



read today's b



Weird 101: Baltimore's unusual college courses



by **Matt Vensel** | September 30, 2008 at 8:04 pm
Posted in [b the paper](#)



We all took some pretty boring classes in college — snoozefests like the Biology of Aging, Advanced Statistics and Research Methods. No wonder we skipped class so much. After all, why leave your bed if you're just going to doze off in class anyway? But local colleges have found a solution: courses that are actually interesting. These offbeat classes might just make me sign up for spring classes and go after another degree.

Honors Introduction to LEGO Robotics @ Towson University:

Playing with blocks was an activity we all left behind in kindergarten, but at one Towson class, playing with LEGOs and building robots is encouraged. Using the LEGO Mindstorms platform — an educational robotics line used across the country — students get into the basics of mechanics and electronics by building robots with LEGOs. Which is cool, unless you're 40 and you do it in your parents' basement.

The British Invasion @ Towson University:

In the 1960s, the British invaded the United States — again. The course, starting next June, explores how the Beatles and James Bond became phenomena. Students get a first-hand look at the subject by crossing the Atlantic for a two-and-a-half-week U.K. stay to explore the Invasion's roots. "We were looking for opportunities that would allow students to study abroad and broaden their horizons," said professor Tracy Miller. "This seemed an obvious way to accomplish it."

The Art of Juggling @ McDaniel College:

In this new exercise science class, students juggle scarves, beanbags, rings and sticks. Professor Jeff Marx, please explain. "At McDaniel we consider developing a student's health and well-being an important part of our curriculum," he said. "I'd love for one of my students to go on to become a world-renowned juggler. But much more important, to me, is that they learn there are options in their life beyond the cell phone and late-night TV." No word on when The Art of Juggling 2: Juggling Fire will be offered, but I might want to sit in on that one.

Hip-Hop Dance @ McDaniel College:

So you've got no rhythm and the only dance move you know is the peppergrinder. Don't worry. McDaniel is offering this special topics course, teaching you all the moves you'll need to cut a rug at Iguana Cantina on Friday nights. Just make sure you check your dance partner's ID before you move in for the bump and grind.

Statistics Through Baseball @ Salisbury University:

Statistics? Wake me up when you're done. No one likes math and numbers — at least no one I want to associate with — but by using baseball to spice up a usually mundane subject, Salisbury's Lee May teaches statistics to unsuspecting sports fans. "Students leave [the course] with an introduction to probability and statistics comparable to what they would receive in a traditional course in introductory statistics," said May.

History and Theory of Games @ University of Maryland, Baltimore County:

Students attempting to break into the gaming industry take a lot of atypical — and very technical — classes, but this is a class everyone can wrap their head around. "Games are as old as people. They are what humans do, when they can," said professor Neal McDonald. "It's a serious, interesting, rapidly maturing field of scholarship." This guy has the best job ever. McDonald plays a myriad of games, some dating back to the Stone Age, to show his budding game designers the origins of today's games and the infinite possibilities for tomorrow's.

Prima Donnas, Pre-Madonna: Images of the Fantasy Female in Performance @ Goucher College:

Freshmen examine famous prima donnas in history from Greta Garbo and Marilyn Monroe to the Material Girl, and the roles they played in their times. "The prima donna becomes a myth, a fantasy, which allows us to live through her, around her," said professor Thomasin LaMay. "But eventually we can kill her, pull her down, cause her to fail, so vicariously 'we' succeed at not seeing." Sounds intriguing, but if that's true, when will Madonna finally go away?

Fitness for Scuba Divers @ Anne Arundel Community College:

Question of the Day

If you could have your epitaph say anything, what would it be?

6 comments



where to find b

Most of us are recreational scuba divers — what, you're not? — but if you want to engage in more advanced deep-sea dives, you'll need to get your body into shape. AACC offers Fitness for Scuba Divers, which shows students what they need to do in the gym and in the pool to prepare for when they're out in the field, er, ocean. This makes total sense to the 0.0003 percent of our readers who actively wear an oxygen tank and flippers.

The Theology of Eating @ Loyola College:

If you've ever read the Bible, you probably know that Jesus guy means business when it comes to food, whether he was turning water into wine or chowing down with his homies shortly before his death. This one's online course description says the class explores, "the complex religious issues associated with eating." So you're saying the Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Contest might be sacrilegious? Oh, Joey Chestnut, why have you forsaken me?

Perspectives on Popular Culture: Television Situation Comedy @ University of Maryland, College Park:

OK, so this class doesn't exactly tackle the seemingly never-ending Rachel and Ross saga or the essence of Michael's "That's what she said" jokes on "The Office," but professor Greg Metcalf said we can learn a lot about our society from sitcoms. "The approach is closer to anthropology than studying the Great Books," he said. "We look at sitcoms over time to study the changes and continuities in American culture." He forgot to mention life lessons learned from Steve Urkel and Uncle Phil.

Here's eight ridiculous non-credit courses that didn't make the cut:

- Pet First Aid and CPR @ AACC
- Background Acting 1: Be a Movie Extra @ AACC
- Santa Claus Training @ the Community College of Baltimore County
- Massage for Couples @ AACC
- Get Paid to Talk: Commercial Voice-Overs @ AACC
- How to Speak and Understand Football @ CCBC
- Dating Tips @ AACC
- Outdoor Survival Techniques @ AACC

Matt Vensel is a content creator for b. E-mail him at matt@bthesite.com.