

# Students re-examine biology

By Scott Simonson  
Emerald Contributor

Thanks to workshop biology, students are reading supermarket tabloids differently these days.

As strange as it may seem, a headline shouting "Half-human, half-fish found in Florida" can provide an ideal context for discussing how different types of respiratory systems get oxygen into the bloodstream.

From the *Weekly World News* to *The New York Times*, the workshop biology class uses newspaper articles to show the interplay between science and public affairs.

"We're giving students some practice in something they'll be doing for the rest of their lives. You should always understand enough of the underlying scientific principles to understand what a politician is saying or a doctor is telling you," said Tom Landon, assistant professor of biology and instructor for this term's workshop biology class.

A one-year sequence aimed at students not majoring in biology, the class is designed to develop science literacy while teaching major concepts in biology.

Understanding these concepts often means putting biology into a practical framework and asking questions such as "Why does beer make you pee so much?" to learn how the kidney works, Landon said.

"My field is fascinating to me in and of itself. I tend to think that others are fascinated by it," he said. "What we've found is, unless you put the information in a context of practical value to most people, it's just another set of facts to forget after you memorize them for a test."

This approach seems to have won some believers among workshop biology students.

"I think it's a good class," junior Patrick Heriza said. "I like the way it's organized. I think

we're being open-minded for ideas. We get to question what the teachers are saying, and it's great for non-majors."

"It's much better than the traditional biology class," senior Melissa Letcher said. "What they present in class encourages you to do your reading. It's a smaller class, and that facilitates discussion."

Not only do the goals of workshop biology differ from a "traditional" introductory biology class, the structure of the 100-student course is different as well, said Deborah Morris, the project coordinator.

Less class time is spent in lectures and more time is spent in labs, Morris said. Also, each term's labs are organized around a specific social issue such as human genetics, cancer or human physiology.

The course has three goals: to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills that can continue to be used after the course ends; to promote the concept of science as a dynamic process instead of an unrelated collection of facts; and to demonstrate the interplay between science and public affairs.

Landon said the course covers less material than a "traditional" class, but the discussion in both lectures and labs helps cover topics in greater depth.

"Realistically, a one-year biology course is not going to cover everything you need to know anyway," he said. "By going over fewer items in more depth, I hope people will be able to apply and use general principles in thinking about things."

Each term, workshop biology students are required to make an in-depth examination of an existing scientific controversy and present their findings to the class.

Called Issues Projects, Morris said these small group assignments are one example of how workshop biology's educational

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— Patrick Heriza,  
workshop biology student

philosophy may differ from more traditional biology classes.

"It does seem that social issues and public policy are the distinguishing features of the course," she said. "But what's less obvious is what we ask students to do in the labs, and the kind of activities they do."

Morris said labs are designed to confront students' misconceptions of a subject instead of just telling students what is or is not correct.

"We believe that students have to construct their own concepts from their own observations, and they do that through writing and doing experiments," Morris said.

"That's really different from the way a lot of people perceive science, which is being either a collection of facts that we already know and aren't going to change, or as a collection of methods that are going to give you the ultimate right answer," she said.

Morris said the government agencies funding the project are interested in more than developing a new class for the University.

"We're expected to develop something that will be useful elsewhere," she said.

While the usefulness of the class at other colleges is still being determined, workshop biology has already paid dividends, Morris said. The biology department has received a \$1 million grant from the Howard Hughes Foundation to develop a program for biology majors.

# Psych department ranked 11th

By Colleen Pohlig  
Emerald Associate Editor

Research at the University's psychology department is among the most influential in the world, according to a recent analysis by the American Psychological Society.

The APS, one of the two main national societies for psychological research, ranked the University's psychology department 11th among the 50 highest-impact institutions, a report published in the November *APS Observer* said.

"Gaining national recognition takes a long time," said Dave McDaniels, associate dean of natural sciences. "This reflects over 30 years of hard work by the psychology department. It takes a group of dedicated and creative faculty to achieve this."

Institutions with the highest impact ratings include Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pa., first; the University of Vermont, Burlington, second; and Princeton University, N.J., third.

The ranking was based on research papers most frequently cited in the sciences and social sciences from 1986 to 1990. During the five-year period, University psychology department faculty published 209 papers that were cited 926 times.

Steve Keele, a psychology professor and department head, said the rating system was an attempt to adjust for the size of the schools.

No attention was paid to the content of the papers, he said.

Keele said the honor is not unusual considering the department's reputation for quality research.

"From a variety of ratings, it's not unusual for the department to be among the top 15 out of the nation in terms of research," Keele said. "The University and the public needs to be reminded that this University provides the best research in the world, and this honor is a reminder."

The ranking was higher than departments at institutions such as the University of Chicago, the University of California at Berkeley, Harvard University and the University of Washington.

McDaniels said the rating is beneficial to prospective students who are considering a career in psychology.

"It will benefit the University and will get more people interested in psychology and the University if a student's counselor can say they just read the University of Oregon was ranked high — it makes the University more attractive," McDaniels said.

## ET ALS

### MEETINGS

Unwanted Sexual Behavior Task Force will meet today from 12:30 to 2 p.m. in the EMU Board Room. For more information, call 346-3210.

Campus Girl Scouts will meet tonight at 8:30 in EMU Cedar Room A. For more information, call 686-9972.

Japanese Student Organization will meet today at 4:30 p.m. in EMU Cedar

Room F. For more information, call 346-9445.

Latin American Support Committee will meet tonight at 7:30 in EMU Suite 1. For more information, call 346-5897.

### RELIGION

Christian Science Organization will meet today at 1:30 p.m. in Room 179 Straub. For more information, call

### MISCELLANEOUS

Outdoor Program will sponsor a presentation titled "Canyon: A Threatened Wilderness" tonight at 7 in the EMU Ben Linder Room. For more information, call 346-4365.

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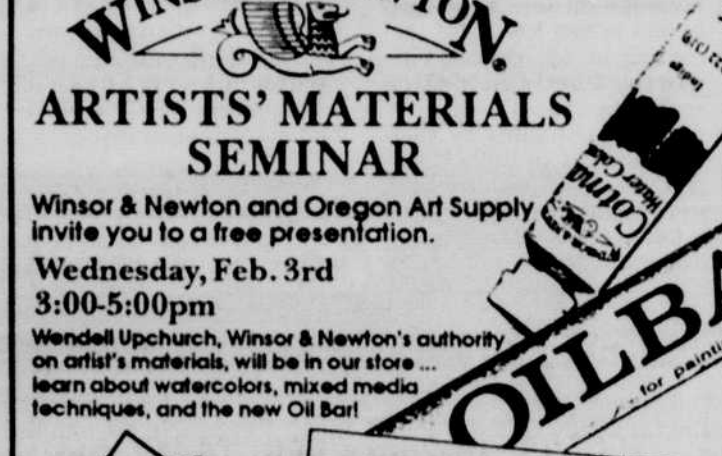
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