

# Professors as professionals: debating the pros and cons

University teachers express different sentiments on the subject of possessing a professional background

By Hank Hager  
Oregon Daily Emerald

For physics Professor James Schombert, working as a staff scientist at NASA was a time he will never forget. But six years ago, he made a career shift and came to the University to teach.

"Even though NASA was fast-paced and exciting, I like being an academic," he said.

Schombert, who now teaches astronomy, is just one of the many professors and instructors on campus who led professional lives before becoming teachers. Although there are no official records of how many professors worked in their field before coming to the University, an abundance of professionals are now employed on campus.

But many on campus say professionals may not always be best suited to work as professors, and a more extensive academic background may be better.

Raymond King, associate dean for the Charles H. Lundquist College of Business, said a professional background is important, but not required.

A professional background "is an additional factor, but not a primary factor," he said.

King said students may have a tendency to like instructors who have been professionals because they include anecdotes about real-life work situations that better illustrate the subject matter. But sometimes, he said, professionals may not always be the most qualified to teach.

"I think students like war stories

because those stories connect with what they're learning," he said. "[But] students like that no matter who provides it."

Jami Barnes, an administrative assistant to Tim Gleason, dean of the journalism school, agreed some professionals may not be the best teachers. But there is no one way to pinpoint who will be the best to instruct students, she said.

"If that person has had no teaching experience, the class may be intimidating and the students won't

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**Gregory Retallack**  
professor,  
geological sciences

give good feedback," she said. "But at the same time, those with no teaching experience can be really good."

Barnes added that the school doesn't directly look to hire professionals for open positions.

Professors on campus do not necessarily agree as to what background makes the best instructor.

Gregory Retallack, a professor of geological sciences, said he has never wanted to become a professional.

"It doesn't appeal to me to have people tell me what to do," he said.

Retallack, who has been at the University since 1981, said he doesn't believe professionals make the best professors.

"It's not an easy thing to teach,"

he said. "[Professionals] are not particularly in tune with what students want."

Those who have worked in the professional field say they prefer the academic lifestyle because it is more conducive to research and can be more rewarding. But they have had to make adjustments.

Schombert, who taught at the University of Michigan for four years before working at NASA, said he misses the wealth of technology he had at his disposal.

"The best thing at NASA is that you had access to the coolest technology," he said. "You would have resources at your command."

But despite the lack of the newest technology at the University, Schombert said he finds teaching rewarding because he is able to see students learn while also being able to do research.

Thomas Bivins, a journalism professor, said the choice to become a professor was an easy one for him. In the 1970s and '80s, Bivins worked for various public relations companies, including RCA electronics. He said he was eager to leave the public relations field.

"I just found the industry to be unstable," he said. "This is something I've always wanted to do."

Bivins said his professional background has helped him teach his students in a more thorough manner. He said he had a hard adjustment to the University when he decided to teach, but he has adjusted and now enjoys it more because he has more freedom in what he does each day.

"You have a lot more autonomy as a college professor than you do as a professional," he said.

# Pure comedy with superb acting to grace Hult Center on Saturday

Tim Conway and Don Knotts will visit Eugene this weekend, and audiences should expect a dynamic performance

By Dave Depper  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Have you had your fill of raunchy, low-brow humor? Does Chris Rock's profanity-laden act rub you the wrong way? Are you sick to death of Tom Green and "Jackass"?

Then you're in luck, because some pure, old-fashioned comedy gold is coming to Eugene this weekend. On Saturday, Tim Conway and Don Knotts will bring their seasoned brand of old-time humor to the Hult Center.

What? You haven't heard of heard of Tim Conway and Don Knotts? Sit down, youngsters, and let the Emerald tell you a story.

Tim Conway is known to his peers as "the comedian's comedian," and judging by his resumé, this statement isn't too far off the mark. Conway has had a long and successful career in comedy. He made his mark way back when on the "Steve Allen Show," which led to high-profile gigs on "McHale's Navy" (soon to be made into a

movie) and the "Carol Burnett Show." He's also won five Emmy awards.

Conway's success hasn't been limited to television, however. He's been a featured performer in Las Vegas, appeared in commercials for PepsiCo and Frito-Lay, and he was even in that modern classic, "Speed 2: Cruise Control."

However, today's audiences may be most familiar with a recent Conway creation: Dorf. Dorf, of course, is that short guy who goes golfing and fishing on home video. Maybe you thought Dorf was played by a vertically challenged, middle-aged man. Not so. Dorf = Conway. Conway = Dorf.

Don Knotts is another performer with a wealth of experience. Also a veteran of the "Steve Allen Show," Knotts is probably best known for his portrayal of Barney Fife on the "The Andy Griffith Show." Like Conway, Knotts has five Emmys under his belt.

Throughout the years, Knotts has made several movie and television appearances, including "It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World," "Herbie Goes to Monte Carlo," "Pleasantville," and "Matlock."

And attention to all the '80s tele-

vision retro-chic fans: Knotts had a recurring role on "Three's Company."

Saturday's event is being billed as "Tim Conway and Don Knotts: Looking Back." It's an apt title for two performers with such lengthy careers. Their act will feature many old skits that the two have performed throughout the years on their television shows, although the show will be geared toward Conway's routines. After all, Conway is more of a pure comedian, and Knotts is a rather a comic actor. Knotts is the straight man to Conway's goofball, and the two have a dynamic comic chemistry when put together.

Master vocal impressionist Lousie DuArt will be opening up the show with a routine that involves impersonating everyone from Barbara Streisand to Pop-eye to Cher. Apparently, she does an amazing George Burns as well.

Pay your respects to some comic legends and go see Tim Conway and Don Knotts Saturday at the Hult Center. Tickets are \$39.50 and \$49.50, and available at the Hult Center Box Office or by phone at 682-5000. You can also get them online at [www.hultcenter.org](http://www.hultcenter.org).

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