Helms: Outside and inside the classroom

By ASHLEY LAM
Editor-in-chief

Prof. Sheldon Helms, an associate professor of psychology, currently teaches general, abnormal, experimental and social psychology at Ohlone. He has been a professor at since 2001 and in that time he has also served at faculty adviser to the Ohlone Psychology Club that hosts the Psychology Club Speaker Series, founded by Helms.

Q If you weren’t a professor, what would you be doing now?
A For over 12 years, before I moved to the Bay Area, I trained to be an actor. I did local community theater, the Kern Shakespeare Festival and some local commercials. If I weren’t teaching, I would probably be trying to break into television or theater.

Q What music genres do you like and why?
A Since 1979, my favorite musician has been Pat Benatar. Not only does she have an amazing voice, but she was also the first real kick-ass woman in rock ‘n roll. Before her, there were female singers, but they mostly sang songs in which the woman was portrayed as a victim or a lovesick person begging her man to stay.

Pat Benatar sang songs that basically said, “If you don’t treat me right, I’ll kick your ass!” It was so refreshing to hear that sort of voice in the early 80s. Her songs became anthems for people fighting for gender equality, not to mention being extremely good music.

It saddens me that each generation I teach has less and less connection to that period of music.

Q What would be your biggest pet peeve?
A My biggest pet peeve is people who don’t use rationality in their everyday lives. Unfortunately, this is the majority of people in the world, which lends itself to all sorts of problems. People waste money and risk their health on sham products (e.g., homeopathic “medicine,” reiki massage, Power Balance bracelets, etc.), and nonsensical notions (e.g., astrology, “The Secret,” anti-vaccine messages, etc.), often ignoring scientists’ and skeptics’ evidence of their ineffectiveness or harm.

Q What is something that you like to do in your free time?
A Aside from hangout with friends and family, I’m also a huge science geek. I attend The Amazing Meeting each summer, a four-day conference on science and skepticism hosted by James “The Amazing” Randi in Las Vegas and his James Randi Educational Foundation (JREF).

It has allowed me to meet such science greats at Neil deGrasse Tyson, Bill Nye the Science Guy, Richard Dawkins, Adam and Jamie (The Mythbusters), magicians like Penn & Teller and James Randi and hundreds of others who are interested in science, critical thinking, skepticism and related topics.

After his recent visit to Ohlone, James Randi asked me to be part of the JREF’s Educational Initiative. As part of that process I’ll be writing articles for his web site that involve strategies for teaching critical thinking at the college level.

Q What’s a much tougher business than education and the market is extremely volatile; you just never know if you’ll be employed next month. Shortly after I fell in love with the science of psychology, I found that I could use my natural talent for entertaining and the skills I learned in theater to teach. That’s when I started trying to find work at a community college. Just like with good acting, a great deal of what I do is character development and storytelling.

To be an effective teacher, you have to create a specific environment in the classroom and make the information come alive. The only way to do that is to reveal to your students the parts of yourself that get excited about the subject you’re teaching.

My acting coaches made that process second nature to me and it was only after my first student evaluation (at another college), when I read descriptions like “His passion for the subject is contagious!” and “He’s so funny, I looked forward to coming to class every night!” that I realized that what I was doing wasn’t universal.

Finding that I could use my natural talent for entertaining and the skills I learned in theater to teach was only after my first student evaluation. My biggest pet peeve is people who don’t use rationality in their everyday lives. Unfortunately, this is the majority of people in the world, which lends itself to all sorts of problems. People waste money and risk their health on sham products (e.g., homeopathic “medicine,” reiki massage, Power Balance bracelets, etc.), and nonsensical notions (e.g., astrology, “The Secret,” anti-vaccine messages, etc.), often ignoring scientists’ and skeptics’ evidence of their ineffectiveness or harm.

I hope to develop a “Critical Thinking in Psychology” course in the future to try and address some of these topics in a more formal manner.

The philosophy professor has been invited to give presentations about zombies, vampires, animal rights and creativity. He has served as the United Faculty of Ohlone College Treasurer a couple years ago, but is currently serving as the UFO president until Dec. 14.

The Prins-driving professor is an outspoken advocate for women’s equality, gay rights and animal welfare.

NEWS

Book your next fundraisers with Laser Tag
Buy 1 laser tag game - $9.99
OR
Pay $20 for Triple Play
Buy 1 Laser maze - $3.99
And get a 2nd round FREE
Call us for
All nighters
Birthday parties
Corporate Events
Open Monday - Thursday 3pm - 9pm
Friday 3pm - 12am Saturday 10am - 12am Sunday 10am - 9pm

For more info go to www.LaserTaggingInc.com or Call us at (510)668-1200

News bites

Faculty of the Month

Wayne Yuen received the Faculty of the Month award for December and January. Yuen is a professor and hands-on leader of Ohlone College.

The philosophy professor has been invited to give presentations about zombies, vampires, animal rights and creativity. He has served as the United Faculty of Ohlone College Treasurer a couple years ago, but is currently serving as the UFO president until Dec. 14.

The Prins-driving professor is an outspoken advocate for women’s equality, gay rights and animal welfare.

Art history resources

Throughout the winter break, students can get ready for Prof. Kenney Mencher’s Art History class in the spring semester. Students are welcomed to use his free series or lectures in chronological order to study with over the winter hiatus. Mencher’s lectures are available at http://www.udemy.com/u/kennymencher/.

For more information please contact Kenney Mencher at (510) 979-7916 or email him at kmecnher@ohlone.edu.

Compiled by Marra-Magsakay and Amy Park