

UNIVERSITY

Students try to understand Holocaust in seminar

By Lori Bettineski
Oregon Daily Emerald

The events commemorating Shoah Memorial Week ended last Friday, but every Wednesday in a tiny room in Room 18 Prince Lucien Campbell students continue discussing the Holocaust.

As difficult and compelling as the subject matter may be, those enrolled in the five-credit Holocaust Seminar struggle to understand the events of the World War II Nazi reign and its effects.

"Since we didn't really learn about it in high school, I've been looking for an opportunity to study the Holocaust for a long time," said senior Sarah Beliveau. "It should be offered every year because it's important for our generation to know more about it."

The history department decided to offer the class fall and spring term this year because it hadn't been offered recently and many students asked that it be made available again. Because enrollment is limited, the history department will likely offer the class again in the near future.

Susan Crane, an assistant history professor who teaches the seminar, said, "Most students know what the Holocaust is about in general, but they are not real clear about the specifics and what the debates are about. Most students are interested in learning more about this."

The discussion this week centered around Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer-Prize winning novel, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*. Formerly on the *New York Times* best-seller list, this comic-book style tale depicts the story of



Susan Crane, an assistant history professor, gives a presentation on the Holocaust.

Vladek Spiegelman, a Jewish survivor of Hitler's Europe, and his son, who tries to come to terms with his father and history itself.

"It challenges people's expectations and draws them into the story," said Crane, referring to the uniqueness of it being a comic book. "In one page, there's more than you can comprehend in three re-readings."

Crane asked how many students wanted more when they got to the end of the book and a mass show of hands confirmed its popularity. "It's an excellent book," said senior Jerry Pierce. "There's

just something about it being a comic book but not belittling to the subject any."

"I also enjoyed it very much," Beliveau said. "It is such a unique presentation of such a powerful event."

In addition to reading *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, students taking the seminar are also required to read five other textbooks on the Holocaust, write a final 15-20 page paper on a topic of their choice and attend film screenings of *The Nasty Girl* and *Shoah*, shown in conjunction with last week's Shoah Memorial.

With the intensity of the subject matter discussed each week, interest in class differs for each of the 18 students but one thing is clear: The interest is definitely there. When Crane asked if anyone wanted to take a break after more than an hour and a half of discussion, the students opted to continue talking about Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*.

"Because Professor Crane seems to keep all avenues open for discussion, I enjoy working with her," said senior Lisa Dunahoe. "I'm hoping to find a door

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—Susan Crane
assistant history professor

into the human psyche as to why this happened and why some people are denying it today."

Because of the number of students in the class who had already seen *Schindler's List*, last week's seminar was devoted to discussing Steven Spielberg's production. Apparently most students agreed that it depicts the World War II massacre fairly accurately, but Crane, who has more experience and familiarity with the subject matter, was a bit more skeptical.

"From what I know it is historically accurate, but I think there was more of a stake in telling about Schindler than the Jews," Crane said. "It's not bad information or misrepresented, but if Spielberg had tried to flesh out the Jews more, it would have been a good thing. Yet at the same time, maybe you can't talk about real pain and suffering in the way they felt."

Crane is a visiting professor at the University, but memories of her class this term are likely to remain with her after leaving Oregon behind.

"I've gotten more out of teaching this seminar than anything I've done," Crane said. "The students always have so much to contribute to the discussion. There's never a dull moment."

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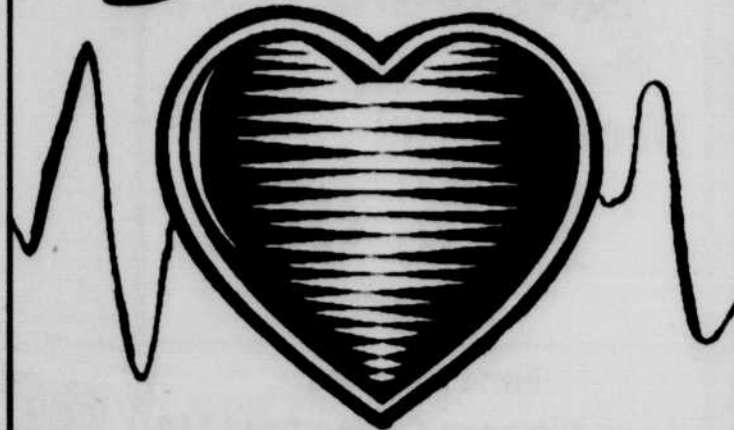
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