

'What teaching is all about'

By ART BUSHNELL
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True or false: A class which utilizes speakers from outside the University community, has optional take-home examinations, conducts pertinent research in the community and has a City Council intern program must be an upper division small group.

False, at least if the class is one of Harmon Zeigler's State and Local Government courses.

Zeigler approaches teaching just a little differently than many educators.

And he doesn't fall into traditional pitfalls just because he is lecturing a large group of students.

"I don't think the size of the class is necessarily a deterrent to good education. I think the important thing is to quit looking upon the classroom as the all in education. The classroom is a place to look at what you are learning. The lecture hall is only one of a long variety of learning tools available to the instructor," says Zeigler.

DIVERSE TOOLS

And Zeigler makes use of many diverse tools. His lectures are based primarily upon his own research and some of the reading material is of his own composition.

"Conducting research and then talking to students and getting them interested in doing their own research, that is what I think teaching is all about. I don't see any difference between research and teaching," he says.

For the past two years students in his spring term course in government have made their own studies based on surveys made by them in Eugene.

Last year's topic was racism in Eugene. But students could do any specific project they wanted with the data pooled from their interviews.

The general class topic was chosen by the students themselves.

WHO IS INVOLVED?

The previous year his class had looked into how much information local citizens have about the political process and who is involved in it.

Zeigler feels the surveys are a very good tool in the learning process.

"You learn more about the political process by doing research in the field and reaching your own conclusions. Students become active participants rather than passive receivers.

"They are no longer simply absorbing information for the professor. They are creating their own information. I provide the guideline for study through literature and lectures," says Zeigler.

Zeigler provides much background information in giving the guidelines.

WORK AS INTERNS

Last year members of his class were provided the opportunity to work as interns with members of the city council. In doing research for council members, the students were provided with ample opportunity to observe the political processes at a local level and to pick up the insights in the real political area outside of the classroom.

Some of the class members made treks to Salem to observe the dealings on the state legislature level.

Zeigler did not stop there in providing the study guidelines.

He also brought outside speakers in to address his class. These included one of the state's leading lobbyists and Charles Potterf, a prominent local political figure.

"In providing the opportunities, Zeigler stresses student involvement.

"The way to teach a course is to engage students in the same process you are engaged in. Nothing is duller to me than going into class with a textbook and lecturing from it. Anyone can go into class and teach with a book. That is not learning, that is memorization. I don't use textbooks, I use research monographs," added Zeigler.

He also feels that the pressures of grades are not conducive to the student getting intellectually involved with the course.

OPTIONAL FINALS

For that reason, all of the examinations in his course are optional, take-homes.

"The less worried kids are with what they have to do for the professor in order to get an A and the more concerned with acquiring information and ideas the better the course is," analyzes Zeigler.

"It is impossible to cheat on my tests. You are not assessed on how many facts you have massed correctly. You can talk to your roommate; this used to be considered cheating. To me this is what it is all about—getting involved and doing something," he adds.



Photo by Phil Waldstein

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