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University of Oregon January 6 - March 10 1983

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# Lack of funds among problems stifling interdisciplinary classes

By Sandy Johnstone  
Of the Emerald

Bridging gaps between departments with individual courses seems like an obvious way to fill educational holes, but the problems facing interdisciplinary classes often convert gaps into caverns.

The most obvious problem is budgetary. With departments already pared to the bone, some professors have difficulty rationalizing interdisciplinary courses to the administrative hierarchy when basic classes are in jeopardy.

"(Funding) is not an insurmountable problem but it is not easy to solve and we can't ignore it," says Robert Berdahl, dean of the arts and sciences college.

So professors who want to teach interdisciplinary courses often must add them to their regular load.

The funding problems are compounded if professors want to team-teach a class. Hassles arise about which professor's department will get credit for the class. Because each person may put in as much time as for a regular class, it is hard to rationalize giving half credit for it to each department, say several University professors.

But the problems don't stop with money.

Steven Lowenstam, head of the humanities department, is not sure interdisciplinary courses are the best courses because the professor may not have enough knowledge of both fields.

Richard Stein, associate English professor, adds the students may have problems



Emerald graphic

## PART III INTERDISCIPLINARY COURSES

because they may know much about one field but only a little in the other.

Considering all the headaches professors seem to inherit when teaching interdisciplinary courses, is it worth it?

"Yes," most would answer. Professors who have taught interdisciplinary courses are enthusiastic about them even as they admit they were a hassle.

Professors center interdisciplinary courses on the research they're working on, so the classes are more dynamic.

Carolyn Keutzer, a psychology professor, and Amit Goswami, a physics professor, teach a consciousness research class, based on research they are collaborating on.

And while they enjoy teaching together, both say teaching interdisciplinary courses can be difficult when departments do not want to release them from their normal schedules.

Some professors have problems finding someone compatible who shares their interest.

Besides his work with Keutzer, Goswami also has taught an interdisciplinary course called the Physics of Science Fiction, which looks at physical principles that are paraphrased in science fiction literature.

"When the opportunity arose and the physics department was looking for new ideas in the early 1970s, it was just a natural," says Goswami. The first time he offered the class in 1973 about 15 students enrolled, and in 1981 the class attracted more than 100 students.

Goswami says using literature and writing as part of the grading process was a new experience. He says he stressed physics over literature, but class discussions on the literature often arose.

Clarence Thurber, international studies program director, taught a course fall term on world value systems that included about a dozen faculty guest lecturers.

Thurber says problems do crop up when teaching such a course. International studies grant money enabled him to avoid money hassles, but he confronted textbook availability and organizational problems.

But Thurber remains positive about his interdisciplinary course. "Students are eating it up."

## Panel to contrast two religious sects

Fundamental differences between Christianity and Judaism will be discussed by an interfaith panel in a series of three monthly dialogues beginning Wednesday.

"In an informal seminar setting we hope to probe those places where Christians and Jews view theological and ethical issues very similarly and also where they view them differently," says Tom Heger, campus Presbyterian director.

The discussions, titled "Living Toward the Faithful Vision of a Good Society," will be held Wednesdays in the EMU during the lunch hour.

"There is no real dialogue" between the Jewish and Christian faiths in this community, Heger said. He said he is hopeful the discussions can develop an ongoing forum for Christian-Jewish talks.

The four panel members are Heber, Myron Kinberg, Rabbi for Hillel, a student Jewish organ-

ization, Stacey Loeb, Hillel staff member and Stewart Shaw, campus Methodist director. All are members of the Campus Interfaith Ministry.

Only three of 10 faiths are participating in the dialogues because "if we had waited for everyone at Campus Interfaith Ministry to get on board it never would have happened," Heger said.

The topic of the first discussion is "Foundations of Faith." Differing Jewish and Christian perceptions and interpretations of the "Messiah" will be addressed.

Heger termed the "Messiah" as "God's promise to his or her personal intervention in human history." He said each panel member would probably offer his or her own definition, however.

February's discussion is titled "Social and Political Ethics." "Personal Ethics" will be discussed in March.

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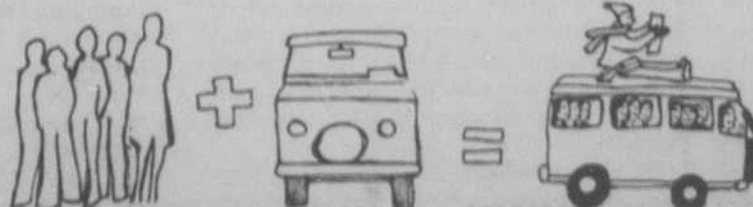
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