

College Readiness

The Research Paper &
Non-Fiction Books

Preparation

- John Robert Wooden, revered and very successful basketball coach at UCLA, used to tell his players: “If you fail to prepare, you are preparing to fail.”

Premise

- The majority of U.S. public high school students now graduate without ever having read a single (1) complete nonfiction book, or written one (1) serious (e.g. 4,000+ words, with endnotes and bibliography) research paper.

Consequence

- Our public high school graduates now enter college well behind their private school peers in their ability to manage college term papers and to read the assigned nonfiction books, in some cases delaying or preventing their taking a degree.

College Readiness

- Last summer the Strong American Schools' *Diploma to Nowhere* report said that more than 1,000,000 of our High School graduates **every year** are in remedial courses in college. Many are in math, but many are in reading and writing courses, too.

ACT 2009

- The most recent American College Testing report found that 23% of our HS graduates are ready for college work. (i.e. 77% are NOT ready)

College Completion

- “Only about a third of U.S. high school students graduate ready for college [ACT]...Forty percent of *all* students who enter college must take remedial courses...and perhaps one of every two students who start college **never complete any kind of postsecondary degree.**” [Tony Wagner]

Praised, but Unready

- In her report for the Fordham Foundation on state social studies standards in the United States, researcher Sandra Stotsky (1999), cited a [Boston] newspaper article about a Hispanic high school student named Carol who was unprepared for college work. Described as a top student, **the girl was stunned by the level of writing that her Boston college demanded of her.** Although the student said that she had received **encouragement and support** from her high school teachers, she wished that her teachers had given her **more challenging work.** According to the reporter, the student discovered that **“moral support is different from academic rigor.”** Stotsky noted that teachers often substitute self-esteem-building assignments for rigorous work.

College Assignments

- Colleges still assign lists of nonfiction books for students to read and research papers for students to write.
- Now, too many are not ready to do that.

Boston HS Graduates

- In January 2008, *The Boston Globe* reported on a new study of the Boston public high school class of 2000. The new data provide, for the first time, a college-by-college breakdown of graduation rates of the city's high school alumni, and with it a new set of **concerns about whether Boston schools are doing enough to prepare their students for the rigors of college.** The analysis follows the release of a groundbreaking report two months earlier by the Council and the city's school department that showed an overall disappointing graduation rate for the class of 2000. While two-thirds of the nearly 3,000 class members went to college, a rate notably higher than national averages, only **35.5 percent** of those who went **had received degrees [including Certificates, Associate's or Bachelor's] seven years later.** [64.5% got no degree in seven years]
- The local public colleges that enroll the most Boston high school graduates have had a dismal record seeing them through to a degree, with many posting **graduation rates of less than 25 percent**, according to a [Private Industry Council] study that reviewed the collegiate careers of the city's class of 2000.

Professors Speak

- *Education Week*, April 26, 2006

Students' Preparation for College-Level Academic Demands

Contrasting Views of HS Teachers and College Professors

Source: *The Chronicle of Higher Education*

	Not Well-Prepared	Somewhat Prepared	Very Well-Prepared	Don't Know
Oral Skills	HS 14%/ College 19%	HS 55%/ College 65%	HS 26%/College 15%	HS 5%/College 3%
Writing	HS10%/College 44%	HS 49%/College 47%	HS 36%/College 6%	HS 4%/College 3%
Reading Difficult Matter	HS 15%/College 41%	HS 56%/College 48%	HS 26%/College 10%	HS 3%/College 2%
Study Habits	HS30%/College 41%	HS 53%/College 50%	HS 15%/College 7%	HS 2%/College 2%
Motivation to Work Hard	HS 27%/ College 29%	HS 54%/College 50%	HS 17%/College 20%	HS 2%/ College 1%
Seek Resources	HS 19%/College 26%	HS 54%/College 55%	HS 23%/College 12%	HS 4%/College 6%
Research Skills	HS 18%/College 49%	HS 53%/College 42%	HS 26%/College 4%	HS 3%/College 6%

College Professors' views of HS graduates' writing skills: 91% not very well-prepared.

College Professors' views of HS graduates' reading skills: 89% not very well-prepared.

College Professors' views of HS graduates' research skills: 91% not very well-prepared.

College Essays

- College admissions officers now routinely ask applicants for 500-word “essays” about their personal lives, goals, background, etc. They do not, as a rule, ask for evidence of serious academic writing from applicants.

Completion

- The National Association of College Admissions Counselors is preoccupied with College Admissions—no surprise.
- There is a lot of attention for HS dropouts, but much less for college “flame-outs.”

Five Paragraphs

- “I had never written more than five paragraphs for any essay or paper in my entire academic career prior to entering university. Not one. Now, I tell you, I wrote one fine five-paragraph essay, but no one ever told me that would become a completely worthless skill after Advanced Placement exams were done and your high school GPA was calculated...”
- “It took me two years to gain a working knowledge of paper-writing, to get to a point where I was constructing arguments and using evidence to support them. I read pamphlets and books on the mechanics of writing college papers, but the reality is simple: you only learn how to write papers by **WRITING** them...”
- “This lack of forethought on the part of high school educators and administrators is creating a large divide among college graduates – and it’s one that helps neither the students nor their alumni institutions. Modern public high schools have an obligation not to simply pump out graduates at the end of the year, but **also to prepare their students for the intellectual rigors of college.**”
- {Laura Arandes, Harvard Class of 2005, graduate of a California public high school.}

Research Papers

- What is lost, then, if 81% of high school teachers never assign a 5,000-word history research paper? It may very well mean that a majority of our high school students never read a complete nonfiction book on any subject before they graduate. They may also miss the experience of knowing a fair amount about some important topic—more, for instance, than anyone else in their class. This way they miss fundamental steps in their preparation for demanding college work.

Writing at Work

- The Business Roundtable reported in 2004 that its member companies were spending more than \$3,000,000,000 (\$3.1 billion) on **remedial writing courses** for their employees, including both **hourly** and **salaried workers**, and both **current** and **new employees** in about equal numbers.

Contentless Writing

- Both the SAT and the NAEP writing tests call for student opinions.
- No writing test calls for any prior student **knowledge** of history, literature, or anything else.

Process v. Content

- When teaching our students to write, not only are standards set very low in most high schools, limiting students to the five-paragraph essay, responses to a document-based question, or the personal (or college) essay about matters which are often no one else's business, but we often so load up students with formulae and guidelines that **the importance of writing when the author has something to say gets lost in the maze of processes.**
- Writing is difficult enough to do, and academic writing is especially difficult if, on the one hand, the student hasn't read anything, and on the other hand, if teachers feel the need to have students "produce" writing, however short or superficial that writing may be. So writing consultants and writing teachers feel they must come up with **guidelines, parameters, checklists, and the like, as props to substitute for students' absent motivation to describe or express in writing something they have learned.**

My Efforts

- What have I done about this situation since 1987?
- *The Concord Review*, National Writing Board, Ralph Waldo Emerson Prizes, TCR Institute...

Varsity Academics[®]

and: “Teach by Example”

- We celebrate HS varsity athletics all the time. There are even nationally televised high school football and basketball games.
- My goal is to match that attention with some for Varsity Academics[®] as well.

Examples

- David Brooks wrote, in a review of Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers* in the *New York Times*: “As the classical philosophers understood, **examples of individual greatness inspire achievement more reliably than any other form of education.**”

The Concord Review

- *The Concord Review* has been, since 1987, the only journal in the world for the academic research papers of secondary students.

So Far

- As of the Fall 2009 issue, *The Concord Review* has published 868 serious research papers by high school students from 44 states and 35 other countries.

Spring 19/3 Average: 7,927 Words

●	Khmer Rouge	Bangkok, Thailand	5,032
●	Slovak Nationalism	Danville, California	12,552
●	Philip of Macedon	Tempe, Arizona	13,264
●	Alaska Pipeline	Bedford, Massachusetts	4,020
●	Augustus Caesar	Edmonton, Alberta	6,301
●	Irish Nationalism	Cincinnati, Ohio	11,961
●	Spanish-American War	Exeter, New Hampshire	10,681
●	Executive Order 9981	Manhattan, New York	3,652
●	Marshall Court	Glastonbury, Connecticut	8,335
●	Catholicism in England	Sevenoaks, Kent, UK	4,917
●	Polish Democracy	Bronx, New York	6,483

Chiara Nappi

- As a physicist, I am accustomed to the many initiatives, such as math competitions and physics olympiads, instituted to recognize and promote interest and talent in the sciences among high school students. However, I have always felt that there was no equivalent mechanism to encourage and nurture students in the humanities, and to recognize their accomplishments. *The Concord Review* strikes me as a simple yet brilliant idea to help fill that gap, and as a very effective way to promote high standards and excellence in the humanities.

Sincerely, Chiara R. Nappi, Ph.D.

Theoretical Physicist

Princeton Institute for Advanced Study

Elitism

- “Elitism” is making the best form of education available to only a few. The democratic ideal of education is to make the best form of education available to all. The democratic ideal is not achieved, and elitism is not defeated, by making the best form of education available to almost nobody.
- Kieran Egan, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, British Columbia

TCR Author (1)

“Teach by Example”

When a former history teacher first lent me a copy of *The Concord Review*, I was inspired by the careful scholarship crafted by other young people. Although I have always loved history passionately, I was used to writing history papers that were essentially glorified book reports...As I began to research the Ladies' Land League, I looked to *The Concord Review* for guidance on how to approach my task...In short, I would like to thank you not only for publishing my essay, but for motivating me to develop a deeper understanding of history. I hope that *The Concord Review* will continue to fascinate, challenge and inspire young historians for years to come.

Emma Curran Donnelly Hulse, Columbia University Class of 2009
North Central High School (Indianapolis, IN) Class of 2005

TCR Author (2)

“Teach by Example”

“The opportunity that *The Concord Review* presented drove me to rewrite and revise my paper to emulate its high standards. Your journal truly provides an extraordinary opportunity and positive motivation for high school students to undertake extensive research and academic writing, experiences that ease the transition from high school to college.”

Pamela Ban, Harvard Class of 2012

Thomas Worthington High School (OH) Class of 2008

TCR Author (3)

“Teach by Example”

At CRLHS, a much-beloved history teacher suggested to me that I consider writing for *The Concord Review*, a publication that I had previously heard of, but knew little about. He proposed, and I agreed, that it would be **an opportunity for me to pursue more independent work, something that I longed for**, and hone my writing and research skills in a project of considerably broader scope than anything I had undertaken up to that point.

Jessica Leight, Yale Class of 2006 (*summa cum laude*)

Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School (MA) Class of 2003/2002

Rhodes Scholar 2006

Term Paper Study

- In 2002, TCR Institute commissioned a national study of the state of the term paper in U.S. public high schools.
- 95% of teachers said they thought term papers were very important.
- More than 60% said they didn't have time to assign & read real research papers.

Comments

“I’ve admired the soundness and clarity of Will Fitzhugh’s vision about education ever since I saw one of the early issues of *The Concord Review*...The *Review* also has a vital message for teachers. American education suffers from an impoverishment of standards at all levels. We see that when we look at what is expected of students in other industrialized nations... *The Concord Review* sets a high but realistic standard; and it could be invaluable for teachers trying to calibrate their own standards of excellence...”

Albert Shanker, late President, American Federation of Teachers

“It was so good to talk with you about your national history journal to publish the best essays of high school students. I think it is a marvelous project on so many levels, **with an impact well beyond the students whose essays are chosen...**”

Doris Kearns Goodwin, Historian

“I very much like and support what you’re doing with *The Concord Review*. It’s original, important, and *greatly needed, now more than ever*, with the problem of historic illiteracy growing steadily worse among the high school generation nearly everywhere in the country.”

David McCullough, Historian

“*The Concord Review* offers young people a **unique incentive to think and write carefully and well...***The Concord Review* inspires and honors historical literacy. **It should be in every high school in the land.**”

the late Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Historian

Colin Rhys Hill

- “Also, FYI, most of the ‘get into college’ publications I read referred to *The Concord Review* as the ‘**Intel Science Competition**’ of the humanities and the only serious way to get academic work noticed.”

“You should know that the Oxford interview tutors for politics spent a lot of time talking to me about my *TCR* essay in the interview.” [This author of a 15,000-word paper I published last year is now a student at Christ Church College, Oxford.]

HS Teachers

I am happy to send along this letter describing both “logistical” and pedagogical dimensions of how I have used *The Concord Review* in class **since employing the first class sets in the 1988-1989 academic year**. You know from the fact that we have expanded our class subscription “coverage” from all U.S. History classes to all U.S. History and World History since 1500 classes that we have been very satisfied with the *Review*. In fact, I am glad to say that, due to an expanding school enrollment, our class set for this year will number about **80** subscriptions.

Will Fitzhugh and *The Concord Review* have made invaluable contributions to the teaching and learning of high school history for more than twenty years. **That more teachers have not utilized this remarkable resource to instruct, inspire, and motivate their students is both lamentable and indefensible.**

Broeck Oder, Chair, History Department
Santa Catalina School, Monterey, California

Page Per Year Plan©

- By assigning an additional page each year in school for term papers about topics other than the author's own life, every HS senior will be prepared to write a creditable 12-page research paper, with at least 12 sources, before HS graduation.

WWW.TCR.ORG

- Our website has had foreign visitors from: Croatia, Vietnam, India, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, Netherlands, United Kingdom (England), United Kingdom (Scotland), Ireland, Egypt, Iran, Singapore, Thailand, Brazil, South Korea, France, Kenya, Nepal, Germany, Norway, Mauritius, China (Beijing), Ghana, Canada, Taiwan, Australia, Puerto Rico, Russian Federation, Moldova, Republic of, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Italy, Japan, Turkey, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Israel, Sweden, Ukraine, Romania, Liechtenstein, Jordan, Indonesia, Hungary, Philippines, Malta, Switzerland, Argentina, Madagascar, Chile, Poland, Spain, South Africa, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Portugal, Denmark, Iraq, Bangladesh, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Serbia & Montenegro, Tunisia, Trinidad, Bulgaria, Belgium, Slovenia, Dominican Republic, Czech Republic, Cambodia, New Zealand, Uruguay, Kuwait, Latvia, Morocco, Azerbaijan, Peru, and Qatar.

● “Wheelbarrow”

There is an old story about a worker at one of the South African diamond mines, who would leave work once a week or so pushing a wheelbarrow full of sand. The guard would stop him and search the sand thoroughly, looking for any smuggled diamonds. When he found none, he would wave the worker through. This happened month after month, and finally the guard said, “Look, I know you are smuggling something, and I know it isn’t diamonds. If you tell me what it is, I won’t say anything, but I really want to know.” The worker smiled, and said, “wheelbarrows.”

I think of this story when teachers find excuses for **not letting their students see the exemplary history essays written by their high school peers for *The Concord Review***. Often they feel they cannot give their students copies unless they can “teach” the contents. Or they already teach the topic of one of the essays they see in the issue. Or they don’t know anything about one of the topics. Or they know more about the topic than the HS author does. Or they don’t have time to teach one of the topics they see, or they don’t think students have time to read one or more of the essays, or they worry about plagiarism, or something else. **There are many reasons to keep this unique journal away from secondary students.**

They are, to my mind, “searching the sand.” The most important reason to show their high school students the journal is to **let them see the wheelbarrow itself, that is, to show them that there exists in the world a professional journal that takes the history research papers of high school students seriously enough to have published them on a quarterly basis for the last 22 years. Whether the students read all the essays, or one of them, or none of them, they will see that for some of their peers academic work is treated with respect. And that is a message worth letting through the guard post, whatever anyone may think about, or want to do something with, the diamonds inside.**

The Middle 'R'

- Francis Bacon wrote: {1625} “Reading maketh a Full man, Conference a Ready man, and **Writing** an Exact man.”

Teacher Time

- There is now more time set aside for tackling drills in football and layup drills in basketball than is available to teachers to help with (and later assess) research papers with their students.

English Class

- In most HS English classes, the assigned reading is fiction.
- The writing is personal, creative, or the five-paragraph essay.

The Walden Review

- As a former English major in college, I would love to have started a quarterly journal for the serious literature papers of high school students, but there was/is no funding for that.

Juggling Values

- In HS sports, we pay close attention to the **best**, and support and improve them, while gym classes must fend for themselves.
- In HS academics we pay close attention to the **least able**, while those who achieve the most academically are left on their own.

Teen Visitor to China

- “Chinese students, especially those in large cities or prosperous suburbs and counties and even some in impoverished rural areas, **have a more rigorous curriculum than any American student, whether at Charlestown High, Boston Latin, or Exeter. These students work under pressure greater than the vast majority of US students could imagine.**”
- “**Novels are not taught in class, and teachers encourage outside reading of histories rather than fiction. The only fiction texts read in class are excerpts from the four classics (Imperial texts that are not considered novels) and Imperial poetry.**” [*The Boston Globe*, June 8, 2009]

Edward Gibbon

- “We may safely pronounce that, without some species of **writing**, no people has ever preserved the faithful annals of their history, ever made any considerable progress in the abstract sciences, or ever possessed, in any tolerable degree of perfection, the useful and agreeable arts of life....”
- *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* [1776] London: Everyman's Library, 1993 Volume I, pp. 242-243

Example

- “Example is always more efficacious than precept.” Imlac in *Rasselas*, by Samuel Johnson [1759]



END



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