

Political made personal

"If you don't like what's going on, do something about it. If you vote, if you complain loudly enough and write enough letters, eventually somebody's going to hear what you have to say," says Richard Hardy, right, associate professor of political science. Hardy encourages his students to take an active role in the political process.

Richard Hardy is watching the *Tonight Show*, ever alert for material he can borrow. Comedian Jay Leno is warming up the audience with his opening monologue and lets loose with a can't-miss joke: "You know where the word 'politics' comes from, don't you?" begins Leno, pausing for effect. "'Poly' means many, and 'tics' means blood suckers...." Sure enough, the zinger gets a big laugh.

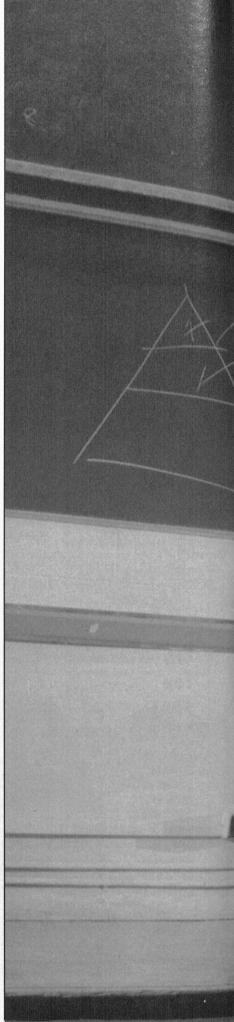
Hardy winces. And then he makes a mental note of the remark. Yes, he thinks, that one will work. That one will work nicely.

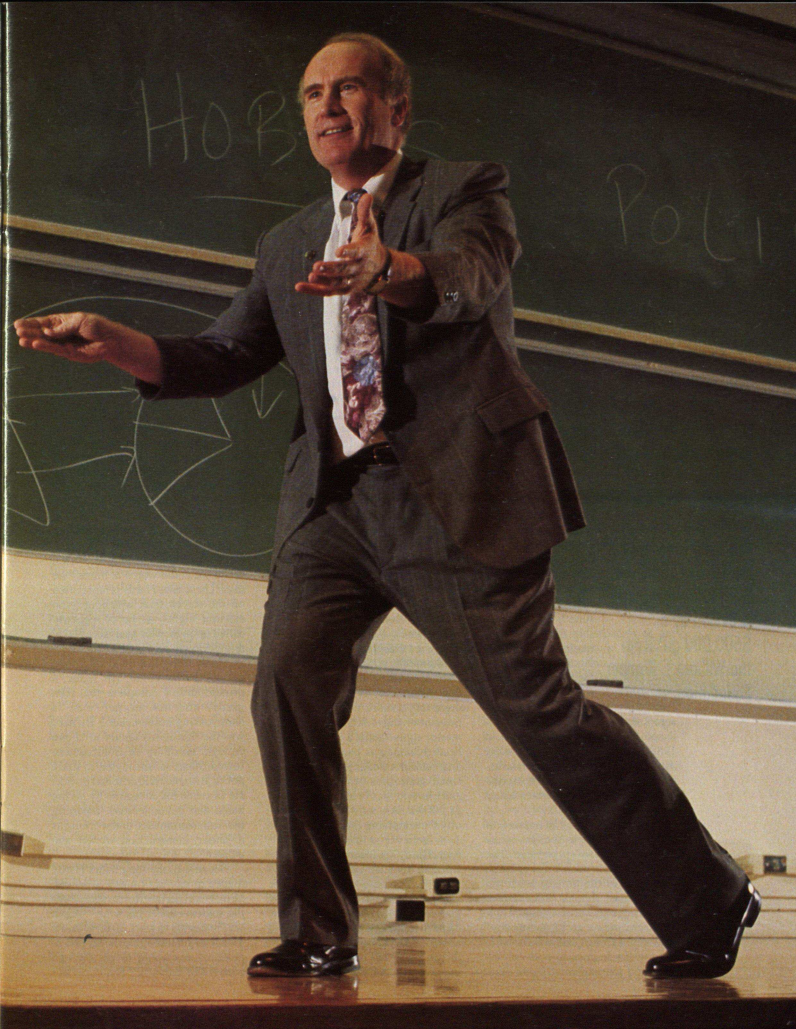
It's just another cheap shot, according to the MU political science associate professor, a good example of the blight he sees as pervasive in this country: a toxic combination of apathy and cynicism toward all things political. He'll include it in one of his lectures. Not only will the Leno joke get students' attention and provide a little levity, but also Hardy will use it as a springboard for discussion of why there's so much talk about the problems with government and so little action toward changing things for the better.

"When most students come to this university, they are mirroring the attitude most Americans have — that politics is something dirty," he says. "But the fact of the matter is, it's really the most civilized way to solve our problems."

Hardy exhibits levels of sincerity and idealism that in some circles

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might be considered unfashionable. He rejects the notion that individuals have little chance of making a difference. "I believe that citizenship is the highest office in a democracy," he says.

Former student Lisa Boyer, now a social studies teacher at Columbia's West Junior High, says the Public Policy course she took from Hardy changed her life. "That's when I decided I wanted to get a degree in political science," says the '87 graduate, who also earned degrees in history and education. "Dr. Hardy made politics seem important and showed us that we as individuals can have an impact on things. Now

that I'm teaching ninth-graders, who really don't see the importance of government in their lives, it helps that I can be excited about it."

His contagious enthusiasm is not confined to MU lecture halls. Hardy is in near constant demand to speak to civic groups across the state, including alumni chapters. The LaClede County chapter of the MU Alumni Association sponsored his talk June 6 on "Citizenship: The Highest Office in a Democracy." His 860-page text, *Government in America*, has been adopted by school systems

across the country since it was published by Houghton Mifflin Co. in 1988. And he was honored in 1990 by the Missouri House of Representatives as "one of this state's most competent and most respected leaders in the field of education."

Students, who may be unaware of all this, do know the associate professor's classes are popular. They say that he is a wonderful speaker, that he takes the time to learn students' names, that his office door is always open. "I know a lot of people who try to take every class he teaches," says senior Doug Card, who is working toward degrees in political science and journalism. "If you don't

get into his classes early, you won't get in at all."

Hardy is probably best known for teaching the American Government class, a required course for most of the 500 students typically enrolled in it. He also teaches State Government, Constitutional Law, Public Policy and some graduate courses. By all accounts, Hardy is most respected for his insistence on giving equal time to different viewpoints. "He argues both sides of an issue so well, you really can't tell what he thinks himself," Card says. "He doesn't let bias creep into his courses."

Hardy has strong feelings about using the lectern as a pulpit. "No one elected me to be their professor," he explains. "What I do politically on my own time is my business, but when I go into a classroom I don't have the right to shove right-wing or left-wing ideology down students' throats. My job is to present both sides of every issue, no matter what I think." When students ask him whether he's a Democrat or a Republican, he is pleased they have to ask.

For the record, Hardy is an active Republican. But his list of guest lecturers in recent years boasts heavyweight politicians from both sides: Republicans Gov. John Ashcroft, U.S. Sen. John Danforth, Secretary of State Roy Blunt, and State Attorney General William Webster; and Democrats State Sen. Roger Wilson and State Rep. Betty Hearnes.

In March 1988, Hardy snagged then-Vice President George Bush for an impromptu American Government class appearance during a campaign tour. That year, as in 1984, Hardy organized a mock political convention involving 1,600 students who made signs, edited newspapers, headed campaigns, plotted strategies, and made nominating speeches. The small-scale presidential campaign and election was funded in part by a \$1,000 MU Alumni Association Faculty Development Incentive Grant.

A believer in hands-on experience, Hardy has incorporated a simulation in his State Government class as well. "You have to learn about the legislative process, because that's the guts of state government," he says. "And it can be very boring to read about it." To get beyond the boredom factor, Hardy has students role-playing as legislators, elect leaders, write

bills, form committees and generally immerse themselves in the workings of government.

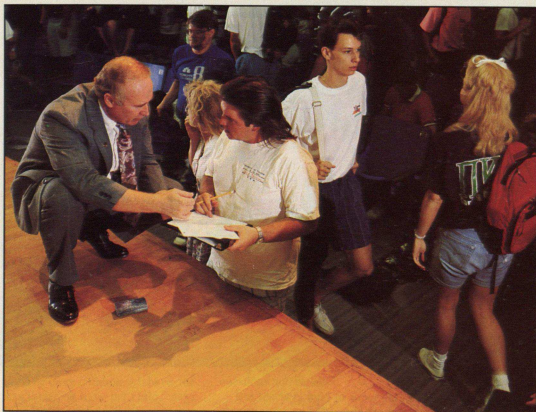
Student evaluations of Hardy's teaching — ranging from 3.78 up to 3.94 on a 4.0 scale in the auditorium lectures since 1985 — indicate that his keen interest in politics is infectious. "I enjoy politics the way many people enjoy sporting events," he says. "I see a great contest in the political arena — only there's more at stake, and it affects our everyday lives."

While he has been mentioned as a possible contender for the U.S. Representative office currently held by Democrat Harold Volkmer, Hardy says his political aspirations will have to wait. "I haven't ruled it out entirely, but it's unlikely at this time," he says. "Right now I'm very content with being a teacher, and I'd find that difficult to give up."

The scholar traces his fascination with politics to his boyhood in Iowa. He enjoyed listening to his parents talk about presidential races and has a vivid memory of the day in 1956 his father took him into downtown Burlington to watch the election returns on a television sitting in a store window. "It was a big deal when we were able to get a television set so we could watch at home," he says. These days Hardy is more often on the screen than watching it on election nights, as he is regularly called upon to offer analysis to local television viewers.

Hardy describes his background as solidly blue-collar. His father, a printer, didn't complete the 10th grade, and his mother was "a hardworking homemaker." Richard was the first in his family to attend college, enrolling in Southeastern Iowa College in Burlington to study political science and criminal justice. He financed his education by giving banjo and guitar lessons, repairing musical instruments, and working as a janitor, construction worker and painter.

Because of the long hours Hardy logged to pay tuition and expenses, he makes a special effort to take working students under his wing. "When you're having to work 30 or 40 hours a week to get through college, you're probably not going to get through with a 4.0," he says. "But these stu-



Hardy has taught more than 7,000 students in the past five years. He has tried to inject each one of them with a sense of responsibility toward society and the political system that governs it.

dents, unlike Skip and Muffy with no money worries, see the real world. They have to work for everything they get, and I respect that."

Hardy went on to earn a bachelor's degree with honors from Western Illinois University and a master's degree from the University of North Dakota. While working on a doctorate in political science at the University of Iowa, Hardy taught civics, history, reading, music and math at a local high school. In 1978 he completed the degree and joined MU the same year. And with the exception of a year spent as visiting assistant professor at Duke University in North Carolina, he's been here ever since.

The accomplishment of which he is most proud is his high-school textbook. The effort required 18 months of work to meet the publisher's deadline, with Christmas his only day off. The ordeal meant not only hard work but also a lot of tolerance on the part of his wife, Linda, and teen-agers Amanda and Thomas. "It was tough, and at the time I swore I'd never do something like that again," he admits. "But it was a real education for me. When you have to convey these complicated concepts in ways that are easy to understand, you really come to terms with the material."

Partly as a result of writing the book and partly due to his desire to heighten civic awareness in young people, Hardy has become a valuable liaison between MU and high-school social studies teachers in Missouri and elsewhere. Since 1987 he has been the keynote speaker at about 16 regional, state and urban public school social studies organizations' conferences outside Missouri. And for the past few years he has been a major player in a statewide program aimed at stimulating teaching about the Constitution, taking part in programs and workshops presented to more than 500 public school social studies teachers throughout the state.

Once students graduate from high school, where they may have used the Hardy text, and find themselves in one of his classes at Mizzou, they get the civic involvement spiel. "So many of us—not just students—are unaware of what our government does," he says. "In the '88 presidential race, only 50 percent of those eligible to vote actually voted. In 1876, on the other hand, we had more than 80 percent voter turnout. And in local elections these days, we're lucky to get 10 percent or 15 percent voter turnout."

"But there are other things people can do besides voting," he adds, tallying the offenses of a civically ignorant culture. "Only about 19 percent of Americans have ever attended a public meeting. Only about 12 percent have ever written a letter to an elected official. And only 10 percent have ever contributed to a political campaign."

Hardy urges his students to get involved in some way in a political campaign. "You learn the system from the bottom up that way," he says. "You learn about mass mailings, polls, having the door slammed in your face. Then when students go back to read those textbooks, it means something to them."

Indeed, that is Hardy's mission: to make politics mean something. He regularly rises at 4 a.m. to organize the day's lectures—no canned notes for him—and continually updates his material to keep it fresh. "You're only as good as your latest Supreme Court decision," he says, grinning. "And it's a big responsibility, knowing that what I write at 5 a.m. will be in a thousand notebooks by noon."

As sobering as that mission is, however, Hardy remains humble. "I'm just an average person," he says. "I just work hard." ☐