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Academic Responsibility---Final Exams

John Bird

Winthrop University, birdj@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
Rock Hill, SC

Academic Responsibility ---- Final Exams

Last spring, we adopted new guidelines that grew out of the Faculty Roles and Rewards Taskforce, a document entitled "Faculty Roles"; I would like to take this space for a few weeks to start a discussion about some aspects of one part of that document, academic responsibility. My first topic is actually an ending topic: final exams. Every December and every May, I get really, really angry. Since it is the end of the semester, only the people who are still around hear me vent. Here is what upsets me so: it is Friday afternoon of exam week, 3:00 pm. I walk down to my classroom in Owens to give my CRTW class their final exam in the appointed exam time. All semester, that wing of Owens has been filled with classes. But on this particular day, I pass empty classroom after empty classroom. Only one other class has students in it, students waiting to take their final exams. The Faculty Roles document includes "adherence to academic policies," then lists a number of examples, including "final exam

schedule." (Link to the entire document: <http://www.winthrop.edu/uploadedFiles/academics/RolesDocumentApril2011.pdf>) Here is the academic policy on final exams, from the Faculty Manual: "Final Examinations for Undergraduate Courses: The form of the final examination is determined by the instructor. However, a final examination, or comparable evaluation, should be administered in all classes. The exam period may not exceed two and one-half hours. The times and places of final examinations are officially scheduled by the Registrar and faculty are expected to adhere to the scheduled times." The procedures for graduate classes contain a bit more leeway, but they still call for some culminating activity. (Here is the link to the entire policy: <http://www2.winthrop.edu/public/policy/fullpolicy.aspx?pid=77>) My purpose here is not to point accusing fingers, especially since my suspicion that a good number of us are not adhering to this policy is admittedly based on very limited observation.

Instead, my purpose is to raise the issue as one to be discussed by colleges, deans, divisions, departments, and faculty members. Am I correct in my observations at the end of each semester? Are a sizable number of us not following the final exam policy that we have all agreed to, and which we have now emphasized again in Faculty Roles? If so, why? How can we justify our actions? What are the effects on our students? What are the effects on the integrity of our courses? What are the effects on our colleagues? Two observations, one internal and one external. Long long ago, before I came to Winthrop, we did not have an exam period. The faculty fought hard to carve time from the semester so that we could give our students comprehensive final exams, and not merely administer them on the last day of class, as was the previous policy. If we are no longer making full use of that time, we have robbed time from the semester with nothing to show for it. And externally, faculty are increasingly coming under fire from legislators and

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the media and the public at large because they question the validity of our work. We know full well how wrong-headed those questions are, but we certainly don't want to give them any more ammunition. I know that I may upset a few folks, who will say “academic freedom” and tell me I am out of line for bringing up this topic. But I would answer that I am merely bringing up procedures from the Faculty Manual, procedures that we have

voted on and agreed to follow. I now realize that my end-of-semester frustration and anger was misplaced. The time to rant about final exams is not during the time they are being given, or supposed to be given, but in August and January, when we are making out our syllabi for the upcoming semester. Those are already done for the fall, but it might not be too late to go back and insert a final exam during the exam period. Just saying, as they say.

It could be that many of us are not even aware that we have in place a policy on final exams. I certainly understand that. I don't sit around reading the Faculty Manual for fun. (In fact, it took me about fifteen minutes of searching to find it online.) A number of campus bodies will be re-examining academic responsibility over the coming year—I just wanted to use this space to get the discussion started. And to get that frustration off my chest...

XXITE 2.0 ----- The Virtual Gathering Place for WU (The Reboot!)



Jo Koster and I invite you to join XXITE (Twenty-first Century Teaching Excellence)—or if you have already joined, to check it out again as it grows and develops. Maybe you have not been there in a long time—if not, you will see many changes in look and content. For example, XXITE now has groups dedicated to HMXP and CRTW, with

those of us who teach those courses sharing ideas and materials. Talk to Jo about setting up your own interest group. Jo is particularly interested in recruiting a few people to blog regularly about their teaching.

Jo set up this interactive site to give Winthrop faculty a virtual gathering space to share ideas about teaching and

technology. You'll find blogs and discussion forums on various topics—and we urge you to add your own ideas. Visit again at <http://wuxxite.ning.com/> or email Jo Koster for an invitation to join: kosterj@winthrop.edu. The TLC website also has links to navigate your way there or to join: <http://www2.winthrop.edu/tlc/>

A New Service From the TLC: Teaching Consultation

The Teaching and Learning Center is offering a new 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 at (803) 323-3679 or birdj@winthrop.edu.

Tomorrow's Professor

Here is a link to a recent article at Tomorrow's Professor, "The Top Ten Things New Faculty Would Like to Hear From Colleagues":

<http://cgi.stanford.edu/~dept-ctl/cgi-bin/tomprof/posting.php?ID=1186>

You can subscribe to Tomorrow's Professor and receive interesting articles about teaching and academia every week:

<http://cgi.stanford.edu/~dept-ctl/cgi-bin/tomprof/postings.php>

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BLOG POSTS

- NEW POSTS ON THE RENOVATIONS**
Posted by [Mark Y. Heston](#) on June 20, 2012 at 2:09pm
- CORE VALUES**
Posted by [Mark Y. Heston](#) on June 5, 2012 at 9:41pm
- PLAYING TO TYPE**
Posted by [Mark Y. Heston](#) on May 25, 2012 at 10:22am
- TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING IN THE CLASSROOM**
Posted by [Graham Heston](#) on March 19, 2012 at 12:11pm — 2 Comments
- GONE WITH THE WIND...**
Posted by [Jo Koster](#) on March 6, 2012 at 10:55am — 2 Comments

* Add a Blog Post

LATEST ACTIVITY

What are you up to?

[John Bird](#) visited a discussion to the group [CCTW](#)

NOTES

- DO COLLEGE PROFESSORS WORK HARD ENOUGH?**
Created by [Jo Koster](#) Mar 25, 2012 at 1:49pm. Last updated by [Jo Koster](#)
- WHO OWNS YOUR COURSE?**
Created by [Jo Koster](#) Mar 19, 2012 at 12:07pm. Last updated by [Jo Koster](#)
- STUDENT OWNERSHIP OF TABLETS INCREASES, PREFERENCE FOR**
Created by [Jo Koster](#) Mar 14, 2012 at 11:24am. Last updated by [Jo Koster](#)

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Thought for The Week

"Wisdom teaches us that none but birds should go out early, and that not even birds should do it unless they are out of worms." --
Mark Twain