A hot topic on every campus

A new UF political science course examines the dynamics of terrorism.

By Camelia Negoita

The Gator Times staff

According to former Secretary of State Madeline Albright, terrorism is the most important threat that the United States and the world face at the beginning of this new century.

In the light of the recent terrorism attacks, a new University of Florida undergraduate level course POS 4931, simply called Terrorism, has raised the interest of numerous students in the 2002 spring semester.

Terrorism, the first class of its kind to ever be offered in the department of political science, will not be focused only on the attacks of September 11, but it will also incorporate a larger perspective on the role violence plays in resolving social and political issues and the motivation behind it. Designed into the course is the presentation of diverse international and domestic terrorist groups and individuals, as well as security issues and preventive methods against future acts of violence.

Adam Silverman, a doctoral candidate at University of Florida, is drawing his knowledge from a master's degree he received from Florida International University and three years of study in security and politics.

Since 1999, the year his academic experience began at UF, Silverman has taught classes on various topics ranging from Religion and Politics to American Federal Government.

Although the timing couldn't have been better, the course was put together over a period of two years, using funds from the Brier Family Endowment and with the support of the UF Center for Jewish Studies. Asked about any initial fears regarding the demand for such a new and controversial course, Silverman said that the title and the topic would have been an attraction enough to have students sign up for it.

"Every department has several courses that have hot topics or titles - like religion and politics, Middle Eastern politics - and they are filled up every semester, so we knew that this course was going to be successful," he said.

Due to the overwhelming request of more than 100 students, the class, which initially met during period six, was rescheduled for a different time, period three, and was assigned a larger room.

Although the September 11 events brought in some people that otherwise would not have attended, most of the participants had planned this course into their schedules as soon as the beginning of the fall 2001 semester.

Jackie Kerr, a 53-year-old Criminology student and retired police officer, was looking for something to complement her studies and give her a look into different forms of deviant behavior other than the homicide ones.

"I wanted something slightly different from the regular criminology courses and I think this course will offer me a wider view," Kerr said.

The course syllabus recognizes the possibility of discussions or differences of opinion that some of the issues presented may rise.

Alan Brech, a graduate student in Anthropology is not registered for the course, but he is attending it because he wants to confront his perspectives on terrorism with the ones that Silverman will present.

"The word terrorism was first applied to the French Government during the 1948 revolution, so it's a contradiction that these days terrorism is only limited to subnational groups and not states as well," Brech said. "I wanted to see how somebody who is not in the field of anthropology defines it."

Silverman said he would deal with these sensitive differences as tactfully as possible. The class is not required for any major, and it can be used as an elective only by political science, Jewish studies, and criminology students.

As of now, the Certificate in International Relations does not incorporate it in its curriculum, just because it is not a regular course and there is no certainty the class will be offered again next semester.

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