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Editorial: Taft spent her life in service to education
Wednesday, March 10, 2010

Kathy Taft spent the last two decades of her life tirelessly working on behalf of public schools, first in Pitt County and later as a member of the North Carolina Board of Education. Her record is one of consensus-building at critical moments and progressive advocacy on behalf of those without a voice.

Her death on Tuesday at age 62 leaves behind a host of questions which an ongoing investigation seeks to answer. But it also cuts short that life of public service and has stolen from family and friends a kind and generous soul who will be greatly missed in this community.

Taft’s life was one spent in and around the classroom. A 1981 cum laude graduate of East Carolina University, she served as an instructor at both the University of North Carolina School of Dentistry and East Carolina’s Health Education Department. Taft was a founding member of the Pitt County Communities in Schools program and was involved in various education boards throughout her life.

She won election to the Pitt County school board in 1990, representing District 5 at a time when the county’s explosive growth posed steep challenges to public education. Taft provided a sensible voice toward meeting the demands of an expanding student population, bringing together those of disparate views while serving as vice chair of that board.

Five years later, Gov. Jim Hunt appointed her to the N.C. Board of Education, serving a 15-county region that includes some of the state’s poorest communities. It was a rocky confirmation process, but she would serve with distinction once there, earning a second eight-year term in 2003.

Throughout her time in Raleigh, Taft successfully provided a tireless and relentless voice on behalf of eastern North Carolina. There were flirtations with higher office — including a campaign for the Democratic nomination in District 5 two years ago — but she never wavered from her determination to improve schools across the state.

Her death on Tuesday is being investigated as a homicide, with Raleigh police offering few details as to the circumstances of a brutal assault at a home in that city during the weekend. If a crime has occurred, as is suspected, one hopes justice comes swiftly to those responsible.

For now, however, focus should be on wishing peace and comfort for Taft’s family and friends for their loss, and to celebrating the memory of this remarkable, kind and caring public servant taken too soon.
Life dedicated to family, education

Kathy Taft was a Pitt County Democrat with far-reaching political connections who was involved in some of North Carolina's most important public school initiatives of the past 15 years.

Friends and family said that the 62-year-old member of the State Board of Education had a passion for education and politics; she was often in the company of state legislators, governors and even a vice president. Al and Tipper Gore were among her wide circle of friends. Within an hour of her death Tuesday, the state's highest-ranking politicians released a flurry of testimonials.

Gov. Bev Perdue, U.S. Senator Kay Hagan and top education leaders recalled a policy-maker who understood practicalities. They remembered a petite but strong woman in a political arena dominated by men.

"The kindness she showed me, as a fellow woman from Down East working to make a difference, is something I will never forget," said Perdue, a friend of 25 years, in a prepared statement. "Her passion for education and for finding every opportunity to better serve North Carolina's children has clearly made this state a better place to live and raise a family."

Taft grew up in Kinston, the daughter of a doctor. She worked as a dental hygienist early in her life, then moved to Greenville, where she studied health education at East Carolina University and received a bachelor's degree with honors.

In Greenville she met Tom Taft, a lawyer and the man she would marry.

They had four children - Jessica, Paige, Thomas Jr. and Jonathan - and immersed themselves in Democratic politics in Greenville and beyond before their marriage ended in 2001. Before their divorce, the two were hosts to Al and Tipper Gore at Figure Eight Island during his 2000 run for president.

"Tipper and I are deeply saddened by the tragic loss of our longtime friend," Al Gore said in a prepared statement Tuesday. "Our thoughts and prayers go out to her family and to her many friends across the state of North Carolina and beyond."

Praise from Jim Hunt

Jim Hunt, the former governor who appointed Taft to the State Board of Education, said he was drawn to her for the leadership position because of her commitment to helping every child learn.

"She wasn't one of those people who would just pat you on the head," Hunt said. "She would pat you on the head and say we can do even better."

Taft represented 15 counties in northeastern North Carolina on the board. She helped draft policies designed to end the social promotion of students, requiring them to illustrate through testing or some other means their academic readiness for the next grade. She was a strong advocate for requiring high school seniors to complete comprehensive projects before graduation and a supporter of offering high
school courses to high-achieving middle school students.

Phil Kirk, chairman emeritus of the state board of education, said Taft was hardworking and effective.

"She was a consistent voice for high standards for educators and students," Kirk said. "Kathy never turned down an assignment and was not afraid to take an unpopular stand. At a time when much focus was on the lower-performing schools and lower achieving students, Kathy was a consistent advocate for more attention for our gifted and talented students."

Committed to schools

A belief that a strong public school education is at the root of every child's path to success drove Taft in her work, her ex-husband Tom Taft said. "She just believed public education was the most important element of democracy," he said.

As committed as she was to the state's public schools, Taft was even more dedicated to her four children and grandchildren, her friends and family say.

She spent three weeks in February and March in Boca Raton, Fla., with her daughter Jessica Gorall and two of her five grandchildren.

In recent years, Taft struck up a relationship with John Geil, a Raleigh divorce lawyer with strong political connections, too. Geil was in Naples, Fla., according to family and friends, when Taft was found at his Cartier Drive home, severely beaten.

Last week, Taft returned from Florida to North Carolina for a two-day state school board meeting in Halifax County.

On Thursday, she went to Chapel Hill to visit her son Jonathan Taft, a senior at UNC-Chapel Hill. The two ate at 411 West, the family said, and Kathy Taft returned to Geil's home in Raleigh.

On Friday, Taft and her sister Diana, a resident of Oriental, spent much of the day together. They ate dinner together and then watched "Paper Moon" at Geil's home.

What happened next is something that family, friends and police decline to discuss.

Communion and rites

The family stood vigil as Taft clung to life in the WakeMed intensive care unit.

On Tuesday morning, the Rev. Bob Hudak, rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Greenville, administered communion to family and friends and last rites to her.

Instead of the violent end to Taft's life, family and friends prefer to recall the many achievements.

"She really was a spirit," said Tom Taft, a former state senator from Greenville. "She was civic-minded, joyful and happy."

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State won't raise pay

RALEIGH -- North Carolina's teachers and state employees can expect another year without a pay raise.

Gov. Bev Perdue said that, although salaries will remain flat in the coming budget year, she's aiming to pay back the 0.5 percent pay cut that state workers and teachers received last year in the form of a two-day furlough.

"There is no money for teacher or state employee raises," Perdue said in a recent interview. "I hope to find money to repay the furlough. Because I've been able to pay the bills, and I need to give them back their money the way I did local governments."

Last February, Perdue seized $38 million of lottery money earmarked for local school construction to sustain the state's cash flow and pay bills. She returned that money in August.

State employees on Tuesday expressed little surprise that their paychecks won't grow.

"I feel lucky I have a job, because there are a lot of us who don't," said Eric Blevins, head of photography at the N.C. Museum of History in Raleigh.

"We've sort of expected this," said Mary McCray, president of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Association of Educators, the county's major teachers group. "It's encouraging that there's a possibility that we would get the half-percent back."

Perdue's administration writes the first draft of the state budget every year, and lawmakers then make substantial changes before passing it. In this case, though, legislative leaders already agreed with Perdue on forgoing raises. They expressed caution about paying back the $65 million to $70 million in furlough money.

"It depends on the economy," said Rep. Mickey Michaux, a Durham Democrat and senior budget committee chairman. "I would gladly consider it, but that'll be tempered by what [revenue] we're bringing in."

How they lost last year

Chrissy Pearson, Perdue's communications director, described Perdue as looking into ways to make the furlough repayment happen.

"It may be too early to tell what the budget will hold for state employees," Pearson said. "We continue to face very tough times. We continue to ask our state employees and state agencies to do more with less, and the governor is acutely aware of how difficult that is."

In April last year, Perdue ordered the state's 82,000 teachers and 91,000 state employees to take a two-day furlough, effectively a half-percent pay cut to help balance the budget.
That money was not paid back, and when the new budget year began a few weeks later, no raises were handed out. July 1 will mark the beginning of the second consecutive budget year without a pay raise for state workers.

Not surprised

Dana Cope, executive director of the State Employees Association of North Carolina, said his members are disappointed but not surprised.

"While we're not happy with the prospect of no salary increases, we understand," Cope said, adding that the workload has grown. "The demand on state services is rising exponentially at the same time that there's been no growth in the number of positions providing them."

Perdue eliminated about 2,000 state jobs last year.

Cope praised Perdue for recognizing the need to sustain essential public services. Cope and SEANC backed Perdue in the 2008 campaign. Perdue has since given the association the authority to represent state workers in discussions with state agencies about workplace conditions, which business organizations view as a step toward collective bargaining. North Carolina and Virginia are the only states with a complete ban on collective bargaining by public employees.

At least no layoffs

State employees can take some solace in holding on to their jobs. At least 14 states laid off state employees during this budget year, from 20,000 California teachers to 48 Missouri state parks employees, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Many private sector employers have taken more drastic steps, laying off thousands of workers, cutting salaries and shuttering entire plants. Cope cautioned, though, that private companies are responding to a drop in demand for their products and services, while the demands on state government increase during a recession.

"And you're still losing positions," he said. "You're still taking wage and benefit cuts."

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Carrying on in her footsteps

BY KAYLA TAUSCHE

As an early-twentysomething, the concept of two years—ten-tenth of life as you know it—seems massive and infinite. When you actually live it, two years past can feel like just yesterday.

It was yesterday, then, that I picked up a copy of our college newspaper to find an article, boxed in red, about an unidentified woman found dead a mile from campus, wearing sweatpants and tennis shoes, with blond locks hanging past her shoulders. And yesterday that the woman remained faceless; yesterday still when our voices of reason told us it was a homeless person who had been wandering around late at night in the sinewy, dark roads off Frankl

POINT OF VIEW

in Street. And yesterday when we finally learned that this stranger was our dear friend Eve Carson.

It was two years ago, this yesterday when our world was violently and at once ripped apart. Each one of the last 700-plus days has seen an immeasurable number of people struggling with what once was a relatively easy task: getting by.

But looking back, it’s clear that, with each of these cycles of 24 hours that have come to make up our recent past, the ending to that phrase would change ever so slightly, as if coming to terms with this most senseless of losses was a sort of canonization. Getting by after our small town was rocked with such terror and violence. Getting by after enduring such bottomless sorrow. Getting by after realizing that the e-mails, phone calls, messages and whispers that once came from that bright spot in your life could now be traced back only to air.

Getting by because there’s nowhere you can get without moving forward. I have to say we’ve gotten pretty far, and these thousands of Eve’s peers—who just yesterday were paralyzed by the news of her death—are now boldly facing the day in her honor.

There is the alumnus from the University of Georgia, in Eve’s home of Athens, Ga., who has undertaken a cross-country bike ride for charity; there’s the recent UNC graduate who has devoted himself to teaching underprivileged children in Durham, the hometown of Eve’s alleged murderers. There are her college roommates, and countless others, who have found themselves everywhere from South Korea to New York to California, preaching the gospel of how good this life is. Not least of which is the once-unknown Anoop Desai, who let her inspiration take him to Hollywood as he snatched a coveted spot in the top ranks of “American Idol,” and just a year ago sounded her memory on national television.

There is, now, a garden, a 5K race, a scholarship—and too soon there will be students at UNC whose only knowledge of her comes from these monuments.

There are papers floating down the formerly state annals of the state legislature that are addressing the ineptitude of the probation system, the need for a crackdown on gun violence and the ever-living struggle of ensuring a fair trial.

And then there are the papers that lie in my lap, and there’s a pen that takes more deliberate strokes these days. As a journalist, I have found myself cursing my profession as it sensationalized her story with the gruesome details of her death—choosing to neglect the large part of an audience that was, and for a long time would be, reeling from her absence.

Words—here, grisly, slam, shoulder, hip, head, final, fatal—that dissect our unchangeable pasts, I learned, should be traded in for those that move each moment forward. No story’s subject is inhuman.

Because there are still days, no matter your loss, when you forget that yesterday is gone, and your lungs sink in with a pain that can’t possibly be biological: a heaviness that still finds and catches up with you, takes the wind out of you, and brings you to your knees.

But then a better memory comes along: Bob Carson, Eve’s father, giving voice to his own optimism for our generation, and reminding us that we have miles to go, and missions to keep. Two years has proven more than enough time to learn to be brave in our ambition. It is still for her, our unadulterated perseverance.

Kayla Tausche graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill in 2008. She works for the Financial Times Group.
Book of condolences includes local dean's note to JFK widow

CHAPEL HILL -- Fifteen-year-old Barbara Rimer was so devastated by John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963 that she dashed off a condolence letter to the president's widow.

She didn't think of the letter again until an author called 46 years later seeking to publish it in a book.

And with that, Rimer, 61, learned a bit about herself.

When JFK was killed, Rimer was a ninth-grader in suburban Philadelphia. Today, she's the dean of the Gillings School of Global Public Health at UNC-Chapel Hill.

She has spent her career in that field, a public service that harks back to the message of service Kennedy conveyed to a nation in his inaugural speech. It was a charge the teenage Rimer took seriously.

The first lady received 1.5 million condolences after the president's death. They came from all over. Some were penned on elegant stationery, some on paper scraps. Some were typed, some were written in pencil, others in ink, stained by tears.

Many were destroyed, but about 200,000 were kept at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston. University of New Hampshire historian Ellen Fitzpatrick read 15,000 and chose 250, including Rimer's, to publish.

The book, "Letters to Jackie: Condolences From a Grieving Nation," has just been released.

Rimer wrote in part, "I promise you that I will give body and soul to perpetuate the very ideals President Kennedy lived for."

"It's so naive!" Rimer said this week. "But it was a time that was naive. We felt personally connected to the man and his mission. It was a time when people believed in government."

Rimer worked at the National Cancer Institute before coming to UNC-CH in 2003. Rimer, who was an earnest, idealistic teenager, said this week that she's pleased to see that the beliefs she holds now were evident even then.

"The letter shows me I was on the path of mission and service," she said. "I feel like I got a piece of my history given back to me."

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New president at Greensboro

GREENSBORO -- Lawrence Czarda has been named the new president at Greensboro College.

The Greensboro College board of trustees voted Tuesday to hire Czarda, 57, who is vice president for administration at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va. He has spent more than 26 years at the university in various administrative roles.

Trustees Chairman R. Carter Pate said Czarda understands how schools such as Greensboro College fill a niche for students who need extra attention. Pate also said Czarda has a "deep, deep knowledge" of issues in higher education.

"Larry was the head-and-shoulders finalist," Pate said. "I could see very quickly that his tenure had really prepared him for this day, that he would have all the answers based on his experience."

Czarda succeeds Craven Williams, who retired in July.

Czarda earned his doctorate from George Mason.
Group wants county eye on animal waste issue

BINGHAM TOWNSHIP -- Neighbors of a UNC-Chapel Hill animal holding and research facility in rural Orange County are feeling nervous about treated wastewater spills from the complex and the university's plans to expand it.

In recent months, there have been four leaks or spills of treated wastewater at the Bingham Facility, located roughly a dozen miles west of Chapel Hill and Carrboro.

In the worst, an unknown amount leaked from a partially full 1.6 million-gallon storage pond into Collins Creek, a tributary of the Haw River and eventually Jordan Lake. The university has shut down the facility's system and is trucking wastewater to the Orange Water and Sewer Authority's treatment plant, as the university waits to hear about a possible state fine.

Last week, Bingham Township residents asked for help. They have met with university officials and toured the site. But with the university planning a $27 million expansion, they told the Orange County Board of commissioners they need the county staff to help monitor what's going on.

"They put us in a room, and they try to overwhelm us with the value of their research," said resident Jack Pless, a documentary filmmaker and member of the citizens environmental group Preserve Rural Orange. "We're not saying, 'Don't do the research.' We're there to say, 'Don't dump into the creek. Don't pollute the air.'"

The Bingham Facility houses about 85 dogs now, but plans call for 400 to 450 dogs, as well as up to 150 hogs and 2,000 mice. The dogs and hogs are used in research on heart disease, blood clotting and Duchenne muscular dystrophy, which affects one in 5,000 male births.

Chancellor Holden Thorp has apologized for the problems. He has put Associate Vice Chancellor for Research Bob Lowman in charge, and the university has begun sharing information in a timely way with neighbors through-e-mail.

County's caution

The county commissioners agreed to review the residents' request. But Orange County Commissioner Barry Jacobs said this is a bad time to assign county staff members extra duties.

"We're looking at reducing or consolidating staff functions because of the recession," he said. "It's not the easiest time to turn around and make resource commitments."

Still, Jacobs added, "It sounds to me like there are some serious problems."

The master plan for the 57-acre site did undergo county staff review, Planning Director Craig Benedict said. It looked at building setbacks, parking and other design details. But the nature of the facility itself was already allowed under the site's agricultural zoning and did not require a permit, Benedict said.
That was also the case with one of the facility's two wastewater treatment systems. The one receiving waste from the dog kennels was considered agricultural and did not require a permit. Since then, UNC officials have clarified that the second system originally described as treating waste from kitchens and bathrooms also handled animal waste.

Resident Laura Streitfeld said the neighbors will continue pushing for a written development agreement to protect the environment from the Bingham Facility expansion.

The university spent months negotiating with the town of Chapel Hill on Carolina North, UNC-Chapel Hill's future satellite campus, she said. It has held several meetings to get input on the redevelopment of the University Square shopping center downtown.

"This is a research campus," she said of the Bingham Facility, "yet there's been no public process."

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'Alternative' spring-breakers steered from Haiti missions

By Betty Klinck, USA TODAY
In the next couple of weeks, thousands of college students nationwide will forgo relaxing with fruity drinks and flip-flops during spring break to go on educational service trips known as "alternative breaks."
About 72,000 students will take part this year, estimates Break Away, an alternative-break resource representing programs at about 130 colleges.

VOLUNTEERING: Workers put furloughs to good use

HAITIAN STUDENTS: Struggle over whether to return

VIDEO: Students pitch in for Haiti

A number of colleges have shown interest in helping Haiti after its earthquake.
But they're being discouraged. The Center for International Disaster Information (CIDI) is telling inexperienced volunteers to wait at least a few months before traveling to Haiti, center director Suzanne Brooks told the online publication Inside Higher Ed.
"I don't think it's impossible that a year from now for spring break there may be some programs up and running, but I really don't think it makes sense for this year," she said.

Inside Higher Ed also says Break Away has told its college chapters not to arrange trips there until conditions are better. "There is a lot of work that needs to be done by people who have skills to help with the immediate response to disaster before unskilled groups can start going there," said Samantha Giacobozzi, programs director. "The resources that would be utilized by alternative breakers would be better used by Haitians and people doing essential work."
So for now, more of the alternative breaks will be in traditional service tasks.

Blake LeMaster, a senior at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, will travel to Dallas to work with leukemia patients at a pediatric oncology clinic.
LeMaster is co-chair of Vanderbilt's alternative-breaks program. This spring the program will send about 500 students out on 36 trips, says adviser Shaiya Baer, assistant director of the university's Office of Active Citizenship and Service.

During her alternative break last year, Britney Holland, a senior at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, taught as part of the Kilimanjaro Young Girls in Need program in Tanzania, where she also helped revitalize the cafe the girls ran when they were not in school.

Holland, an Iraq war veteran, is leading an alternative break to Colorado Springs, where she and other student veterans will rebuild the homes of Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans.

Loyola Marymount is sending 18 other trips out this spring but is unable to send students to its most highly requested location, Haiti, because of safety concerns, says Joanne Dennis, alternative-breaks coordinator.
"We're looking into sending a team down there this summer, if this is going to be a possibility ... but right now Haiti doesn't need unskilled volunteers taking up their resources," Dennis says.

Florida International University in Miami is planning to send 12 students to Haiti this summer through its alternative-break program to work on humanitarian relief and health care, says Angel Garcia, assistant director for leadership and service.

This spring break, Florida International's alternative-break program will aid Haiti victims by working at an orphanage with children who have spilled over into the Dominican Republic.
Students at Xavier University in Cincinnati will be working with orphans in Jamaica, helping rebuild parts of their orphanage and through participating in developmental activities with the kids, says Christopher Bridges, assistant director of peace and justice programs.

Another program from American University in Washington, D.C., will be traveling to the Navajo Nation reserve that spans parts of Arizona and New Mexico to work on an environmental justice program with the states' uranium and coal mines.

Despite the diversity of alternative-break trips, which range from addressing homelessness in Washington, D.C., to geriatric care in North Carolina, the programs all have one mission: "to work toward creating active citizens through education, action and reflection," Bridges says.
At universities, is better learning a click away?

A divide is emerging over how sophisticated classroom clickers should be.

The Associated Press
updated 2:27 p.m. ET, Mon., March 8, 2010

BOULDER, Colo. - The students in Michael Dubson's physics class at the University of Colorado fell silent as a multiple choice question flashed on a screen, sending them scrambling for small white devices on their desks.

Within seconds, a monitor on Dubson's desk told him that 92 percent of the class had correctly answered the question on kinetic energy, a sign that they grasped the concept.

Clickers — not unlike gadgets used on television game shows — first appeared in college classrooms over a decade ago and have since spread to just about every college and university in the country thanks to cheaper and better technology.

But as clickers have become commonplace, a divide has emerged over just how sophisticated they should be.

Losing battle?
Some professors like Dubson endorse simple, straightforward devices that stick to multiple choice questions. Others embrace fancier models or newer applications for smart phones and laptops that allow students to query the professor by text or e-mail during the lecture or conduct discussion with classmates — without the cost of purchasing a clicker.

Those preferring simplicity say pared-down remotes reduce distractions in a multitasking world, while others say fighting the march to smart phones and digital tablets is a losing battle.

Clickers first gained popularity in large science lecture halls as a way of gauging whether students understood the material. They have since migrated into smaller classrooms and can be found in nursing and other professional schools. Even middle schools and high schools are using them.

Research at the college level has found that students like using the devices and attendance often goes up. But results are mixed when it comes to learning. Some evidence suggests clicker use has led to only modest gains in retention and test scores, while other studies have detected little or no improvement, according to a November article in the North American Journal of Psychology.

"It's not magic," Dubson said. "It can be used very badly or well."

What works with the clickers, according to Dubson and other professors, are questions that spark discussion and get students to explain concepts to each other. What doesn't is using them sporadically or for rote memorization. Students also become resentful when they're used to play attendance cop and spring pop quizzes.
At the University of Colorado, 20,000 of the 30,000 students on campus own clickers. They can be found in music, environmental studies, communications, comparative politics and law classes.

'Clicker groups'
Dubson sprinkles in clicker questions every five or 10 minutes in his calculus-based introductory physics, a tough required course for physics and engineering majors.

He's using a concept called peer instruction. Instead of lecturing for 50 minutes and taxing attention spans, questions are projected on a screen, students gather in registered "clicker groups" to discuss them, then students use their clickers to respond.

"We want students to get in the habit of translating the messy questions into plain English, to be able to explain it," Dubson said. "Students for the most part aren't used to that."

Clickers get mostly positive reviews in Dubson's class of 250.

"With such an enormous classroom, it's about as close as you can get to a hands-on approach to the material," said Jaris Judd, a sophomore from Blairsville, Ga. "This keeps you more on track and in tune."

William Powell, a junior from Durango, Colo., saw two benefits: "It's good impetus to pay attention and not let your mind wander during the lecture. You can see how other people are doing compared to you ... and analyze why someone may have picked a different answer."

The praise wasn't universal. Even though Dubson keeps the stakes low — clicker questions are bonus points and count for a maximum of two percent of someone's grade — the system by its nature makes attendance part of students' grade, said Maximilian Bondrescu, a Fort Collins, Colo., junior.

"Plus it's an expense," he said. "An extra device to carry around. It runs on batteries and the batteries run out. But mostly I don't like the attendance thing."

Costs range from $35 to $70
CU-Boulder chose the device — which uses the same technology as a garage door opener and has five laser buttons — because it's simple and durable, Dubson said. One student's stopped working when he spilled Coke on it. He cleaned it with soap and water and it worked fine. Students pay about $35 for them.

More sophisticated clickers run in the $60 to $70 range. Some have gaming features that appeal to the Wii generation and one can record the fastest responders.

Most, if not all, of the handful of major companies in the clicker business are marketing applications that use smart phones or Web browsers to accomplish many of the same functions.

At Central Michigan University, students in an introduction to teaching course use iPhones and iPod touches to answer poll questions and access discussion material on the Web. Students who don't own either device can rent an iPod touch for $30 through the CMU Bookstore.

Several schools — including the University of Notre
Dame, Virginia Tech and the University of Florida — have turned to a text-messaging product marketed as a cheaper alternative to clickers.

Derek Bruff, assistant director of Vanderbilt University’s Center for Teaching, said simple clickers are great at multiple choice questions. But he’s more excited about using smart phones, which allow students to ask questions of instructors, hold back-channel discussions with each other and respond in their own words.

On the other side of the great clicker divide is Timothy Stelzer, an associate professor of physics at the University of Illinois and co-inventor of the iClicker, used at CU-Boulder and 900 other campuses.

He argues that students will be too distracted by other things on their Web browsers and points to a Stanford University study last year that showed undergraduate students are lousy multitaskers.

"You obviously have to make something that sells," Stelzer said. "But it's very possible the excitement and enthusiasm about Web clickers might just kill the whole peer instruction thing."

Harvard physics professor Eric Mazur, a pioneer of peer instruction, said he's sympathetic to both camps. Still, he predicts that clickers will be obsolete in 10 years because nearly everyone will own something like a laptop, tablet or smart phone, and he dismisses the argument that multitasking will be a problem.

"The teacher," he said, "just has to be more interesting than YouTube."

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After Harvard Controversy, Conditions Change but Reputation Lingers

By TAMAR LEWIN

NEW YORK — It has been five years since Lawrence H. Summers, then the president of Harvard University, suggested at an academic conference that innate differences might explain why fewer women than men succeed in science and math careers. His remark sparked a firestorm that brought many changes — among them, Mr. Summers’s resignation and the naming of the university’s first female president, Drew Gilpin Faust.

Although many top universities took action in the early 2000s to help women, especially women in science, Harvard, under Mr. Summers, had an unimpressive record. Tenure offers to women plummeted after he took office in 2001. While Harvard extended 13 of its 36 tenure offers to women the year before Mr. Summers became president, that dropped to 4 of 32 the year before his speech. And several departments did not have a single tenured female professor.

Then, at a conference in January 2005, Mr. Summers delivered his now infamous remarks.

He told the audience that “there are issues of intrinsic aptitude, and particularly of the variability of aptitude,” which he said were reinforced by “lesser factors involving socialization and continuing discrimination.”

Harvard has changed since then. Last year, tenure offers went to 16 women and 25 men. Universitywide, slightly more than a quarter of Harvard faculty members are women, an all-time high, with senior faculty accounting for most of the increase. And not only is the president a woman, but so are the deans of the engineering school, the law school, the education school and Harvard College and the Radcliffe Institute.

“This is not your father’s Harvard,” said Martha Minow, dean of the law school.
Since Mr. Summers’s resignation in 2006, Harvard has poured millions of dollars into child-care centers and family-friendly programs for faculty — including child-care subsidies of up to $20,000 and research-enabling grants that let junior faculty take their babies and nannies on field trips.

But Harvard has changed in another way, too: Its endowment has lost $11 billion. And with budget cuts now high on the agenda, Ms. Faust acknowledged that changes might be coming in its spending on such programs.

There is little eagerness at Harvard to discuss the Summers incident. Two top female scientists — Cynthia Friend, the former head of the chemistry department, and Barbara Grosz, who led a task force on women in science after the speech — declined to be interviewed.

And at Harvard, as at most American research universities, math and science remain male domains. The math department’s first tenured woman, Sophie Morel, arrived just three months ago. The department admitted two female graduate students this year and none last year.

When Lauren Williams was offered a math lectureship shortly after Mr. Summers’s remarks, she said, she asked repeatedly whether it was because of her gender and was reassured that it was not. But with women so scarce, a cloud of suspicion was there.

“Shortly after I started my position at Harvard, another mathematician asked me: ‘Why did Harvard hire you? Did they want a girl?’” said Ms. Williams, who has since left Harvard for a tenure-track position at the University of California, Berkeley.

The earth and planetary sciences department tenured its first woman, Ann Pearson, this year.

“Different departments are at different points,” said Elena Kramer, a biology professor. “In biology, where women earn half the Ph.D.’s, it’s not so hard to hire women. You don’t need any hand-wringing; if you’re doing a good search, you’ll get women. In physics, we need to work on getting more young women into the field as undergraduates.”

Ms. Faust singled out one of the new pipeline programs — the Program for Research in Science and Engineering — as a success, no longer considered an experiment.

Given the overlap between the biological clock and the tenure clock, helping more women into senior academic positions is especially difficult at Harvard, where tenure is unusually slow, coming only with promotion to full professor. Also, Harvard has long been known for recruiting outsiders to senior positions, rather than promoting junior faculty.
“Harvard has been shifting in recent years, bringing people in earlier and promoting them from assistant professor to associate and tenure,” Ms. Faust said. “We believe in the tenure track, and we’re drawing on a different pool now. It’s a culture shift.”

But reputations are difficult to change.

“Our biggest challenge is this misperception that Harvard doesn’t tenure its own junior faculty,” Ms. Kramer said. “And because many of our wonderful senior faculty women came up in the ’70s and ’80s and don’t have families, some young women who know they want families might look at them and say, ‘I don’t want that kind of life’ and take themselves out of the pipeline.”

Two task forces that Mr. Summers appointed after his speech — on women in the faculty and women in science and engineering — recommended most of Harvard’s new programs, plus the appointment of a senior official to oversee them. That official, Judith Singer, tracks both women and minorities as they move up the tenure ladder.

“The sea change is that we actually have a tenure track now,” she said. “We are increasingly promoting from within, and 36 percent of the junior ladder faculty are women. Senior faculty is hard to change, because 95 percent of them were here last year, so it’s mostly a function of who you bring in. And there is still an old guard, to be honest, for whom this is not a priority.”

Some women in the physical sciences say a few older professors seem to look through them.

“The only objectionable experiences I’ve had involved senior faculty over 60,” Ms. Pearson said. “In one panel discussion, I made a point, then a few minutes later, a senior faculty member made the same point. A colleague closer to my age pointed out that when I said it, no one paid attention, but when he said it, they did.”

Undergraduate women studying math and science say that while they do not have nearly enough female professors, many male professors encourage them.

“There are events for women in science or women in research, where there are professors of both genders, but only female students,” said Rebecca Hersher, a junior neurobiology major. “I feel like if I called a professor and said I’d like to go out to dinner and get to know them better, they’d actually be more likely to say yes because I’m a woman.”

Howard Georgi, former chair of the physics department, remembers being struck years ago by how differently men and women responded to a survey of physics majors’ satisfaction.

“The men loved it and the women hated it, and because there were more men than women,
and we’d never before broken down by gender, we’d looked like we were doing O.K.,” he said.

“Women who concentrate in the field are happier now,” he added, “but there hasn’t been a dramatic change in the numbers coming in and that’s a little frustrating and puzzling.”

Does having a woman as Harvard’s president make a difference?

“I don’t think so,” Mr. Georgi said, adding, “but maybe not having Larry...”