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# Those Funny Academics: Deadlines, Procrastination, and One Last Call for Proposals

John C. Bird

Winthrop University, [birdj@winthrop.edu](mailto:birdj@winthrop.edu)

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# The Weekly Reader

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

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Training 2/16

Quantitative  
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Classrooms  
2/21

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

Director, Teaching &  
Learning Center  
Dinkins Hall 211B  
(803) 323-2447

EMAIL:  
[birdj@winthrop.edu](mailto:birdj@winthrop.edu)

Winthrop University

## Those Funny Academics: Deadlines, Procrastination, and One Last Call for Proposals

We academics are a funny lot.

The deadline for proposals for the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning is tomorrow, February 15. While we have received a decent number of proposals, we need more. It is easy to panic and worry that the conference won't happen this year if there are not enough sessions.

Then I remember what academics are like, and I relax a bit.

One of the best and most important conferences I go to is the Quadrennial Conference on the State of Mark Studies, held every four years at Elmira College in Elmira, NY. (Mark Twain had a very close connection with Elmira: his wife was born there, and he spent the summers of his most productive years at his sister-in-law's house, Quarry Farm, perched high above the town and the Chemung River, where he wrote *The Adventures of Tom*

*Sawyer and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, among other works.)

This gathering of Mark Twain scholars and enthusiasts is like no other anywhere, drawing people from ten or so countries. When you read a paper there, the people you are citing are sitting in front of you. It is that kind of conference. It is also a Mark Twain conference, which means cigars are smoked, Scotch is drunk, jokes are told. (Passive voice intentional to protect the guilty.) I look forward to it more than any conference I go to.

Even so, it wasn't until late in the afternoon last Monday that I suddenly remembered the due date for paper proposals was *that day*. I had known about the conference for six months, and I had been meaning to send in a proposal over the Christmas break. But I kept putting it off, even though I knew exactly what I wanted to propose.

So I hurriedly wrote my

proposal, sending it in just before the deadline.

The Center for Mark Twain Studies has a new director, and this is his first quadrennial conference, a huge undertaking. I am sure he was sweating, with proposals merely trickling in. I would bet big money that mine was not the last he received, and I would bet even more that he received a flood of them on that last day—and several more since.

What is it that makes us (many of us—I am sure there are many people who are quite punctual) behave this way? Perhaps it is the triage mentality that many of us have adopted in order to juggle all we have to do: classes to prepare for, papers and projects to grade, committee meetings to attend, and so on and so on and so on—not to mention the fact that we have a life outside of school. Just let me get through today and get done what must be done! Tomorrow will have to wait its turn.

*"I try to remember the way I am when I am dealing with students and their due dates. While I know it is important to set reasonable deadlines and hold to them, I am apt to give students some leeway, to make some allowances. My 20<sup>th</sup>-Century American Fiction and Drama class has a paper due Thursday by midnight, according to the syllabus."*



**Continued from page 1**

Forty years ago I started teaching, my first two years spent teaching high school. I noticed something interesting about my fellow teachers: the ones who were the strictest disciplinarians in their own classrooms, who prided themselves for running the tightest of ships, were the worst cut-ups in faculty meetings. They whispered to each other while the principal was talking, passed notes, laughed, and made faces—all the behaviors that would get them thrown out of their own classes if they had caught themselves doing such.

Yes, we academics are a funny lot.

I try to remember the way I am when I am dealing with students and their due dates. While I know it is important to set reasonable deadlines and hold to them, I am apt to give students some leeway, to make some allowances. My 20<sup>th</sup>-Century American Fiction and Drama class has a paper due Thursday by midnight, according to the syllabus.

The students have had the assignment for three weeks. I told them every class meeting that I would like them to email me with paper topics, which fewer than half a dozen did, out

of 21 students. I reminded them I was willing to read drafts, or partial drafts, at any time. So far, I have seen four.

They are being well-trained in the fine art of being an academic!

Yesterday, I extended the due date to next Sunday night, without them asking me. I knew I would probably not get to grading them this weekend, given the work I have to do this weekend, packing for an impending move. I am sure the extra few days will help.

I also know that I will get six or seven drafts on Saturday, when they finally start writing what they should have started two weeks ago. I will be annoyed, but I will understand, and I will do my best to reply. After all, how different am I from them?

That said, tomorrow is the deadline for proposals for the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning. If you send one by 5:00 pm, you will be right on time. And no, what I just wrote about my class does not mean the deadline is being extended. ☺

Although I wake up in the middle of the night and can't get back to sleep,

worrying that the conference won't happen this year, in the light of day I know it will, that today and tomorrow will bring in the proposals people have been mulling over since the call went out last semester.

See you Friday, March 24 for another great teaching and learning conference! Here is the link to the call for proposals:

<http://digitalcommons.wintrop.edu/tlcconference/>

.....  
 See the box below on the third page for the call for proposals for the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning. The deadline for proposals is—did I mention?—tomorrow!  
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Mark Twain in his octagonal study, Elmira, NY, ca. 1874

## 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](mailto: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 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](http://www.winthrop.edu/tlc)

## The 4th Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning 3/24/17

The 4<sup>th</sup> 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

"...since we have perched away up here on top of the hill near heaven I have the feeling of being a sort of scrub angel & am more moved to help shove the clouds around, & get the stars on deck promptly, & keep all things trim & ship-shape in the firmament than to bother myself with the humble insect-interests & occupations of the distant earth."

--Mark Twain in Elmira