

Smaller means personal

Seminar classes give students an intimate education

By Jolayne Houtz
Of the Emerald

Some 200 students quiet down as a professor turns the microphone on to begin another 50-minute lecture in 150 Geology.

But in a small Condon Hall classroom, 30 students form a semi-circle around the professor to exchange views on Sartre's existentialism.

These students are participants in one of eight seminar classes, limited to 30 people and made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

However, the seminars are unadvertised, and students do not know when they are registering that the class will be different from a traditional lecture course, says Donald Taylor, director of the University's humanities center.

"We wanted to see how the concept of small, intensive classes would work with a cross-section," Taylor says. Students have a random chance at getting into these classes.

Taylor compared this concept to the Honors College, where students are "selected and self-selected" for the smaller class settings.

Students generally have no tests in these classes but are graded on four to five papers, which "consume an enormous amount of time," according to Roger Chickering, a history professor who teaches a Western Civilization seminar. He discusses every paper with each student.

"There's been some major problems with the writing, but I've been encouraged with the progress of the papers," Chickering says.

Taylor shares his concerns about student writing.

"The writing is not up to the level of the discussion," he says.

Like Taylor, Arnulf Zweig, a philosophy professor who teaches a metaphysics seminar, blames this on poor high school teaching and lack of practice.

"It is possible to get through high school without much practice in reading or writing," Zweig says. "Books aren't a normal way of life for people, and there are nuances of language that one can only learn from being around literature."

According to Taylor, who visited all eight classes this term, 60 to 90 percent of students participate in class discussions.

But not all students and professors agree with Taylor.

"There is a tendency for a fair number not to

talk, either because they are unprepared or afraid. Their wisdom or their ignorance is on parade," Zweig says.

He blames this in part on the subject, metaphysics, which is difficult to teach in a small class setting because students lack the ability to read from original sources.

"Most people are reluctant to share their viewpoints, and sometimes it's difficult to get the discussion moving," says Kevin Low, a student in Zweig's class. "Zweig makes it interesting, though. He has a way with words."

Chickering agrees that "it is more difficult to generate sustained discussion," but he says the experience has been positive overall.

"Chickering leads class discussions very well, and I think most people participate," says Greg Leonard, a student in Chickering's class.

Though the amount of participation varies from class to class, both students and faculty agree that it is more demanding than a typical lecture class. Professors volunteer to teach the classes as part of their regular load, Taylor says.

"You have to think of each student as an individual, and I've gotten to know the students more closely," Zweig says.

"Both the teacher and the student are on the spot, and the students can't hide behind 50 others," he says.

"You have to concentrate and come up with ideas of your own — it takes more preparation," Low says.

But Taylor sees this as an advantage.

"We have a good faculty, but they're not able to teach this way in general. My observation is that, yes, both faculty and students work harder and enjoy it more," he says.

Low agrees the classes are more interesting.

"But the word that sounds bad is 'experimental.' It has bad connotations," he says.

Taylor hopes someday to advertise the classes and envisions two distinct settings — the large lecture hall and the small class atmosphere. He also hopes that the classes will become part of the University's budget when the grant runs out.

"If we could afford all small classes, I think Oregon would be giving the best education in the Northwest," Taylor says.

Low, who says he would take another such class if possible, quoted Zweig in his evaluation of the class.

"It gives you an opportunity to study Harvard or Yale-style without the fees."

Museum exhibits Northwest art

By Patrick Low
Of the Emerald

On the far left corner of the University Museum of Natural History, an exquisite carving made out of walrus ivory depicting Eskimos, walruses and a polar bear lies behind a display window as part of the museum's exhibition of traditional Northwest art.

But it is more than a work of sophisticated craftsmanship — it also is a cribbage board.

The carving perfectly symbolizes the European influence on Northwest tribal art and sets the tone for Raven's Cousins, the exhibition's title.

Raven's Cousins offers a remarkable spectrum of cultural Northwest art during the last 100 years and displays items as different as a primitive ceremonial rattle and an Art-Deco bead bag. The pieces were crafted by the Native American tribes that lived from Alaska down to Northern California.

Raven's Cousins is divided into three categories: traditional art from the Northwest coast, the coast of Alaska and the Columbia-Fraser Plateau. Although there is great diversity between and within these cultural areas, the cosmologies of all the peoples revolve around a belief in a "transformer" — the mythical animal hero who transformed the world from a spiritual plane to the earthly one through a series of disconnected in-

cidents. These incidents form the body of all their stories and legends.

The transformer of the Northern Coast and Alaskan natives is Raven, and the stories of how Raven transformed the world were shared by neighboring peoples who duplicated them as exploits of their own transformers — Coyote, Mink and Blue Jay.

They are all, therefore, Raven's cousins.

The exhibition is a project of the University's anthropology department. Some of the exhibits are part of the museum's collection and some on loan from private collectors. Most have never been displayed in public before.

"We wanted to show the amount of cultural diversity within the Northwest," says Sandy Snyder, one of the graduate anthropology students who put together the exhibition. "You can see there are different aspects to them (the native cultures), but there's a common thread of legends that runs through and that's why we've called it Raven's Cousins. They tend to blend into one another."

The exhibits cover almost all aspects of native life. Animal motifs abound in the arts of the Northwest, and many of the exhibits portraying animals show a remarkable degree of artistic sophistication. One of the most striking pieces is a Chilkat

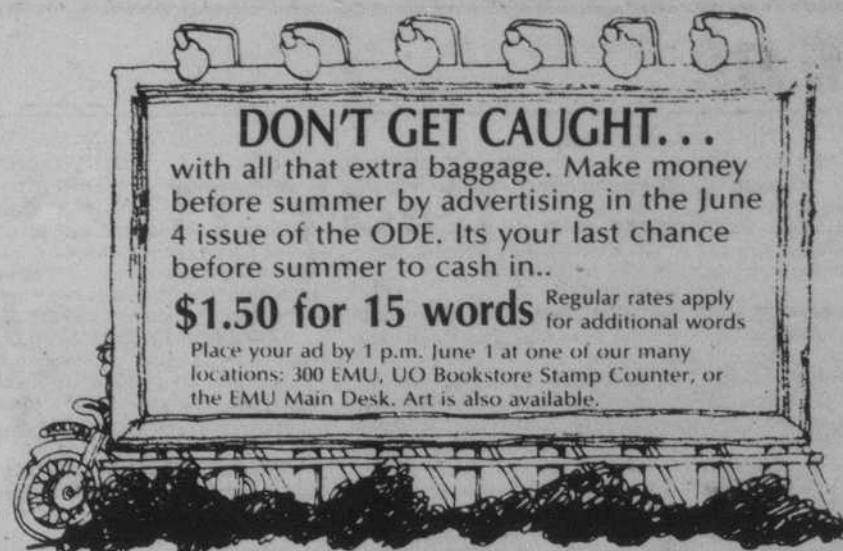
blanket woven from goat yarn and bark twine depicting a killer whale. Its design is abstract but highly mesmerizing.

According to Snyder, the Chilkat blanket is a good example of Northwest coast art. "Much of the Northwest coast art forms are very sophisticated, very stylized representations of animals," she says. "Only someone very acquainted with the art form or from that culture could immediately recognize the signs indicating that something was, say, a beaver or a killer whale."

Most fascinating of all to visitors of Raven's Cousins must be the European-influenced pieces like the ivory cribbage board and the Art-Deco bead bag. The strangeness of this blending of European and American Northwest artforms is at its most conspicuous in one particular exhibit — a straw-woven teacup and saucer set.

Raven's Cousins was designed by Mary Perch and prepared by Mike Smith. It was researched and put together by museum director Don Dumond, curator Theodore Stern, Lucy Hamilton, Pamela Endzweig, Sandy Snyder, Felicia Rounds and Martha Frankel.

It has been on display since Apr. 1 and will continue until December at the Museum of Natural History. The museum is open Tuesday to Saturday every week from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free.



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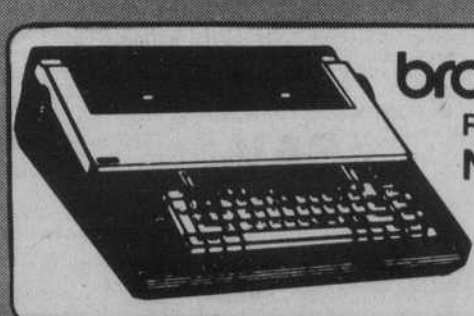
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