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# Journalism includes 'funny business'

By Doug Nash

The stereotypical journalism course may not be overwhelmingly appealing to the elective-hungry student. Perhaps the most common image is that of sweating students frantically struggling with battered typewriters to meet classroom deadlines.

Those images don't hold true in "Caricature and Graphic Humor." Students in that class are in the funny business — they study cartoons.

"It's really an art appreciation course," says Professor Roy Paul Nelson, a former editorial cartoonist for the Eugene Register-Guard and author of three cartooning books. "My goal is not to make cartoonists out of them but to get them to understand the uses of art in the news media."

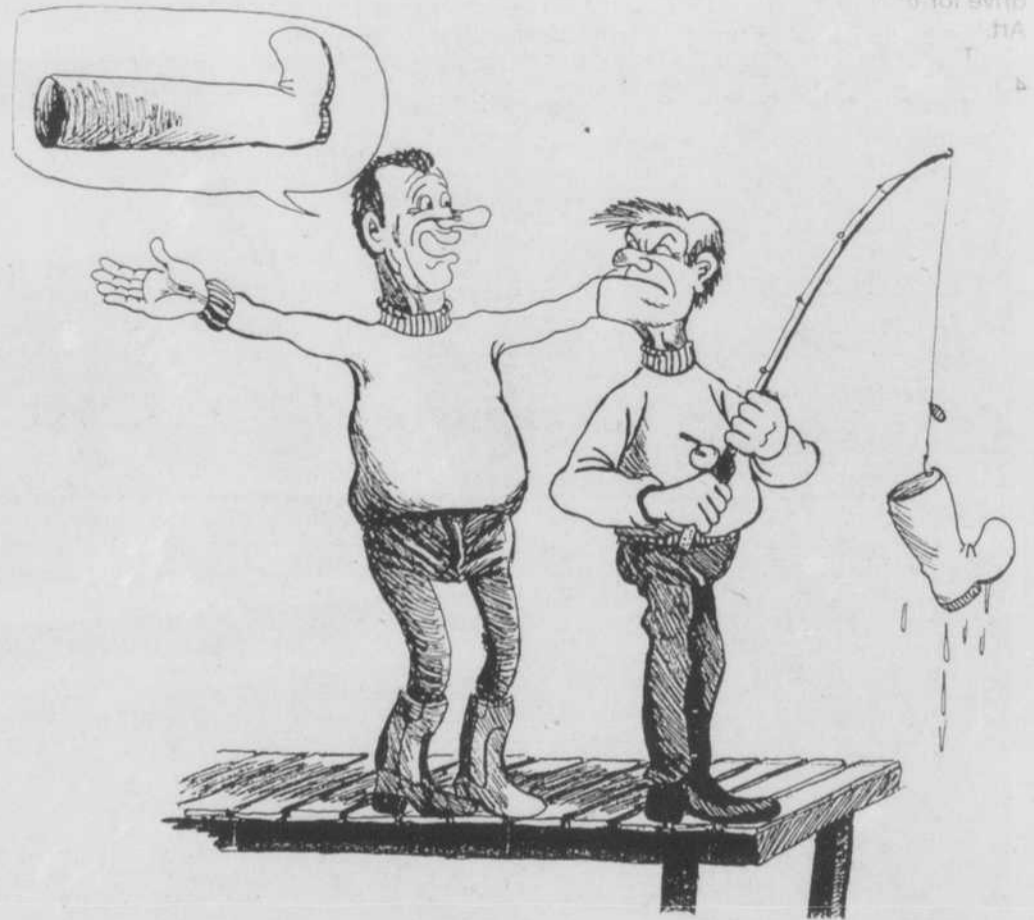
Nelson's course originally appeared in the late 50s under the title "Editorial Cartooning," to emphasize the "serious phase of the art." The course has since branched out into gag cartoons, comic strips, book illustrations, advertising and greeting cards.

Expanding the topics covered in the class has drawn more students as well.

"Earlier we were lucky to get a dozen students in the class," Nelson says. About 55 or 60 people are in the class now. While most of them are journalism majors, they have varied reasons for enrollment.

"I haven't done any drawing since grade school," admits journalism graduate student Dean Baker, who intends to use what he learns in the class for the Skinner City Weekly, his newly-formed public newsletter.

"I plan to make a living doing illustrative work," explains senior art major Betsy Charlton.



Cartoon by Ragnar Askeland

"Aside from the drawing portion of the class, we've developed a good background in the history of caricature."

Drawing ability does not give one an unfair advantage in Nelson's class. "He is not impressed by a flashy drawing," Charlton says.

Instead, Nelson uses class time to trace the development of the cartoon and expound its importance.

"Cartoons dress up the writing," he says.

Despite being an art-related course, Nelson bases his grades mostly on an written examination and a book report. Still, students have ample opportunity to try their hand at drawing. And while there are few Gary Trudeau's in the class and nobody has yet come up with a replacement for Trudeau's "Doonesbury" strip, Nelson says many students are often pleasantly surprised.

"Many journalism students are artists, of a sort. The two talents go together fairly well."

Most people will put their learned graphic abilities to work, Nelson says. "It's amazing how many jobs there are where a little drawing comes in handy."

Cartoons are the lifeblood of the class. Nelson's approach insures that most of the time is devoted to his students' presentations.

Indeed, Nelson seems to obtain a great deal of personal enjoyment from the course. Handing back homework that ranged from complex drawings to stick figures, Nelson treats each with equal sensitivity.

"I really wish I didn't have to grade these," he apologizes.



Cartoon by Brian Hahn

Top: a gag cartoon by a current cartoon student. Above: a caricature of Professor Nelson by a former student.

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