



February 22, 2013

Frank Serio, Head  
Department of Mathematics  
Northwestern State University of Louisiana  
Natchitoches, LA 71497

Dear Frank,

I understand that you are currently reviewing your program, after a two-year probationary period, to determine how best to chart a course, both for the Department of Mathematics and, more generally, the mathematics program at Northwestern.

I understand that the number of majors in your program has grown. In addition, you and your colleagues have implemented a concentration in healthcare informatics, and have a concentration under development to prepare students to pursue a career in actuarial science.

These concentrations illustrate the central role that mathematics plays across disciplinary boundaries. As our society and economy become more dependent on technology, the need for more people to have more, and deeper, mathematical expertise does not necessarily translate easily into large numbers of majors. But it does mean that mathematics departments and faculty play a more significant role in preparing undergraduates in many majors. I find this to be a compelling reason for strengthening, not limiting, support of mathematical sciences departments.

The substantial bequest to support students studying mathematics at Northwestern recognizes the important role of mathematics; I commend you and your colleagues for doing the kind of work that attracts such support.

Another aspect of the Northwestern program that I've found notable is the *requirement* that all majors work with an advisor to prepare and present independent work at the Section meeting. While we've discussed how meaningful such an experience is, Northwestern faculty made a commitment to including *all* majors, not just those so inclined, to support the outside-the-classroom effort required for students to make what is almost always their first professional presentation. I know that this takes an enormous amount of time, and I commend you and your colleagues for your willingness to go the extra mile for your students.

Since 1993, when we first re-connected at the Louisiana-Mississippi Section Meeting of the MAA, we've talked a lot about the importance of mentoring students in mathematics outside the classroom. We've both invested a lot of time to prepare students to participate at the annual Section meetings, and Northwestern faculty involvement at the Section level has, in my opinion, played a significant role in

keeping our Section vibrant.

I look forward to seeing you at the upcoming Section meeting. I expect it to be, as usual one of the high points of my year!

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Pearson", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael Pearson  
Executive Director