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The Employable Graduate - and Our Role in Making So

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The Employable Graduate—and Our Role in Making Them So

Last week, Dr. Amanda Hiner, my colleague in the English Department, gave an excellent TLC session, "The Employable Graduate." If you missed her session, you can see her PowerPoint and a handout on the TLC Resources page, on the right side under "TLC Sessions":
http://www2.winthrop.edu/tlc/NewDesign/resources_mainpage_old.htm

I want to highlight some of the Amanda's research and suggestions, because what she is presenting is vitally important for us and for our students. Amanda has been conducting research for the past few years on critical thinking and student preparation, an outgrowth of her teaching of CRTW 201 (a great example of how our best research often begins with our teaching). In this presentation, she begins with a recent Rutgers study, which found that only 51% of recent college graduates were employed full time, that 43% of graduates were in jobs that did not require a college degree, and that

their median student loan debt was $20,000. These figures are no doubt closely tied to the economic downturn, but I suspect that the situation will not improve in the near future. These are indeed sobering statistics; I know I feel happiness for our students as I watch them walk across the stage at commencement, but I also feel sympathy for the tough future they are walking into.

Amanda's presentation then focuses on what employers say they want from the graduates they hire, as well as what they find in recent graduates. Her research shows that employers find a skills gap in these students: even though job vacancies rose 35% in the past few years, unemployment remains high, with one third of employers saying they think recent graduates lack the skills needed to succeed on the job. A 2012 survey of employers in North Carolina cites a gap in "soft skills": communication, analytical problem solving, critical

thinking, writing, leadership, interpersonal relations, personal ethics, teamwork, and following directions. Specifically, these are the top skills they see recent graduates lacking: communication/interpersonal skills, 59.8%; critical and analytical thinking, 46.8%; problem solving, 45.4%; and leadership, 34.4%.

A 2010 survey had similar findings, with 89% of employers saying students need to communicate effectively both orally and in writing; 81% saying critical thinking and analytical reasoning are key skills for success; and 75% saying the ability to analyze and solve complex problems is necessary for success.

Amanda has much more in her presentation, and I urge you to read it and think about it, especially as it relates to the students you encounter in your teaching and in other settings. Amanda offers

"*If all I do in my classes is present students information from the textbook and from the field on endless PowerPoints, if all I do is test them on facts and figures that they temporarily memorize, then discard, if all I do is spout knowledge and expect my students to lap it up, then I am failing my students, and failing them grossly. They will still graduate, but will they be employable?*"

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some excellent teaching strategies, including emphasizing academic rigor, engaged learning, critical thinking, writing, and collaborative learning, among other strategies. Her research and presentation certainly give all of us at Winthrop a great deal to think about.

My reaction, after my initial dismay at some of the findings, is actually quite positive, at least as it relates to what we have done with our curriculum, especially general education. The Touchstone Program and the Touchstone Core are not perfect, but they are a good start at addressing what Amanda calls "soft skills." The Touchstone Core by itself theoretically addresses many of the problems cited above: WRIT 101 emphasizes academic writing and argument; HMXP 102 emphasizes collaborative learning, engaged learning, critical reading and writing, and personal ethics; CRTW 201 emphasizes critical thinking and analytical problem solving, as well as rigorous academic reading and writing. Winthrop is the only

college or university in South Carolina that has such a required core for all of its students; thus, we can be more assured than many of our peers that we are providing our students the key skills they need as they move into today's workplace. We have a solid program in place— although we must continue to work on its implementation, work that those who teach these three courses are constantly engaged in.

But the preparation of our students cannot be confined just to the Touchstone Core. To make sure our students are fully prepared in these vital skills, we must infuse such deeper learning in all of our courses, from the general education Touchstone Program to upper division courses in majors. In all of our courses, we must move beyond presentation of facts and content to deeper, more engaged learning. If all I do in my classes is present students information from the textbook and from the field on endless PowerPoints, if all I do is test them on facts and figures that they temporarily memorize, then discard, if all I do is spout knowledge and

expect my students to lap it up, then I am failing my students, and failing them grossly. They will still graduate, but will they be employable?

Many thanks to Amanda Hiner for her eye-opening research. I hope her work can reinvigorate a campus conversation about teaching and learning for this new century.

TLC Resources Page

Check out the new TLC Resources page. You will find videos, PowerPoints, and handouts from recent TLC sessions, as well as teaching and technology resources. Thanks to Dana Bruneau for this ongoing effort!
http://www2.winthrop.edu/tlc/NewDesign/resources_mainpage_old.htm

Go2Knowledge Group

Join us for a group discussion of the Go2Knowldege presentation "Creating an Active Learning Environment." Tuesday, January 29 at 11:00 am. Register at the TLC site, watch the video, then join us for the discussion.

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 The TLC website also has links to navigate your way there or to join: http://www2.winthrop.edu/tlc/

Join XXITE 2.0 or Register for a TLC Session
At
www.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.

Go2Knowledge—Learning On Demand!

Go2Knowledge is a website that offers a variety of video presentations on faculty and staff professional development. You will find presentations by nationally-known experts in seven categories: At-Risk Populations, Campus Safety, Organizational Development, Student Success, Teaching and Learning, Technology, and Open Educational Resources. Within each category, you will find a number of excellent and informative videos. The Office of Academic Affairs has provided us a one-year subscription to this service.

People often tell the TLC that they would like to go to sessions, but they don't have the time or they can't at the times sessions are offered. With Go2Knowledge, you can attend sessions on demand, anywhere, 24/7. The TLC will also have frequent Go2Knowledge Groups, where we meet to discuss a presentation. Log in here: http://www.go2knowledge.org/winthrop See you there!

Thought for The Week

"The time to begin writing an article is when you have finished it to your satisfaction. By that time you begin to clearly and logically perceive what it is that you really want to say."
--Mark Twain