

Program conveys the American way

By Michael Duke
Of the Emerald

Frank Sinatra sums it up best when he sings: "I did it my way."

What the entertainer conveys, says English Prof. Barbara Mossberg, is the American way of doing things. He also conveys the independence of the Marlboro man alone atop his horse, the drive of the immigrant who came to the then-New World and even the wealthy Ewing family on the television show "Dallas."

Through his song, Sinatra depicts the independence, drive and goals of the "pure" American, she says. And Mossberg is one to know about this country's image, as she and history Prof. Allan Winkler soon will be in charge of a new American studies program on campus.

America represents many things, such as mobility, ambition, originality, technology, self-reliance, power and op-



Barbara Mossberg

portunity, Mossberg says. By contrasting "Americana" — Mickey Mouse, McDonald's restaurants, Mark Twain, Babe Ruth, "American Graffiti" and "Star Wars" — with America's history, Mossberg attempts to landscape America's self-image in an American studies preview class offered this year.

"By definition, Americans are people who dream of doing things a better way," she says. "These are the kinds of people who came to America in the first place. It's the American dream; we can raise ourselves by our own bootstraps."

All Americans, in essence, came out of an obscure past looking for a new life and a fresh chance, Mossberg says. This culture is different from others because of this immigrant experience, she adds.

"We escaped the old world of limited and restricted fate," she says. "This idea is seen in the heroes we have."

The popular American hero is the lone figure, she says. "He is a stranger who rides into town from the East. Unknown to everybody, he stays in town for awhile, solves its problems and then rides back out of town."

"It makes sense to our culture that we make him a cult hero. We idolize the person who doesn't belong," she says. "Take Rip Van Winkle or Huckleberry Finn. They are virtuous because they escape civilization."

While we identify with the stranger, we are struggling to establish a community, she says, and tension arises because a high value is placed on conformity.

"Our pace is fast, we are very mobile, we don't stand still," Mossberg says. "We believe in the possibilities of our future; you can be anything you want. But if you just stand still, if you don't better your parents, that's failure."

America's world role is one of ambivalence, she says. Americans are admired by people in other nations for their

ideals. There is sympathy for American problems and respect for American honesty and self-criticism, Mossberg says. In one hand, however, the power this country has as a counter-part with the Soviet Union over the fate of the world is a great concern, she says.

Most Americans are not that deeply aware... that this country is such a world power," she says. "We are more concerned with our own community and our own lives in general."

All of these factors — independence, drive, mobility and power — make up the American image, Mossberg says. The American studies degree will interrelate these areas through books, films and lectures.

Once the degree is offered next year, approximately 50 faculty members from 12 departments will offer 70 courses pertaining to the program.

"The priority is to have the student integrate their courses around a theme. The degree is individually tailored to the

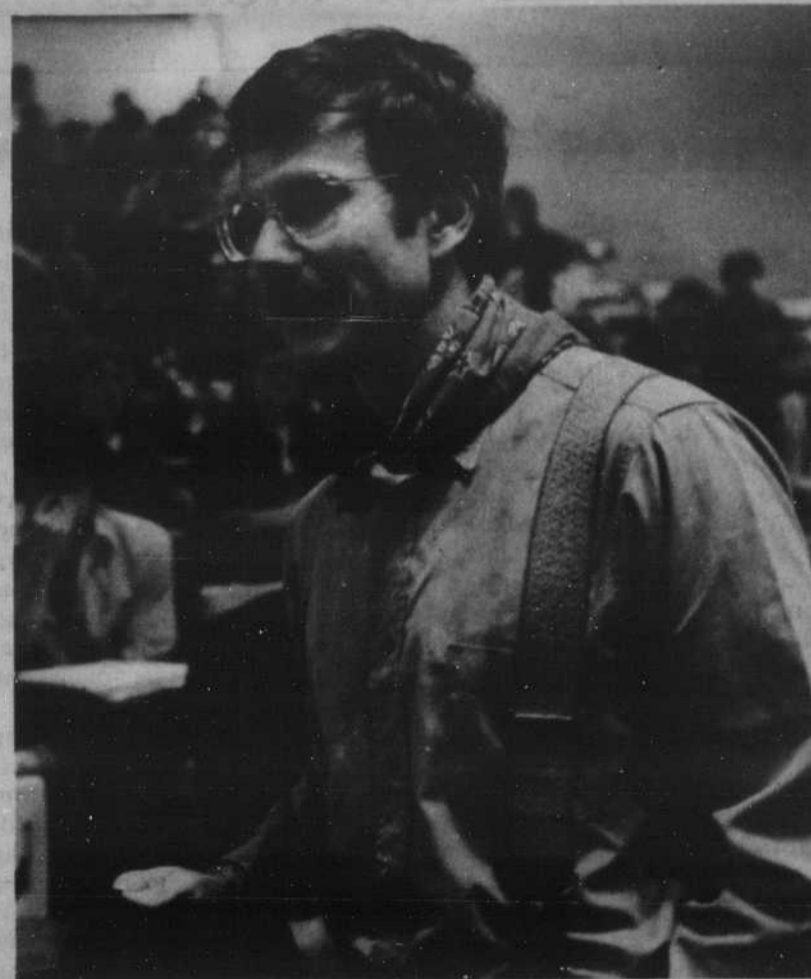


Photo by Michael Clapp
Prof. Allan Winkler took an opportunity last April to give his history students a taste of American studies at its best.

students' interests as long as they are working with American studies faculty," she says.

To receive a major degree in the program, students must complete 30 hours of related courses, with at least 21 upper-division hours. An essay and an upper-division seminar also are required.

The essay and seminar are needed for a minor, along with 15 hours of related classes, nine of them upper-division.

Don't Fall For It!

An open letter to students who are considering Speed Reading Courses:

During the last several days, Evelyn Wood Reading Dynamics has been placing large ads and distributing flyers to attract students to a free speed reading lesson. With the amount of reading required in a university education, many students are looking for ways to increase their effectiveness and efficiency as readers and are quite understandably attracted to such advertising. That's why colleges across the country have been offering speed reading classes as an alternative for students who would otherwise be prey to grasping entrepreneurs. **It is important that students know that the University of Oregon provides such a program, specifically focused on the needs of university students, for one-tenth the cost of Evelyn Wood.**

In addition, students should know that Evelyn Wood's marketing techniques are at best questionable. For example, a student who attended the Evelyn Wood session called our center to inquire about the differences between that program and the University's. During our conversation I realized that he had been erroneously told that we use reading rate-building machines, an approach to speed reading that has been thoroughly discredited. Moreover, he said that somebody else in the room confirmed that information based upon personal experience in one of our classes. It was then that I realized that Evelyn is up to her old tricks; the second student was surely a plant. I've been at this university six years and have never even seen such a machine here!

For at least ten years I have seen Evelyn Wood salespeople misrepresent the programs of Cal, Stanford, Texas and now Oregon. Through the years I have consistently disapproved of the anti-intellectualism pervasive in Evelyn Wood's advertising (e.g. "Don't waste your time studying."); the mendaciousness in their marketing (*discrediting academic reading programs*); and their general lack of insight into academic reading (e.g. "You can speed-read Hegel.").

Evelyn Wood Corporation is right when they say it is possible to increase one's reading speed. They are absolutely wrong when they say that they offer something that cannot be learned as well in a university program. Most university courses, certainly ours, have distilled the most effective techniques from the various commercial programs and from research in the psychology of reading and have applied them to academic purposes. **The University's course is not only cheaper (\$40); it is better.**

I encourage all students who are interested in increasing their reading speeds to inquire about the University's course at the Learning Resources Center. **We will be opening extra sections this week.** Talk to one of the staff members at the Learning Resources Center or to students who have taken the course. A potential expenditure of almost \$400 certainly warrants such investigation.

Sincerely,

Dave Hubin, Director
Learning Resources Center