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Announcing the 3rd Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning—and a Plea for Teaching Critical Reading

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Teaching and Learning Center

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Winthrop University

Announcing the 3rd Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning— and a Plea for Teaching Critical Reading

I want to write about teaching reading strategies today, but first I am happy to announce that the call for papers and sessions for the Third Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning is now up on the TLC website:

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

The conference will be held on campus Saturday, February 6, 2016, from 9:00 am to 5:30 pm, with sessions in the DiGiorgio Student Center and the West Center. The conference fee of \$45 includes a continental breakfast and a sit-down luncheon in the Richardson Ballroom. Our keynote speaker will be Dr. Dan Mahony, who will talk about his teaching career and his vision for teaching and learning at Winthrop.

The deadline for submissions is November 16, 2015. The website has a number of suggested topics, and I know that our talented faculty and staff will help us make another excellent program. We

opened the conference up to area colleges and universities last year, and we are sure that the number of presenters and attendees will increase again this year. Please submit your proposal, and please plan to join us for what will surely be a stimulating and enjoyable day.

As many of you know, I have focused on critical reading strategies for a number of years. I have been teaching since 1977, and I began to see an erosion in my students' reading skills almost from the very beginning. What alarmed me in the early 80s turned to distress as we reached the 90s and near despair as we passed the millennium. The decline in reading skills that I observed was truly calamitous.

That led me to write down some ideas about critical reading, a two-page handout that has evolved over the years, distilling what I have gleaned about reading strategies into a piece short enough that

even people who have trouble reading can read. A number of people at Winthrop use "How to Read Critically" in their classes, and it is available under "Resources" on the TLC webpage:

<http://www.winthrop.edu/tlc/default.aspx?id=32084>

Scroll down and you will find two links on critical reading; one is the handout, and the other is a video in which I talk about teaching students how to read critically.

The handout begins by asserting, "The key to success in college, in all courses, in all disciplines, is critical reading." That is a totalizing statement, but I strongly believe it to be true. If students cannot understand on a deep level what they read for college, it is highly unlikely they will succeed.

As I define it, the central act of critical reading is annotation, which has two parts: underlining key words, sentences, and phrases; and writing in the margins. Most students are very resistant to annotating their texts, for a variety of reasons:

“How To Read Critically” is a central component of our general education core: it is included in the ACAD Planner, it is bound into the custom edition of the handbook for WRIT 101, it is included in the HMXP reader, and I think most instructors of CRTW use it, our course that has “critical reading” in its title. I think a focus on critical reading has spread to other courses and disciplines, but I would hope that it could completely suffuse our university curriculum.



Continued from page 1

they don't want to write in their books, they think doing so will harm a book's resale value, they think it is hard, they don't see the value in it. And even more, they have been trained *not* to write in their books all the way through school, up to now. The handout addresses those concerns, and I take some class time to rebut the reasons for their resistance.

As the handout says, critical reading is hard, and it takes longer than the kind of passive reading most of our students are doing, but it actually saves time in the long run. In class, when I ask students to tell me what the author is saying on page 47 of the text, most students have to furiously reread the passage. But the students who have read critically, who have underlined and written key words in the margins, can answer the question readily.

Similarly, when it comes time for the midterm exam, covering the first ten chapters in the biology or history or psychology textbook, most students will have to spend the night before hurriedly rereading those ten chapters. The student who has read critically can study much more

efficiently and successfully by reviewing her annotations. Those key words in the margin amount to an outline of the whole ten chapters.

I use this handout on critical reading in all my classes, from freshman introductory classes to American literature surveys to upper-division literature courses, and even in my graduate courses. I check my students' books to make sure they are reading critically, that they are underlining and writing key words in the margins.

Despite their resistance, and with my persistence, most of my students make an honest attempt at critical reading, and they tell me that it does indeed make a big difference in their learning, in their grades. I can see a difference in class: instead of blank stares and hurried rereading of passages when I ask a question, students can go right to the point. I notice that students are more comfortable and familiar with their texts, and that they refer to pages and passages and key words and concepts more quickly and with more confidence.

Rather than bemoan what I perceive as the erosion

of a key skill, I tried to find ways to help my students develop that skill.

I have been pleased with the result, and I am pleased that so many faculty on our campus have used that handout and have focused on critical reading in their classes.

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If you are concerned about your students' reading for your class, and if you want to find ways to engage them more fully and to ensure that their learning is deeper, I urge you to share “How To Read Critically” with them. Let me know how it goes!

Next week: more critical reading strategies for the classroom.

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/>

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Thought For the Week

"Good friends, good books, and a sleepy conscience: this is the ideal life."
--Mark Twain