$box{f Robert\ JS\ McDonald}{f Yale\ University}$ | Service and Advising Experience

1. Teaching Related Service

I have a passion for sharing my teaching and supporting other instructors. That is why I joined the graduate student peer mentor program in my department at UConn in the fall of 2014. The program pairs incoming first year graduate students with an experienced TA in the department to provide teaching support and resources. Unfortunately, when I arrived at UConn, the peer mentor program was nearly nonexistent, with no interested graduate student to coordinate it. As a result many in my cohort had a challenging adjustment to graduate life. Determined to fix this, in the summer of 2015, I took over the program as TA Network Coordinator, and held the position for the rest of my graduate career. Moreover, I was able to secure department funding to host game and pizza nights to share our teaching and help develop a support network for each student.

At Yale, I have enjoyed continuing this work by mentoring new teaching faculty, postdocs, and graduate students. I attend classes a few times throughout the semester and provide teaching feedback. I have also been given the responsibility of hiring and training undergraduate learning assistants and tutors, and was asked to coordinate a course this semester with a team of four undergraduate learning assistants.

2. Advising Experience

I am devoted to offering undergraduate support, especially to students who may be unsure about the direction of their mathematical career. At Yale, I have had the pleasure of being a placement advisor for calculus advising in the fall semesters of 2019 and 2020. After being assigned a course by the placement exam, incoming freshmen come to calculus advising to learn more about their placement, and discuss whether moving up or down a level would be appropriate. As a placement advisor, I spoke with students about their experience and trajectory, explained their options, and made the final decision in their placement. A common concern of students was falling behind in the calculus sequence due to low placement. I was able to share my own experiences as a freshman math major starting in differential calculus to comfort these students.

At the University of Connecticut, I participated in the Directed Reading Program, where I was able to connect with an undergraduate math major and read through a graduate-level text in number theory. The student and I met once a week to discuss readings and problems, and work through these together on the board. Typically, the program ends with a presentation, but when the student decided to apply for graduate school, our focus shifted to GREs and applications. This became another opportunity to offer support by sharing my own mathematical journey.

As a graduate student, I also participated twice as a graduate student mentor in the Connecticut School of Number Theory summer school at UConn. This summer school is aimed at undergraduates with an interest in doing research, some who may even be thinking of a graduate career. Students spend a week in mini-courses and collaborate on challenging problem sets. I had the responsibility of mentoring students throughout the program and overseeing problem sessions.

Though I have not had any formal involvement in academic advising, I believe my related experience in providing support to undergraduates will translate well to advising a diverse student body. Because I love speaking with and working with a undergraduates, it is a responsibility that I truly look forward to becoming involved in at whatever institution I find myself next.