

Penn State Harrisburg offers unique classes

By **RACHEL SHEPHERD**
Assistant Editor

Robert Bylone is taking graduate classes to attain a master's in environmental engineering. Bylone said one of his courses, environmental sociology, is of special interest to him. He said he enjoys the class because it is an open forum for discussion, as opposed to a traditional lecture structure.

Environmental sociology is just one of several interesting courses offered at Penn State this semester. Others include a feminine/masculine class for sociology majors and a course on religion and cultural issues in the Holocaust.

Dr. Steven Couch, sociology professor, said the environmental sociology class is about the relationship between the physical environment and society. Topics include the interrelationship between environmental and social problems-how they are caused and how they can be resolved. Couch has taught the class several times before.

"The class changes quite a bit because there's a lot of research going on in this area; it's pretty 'cutting edge' in sociology," he said.

Couch also said the class focuses on theories in environmental sociology with relative in-depth examples. The main emphasis this year will be Three Mile Island, because March marks the 25th anniversary of the TMI accident.

The masculine/feminine class, taught by Kamini Grahame, emphasizes the ways in which masculinity and femininity are constructed and reinforced, as well as, what is done through the various institutions in society. The class critically addresses the concept of gender and theories of gender difference.

"I really like that students have said they look at gender in ways they hadn't before and that they are able to think about and see in everyday events and practices how we create and re-create, as well as, challenge gender," Grahame said.

Recently, the class watched the gender-based film "The Crying Game." Jillian Noll, sociology, said her class debated for two sessions about which characters were a specific sex just by the way they looked and the gender characteristics they displayed.

"The class really got to talking about a specific character, Dil, who was a man dressing as a woman," she said.

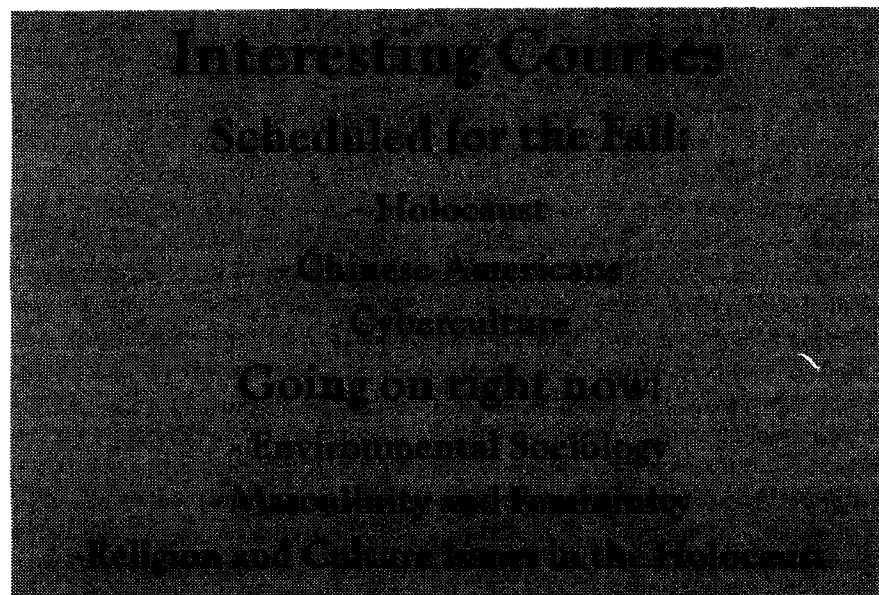
Noll also said she would recommend this class to any student at Penn State. "It really makes you think about how society stereotypes and classifies people as male or female," she said.

Religion and culture issues in the Holocaust is one of a series of courses on the Holocaust taught by Dr. Neil Leifert. Leifert said this course is about religious issues in the Holocaust.

"[This class is about] the general indifference at best and participation at worse, of Catholics and Protestant Christians in the persecution of Jews during the Nazi era," he said.

Leifert said he is fascinated by the topic. He said the small class size - nine students - allows for intimate discussions.

There are several courses that will be offered next semester for students inter-



ested in learning more about culture. Leifert will be teaching an introductory class in the Holocaust series. The course will give an overview of Nazi Germany's destruction of European Jewry.

Leifert, who has taught this course since 2000, said, "It appears that students do not learn much about this history in high school. [My expectations] are that students will come away understanding the dangers of racism and the depravity to which it can degenerate if not checked."

John Haddad will teach a course in American studies called Chinese-Americans. This class will be devoted to the study of the Chinese-American experience as it traces the history of Chinese culture. Haddad said he hopes his students will see how the interdisciplinary methods of American studies can be used to bring to life the study of an ethnic group.

"I am thrilled to teach this course," he said. "Back in the 1990s, I taught American history and culture at a university in Tianjin, China. After returning to the United States, I became fascinated in the ways that Chinese-Americans have combined traditional Chinese culture with American values and customs to create an entirely new culture that represents the synthesis of the two."

Dr. Sam Winch will teach a course entitled Cyberculture next semester. The class focuses on the social and cultural effects of new media, self-presentation in virtual worlds, online communities and virtual relationships. Winch has only taught this class once before as a graduate seminar titled Virtual Communities.

"What we found was that we all have a lot of real-world experience with virtual communities and interaction," said Winch. "It was interesting to compare new media to old media and the ways we now regularly interact and what this means for our ideas of knowledge, privacy, and a whole host of other things."

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