

FALL 2011
ANTHROPOLOGY 2040-1 (13398)
ANTHROPOLOGY OF HUMOR AND LAUGHTER
(3 credit hours; fulfills DV and BF requirements; no pre- or co-requisites)
SYLLABUS
(also available at <http://ewas.us/Fall.Humor.2011.1.htm>)

Instructor: Dr. Ewa Wasilewska, Associate Professor/Lecturer, Dept. of Anthropology.
Contact info.: Office: Stewart 101. With Dr. Wasilewska -- by appointment only.
Office phone: 801-581-6251. Please call between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. and leave your name, phone number, and course number so the instructor can call you back. Telephone appointments are acceptable.
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Dr. Wasilewska's website: www.ewas.us

Time: Tuesdays from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Location: ST 104

Course description:

Studying laughter is not a laughing matter. Humor is a serious issue. However, neither laughing nor humor have received a proper attention from the scientific world until recently. This course is designed to introduce students to anthropology of laughter and humor, and then to demonstrate their importance in examining stereotypes, the formation of groups, and the societal structures that facilitate them. Consequently, the first part of the course (four meetings) focuses on theoretical and methodological issues involved in the anthropological study of humor and laughter, including very recent research on both as based on biological, genetic, and neurological data. When it becomes clear (through the use of specific examples) that different forms of humor not only reflect socio-political values, dynamics, conflicts, and challenges experienced in the multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual complexity of the American "Melting Pot" but also perpetuate the existing stereotypes, inequalities, and perceptions, the rest of the semester will focus on analyzing how certain groups come to be defined as outsiders who are supposedly fair game for racist, sexist, or other forms of derogatory humor, as well as the societal structures that make this possible. In other words the theoretical and methodological tools will be applied to what students are already familiar with and intuitively comprehend, i.e., the use and abuse of humor in the U.S.

Disclaimer/warning:

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 this 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.

Course Objectives:

At the end of this course students will:

1. Learn about positive and negative aspects of humor that shape and promulgate the so-called "traditional" views of and about the American society as based on numerous humorous material (verbal and visual)

presented at each meeting (American humor that is more easily comprehended by American students is used to illustrate all theoretical and methodological issues discussed throughout the course).

2. Acquire knowledge and understanding of physiology of laughter as one of the least understood but most ancient and important parts of brain circuitry (subcortex) essential for survival and adaptation within biological constraints of any given organism. Sex and laughter (male perceived dominion as laugh-getters versus females as laugh-givers in search of a suitable sexual partner).
3. Become acquainted with the newest research on both human and animal laughter indicating that learning how to consciously control and/or trigger laughter has potentially unlimited benefits in treatments of numerous health diseases (e.g., ADHD, cancer, drug addictions, depression) as well as reducing social tensions and promoting conflict resolutions among various segments of any given society. Likelihood of developing depression in peoples of different ethnic and racial backgrounds as the result of both cultural and genetic factors. Access, availability, acceptance, and divergence of treatments in the U.S. as reflecting social inequalities.
4. Learn about the role of laughter and humor in human evolution: bipedalism and speech, (“Walkie-Talkie” theory of speech), language (genetics – FOXP2), cognitive humor as the result of evolutionary adaptiveness.
5. Acquire knowledge of theories on origins, mechanisms/techniques, and types of humor as the effective means of communication inter- and cross-culturally. “American Melting Pot” – creating and/or breaking barriers in communication through humor.
6. Learn about various ethnic groups and their in- and out perceptions as reflected by humor (stereotypes).
7. Be able to understand gender differences in laughter and humor perception/response as related to sexual behavior, aggression, and the reward center of the brain. Gender humor.
8. Learn about traditional (kinship based) and non-traditional joking relationships as the means of governing and maintaining any given society. Joking-relationships in the U.S. – creating new “minority” groups (e.g., “Golden Girls.”).
9. Review and discuss potential for “medically” induced laughter and/or humor in order to enhance overall functioning of our bodies or its parts, to repair broken circuits, and to induce positive moods and/or physical reactions to be held cumulatively when making positive behaviors our own. Equal treatment of and for all.
10. Be able to understand that humor is often challenging the existing social structures by being one of the most effective instruments of social control and/or conduits of social conflicts.
11. Be challenged to examine their understanding and applicability of such American symbols of democracy as freedom of speech, of artistic expression, tolerance, right to..., etc.

Content Overview:

This course will introduce students to anthropology of both, humor and laughter, since these two concepts, 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 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.

Humor is a significant characteristic of cultural systems. 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 focusing on non-dominant groups in the U.S. who are often the butt of jokes (see below: “Weekly Schedule of Topics”).

Teaching and Learning Methods:

This course is a combination of lectures and discussions. Each meeting will be richly illustrated with video-clips, verbal and/or visual humorous situations, and movies. It is critical that students attend each meeting since most of the visual material will be available only in class. While students are encouraged to initiate and participate in all discussions as well as freely express their emotions induced by in-class humor, they must remain respectful of all classmates and tolerant of all humorous material, even of the most offensive in its nature such as hate humor (see above: “Disclaimer/warning”).

Evaluation Methods:

This course, due to its potential offensiveness and extensive information from variety of seemingly unconnected scientific disciplines, is a challenging one requiring more than fair amount of objectivity, open-mindedness, and willingness to explore the unknown. Students are expected to:

1. Attend class meetings.
2. Do their readings in advance so they can fully participate in any discussions.
3. Complete and turn in on time all assignments (hard copies unless emails are requested and/or specifically permitted), including take-home exams (see below: "Exams, Assignments and Grades"). An extension might be given upon a valid request.
4. Offer their opinions and argue their points. The grade will be based on the knowledge of the required material, outside research (if needed), and analytical reasoning process (in good and edited English).
5. NO PLAGIARISM IN ANY SHAPE OR FORM (see below: "Academic Misconduct").

Exams, Assignments and Grades:

September 20, 2011: Exam # 1 (take-home) – 20% (to be turned in on October 4, 2011)

This exam will cover the first 4 class meetings. It is crucial that all students pass this exam with at least a "C" grade.

October 4, 2011: Assignment # 1 (take-home) – 10% (to be turned in on October 18, 2011)

This assignment will test students on their understanding of humor functions as social control and/or conflict.

November 8, 2011: Exam # 2 (take-home) – 30% (to be turned in on November 22, 2011)

This exam will focus on a student's ability to analyze and apply the learned material to various situations. It will also require knowledge and understanding of the roots of specific minorities' type of humor (in-group stereotyping of stereotypes) as well as common stereotypes.

November 15, 2011: Assignment # 2 (take-home) – 10% (to be turned in on November 29, 2011)

This assignment is designed to test students on their ability to use acquired information (sex, aggression, gender roles, commercials) to examine a role of humor in reducing or increasing crime rates (homicide, rape, etc.) in various countries.

November 22, 2011: Assignment # 3 (take-home) – 10% (to be turned in on December 6, 2011)

This assignment will examine students' knowledge on the importance of humor in religious rituals (humor in and about religion/s).

December 6, 2011: Final exam # 3 (take-home) – 20% (to be turned in on December 13, 2011)

This exam will cover the rest of meetings focusing on issues of hate humor, absurd humor, political humor, and freedom of speech and of artistic expression (e.g., Borat, Amazing Racist, and Chris Rock).

There won't be any extra-credit assignments in this class. Each exam and assignment will be graded using the Letter-Grade scale ("A" as the highest, "E" as the lowest [no-pass] grade. The final grade will be calculated accordingly by setting up values of the Letter-Grade scale using the 4-Point scale.

<u>Letter Scale</u>	<u>4 Point Scale</u>
A	4
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3
B-	2.7
C+	2.3
C	2
C-	1.7
D+	1.3
D	1
D-	0.7
E	0

Required Readings:

1. Cohen, Ted: *Jokes. Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters*. The University of Chicago Press. 1999. Although this book is specifically assigned for only a couple of weeks, different examples of jokes and Cohen's analysis will be used throughout the whole course.
2. 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 through electronic reserve or as hard copies.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND DATES:**Week # 1 – August 23, 2011****Let's laugh!****Introduction: humor offensiveness, consents, and disclaimers.****What is laughter? Recognizing, vocalizing, defining, and using laughter.****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 – August 30, 2011**Your Brain on Laughter!****Physiology and evolution of laughter. Can laughter and/or humor be addictive? “Dogs may laugh but only cats get the joke!” Part 1.****Readings for Weeks #2 and 3:**

Kawakami, Kiyobumi, Kiyoko Takai-Kawakami, Masaki Tomonoga, Juri Suzuli, Tomiyo Kusaka, and Takashi Okai: Origins of Smile and Laughter: A Preliminary Study. In *Early Human Development* 82 (2006): 61-66.

Krause, et al.: The Derived FOXP2 Variant of Modern Humans Was Shared with Neandertals. In *Current Biology* (2007), doi:10.1016/j.cub.2007.10.008.

Panksepp, Jaak: Neuroevolutionary Sources of Laughter and Social Joy: Modeling Primal Human Laughter in Laboratory Rats. In *Behavioural Brain Research* 182, 2 (2007): 231-244.

Panksepp, Jaak and Jeff Burgdorf: “Laughing” Rats and the Evolutionary Antecedents of Human Joy? In *Physiology and Behavior* 79 (2003): 533-547.

Parvizi, J., S.W. Anderson, C.O. Martin, H. Damasio H, and A.R. Damasio: Pathological Laughter and Crying: A Link to the Cerebellum. In *Brain* 124 (2001): 1708-1719.

Wasilewska, Ewa: Vocalizing Laughter, Recognizing Humor... A Journey into Mysteries of a Brain. A chapter for a yet unpublished *Anthropology of Humor*. Only for the internal (course) use.

Week #3 – September 6, 2011**Your Brain on Laughter!****Physiology and evolution of laughter. Can laughter and/or humor be addictive? “Dogs may laugh but only cats get the joke!” Part 2.**

Readings for Week #3: see above

Week # 4 – September 13, 2011

Humor me!

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

Readings for Week #4:

Martin, Rod A.: Introduction to the Psychology of Humor. In *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*. Elsevier Academic Press. 2007. Pp. 1-30.

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 # 5 – September 20, 2011

Are you laughing yet?

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

TAKE-HOME EXAM # 1 to be turned in on October 4, 2011.

Readings for Week #5:

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 # 6 – September 27, 2011

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

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

Readings for Week #6:

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.

Week # 7 – October 4, 2011

“Thank You for Smoking!”

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

Assignment # 1 – take-home to be turned in on October 18, 2011

Readings for Weeks #7 & 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 # 8 – October 11, 2011
FALL BREAK!

Week # 9 – October 18, 2011

“Your culture or mine?”

Cross-cultural humor: joking relationships. Etic 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 25, 2011

My culture, not yours!

Ethnic humor: its nature and functions. Popularity and demise. Part 1.

Readings for Weeks #10 and 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.

Week # 11 – November 1, 2011

My culture, not yours!

Ethnic humor: its nature and functions. Popularity and demise. Part 2.

Readings for Week #11: see above.

Week # 12 – November 8, 2011

My culture, not yours! Stereotypes... class discussion will be based on a chapter from O'Rourke's *Holidays from Hell*. Be prepared!

TAKE-HOME EXAM # 2 to be turned in on November 22, 2011.

Readings for Week #12:

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

Week # 13 – November 15, 2011

“Sex and the City.”

Gender, sexuality and sexual inequality in humor. Aggression and power.

Assignment #2 – take-home to be turned in on November 29, 2011.

Readings for Week #13:

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

Azim E., D. Mobbs, B. Jo, V. Menon, and A.L. Reiss: Sex Differences in Brain Activation Elicited by Humor. In *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science of United States* 102 (2005): 16496-16501.

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

Lefcourt, Herbert M.: Sex and Humor: Interactive Predictors of Health? In *Humor. The Psychology of Living Buoyantly*. Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers. 2001. Pp. 151-163.

Martin, G.N. and C.D. Gray: The Effects of Audience Laughing on Men's and Women's Responses to Humor. In *Journal of Social Psychology* 136 (1996): 221-231.

Week # 14 – November 22, 2011

“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.

Assignment #3 – take-home to be turned in on December 6, 2011.

Readings for Week #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.

Week # 15 – November 29, 2011

“Q: What did the blonde name her pet zebra? A: Spot.” Part 1.

Hate and absurdity humor. Social inequality and stereotyping.

Readings for Week #15 & 16:

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 6, 2011

“Q: What did the blonde name her pet zebra? A: Spot.” Part 2.

Hate and absurdity humor. Social inequality and stereotyping.

FINAL EXAM – take-home; to be turned in on December 13, 2011.

Week # 17: December 13, 2011

LAST DAY TO TURN IN YOUR FINAL EXAM!!!

(Dept. of Anthropology, ST 102)

ADA Statement:

“The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for

Disability Services, 162 Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations.” (www.hr.utah.edu/oeo/ada/guide/faculty)

Faculty Responsibilities:

“All students are expected to maintain professional behavior in the classroom setting, according to the Student Code, spelled out in the Student Handbook. Students have specific rights in the classroom as detailed in Article III of the Code. The Code also specifies proscribed conduct (Article XI) that involves cheating on tests, plagiarism, and/or collusion, as well as fraud, theft, etc. Students should read the Code carefully and know they are responsible for the content. According to Faculty Rules and Regulations, it is the faculty responsibility to enforce responsible classroom behaviors, and I will do so, beginning with verbal warnings and progressing to dismissal from and class and a failing grade. Students have the right to appeal such action to the Student Behavior Committee.”

(www.admin.utah.edu/ppmanual/8/8-12-4.html)

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 that 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.”