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Fishing or math? You decide

■ The University offers classes on fly fishing, but the treat is getting out to the local rivers

By Tony Chiotti for the Emerald

When you're standing waist deep in the Willamette River, 10 miles deep in the Willamette National Forest, holding on for dear life as a native rainbow trout tears downstream into the blinding, red sunset, the last thing on your mind is that paper due on Monday. Your only concern is whether this beast is going to submit before you run out of line.

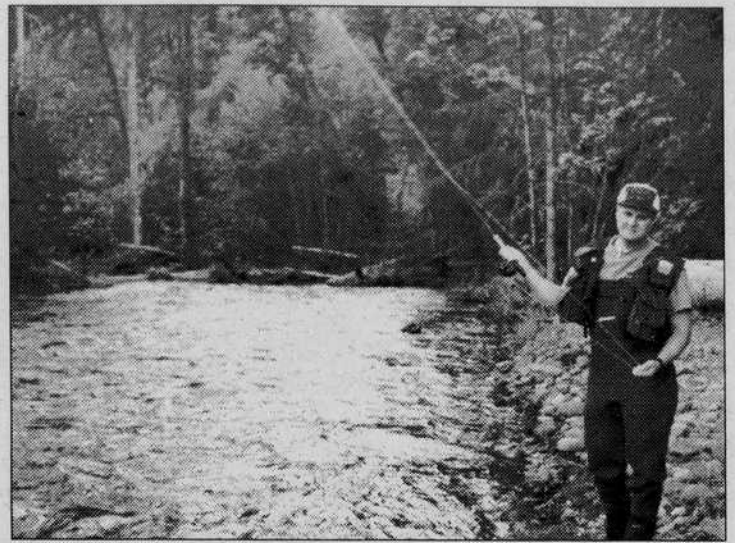
A fly rod offers the perfect excuse to get off campus and explore western Oregon, an area that is home to some of the finest fly fishing to be found — anywhere. Whenever you catch yourself bitching about the rain, just picture all that water trickling off the western slope of the Cascades and forming a watershed rich enough to keep you occupied for the rest of your life.

With winter steelhead and salmon runs through the coastal streams and insect activity that runs throughout the rest of the year, this is one of the few places in the world that can boast true, year-round fly fishing.

The West's abundance of public land offers unparalleled access to the water. Just outside of Eugene, the Willamette splits into a number of forks and tributaries, each offering its own unique challenges and rewards to the adventurous angler.

A Lane Transit District bus runs straight from downtown to the legendary McKenzie River. Heck, there are rainbow trout and eight-pound steelhead to be pulled out of the Willamette near Autzen Stadium or from the gravel bars that allow you to wade right out from the banks near Valley River Center.

For those who don't know even how to start catching the abundant fish, the University offers introductory fly fishing classes in the fall, spring and summer terms. Chris



Chris Culver casts his luck on the river. Culver teaches a fly fishing class at the University. Tony Chiotti for the Emerald

Culver, who teaches the classes, also offers fly tying workshops in the EMU Craft Center each winter.

Culver doesn't stay in the classroom long. After a brief run through the basics and some coaching on the signature, lilted cast, it's off to the streamside, where the majority of the class is held.

"People worry too much about casting," Culver said. "They're worried about trying to cast 30 or 40 feet and trying to look good, but they'd do better if they spent some time learning about the insects — understanding the life-cycles of the mayflies and caddisflies."

Aquatic insects provide trout with feeding opportunities throughout their life-cycle. You must figure out what the trout are feeding on at that particular moment and match it with a fly of the similar size, silhouette and color.

Duplicating the behavior of the insects is also important. For example, an adult caddisfly skeets along the surface of the water as it prepares to lay its eggs, while a grasshopper struggles in the surface film of the water. The fly fisherman becomes a puppeteer, jerking, flipping and finessing the line to create the illusion of life at the end of an

ultra-fine leader.

"I would say the main thing is being a good observer," said Rick Hafele, an aquatic etymologist and author of the streamside bible, "The Complete Book of Western Hatches." "Look around and see what's in the trees and what's flying around. Go out and pick up rocks and turn them over and look at what the dominant species are. You don't even need to know what their names are. You can just look at them and tell which ones are dominant and then pick a pattern that looks like that."

Having the right flies for the stream you are fishing requires that you anticipate the insect activity, and come prepared with those fly patterns. The best bet for doing so is to inquire at a local fly shop as to what hatches are underway in the area you plan to fish.

Allan Cline, owner of Home Waters fly shop, said that keeping your equipment minimal is the most important thing when starting out.

"The last thing you want to do is buy a vest because then you'll want to fill up every pocket with stuff you don't need," he said. "You also want to avoid spending

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