

The Real World: Mini-Term

ELYSA WAN

Whether we like to admit it or not, reality TV shows have their appeal. They tap into common strains of narcissism, vanity, melodrama, romance and all things worldly.

A group of students at NCSSM delved into this world when they participated in an independent study: Experiments in Social Psychology.

The ten experimental subjects were Teresa Lee, Richard Connelly, Bethany Powers, Claire Bateman, Daniel Certo, KT Barrette, Laura Lindsey, Matt Scott, Quinton Buesching, and Kevin Beier. The two monitors present were Kurt Metscher and Albert Ren. Before the actual experiment the students researched and determined their subjects' personality types. They then saw how these classifications applied to a real situation.

The ten people were confined to the Visiting Scientist's apartment for 3 days and nights.

As expected, there were some interpersonal tensions that arose. But Connelly noted that he thought it went "better than expected." Teresa Lee added, "If we didn't have any guys, it would be much easier."

At the conclusion of the experiment, everyone was left with a sense of relief and about 150 hours of video footage to edit. Be sure to look for the final product, coming soon.

Blind Like Me

SHER VOGEL

As many of you who stayed on campus noticed, my Mini-Term project was to be "visually impaired" for seven complete and consecutive days by wearing electrically taped swim goggles. I only removed the visual obstructions when I slept at night.

The original purpose of this experiment was to test if my remaining four senses would heighten so as to compensate for the loss of vision. But just as Plato taught, my ideal was compromised by reality: the slackness I aspired to became a mixture of boredom and frustration. I couldn't write or read anything, so I tried listening to books on tape. I often, however, fell asleep. Listening to movies or TV also resulted in me falling asleep.

I found solace in playing the piano and visiting people around campus (I was not allowed to leave campus for liability reasons). For all seven days, I was almost

entirely co-dependent, and also carried around a tape recorder. Here are a few things I've noticed and lessons I've learned -

- Canes are a necessity!
- The "graduation doors" don't have a railing, so it would take a visually impaired student longer to graduate (as if 40 more days isn't enough).
- It is possible to do laundry with your eyes closed.
- The entire PEC is accessible to the visually impaired.
- There is a garden at UNC specialized for the visually impaired; each flower has a strong and unique odor.
- Generally, people assumed that since I couldn't see, I couldn't hear either.

The other three days of Mini-Term I did a lot of research. In the end, I found out that although it may have seemed that my senses heightened, the loss of one sense just helps you concentrate more on the others.

Nietzsche and Dracula: God is Undead

ELYSA WAN

The thought of vampires incites a wide range of emotions among different people. This extremely open-ended Mini-Term course examined the cause and justifications of these different emotions, tracking the evolution of the vampire's image throughout the 19th and 20th century.

A quick sampling of their investigation includes the relationship between Dracula and anti-Semitism, sex appeal, the AIDS epidemic and many more eclectic topics.

According to some students, recent versions of vampires seem to be more humanized. Students explored this trend through different sources including: "Interview with the Vampire," Brahm Stoker's *Dracula*, *The Witching Hour* by Anne Rice, and paintings and illustrations from the 19th century and beyond.

Are Students Slacking During Mini-Term?

CHARLIE STONE

For many students, Mini-Term is a chance to relax and escape the stress of day-to-day school. All across campus during Mini-Term, NCSSMers sat on the benches, soaked up the sun, and went out to eat. Whether they went to Italy, took a class or filmed a movie, most students agree that Mini-Term was one of the most fun times of the year.

But is the academic aspect of Mini-Term being lost amid all the fun? Some faculty members are worried that students use Mini-Term more to slack off than to further their education.

Mini-Term, after all, was designed to be "a chance to pursue special academic interests outside the normal curriculum," said Mini-Term coordinator Tom Clayton. Mr. Clayton said that ever since Mini-Term replaced Special Projects Week three years ago, the administration has made a very serious effort to improve the academic value of Mini-Term. Classes were introduced and an effort was made to tighten the standards for which independent projects were approved. Despite this, Clayton said, every year a few students find ways to be lazy.

Clayton doesn't think that laziness is an overwhelming problem. "I think the number of students who have fantastic experiences each year outweighs that," he said. He argued that some of the perceptions of slackness may be misconceptions.

"Students often work different hours than they would during a normal school week. Sometimes a student who is relaxing in the morning is doing quite a bit of work at night. Also, during a normal week many students spend much more time on school-work than the eight hours a day we expect during Mini-Term, so it can be a little bit easier."

Another issue that concerns the faculty is the academic merit of some of the independent projects. Dr. Jo Ann Lutz, chair of the math department, worried that a lot of projects were approved with

"pretty minimal academic merit."

For Clayton, testing a project's worth includes examining the amount of background involved. He said, "Is cooking or going to Italy or Ireland worthy in itself? Maybe not, but if you also study the history and culture of the country you visit, or the role cuisine plays in a certain society, then that has more worth."

Most faculty think that Mini-Term is a vital part of the school year, but some wondered about its length. Lutz said, "Mini-Term is too long. Last year, when I taught Surreal Numbers, even my strongest students were tired of it by day seven." Many faculty members argued that energy drops off after the fifth or sixth day. A shorter Mini-Term would also mean less stress on the faculty, many of who find teaching an eight-day course exhausting. Dr. Noreen Naiman said, "Mini-Term two years ago was one of the worst times of my life. I had so much work."

Some students also report Mini-Term being a lot of work. "I was in lab for eight hours a day and I spent about five hours every night planning and setting up for the next day," said junior Tim Collier, who took High Speed Imaging. "It was fun, but wow."

Mr. Clayton agreed. "A lot of students get very into their Mini-Terms, and that's great." He said that Mini-Term is evolving. "There's a lot of stuff we're looking at: how long to have it, when to have it in the year. It's a compromise."



The Italy Mini-Term group poses in front of Florence's picturesque landscape.



Blair Rudlock



Mini-Term Quotations

What did you like the most about Mini-Term?

• "Mini-Term has been one of the most profound, elucidating, and intoxicating experiences in my career at this North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics. Every morning I woke up realizing that today I will work towards accomplishing an endeavor that I had chosen for myself. It is a great feeling. I love Mini-Term and chocolate." -Hao Feng

• "Sleep." -Mary Grant

• "Gettin' down and dirty with recycling bin lids." -Kristin Drum

• "You learn lots. It's a learning about things you're not used to. Great opportunity." -Tim

• "Being able to be busy and productive." -Michael

• "Being able to play piano to do usually." -Michael

• "The people." -Matt S