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SEARCH offers alternatives

What do the Food-Op, the tool library, the women's studies department and — to some extent — the EMU Craft Center have in common? They all started as SEARCH classes.

Since the nontraditional program began in the winter term of 1967, 50,000 students have taken SEARCH workshops and courses and more than 100,000 credits have been awarded, says Kevin Kouns, the program's administrative coordinator.

"SEARCH is a supplement and a complement to the existing system," he says. "As far as I know, we are the only one in the country that generates credit for student-taught courses."

SEARCH offers University-approved credit courses and free, non-credit workshops that would not otherwise be taught, Kouns says.

The courses and workshops are distinct from the usual University offerings because students, faculty, and community members can teach or take a SEARCH class, Kouns says.

SEARCH also serves as a compliment because "if students or faculty have an idea, they can try it out here and let it spin out," Kouns says.

"With the budget cuts, SEARCH becomes more necessary. Departments have less money for experimentation, fewer GTF positions and less flexibility. They can work out their ideas here," he says.

For example, a 1970 SEARCH course titled "Can Man Survive?" initiated the Survival Center, Kouns says. "I guess the Survival Center is kind of our grandchild, but it's more than twice our size."

The SEARCH program began as part of the "free university" movement. "Rather than just classroom learning, students felt that learning should be more responsive and more flexible. The program grew out of the radicalism of the '60s," Kouns says.

The program bred antagonism toward the University and the University became afraid of the program, he says.

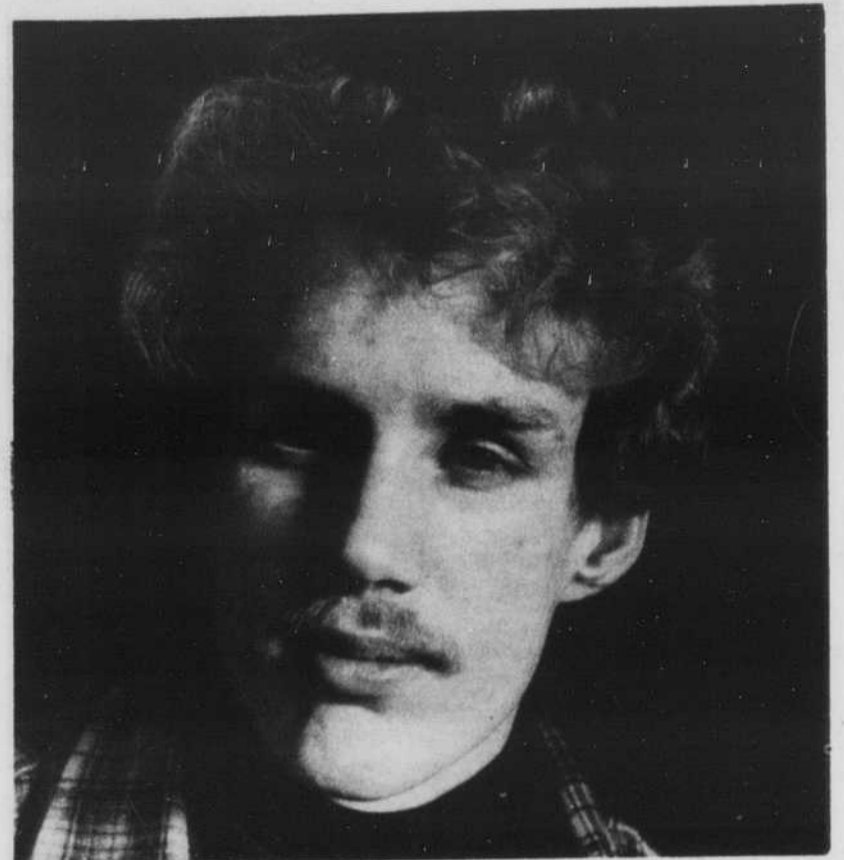
"They thought the program would be taken over by radicals," Kouns says. The University, however, couldn't do anything to ease their fears except support the program and keep some control over it, he says.

"That is why SEARCH took the form that it did and became part of the ASUO," Koun says.

Since 1967, SEARCH has offered numerous classes and workshops. Some of their class offerings have been: Mountaineering, Dutch, Hebrew, Anthropology, Emerging Law of Students Rights and Economics of Wine Industry.

"The courses we offer usually tend to be more narrowly focused or are controversial," Kouns says.

SEARCH got in some trouble when it offered Aerodynamics



Kevin Kouns

of the Frisbee. "How are you teaching frisbee in a University?" Kouns quotes critics as asking at the time.

All students are encouraged to investigate enrolling in or and teaching SEARCH courses, Kouns says. To bolster interest in the program, the organization is running weekly advertisements, sending out letters and flyers, and organizing an outreach list

of community organizations whose personnel might want to teach classes.

"For the past couple of years the attitude on the part of the SEARCH management was that the program can run itself. Well, it can't and we are trying to turn things around," Kouns says.

By Lori Lieberman
Photo by Mark Pynes

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