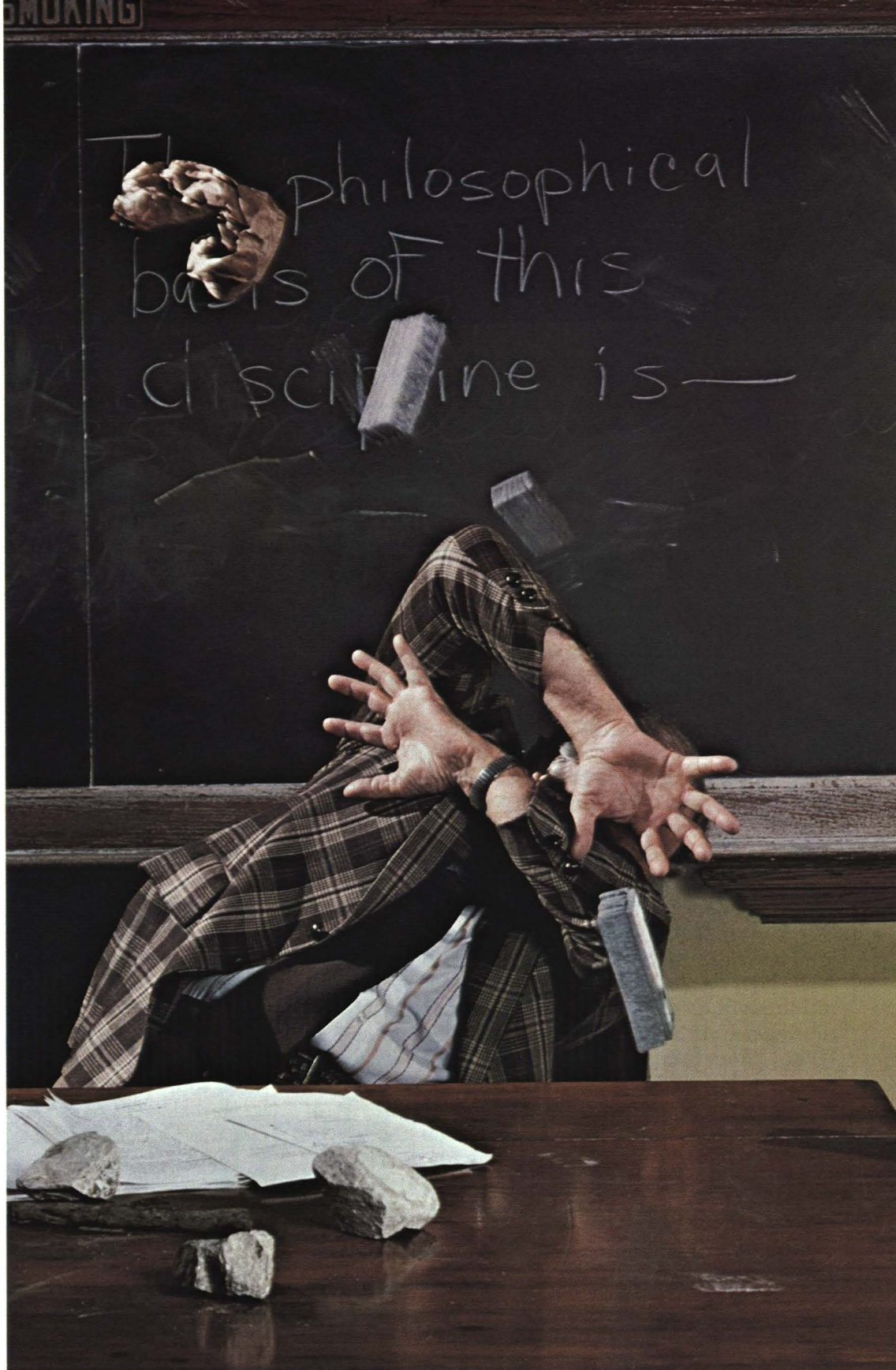


# STUDENTS THROW BRICKBATS AND BOUQUETS

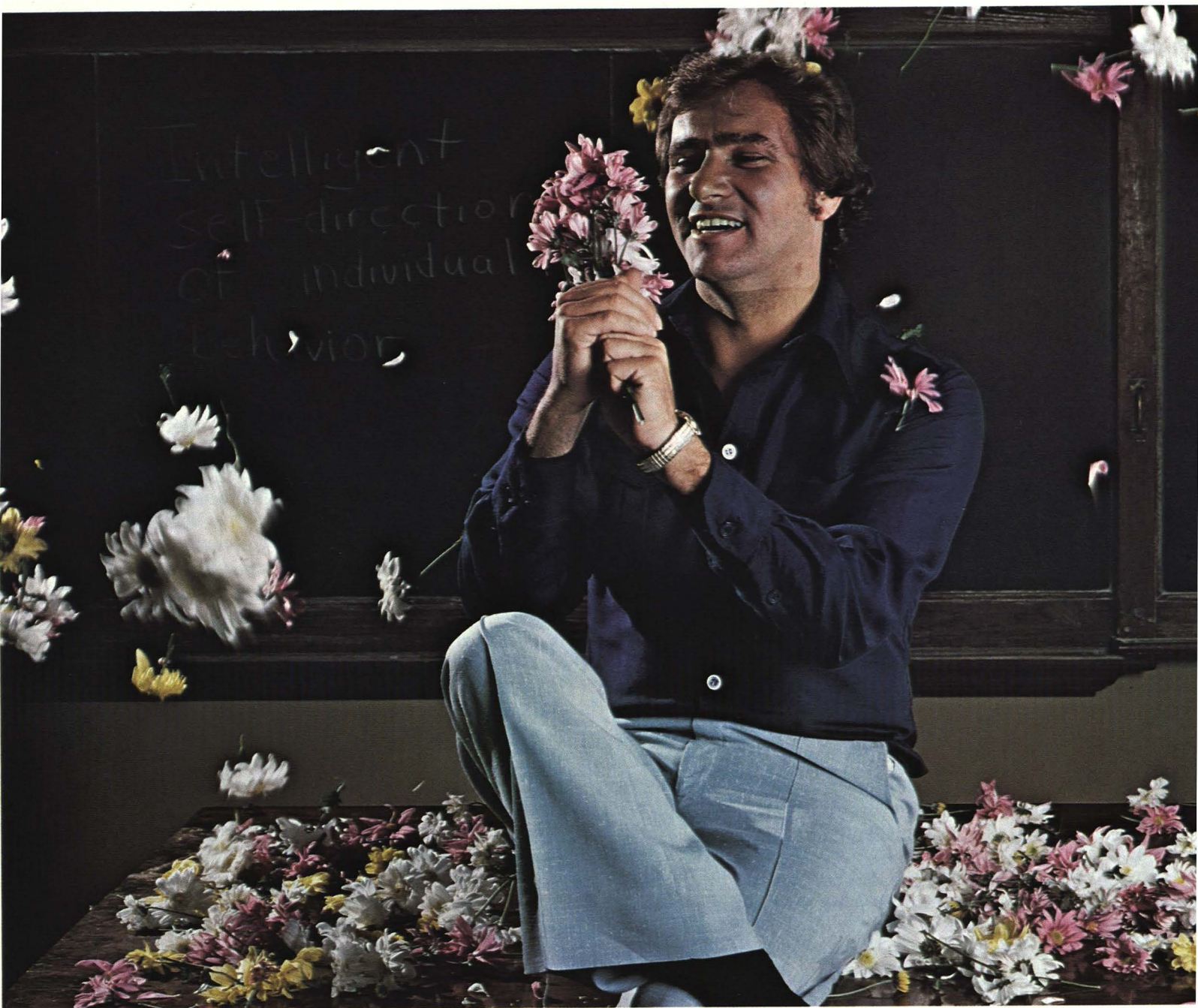
By Anne Baber



**"Some profs  
are so bad  
they make  
you want  
to throw things!"**



Photos by Dave Holman



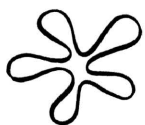
"His class was  
the very best class  
I've ever had the privilege  
to attend at Mizzou.  
I recommend it."

MSA's *Coursebook* may help the jaded upperclassman as well as the quivering freshman separate "the good guys from the bad guys" among the Campus faculty.

Colin Box, the *Alumnus*'s cover man, is "a good guy." He deserves the title for many reasons, not the least of which is that he wasn't too uptight to pose among the daisies. Some of the other top-rated professors were. But even his class did not draw a 100 percent rave review.

"It's a very open class, people often expressing their ideas and experiences. It is often so enjoyable that one forgets he is in class," wrote Mary Lottes. . . . "He is very successful in gaining the class's interest and gets his ideas across. . . . He also relates some pretty racy stories to the class; and if one prefers to keep him/herself sheltered from reality, maybe he should skip this course. The only time this class is a bitch is when it is time for a test. Like most teachers, Box says he only gives tests because he has to—calling them quizzes—*ha*. The testing procedures should not prevent one from enrolling in this course, because it is probably one of the more informative classes you can take."

Box teaches The Elements of Health Education,



*"He made  
a boring subject  
fascinating."*

which covers such topics as prevention of disease, first-aid, drugs (including marijuana and alcohol) and sexuality.

Though Box was pleased at his high rating on the objective questionnaire (85 percent of his students thought he was interesting and 98 percent thought he was dynamic and energetic), he had made no attempt to get hold of a *Coursebook* and look himself up. "I'm more concerned with what students get out of my class than what they think of me as a teacher," he said.

Out of more than 2,000 undergraduate courses at Mizzou, the 190-page *Coursebook* lists only 250. But those 250 represent "30 to 40 percent of all student hours," says sophomore Paul Spencer, who was in

charge of the project, sponsored jointly by the Missouri Students Association and the Education Student Council.

"We tried to get scientific reliability by having students answer an objective questionnaire," Spencer says, "but we added color and personality to the sta-



*"insults the  
intelligence of a  
third-grader"*

tistics by using subjective student comments."

Only 5,000 copies of the book were printed—obviously not enough to provide one for each student on Campus. About 3,800 books were passed out in April before students registered for fall classes. The remaining copies are for incoming freshmen.

The project won't be repeated next year. It cost \$6,400. MSA had hoped to support it with a proposed raise in student activity fees. But students indicated that they didn't want the fees raised, so the project was not re-funded.

Under the circumstances, it's easy for people to say the *Coursebook* isn't very important. Every few years, some sort of rating comes out. And student evaluations of teaching always suffer a credibility gap. Many professors don't like to be rated. They say things like, "Students don't know what they got out of the course until a long time afterward," and "Students who aren't making a good grade rate the professor low because of 'sour grapes,'" and "The questionnaire wasn't 'scientific.'"

Sure, there are some problems with a student effort of this kind. The *Coursebook* doesn't include any foreign language courses and is weak in its coverage of art and music. And upper-level courses, were, in general, omitted. But, as one faculty member pointed out, upper-level courses for majors "don't need to be evaluated, since majors have no choice but to take them."

While admitting the book's shortcomings, Spencer defends its usefulness to students. He thinks students need a variety of sources of information about courses. And he believes that the *Coursebook* is a positive addition to the other available sources: the catalog, the opinions of friends, Ag and A&S Student Council booklets and the many instructors who are will-



ing, “occasionally eager,” to talk with students about their courses before registration.

The *Coursebook*, he contends, also can help students choose the best section of a large course. It offers the “objective judgements of the collected students,” not just the opinion of an individual friend.

Four professors teach Biological Sciences I. “Interesting” ratings ranged from 94 percent down to 64 percent. It seems reasonable to expect that biology students will pick the highest-rated sections.

What teaching traits and practices turn students off in the classroom?

There’s the professor who pretends that the test isn’t important . . . until grades are given out.

“She said she wanted this to be a very free learning class, etc. Well, when the class came around, I was very excited because I enjoyed taking it and I thought this was great (other students always told me she screwed them with grades in the end). When I got the test back, they were right. On the midterm, out of a 4 point scale, the median score was 1.8, and she left it at that with no scale. She complimented the students who used direct quotes on their test from the book.”

There’s the professor whose course demands too much time . . . or money.

“The books cost about \$60 this semester, and sometimes you will need to devote as much as 20-25 hours in one week to finishing an assignment.”

There’s the professor (or Teaching Assistant) who can’t or won’t answer questions and give help to floundering students.

“It is hard to get effective help. The T.A.s do not attend lectures and are often not in touch with how the lecturer is treating the material and are, therefore, not much help.”

There’s the professor who is going to cover everything . . . come hell or high water.

“When he got behind, he just lectured faster and faster.”

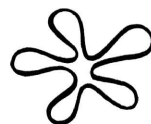
And what turns students on the classroom?

Theodore Tarkow’s students, 100 percent of them, rated him interesting.

“He lectures, but encourages student comment . . . never makes students feel stupid for their opinions . . . relates the Greek and Roman classics to current events . . . makes good use of his voice and personality in class and laces his lectures with humor that is *really* funny. . . tries to establish personal relationships between student and teacher by making him-

self available through frequent office hours,” says Susan Senn.

Most students really don’t want a snap course. But some who will use the book to search for an easy three hours, may change their minds when they read about Professor X. After criticizing his lecture style, sketchy notes, presentation of material on which students are tested and saying she didn’t learn anything, one evaluator student says, “Many students will take this course because it is supposedly a ‘punt’ course. Is this a valid enough reason for a student to take a course? I don’t think it is or should be. I really do feel the University should take a closer look at the educational quality of many of their courses. Perhaps if they could take time to personally evaluate some of these courses, problems such as the ones I presented would cease to exist.”



*“an experience  
of friendship  
as well as learning.”*

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Whether the *Coursebook* affects enrollment probably never will be known. The book does indicate that there are indeed some bad professors, but also a lot of really exciting ones. It also proves that students care about the quality of their education. More than 85 student volunteers compiled the information and spent more than 400 hours keypunching the questionnaire responses. Hundreds of students took out-of-class time to write comments, both good and bad, about their classes. The *Coursebook* was an ambitious project and a worthwhile one.

But best of all, the *Coursebook* describes some of those beautiful relationships between students and teachers that make the college years so memorable.

“The instructor seemed like a critical old lady at first,” says Tom Threlkeld about Professor Vera Townsend, who teaches Modern Art and Architecture, “but appearances are deceiving. Although I have not had a great amount of interaction with her, the more I do the more her kindness and real interest in all her students shows. She is very mild-mannered and unassuming, has her faults, but knows it, too. She is interested in her field, interested enough that it flows to her students.” □