

Things to do ahead of graduation

March 16, 2014 by Daniel J. Bauer

An article this past week in The China Post about an early graduation ceremony at Taipei Japanese School coincided with thoughts I've had for some time about what students might consider doing in the last weeks of their college careers.

The Taipei Japanese School story is about the ascent students make into their high school years. Comparing a move from elementary to high school education with the steps university seniors take when they graduate and enter society may seem like a comparison between pandas and zebras, and thus not "doable." Is a partial comparison possible?

The custom of Taipei Japanese School graduating its students in the month of March matches graduation traditions in Japan. What better time of the year over there than cherry blossom time to celebrate the end of one journey in life and the beginning of another?

Writer Katherine Wei developed the flower theme nicely in "After Commencement Day, let your dreams soar" by commenting on the casual, rough and tumble flavor of our month-of-June graduations in Taiwan (my words for the phenomenon). She hinted that our way, in contrast to the Japanese, is akin to "dandelion fluff."

Graduation in the Land of the Rising Sun occurs "when cherry blossoms dot the streets." And the ceremonies are "no nonsense." She says Taiwan graduations tend to feature "sweaty, fidgety students [who] whisper and giggle through speeches." Our friends in Japan however do not see graduation as "a day for romping and rolling your eyes at the speaker on stage."

I'll cease quotation of my colleague's work here, lest her words outperform mine, and I embarrass myself. (For the record, I do not know Ms. Wei.) I'll also not beat a dead horse about goofing around during graduation ceremonies. I did that not long ago in "'Selfies' and our common courtesy" (CP 12-15-13 p. 4).

Let us consider how Taiwan college (and high school) students may want to use their last 10 weeks before graduation arrives, and it is time . . . to go. For schools in Japan, the ceremony may have already happened. We're the lucky ones in Taiwan. We've still got time left.

A friend of mine who was a priest ("shen-fu") and professor recently passed away. Recalling this man's

gifts of intelligence, patience and humor, a classmate remarked in an e-mail: "It's too late now. I wish I had written him a letter long ago and apologized for having been such a pain in the butt in his courses."

It is never too late to say we are sorry for foolish or even serious discomfort we've caused someone. If you are graduating in May or June, ask yourself if you've got a classmate, friend, or teacher with whom you've had a misunderstanding or bad moment. Don't put off that apology for a past mistake. Once you graduate, in a sense, you're just gone. And who knows, he or she may be, too.

Graduation time is a time to say goodbye. It's also a time to say thank you. I lack the words to describe how it feels when students contact me years after graduation to say that a word I may have spoken, or some little thing I did, turned out to be a blessing for them. If you're graduating soon, why wait for some golden moment 10 or 20 years in the future to share a secret of affection or gratitude with a classmate or teacher? Do it now. Don't put it off.

Many universities cannot avoid high tuition costs. Moms and dads sacrifice greatly to get their children to graduation day. Before we thank anyone for all we've received as students, we ought to thank our parents first.

If I were graduating in just ten weeks, I'd resolve to read a couple more books before that big day arrives. An utterly old-fashioned idea, but I've got to be me. So much happens so quickly after graduation that it may be tough to carve out time for reading. No one asked me for a plug here, but I'll make one anyway. If you need some books, deep or easy, stop by the used book sale March 22 at Taipei American School. For a pittance you can help the Orphanage Club and treat yourself at the same time.

Surely it is only wise to take good advantage of the coming ten weeks. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking points :

1. You may or may not be a senior, looking forward to graduation from Fu da in June. Nevertheless, do words such as "forgiveness" and "thank you" seem relevant to you these days? You don't have to say so OUT LOUD, but do you owe an apology to anyone in your life? Do you have a THANK YOU to say to someone who has been good to you lately?
2. This column speaks of goals to make for the last 10 weeks of a school year. Do you have any special goals you hope to accomplish between today and June 15?
3. Was graduation from high school important to you personally? What feelings did you have a couple years ago as you said goodbye and left your high school years and to start a new life at Fu da?

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