

TOP STORY

'Humour Summer School' helps introduce humor research to students

By **BRAD PUSHKAR** Summer Reporter Jul 24, 2017



Doug Pruim watches Willibald Ruch address the attendees Saturday during the Humour Summer School in the Stewart Center. Ruch has been involved with the Humour Summer School since its creation in 2000.

BY BRAD PUSHKAR/Summer Reporter

When thinking of Purdue, some might not think it is a funny place.

But over the weekend, the university hosted the “Humour Summer School” in the Stewart Center. The event drew in attendees and lecturers from around the world to present their ideas and research on humor.

The event was organized by Purdue professors Julia Rayz and Victor Raskin, both humor researchers. Rayz studies artificial intelligence and humor related to it, while Raskin was the first editor in chief of “Humor: International Journal of Humor Research.”

Lecture topics varied throughout the week, including “The Art of the Practical Joke,” “Humor in the Workplace” and “The Appearance and Evolution of the Disaster Joke.”

Although humor involves telling jokes, lecturers weren't simply throwing one-liners around. Instead they would give some examples of jokes, as well as explaining the ideas and behind them.

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In the lecture on disaster jokes, Christie Davies talked about how that form of joke is the most recent to appear, showing up in the last 50 to 60 years. Disaster jokes are jokes after well publicized events, such as Princess Diana's death, 9/11 or the Challenger explosion.

"Humor in the Workplace", on the other hand, focused more on how companies can use humor to help draw in customers, as well as promote workplace health and fun.

Topics varied in discipline, ranging from sociology and psychology to artificial intelligence and anthropology, which is important in covering all aspects of humor.

"Humor is interdisciplinary. You cannot just do it from your side, you have to take a lot of other perspectives into account," Rayz said. "It's practically impossible to look at it from a single facet."

Willibald Ruch, a professor at the University of Zurich, was one of the founding members of the "Humour Summer School" and has seen some changes from the original meeting in 2000. He said that when the school started, psychology was the main discipline discussed and covered but is glad the school has broadened.

He sees the range in disciplines as a way to help promote learning and answer the questions many students may have.

"You have to be good in your own discipline, but you can learn a lot from others," Ruch said. "Students tend to come with very general questions, and they sometimes can't necessarily be answered with your discipline."

Purdue has a history with humor, hosting the 1988 International Society for Humor Studies Conference, for which Raskin served as the chair member. This year's conference was in Montreal, which Ruch said helped to make the trip for lecturers easier.

The school also included a symposium for the attendees to be critiqued on their humor research

and ideas.

Interacting with peers helps students meet researchers in their field, Rayz said. This helps some students at other colleges around the world that do not have an advisor to approach for help with their humor research.

Brad Pushkar