1. Send me an email (my address is mark.zuiker@mnsu.edu) by Friday, August 29, 2003). The subject line should be, without any variation, “MATH 354 Enrollment” or “STAT 354 Enrollment” (without the quotes). The text need only indicate you are enrolled. This is so I can create a mailing list with an email account that you actually use (Suggestion: if you want to forward your email to another account other than your University account, you can do so at https://www.mnsu.edu/its/userid/).

2. I would like for you to write your “Math/Stat Autobiographies” by Tuesday, September 2, 2003. The length should not be more than two pages. Your “Math/Stat Autobiography” should include a description of at least one successful episode from your mathematical/statistical 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).

You may email me your “Math/Stat 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 354 Autobiography” or “Stat 354 Autobiography” (without the quotes).

Mathematics/Statistics 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 complete my doctorate in mathematics education (with a minor in statistics). 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 and Statistics 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!

During the Winter of 1998, we experienced the birth of our first child, Eryn Nicole. She is now almost
5.5 years old and will be starting kindergarten this Fall. 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.

The is my second 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!