Here We Go Again—and Again, and Again, and Again: Thoughts on Starting Yet Another Semester

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Here we go again!
I was thinking about writing a column on starting over, but I got that déjà vu feeling—I have written that column before. What more could I possibly say?

I realized the other day that I first stepped into a classroom as a teacher 40 years ago this month. Jimmy Carter was about to be inaugurated as president. I was in my last semester of college, starting my student teaching at East Mecklenburg High School in Charlotte. I was 22 years old, barely older than my students, and I had almost no idea what I was getting into.

Forty years! How many times have I said, “Here we go again?” Since I taught summer school for seven years and since my previous college had three terms, the number is well over 80. No wonder I feel so tired!

As I have written before, one of the benefits of working as a teacher is that we have clear beginnings and endings. Many jobs do not give you those fresh starts, the chance to start all over.

But this is over and over and over! It never stops!

My first full-time teaching job was at Mooresville High School in Mooresville, NC. Mooresville then was not the upscale bedroom community to Charlotte that it is now; it was a sleepy mill town, seemingly a million miles from “the big city.”

That first year, 1977-1978, Jackson Browne released his live album, *Running On Empty*. The second to last song, “The Load-out,” is one of the best songs ever written about life on the road for a touring musician. It starts out with just Jackson on piano and the great sideman David Lindley on lap steel, wistfully describing the aftermath of a show:

> Now the seats are all empty<br>Let the roadies take the stage<br>Pack it up and tear it down<br>They’re the first to come and last to leave<br>Working for that minimum wage<br>They’ll set it up in another town.

He continues, thinking about how the show had been:

> Tonight the people were so fine<br>They waited there in line<br>And when they got up on their feet they made the show<br>And that was sweet, But I can hear the sound of slamming doors and folding chairs And that’s a sound they’ll never know.

He thinks about what lies ahead:

> But the band’s on the bus<br>And they’re waiting to go<br>We’ve got to drive all night and do a show in Chicago or Detroit, I don’t know We do so many shows in a row And these towns all look the same.

That is the feeling I have
“And that is what happens when I walk into my class, again. It happened last week. It was magic. Again. All over again. Again and again!”

**Bring on the new semester! And won’t you stay, just a little bit longer? Here we go again, and ain’t it great?**

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...as I start all over again. And again. And again. But the emptiness gives way to another feeling:

We just pass the time in our hotel rooms
And wander 'round backstage
Till those lights come up
And we hear that crowd
And we remember why we came.

The song, of course, becomes a rousing anthem about the joy of performing, for both the artist and the audience. And then it morphs into “Stay,” a cover of the beach music song by Maurice Williams and the Zodiacs. What had been weary resignation is magically transformed into joy and wonder. That ending is a call to the audience to join in:

People you've got the power over what we do
You can sit there and wait
Or you can pull us through
Come along, sing the song
You know you can’t go wrong.

'Cause when that morning sun comes beating down
You're going to wake up in your town
But we'll be scheduled to appear
A thousand miles away from here
And that is what happens when I walk into my class, again. It happened last week. It was magic. Again. All over again. Again and again!

Bring on the new semester! And won’t you stay, just a little bit longer? Here we go again, and ain’t it great?

Here is a link to a YouTube video of Jackson Browne performing his song at the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles, August 15, 2015. How many times has he sung this song in the past 40 years? But he still finds joy, despite doing it over and over again.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESFe7MNnyRk

The Fourth Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning will be held Friday, March 24, 2017. This year, the conference will be held on that Friday afternoon, from 1:00 pm to 5:30 pm. The conference fee will be only $15.00, enough to cover the conference costs and to let us have a concluding cocktail session and keynote speaker.

The conference has built every year, with fuller attendance from colleagues and universities. But the heart of the conference remains the presentations by Winthrop faculty and staff.

The deadline for proposals is February 15, just under a month away. Here is the link, with the call for proposals and the submission form:

http://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/tlcconference/

You can also look at last year's conference to give you some ideas about presentations.

I hope you will make your proposal for an individual presentation, a full session with several presenters, or a workshop. We look forward to another great day of thinking about teaching and learning.
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!

The 4th Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning will be held Friday, March 24, 2017. Registration is only $15.00. Proposals are due February 15. You can find the call for proposals and the submission form here: http://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/tlcconference/

Thought For the Week

“New Year’s Day—Now is the accepted time to make your regular annual good resolutions. Next week you can begin paving hell with them as usual.”

—Mark Twain