



10-5-2015

Got the Working Man Blues: Different Jobs, Same Jobs, All Over Campus

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Recommended Citation

Bird, John and Teaching and Learning Center, "Got the Working Man Blues: Different Jobs, Same Jobs, All Over Campus" (2015). *The Weekly Reader*. 79.

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October 5, 2015
Volume 7, Issue 7

The Weekly Reader

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

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Got the Working Man Blues: Different Jobs, Same Jobs, All Over Campus

As I walk around campus and visit various offices and venues, I think about the different jobs people do here. Those of us in the faculty may seem separated somewhat from the staff, given our jobs. Professors in their ivory towers and all that. But then I think about the jobs I have had, jobs other than the one I have now. Will you indulge me as I run through my job history?

My first real paying job was at Burger King, when I was 16. A few years later, I worked at Chick-fil-A at Southpark, when it was the only fast food restaurant at the mall, and before they had free-standing stores. The work was not glamorous, although I once sold a Chick-fil-A sandwich to Jim and Tammy Bakker. (This was before the Tammy t-shirts with makeup smeared all over them, saying "Guess who I ran into at the mall?") Since I was working mostly with people my own age, it was fun much of the time, although I quickly learned that

dealing with people and food tends to bring out the best and worst in our fellow humans.

When I go to Thomson Cafeteria or to Popeye's in Digs and get my food from the worker, I almost always remember that I once stood on the other side of the counter. I know. I have been there.

The summer before I went to college, and then for about a year after I dropped out of college my freshman year, I worked at a place in Charlotte called Southeastern Magnesia and Asbestos. Happily, I did not deal with asbestos very much in that small shop, but I did learn what life was like on a small assembly line. Every day, all day, I ran a machine my boss had rigged that took pink fiberglass rolls and backed them with grey plastic or aluminum scrim, running whatever covering I loaded through the white glue that I mixed, to make heating and cooling insulation rolls. I can still hear the sound of "Fred,"

as I named him, I can still hear all the songs that played on the radio that summer, I still remember the sharp sting of fiberglass slivers in my arms and hands.

When I see somebody on campus getting his or her hands dirty, performing endlessly what seems like a mindless task, I know. I have been there. I also know how such work can free your mind. Not so mindless, it turns out.

At two different times in my youth, I was a custodian in an office building. Every night and on weekends, going through the empty offices, emptying garbage, dusting desks, vacuuming, cleaning bathrooms and toilets. An invisible force, unseen and unheard, perhaps forgotten or ignored. But I do not ignore these great workers when I come into my clean office in the morning. I know. I have been there.

One summer, I drove a bus that picked up people with disabilities and drove them to work or to school

“So to the staff, when you see one of us strange creatures, those nutty professors, walking across campus, books in hand, head stuck in some cloud, don’t assume that we are just thinking about theorem s and spreadsheets and experiments and philosophy. We may just be thinking about your job, which is our job, seemingly different, but all doing the same thing.”



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in Charlotte. I drove all over town, picking up Jinks and Don and taking them to the Nevins Center, where they were happy to have a menial job; getting out of the bus to help Henry, blind from birth; lowering the ramp and letting Martha on board in her wheelchair.

Another summer between college classes (I eventually dropped back in!), I painted houses, scaling 40-foot ladders to scrape peeling paint and apply new coats, or standing with my angled brush and painting trim, which to my surprise I was very good at. I know the smell of paint intimately, the feel of paint on my hands and arms, the joy of scrubbing off at the end of a long day. When I see someone painting on campus, I usually pause and watch awhile. Few jobs give as much satisfaction as putting a fresh coat of paint on and old surface. I know. I have been there.

Another summer, I cut the grass at a huge chemical plant outside Greensboro. I rode my big tractor all over the massive grounds, yellow hard hat on my head, steel-toed boots on my feet. The plant was so big that as soon as I finished cutting the grass, it was time to start over again. I was walking to my

office yesterday and paused to let the woman cutting the grass between Bancroft and Kinard pass. She could not know how clearly I knew what she was doing, what she was feeling: the vibrations of the machine under you, the patterns you get to make, the bumps and jolts of uneven ground. I know. I have been there.

I was a telemarketer once—for three days. I made my calls and read my spiel. I have forgotten, or repressed, what I was trying to sell. Most people just hung up, many cursed me, a few bought what I was selling. I most remember the older woman who started crying and said it was just so good to talk to someone, and thanked me for calling her. I broke the rules and talked to her for about 15 minutes. Then I quit.

While I was in graduate school, I worked in the library, checking books in and out, working the card catalog (a real wooden one, with drawers and paper cards!), re-shelving books. I sure learned the intricacies of the Library of Congress system. When I see student workers on campus, I know what they are doing and how they feel. I have been there.

I taught high school for two years before I went

back to graduate school, and I taught seventh grade one year while I was writing my dissertation. In many ways, those three years of teaching at the secondary level were the most rewarding teaching I have ever done. I am glad I made the decision to move to college teaching, but I would not trade those three years for anything, and I know I am a better teacher because of them.

In fact, I am sure I am a better teacher because of *all* the jobs I have worked, no matter how far they seem from being a professor.

I write about my experience because it is what I know, what I have lived, but I know I am not alone among the faculty. We do know what many of the other jobs on campus entail. We know. We have been there.

So to the staff, when you see one of us strange creatures, those nutty professors, walking across campus, books in hand, head stuck in some cloud, don’t assume that we are just thinking about theorem s and spreadsheets and experiments and philosophy. We may just be thinking about your job, which is our job, seemingly different, but all doing the same thing.

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.

If you have a request for a session you would like to see, please email me and I will try to arrange it. And if you have a session you would like to present, please email me. We will set something up as soon as we can!

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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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 3rd Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning

Save the date! Saturday, February 6, 2016 we will have our 3rd Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning. The call for papers and sessions is now up on the TLC website: <http://www.winthrop.edu/tlc/>
The deadline for submissions is November 16, 2015.

Thought For the Week

"Work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do. Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do."
--Mark Twain