

Instructor opens minds, discussion



Matt Hanrohan Clackamas Print

Political Science Instructor Dean Darris teaches his students to use the Socratic method, centered on open discussion and looking at the reasoning behind conclusions.

Ben Maras
The Clackamas Print

While some may run screaming into the night when the word "politics" is mentioned, Dean Darris, political science instructor here at Clackamas, has made it his life study and passion.

Darris, who describes himself as a "civic missionary preaching the gospel of self government," is currently in his 14th year teaching at the college. He previously taught at Marylhurst University and Chemeketa Community College, and was a graduate assistant at Portland State. Like many of his students, what first touched Darris was an inspirational professor.

"I always had an interest in power and institutional apparatus of government in a very minimal sense," Darris said. "But, [he] inspired both my heart as much as my mind, and that's what I try to do as both a teacher and a writer. Politics is not a dreary, drab subject, but one that can be incredibly exciting for both student and teacher alike."

Darris brings this excitement to his classes, using an ancient technique known as the "Socratic method."

Named after the Greek philosopher Socrates, the Socratic method

takes advantage of open discussion, with an emphasis placed on the reasoning behind the conclusion.

"I find the Socratic method most appropriate for the study of politics because politics is so much about teaching students to articulate their own political values," Darris said. "The Socratic method encourages—if not compels—students to articulate the reasons for their beliefs ... and forces one to confront one's own values and make sure we're clear on why we believe what we believe."

Although some may find the study of politics and social science in general worth very little in the "real world," Darris is quick to answer the critics.

"So much of college is preparing students for jobs they might get; political science is all the more relevant because it prepares us for a job we already all have, which is 'citizen,'" Darris said. "I used to answer seriously, but everyone thought I was joking when they'd say, 'What are you going to do with [a political science] degree,' and I'd say, 'I dunno, change the world for the better?'"

In addition to changing the world for the better, Darris seeks to change every student for the better, hoping to instill in them the same conceptual thinking skills that

were given to him in college, because, as he says, "thinking is a skill which must be acquired."

As well as a teacher, Darris is also a writer. His book "American Democracy: Promise and Betrayal" is in the third edition, and is jacket endorsed by Ralph Nader and Congressman Peter DeFazio. Although he admits that it is a progressive text book, he says his only bias is for democratic justice.

"You can find out that this political system is open to the most common of persons, every one of us is as important as any other one, regardless of if we were born as a Kennedy or as a Darris. It's time for the political system to put the interest of the working majority at the core of its fundamental policies," Darris said.

And how does he recommend one achieve this?

"Get out and vote. My classes are designed with the goal that when you vote, you know what you're voting on and why, because voting shouldn't be a vacuous exercise; it's a fundamental exercise in democratic politics, so one of the things I try to do is help students vote in a more meaningful fashion," he said.

"Democracies," Darris adds, "are only as healthy as people's understanding of them."

Wiccan Samhain reverent holiday

Cassandra Mathieson
The Clackamas Print

Some view October 31 as a time for fright, a time for all things ghoully and goblin-like, and most of all, a time for tramping from door to door begging for sweets to grace one's palate.

But for others here at Clackamas, October 31 is time for a different, more reverent celebration.

Here on campus we have many students who consider themselves Wiccans, that is, those who follow the neo-pagan religion of Wicca. This holiday for them holds much more meaning than the sure-fire intent on dressing in shoddy linen costumes and tromping around in the rain.

During this time of the year they celebrate Samhain (sow-in). This is the Wiccan holiday which signifies one full turn on their wheel of the year, and is a time when it is traditional to eat foods from the winter harvest and perform rituals to boost confidence or dispose of weakness.

Shelley, a student here at Clackamas and an ordained priestess in Wicca, celebrates this holiday every year on October 31.

"Samhain is a time when the veil that shadows the two worlds from each other is thinned, and it becomes easier to communicate with the spirit world. Some families will set a place at their dinner table on this night because it is a time to honor your loved ones who have passed."

Because Wicca is a religion celebrating sions of their main Mother Goddess, mo shipped around this ti

According to 13m popular website amoc at Clackamas), such g those like Hecate, Macha, Lilith, and ma

Some foods from harvest to be eaten time are beets, nuts of squash, and corn.

Mary, another Wi ing Clackamas, spok family traditions.

"This is what I've taught to do so it isn't to me," she said. "M pagan so we always stuff depending on w

year that it is. Like no makes pumpkin p pumpkins are natur around this time and meant to eat with the

Mary also summed Wiccan religion mea well as the significan son.

"I think Wicca giv ter love for nature, "because we believe thing in our natural w nected and that ma when they live off t that grow naturally at ent times of year."

Editors' note: On follow the AP Style C capitalizing "pagan intended to show bias



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