

# THE MANY HATS OF CHRISTOPHER LUCAS

**Sherlock Holmes could tell  
a man's life history by looking at his hat.**



Christopher Lucas, professor of education, doesn't wear hats, but he reveals much about himself, as we all do, by the things he surrounds himself with. You can tell a lot about a professor by looking at his office.

Lucas's outer office on the third floor of Hill Hall is a crush of file cabinets and secretaries. Brightening walls and doors are cartoons, newspaper clippings, notes and posters. The first clue is a poster that says, "No one ever said teaching was going to be easy." Ah ha. Here's a man who takes his work very seriously.

The door to his inner office is closed. There's a small, neatly typed sign on the door:

IF I'M NOT IN . . .

*I'm probably grading papers; preparing for a class lecture or presentation; reviewing library acquisitions; counseling with a student; attending a departmental, divisional or Campus committee meeting; teaching a class; preparing a speech; conducting research; engaged in a writing project; attending a state, regional, or national conference; previewing some instructional materials; consulting in conversation with a colleague; completing an administrative report; conducting business with one of several civic and community service organizations; reading a book in order to keep up with literature in my field - or, just possibly, screwing around.*

*In any case, I'm sorry I missed you. Please try again. Call me at home. Or leave a message with the receptionist. There's probably a good reason why I'm not here.*

Christopher J. Lucas

Hmmm. Nice concern for students. It sounds as if he cares about being available. A good list of what goes on during a busy professor's day. This Lucas can be casual, even a little flip, and get away with it.

The door opens. Lucas's office, like many all over Campus, is a one-windowed cubbyhole, just big enough for

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**ON LUCAS'S OFFICE DOOR  
IS A SIGN TELLING STUDENTS  
ABOUT HIS BUSY SCHEDULE  
AND WHERE TO FIND HIM.**

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a desk, visitor's chair and floor-to-ceiling bookcases. The predictable diplomas (His are from Syracuse University, Northwestern and Ohio State) paper one wall, surrounded by certificates attesting to his membership in all the right honoraries, including Phi Beta Kappa.

"The one thing I never intended to be when I was in col-

lege was a teacher," Lucas says, alleviating the need for further visual eavesdropping.

Today, Lucas is not only a teacher, but he's a teacher of future teachers in the College of Education. He's a bit scornful of "cookbook recipes" for teaching, the "nuts and bolts" methods classes, though he acknowledges that students find such classes helpful.

He teaches philosophy of education and believes that what he's doing helps to prepare good teachers. He likes to quote Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes: "Theory is the most practical thing in the world."

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"Students are scared of what I teach, the philosophy of education, but they like it eventually," he says. Students flock into his classroom, but not from enthusiasm over the subject matter. His courses are required of both undergraduate and graduate students. Lucas envies a colleague in the history department whose students sign up because they are interested in what he's teaching. "In a professional school, students in required courses are saying, 'Teach me something. I dare you.'" Lucas's tone is more wistful than rancorous.

But he's also a popular teacher. "On the first day of class, he said he wouldn't bore us," remembers Joan Harbourt, a senior majoring in physical education. "So far, he's kept his promise." Some students go so far as to say his classes are the best in the College of Education.

An observant student could learn a lot about good teaching techniques by watching Lucas in action. "I don't have any secrets to sell," he insists. Perhaps not, but his methods are typical of good teachers.

Lucas's hours in the classroom, however, are only a part of his frenetic activity as the sign on his door suggests. "I'm a workaholic," he admits, ruefully.

To discover the real Christopher Lucas, the sleuth would have to take a look at the many imaginary hats he does wear — at home, in the community, in the University and within his profession.

He's the husband of Terrie, father of 4½-year-old Greg and sometime carpenter. The Lucas's live in a barn-shaped house, surrounded by trees on four acres, 18 minutes south of Campus. Lucas finished the basement into a family room, working nights and into the wee hours of the morning. The next project is a garage.

He collects turn-of-the-century stereoscopes. He has 19 of the binocular-like devices and "an afternoon's worth"

of the double-photographs that, when viewed, appear three-dimensional. For entertainment, he puts a rasping record on his Victor "talking machine," which produces what he calls "low-fidelity," and looks at pictures which give him a tour through Sears and Roebuck's new Chicago headquarters, circa 1908.

His car, on the other hand, is not an antique. He zips around town in a Datsun 260Z, a machine he calls his "post-adolescent indulgence. It's the difference between getting there and having fun getting there," he explains.

When Lucas goes someplace, chances are that it's a committee meeting. He's a member of more than two dozen Campus committees that run the gamut of his varied interests. He serves on the Faculty Council, the Campus-wide faculty governing body, which he says sometimes gets bogged down in "administrivia," and with equal energy chairs the Travel Advisory Committee for the Museum Associates, planning trips abroad for art lovers.

"Like clothes hangers in a dark closet," he says, "they breed and multiply. You're appointed to a committee, express some concern, and before you can say 'Madam Chairman,' you're appointed to head a sub-committee on the matter.

"On a scale of one to 10, with 10 being the most pleasant, I'd rank serving on committees at about minus five." But, he's an incurable optimist that this committee or that might really do some good and finds it impossible to say no to a good idea.

Lucas also was president of the Columbia Humane Society for five years during the planning and fund-raising for a new animal shelter.

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## LUCAS TEACHES, WRITES AND SPEAKS ON EDUCATION IN ANCIENT BABYLONIA, MODERN CHINA AND THE FUTURE.

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From talking about the cat and dog population explosion, Lucas can jump right into a scholarly rundown on education in the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China (Taiwan), comparing those systems with American schools. He has a growing reputation as an authority — he objects to the word "expert" — on education in the two Chinas and the United States.

His interest in China goes back to when he was five years old and was enthralled by the stories told by his aunt, a medical missionary there. Throughout his years as a student, Lucas took whatever courses were available on China. About 10 years ago, he set a goal for himself of reading two or three works on China every month.

"You acquire quite a library over time that way," he says. A couple of years ago, he and several other Mizzou professors interested in China formed a study group. In 1975, after years of "Red" tape, he was one of a small number of American educators invited to tour the People's Republic of China, a land not noted for enthusiastic welcome of tourists, even serious ones. Last fall, on a tour sponsored by the Ministry of Education, he visited the Republic of China.

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Since his trips, he's been in demand as an after-dinner speaker. He makes as many as four speeches a week, illustrating his talk with a collection of excellent slides he took. Believing in opening the Bamboo Curtain, he rarely turns down community groups or Campus audiences.

During the winter semester he teaches a class in the Honors College on Chinese Civilization. That's in addition to a full teaching schedule in the College of Education.

There's more. In the last eight years, Lucas has written three books on educational philosophy, educational history and contemporary education. He also has had more than 40 articles published in academic journals and the mass media. Currently, he's writing about scribal education and learning in ancient Babylonia. "Teachers had trouble getting the kids to do their homework in 3,000 B.C., too," he says. He's writing a couple of book reviews, news for newsletters, and another book, aimed both at students and the general reader, about the broad social problems usually not confronted in the public school classroom.

Author, speaker, animal-lover, teacher, committee-man, world traveler, student and observer of the two Chinas, sports car enthusiast, antique collector, do-it-yourselfer, father and husband — Do any of these hats reveal his ultimate destiny?

Solution: Remember the car? Lucas's destination is unknown, but all his roles are a way to have "fun getting there." □

By Anne Baber

# GOOD TEACHING IS...

**ENTHUSIASM** "The most basic elements in good teaching, I think, are imagination or creativity and simple enthusiasm. It's contagious. If the teacher drones on lifelessly, students will drift off. But if the message gets across that I care about what I'm saying, well, at least some students will come to share that same concern."

"A classic," Lucas says, "is a book nobody has to write again. Nobody had to write 'Son of Hamlet.'" The definition gets a laugh.

**STYLE** "If I have any discernible teaching style, it's an amalgam of my own personality — what I am as a person — my recollections or imitations of good teachers I've had, and lastly, my fitful efforts to apply what I've read in the research literature. How it all comes together remains a mystery."

**THEATER** "There's a fine line between theatrical showmanship in the classroom and solidly-based good teaching. I can try to entertain and students will find it enjoyable, but it's questionable whether anything valuable is happening. Or I can work hard at offering high-quality instruction, yet it need not be especially entertaining. Only sometimes can one hope to combine successfully the elements of scholarship and theater. Then all of us, instructor and students alike, are satisfied."

Making a point about career-directed education vs. the liberal arts, Lucas tells a story about visiting with a young British chap, who was "bumming around the United States before going to work in a business. I asked him if he majored in business. He replied [A hint of a British accent surfaces.], 'Whatever for? I got an education in school; I'll be trained after I go to work.'"

**SWEAT** "Teaching is hard, exhausting work. Sometimes I leave a classroom drenched with nervous perspiration. A good metabolism or a high energy level — I wonder if it's not an essential prerequisite for good teaching?"

**A HELPFUL PUSH** "Sometimes the best teaching consists of nothing more than getting students started, and then getting out of their way. The most meaningful learning is the learning we do for ourselves."

**GRIST** "Everything is grist for the mill — an article read recently, an anecdote recounted by a colleague, a personal experience — anything and everything has potential to be exploited in teaching something."

Lucas begins class by waving a small newspaper clipping to catch the students' attention. "Here's another Ann Landers column: Somebody else is urging a return to the basics." He reads the letter, then notes that such popular columnists reflect (and in some cases shape) public opinion and that it's good to be aware of today's educational controversies as they are reported and commented on in the mass media as well as in the academic journals.

**PREACHING** "My task goes beyond the soap box. I believe that I'm successful in concealing my prejudices. Students have to ask me at the end of the semester where I stand. At that point, I'll tell them, but during the class I try to present all relevant points of view. That kind of expository approach forces students to think the problems through for themselves."

**THIN BOLOGNA** "A University is an instrument to get a job done — to educate people. Sometimes it's a blunt instrument, but one that paradoxically slices the bologna too thin. The separate schools and colleges and departments accentuate the fragmentation of knowledge. Knowledge is more integrated than one might imagine as he looks at a university catalog."

