

Glasses on. Glasses off. Glasses halfway on and then off again. Repeat.

Sometimes it is hard not to wonder if the dark-rims are there solely for theatrics, but it only takes a short time to see that they are merely a physical constraint; mentally, his vision is perfect, and it is only becoming more exact over time.

Every semester, as he selectively focuses the topics of his classes – much like a routine eye exam – Bruce Geelhoed, chairman of the history department at Ball State University, feels that his students get a better picture of the past.

“I had a suspicion that students didn’t really know who these people were,” he says, and years ago he set out to change that. He turned to a carousel slide projector and highly focused topics to paint a more personal picture of the people being discussed.

“The families that they were reading about were faceless,” he says about members of modern dynasties, like the Rockefellers or the Fords. Large, telling photographs now serve as the backdrop for his lectures, and Geelhoed makes sure that during every second he is without chalk in hand, someone’s mug is on the screen. He then encourages students to look for connections: similarities between the qualities and emotions described in the text and the expressions on the unfamiliar faces.

Today the slides have been promoted to transparencies, but have yet to make the jump into digital form. “I’ve never mastered PowerPoint,” he says with a chuckle.

Sophomore genetics major, Jillian Carroll, describes Geelhoed as “funnily awkward with technology.”

More

1st add Profile – Dr. Bruce Geelhoed

But his constant fumbling with the Burkhardt Building's ancient ELMO projectors does little to detract from the message. If anything, it just shows how much he wants to make sure that his students connect with the past. He especially likes the bigger rooms that have massive projector screens – that way he can make the faces as large as possible.

Before the switch, Geelhoed's long-running class, Honors Symposium in Contemporary Civilization, was covering seven to eight historically significant families per semester. Now the course covers four. While focusing the topics has forced him to slow down his teaching, it has allowed Geelhoed to go into much greater depth about the individual events and incidents.

"I'm constantly adapting to new information," he says, and frequently finds himself teaching entire classes about events previously marginalized due to time constraints.

"There's more for them to learn about."

The magnitude of his knowledge shows, and Geelhoed relishes in the flexibility of honors courses; he can usually design his classes how *he* wants.

"His broad depth of knowledge in his subject matter is truly impressive," says sophomore business major, Ian Nastally. Nastally appreciates Geelhoed's efforts to help even uninterested students understand important topics and issues.

"He has a way of making the subject so interesting that there really is no need to study for his exams, because the information just sticks with you," Jaclyn Hennell, a sophomore music theater major, says. "While he maintains a grading system, he makes the class about the subject, rather than about the grade. His class is the only class that I really don't care what grade I get."

More

2nd add Profile – Dr. Bruce Geelhoed

Geelhoed's desire for understanding often leaves a traceable visual of his recent activity. Trails of chalk dust dot his clothing, stamped out during enthusiastic sessions where he will do anything, save for scaling the chalkboard, to get the message across.

“Anybody want to ask a question?” he habitually asks after revealing each one of his conclusions. “Can I go on?...I’m gonna go on...” The warning is genuinely concerned, but is also short and pressing, because it is likely that he has been itching to start explaining the next topic long before he is forced to cut short the first. Sometimes it seems like the mind of Dr. Bruce Geelhoed sees too much to tell about.

###