“Disce Latinam! Creating the Next College Level Introductory Latin Course”

Introductory remarks

It will come as no shock to anyone in this room that choosing a textbook for beginning Latin courses at the college level is hazardous business. One choice involves choosing reading method books designed for a much younger audience. These I have elsewhere called “The Trinity” as they consist of *Ecce Romani*, *The Oxford Latin Course*, and *The Cambridge Latin Course*. The other choice is to use grammar-first books which are thorough and fast paced, but lack connected readings and are often rather overwhelming for the average college student.

Tom Sienkewicz and I are under contract to produce *Disce Latinam!* for Pearson Prentice Hall with an expected publication date 2010 – if the job doesn’t scare us to death first. The first draft of the book is essentially written and I have been teaching it to intensive Latin students in the Fall and Spring semesters of this year. The course meets five days a week and carries six credit hours, with each semester being the equivalent of two semesters’ worth of Latin.

As of now the students, some 17 hardy souls, are on chapter 34 out of 40. They readily read Catullus’ simpler poems and will move on to other authors before the semester is over.

Thus, I am tempted to swell up with pride, but I am too old and experienced to get carried away. We are convinced the book can become better and it is the purpose of this panel to obtain two basic types of input from those who teach beginning Latin at the college level and those who are involved in Latin pedagogy at any level.
When Rachel McCoy, our editor from Pearson approached me, I agreed that there was a crying need for a new textbook, but I was reluctant to enter the project. But Rachel was not recently crowned as Pearson’s Editor of the Year for no reason. She persisted. I had a strong sense of what a new textbook had to be and I knew it would entail both money and commitment from a publisher. Yet every objection I could find, Rachel answered.

A college textbook, I said, had to be written expressly for college students of the 21st century. That would mean serious online content. “No problem,” Rachel shot back. “Ah,” I countered, “but I am very sick of Latin textbooks looking like they were produced camera-ready out of MS Word. Kids today need a textbook that is visually appealing and needs to have visual layouts that encourage learning by other means than rote memorization. And color is expensive.” “We insist on full color,” she said. “But I do not have the time, talent, or energy to do fancy layout,” I rejoined. “Actually,” she said quietly, “we forbid authors to do layout. We restrict that to our professionals.”

And so it went. I demanded relevant photographs? Of course. Online workbook? A must. Teachers’ handbook? We always do that.

I played my trump card. “But anyone who tries to write a textbook should find out first what the users, both student and faculty, want and need.”

I should have known better. Tom and I have now presented, between us, at a previous CAMWS, CANE, and CAAS. Each time we have received wonderful input from audiences that has significantly helped mold the book and its structure. Today we take one more step in this process and ask for your help. First a guide to our underlying principles and philosophy.
It is clear that most college instructors, mostly due to the exigencies of speed, have trouble with the pace of reading centered textbooks. Yet those using books like Wheelock miss a connected narrative. This brings up the first basic philosophy behind *Disce Latīnam!* – that of compromise. For *Disce Latīnam!* consciously attempts be a hybrid text -- to combine the best features of both the reading method and the grammar first method while avoiding the perceived flaws in each method.

In this hybrid method, most grammar is introduced before the reading, but is introduced in a very basic format. Thus, if we are presenting the dative, we say, “These are the forms of the dative that you will encounter in the first reading. Whenever you see it, translate it using the words ‘to’ or ‘for.’” After the reading we will explain in more detail. We have put all the datives in bold, so be aware of them.”

Then, after the reading, terms such as indirect object will be introduced formally as will the full paradigm of the declensions and forms learned to date. The basic theory is that it is faster and more efficient to front load the student for reading rather than relying entirely on induction or deduction and that some things, say, sequence of tenses, are better and more quickly explained through, well, explanation. But we keep it as simple as possible first, having as our rule, “What do they need to read?” Then, after they have read, we turn to more in depth explanations.

As your template shows, each chapter begins with a preview of what the chapter contains. There are two readings, each one stressing a new bit of grammar, although there are also “consolidation” chapters that take a breather and cement knowledge supposedly learned.
Exercises abound in *Disce Latīnam!* but only a few are in the textbook itself. We have conducted ourselves by the principle that what is done in class goes in the textbook and what is done outside of class goes in the workbook.

You will see also that there are standard sections to each chapter. *Rōmanī Ipsi* stems from our belief that each chapter needs some Latin from antiquity in it (we dislike the terms “real” vs. “made up” -- it is all real, and even the *Aeneid* was made up). In this section we have funeral inscription for some of the characters we have incorporated into the story line, a runaway slave collar, and many selections from ancient authors. We have learned on the first test run that these latter should be shorter and easier if we want busy college classes to use them, but they will be there.

*Mundus Romānus* is the mandatory culture section but with some rules to it. Any picture in *Disce Latīnam!* has to be relevant to the story line and the teachers’ manual will contain complete information to facilitate its use. And each cultural section is intimately tied to the story line.

*Latīna Hodierna* owes its existence to current German Latin textbooks. These new books sell themselves by promising to help Germans with their English. We too tie in Latin from the chapter to today’s world. Entries range from Latin words that have made their way into modern languages (e.g. English, Spanish, Italian, French etc.) and extend to things like the Great Seal of the United States and Latin mottoes of states, military organizations, and firemen.

*Orbis Terrārum Rōmāna* is a nod to the fact that most of our story takes place in Rome. Each chapter has a brief snapshot of some place in the Roman world that is mentioned in the story.
Angulus Grammaticus is a tribute to the fact that one textbook never fits all. Some of us love grammar. We breathe it and drink it in like life’s very own essence. And we know, we truly believe, that our students love it too. Others of us are more casual lovers and think that grammar is fine and well in its place, but should only be taught formally in so far as it enables translation. Our book tries to serve both masters. The grammar needed for reading is in the chapter. The finer points are in the AG. Thus, “to or for” and “indirect object” may be in the body of a chapter, but ethical dative or dative of advantage are to be found in the AG.

That, then, is the lay out of each chapter. But what of the narrative? Previous focus sessions told us that the narrative had to be more grown up than that of, say, Ecce and many stressed that it needed to be varied – showing multiple facets of Roman life.

After a lot of thought and rewrites, and after invaluable help from Greg Daugherty, our president and an expert on Roman daily life, the story emerged of parallel families living in Rome at about 9 BC. Why 9 BC? We first of all wanted the Augustan age. Why has a book not centered on that to date? Then looked long and hard at timelines to insure as many living authors as possible, to check on what buildings were actually built at the time, and what was happening throughout the empire. At times we have stretched the dates a bit (a dead person or two inhabit our pages) but we are pretty careful overall.

We have two families. I ask you now to turn to your two family tree pages. The first family, the Servilii, live on the Viminal hill. Servilius is an up and coming patrician who wants to rise in the favor of the Augustan hierarchy. He is running for praetor. He has three children, as you see on your handouts, and they are all part of his plan. His
daughter’s arranged marriage is a strong plot element. The second family is lead by the stalwart Valeria. In northern Italy her husband died and her son went into the army. She has sold the family farm to come to Rome to open a taberna or thermopolium. Most of the money has gone into the shop so she, her pregnant daughter and son-in-law, the grandmother, and one slave all live in two crowded rooms in the Subura. Nor can we forget Socrates, the family’s pet monkey, who, like it or not, has key roles to play. Secondary characters include pedagogues, midwives, false prophets, muggers, runaway slaves, and more.

I direct your attention now to the Scope and Sequence for the book. This lays out, chapter by chapter, what happens in the story line of each chapter. I hope you find this interesting. I am personally gratified that my current students have expressed emotional reactions to the stories and have, mirabile dictu, read ahead to find out what happens next. I am very encouraged by this.

You will also see there the grammar in the order in which it appears in each chapter. How did we determine this order? We have a very simple rule for this. The grammar should come in order of frequency. That which is used most often comes first, and so on. For this we relied on Ditler’s Teach the Latin I Pray You which in turn relied on the studies carried out in the 50s and 60s. We broke the rule once or twice for the sake of the narrative, but did so rarely.

How about vocabulary? You will see that each reading has a Verb Utenda section. Currently, any word that is not yet a Verbum Memorandum is given. Once a Verbum Utendum has been used several times, it becomes a Verbum Memorandum and is no longer glossed. Frankly, this has led to far too many glosses (they will appear in the
margin in the finished product) so we will now stop glossing a word after a designated number of uses even if it is does not become a *Verbum Memorandum*. There will, of course, be a full glossary at the end of the book. All vocabulary use, by the way, was dictated by our creation of a list of most frequently used Latin words. We did this by consolidating four or five existing lists. Thank Heaven for computers! The more frequently a word appears in extant Latin, the earlier we try to have it appear in *Disce Latīnam*!

There are forty chapters in *Disce Latīnam*! and the pacing, for average students, should be about 2-3 class hours per chapter. Following these chapters there will be readings from ancient authors, especially from texts mentioned or paraphrased in the chapters.

There you have the overview of *Disce Latīnam*! It is time, now, to turn to our presenters. Each presenter will have two tasks. The first will be a 15 minute exposition of the presenter’s experience with existing Latin textbooks and her/his beliefs for what should exist in a future textbook.

The second part of the panel will then be a discussion of three sample chapters of the textbook. Panel participants have seen these in advance. Strengths and weaknesses of the sample will be discussed, first by the panelists and then by all in the room. You in the audience have been given Caput 18 in its current form and this is the last part of your handout.

At this stage of writing *Disce Latīnam*! we especially need feedback on the following issues: 1) the usefulness and format of workbooks 2) the merits of a teacher’s
manual vs. an annotated teacher’s edition 3) what an optimal on line package should look like 4) whatever else may arise.

I now present to you…….