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Lifelong Learning—It's Not For Just the Old Folks Anymore!

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Lifelong Learning—It's Not For Just the Old Folks Anymore!

I know that a number of Winthrop faculty members have given presentations to the Lifelong Learning Group at Sun City. I have talked to them about Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Last month, I talked about controversies surrounding *Huck Finn* to a similar group run by Queens University in Charlotte. What a pleasure it is to talk about something we are very interested in to a group of over 100 seniors, who are there because they are eager to learn!

The Queens audience was 180, I think the leader announced. About 40 of them stayed for an optional extra 30 minutes to ask questions, very good, insightful questions. I left after my hour and a half with them exhausted, but exhilarated. I have that feeling sometimes after a really good college class, but I have felt that way every time I have talked to a group of lifelong learners.

Lifelong learners. I really

like that name! I am not that many years away from retirement, so perhaps I will join a group of lifelong learners before too long.

Then again, I am already a lifelong learner. Aren't we all?

I have spent more than 30 years, over half my life, learning about Mark Twain. I have focused on more writers and subjects than Twain and his works, of course, but my central focus has been on him. I wrote my M.A. thesis on his very bawdy short piece, *1601* (Google it if you are curious, but be warned that it contains all the dirty words George Carlin talked about). I wrote my dissertation about his narrative use of first person. I have published articles and a book about his works, and I am working now on a book about his life in the year 1884. I am currently president of the Mark Twain Circle of America, which I think is the largest American single-author group.

Yes, I pretty much eat, sleep, and breathe Mark Twain. I have learned a lot about him, his life, his works, and his times. Yet I have so much left to learn. He is my scholarly focus, but I will always be a lifelong learner about him.

Mark Twain was himself a lifelong learner. He had to quit school soon after his father died when young Sam was only eleven. But he was a voracious reader, and he educated himself on a vast array of

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topics, especially history, but also biology, astronomy, geology, and archaeology, among many others. He never lost his curiosity about the world and about human nature. The range of his intellect astonishes and humbles me.

What an amazing place a college campus is, when you think about all the lifelong learners that make it up. Each person on the faculty has a laser focus on a topic, and each of us is an expert in that field. The next time you are in Faculty Conference or another large gathering, consider the collective knowledge gathered in that room. Even though we might not understand each other when we get into the details of our esoteric topics, it would be very impressive.

Even though they might not think about it or realize it, our students are lifelong learners too. I have never really thought about that, since I associate the phrase with seniors. But why should a person wait that long to have that kind of intellectual fun?

If our students could graduate from Winthrop with the idea that their education is not ending, but only just beginning, they would be squarely launched on that path of

lifelong learning. And they would not have to wait until they were their grandparents' age to think and act that way.

Do you remember how excited you were about learning when you were five or six? I remember being so excited about learning how to write each new letter. I would print a “B” or an “N” over and over, looking at their shapes, wondering how to put them together to make words. That same excitement can still come back for me, often when I do not expect it. What a great feeling to have, a lifetime long.

The great thing is that now I feel that same excitement when other people feel the excitement of learning. As teachers, we get the best of both worlds. We get the excitement of learning, and we get the excitement of watching other people get excited about learning. What could be better?



Less than two weeks remain before the deadline for proposals for the 3rd Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning. The conference will be held on campus Saturday, February 6, 2016, from

9:00 am to 5:30 pm. We will have interesting and engaging sessions all day, with a sit-down luncheon and a keynote address by Dr. Dan Mahony. Attendance and participation has grown each year, from 80+ the first year to around 120 last year. We expect even more growth this year as the conference gets more established and as we reach out to a wider audience of area colleges and universities.

Last year's sessions covered a variety of topics, including new technologies, flipped classrooms, critical thinking, global learning, study abroad, academic publishing, undergraduate research, and innovative pedagogical strategies, among many others.

As I said, the deadline for proposals is November 16, just under two weeks away. We urge you to submit your ideas for what we know will be an interesting and stimulating conference. You will find the submission form at the TLC website:

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



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.

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
At
www.winthrop.edu/tlc

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

"Learning softeneth the heart and breedeth gentleness and charity."
--Mark Twain, *The Prince and the Pauper*