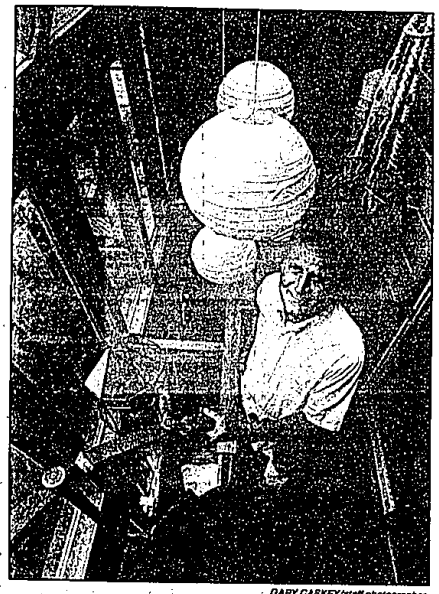
California classroom

OU prof to probe science, mysticism

By Tim Richard
staff writer



GARY CASKEY/staff photographer

Dr. Vaughn Whited, OCC philosophy professor, demonstrated his love of physics when he built much of his highly energy-efficient house on Cass Lake.

Others may argue about the gulf between science and religion.

Not Vaughn Whited, philosophy professor at Oakland Community College.

"I want to bring science and theology together," said the one-time Methodist clergyman who recently was granted a year's sabbatical leave by the OCC board of trustees.

The West Bloomfield resident who teaches at OCC's Auburn Hills Campus will travel to Holy Name College, a Catholic seminary in Oakland, Calif., to probe the links between science and mysticism.

There he will study with a mystic, Matthew Fox. "I've read all his books. He has been an outstanding physicist," said Whited. "He allows only 40 in his group."

"I WAS A Methodist clergyman a long time and popular in Ann Arbor," said Whited. A native of Monroe, he earned a degree in psychology and philosophy, and a divinity degree from Asbury College in Kentucky in the 1940s before becoming a campus pastor at the University of Michigan.

He noted the similarity in his career and that of another former Methodist clergyman — OCC Chancellor R. Stephen Nicholson. "I've known Dr. Nicholson since he was a missionary," he said.

In Ann Arbor, Whited earned master's and doctoral degrees in communications from U-M in the '50s, also chairing the city's Human Relations Commission.

After a teaching stint (1963-66) in California, Whited returned to Michigan as provost of the Auburn Hills Campus under the late President Joe Hill. Whited went back to teaching in 1975.

"I'M GOING to broaden my religion base for the benefit of my World Religion class," he said of his California studies. There's a growing curiosity among college students about the religions of the world.

"There are just different paths to the same goal. Science doesn't destroy religious belief. The mystic feels he uses his spirit as well as his brain. The mind is holographic because it wants to know the whole universe."

It's common for scientists to be deeply interested in religion, Whited said, citing:

- Physicist Fox, his California mentor, who is deep into the spirituality of native Americans and Buddhists.
- J. Robert Oppenheimer, the American atomic physicist, who learned Sanskrit in order to study concepts of the atom in the writings of ancient philosophers.
- Albert Einstein, the father of nuclear physics, who said, "All I really want to know is how God thinks." Whited noted that Einstein's students corrected the professor's math, which the legendary scientist considered less important than basic concepts.

"RIGHT NOW science has so many diversities that something needs to be done to pull it all together," said Whited, who studies concepts of physics without the math, Einstein-style.

The OCC professor will receive full pay during his year's leave. OCC grants full pay during sabbaticals to faculty members with 14 or more years seniority. Whited has 20 years.

To study with Fox, he had to come up with $12,000 of his own money for tuition and expenses.

Whited shares the American Indians' feeling of a close relationship with the ground. His Cass Lake home of 3,000 square feet is built in the "envelope" style with heavy insulation and great energy efficiency.

"My heating and cooling bill the first year, combined, was $140," he said, adding proudly, "I did half the labor myself."

OU enrolls for summer

Summer registration for both undergraduate and graduate students at Oakland University will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday, June 30, in the Oakland Center Crockery on campus near Rochester.

Late registration for on-campus classes is 1-6:30 p.m. July and 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. July 2-3 and 7-8. Late registration will be in the registration office at 100 O'Dowd Hall.

Coronary symposium Friday at OU

Physicians seeking relicensure can learn about prevention of coronary heart disease Friday, June 20, at an Oakland University symposium.

Tuition is $95 for the third annual Prevention of Coronary Heart Disease Symposium, on OU's campus near Rochester.

Call OU's continuing education office at 370-3120 weekdays until 8 p.m. for registration information.

Keeping up with the times

The Continuum Center, part of the School of Human and Educational Services of Oakland University, conducts continuous classes, workshops and seminars on a broad spectrum of subjects pertinent to societal changes throughout the Detroit suburbs. To get information on what the center is offering this month, call the center at 377-3033.

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