

The Jambar

Thursday, October 18, 200

Psych professor has unique teaching style

In Dr. Stephen Graf's psychology classes, YSU students are in charge of their own destiny — at least for the semester.

On the first day of class in psychology of intimate relationships, Graf warned students, "My class is different; it may make you uncomfortable."

"You will love it or absolutely hate it," Graf said.

The first thing a student must do after walking into Graf's class is pick up the folder with his or her number on it and find a partner. Everyone must have a different partner each day.

They then exchange "TRIP" logs. Included on the TRIP log are things such as "reach class on time," "stay to end," "bring needed materials," "fluency bonus," "recorded SAF on daily timing record sheet each day," "reach SAF aim in class for yellow and blue" and "free-write feedback."

The partners check each of these things on each other's logs. If they have done it, they get a dot; if not, they get an X. They then add up all the dots and all the Xs for the semester.

Students need to keep a three-to-one ratio, or three dots for every one X.

Dan Wloch, a fourth-year psychology major, said he likes Graf's methods. It shows him and other students how to work for the grades they want, without taking any tests.

Wloch is on the "can do" path and says Graf is a great teacher, and he would take one of his classes over anyone else's.

At the start of class, Graf tells students to begin resonant tuning. This involves a student sitting and basically humming until Graf tells them to stop. If a student reaches class before or during resonant tuning, they are

on time. Any time after the tuning has stopped, they are considered late.

Following resonant tuning on Thursdays, students take out a piece of paper and have five minutes to do a free-write. They write information in outline form on what they read for homework.

Students also have two decks of SAFMEDS, which stands for Say All Fast, Minute Every Day, Shuffle. These are basically flashcards.

They are supposed to time themselves on each deck for at least once a day and record it. Their ultimate goal is to achieve fluency, or reach 17 in 20 seconds. They also complete one timing in class every day.

Once a student thinks he or she has achieved fluency, the student needs to try it with Graf watching.

If he or she does it, the student gets the number of bonus points that is assigned for achieving it on that day. The bonus points get progressively smaller.

The SAFMEDS involve memorizing the cards and being able to see them and say the answer right away.

Dr. Philip Brady, professor, literature and creative writing, said he has discussed Graf's methods with him and that they share an interest in learning by heart.

Jim Gaston, sophomore, religious studies, said he least likes the memorization of the SAFMEDS but said he does like the fact the class is a new challenge and nothing like he's ever experienced before.

Gaston said while he understands it now, the concept of the class and Graf's methods were somewhat difficult to grasp at first.

"The idea of his technique is different. It would be easier if

more professors used it," Gaston said.

He is on the "can do" path for now but said he may fall to get by.

The rest of class is usually spent in discussion. These discussions are called free-says and revolve around the reading for the day. The only catch is, Graf does not say a word. These are entirely class led. Everyone has to respond at least once every eight minutes.

In addition to all this, each student is on a path of his or her own choosing. There is the "can do" path and the "get by" path.

The "can do" path is more involved and requires a little more work, but it is easy to get an A, and students don't have to take the final.

The "get by" path is a lot easier and takes much less work, but according to Graf, it is impossible to get an A.

He said he chooses to teach using the "get by" and "can do" paths because it provides students with some choice as to the amount of time and effort they wish to put into the course.

"I figured that even those on the 'get by' path get exposure to the ideas and see others benefiting," he explained.

He also said that on average, he gets three students taking the "get by" path for every two on the "can do" path.

Texts for the class includes Graf's own "Monitoring Relationships."

He said he chose to write his own book because, "Writing my own gave me control of those features and also allowed me to spend class time doing something besides lecturing."

Graf also teaches general psychology and topics in psychology, which includes about five different topics.

Adriene Geiger, freshman, business, said Graf's methods

help her retain the information better and makes application easier. She said she likes the fact she is responsible for her own grade and is very impressed with Graf.

Geiger said she had Graf as a professor for general psychology and liked him, so she took him for psychology of intimate relationships and is on the "can do" path.

Dr. Steve Ellyson, professor, psychology, who is one of Graf's colleagues, said he thinks Graf's methods are very interesting, but his approach differs significantly from the way he teaches his own classes.

"I believe the function of a university is to expose students to a 'universe' of ideas, theories, possibilities and even professors. While I don't use his methods, I am proud to be in the same department as Dr. Graf," he said.

While he does not use Graf's method himself, he said he has seen professors at other schools where he has taught and visited use of a strong behavioral approach. Ellyson said that while Graf is a minority in his approach, he is not alone.

Pam Paris, sophomore, business, said Graf's class is unlike anything she's ever experienced in a classroom.

Unlike some of the other students in Graf's classes, her favorite part of class is the SAFMEDS. But she said she least likes the free-says in which Graf does not participate. Paris is on the "get by" path but said she would not like to take another one of Graf's classes.

Jim Esperon, psychologist at the University Counseling Center, said he is familiar with Graf's methods chiefly through discussion with students.

"As far as I can tell, Dr. Graf relies heavily on memorization, which is demonstrated through recall and at a timed pace, and



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GRAF

uses the same over-learning methods on a timed pace for basketball shooting," Esperon said.

Although he said he finds Graf's methods interesting and effective, he suggests two variables:

"First, some students are more reflective and take more time to think through problems; they also tend to be slower in decision-making in general, less reactive, etc., but not necessarily less bright than quick responders.

"Secondly, I don't know if Dr. Graf measures depth of understanding by way of application."

Graf said he has developed his method through addressing questions.

He asked what key behaviors his students should be able to do and what conceptual tools the students should be familiar with.

He said he has tried to be open to exploring possibilities that wouldn't seem workable to most people, such as the class discussions that are monitored, in which the professor doesn't participate.

Many students said the class does indeed make them uncomfortable, but others said they do love the class.