

Superhero teaches at JCCC

During his postdoctoral studies at the University of Mississippi School of Medicine, Dr. Dennis Bishop investigated the role of the kidneys and vascular reactivity in the development of hypertension. Now an adjunct associate professor of science, Bishop teaches *Human Anatomy* at JCCC.

But behind the mild-mannered demeanor of this scientist is a man who knows every detail of crime in Gotham City, the dark side of Batman and the maniacal killings of The Joker. Bishop has a passion for comic book collecting, and his specialty is Batman comics and other comics referencing the caped crusader's early origins — *Detective Comics*, *World's Finest Comics*, *Justice League of America*, and *The Brave and the Bold*. Batman, first created by artist Bob Kane and writer Bill Finger, was introduced in *Detective Comics* #27 (1939).

Pulling out a stack of rare and valuable comic books, Bishop talks in rapid-fire speed about the history of comic books.

“Look at this one — it cost 15 cents during the Great Depression. That was a lot of money back then,” Bishop said. “Comic book publishers were targeting adults who read comic strips in the paper. During World War II, American servicemen read comics in their barracks.”

Then came the censors, Bishop explains. During the 1950s, psychiatrist Fredric Wertham published *Seduction of the Innocent* about how comic books were destroying the morality of America's youth. Comic books became the subject of Congressional oversight under the Comic Code Authority in 1954.

Bishop owned his first comic book by age 7 or 8. By the 1960s, \$1 of lawn mowing money would buy him eight to 10 comics a month — DC and Marvel titles. But it was *Batman* comics he saved. The old stories were his favorite — before television portrayed Adam West as a satire of Batman and The Joker as a trickster. When Bishop left for college in 1969, he gave his *Batman* comics to a friend.

Bishop never read another comic for 20 years until the release of Tim Burton's *Batman* movie in 1989, when Batman returned as a dark and brooding crime fighter and The Joker returned as evil. Bishop was lured back into the world of comic book collecting, rebuilding his collection and buying new ones.

Bishop has approximately 8,000 comic books. He has a



Dr. Dennis Bishop shows off a few of his nearly 8,000 comic books relating to Batman.

ledger that lists every title in chronological order of books he owns with a notation to the side of the significance of each one. Example: *Detective Comics* #205 (March 1954) is the origin of the batcave. Blanks are left for the books yet to be acquired.

He has consecutive *Batman* comics dating from April 1956. If he can fill in three more, his collection will be complete to April of 1955. He has a consecutive collection of *Detective Comics* dating from May 1957, missing only August 1958 and September 1957. But he also owns older ones that date to the 1940s.

“Comics in near mint condition can now sell for \$7,000-\$15,000. A copy of *Detective* #27 (Batman's first appearance) sold at auction in February 2010 for \$1,075,500, making it the most expensive comic ever purchased,” Bishop said.

Bishop has a bachelor's degree in zoology from the University of Missouri-Columbia, master's degree in biology from UMKC, and doctorate in physiology from MU-Columbia. Most recently, he taught biology in the Shawnee Mission School District until he started teaching as an adjunct at JCCC in 2009. By the way, Bruce Wayne was also a brilliant scientist, a superhero without super powers. **Im**