

Scuba divers who pass a class offered through the University take their first "open-water" dive in Puget Sound's Hood Canal — after a period of training in Leighton Pool.



Scuba diving: a world without midterms

It's that time again. Midterms are looming large in most classes, and for some students that means a lot of hard work just to keep their heads above water.

But there's one class the University offers where you're supposed to sink — and not come up for air.

That class is scuba diving, which is offered on a continual basis during the year through the physical education department. For a registration fee, and the demonstration of appropriate skills, individuals can become certified "open water" divers at the end of nine weeks.

While that may not be enough to land a role in the hit movie "Splash," it does mean the opportunity to experience scuba diving first-hand.

"We invite everyone to experience the sport of scuba diving, and to show how safe and how fun it can be," says Helio Vieira, who teaches the diving class. "It's simply another world down there."

Considering the state of the world on dry land during midterms, the offer seems appealing.

"It's just an incredible high," adds teaching assistant Greg Biben, who recently returned from diving off the coast of California's Catalina Island. "It's traveling through a different medium, with a feeling of weightlessness. You can even feed the fish while you're down there."

First, however, a student must learn how to get there.

"We teach students how to handle their equipment, how to swim with a tank, and how to utilize appropriate life-saving methods. We try to create a safe environment (relative) to actual diving in terms of all the drills," says Vieira.

The best way for area residents to receive proper instruction, continues Vieira, is through classes offered at the University, Eugene Skin Divers Supply, or Sea Sports in Springfield. Fees for an "open water" diving class — the initial certification level — range from \$130 for a four-week class at the commercial outfits, to \$145 over a term at the University. Cost

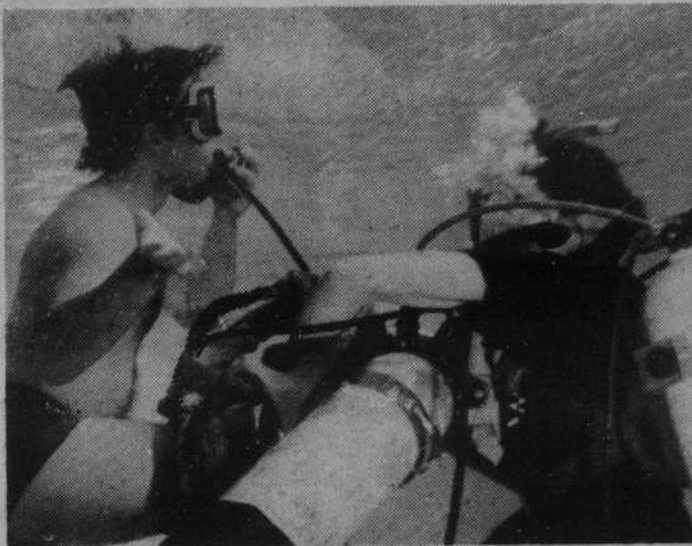
covers equipment rental, oxygen, training tables, and qualified instruction.

Upon certification, money becomes less of a barrier, because prices go down. Normal weekend rates for equipment rental and oxygen range from \$27.50 at Eugene Skin Divers Supply to \$25 at Sea Sports.

If some of these figures still seem a little discouraging, especially for students who feel they're already getting soaked financially by tuition and books, there are ways around those problems, according to Biben.

One economical "lifesaver," he says, is the newly-founded Scuba Club. Membership is \$5 a term and includes discounts on rental equipment and oxygen.

"Without your own equipment you're talking about \$50-\$70 a weekend," says Biben. But with discounts from the Scuba Club, \$25 will usually cover



The University's scuba diving class emphasizes proper preparation and adherence to safety regulations.

rental, oxygen, transportation, and even the refreshments afterward, he says.

Partying of any kind before diving is strongly discouraged, however.

"You can have a beer or two 12 hours before," says Vieira, "but in diving there's no room for error. One error, you're dead."

John Temple, diving instructor at Eugene Skin Divers Supply, agrees.

"Going out there (diving) means doing things safely so the student can reduce the risk of error, and be confident under water."

Therein lies the highest priority of the diving classes: to practice skills that will make students safe divers. Classes are not, however, all drill and no play.

"We have a blast," says Biben, who helps teach the University class. "The best part is when we take our three-day weekend trip to Hood Canal on the Puget Sound at the end of the term."

There students become officially certified in an "open-water checkout," and then search for Dungeness crab, explore the reef, or simply enjoy each other's company.

"It's great," says Biben. "There's a real sense of camaraderie after spending all that time together in the pool. The weekend helps us just to relax, while serving a purpose (the open-water checkout)."

Those interested in learning more about the class, or other opportunities in scuba diving, can contact Vieira through the physical education department or Jim Lobdell of the Scuba Club at 686-0698.

"It has been so far very slow," Vieira says of the area's interest in scuba diving. "But we're interested in getting people involved. Diving is just a very exciting activity."

Much more so than, say, a midterm.

By Hal Myers

Photos by Steve Crowell

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