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# The End of Time: Some Thoughts on the Last Days

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Teaching and Learning Center

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# The Weekly Reader

Teaching and Learning Center, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC

## UpComing Sessions

Webinar:  
Today's Chinese  
Students 12/4

Writing  
Proposals for  
Research  
Council Grants  
1/8

FERPA Training  
1/17

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## The End of Time: Some Thoughts on the Last Days

As hectic and crazy as the next few weeks will be, as I have said before, we are fortunate to have clear beginnings and endings. Most jobs are like an endlessly flowing river, but a university is more like a long canal, with locks and intermittent land excursions. (That simile is not quite right, but I hope the idea is somewhat clear.) With this last issue of *The Weekly Reader* (last for the semester, that is), I want to give some ideas for navigating the end times (to continue the flawed simile).

**Back to the Beginning:** Remember the first day of class, when you passed out the syllabus and went over goals and course requirements? The students no doubt skipped right past the goals and focused on what they would have to do in the course, and when. One of the last days of class is a good time to break out the syllabus again. Go back to those goals the students ignored before: having

them read the goals and reflect on how much (or little) they have achieved can be an important part of the assimilation of learning that needs to happen at the end of courses.

**Getting the Most From Evaluations:** When I was a student, long ago in a land called the 1970s, I treated course evaluations as just another pesky chore to do before the end. It was not until I became a teacher that I realized how important course evaluations are to the instructor and to the institution. I have found that a five minute or so explanation of what happens with course evaluations helps students take those forms more seriously. And when they see that you take course evaluations seriously yourself, they fill them out more mindfully, with more reflection.

**The Rush to Final Papers and Projects:** In my vegetable garden, I so look forward to the first tomato of the year. What a treasure that is! But by the end of the growing season, with the garden in more than a bit of disarray, the last of the tomatoes are nearly forgotten things. What should be the culmination of a whole growing season is more or less abandoned. Student work can suffer the same fate. They will undoubtedly rush, in all of their courses, to just get 'er done, the last big paper, the final big project. And I will be tempted to evaluate them haphazardly, wearied as I am by the paper chase. But the end deserves just as much attention and energy as the beginning or middle, and probably more so, since the end is where the goals are (we hope) achieved. I have

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given my students due dates for their final papers, but I have also told them that, if they need to, they can privately discuss with me an extension. They really appreciate a bit of flexibility, and I must confess I do too. Further, if my students can budget their time and rearrange things so that not everything in all their courses is due on the same day, they will do a better job on their work. And that's the point, isn't it?

**Finally, the Finals:** We are required as part of our academic responsibility to give our undergraduates final exams, during the assigned final exam period, in all our courses (with the exception of some courses, in which a final exam is not appropriate, but for those, we are required to provide some sort of culminating experience, during the final exam period). The final exam is in danger of becoming an afterthought, the last hurdle that our students and we have to jump before we can head home for the holidays. But a final exam should be much more: besides being

the final test of learning in the course, it ought to be the final *opportunity* for learning in the course. A good final exam not only tests learning, but also becomes a tool for learning itself. Good final exam questions, whether objective or essay, should move up Bloom's Taxonomy, dealing with remembering and understanding, of course, but also applying, analyzing, evaluating, and even creating. Rather than a hurdle to be jumped, a real final exam becomes both the finish line and a new starting point. (If you do not use the final exam period to give students final exams, as we say we are required to do, you are robbing your students of a very important learning activity. The halls that bustled all semester are often mighty quiet when I walk into my scheduled Friday afternoon final exam. For some reason...)

**And New Year's Resolutions:** We will start this whole crazy machine all over again early in January. I have a suggested New Year's resolution for ourselves: resolve in the new year to

engage more frequently in faculty and staff development. The TLC will have a new crop of sessions on a variety of topics. Resolutions are easy to make, but easy to break: the West Center will be overflowing in the first few weeks of the new year, but those crowds will dwindle as the year grows. But those who persevere and exercise regularly see very positive results. The same is true of faculty and staff development. You should be able to find at least one TLC session every month that is of interest to you. If you make it a priority to register and attend, and if you commit before meetings and other work waylay your good intentions, you will exercise those teaching muscles too. Another good resource: find a book in Dacus Library on some aspect of teaching or staff training and read it over the course of the semester. We are teachers, but we are learners first. Since the Mayans have warned us that the world will end on December 21, perhaps none of this matters. But just in case that calendar thing is wrong...

## XXITE 2.0 ----- The Virtual Gathering Place for WU (The Reboot!)

Jo Koster and I invite you to join XXITE (Twenty-first Century Teaching Excellence)—or if you have already joined, to check it out again as it grows and develops. Maybe you have not been there in a long time—if not, you will see many changes in look and content. For example, XXITE now has groups dedicated to HMXP and CRTW, with

those of us who teach those courses sharing ideas and materials. Talk to Jo about setting up your own interest group. Jo is particularly interested in recruiting a few people to blog regularly about their teaching.

Jo set up this interactive site to give Winthrop faculty a virtual gathering space to share ideas about teaching and

technology. You'll find blogs and discussion forums on various topics—and we urge you to add your own ideas. Visit again at <http://wuxxite.ning.com/> Or email Jo Koster for an invitation to join: [kosterj@winthrop.edu](mailto:kosterj@winthrop.edu) The TLC website also has links to navigate your way there or to join: <http://www2.winthrop.edu/tlc/>

## A New Service From the TLC: Teaching Consultation

The Teaching and Learning Center is offering a new service: teaching consultation. At the instructor's request, I (or another agreed-upon person) will visit your class to observe and consult with you afterwards about your successes and challenges. This consultation has nothing to do with the tenure and

promotion process, and no reports will be made to department chairs or deans (unless you so request). The invitation to the consultant can only come from the instructor, not from a dean or chair or any other person. All conversations will be private and confidential. If you don't want me to visit your class and observe your teaching, we could

just meet and talk about your teaching. If I am not available to visit your class because of my schedule, I will find a qualified person to do the consulting. So please let me know if you would like to invite me into your class or for a consultation. Call or email me at (803) 323-3679 or [birdj@winthrop.edu](mailto:birdj@winthrop.edu).

FACULTY CLUB MY PAGE DISCUSSION FORUM BLOGS CHAT LINKS GROUPS HMXP CRTW

### Winthrop XXITE: Passionate Teaching

WINTHROP'S INITIATIVE FOR 21ST CENTURY TEACHING EXCELLENCE

A friendly place where Winthrop faculty & friends can share information and experiment with using social networking for teaching & research.

**BLOG POSTS**

- NEW POSTS ON THE RENOVATIONS**  
Posted by [Mark Y. Heizinger](#) on June 22, 2012 at 2:09pm
- CRSE SILVER**  
Posted by [Mark Y. Heizinger](#) on June 5, 2012 at 9:43pm
- PLAYING TO TYPE**  
Posted by [Mark Y. Heizinger](#) on May 25, 2012 at 10:22am
- TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING IN THE CLASSROOM**  
Posted by [Amanda Hines](#) on March 13, 2012 at 12:11pm — 1 CG
- SONE WITH THE WIND...**  
Posted by [Jo Koster](#) on March 6, 2012 at 10:55am — 2 Comments

[Add a Blog Post](#)

**NOTES**

- DO COLLEGE PROFESSORS WORK HARD ENOUGH?**  
Created by [Jo Koster](#) Mar 26, 2012 at 1:34pm. Last updated by [Jo Koster](#)
- WHO OWNS YOUR COURSE?**  
Created by [Jo Koster](#) Mar 19, 2012 at 12:07pm. Last updated by [Jo Koster](#)
- STUDENT OWNERSHIP OF TABLETS INCREASES; PREFERENCE FOR GROWING**  
Created by [Jo Koster](#) Mar 14, 2012 at 11:24am. Last updated by [Jo Koster](#)

**LATEST ACTIVITY**

What are you up to?

[John Bird](#) added a discussion to the group [CRTW](#)

**EPIC 2020**  
This video is causing a lot of buzz in the higher education world, predicting a huge operation shift (already underway) that will see the end of ALL traditional universities by the end of the decade. I think it would be very good for CRTW classes—haven't tried it yet, but will soon. The link has two

Join XXITE 2.0 or  
Register for a TLC  
Session  
At  
[www.winthrop.edu/tlc](http://www.winthrop.edu/tlc)

## Thought for The Week

"Every time you stop a school, you will have to build a jail. What you gain at one end you lose at the other. It's like feeding a dog on his own tail. It won't fatten the dog."  
--Mark Twain