

Anthropology of Humor and Laughter
Anthro. 3969-1; 5969-1; 396-1 (3273; 3197)
Fall Semester 2008
Dr. Ewa Wasilewska

COURSE OUTLINE

- Instructor:** Dr. Ewa Wasilewska
- Office hours:** By appointment only; please call the Department of Anthropology (581-6251) and leave your name, phone number, and class number.
E-mail: Mruczek@AOL.com
Website: www.ewas.us
- Time:** Each Thursday at 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- Location:** CAMPUS – AEB 310
- Important dates:** September 3, 08 – last day to drop classes
September 8, 08 – last day to register, to elect CR/NC option or to audit classes
October 24, 08 – last day to withdraw from term length classes
- Required Texts:** **Cohen, Ted: *Jokes. Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters.* The University of Chicago Press. 1999.**
Although this book is specifically assigned only for Weeks 4/5, different examples of jokes and Cohen’s analysis will be used throughout the whole course.
- All other required articles, chapters from different books, etc., are listed under specific topics discussed during the semester. All of them are available at Marriott Library Reserve Desk as hard copies or through electronic reserve or both.
- Optional Texts:** **Robert R. Provine: *Laughter. A Scientific Investigation.* Viking. 2000.**
- Arthur Asa Berger: *An Anatomy of Humor.* Transaction Publishers. 1998.**
- Subject:** Humor is a significant characteristic of cultural systems. Although research on humor has been traditionally dominated by specialists in such fields as psychology, language and literature, this important social behavior has recently (since publication of “Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach” by

Mahadev L. Apte; Cornell University Press 1985) drawn attention of diversified group of anthropologists. Currently, anthropological studies of this topic are extended beyond conventional research on joking relations or religiously oriented themes (e.g., sacred clowns), delving into barely explored territory of biosocial and evolutionary aspects of humor; its intrinsic qualities of expressing, describing, and evaluating culture-based institutions, symbols, relations and values; and using humor as an important conceptual and methodological tool providing insights into behavioral patterns of any society. All these aspects of humor will be discussed in the class.

This course intends to introduce students to anthropology of both humor and laughter since these two terms, although closely associated, are not the same. While laughter is the most obvious indicator of going through humorous experience, it does not have to appear only in connection with the vocalized or visualized (conceptualized) humor. As such, laughter is not limited to humans (e.g., “tickling a chimpanzee”), but the question whether humor is remains open for discussion. Consequently, physical, physiological, clinical and psychological aspects of laughter will be presented as relevant to the discussion of conceptualized humor.

While this class does not intend to be funny, playful, amusing, etc., selected examples of conceptual humor from different cultures and time periods will be used.

Requirements:

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

The final grade will be based on four exams and additional assignments. Exams will consist of different sections (including essay questions) especially designed for the type of material, which will be covered during class meetings. In order to pass these exams it is necessary to attend lectures and to read the required material. Since the amount of information to which students will be exposed is significant, review sessions are planned after the last session before each exam, after the regular class period. The most important information, names, terms, definitions, etc., can be found in the notes prepared by the instructor in order to structure the learning process in the most effective way.

GRADUATE STUDENTS

In addition to the requirements listed above, graduate students are required to write an additional research paper of ca. 20 pages (plus bibliography). Each topic must be discussed with the instructor

first and at the end of the semester each graduate student might be asked to present a brief summary of his or her research to the class.

Week # 1 – August 28, 2008

Let's laugh!

What is laughter? Recognizing, vocalizing, defining, and using laughter. Physiology and evolution of laughter. Is laughing what makes us human or is it smiling?

Readings for Week 1:

Polimeni, Joseph & Jeffrey P. Reiss: The First Joke: Exploring the Evolutionary Origins of Humor. In *Evolutionary Psychology*. Vol. 4. 2006. Pp. 347-366.

www.human-nature.com/ep/downloads/ep04347366.pdf

Provine, Robert R.: Chapters 1-3. Pp. 1-53. Chapter 5. Pp. 75-97.

In Robert R. Provine: *Laughter. A Scientific Investigation*. Viking. 2000.

Strubbe, Bill: Getting Serious About Laughter. In *World And I*. 2003.

www.worldandi.com/newhome/public/2003/march/nspub.asp

Week # 2 – September 4, 2008

Humor me!

What is humor? Defining humor through its attributes: sources (stimuli), their perception and evaluation, behavioral responses. From Humoral Pathology to Paleohumorology.

Readings for Week 2:

Veatch, Thomas C.: A Theory of Humor. In *Humor, the International Journal of Humor Research*. May. 1998. HTML version at www.tomveatch.com/else/humor/paper

Week # 3 – September 11, 2008

Are you laughing yet?

Basic elements, factors, and subjects of effective humor. Linguistic studies of competence in communicating humor.

Readings for Week 3:

Berger, Arthur Asa: Anatomy of Joke. In *An Anatomy of Humor*. Transaction Publishers. 1998. Pp. 57-61.

La Fave, Lawrence et al: Superiority, Enhanced Self-Esteem, and Perceived Incongruity. In *Humor and Laughter: Theory, Research, and Applications*. Edited by Anthony J. Chapman and Hugh C. Foot. Transaction Publishers. 1996. Pp. 63-92.

Rothbart, Mary K.: Incongruity, Problem-Solving and Laughter. In *Humor and Laughter: Theory, Research, and Applications*. Edited by Anthony J. Chapman and Hugh C. Foot. Transaction Publishers. 1996. Pp. 37-54.

Week # 4 – September 18, 2008

How many anthropologists does it take to screw in a light-bulb?

Culture codes and conceptualization of humor. Conditional and non-conditional jokes.

REVIEW!

Readings for Weeks 4 & 5:

Berger, Arthur Asa: Introduction: Humor, Psyche and Society. In *An Anatomy of Humor*. Transaction Publishers. 1998. Pp. 1-13.

Berger, Arthur Asa: A Glossary of the Techniques of Humor: Morphology of the Joke Tale. In *An Anatomy of Humor*. Transaction Publishers. 1998. Pp. 15-55.

Cohen, Ted: *Jokes. Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters*. The University of Chicago Press. 1999.

Rapaille, Clotilde: Introduction. The Birth of Notion. In *The Culture Code*. Broadway Books. 2006. Pp. 1-28.

Week # 5 – September 25, 2008

EXAM!!!

Week # 6 – October 2, 2008

“Looking for Comedy in the Muslim World.”

Social functions of humor. Humor as Social Control and/or Social Conflict. Part 1.

Readings for Weeks 6, 7, and 8:

Koller, R. Marvin: Chapter 2: Sociological Analyses of Humor. In *Humor and Society: Explorations in the Sociology of Humor*. Houston. 1988. Pp.17-31.

O’Rourke, P.J.: The Piece of Ireland That Passeth All Understanding. Ulster, May 1988. In *Give War A Chance. Eyewitness Accounts of Mankind’s Struggle Against Tyranny, Injustice and Alcohol-Free Beer*. Grove Press. 1992. Pp. 25-38.

Week # 7 – October 9, 2008

“Looking for Comedy in the Muslim World.”

Social functions of humor. Humor as Social Control and/or Social Conflict. Part 2.

Week # 8 – October 16, 2008

FALL BREAK!

Week # 9 – October 23, 2008

“Your culture or mine?”

Cross-cultural humor: joking relationships. Etic humor and emic humor.

Readings for Week 9:

Apte, Mahadev L.: Joking Relationships. In *Humor and Laughter. An Anthropological Approach*. Cornell University Press. 1985. Pp. 29-66.

Davidheiser, Mark: Special Affinities and Conflict Resolution: West African Social Institutions and Mediation. In *Beyond Intractability*. 2005-2006.

www.beyondintractability.org/essay/joking_kinship

Also review:

Polimeni, Joseph & Jeffrey P. Reiss: The First Joke: Exploring the Evolutionary Origins of Humor. In *Evolutionary Psychology*. Vol. 4. 2006. Pp. 347-366.

www.human-nature.com/ep/downloads/ep04347366.pdf

Week # 10 – October 30, 2008**My culture, not yours!****Ethnic humor: its nature and functions. Popularity and demise. Part 1.****Readings for Weeks 10 & 11:**

Apte, Mahadev L.: Humor, Ethnicity, and Intergroup Relations. In *Humor and Laughter. An Anthropological Approach*. Cornell University Press. 1985. Pp. 108-148.

Davis, Christie: Who Gets Called Stupid? In *Ethnic Humor*. Indiana University Press. 1996. Pp. 41-83.

Ziv, Avner: Humor in Israel. In *National Styles of Humor*. Edited by Avner Ziv. Greenwood Press. 1988. Pp. 113-132.

Assignment “From Hell:”

O’Rourke, P.J.: The Innocents Abroad, Updated. In *Holidays in Hell*. Grove Press. 1988. Pp.5-11.

1. Explain stereotypes of 10 ethnic groups as based on O’Rourke’s smart comments (remember, he visited these countries in 1980s).
2. Question lottery: draw an excerpt from O’Rourke’s article and explain its meaning.

(to be turned in on November 29, 2008)**Week # 11 – November 6, 2008****My culture, not yours!****Ethnic humor: its nature and functions. Popularity and demise. Part 2.****TAKE-HOME EXAM!!! (to be turned in on November 20, 2008)****Week # 12 – November 13, 2008****“Sex and the City.”****Gender, sexuality and sexual inequality in humor.**

Readings for Week 12:

Apte, Mahadev L.: Sexual Inequality in Humor. In *Humor and Laughter. An Anthropological Approach*. Cornell University Press. 1985. Pp. 67-81.

Gruner, Charles, R.: Sexual, Sexist, and Scatological Humor. In *The Game of Humor*. Transaction Publishers. 1997. Pp. 107-130.

Koller, Marvin, R.: Sexual and Gender Humor. In *Humor and Society: Explorations in the Sociology of Humor*. Cap and Gown Press, Inc., Houston. 1988. Pp. 111-125.

Week # 13 – November 20, 2008

“Three clergymen – one Catholic, one Jewish, and one Episcopalian...”

Religious humor: sacred vs secular. Sacred clowns and not-so-sacred jokes. Between appropriateness and hostility.

Readings for Weeks # 13 & 14:

Apte, Mahadev L.: Cultural Expressions of Humor (Humor in Religion. Humor and Language. The Trickster in Folklore.) In *Humor and Laughter. An Anthropological Approach*. Cornell University Press. 1985. Pp. 151-238.

Cohen, Ted: Jewish Jokes and The Acceptance of Absurdity. Taste, Morality, and The Propriety of Joking. In *Jokes. Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters*. The University of Chicago Press. 1999. Pp. 45-86.

Koller, Marvin, R.: Religious Humor. In *Humor and Society: Explorations in the Sociology of Humor*. Cap and Gown press, Inc., Houston. 1988. Pp. 177-194.

TAKE-HOME EXAM!!! (to be turned in on December 11, 2008)

Week # 14 – November 27, 2008

THANKSGIVING BREAK!

Week # 15 – December 4, 2008

“Q: What did the blonde name her pet zebra? A: Spot.”

Hate and absurdity humor. Social inequality and stereotyping.

Readings for Week # 15:

Berger, Arthur Asa: Huckleberry Finn as a Novel of the Absurd: Making Sense of an Existential Hero. In *An Anatomy of Humor*. Transaction Publishers. 1998. Pp. 145-154.

Gruner, Charles, R.: Drollery in Death, Destruction and Disaster. In *The Game of Humor*. Transaction Publishers. 1997. Pp. 41-73.

Oring, Elliott: The Senses of Humor. Joke Thoughts. The Humor of Hate. Blond Ambitions and Other Signs of the Times. In *Engaging Humor*. University of Illinois Press. 2003. Pp. 13-70.

Week # 16 – December 11, 2008

The Satellite Dish for Campers.

Political and organizational humor. Globalization and consumerism.

Readings for Week # 16:

Friedman, Linda Weiser & Hershey H. Friedman: A Framework for the Study of Computer-Oriented Humor (COHUM). *CIS Working Paper Series*. New York. 2003.

www.papers.ssrn.com/sol13/papers.cfm?abstract_id=907710

Koller, Marvin, R.: Political Humor. In *Humor and Society: Explorations in the Sociology of Humor*. Cap and Gown Press, Inc., Houston. 1988. Pp. 215-232.

O'Rourke, P.J.: Why Americans Hate Foreign Policy. In *Peace Kills: America's Fun New Imperialism*. Atlantic Monthly Press. New York. 2003. Pp. 1-16.

O'Rourke, P.J.: Kuwait and Iraq. March and April 2003. In *Peace Kills: America's Fun New Imperialism*. Atlantic Monthly Press. New York. 2003. Pp. 144-185.

The Museum of Weird Consumer Culture. At www.indiana.edu/~wanthro/museum.htm

TAKE-HOME EXAM!!! (to be turned in on December 18, 2008)

Week # 17 – December 18, 2008

Last day to turn in your papers!!!

IMPORTANT!!!

**DISCLAIMER
ANTHROPOLOGY OF HUMOR AND LAUGHTER
FALL SEMESTER 2008
TAUGHT BY DR EWA WASILEWSKA**

Some of the writings, lectures, films, or presentations in this course may include material that conflicts with the core beliefs of some students. Please review the syllabus carefully to see if the course is one that you are committed to taking.

It is understood that the principles of academic freedom permit topics of all types, including those with offensive content, to be part of courses, lectures, and other academic pursuits. Much of humor is inherently offensive. Indeed, it is the offensive aspect that often makes for the humorous nature of a particular setting.

The materials in this course consist of offensive content that is used or displayed in an educational setting for educational purposes. This course will present students with objects, pictures, videotapes, audio recordings, computer communications, literature and lectures that are potentially—even certainly—offensive. Potentially offensive topics which will be discussed in the class include, but are not limited to, race and ethnic humor; hate humor; religion and religious humor; sexual, sexist and gender humor as well as linguistic humor. All topics are listed on the syllabus. Once again offense or the potential for offense is innate to humor. This course cannot be taught fully or effectively without exposing students to offensive material.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

Please familiarize yourself with the University of Utah CODE OF STUDENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES (“STUDENT CODE”) at

<http://www.admin.utah.edu/ppmanual//8/8-10.html>

The following is an excerpt from this CODE explaining specific actions, which won’t be tolerated in this class.

“2. “Academic misconduct” includes, but is not limited to, cheating, misrepresenting one's work, inappropriately collaborating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification of information, as defined further below. It also includes facilitating academic misconduct by intentionally helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic misconduct.

a. “Cheating” involves the unauthorized possession or use of information, materials, notes, study aids, or other devices in any academic exercise, or the unauthorized communication with another person during such an exercise. Common examples of cheating include, but are not limited to, copying from another student's examination, submitting work for an in-class exam that has been prepared in advance, violating rules governing the administration of exams, having another person take an exam, altering one's work after the work has been returned and before resubmitting it, or violating any rules relating to academic conduct of a course or program.

b. Misrepresenting one's work includes, but is not limited to, representing material prepared by another as one's own work, or submitting the same work in more than one course without prior permission of both faculty members.

c. “Plagiarism” means the intentional unacknowledged use or incorporation of any other person's work in, or as a basis for, one's own work offered for academic consideration or credit or for public presentation. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, representing as one's own, without attribution, any other individual’s words, phrasing, ideas, sequence of ideas, information or any other mode or content of expression.

d. “Fabrication” or “falsification” includes reporting experiments or measurements or statistical analyses never performed; manipulating or altering data or other manifestations of research to achieve a desired result; falsifying or misrepresenting background information, credentials or other academically relevant information; or selective reporting, including the deliberate suppression of conflicting or unwanted data. It does not include honest error or honest differences in interpretations or judgments of data and/or results.”

The following sanctions will be imposed in this class for a student engaging in academic misconduct:

1. A failing grade for the specific assignment, paper, exam, etc., without possibility to re-write it, re-take it, etc. This academic misconduct will be reported to the Chairman of the Department of Anthropology.
2. The second offense will be sanctioned with a failing grade for the whole course. In such a case, the following rule of the University of Utah **CODE OF STUDENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES** is applicable and will be followed: "If the faculty member imposes the sanction of a failing grade for the course, the faculty member shall, within ten (10) business days of imposing the sanction, notify in writing, the chair of the student's home department and the senior vice president for academic affairs or senior vice president for health sciences, as appropriate, of the academic misconduct and the circumstances which the faculty member believes support the imposition of a failing grade."
3. For more information concerning sanctions for academic misconduct (additional sanctions might be imposed) and your rights and procedures to appeal these sanctions please refer to the aforementioned **CODE**.

If you need more information and/or explanations please don't hesitate to contact the instructor.