

= Skeptic 's Toolbox =

Held every August since 1992 , the Skeptic 's Toolbox was formed by psychologist and now @-@ retired University of Oregon professor Ray Hyman . The workshop , held over four days , focuses on making people into better critical thinkers by investigating a central theme . The attendees are broken up into groups and given tasks that they must work on together and present in front of the entire group on the last day . The Skeptic 's Toolbox is sponsored by the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry .

= = History = =

Hyman created the Skeptic 's Toolbox in 1989 to teach people how to be better skeptics . He tells James Underdown that " we were putting out more fires by skeptics than by believers ... they were going overboard " . The first toolbox was in Buffalo , NY with himself , James Alcock and Steve Shaw (now called Banachek) . With the exception of one year when the toolbox was held in Boulder , Colorado , the toolbox has been held at the University of Oregon in Eugene . In general , the faculty likes to keep the numbers at about 90 in order to give everyone personalized attention , and allow everyone the chance to participate . At the 1993 Toolbox , " More than a hundred people participated , from 19 states , Canada , and Hong Kong , and their enthusiasm continued to grow with each passing day , ending on the fifth day with what appeared to be a unanimous ' If only we had more time ! ' " .

In 1997 Skeptical Inquirer Magazine announced that CFI would begin offering an academic certificate for students in a three @-@ year program . Students needed to complete 30 units in academic work as well as in workshops . The two certificates offered were Humanistic Studies and Science and the Paranormal , attending The Skeptic 's Toolbox would satisfy one of the workshop requirements .

= = Methodology and focus = =

While critical thinking is the overall focus , lectures designed around the theme focus on the specialties of the faculty . A reporter for the Register @-@ Guard attended the 2003 toolbox and wrote of his experience hearing lectures on post traumatic stress syndrome , graphology , repressed memory court cases , communication with the dead , healing through prayer , traditional Chinese medicine and psychic dogs . All that and Jerry Andrus 's display of optical illusions too . The goal of the Toolbox is to " help skeptics add to their arsenal of tools and techniques with which to both guard against deception and properly evaluate paranormal claims " . Learning how to communicate with believers is also considered important : " Skeptics search for truths , believers tend to want validation of their experiences " .

Getting the skeptical message across to believers was a focus at the 1993 event . Faculty felt that non @-@ skeptics might be more receptive if attendees understood how they were perceived by others . " Many people view skeptics as die @-@ hard cynics and debunkers , even as enemies of free speech . Nonskeptics often hear only the " COP " in CSICOP " .

In 2010 , interviewed by D. J. Grothe , Hyman explained , " give people the tools to think , help them to become better thinkers " . Mentalist Bob Fellows performed at the second conference and told the audience , " The effect (of a magic trick) on audiences who (believe the trick is real magic) can be enormously powerful . And when deceit is involved , they can be potentially harmful as well " . Hyman felt that it was necessary to teach attendees with a " case @-@ based approach ... concrete examples as a first step toward extracting broad examples ... (giving) the benefit of context " to the learning experience .

= = Faculty of the Toolbox = =

Loren Pankratz - A founding faculty member of the Skeptic 's Toolbox , Pankratz explained to

Harriet Hall , about the beginnings of the Toolbox , " Ray Hyman , Jerry Andrus and I were meeting together once a month or so and we decided that maybe the three of us could put a Toolbox together . "

Barry Beyerstein - " One of the many enjoyable tasks I undertake for CSICOP is to lecture in Ray Hyman 's annual summer workshop at the University of Oregon . Not only is it the towering presence of Ray himself , and the joy of observing the sheer brainpower of my fellow faculty at work , it is also the people , literally from around the world , who enroll in this and other CSICOP functions that keep me from suffering that occupational hazard ' skeptic 's burnout . ' They are a remarkable lot , genuinely nice people committed to critical thinking and leaving the place a bit better than they found it . They make me very pleased that my fate was to become a skeptical inquirer . "

Harriet Hall - Prior to attending the Toolbox as a student , Hall had been a " passive skeptic " , " I hadn 't done any writing ... Ray Hyman and Wally Sampson encouraged me to try my hand at writing , one thing led to another and now I 'm on the faculty of the Skeptic 's Toolbox . "

Lindsay Beyerstein - She started attending the Skeptic 's Toolbox when she was 14 ; her father Barry Beyerstein strongly influenced her involvement in the skeptical movement . " It 's sorta funny , the skeptics ' movement is now finally old enough , it 's like Scientology , we have second gen ! " She recounts , " I was always involved with my Dad in skeptical meetings ... " We would have family newsletter @-@ stuffing nights (for the BC Skeptics) . " instead of hiring babysitters her father would take Lindsay to his media interviews . " Does Satanic music cause suicide ? Out @-@ of @-@ body experiences ... it was always something new and different . "

James Alcock - " Ray and I and a magician by the name of Steve Shaw , now known as Banachek did the very first Toolbox in Buffalo ... a little while later Ray asked me if I could come out here to this group . " Ray stated " It took a long while to get Jim out here , but finally we managed it . "

= = Other = =

Gallery of photos