

By the book

Student-published course guides give lowdown on classes, profs

By GREG MOORE

Daily Athenaeum, West Virginia U.

The official university catalog might tell you which math class you need for graduation — but it won't give you the scoop on what professor is "the reigning polyester king of Cambridge" and who else offers "a good shoulder to cry on."

For that type of information, you need a student-published course guide.

"With our guide, we have no restrictions," said Stephen Newman, editor of Harvard U.'s 1990-91 *Confidential Guide*, considered the granddaddy of all student-published guides.

The "Confi Guide," a highly opinionated and sometimes irreverent look at hundreds of Harvard and Radcliffe courses, competes with the more straight-laced Committee on Undergraduate Education guide published by the university.

Newman said that in the past, when professors complained about the negative comments in the administrators' CUE guide, the comments were changed. He said the CUE guide "tends to put everything in a more positive light."

The "Confi Guide," on the other hand, illustrates a review about a theology class with a photo of Andrew Dice Clay, and warns prospective English majors that the department is "in no rush to see that your needs are met. It doesn't particularly care whether or not you're happy. What are you going to do about it? Major in bio-chem?"

But students are encouraged to use both guides and talk with professors and students who have had the class as well. "It's important that we aren't someone's sole source," Newman said.

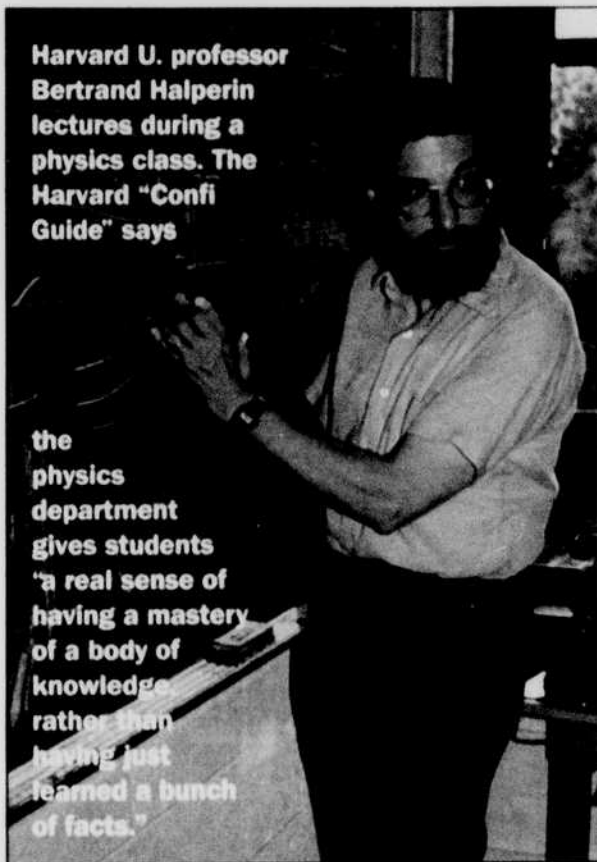
Pennsylvania State U. student Saul Treiman edited the first PSU guide for this fall. The guide consists of grading and attendance policies, class content and instructors' remarks, but Treiman said student comments may be added.

"That's definitely something we're looking at," he said. "There may be some way to do that with the OK of the administration."

He said some people were afraid "it would get very

Harvard U. professor Bertrand Halperin lectures during a physics class. The Harvard "Confi Guide" says

the physics department gives students "a real sense of having a mastery of a body of knowledge rather than having just learned a bunch of facts."



JOEL JEAN-PIERRE, THE MASS MEDIA, U. OF MASSACHUSETTS, BOSTON

confrontational" if students started throwing around negative comments in the first issue.

Syracuse U. student leaders are planning to augment their course guide with student comments within the next several years, according to Eric Jacobson, vice president for academic affairs. The guide currently reviews about 75 courses each semester, including course content and grade distribution. Jacobson said students will be polled at the end of each semester to get their opinions of the class.

All of the guides are geared toward the most popular classes on campus. Treiman said Penn State's guide concentrates on electives rather than the required classes, because, "It's kind of missing the point otherwise."

Freshmen get the most use out of the guides. "We sell about 1,500 copies, and 800 to 900 of those go to freshmen," Newman said. "After a year, you kind of figure out what the gossip is and what classes are like."

Leader of the pack: Student entrepreneurs find one-strap success

By NICOLE WERBECK

The Kent Stater, Kent State U.

Prepare for the attack of the one-strap backpack.

The ToPaq, a single-strap spin-off of the traditional bookbag, is scheduled to hit college-bookstores this fall at more than 40 schools nationwide.

ToPaq is the brainchild of three Cornell U. alumni who developed it for a class project two years ago while still in school.

Short for "totally original paq," ToPaq solves the bothersome problem of balancing a two-strap backpack on one shoulder. The lone strap is centered on the pack so carriers can sling the ToPaq over either shoulder. It also features a hook on top for hanging, a thumb loop, an ID slot on the strap, and one internal and external pocket.

Phillip Straughan, a May graduate and president of the company, saw a prototype of the ToPaq in London several years ago and purchased the U.S. rights to the product. He and fellow students Tiffany Norwood and Oliver Pfeffer then produced the ToPaq for a course in entrepreneurship. The trio reworked the pattern, focusing on balance and practicality, and walked off with \$5,000 for the best project.

The ToPaq principle is so obvious that Straughan was surprised no one thought of the idea before. "We are simply answering the backpack wearers' natural needs," he said. "The backpack has been designed to be comfortable on one shoulder, the way most people with a two-strap pack attempt to wear them."

"I thought (the ToPaq) was neat. I first used a backpack in college, and I always had trouble with it flying off," he said.

Straughan has big plans for his product. "Our long-term goal is to get the pack on the back of every backpack wearer in America," he said.

Nonverbal communication can affect classroom performance

By BOB FAHEY, JR.

Salem State Log, Salem State U.

Can the way a career professor smiles at you change your career goals from ditch digger to brain surgeon?

Probably not, but two leading body language experts do agree that professors' physical gestures toward students can affect students' achievement rates and even their career choices.

Monica Harris, an assistant professor of psychology at the U. of Kentucky, said professors are more likely to touch, smile at, and stand closer to students they expect to excel, while treating low-expectancy students more coldly. And this acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy, according to researchers.

But one reason, Harris said, is that motivated students tend to sit closer to professors, a move that draws further encouragement from professors.

Proximity is just one nonverbal factor that influences the educational environment. Gender and ethnic background also can

affect the student-teacher relationship.

Professors treat male and female students differently according to the course material, Harris said. "They expect women to shy away from mathematical and technical fields and go for the written word," while men get the nod, so to speak, toward the technical fields they currently dominate, she said.

Women are better at picking up the subtleties of nonverbal communication than their male counterparts. According to Harvard U. psychology professor Bob Rosenthal, when students view two-second films of a person who could be either describing nature or scolding a child, women guess the correct answer much more often than do men.

And students from Western nations rely on visual cues more than Eastern students, who are more sensitive to tone of voice.

Rosenthal founded the "Pygmalion theory," named after the Bernard Shaw play where a skilled linguist turns a street waif into a classy debutante, and used it as a basis

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