

The Yes Men affect UT

Political activism has a whole new meaning once the Yes Men get involved.

The Yes Men shared their stories on how they use a satirical approach to expose the corruption of large governmental organizations in the Driscoll Auditorium March 30.

Jacques Servin and Igor Vamos, better known by their aliases Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno, respectively, make fake websites that look similar to actual government websites.

“It was all satirical. We thought people would read it and think it was funny and find ways to actually protest or make a difference,” said Vamos.

Companies and news organizations began to reach out to them, mistaking the two for the companies they impersonated and would ask them to speak at numerous conferences.

“The trick was to see how far we could go without them knowing,” Servin said. “Their reactions were so surprising, we decided to get a camera.”

BBC News contacted them through their fake website impersonating Dow Chemical Company and asked them for a representative to speak about the 20th anniversary of the Bhopal Disaster.

Obviously, they were unable to send the requested representative, so they offered to send a substitute.

Servin posed as the representative, went on live TV and announced Dow was going to take full responsibility for the disaster and compensate those affected.

Clearly this was fake, but for 45 minutes the world thought this was true—until the statement was later retracted by the

actual company.

Servin said the goal is to make people laugh; humor can change a person's opinion.

"Humor is a powerful way to get across important ideas because it catches you off guard," Servin said. "You end up thinking about it in a way you aren't used to thinking about it."

Barry Whittaker, a UT professor of art, said seeing the Yes Men's passion for their work could show students how to be passionate about something they care deeply about and how to implement that passion in their work.

"I was really inspired by how they were merging this this idea of art, activism and performance all into this weird, hybrid world," Whittaker said. "Also, I felt it was important to have students find other people who are doing new things but having strong opinions about them."

Alex Seifert, a second-year political science major, said it was interesting for him to see how individuals or even small groups of people can influence governmental systems and different interest groups and try to affect policy on their own.