

Anthropology of Humor and Laughter
Anthro. 3969-2; 5969-2; 396-2 (16962; 17472)
Spring Semester 2007
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 320
- Important dates:** Jan.17, 2007 – last day to drop classes
Jan.22. 2007 – last day to add classes
Jan. 22, 2007 – last day to elect CR/NC option or to audit classes
March 2, 2007 – 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.**
- Ewa Wasilewska: *Anthropology of Humor and Laughter. Notes.* 2007. (EW)**
Notes can be purchased during the first three class meetings from an instructor.

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 three 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, three extra 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. At the end of the semester each student will be required to turn in a research paper (10-12 pages plus bibliography) on the topic of humor and/or laughter.

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 – January 11, 2007

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:

EW: #1

Provine, Robert R.: Chapters 1-3. Pp. 1-53. Chapter 5. Pp. 75-97.
In Robert R. Provine: *Laughter. A Scientific Investigation*. Viking. 2000.

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

Strubbe, Bill: Getting Serious About Laughter. In "World And I." 2003. On Internet.
www.worldandi.com/newhome/public/2003/march/nspub.asp

Week # 2 – January 18, 2007

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:

EW: #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 – January 25, 2007

Are you laughing yet?

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

Readings for Week 3:

EW: #3

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

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

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

Week # 4 – February 1, 2007

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 Week 4/5:

EW: #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, Clotaire: Introduction. The Birth of Notion. In *"The Culture Code."* Broadway Books. 2006. Pp. 1-28.

Week # 5 – February 8, 2007

EXAM!!!

Week # 6 – February 15, 2007

"Looking for Comedy in the Muslim World."

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

Readings for Week 6 & 7:

EW: # 6 & 7

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, In justice and Alcohol-Free Beer." Grove Press.1992. Pp. 25-38.

Week # 7 – February 22, 2007

"Looking for Comedy in the Muslim World."

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

Week # 8 – March 1, 2007

"Your culture or mine?"

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

Readings for Week 8:

EW: # 8

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 # 9 – March 8, 2007

My culture, not yours!

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

Readings for Week 9:

EW: # 9

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

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 that he visited these countries in 1980s).
2. Question lottery: draw five phrases from those prepared by the instructor and explain their meaning.

Week # 10 – March 15, 2007

“Sex and the City.”

Gender, sexuality and sexual inequality in humor.

REVIEW!

Readings for Week 10/11/12:

EW: # 10/11/12

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

Week # 11 – March 22, 2007

SPRING BREAK!

Week # 12 – March 29, 2007

EXAM!

Week # 13 – April 5, 2007

“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 Week # 13:

EW: # 13

Week # 14 – April 12, 2007

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

Hate and absurdity humor. Social inequality and stereotyping.

Readings for Week # 14:

EW: # 14

Week # 15 – April 19, 2007

The Satellite Dish for Campers.

Political and organizational humor. Globalization and consumerism.

Readings for Week # 15:

EW: # 15

Week # 16 – April 26, 2007
READING DAY! NO CLASS!

Week # 17 – May 3, 2007
EXAM!
Last day to turn in your papers.