CUOL sends you our love for Valentine's Day later this month.

Riveted: The Science of Why Jokes Make Us Laugh, Movies Make Us Cry, & Religion Makes Us Feel One with the Universe

Jim Davies, Associate Professor
Institute of Cognitive Science

Tales from the Field: Rachel Collins
How CUOL helped a distance student complete a degree without sacrificing her lifestyle
Jim Davies reflects on his latest book,
*Riveted: The Science of Why Jokes Make Us Laugh, Movies Make Us Cry, and Religion Makes Us Feel One with the Universe*

Jim Davies reveals how his latest book uses science to explain why we find things compelling.

Could an addictive television show, a personified god, and a commercial that leaves us with the urge to buy a Toyota have anything in common?

According to Jim Davies’ latest book, they could.

The notion that we find things compelling for common, psychological reasons is the premise behind *Riveted: The Science of Why Jokes Make Us Laugh, Movies Make Us Cry, and Religion Makes Us Feel One with the Universe*. The book uses scientific reasoning to explain attraction.

“I call it ‘a unified theory of compelling things,’ ” says Davies.

Though *Riveted* is grounded in science, Davies says the book is not geared solely towards readers with a scientific background.
“It's meant for people who are curious about what they’re attracted to,” explains Davies.

Davies says Riveted can help readers build their “psychological immune system.” He explains that developing an understanding of what influences attraction can enable readers to reflect on the true appeal of what attracts them. As an example, Davies points to the compelling nature of a car commercial featuring a beautiful woman.

He says, “If you realize that you can build an association of the good feelings you get looking at a beautiful woman while you’re looking at a Toyota … you can say, ‘Well alright, step back … Do I really want a Toyota?’”

Overall, Davies says he is happy with the response he has gotten from readers.

“I’ve been reviewed in the Wall Street Journal and places I’ve never dreamed,” he says, with a smile.

While most reviews of Riveted have been favourable, Davies concedes that some readers have offered negative feedback on the book.

“Some people say there are too many references, some people say there are not,” says Davies. “You can’t please everybody.”

But his most important takeaway from the Riveted feedback is that “no one has said it’s wrong.”

“Maybe I’m not the best writer in the world, but this is the best idea I’ve ever had,” says Davies. “A lot of smart people have read the book and no one has said that I’m full of baloney.”

“That, to me, is the biggest reward.”
Jim Davies: Author, professor, and time-manager extraordinaire

Carleton University professor and author Jim Davies shares the story of his journey to success.

He is an associate professor at Carleton University’s Institute of Cognitive Science, but Jim Davies’ expertise extends beyond the realm of teaching.

His hobbies include screenwriting, painting, and swing dancing. He is a regular contributor to the popular science magazine, *Nautilus*, and his latest book has been praised in publications such as the *Wall Street Journal*.

When asked to recall what shaped his path in life, Davies says the support of his parents helped fuel his childhood interest in books and science.

“As a kid, I had subscriptions to *Discover Magazine* that my parents were happy to buy for me,” says Davies. “They were very encouraging.”

Davies grew up in upstate New York, where he says he was constantly exposed to the arts. He says the “shocking amount” of youth theatres in his hometown gave him the opportunity to pursue acting in his spare time.

“I think I was in 50 plays before I went to university,” Davies says.

Towards the end of high school, Davies developed an interest in philosophy. He completed a bachelor’s degree in philosophy in New York, and then moved to Atlanta to pursue further education. By 2004, Davies had completed a Ph.D. in computer science, with a certificate in cognitive
Today, Davies is teaching “Mysteries of the Mind,” a Carleton University Online course (CGSC 1001 V). His main research work is dedicated to modeling the human imagination on computers, and he manages graduate students.

“I like my job a lot,” says Davies, with a smile.

In his spare time, Davies wrote Riveted: The Science of Why Jokes Make Us Laugh, Movies Make Us Cry, and Religion Makes Us Feel One with the Universe, which was published in 2014. But Davies says his interest in artistic hobbies “goes through phases.”

“Right now, I’m more focused on fiction writing,” says Davies, “but if my friend makes it as a big time director and wants me to write a screenplay, I might get back into that.”

In order to juggle work and a multitude of hobbies, Davies says he uses a time-management strategy he calls the “half-hours method.” He creates a detailed schedule on a spreadsheet which displays every hour of his day. He refuses to work on any project for more than half an hour. Davies says his strategy is based on a person’s psychological perception of time.

“When you look at a list of all the things you have to do…and realize that you only have that amount of time to do it, it puts a psychological change in you,” he explains.

Davies’ used the half-hours method to help him complete Riveted, which he says he wrote in chunks every day. However, he adds that his passion for the book often enabled him to work for extended periods of time without being distracted.

“I enjoyed writing it so much…I was able to do it for an hour or more at a time,” he says. “[Riveted] was the most important thing in my academic life.”

When he considers Riveted and his other ongoing pursuits, Davies says
he is “very, very happy,” with the point he is at in life.

“It has been a dream of mine since at least ’94 to publish a book,” he says. “Now that I’ve done it and it’s been decently received…I can smile about that every day. It was very important to me to do that, and I’ve got a job that I like, so I’m quite satisfied.”

Davies hesitates for a moment, then chuckles, and adds, “the trick is to be satisfied but at the same time very ambitious, so I try to get up every morning and work on my next book.”

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**Tales from the Field:**
Rachel Collins

*How CUOL helped a distance student complete a degree without sacrificing her lifestyle*

*A Carleton distance student explains how CUOL helped her work, travel, and nurture her love of learning.*

Rachel Collins loves learning, travelling, and experiencing new things. With the help of CUOL, she’s able to enjoy all three.

Collins is a Carleton distance student living in Berlin, Germany. This past December, she completed her undergraduate thesis.

“CUOL has helped me immensely in achieving my educational goals,” says Collins.

Collins was working full-time in B.C. with a science degree under her belt
when she decided to enrol in CUOL courses. She says the flexible nature of CUOL helped motivate her to nurture her interest in psychology.

“I could watch the lectures on my lunch break, after work, or on weekends,” says Collins. “The flexibility...meant that I could pursue my academic goals seriously.”

Since enrolling in her first CUOL course in September 2010, Collins has completed more than six classes through the service. She says her choice to use CUOL has allowed her to work, travel, and study on her own schedule.

When asked to describe her CUOL learning experience in a single word, Collins calls it “convenient.”

“My experience absolutely supports the usefulness and necessity of courses available online/on demand,” Collins says. “CUOL can provide people in all kinds of circumstances with access to a university education.”

Collins says she would recommend that students in Ottawa or elsewhere take classes through CUOL because of its convenience and flexibility. She says her experiences as a CUOL distance student exemplify how the service is especially beneficial for students with various obligations outside of school.

Collins was able to complete enough courses through CUOL that she could return to Carleton’s Ottawa campus for only one full-time year.

“This meant only one year away from work for me,” she explains. “My husband’s company even allowed him to freelance for that year, provided we agreed to come back.”

As a distance student, Collins completed her examinations under the supervision of a variety of in-person proctors. She calls proctored examinations “amazing,” because they allow students outside of Ottawa to pursue university credits at Carleton.

While Collins admits she was often unable to ask for clarification on
exams, she says the proctored examination setting ultimately worked in her favour by forcing her to master the course material.

“It truly puts you in the position of having to give your best answer,” she explains.

Today, Collins is auditing a religious studies course that is available on CUOL. Though she has fulfilled her requirements for graduation, she says she hopes to continue taking and auditing CUOL classes in the future and plans to pursue a master’s degree in psychology in September 2016.

“I find it really important to keep learning and to stay open-minded somehow,” she says. “CUOL offers a really flexible way to do that.”

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**TechCorner** –

*University professors use classroom games to promote learning*

*University professors are combining gaming and learning in a trend known as “gamification.”*

Imagine a classroom in which students were encouraged – instead of admonished – for playing games.
University professors are turning this classroom environment into a reality through “gamification” in education – the introduction of game-like elements into class.

Mary Waller’s digital simulation game, *Crisis Match*, is an example of gamification in action. Waller, who teaches organization studies at York’s Schulich School of Business, designed a digital game in which students must work together to solve problems at a fictional company. The game has a realistic narrative that Waller says is a useful tool for teaching crisis management.

Not all professors are advocates of gamification. Critics of the approach suggest that there is not enough proof that games are a useful educational tool.

Regardless of speculation about the value of in-class gaming, the use of game elements in higher education is on the rise. From digital simulations to in-class competitions, university professors are turning to the world of games to engage their students in learning.

Did you know?

CUOL conducted a whopping 22,500 examinations over the last academic
year. Out of those, 2,500 were for students taking courses at other institutions, writing with our CU Testing Centre.