

U.S.–CHINA FORUM ON DISTANCE EDUCATION

By **Chip Cassano**, *UMUC*

University of Maryland University College will host the 4th Annual U.S.–China Forum on Distance Education, June 29–July 2, 2008, at the university's Inn and Conference Center in Adelphi. The three-day forum—co-hosted by the China Youth Center for International Exchange and the China University Distance Education Committee of the China Educational Technology Association—will focus on “Mega Trends and Innovation in Distance Education for Sustainable Growth: Pedagogy, Technology, Services and Partnerships.”

“As China assumes an ever more prominent role on the eco-

nomie and political world stage, the vital role of education, and the exciting opportunities presented by distance education, become increasingly clear. This forum offers an ideal platform to begin or continue important dialogues about the role and interplay of technology and education in the 21st century,” said UMUC President Susan C. Aldridge.

The forum will feature workshops focused on learner support, best practices in support of online teaching, and Second Life's potential in distance education. A panel discussion will address international cooperation and major trends in distance education; the featured speakers will come from the USA, Brazil, Canada, and China.

The forum will coincide with a visit on July 1 from Zhou Wenzhong, Chinese ambassador to the United States. The ambassador will present a special lecture on the geopolitical, economic, and cultural issues affecting China's relations with the U.S. The lecture is part of UMUC's biannual “Meet the Ambassador” series, which is designed to encourage an international exchange of ideas and promote a better understanding of different countries and cultures.

Registration is required for the forum; the ambassador's lecture is free and open to the public. For more information or to register, visit www.umuc.edu/uschina or call 301-985-7937.

Chinese Language “Meetup” around D.C.

By **Elaine Yummei Ting**

Office of Multi-Ethnic Student Education, UMCP

As an assistant director at the Office of Multi-Ethnic Student Education, I have always encouraged our students to study foreign languages by pointing out the increasing demand in business and other occupations for foreign languages skills. I have noted that a large metropolitan area like Washington, D.C. affords excellent opportunities to practice new foreign language skills outside of class. One such opportunity is the Washington D.C. Chinese Language “Meetup” group, for which I have served as lead organizer since the spring of 2003. Over the past five years, our group has grown from around 50 members to over 900 members, making it one of the fastest growing language groups in D.C. area.

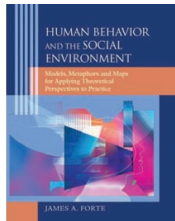
Chinese Language “Meetup” provides a place for people who are learning or speaking the Chinese language to meet. Each month, we gather at a different Metro-accessible restaurant in the Washington area in order to practice conversation. The group welcomes Chinese speakers from all backgrounds, including native and non-native speakers, and our membership is extremely diverse. Each meeting is divided into beginning, intermediate and advanced groups, all of whom sit together and practice speaking Chinese at their respective level of proficiency. Each learning level group has a moderator who works to facilitate conversation in Chinese throughout the meeting. These monthly get-togethers are an excellent opportunity not only to practice a new language, but also to meet and network with other people with similar professional or other interests in Chinese language and culture.

Anyone who speaks or hopes to speak Chinese, or has an interest in Chinese culture, will find an enthusiastic welcome in this group. For information on joining or attending an upcoming meeting in Washington, please go to <http://chinese.meetup.com/13/>.

BOOK REVIEW

Human Behavior and the Social Environment: Models, Metaphors, and Maps for Applying Theoretical Perspectives to Practice (Wadsworth, 2006)

By **James A. Forte**
Social Work Dept., *Salisbury University*



Reviewed by **Guido Francescato**, Professor Emeritus of Architecture, *UMCP*

Though not immediately obvious, the “practice” to which the subtitle of this book refers is that of social work, and it is to students of that profession that the book is aimed. As one who is not a social worker, I must admit to a degree of perplexity about the appropriateness of my reviewing this volume, but I was asked to do it, so here goes.

Forte's book is organized in three parts. The first deals with definitions and proposes a linguistic analogy for understanding theory. Not surprisingly, therefore, given this point of departure and the applied nature of social work, this section of the book focuses on tools for “translating” theories into applications. Among such tools, particular attention is paid to models, metaphors, and a variety of mapping techniques for representing relationships in visual form. The second part of the book is by far the most extensive and is devoted to discussing the application of these translation tools to the practice of social work. Each chapter in this second and central part deals with one specific theoretical perspective, such as ecological theory, systems theory, biology, cognitive science, psychodynamic theory, behaviorism, symbolic interactionism, social role theory, economics, and critical theory. Even to one not familiar with the field of social work, it is apparent that this formidable list of theoretical orientations necessarily calls into question issues of validity, complexity, and conflict. Admirably, in the third part of the book, Forte confronts such issues and provides guidance for coping with what he calls the challenge of theoretical pluralism. Here he focuses on integrative and holistic approaches, as well as on the obstacles involved in blending and unifying competing perspectives.

The eleven chapters in the main section of the book, devoted to the major theories underlying the field, are all structured in a fairly similar manner. They include an introduction; a discussion of what, in keeping with the language analogy, is labeled as related dialects or associated perspectives; biographical sketches and thumbnail descriptions of the central positions of a series of exemplary theorists; the root metaphors of the particular perspective under review; its core assumptions; its relationships with human development; the mapping of its conceptual frameworks; a discussion of the limits of the perspective; and an example of how it was used in shaping the understanding of a specific problem and designing an intervention to address it.

“Nothing,” Kurt Lewin famously wrote, “is as practical as a good theory.”* Although he does not cite Lewin, the author certainly views theories primarily as tools. This point of view will be appreciated by those students who are impatient with the abstractness of theoretical work and its perceived lack of relevance to the solution or amelioration of practical problems. By demystifying a number of important theoretical aspects, unraveling the complexity of the relationships among diverse and often competing points of view, and demonstrating how highly dependent useful action is on conceptual work, Forte has made it possible for his readers to gain a valuable understanding of the rich intellectual corpus available to social workers.

The book is written in a plain, even engaging, language that should be well received by its intended audience. It is, however, more than six hundred pages long—a length not made more bearable by the author's propensity for repeating concepts that even beginning undergraduates might grasp the first time.

* Lewin, K. *Field theory in social science: Selected theoretical papers*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1951, p. 169.

Reflections on Journalism

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What's happening? There are complex factors behind this trend, but in another way it's quite simple, really: The Internet is destabilizing the business models of traditional news media, and media companies everywhere are struggling to keep some sense of equilibrium.

“Until recently, [news] producers monopolized the information flow and the resulting revenue. Now they have less control and more competition,” explains UMCP journalism professor Carl Sessions Stepp, writing in the April/May issue of *American Journalism Review*, which the journalism school publishes.

As everyone knows, the Web continues to change dramatically how consumers get their news and information. More to the point, every year it takes a bigger bite of the billions of dollars in advertising that traditionally have gone to news companies and largely subsidized those expensive news staffs. So revenues slip, which in turn undercuts media companies' stock prices, which in turn has those companies shrinking their payrolls through buyouts and layoffs.

Many journalists, including Stepp, wish the media's response to the digital challenge was less defensive and more creative—rather than fear the digital revolution, he says, embrace it for its inherent opportunities to connect with audiences in new ways. But that has not been the case; higher education has nothing on the new industry when it comes to aversion to change.

“Because technology has fostered near-infinite ways of finding and spreading information, there is actually far more revenue available than ever,” Stepp writes. “But it is spread thinner, and the mainstream media have proved sadly slow in corraling their share.”

Increasingly it seems clear that if there is going to be a revolution in the business of news, it will fall to the next generation—the young men and women who are digital “natives,” as opposed to digital “immigrants” like me—to lead the way.

The good news is that, despite the myriad challenges confronting the media, student interest in journalism and mass communication, at Maryland and at our peer institutions around the country, remains at near-record highs. It's true that, more and more, even incoming freshmen are aware of the industry's turbulence. Yet these young men and women have literally grown up with media; they enjoy communicating and consider it a gratifying means of expression. Many of them have worked for student media in their high school careers. So the idea of building careers in media-related fields remains very appealing.

But in such a fast-changing digital world, few can predict what the media business will look like in the four or five years it will take these students to graduate. So how best to prepare them? At the Merrill College of Journalism, we are trying to meet that challenge in a number of ways.

For starters, in late May we will break ground on a state-of-the-art Journalism building, to be called Knight Hall in recognition of the lead donor, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The construc-

tion and furnishing of this dazzling new facility will cost nearly \$30 million. In a public-private partnership that is a model for the College Park campus, the State of Maryland will provide \$16 million of this funding and the Merrill College is raising the remainder.

Knight Hall will be a dynamic environment where traditional print, broadcast and Web-based approaches to journalism will merge and, we hope in time, help spawn entirely new and exciting modes of newsgathering and storytelling. High-tech labs with professional-grade equipment will enable this kind of creativity.

To nudge students in that direction and better prepare them for the digital age, the school recently moved to require several new courses that will ensure all students have multimedia skills and experiences before they graduate. Perhaps the most important of those will be an upper-level capstone course where students will work in small teams in a multimedia environment. The capstone course also is designed to encourage more journalism students to think about the entrepreneurial possibilities of media—how to produce media products and even whole financial models that will help sustain responsible journalism far into the 21st century.

In confronting the digital frontier, though, we are also taking pains that students remain mindful of the news media's responsibilities to keep citizens informed. In the anxiety currently gripping the media industries, too many companies are forgetting those obligations that obtain in exchange for their explicit protection under the First Amendment. Maryland journalism students are not allowed to forget that. We are first and foremost about public affairs journalism—news in the people's interest.

I should also say that despite the media's problems, Merrill students continue to get good jobs. Ironically, when companies buy out senior reporters and editors, they often fill in behind them with eager young journalists who have, shall we say, more modest salary expectations.

Brave new worlds can be scary, but they can be exciting, too. It takes vision and faith to see those opportunities, and I know Maryland students are confident as they go out to meet their future.

Thomas Kunkel is Dean of the Philip Merrill College of Journalism and President of *American Journalism Review*, a national magazine published by the College. At Maryland he has served as Director of the Knight Center for Specialized Journalism, and as editor and director of the Project on the State of the American Newspaper. A writer and editor, Kunkel has spent most of his career in newspaper management. Most recently he was deputy managing editor of the *San Jose Mercury News*. Now he's moving on to become President of St. Norbert College. Bon Voyage, Tom.

CORRECTION

In the last *Faculty Voice* issue, the introduction to Prof. Jeffrey Bub's article (“The Quantum World,” page 6) stated: “Recently, the American Institute of Physics' annual conference, ‘New Directions in the Foundations of Physics,’ was organized around his [Prof. Bub's] work.” This information, obtained from UMCP's administration, is incorrect. The conference was not connected with the American Institute of Physics; it was organized by the Foundations of Physics Group (comprising faculty members and graduate students at UMD, Johns Hopkins, and Georgetown) at the American Center for Physics in College Park. Apologies to all concerned.