

WHITEWATER RAFTING 101

Honors program takes education to the extreme

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When some people hear the words "University Scholars and Honors Programs" they yawn and envision a stuffy classroom full of Steve Erkle clones gleefully memorizing entire sections of Webster's Dictionary.

YSU Honors Program Director Nathan Ritchey wants to sever this sometimes automatic link between what is scholarly and what is monotonous.

"When I was asked to join the honors program in college I said 'No' and thought 'Why would anyone want to do that to themselves?'" Ritchey mused. "But this is not your average honors program. I want to offer unique opportunities for students. I want them to be challenged, but I don't want it to be with a lot of tedious busy work."

Tedious busy work is definitely not what students will encounter when enrolled in Honors Program courses. Instead, they will become part of a "weekend honors experience" guaranteed to forever separate the concepts of higher learning and high forms of boredom.

The weekend honors experience was born from Ritchey's desire to teach academically chal-

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lenging course work in a vital and refreshing manner.

As a result of Ritchey's endeavor, YSU now offers a variety of weekend honors experience courses that blend traditional classroom topics with exciting hands-on experiences.

Future weekend honors experience courses combine the study of river geology with white water rafting; the study of anthropology with the actual excavation of a historical site; and the study of Beethoven's life with a concert performance by the Youngstown Symphony.

"The idea behind the weekend honors experience is to pick a topic and study it and become engulfed in it for the weekend," explained Ritchey. "These courses are amaz-

honor courses for them. Then we realized that we should invite all the students to take these courses. The response has been amazing," said Ritchey.

"Three years ago I was running the honors program out of my math office, now we have an assistant director and an honors complex in this dorm. The program has been so successful that I've been invited to speak at a National Collegiate Honors Council meeting to talk about the program's unbelievable growth in three years. It's been very gratifying to be a part of this success."

Any student can enroll in weekend honors experience classes but must have a 3.4 or higher and already have taken at least 12 credit hours to officially join the Honors Program.

A typical weekend honors experience involves first reading a book on the selected topic, attending the actual event and then writing a paper.

The whitewater rafting and camping excursion at New River Gorge in which students will learn about river geology is scheduled for May.

Also planned for May is an up close and personal weekend with Isaiah Jackson and the Youngstown Symphony where students will learn about the revolutionary life and times of Beethoven.

During the fall quarter, a weekend will be spent unearthing lost treasures at Quaker Town, an extinct community in Western Pennsylvania.

Previous honors courses have focused on a variety of topics such as an in-depth look at lost generation films and the controversial siege at Waco.

Lynn Nickels, sophomore, Arts & Sciences, attended the honors class titled "Waco and the Rise of the Local Militia."

"The class was very interesting and informed me of some surprising facts on a controversial topic. I left that class thinking that the FBI were the ones who acted crazy and not David Koresh," said Nickels.

Ritchey hopes for a continued growth and success of Honors Program courses.

"I want to tell other students about these programs and invite other faculty members to contribute ideas on something positive and unique students can do for college credit," said Ritchey.

"Sometimes professors aren't enthused about teaching honors courses so I tell them to throw out all the rules and think of how they'd teach a course with complete freedom. I tell people that the honors program is a present you give to yourself. It completes an education and gives students a little knowledge in a lot of areas."