



Tim Jordan

PROFILE

JOSEPH FRACCHIA

THERE'S A REASON THE CLASSES OF Associate Professor Joseph Fracchia are standing room only. Fracchia's Visions of Freedom courses make history current and compelling for the undergraduates he teaches in the UO's Clark Honors College. Each of the courses, which Fracchia describes as "variations on a theme," examines the concept of freedom

through a specific lens, such as socialist worldview, the constraints of race and class, or utopian thinking.

It's all a bit heady for freshman students tackling these graduate-level concepts, but Fracchia believes in elevating his students to the level of the material, not the other way around. "Students get really excited talking about these kinds of issues," says Fracchia. "It's going to get discussion going, and that makes for a successful class."

Fracchia actively collaborates with his students, entrusting them with leading class discussion and posing questions to visiting experts. His teaching approach incorporates two key guidelines: "Respect the students by challenging them," and "translate the material into terms the students can understand, without diluting the content."

And his students seem to respond. "I am a psychology major, so taking history classes from Professor Fracchia meant that I was completely out of my element and comfort zone," says recent graduate Katie Spaventa '07. "He was challenging me because he knew that I could actually do it, and when someone has that kind of confidence in you it makes all the difference in the world."

Fracchia credits his students with keeping his job interesting, citing as an example a biology major who, on his own initiative, penned a thirty-seven-page essay replicating the style of a nineteenth-century novelist, when the assignment called for only eight pages in modern English.

"I never get bored," says Fracchia. "I never find it tedious to teach the same material. No two classes have the same students, so it is impossible to teach the same class twice."

Name: Joseph Fracchia

Education: B.A. '72 and Ph.D. '85 in history, U.C.–Davis; M.A. in history, U.C.–Santa Barbara, 1975

Teaching experience: More than twenty years at Oregon, teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in history and sociology.

Awards: Numerous, including the Ersted Award for Distinguished Teaching (1988), the Sherl K. Coleman and Margaret E. Guitteau Professorship in the Humanities (1992–93), and the Evelyn Nelson Wulf Professorship in the Humanities (1998–99). Most recently, the Thomas F. Herman Faculty Achievement Award for Distinguished Teaching (2007).

Off campus: Fracchia enjoys cooking Italian cuisine, as well as skiing and kayaking. Also, he reports, "I'm very good at doing nothing."

Last word: "Fifty percent of the responsibility for the class is mine as the teacher. The other fifty percent is yours as the student."

—AARON RAGAN-FORE