraph or two. I would like you to write about a success and a not successful experience you had with that course. I would like you to consider what your goal(s) is for this course and how you plan to attain that goal. Consider ways in which I can help you attain your goal. Please update me on anything new or exciting in your life that you think I might be interested in or that may help me help you with this course.

You may email me your “Math Autobiography”, either as an attachment or in the body of your email. If you email me your Math Autobiography the subject line should be, **without any variation**, “Math 201 Autobiography”. You do not need to include the quotes on the subject line.

**Mathematics Autobiography**

Dr. Mark A. Zuiker

While growing up I never really gave much thought to whether or not I “really” liked mathematics, but I knew I was good at it; thus, I enjoyed myself. I usually received A’s in my mathematics and science classes throughout grade school and high school. However, as I think back, I also realized that I worked very hard at learning mathematics. It was never “easy”, but if I worked hard at it, I eventually “got it” and enjoyed the process of “getting it” a “whole lot.”

I first realized that I could excel mathematically when my seventh grade mathematics teacher set several of us aside and let us work through the eighth grade mathematics text while he worked with the rest of the class. The next year we continued on with a high school Algebra I text. This was “fun”!

I took Algebra I and II in 9th grade, Geometry in 10th grade, College Algebra and Trigonometry in 11th grade, and Calculus I and II my senior year in high school. It was not until my junior year in high school that I met my match, or more accurately my whole College Algebra and Trigonometry class met their nemesis, J. D. Santoni. When midterm progress reports came out he sent all but one us failing notices (yes, even I got one). We were all shocked to say the least. No one had ever done that to my classmates and I. Sure, we had all failed the first exam, that had happened before and the results were always curved, so no problem right? Wrong! Mr. Santoni patiently explained that was not going to be the case. He had expectations of what it is we were supposed to be able to do when we passed from his class and he expected us to meet those expectations or suffer the consequences. We knew then we were in for the “ride of our lives.” I worked harder with him for the next two years (all the way through Calculus) and learned more than I ever had previously learned in any of my mathematics classes. Some of these lessons stay with me today and hopefully carry over into my classrooms today. He taught me to never accept less from students than I would expect from myself. Even though students have differing levels of ability
and interests, each should live up to their own potential and should work hard to achieve that potential. Furthermore, he taught me that the only way I was ever going to really learn something was to work hard for it. I really felt good about what I had accomplished when I finished studying mathematics with Mr. Santoni after those two years.

My undergraduate work consisted of majoring in both Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. I received a bachelors degree in each in 1980 from the University of Tulsa. I almost switched to majoring in Economics while being an undergraduate because I found the subject fascinating (and there is a lot of mathematical modeling that is done there). The biggest thing I remember about my undergraduate engineering days were that I found that I loved working problems. I usually had another book for the course and would work problems from that as well as the ones that were assigned in the texts. This help me gain confidence in my understanding of the material. I also learned that it was not the engineering I enjoyed, but it was problem solving. It mattered little whether it was a problem in electrical engineering or a programming problem, I just like to work on it. For example, we had to design a phone amplifier for an electronics class, the circuit only worked marginally (it did receive the highest stability rating though). However, what mattered to me was solving the system of equations that resulted from my design of the amplifier circuit. Although it was several years before I remembered this experience, the realization that I enjoyed mathematics more than engineering eventually led to my pursuing a doctorate in mathematics.

After my undergraduate work was completed I went to work for an Oil and Gas company in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I worked part time on a Master's Degree in Petroleum Engineering Management. I was about 6 semester hours away from completing the degree requirements when oil went to about $12 a barrel and the company (and I) could no longer afford the tuition. About this time (1988) I decided that I preferred the challenges offered by the academic environment as opposed to the corporate environment and decided to pursue a doctorate in mathematics at Oklahoma State University. Two things happened to me there. First, I found that I was more interested in teaching and how my students learned mathematics than I was in “doing” theoretical mathematics. Second, I found that I was interested in how we could use computers and graphing calculators to teach mathematics. So, I moved to another OSU, The Ohio State University, to compete my doctorate in mathematics education. However, while at Oklahoma State I did get complete a substantial amount of mathematics towards my doctorate, as well as developing an interest in Algebraic Number Theory while completing my MS in mathematics. I completed my doctorate during the Fall of 1997 at The Ohio State University, much to the relief of all who knew me. They all concluded that I had been in school long enough!

I have a daughter named Eryn Nicole. She is now just over 6 and a half years old. Since she was born, I have been learning to cope with a whole new state of normal. She is growing in leaps and bounds offering daily challenges that keep life interesting. She and I like to play computer games together on Saturday mornings (and other times when the mood strikes us). She is artistic and loves dramatic play. She is starting first grade this year.

The is my third year back at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I was here before serving on the Faculty at the University of Wisconsin – Stout for three years. I am glad to be back at MSU because this has always been a great place to teach. I have enjoyed working with the students here in the past and am looking forward to doing so again in the future. While moving around I discovered that I owned eight calculators, two slide rules, and two computers. When asking my wife if she thought this was a “little nerdy,” she asked if that was a rhetorical question or did I really need an answer!