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Shelley Hamill

Winthrop University, hamills@winthrop.edu

Teaching and Learning Center

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Dr. John Bird
Professor,
Department of
English
Bancroft Hall 260
(803) 323-3679

Director, Teaching &
Learning Center
Dinkins Hall 233
(803) 323-2447

EMAIL:
birdj@winthrop.edu

Winthrop University

Guest Column: College Students and Stress: What Can We Do to Help?

--By Shelley Hamill, PESH

Editor's note: this guest column from Shelley Hamill is very timely and very important. Certainly some thoughts to keep in mind as we head into the hardest part of the semester for our students, and for us.

College Students and
Stress: What can we do
to help?

It's getting to be that time of year. Have you noticed? It's not just the late flu or allergies kicking in. It's not even "spring fever." It's that little nagging voice inside the students' heads reminding them about all of the work they have to do before the end of the semester. And exams? Seriously?

You know they believe that we get together at the start of each semester as a faculty and plan out assignments so that they all coincide at the same time and culminate with humongous projects just to make their lives miserable. In fact, I actually tell them we do. And, of course, we certainly don't remind

them about those assignments throughout the course or even give them very good directions in the syllabus, right?

The point is, you can do a quick Google search and find countless articles on college students and stress, the many consequences of their stress, and what they need to do about it.

Winthrop's campus has seen an uptick in the last two years of students experiencing anxiety issues, particularly towards the end of the semester. In fact, anxiety has surpassed depression, which appears to be a national trend.

After reading student responses to a recent assignment on stress, I was stunned at what some of them are dealing with on a daily basis. And while not every student is overwhelmed, even a brief conversation in one of my classes with both grad and undergrad students brought forth numerous concerns about anxiety

overload.

My perspective this time of year is: What can I do to help? As teachers, though we want to hold them accountable, we also want to scaffold them as needed to reach their destination. Though we all have our own pedagogical expertise, I offer a few things for consideration as we move with our students in to this time of year:

- Email reminders: yes I know you told and told them, but did they really listen? Once a week or so, hit that class listserve and ping them with a friendly, "Don't forget."
- Checking in: when you open the class, check to see how they are doing with the upcoming assignments. Any questions, concerns, or observations?
- What are your versions of a study guide as exams are approaching? Here's the thing: some of us

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- give very detailed guides, while some of us don't actually believe in them. However, if we can give them a pretty good “ballpark” or underscore in some way where they really should be spending their time studying, it gives them a focus.
- Perhaps consider doing a review session before finals...a “semester in review.”
- Do you provide any extra credit options? Sometimes students find they could really use a little help with doing something for extra points.
- Are you still following your syllabus? One student told me that out of six classes, only two professors were actually doing what they said on their syllabus!
- And speaking of assignments, don't be tempted to add another big assignment towards the end of the semester. Talk about adding stress!
- Some teachers will do a mid-semester check in to see “what's

working and what isn't.” Students appreciate that, and it gives both of you the chance to adjust as needed.

- Students also note that if you can break up big assignments into parts for evaluation, and perhaps to discuss them more frequently, it really does help.

- Lastly, is it possible to build in some flexibility? Life happens to all of us and without a little wiggle room; sometimes even small things can become insurmountable.

Of course, these are just some of the possibilities. I am sure each of us has our own way of helping our students navigate through these stressful times. Finding the balance between pushing too hard and enabling can sometimes be a little tricky, but I would rather err on the side of helping rather than hindering.

Every student is different and has a different way of dealing and coping with stress. Sometimes, a little stress can push them to succeed. But when they are overwhelmed, they may not reach a

successful outcome.

Being present with them, being mindful of the possible struggles, and being willing to assist where you can without affecting the integrity of the discipline can go a long way. And remember, keep breathing...just keep breathing.

--Shelley Hamill,
PESH



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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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 3rd Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning

Many thanks to everyone who attended and presented at our conference on Saturday, February 6. We had 102 attendees, who heard excellent presentations and an inspiring keynote speech by Dr. Dan Mahony. Special thanks to Dana Bruneau for her work in organizing the conference.

Thought For the Week

"April 1: This is the day upon which we are reminded of what we are on the other three hundred and sixty-four."
--Mark Twain