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Laura Fraser / Ryersonian staff

Jim Ward and David Reville have jointly taught the history of madness course since 2004, drawing on life experiences and work in the public sector.

'Schizophrenic team' leads madness class

By Stacey Hale
Special to *The Ryersonian*

Two Ryerson professors are making course selections a lot less maddening.

And madness is David Reville and Jim Ward's forte.

When an introduction to microeconomics or studying Canadian politics doesn't quite have the

He went on to do a series of "dorky" jobs including clerical work and eventually landed a job with the city of Toronto on a Metro clean-up crew.

Today, Reville knows he has bipolar disorder, a manic-depressive illness that causes unusual shifts in a person's mood and energy. But the disorder did not take away from his many accomplishments after 15 years in public life.

appeal you hoped for, flip through your Ryerson course calendar until you reach a history of madness, offered by the school of disability studies.

Long time friends Reville, 63, and Ward, 64, took over the course in 2004. With the help of their personalities and the practical spin of the course, enrolment jumped from 42 to 300 students.

"In the distance we're both old, white buggers with white hair," Ward said, joking that students had trouble telling the white-haired, white-mustached teaching duo apart. "We're a schizophrenic team."

The class is described in the course calendar as: a survey of "the social medial, political, economic, cultural and religious factors that have influenced interpretations of what it means to be 'mad' from ancient time to the present."

Jenilee Forgie, a forth-year business management student took a history of madness last year. She said it was obvious to the class that the profs experienced some of the things they spoke of during lectures, and that made the material more compelling.

"I think the reason (the class) was so popular is because of the profs. They're both such nice, charismatic guys."

Ward and Reville each have a history that's anchored in Toronto city politics and public life. Both men, for reasons close to them, have worked towards giving a voice to society's outcasts. Living on the fringe of society, as homeless and mentally ill people do, is a struggle that Reville and Ward know all too well.

Long before the two met in the early '80s, Ward spent time "bumming around" the world, spending some time in prison.

Reville was hospitalized for what was then diagnosed as manic depression, a mood disorder.

Reville was attending law school at the University of Toronto in the mid-60s when he had a nervous breakdown and was placed in an asylum for two years.

That "killed off my career as a lawyer effectively," Reville said. "I couldn't do it, I couldn't focus on it."

Reville said he reinvented himself at George Brown College, where he completed a licence in plumbing and gas fitting.

"In the distance we're both old, white buggers with white hair."

— *Jim Ward*

and deliver advocacy services for vulnerable people. Reville has also contributed to legal research and written portions of Canada's Divorce Act.

Ward, whose lingering British accent gives away his home country, immigrated to Australia and left formal school early.

He said he spent some of his youth working in fields picking crops and peanuts before joining the Australian navy.

Ward then lived like a transient homeless man, and only turned his life around after being released from prison, he said. He then moved to the United States where he completed a PhD in sociology at the University of Maryland.

"I left (Australia) as a bum and came back with a PhD," Ward said wryly.

Ward and Reville's friendship sparked 24 years ago when Ward was working at Dixon Hall, an agency in eastern Toronto that offers programs to help homeless men and women, and residents of local public housing.

Both men have a personal interest in homelessness— Ward experienced it first-hand, and Reville said that 85 per cent of people with serious mental illnesses are unemployed and at risk of being homeless.

"I left (Australia) as a bum and came back with a PhD."

— *Jim Ward*

Through Dixon Hall Reville and Ward persuaded the city to build a surplus shelter for homeless people. The two joked about how angry the neighbours of the newly built shelter were.

The shelter, since started, has been permanent housing for Toronto homeless for 20 years.

Both men look at homelessness and mentally ill people as products of a larger structural problem.

"(It's) the way we structure political jurisdiction," Ward said, "(it's) not accidental that people are homeless."

As a part-time professor, Reville hasn't become too involved in the Ryerson community, but said he appreciates the students. "I love the way the student body looks," he said.