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Everyday I Have the Blues: Teaching and Learning Online, Teaching and Learning Live

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Every Day I Have the Blues: Teaching and Learning Online, Teaching and Learning Live

I picked up a guitar when I was 17, an acoustic guitar. My brother and some of my friends played, so I was able to learn from them, and as I learned a bit, they learned from me. My mother paid for guitar lessons with a man in our neighborhood, but I stopped after about six lessons. He was trying to teach me how to play like Barney Kessel, but I wanted to play like Neil Young, so I ended my formal lessons. (I'd like to go back in time and slap that 17-year-old idiot, but so it goes.)

Even in those electric times, I was devoutly an acoustic player, folk and country and bluegrass and the songs I was writing. Rather than turn to the dark side of the electric guitar, I went further into the acoustic world and started playing the mandolin.

But about 15 years ago, probably a mid-life crisis moment, I bought a cheap Strat copy and a Pignose amp. I enjoyed banging away, making a lot more noise than I could on my

Guild D-50 or my Kentucky mandolin. But that moment passed.

On my birthday four or five years ago, I walked into a local music store to buy a set of mandolin strings. I saw a red American Fender Telecaster on a rack. Even though I knew my wife would faint when I got home, I bought that sweet Tele. Happy birthday to me! (It helps that my wife has a habit of walking into the jewelry store to get a watch battery and walking out with a diamond ring. We all have our precious, I suppose.)

And then a couple of years ago, I got the urge to add a real Stratocaster to the arsenal, and now I play that cream Mexican Strat almost every day. The mandolin and the acoustic guitar are not abandoned, but my attention has turned to the electric guitar as I round the corner on 60. These days, I am playing the blues.

I bought a few books and

learned a few licks, but I never really clicked with anything I found. Then I started looking online at YouTube videos. The wealth and quality of online musical instruction is quite incredible. I think back to my days of learning to play the guitar in the early 70s and how hard it was to get good instruction. These days, you can find a great teacher at the click of a button.

The teacher I settled on is Griff Hamlin. After clicking with him through his YouTube videos, I bought his instructional series, Blues Guitar Unleashed. Griff really puts it all together, and I have already learned so much from him. Even though he is not my physical face-to-face teacher, he is indeed my teacher. And because of the videos and the books, I can have him as my teacher anytime I want, and I can make him repeat each lesson over and over until I get it. Thanks to Griff and his online teaching, I am finally getting the blues.

“So college will surely change, and we must change too, but I think there will always be a place for the teacher in the classroom, with students, watching for puzzled looks and blank stares, reacting to incisive questions, seeing light bulbs of illumination switch on. It certainly is going to be interesting to watch the change that is gonna come, but also to see that which endures.”



Continued from page 1

And now back to teaching and learning: I read a couple of days ago about a new book by education researcher Kevin Carey, *The End of College: Creating the Future of Learning and the University of Everywhere*. As many others have argued, higher education is in the midst of a huge paradigm shift. Online learning and MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), among other innovations, is changing the face of education and challenging the traditional concept of the university.

I don't know if these changes will bring what that book title suggests, the end of college, but I do know that what we have always known as “college” will change, is already changing. All colleges will have to adapt to that change—all three of our presidential finalists talked about the ways we at Winthrop will need to increase our online learning. So change is gonna come, to quote Sam Cooke.

My experience learning to play the blues shows me emphatically how successful online learning can be with a good teacher, with a clear plan, and with quality presentation. I have seen the online successes that some colleagues have

achieved here at Winthrop. Even in English, a literature course can successfully be taught online; my department chair, Gregg Hecimovich, teaches the British literature survey online with excellent results and with an impressive presentation. If you can take from Beowulf to Virginia Woolf online, I suppose you can take anything. My own success with making my literature courses and the critical thinking course somewhat hybrid gives me hope that even a decidedly old dog can learn this new trick.

But as much as I have learned online (not just blues guitar, but mandolin, piano, cooking, gardening, birding, and fly fishing, to mention only some of my hobbies and interests), I still hold out hope for that human interaction, that face-to-face time with my teachers.

My real progress playing music has come through playing with others. Nothing can replace the interplay of musicians making music, in the moment, in the same space, listening and watching and interacting and learning and teaching. I picked up the mandolin my freshman year in college, but I didn't really begin to learn how to play it until I was in a bluegrass

band, and until that band, The Dawker Mountain Valley Boys, got a steady job at Carowinds in its early years. Those six 20-minute sets a day, six days a week, intensified and turbo-thrusted my learning.

So college will surely change, and we must change too, but I think there will always be a place for the teacher in the classroom, with students, watching for puzzled looks and blank stares, reacting to incisive questions, seeing light bulbs of illumination switch on. It certainly is going to be interesting to watch the change that is gonna come, but also to see that which endures.

Every day I have the blues, to quote the King (B.B.), but the blues are both sad and joyful. You can see that joy in the way B.B. King plays and sings, you can feel and see the pain. In addition to being a great blues musician, he is a great teacher—whether you see him live or online. But there will always be a place for live!



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!

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The 2nd Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning

Many thanks to the presenters and attendees at our 2nd Annual Conference on Teaching and Learning, Saturday, January 31, 2015. It was a great day! Make plans to join us next year. Special thanks to TLC program coordinator Dana Bruneau for making the conference run so smoothly!

Thought For the Week

"I'm gonna pack my suitcase, move on down the line.
Yes I'm gonna pack my suitcase, move on down the line.
Where there ain't nobody worried,
And there ain't nobody crying."
--B.B. King