

YOU MAJORED IN WHAT?

Highly specialized degrees offer a unique college experience

BY SAM MARX

It's not unusual to see history or engineering majors in a college program catalog, and English or biology students are pretty easy to come by, but when was the last time you met someone with a degree in comics or hiking? These are just a couple of the unique majors and minors offered at local colleges and universities.

The Comics and Cartoon Studies program at the University of Oregon made national headlines in December 2013 after an anonymous \$200,000 donation was bestowed on the program. According to Program Director Benjamin Saunders, the 15-month-old program now has more than 30 students enrolled in the minor program that spans six courses. "The idea of a [comics] minor is appealing because it makes any major that anybody takes more interesting," he says. "You can be an economics major."

The program was born out of the success of an exhibit of famous comic art at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art in 2009. "It just started to snowball from there," Saunders says. "We started to build connections with the professional community ... It is really valuable for students to encounter people who make comics." These professionals include some of the industry's top writers, such as Brian Michael Bendis, Matt Fraction and Greg Rucka. With additional funding, Saunders says there can be even more classes that focus on different genres of comics. "In terms of the kinds of classes that could get offered, it's just going to keep on growing."

A whole program devoted to comics may seem silly, but Saunders says, "My entire career ... wouldn't have happened without my early encounter with comics." Like studying literature of the English Renaissance or macroeconomic theory, comics allow students to "learn about different concepts sometimes going back hundreds of years." The course materials are just presented in a more visual form than the books most are used to. In actuality, if a student were to keep up with all the reading for the six comics courses, Saunders says, "It's a very demanding thing."

For UO students that might consider themselves "foodies," the school now offers a graduate specialization in Food Studies, and a Food Studies minor will be available next fall. Students learn about what we eat and how it impacts our communities, politics, environment and culture through courses such as Nutritional Anthropology and Sustainable Agriculture. Students can also take courses such as Food Festival Celebration, which overlaps with the specialized folklore program at UO.

At Oregon State University, undergraduates can take to the trails with the Tourism and Outdoor Leadership degree offered through OSU-Cascades. Students learn how to successfully lead others into the wilderness, as well as build and manage their own related businesses. Where else can assignments include cross-country skiing? To stay warm, they should team up with OSU students from the Apparel Design program. Coursework guides students in how to produce sportswear and "just about everything else that people wear."

For those that worry about their cars getting a fender bender, Lane Community College students can obtain the Auto Body and Fender Technology degree or certification. With both an auto collision option and auto paint option for the degree, students can make sure their cars are never dinged up again. ■

COMIC BY BRYAN PUTNAM



Helping every student reach his/her potential!

Wellsprings Friends School is an accredited independent, non-profit alternative high school founded in 1994. Offering a variety of learning/teaching styles, small classes, lots of personal attention, and a safe, nurturing environment, we provide an engaging high school experience for teenagers whose learning needs are not met in other settings.

Community service, nonviolent resolution of conflict, and working together in community are emphasized throughout our curriculum and school activities. Some students come to us on referral from school districts throughout Lane County; others attend on a private, tuition-paying basis. Tuition assistance is possible.

www.wellspringsfriends.org
541-686-1223

