

First Year Book Project Goes Multimedia

Each year, as at colleges everywhere, freshmen at the University of Maryland come with mingled feelings of excitement and fear. There's the exhilarating prospect of independence but also nervousness about the unknown. For example, how will academic standards be different from high school? For ten years, the First Year Book Project has been a university freshman's first exposure to the world of college academics, awakening their curiosity and soothing their fears. It brings students from all walks of campus life together in an intellectual exercise meant to spark lively discussion and respectful debate. This year, *Dead Man Walking* by Sister Helen Prejean, which addresses death penalty issues, is the book on everyone's minds.

"A committee of faculty, staff, and students chose *Dead Man Walking*," said Lisa Kiely, assistant dean of Undergraduate Studies. "It's a remarkable vehicle for inspiring intellectual debate and exemplifies the university's commitment to encouraging free speech."

Technology is a key component of the First Year Book Project. The Office of Information Technology set up WebCT, an online course management system used to facilitate many courses at UM, to help integrate the campus communities involved in the project.

"The goal of the First Year Book Project is to create a collective intellectual community. What we've done with WebCT facilitates this by providing online discussion areas, teaching and learning activities, an extensive annotated resource list, and an events calendar," said Paulette Robinson, assistant director of teaching and learning support in OIT. "The potential even

exists for classes in different disciplines to join in the same online activity—be it a role play, case study, or debate—giving students the benefit of different perspectives."

The First Year Book Project Web site also includes digitized streaming video of all the events connected with the project that occur on campus. Those who can't attend the events can watch them whenever they wish on campus computers or even in the comfort of their own homes.

"Technology is always emerging and evolving—and growing in importance. This project is excellent because it gives us a chance to demonstrate how technology can augment instruction and learning. It's also wonderful to see the creative ways faculty and students use technology," said Robinson.

The spring months will feature several First Year Book Project events, including a film series and talks by both victims' rights families and an exonerated former Death Row inmate.

For more information about the First Year Book Project, see www.ugst.umd.edu/firstyearbook/index.html.

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