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Guest Column: Why I Educate, by David Schary

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Winthrop University

Guest Column: Why I Educate, by David Schary

Editor's Note: This week, for the first time ever, we have a guest column in The Weekly Reader. I welcome a first-year faculty member to our campus and to this publication. David Schary is an Assistant Professor in Exercise Science. He joined the Winthrop faculty this fall, having completed his graduate work at Oregon State University. Prior to finding his calling in higher education, David coached rowing at the high school, collegiate, and recreational levels. And now, without further ado, take it, David!

As an instructor, it is my job to educate. But I have never actually stopped to consider what that means or how it impacts my teaching philosophy. Merriam-Webster defines educate as "to give (someone) information about something."

This definition, while simple and straightforward, lacks a key component: motivation. It failed to tell me why I should educate. The dictionary ultimately

left me with far more questions than answers.

The responsibility to educate is no small task. In fact, it takes up the majority of my day, as I am sure it does yours. Planning, teaching, grading, advising...repeat. Yet, it's why we chose this profession, right? It had nothing to do with summers off. It is why we chose an institution like Winthrop instead of a larger, more research-focused university, right?

These are the questions that have swirled around my head since joining the faculty. I chose this profession because I want to be a part of a system that creates and imparts knowledge. I chose Winthrop because I wanted to be a part of a liberal arts institution that values the student's educational experience over the all-mighty research dollar. But this brings me back to my dilemma: why do I educate?

In order to answer this

question, I had to think about experience. While I am a junior faculty member, I am by no means a novice in the classroom. Before teaching in graduate school, I had a short career in coaching. But even before that, I was a student, a very experienced student.

Like anyone else who chooses academia, I spent an inordinate amount of time on my education (22 years of schooling racking up five degrees). Yet, until recently, I never questioned what educating was all about. What it really meant to me.

This realization rocked me to the core. I chose a knowledge-based career, at a student-centered institution, without a clear idea of what the heck education is all about. But before my Dean becomes too nervous (ironically, I am in the College of Education), I have begun to answer my question.

I educate to change the

“When we step foot in the classroom, we are not just going through another lesson. We are sharing part of our electrified, fused-together, storm of knowledge in hopes a spark lands in our students’ minds, adding a new idea to their own growing education.”

--David Schary



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world.

I know some of you just rolled their eyes, others laughed out loud, and some stopped reading altogether. But I am serious; to educate is to change the world. I am truly convinced, and hopefully I can convince you too.

On average, I teach about 35 students per day. That means every day I have the opportunity to help 35 people learn something that they didn't know when they woke up that morning. That's amazing! Each day, I get to help inspire ideas in 35 people, ideas that help them navigate their way from the classroom to the workplace. Hopefully, these ideas gained from each class, during each semester, will build on each other and fuse together year after year, creating an electrified storm of ideas ready to burst.

However, the education students leave Winthrop with is only a foundation. If pieced together correctly, this education develops a life of its own, creating an insatiable creature that will continue to desire new knowledge and produce better ideas. Ideas that could (and I believe will) change the world.

Just think about it. The winners of the Nobel prizes all had teachers. They all had someone who inspired them, fed their minds with new ideas, motivating them to want more. I will even guess that you had that inspirational someone. That someone who helped fuse together your ideas that eventually became your insatiable desire for learning. (And, as Dr. Bird reminded us, very few of those inspirational people were college professors – see *The Weekly Reader*, September 16, 2014).

When we step foot in the classroom, we are not just going through another lesson. We are sharing part of our electrified, fused-together, storm of knowledge in hopes a spark lands in our students' minds, adding a new idea to their own growing education.

Some may feel that I'm hopelessly idealistic or overly optimistic. Others tell me that this idea will fade over time, with the endless pounding of the academic-bureaucratic machine. While I can't tell the future, I hope this is not true. There is too much at stake.

I want to change the world. I make no apologies for it; it's my mission. A mission I hope

we can all embrace.

Editor's End Note: I for one did not roll my eyes when I read David's column. Idealistic? Yes. But many of us share that idealism. In the words of John Lennon, "You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one." David is in the beginning of his teaching career, and I am getting very near the end (to quote the Beatles again), but I have not lost that dream and that ideal. The day I do is the day I should hang it up. And I am not planning on that any time soon!

David's offer to write an occasional guest column sparks me to ask if others would like to do so also. If you want to write a column, email me about length, topic, and so on, and we will proceed from there...



A Reminder!

The deadline to submit a proposal for the Second Annual Winthrop Conference is less than a month away! Get your proposal in by December 1, 2014. Here is the link: <http://www.winthrop.edu/tl>
[c/](http://www.winthrop.edu/tl)

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.

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People often tell the TLC that they would like to go to sessions, but they don't have the time or they can't

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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!

<http://www.winthrop.edu/tlc/>

Thought For the Week

"If we would learn what the human race really is at bottom, we need only observe it in election times."
--Mark Twain