

Professor makes students laugh and learn

Doug Hecox has 'Graze Expectations' for the future of agricultural humor

By Adam Ross

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School of Communication adjunct professor Doug Hecox confirmed one undeniable fact for students and readers: his new book, "Graze Expectations," is fun to read on the toilet.

"According to what readers are telling me about the book and where they read it," Hecox said, "apparently I'm improving bathroom literacy."

Published in 2003, "Graze Expectations" is a collection of short pieces that first appeared in the agricultural humor column he writes for numerous publications in the Rocky Mountains, the area where he grew up.

The idea surfaced as Hecox attempted to grow the readership of his originally news- and humor-based column, which has appeared each week in papers throughout the West since 1997. While shopping the column to newspapers in neighboring states, Hecox heard "no" a lot, but finally found someone at a paper in Idaho who was desperate for a writer.

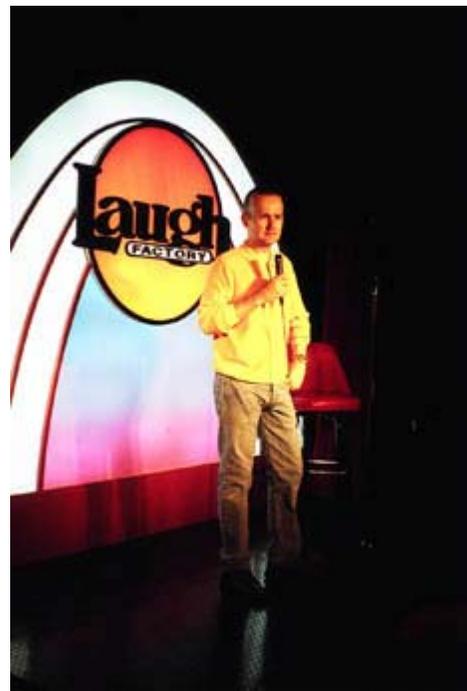
"He asked me if I did [agricultural] humor," Hecox said. "I lived in Washington, D.C., had a view of the Capitol outside my apartment, and didn't know anything about ranching, but I said, 'Why yes ... Yes I do!'"

So Hecox invented a ranch, a brand, a wife, two kids, 400 cattle and in-laws all in an unnamed town. In time, the column grew in reputation and was syndicated to other newspapers. "I may be the only guy playing a character in a newspaper in America," he said.

While not writing, Hecox also performs stand-up comedy in clubs and on college campuses along the East Coast. Hecox said his act spans a wide range of topics, from political humor to darker material, as well as clean humor. "I'm too diverse for my own good," he said, explaining that bookers often have a hard time categorizing him as a performer, making it difficult to find similar comedians for him to work with.

"I'm in one of those phases right now where I am trying to really re-cast myself in the light that I want to be, and intended to be originally," he said. "It's easier to get work when a talent booker knows what kind of comedian you are."

In spite of his diverse style, Hecox has worked with some of the biggest names in comedy, including Dave Attell of Comedy Central's "Insomniac" and George Lopez of ABC's "The George



Media Credit: Laura Beasley
AU SOC Prof. Doug Hecox impresses audiences with his jokes, not his resume.

Lopez Show." But according to Hecox, a long resume doesn't really matter to the crowd when performing a comedy act.

"You can walk on stage with the best resume, \$250 million dollars in the bank, five Porsches and a television deal, but it's going to last you about 30 seconds," Hecox said. "After that, the audience will know if you are funny or not."

Last Thursday Hecox performed at the prestigious New York City Underground Comedy Festival with five other comedians at the Laugh Factory in Times Square.

"It's the first no-pressure show I've ever had. It's always been some competition, or I've had to impress some girl in the crowd, or be funny enough for the booker," Hecox said in an interview before the show.

Whatever the audience, Hecox has shown readers, writers, critics and SOC students that multiple pursuits can be balanced.

"I don't think life is 'either/or'," he said. "I think life is 'and also.' Go after it all, and do as much as you can," he said.

Hecox said he wants to be a person everyone knows by one name, like Cher or Jordan. He's getting closer, but for now he is known by students only by one color: red, which he applies generously when pointing out errors in their journalism homework.

