What inspired you to start *The Concord Review*?

Diane Ravitch, an American historian of education, wrote a column in *The New York Times* in 1985 about the ignorance of history among 17-year-olds in the United States, based on a study of 7,000 students. As a history teacher myself at the time, I was interested to see that what concerned me was a national problem, and I began to think about these issues. It occurred to me that if I had one or two very good students writing history papers for me and perhaps my colleagues had one or two, then in 20,000 United States high schools (and more overseas) there must be a large number of high school students doing exemplary history research papers. So in 1987, I established *The Concord Review* to provide a journal for such good work in history. I sent a four-page brochure calling for papers to every high school in the United States, 3,500 high schools in Canada, and 1,500 schools overseas. The papers started coming in, and in the fall of 1988, I was able to publish the first issue of *The Concord Review*. Since then, we have published 89 issues.

Tell us about some of the most outstanding essays you have received. What made them special?

In 1995, I was able to begin awarding the Ralph Waldo Emerson Prizes for the best few papers from the 44 published in each volume year of *The Concord Review*. Many of these papers are now on our website at www.tcr.org, and students and teachers who are interested may read them there. I have several favorites. Contact me at fitzhugh@tcr.org and I would be glad to send examples to anyone who is interested.

What makes for a great history research essay?

In order to write a great history essay, it is first necessary to know a lot of history. Students who read as much as they can about a historical topic have a better chance of writing an exemplary history paper. Without knowing a good deal about a topic, a student's paper will probably not be very interesting or very good. Of course they must make an effort to write clearly and in an interesting manner. They must also re-write their papers over and again until they believe they are excellent.

Please tell us about some of your most interesting authors. Where did they go to college, what did they study, and what are they doing now?

About a third of our authors have gone to Harvard, MIT, Princeton, Stanford and Yale, and many have gone to other fine universities, such as Cambridge and Oxford. I know of three who were selected as Rhodes Scholars. Many are doctors and lawyers,
How do you evaluate and select essays for publication in The Concord Review?

The purpose of The Concord Review is two-fold. We want to recognize exemplary work in history by secondary students (from 39 countries so far). We also want to distribute their work to inspire their peers to read more history and work harder on their own research papers, because being able to read nonfiction and write term papers are important skills for success in college and beyond, and also because students should know more history if they want to be educated. So I look for papers that are serious, historically accurate, well-researched, and worth reading.

What are your favorite books and why?

I was an English Literature major at Harvard College and I read English Literature at Cambridge. I still enjoy Dickens, Thackeray, Jane Austen, Shakespeare, Samuel Johnson, Alexander Pope, and so on, but I also have a number of favorite historians, such as Martin Gilbert, David McCullough, David Hackett Fischer, James McPherson, G.M. Trevelyan, John Prebble, Max Hastings, and others. I also read a fair number of books on education and contemporary intellectual culture.

Do you have any advice on how to write well?

As I suggested, there is no substitute for knowing a lot about the subject you are writing about. I think it helps to read your drafts aloud to a friend or family member as you go along. You will find things you want to improve or correct as you offer what you write to another person. So, read, reflect, write a detailed outline, write and re-write...that is about it. And read the good writing of other authors.

How can students best prepare themselves to do well in college?

There is a great deal of emphasis in the United States on math and science, but in my view, there is much too little attention here on the importance for secondary students to be able to read complete nonfiction books and to write serious (e.g. 6,000-word) research papers. I have heard from a few of my authors that they were mobbed when they got to college by their peers who never had to write a research paper when they were in high school and so have no idea how to do it. Students who write Extended Essays for the International Baccalaureate Diploma have an advantage, as do the many students who write history research papers on their own as independent studies and send them to The Concord Review.
EXTRACTS FROM PUBLISHED ESSAYS

A Failure to Modernize: The Origins of 20th Century Islamic Fundamentalism

“At the height of the Islamic Empire, the Muslim community was a world leader in both economic status and military strength. However, the Islamic world’s failure to modernize its cultural, political, and economic systems has resulted in widespread financial ruin...Modern fundamentalism has grown out of a belief that in order to correct the economic failures that plague the Islamic world, Muslims must disregard all Western influences and return both culturally and spiritually to a time when Islamic society was most dominant.”

Tyler Waywell is a Senior at Riverdale Country School in Riverdale, New York, where he wrote this paper for Ms. Hannah Turish’s History II course in the 2004/2005 academic year.

The Paradox of Power: An Analysis of the Rise of Parliamentary Power with the Consolidation of the Monarchy in the English Reformation

“The English government has a distinct claim among European nations. It has developed with a unique blend of decentralization and freedom and a strong centralized authority. England is distinguished for its ability to combine good government with a history of freedom and protection of personal rights...England’s exceptional constitutional history served her well in times of transition and revolution.”

Stephen A. Popper is a Senior at the Delbarton School in Morristown, New Jersey, where he wrote this paper for Mr. John Thompson’s AP European History course in the 2003/2004 academic year.

Chinese Democracy, 1954-1966

“This essay began as an investigation of the fate of democracy during the Cultural Revolution. In order to establish how Chinese democracy was changed during this upheaval, it first of all had to be determined how far Chinese democracy was in place before the Cultural Revolution.”

Andrew Paquin is at Harvard College. A native of New Zealand, he wrote this IB Extended Essay for Mr. Barry Drake at Li Po Chun United World College of Hong Kong, in the 1995/1996 academic year.
Each year, The Concord Review selects and publishes 44 outstanding history essays written by secondary students from around the world. The Concord Review is a quarterly journal based in Massachusetts, and the only publication in the world for serious history essays written by high school students. The six most exemplary essays each year are awarded the Ralph Waldo Emerson Prize.

Students who have had their essays published in The Concord Review are viewed favorably by admissions offices at very selective colleges and universities in the United States.

For information regarding submissions, sample essays, and back issues of The Concord Review, please visit http://tcr.org/tcr/submissions.htm or contact:

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If you would like an individual critique of your history paper, The National Writing Board provides an independent assessment service. Please visit http://tcr.org/nwb/index.htm.