Reaction Piece
Professor Chiemi Ma Responds to “To Begin Go to START”

Starts with ‘T’
Which Rhymes with ‘P’
Which Stands for Pool

_Are certain words creeping into his conversation?_
_Words like... “swell”?_
_And... “so’s your old man”?_
_Well if so, my friends, ya got trouble . . ._
—Music Man

Maryann Garbowsky shared her concerns regarding the influence of modern technology in the classroom. As with any “age,” we must contend with the attendant development of a variety of behaviors. What we see as changing behavior is adaptive behavior that enables us to succeed within certain parameters. Rather than basing our evaluation of the current environment on previous paradigms, perhaps we should reconfigure those paradigms. The new challenges can be rewarding; despite the temporary annoyances, the prospect of broader horizons in teaching and collegiality are exciting.

_The cell phone:_ The cell phone is the _cause célèbre_ amongst critics of social behavior. This device headed Garbowsky’s list as a particular annoyance. It is easy to target objects we believe are controllable in order to modify irritating behavior, yet, it is the underlying “it’s all about me” attitude of the behavior itself that is the true problem. On the other hand, if a student is surreptitiously glancing at her cell phone, perhaps there is a sick child at home and the student is receiving an update on the child’s condition. A momentary surreptitious glance at the cell phone shows better form than a pointedly bored face turned toward the open window. A seemingly attentive expression from the front row is no guarantee that the student is actually engaged in the class lecture.

_Student excuses:_ Student excuses will always be with us. Printers do break down, hard drives do crash, and it is far easier to insert a student’s pen drive into the computer to download the digital assignment for printing later than to retrieve the paper version from the family dog.

_Student reading:_ Yes, newspaper readership amongst young people has dropped. Garbowsky indirectly referred to “Young People and News,” a report from the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy when citing Juston Jones’ _The New York Times_ article of 16 July 2007 summarizing it. The report clearly indicates that the readership issue is far more complex and that the “American news system today is highly fragmented” (Patterson 19). The news system is not the only fragmented institution. Many American families are fragmented or live increasingly fragmented lives as individual commitments compete with family dinner and discussions, effectively eliminating sharing news sources as a family unit. Acquiring a news habit begins in the home. Another aspect of the readership issue is “hard news” vs. “soft news,” “hard news” being those with political, government, and public affairs content and “soft news” reporting celebrity goings-on and specific disasters. Coverage of “soft news,” has risen dramatically. The latest Hollywood scandal has a deeper cognitive impact than bills working their way through Congress. “Hard news” is frequently perceived as dull news, made duller by readers’ lack of academic and political knowledge. Educators, then, must exert more effort in developing political awareness and information processing skills in the classroom.

_Student spelling:_ Often, the fallibility of a spell check application can be summarized with the phrase, “they’re our udder soft wear virgins,” followed by the advice not to rely on the spell check application as the final authority. Other than neurological conditions such as dyslexia, errors in spelling are the result of carelessness, laziness, or lack of spelling drills during formative years. Informality, however, is an issue of perspective and acculturation. In the English-speaking world and in the United States in particular (because of the society’s lack of _formal_ class structure), informality is a persistent issue because modern Standard English does not distinguish between the formal and informal – for instance, _vous vs. tu_ - rather, social distinctions are implied by word usage. In contrast, the Japanese language is fraught with social implications. There are many forms of “you” depending on one’s social position, sex, and age. The very act of speaking the language puts one in the mindset of constantly calculating and reevaluating one’s position to another’s. The ease with which many, if not most, foreign or bilingual students can adapt to formal writing compared to American-born-and-raised monolingual students is worth noting. This is not to say that spelling is not an issue; spelling is even more confusing for foreign students, who lack the phonetic or etymological knowledge on which standardized spelling is based. But once spelling has been corrected, the difference in tone in formal writing amongst students often persists.

_Student papers:_ The demise of the rough draft occurs when an instructor neglects to require a formal submission of such assignments. Keeping in mind the ease with which students are able to access and copy intellectual property, an instructor is remiss in his or her duties if rough drafts are not required. Those are useful tools in monitoring student research progress and monitoring instances of plagiarism, as well as assisting the students in formal writing. The onus is on instructors to be well read and cognizant of a variety of recently published materials. As far as citation styles are concerned, those too, are within the control of the instructor. Requiring in-class citation demonstrations or assignments from students allows supervision of the active learning of citation formatting. If one believes that students turn to website tools to complete citation
homework assignments, then ask them to demonstrate their knowledge on a test.

Office visits: Communicating by e-mail or online “office hours” is an excellent and efficient method of communicating with students and in some cases, mentoring them. E-mails also offer the convenience of documenting the exchange of information and preserving “conversations” so students are able to refer to them at a later date. With the frenetic schedule with which we all must contend, asynchronous conferences and consultations have often yielded positive results.

Attention span: Multi-tasking is not necessarily a bad thing. Achieving success in this ever-shifting technological environment requires the ability to divide one’s attention and switch quickly from one thing to another. Extolling the virtues of a long attention span as a positive attribute while decrying shorter, shifting attention spans as a negative one, may be setting up a false dichotomy. Both forms of behavior are maladaptive if applied indiscriminately. For instance, playing a four-part Bach fugue on the keyboard requires both fragmented and long attention spans. One must be aware of the motifs constantly shifting voices. Some notes are detached, others are slurried, yet another is suspended then resolved on a weak beat. During the entire enterprise one must maintain the hierarchy of motifs by constantly switching one’s attention, yet support the architecture of the work through long-term concentration of the whole. Plus ça change . . . perhaps things have not changed so much since 1707.

The community college environment is not a four-year university where the student body, despite coming from diverse backgrounds, is roughly of the same age range and experience levels. Community college students are often working adults and their life experiences vary widely. They choose to be in class and we must keep this in mind. People will always engage in behavior that crosses the line that divides acceptable and unacceptable behavior, but that line is never constant. In the future, someone will yearn for the days when all one had to worry about was the cell phone in the classroom.

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Organization of American Historians Seeks Proposals for Annual Meeting

The Organization of American Historians (OAH) would like to extend an invitation to you and your patrons to submit a session or single paper proposal for the 2009 OAH Annual Meeting, to be held in Seattle, Washington, March 26 to 29, 2009.

With the theme of "History Without Boundaries," the 2009 Organization of American Historians program committee seeks an eclectic program that will highlight the creative use of history in research, education, the media, and public presentations. OAH seeks proposals reflecting the broad chronological and subject diversity of American history, including race, gender, disabilities, social, cultural, political, diplomatic, and military studies, by those teaching at universities, community colleges, and secondary schools, public historians, and independent scholars.

The program committee invites the submission of panels and presentations that deal with these and other issues and themes in American history. We welcome teaching sessions, particularly those involving the audience as active participants or those that reflect collaborative partnerships among teachers, historians, and other history educators at all levels. We encourage presenters to post their papers on the OAH website before the meeting, in order to deepen the discussion in Seattle. We prefer to receive proposals for complete sessions, but will consider individual paper proposals as well. The call for papers is available on the OAH website at http://www.oah.org/2009.

The Association for Core Texts and Courses 14th Annual Conference

This year’s conference, which takes place April 3-6 in Plymouth Harbor, Massachusetts, seeks to explore the possible meanings for this question and the answers which the past, present, and future may provide through the reading of core texts. Plymouth, Massachusetts is an appropriate setting to explore such a perennial question.

Plenary Speakers Thursday through Saturday: Wm. Theodore de Bary, Columbia University, author, Confucian Tradition & Global Education; Joseph Bottum, editor, First Things; Anne Leavitt Dean of Social Sciences, Malaspina-University College; Phillip R. Sloan, President ACTC, University of Notre Dame, editor, Controlling Our Destinies: Historical, Philosophical, Ethical, and Theological Perspectives on the Human Genome Project. Theophas Smith, Emory University, author, Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America.

For more information, visit the ACTC website: http://www.coretexts.org/14th_annual_conference.htm or contact Rosa Grundig, ACTC Liberal Arts Institute at Saint Mary’s College of California, 1928 Saint Mary’s Road, Moraga, CA 94556, 925 631 8597 (rgrundig@stmarys-ca.edu).