

Course guides students in analyzing activism

By LYNN CASEY

It's not very often that a class will include speeches by Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver, Phyllis Schlafly, Richard Nixon and Jo Freeman.

With such a list of speakers, it's no wonder 103 Bingham is packed every Tuesday and Thursday at 11 a.m. Of course, the speakers do not appear in person—it's all on tape. So why do

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Speech 61 Professor Robert Cox talks to class
... Roll never taken, but no empty seats in course

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students pack the lecture hall for a course that requires minimal note taking, and in which the professor doesn't take roll or give pop quizzes? Two reasons.

The speech course, "The Rhetoric of Contemporary Social Movements," is more than interesting because it deals with protest movements that are relevant today. Secondly, the professor, Robert Cox, encourages discussion among the more than 100 students in the class.

The purpose of the course, says Cox, is to look at the persuasive use of symbols—both verbal and nonverbal—in recent social movements.

"The course tries to develop an appreciative, critical understanding of social protest and collective behavior that has helped to shape America in the '60s, '70s and '80s."

The course, however, is more than a lecture session for its students. "It's the type of course that encourages people to become interested in a subject," says Mike Platt.

"It's valuable," Platt says. "It's history but it's more than that. What you learn in class can be applied to what's going on now. You learn facts, but you also learn to step back and look at things with a more critical eye."

The students are not the only ones who are excited about the class. So is Cox and he doesn't hesitate in letting his students know how much he

appreciates their interest and attendance.

"He's so excited about the course that it's transmitted to everyone else in the class," Platt says.

Cox has taught the course for three years but considers this semester's students to be the most attentive he's had so far.

"This class is asking a lot more questions," Cox says. "But they're not taking sides on issues that 10 years ago moved people to protest."

"I continue to be surprised at how little controversy tends to be generated. I suspect more personal involvement as we move along in the

course and start discussing more familiar issues like abortion and the feminist movement."

The majority of the class has developed a tolerance for the rhetoric of all types of political views, but at the same time they have not given up their own beliefs, Cox says.

"I hope the course will give students the ability to make critical evaluations of others and to articulate their rationale for doing so," Cox said. "I don't discourage making value judgments in the course."

During his first semester teaching the course, Cox was stunned when a student asked what napalm was during a discussion of the anti-war protests.

Cox said he realized then that most of the students in college today were nine and 10 years old when demonstrations broke out on college campuses during the '60s.

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Though the Vietnam War is history now for most students at the University, for Cox it is a part of his past he can't forget. And the naivete of students about the protests in that period is making him think about his own age as he teaches about the activism of today.

not support the use of marches and demonstrations.

"One thing our group decided, and we hope it will have appeal, is to get our views across in a rational way," said Gary Pressley, a member of Carolina Students for Freedom. "We believe ideas in the long run carry more weight if they're not carried on in a heated way."

Still, the use of demonstrations is not ruled out totally by groups wanting to make their purpose visible to the public.

In April of 1979, a group of black students gathered in the steps of South Building to protest the university's decision to deny tenure to Sonja Stone, a co-director of the curriculum in African and Afro-American studies. The decision later was reversed.

In November, 200 people attended a silent protest against violence. The vigil, which was in front of the Franklin Street post office, followed the Nov. 3, 1979, killing of five CWP members in a shootout between the Klux Klan and CWP in Greensboro. The Chapel Hill protest also had a direct link to the '60s. A silent vigil was held in front of the post office every Wednesday from 1967 to 1973, the longest continuing protest of its kind in U.S. history.

Following Iran's Nov. 4, 1979, seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran and the taking of 52 American hostages, students at Carolina and across America held campus demonstrations denouncing Iran's revolutionary government.

When a demonstration is planned, the group holding the protest must continue to be sensitive to public perceptions of its actions if the demonstration is to be effective.

"People hold sit-ins and demonstrate out of necessity," says Allen Johnson, cultural coordinator

for the Afro-American studies curriculum. Johnson attended undergraduate and graduate school at UNC.

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"Since I've been here, the Black Student Movement has had a demonstration every year. Some years we had three or four. So far, we haven't had to protest this year."

CAROLINA Students for Life plans to picket the abortion ward at N.C. Memorial Hospital later this year. The decision to picket was agreed upon only after careful deliberation by the group, said Chris Kremer, co-chairman of CSL.

"We passed out a questionnaire to members to see if they would support a picket," Kremer says. "Ninety percent of those questioned said they would support the picket. The others said they were opposed to that type of political activity."

Groups are as careful about the words they use as they are about their actions. For example, Carolina Students for Freedom spent much time in choosing its name

"We debated between the use of the word 'freedom' and the use of the word 'liberty,'" Gary Pressley said. "We chose the word 'freedom' because we didn't want to be confused with the Libertarians. The name we chose also leaves us open to include other issues besides ERA."

"We disapproved of 'anti-ERA' because it is a negative term instead of a positive one."

Not all groups strive for mass appeal. Moral Majority, which recently has gained strong political support across the nation, limits its appeal to fundamentalist Christians.

On campus, the Revolutionary Communist Party for several years has sponsored a literature table near the Pit almost every week. Carolyn Klyce, a supporter of the party and a former member of the Communist Youth Brigade, says the RCP stands for revolution and makes no bones about it. Group appeal is not important to the party's members.

"If you stand for something and call yourself something else that would be dishonest," Klyce said.

No one knows what the future of political activism at Carolina will be or which groups will be most influential in the '80s. One thing is certain: People will continue to debate issues and attempt to win support for their stands on the issues.

The rhetorical tactics will continue changing as they did over the past decade. For now, violent protest has been muted to organized lobbying. As Abbie Hoffman, former '60s activist, recently said, emphasis of activism today has shifted from confrontation to coalition.

Lynn Casey is an editorial assistant for The Daily Tar Heel.