

SEARCH

Religion classes ignite credit controversy for dubious courses

By Melissa Martin
Of the Emerald

Fewer SEARCH classes this fall may be why last spring's controversy about University credit for dubious courses is in remission.

Last year several SEARCH courses were put on the stand in a

sistent problem," Holbo says. Religion has been the most recent trend in SEARCH classes.

The academic affairs office was interested in the SEARCH program last year because it wanted to "maintain the highest standards possible for the best possible classes," Holbo says.

pus, which will not violate church and state law, and religious groups using the academic institution.

The classes and workshops examined last year include "Twilight of Western Thought: A Christian Response," "Eckankar," "Cults, the Occult, and the New Age" and "Paganism and Witchcraft: Theory and Practice."

Doug Groothuis has been teaching "Twilight of Western Thought" for five years and says he is pleased with the continued student response. His class size of 20 to 30 students has been steady over the years.

Groothuis says sometimes he has a student in class who questions his teaching.

"I like the interchange. It sharpens the class."

Although many SEARCH classes are accused of providing an easy "A," Groothuis says his class is tough because he requires a term paper from students.

The class covers "big pivotal issues," Groothuis says, such as "Is there a God?" and "What is God like?" The University avoids these big questions, he says.

"Your philosophy has a direct bearing on everything you do," the University philosophy graduate says. Groothuis also works with McKenzie Study Center, a Christian educational campus group.

"In American culture, Christianity is considered an emotional experience. But it is an all-encompassing view of self-existence and its implications."

Groothuis says his class deals with the "authority of God, the revelation in the Bible and the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Students assume their professors are neutral, Groothuis says, but "many professors are prejudiced against the Christian world view."

His goal in the classroom is to help people think, "not just come from the University with raw data."

As a SEARCH instructor, Groothuis receives no pay from the University.

After many debates with higher education officials and a law school representative, Groothuis helped his "Twilight" class survive attacks against its academic credibility.

Holbo says the class barely "passed mustard."

"It's intellectually demanding," says Ben Johnson, sociology department head. Although "questions on Doug's (Groothuis) ability" reach his office periodical-



Emerald graphic

The SEARCH program is a 'persistent problem,' says Paul Holbo, vice-provost for academic affairs.

trial that dealt with the legal aspects of separation of church and state, according to Paul Holbo, vice-provost for academic affairs.

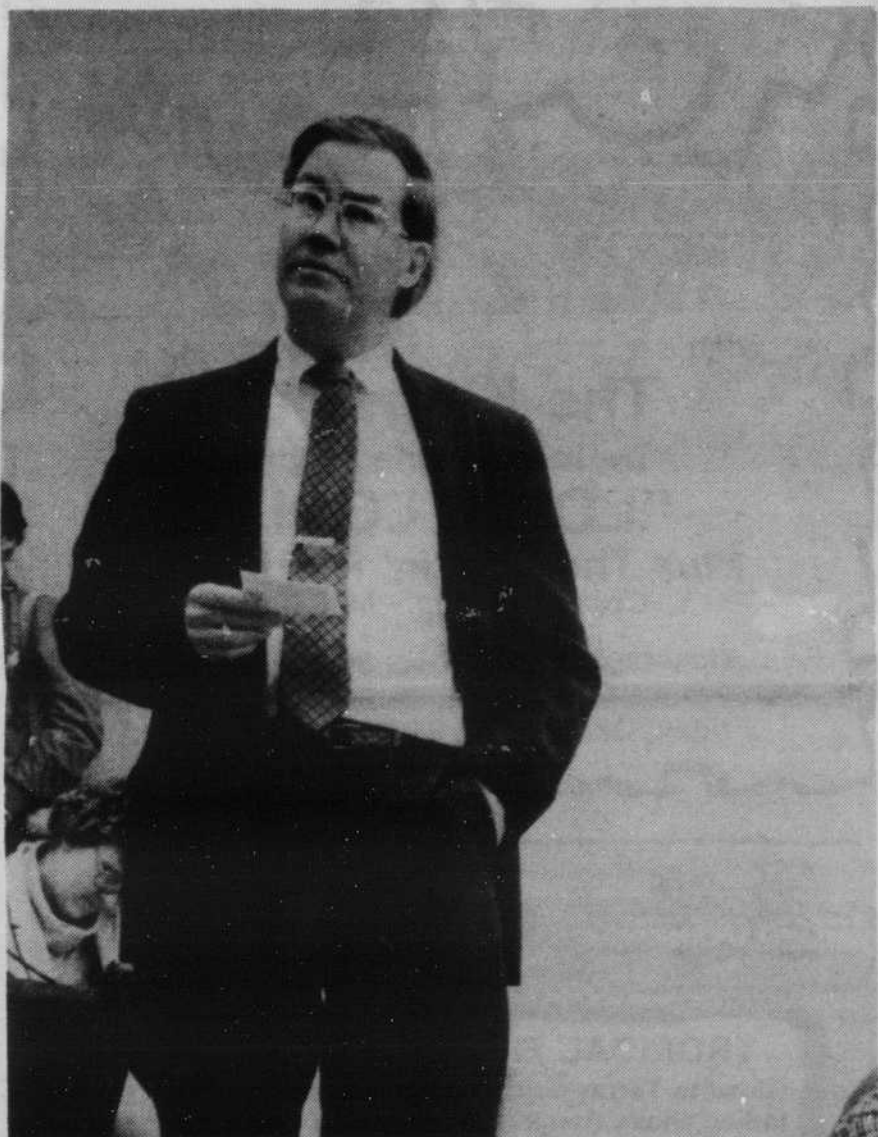
"SEARCH" stands for Student Exploratory Actions Regarding Curricular Heterodoxy.

The SEARCH program is a "per-

The classes were designed to be student initiated and faculty taught. But now Holbo questions the instructors' qualifications.

"Interest groups try to use these courses for their own advantage," he says.

Holbo distinguishes between religious groups meeting on cam-



Emerald Photo

Paul Holbo, vice-provost for academic affairs, questions the academic quality — and legal implications — of religiously oriented SEARCH courses being taught at the University.

ly, Johnson says he has never heard students complain.

"I've been uniformly impressed by the high quality of instruction and attentiveness of the students," says Johnson, who has attended the class.

Because Groothuis is leaving for seminary next year, this is the last time the course will be offered, he says.

Johnson calls the course an approach to the subject matter that "one does not often find in a sociology department."

"I get letters of complaints about SEARCH courses," Holbo says. "I was awakened one Saturday morning to a call."

students, townspeople or faculty members can teach.

The credits transfer as electives, she says, but do not fulfill University requirements.

SEARCH courses must meet department standards before they can appear in the catalog, Hope says, but the classes have the advantage of being more relaxed, having more discussion and being more open than others.

"The University uses us (SEARCH) to test out new courses and we do it for free," Hope says.

Holbo suggests the SEARCH program can maintain itself best by maintaining the academic level.

In SEARCH's history, the

Last year several SEARCH courses were put on the stand in a trial that dealt with the legal aspects of separation of church and state.

The ASUO-sponsored SEARCH program is responsible for exercising control over the actual content in SEARCH classes, Holbo says. By not filtering out the questionable classes, Holbo says SEARCH leaders are approving them.

"We wash our hands of those workshops."

"Students should have their own activities, but don't drag the University into this," Holbo says.

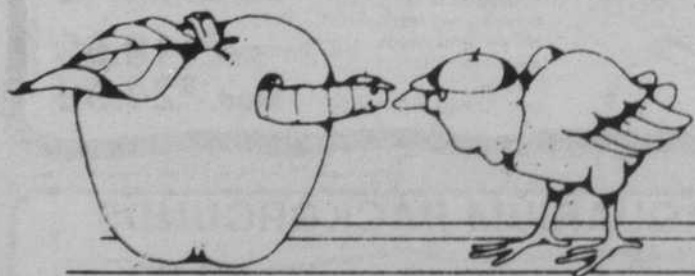
Former SEARCH coordinator Mary Hope says the program has "unlimited possibilities" because

sociology department has cooperated the most, Holbo says, by consistently meeting the application deadlines for the college dean and curriculum committee.

"I for one welcome an expansion of perspective," says Johnson of the "Twilight" class.

Holbo agrees that was the original intent of SEARCH, and he would like to see qualified faculty members using the SEARCH program to teach language courses such as Finnish and Hebrew — courses that would normally not be available at this University.

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