



10-20-2014

It Can Happen Here - and We All Have a Responsibility to Make Sure It Does Not

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Recommended Citation

Bird, John and Teaching and Learning Center, "It Can Happen Here - and We All Have a Responsibility to Make Sure It Does Not" (2014). *The Weekly Reader*. 60.

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October 20, 2014
Volume 6, Issue 8

The Weekly Reader

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

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Winthrop University

It *Can* Happen Here—and We All Have a Responsibility to Make Sure It Does Not

I had intended to write about what makes for excellent teaching this week, but I read the news today. Oh boy!

I have been a lifelong fan of the University of North Carolina sports teams, especially Tar Heel basketball. Dean Smith is one of my idols, for his great coaching, of course, but also for his excellence in teaching. I have adapted some of his teaching practices to my own teaching, such as using inspirational and thought-provoking quotations and pointing to people who assist you in something you have done well on.

But today's news gives a very serious black eye to a great state university and a storied athletic department. The scandal of sham classes for athletes was already known, but the report that came out yesterday deepens the shame.

Collusion between the Department of African and Afro-American Studies and the Academic Support

Program for Student-Athletes steered students, most of them athletes, into what the report calls "paper classes": bogus courses that did not require any attendance or interaction with a professor. The only course requirement was a 20-page paper, which was not graded by the professor of record for the course, the former (thank goodness!) chair of the department. Instead, the program manager who set up the fake courses "graded" the papers—meaning that she read the introductions and conclusions, then gave the papers high grades, usually A's. According to the report, more than half the papers contained plagiarism of a quarter of the material. Many students merely cut and pasted off the internet, turned in their papers, then received an A for a semester course.

The manager who oversaw this egregious breach of academic integrity says that she had a hard time in school and

she wanted to help struggling students, especially athletes. The scandal has also ensnared the former chair of the faculty, a woman who has written books on ethics—but who has been caught aiding women basketball players by suggesting what grades students could be given to remain eligible.

The blame is widespread, and so are the bad effects. The entire university has its name sullied, as does the athletic department, the football and basketball programs, and student support services, among others. Imagine being a faculty member in the African and Afro-American Studies Department. You have held real classes with high standards and stringent course requirements—but who would believe that now? Imagine being a student-athlete at Chapel Hill. You worked hard for your grades and your degree, earning the university millions of dollars, in the case of football and basketball. You are now a

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suspect too.

The ABC crowd (“Anybody But Carolina”) is laughing and crowing. They are already calling UNC “The University of No Classes.” The nation’s first public state university has to sit silently and take the criticism.

We at Winthrop could be smug and say, “It can’t happen here.” We don’t have a football program—yet. (I must say, even though I am a football fan, I hope we never do, especially if we were to go the non-scholarship route that was being pushed last year. Go watch Campbell or Davidson play football, if you can stomach it. Better yet, just watch some flag football.) (Mini-rant over.)

But it *can* happen here, just as it can happen anywhere, just as it is already happening at many schools, although perhaps not to the sickening extent it happened at UNC.

I keep coming back to the rationale the manager used, that she wanted to help struggling students. Think of the harm she did with that misguided purpose.

• We give students no help when we offer them credit for doing little or no work. I

am sure you remember being a student. Word passed around about a “crip course”—a class you could take and do little or no work for a high grade. Many students flocked to them. They got their easy A and their course credit, and the professor did little or no work—and got paid. (Probably promoted too.)

But I bet you also remember the contempt those students had for those courses and those professors. They took their unearned grades, but they mocked and belittled the professors who colluded on the scam.

We all should want to help students as much as we can, especially struggling students. But that help must come only after we set high standards and hold students—and ourselves—to those standards. Every time we lower our standards, for whatever reason, we lower ourselves, our students, our disciplines, and our university.

Student-athletes at Winthrop that I have taught have been among the best and most hardworking students I have encountered. I hate that the misguided actions of a few unscrupulous people at another university I love might bring scrutiny and

suspicion to our students here and elsewhere.

I was a member of the last taskforce on academic integrity at Winthrop, a number of years ago. What we found then about student (and faculty) attitudes about cheating was dismaying. Those attitudes are widespread, nationwide. Academic Council is currently examining the issue again. We must all pay attention as the conversation continues. Academic integrity, as the Chapel Hill scandal reminds us, is not just a student imperative. And as that scandal shows us once again, if just one or two people on a campus violate academic integrity, especially if they are faculty or administration, we all get brought down.

It *can* happen here. It is up to each of us to make sure it does not.

A link to the Charlotte *Observer* story on the scandal:

<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2014/10/22/5260492/fake-class-scheme-aided-unc-players.html#.VEhjkedYDvd>

Thanks For Helping Make the Teaching and Learning Center Work!

Winthrop's Teaching and Learning Center offers a wide variety of sessions each year for faculty and staff, on teaching, technology, professional development, and personal development. From leading class discussion to mastering the Smart podium to tenure and promotion to cooking soufflés, the TLC tries to make sure that all faculty and staff receive

the kinds of professional and personal development that will make them better teachers, administrators, and employees.

To offer this programming, the TLC depends on the talent, expertise, and generosity of our faculty and staff. We do not have a big budget to bring in outside speakers and experts. Even so, we are able to offer engaging,

timely, and valuable sessions every year on a variety of topics. We thank those who have offered their time and talent in past years.

We also thank those of you who have attended TLC sessions. Your time is valuable, and we appreciate you taking some of it to enrich yourself through professional and personal development.

A Service From the TLC: Teaching Consultation

The TLC for several years has been offering a 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 (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!

Register for a TLC Session
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The 2nd Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning

The call for papers and presentations for our Second Conference on Teaching and Learning, Saturday, January 31, 2015 is posted on the TLC webpage. Deadline for proposals is December 1, 2014. Come join us for a great day of teaching and learning!

Thought For the Week

"I think we never become really and genuinely our entire and honest selves until we are dead--and not then until we have been dead years and years. People ought to start dead, and they would be honest so much earlier."
--Mark Twain