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Best of LA

2012

BEST OF L.A. CLASSES

written by PAUL ROGERS



UCLA's Organic Chemistry class: (l to r) instructor Neil Garg with students Justin Banaga, Yannick Goebwith, and Kimberly Bui. Photo: Reed Hutchinson, UCLA.

With this being our annual *Best of L.A.* issue, we took the opportunity to profile some of this city's most inspiring college classes. Exploring everything from pre-modern copper smelting and traditional Chinese medicine to Capitol Hill bargaining and high-speed fiction writing, these courses use imaginative content and/or innovative teaching methods to impart life lessons which transcend their specific subject matter.

HUMAN SURVIVAL: LEARNING FROM THE PAST at USC

Instructor: Dr. Lynn Swartz Dodd

In this new freshman course, students earn two college credits through hands-on experimental archaeology - literally learning how to feed, clothe, defend, and shelter themselves using pre-modern techniques. Each student gets to make cheese, bread, oil lamps, thread for weaving and stone tools for cutting, as well as brewing beer and smelting copper just as our ancient ancestors did.

"USC has always done a terrific job of giving their students the chance to master so many skills, from moviemaking to dentistry, and now, apparently, apocalypse survival," said student Austin Welsh. "This class is everything I dreamed it would be. I spend my Tuesdays doing a bit of philosophy, economics, theater, and now, a bit of copper smelting... I consider these skills to be both the least and most useful ones I've picked up at USC so far."

ORGANIC CHEMISTRY at UCLA

Instructor: Prof. Neil Garg



Neil Garg. Photo by Ashwin Sunder.

Officially titled Chem 14D: Organic Reactions and Pharmaceuticals, this class is the second quarter of undergraduate level organic chemistry for students interested in pre-health professions (medicine, dentistry, optometry, pharmacy, etc.). But it's the inventive manner

in which Neil Garg, Associate Professor and Vice Chair for Education in UCLA's Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, communicates traditionally memorization-heavy content (including having students make their own music videos about organic chemistry) that sets this class apart.

"Professor Garg is without a doubt the best professor I have had at UCLA. He finds revolutionary ways to combine what college students like - music videos, technology and expressing ourselves - with what they need to know: organic chemistry," said student Maria-Kassandra Coronel. "What I love most about organic chemistry is it combines problem-solving and deduction skills with creativity, and gives me that great feeling that I'm accomplishing something meaningful."

CLINIC THEATER at Yo San University

Instructors: Dr. Brady Chin, Dr. Benny Lin, Dr. Nai Qiang Gu

This 30-hour course is part of Yo San University's 4-year/3,375-hour graduate program in acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine. It offers students their initial exposure to acupuncture and traditional Chinese in a clinical setting, and prepares them to transit from classroom to clinic and patient care. Clinic Theater is a third-year course in the school's Masters of Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine (MATCM) degree program.

"Students in this course will have the opportunity to experience firsthand and close up how traditional Chinese medicine theories and diagnostic principles are integrated into clinical practice by observing the entire assessment, diagnostic and treatment procedure conducted by experienced, licensed practitioners/faculty," said Lawrence Lau, Dean of Academic and Clinical Affairs at Yo San University. "This course embodies the application of academic theories to clinical practice and the integration of didactic and clinical teaching modalities."

WRITE A NOVEL A MONTH AS PART OF NATIONAL WRITING MONTH at UCLA Extension

Instructor: Ian Randall Wilson, fiction writer and poet

Every fall quarter, UCLA Extension Writers' Program offers Write a Novel in a Month, designed and taught by fiction writer and instructor Ian Randall Wilson, to coincide with National Novel Writing Month. Last year, over 250,000 writers worldwide took up the challenge to write an entire draft of a 50,000-word novel over the 30 days of November. Immersing themselves in one of the wildest writing experiences ever, Wilson's students get the structure, support, and know-how they need to generate material and move their drafts along, word-by-word. It speaks volumes (no pun intended) that, over the past six years, more than 84 percent of Wilson's students have completed their draft on time.

"The feeling of accomplishment on the part of these novelists - because once they finish a draft they are novelists - is immeasurable," said Wilson.

THE ART OF POLITICAL BARGAINING at USC

Instructor: Prof. Jeb Barnes

In an age of intense partisanship and polarization on Capitol Hill, this two-unit First Year Investigation (FYI) seminar for freshman asks what is the art of political bargaining? What factors engender gridlock? What factors produce legislation? What is the opportunity for change in Congress?

"On the first day of class, I arrive with a warm batch of homemade brownies and tell the students that they need to divide them using majority rule. Soon students are busy building coalitions, trying to persuade members to join them and buying off 'swing votes' with promises of a greater share," said instructor Jeb Barnes, Associate Professor and Vice Chair of Political Science and a Dornsife Faculty Fellow at USC. "The next week we watch a documentary on the passage of national health reform and use what we learned in the first class to understand the negotiations."

THERE'S NO BUSINESS WITHOUT DIGITAL BUSINESS at UCLA

Instructors: Peter Guber, Chairman and CEO of Mandalay Entertainment Group, and Richard Rosenblatt, CEO of Demand Media



Peter Guber. Photo by David Carlson.

Co-taught by top entertainment and digital media executives and entrepreneurs Peter Guber and Richard Rosenblatt, this Anderson School of Management graduate course explores and decodes how various industries and highly successful individuals utilize today's array of ever-evolving digital media.

Looking at both ends of the food chain - the business/artist/producer/content producer and the audience/customer/patron - the course examines how businesses are both surviving and thriving in the technological age. Guber and Rosenblatt argue that purposeful story telling is even more imperative in the digital age, but that tellers must understand the platforms, the technology, the differing audiences and the goals even more implicitly in order to ignite the digital narrative.

"The tremendous and diverse quality of guests that dialogue with the students makes it a unique and memorable experience," said Guber.

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GUIDE

BEST OF L.A. CLASSES

MILLER INTRODUCTION TO JUDAISM PROGRAM at American Jewish University

Executive Director: Rabbi Adam Greenwald



Adam Greenwald. Photo by Cheryl Kaufman Photography.

For nearly half a century, the Miller Introduction to Judaism Program at American Jewish University has served both Jews and non-Jews who seek meaning in Jewish living and a connection to the Jewish community. This 18-session, university-accredited course explores both Judaism's greatest and most revolutionary ideas as well as the nuts and bolts of day-to-day Jewish living. Students can join the course (offered at multiple Los Angeles locations and supplemented with Shabbat retreats and individualized mentorship) at any time and complete it at their own pace.

"In each and every course, an ancient tradition refreshes itself and comes alive in a brand-new way with the input of the rich diversity of people who find their way to the Introduction to Judaism Program," said Rabbi Adam Greenwald, the program's executive director. "Our students become our partners in shaping a renewed Jewish future."



Nurit Katz. Photo by Derek Liu.

PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABILITY I: ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION at UCLA Extension

Instructor: Nurit Katz, Chief Sustainability Officer at UCLA

Taught with palpable passion by UCLA Chief Sustainability Officer Nurit Katz, this class is the first core course in UCLA Extension's Global Sustainability Certificate program. It serves as an introduction to the broad field of sustainability (from sustainable agriculture to corporate responsibility to design) by offering the analytical frameworks and tools to help students tackle contemporary social and environmental challenges.

"A perfect blend of theory, empirical evidence, sobering conclusions, and inspiring optimism; this course pushes beyond the boundaries of 'going green' and forces students to reconsider some of their most fundamental beliefs about humanity's role in the world," said student Ian Kenny. "This course set the stage for a variety of courses that I would go on to take over the next year and a half, allowing me to view new and exciting course material through a critical and vibrant new lens."

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION at UCLA

Instructor: Prof. Tim Groeling



Tim Groeling

One of the core required courses in the Communications Studies major, professor Tim Groeling's Political Communication class is a broad survey course covering the history, causes, and effects of political news. Groeling's approach is unusually interactive, illustrating key concepts with examples, surveys and experiments that draw on students' own experiences to drive key points home.

"The best example of this is the core project in the class, in which students make commercials for a fictitious presidential campaign," Groeling, Associate Professor and Chair of UCLA Department of Communication Studies, explained. "I've been doing this project since 2002, and students tell me that nothing is more effective at driving home the power and limitations of this form of political discourse. They also tell me that they have become much more sophisticated consumers of advertising (and news, in fact) after having made their own ads."



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