Many times in my childhood I heard my father say, “That don’t make CTS period!” Children don’t always understand what they hear, and it was some time before I realized that he was making a play on words. The abbreviation for “cents” is cts. — or “CTS period.” It finally made sense.

As I became an adult I discovered that many things don’t make CTS period. Here are just a few examples:

**Neckties.** If it were up to me, neck nooses would be banished as cruel and unusual punishment. I believe we’d all think a little more clearly if the circulation to our brains were restored.

**High heels.** A man who hated women must have created this foot fashion fetish. The untold damage to feet, legs, and backs ought to require a Surgeon General’s warning.

**Things that fasten behind you.** Unless you’re double-jointed, it’s just plain unnatural to try to fasten something behind your back. Zippers, hooks, bows — Harry Houdini might have made a career out of escaping such contraptions, but the rest of us ought to be given a break.

**Professional wrestling.** An oxymoron if ever there was one. (Perhaps professional wrestling is a “sport” for oxen and morons ... ). We’ve taken virtual violence to a new level. P.T. Barnum was right; there’s a sucker born every
minute, and he or she is a fan of the World Wrestling Federation.

**Extra gold light beer.** Once upon a time there was just beer. Someone came up with the idea of lower-calorie beer, *ergo* the introduction of light beer. Others wanted the full, rich body of European beers without the bitterness, *ergo* the introduction of extra gold beers. The marketing brew gurus then introduced extra gold light beer, which, if you’re paying attention, is just plain beer. As H.L. Mencken reported, “No one ever went broke by underestimating the taste of the American public.”

**Enormous Sports Utility Vehicles.** I’ll admit it: I own an SUV — one of the smaller models. It’s great in the snow and it seats five people comfortably, although most of the time it’s just a commuting vehicle. In the spirit of “bigger is better,” the auto manufacturers came up with larger SUVs — and even larger SUVs — and incredibly huge SUVs. They’re lousy on gas mileage, they don’t fit in most garages, and they cost as much as a small house, but they’ll probably come out on top — literally — in a head-on collision with just about any other vehicle short of a Mack truck. Ford has the Explorer, the Expedition, and the Excursion. I have some names to suggest for their future models: the Excessive, the Extravagant, and the Exorbitant.

**Panty hose.** OK, I don’t wear them myself, but I live in a house with my wife and three daughters. I can’t imagine a less practical undergarment, and they seem to have a lifespan slightly shorter than the average housefly. Women’s liberation ought to include freedom from uncomfortable, impractical unmentionables.

I could go on, but all of this is to introduce the notion that we’re not immune to things that don’t make CTS period in higher education.

It doesn’t make CTS period when an institution encloses a Braille map of the campus in a Plexiglass case to protect it, but that happened at an institution where I used to work. On 4-feet by 8-feet sheet of quality plywood, the artist used a variety of woods to create a relief scale model of the entire campus. Each building included Braille designations for entrances, handicap
ramps, and building names. For the sighted the map was a work of art and beauty. For the visually impaired the map was a useful tool for navigating the campus. But the director of disability services, concerned that the map might be damaged, had it enclosed.

It doesn't make CTS period when an institution installs a touch-tone registration system for the campus, only to discover that the campus is still using a rotary phone system. Strange, but true.

It doesn't make CTS period when institutions locate integral student services in remote parts of the campus. Prior to our student success efforts at my current institution (James Madison University), Registration Services, Student Accounting, and Financial Aid couldn’t have been farther apart, literally and figuratively. Our students referred to this setup as the Bermuda Triangle; somewhere between these distant offices, things got confused or lost. Other students remarked that the arrangement was like traveling through Europe; each office was like a separate country, with different borders, languages, customs, and currencies. Breaking down these artificial boundaries became a primary objective in our effort to make a little CTS period out of the mess we’d created.

It doesn’t make CTS period when we help students develop their leadership capacity, then express our dismay when they use that capacity to challenge our policies and procedures.

It doesn’t make CTS period when we let parents assume full responsibility for their students’ problems and concerns — at the expense of the student’s development of personal responsibility.

It doesn’t make CTS period when we forget that the primary reason students are on our campuses is to learn. If we’re spending time, money, or other assets on programs or services that don’t have measurable learning and development outcomes tied to the institutional mission, we’re misusing our resources.

It doesn’t make CTS period when we think and act departmentally rather than universally. We are a part of the whole, not apart from the whole. Our goals and objectives should be derived from the institution’s mission, not vice versa. It’s not enough to perform our functions well; we also need to interact and intersect effectively with the rest of the campus community.
To make CTS period, we need to be sensible and sensitive. We need to be perceptive and reasonable, show good judgment, and make good use of our critical thinking skills. We need to be open to and aware of the needs and expectations of others. In effect, we need to come to our senses if we hope to make sense of our world for ourselves and for our students. Anything less would be senseless.

I have trouble with the term “common sense.” Common sense is all too frequently the mantra of people who are afraid of education or educated people. What we need is uncommon sense; new ways of looking at things. We need to break free of “conventional” wisdom. Unconventional wisdom may provide us with solutions to the age-old problems like prejudice, injustice, and aggression — conditions that haven’t been rectified by conventional means.

Socrates wondered if the unexamined life was worth living. We have a unique opportunity in our profession to model and teach life-examination skills by giving our students the gifts of reflection and critical thinking. Perhaps they’ll be able to create changes and challenge our institutions to make CTS period out of the illogical things we sometimes do.

REFLECTION

1) What are some of the things in your professional experience that just don’t make CTS period?

2) How do you model sensibility and sensitivity in your work? Who are your models in these regards?

3) Does your campus have any “Bermuda Triangles”? What can you do to eliminate them?

Listen very loud to the things that make CTS period to you, your colleagues, and the students you work with.