Course Outline

FOLK 2404: Urban Legend

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T-Th, 1-2:15, Winter 2017

Calendar Description

A study of contemporary legends, conspiracy theories, and rumour in North American culture, with an examination of how they function and how they affect our perceptions.

Fair Warning

Participants in the course should be advised that much of the material being studied may be considered offensive, or potentially trigger adverse reactions. Sexuality, racist attitudes, and religion are all discussed at length, and your fellow students may struggle to express opinions in a way suitable for classroom discussions. Let us go into this with patience, and not seek out offense when none is necessarily meant.

Different Kind of Fair Warning

I’m writing a new book and one of the things I need to do is refresh myself on some aspects of legend and belief. Since I have forty excellent students I’m going to take the advantage and work through my reading list with you. This should be fun.

Required Texts

Everything is on Moodle. A reading a day. Read it, come to class, we discuss it, we move on.

Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Database Assignment</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotation Assignment</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Class-by-Class Breakdown and Reading Schedule

I used to break things down by unit, compartmentalizing everything. This semester I’m simply moving from one article to another. There is an order and a rationale to it but I’m approaching it more as an unfolding of the complexities of legend scholarship with one topic segueing into the next.

Jan. 5  
Beginnings

Jan. 10  

Jan. 12  

Jan. 17  


Feb. 16 Midterm Exam

Feb 21 and 23 Midterm Break


Mar. 2 Frank, Russell. 2004. When the going gets tough, the tough go photoshopping: September 11 and the newslor of vengeance and victimization. New Media & Society 6.5:633-658.


Mar. 30 Course evaluations / conclusions / exam preparation

Apr. 4 Buffer day

**Database Assignment – Ongoing, to be completed by March 7**

An opportunity to experiment with a new assignment, this requires you to discover five contemporary legends—or what you can argue is something akin to contemporary legend—in your day to day life. Using the database option on Moodle, you will create a record that identifies the source (Internet, popular culture, or IRL) of the legend, describes the “text / texture / context” of its performance, and justifies why you think it is a legend. After entering two entries you will be able to see your classmates contributions and add comments: you must comment on at least three other entries.

More detailed instructions will be available once the database template is completed, which will be by the end of the second week of classes.

*There are a number of television programmes – Urban Legends Exposed, Mythbusters, and the like – and websites – particularly snopes.com – which are not to be cited in this 'legend-spotting' exercise.

**Annotation assignment – Due March 30**

Students will conduct a short ethnographic collecting exercise, in which they will collect a contemporary legend text in as natural a context as possible, which they will in turn transcribe, identify, and search for parallel versions.

They will also include a short write-up (1200-1500 words) providing a description of the narrative context, interpreting how the legend is interpreted by the performer, by the group in which it was performed, and by the student him- or herself, and reflecting on the nature of the collection exercise itself. Library / database research is expected, with at least three academic citations to provide context for your legend / argument for legendry.

I have no problem with double-dipping: you may choose one of the items collected for the database assignment and expand on it.

**Midterm and Final Exams**

Multiple-choice and short answer questions based on readings and lectures.

Midterm February 16; final in exam period.
General Policies

Assignments:
All assignments must be completed in order to pass this course.

Late or missed assignments:
The two assignments are due by midnight of their respective due dates. Anything later than that will be penalised at one mark per day.

About Internet sources
If you must use them, at the very least use Google Scholar to start your searches. And remember, if you can find something, cut and paste it, and claim it as your own, I can certainly find it again and expose you.

Plagiarism:
Plagiarism is defined by the university calendar as follows:

Plagiarism is the act of representing the intellectual work of others as one’s own. Such misrepresentation is treated as a serious violation of academic standards and principles. When a student submits work for a course, it is assumed that the work is original except where the student properly acknowledges the use of other sources. Of course, good scholarship often requires drawing on the work of others, but any borrowed material— including words, ideas, data, statistics, graphics and other intellectual matter, whether drawn from print, electronic, or other non-print sources— must be fully acknowledged according to the accepted practices of the relevant discipline. (CBU Calendar)

This means that when you use sources, whether they are from the library, from the Internet, or (as is often the case in folklore) from interviews with people, you must clearly distinguish both (a) what are someone else’s ideas as opposed to your own, and (b) what are someone else’s words as opposed to your own. I have found that many students leave themselves open to the charge of plagiarism by either doing little to clearly make the distinction between their own work and someone else’s, or (more often) not quite grasping the concept of what the essay is. An essay is more than a number of sources interwoven with some linking material: it is an effort at expressing an original idea which is more often than not based in part on other peoples’ own efforts at expressing similar or parallel ideas.

So, of course (as the policy says) you will be quoting and drawing ideas from other people, but remember:

- There is nothing wrong with quoting somebody, even quoting them extensively, provided that you recognise and indicate in the text that this is not your idea or words but those of someone else.
- There is nothing wrong with paraphrasing somebody, provided that you recognise and indicate in the text that, although they may now be your words, they are someone else’s ideas.
- A list of references (bibliography, works cited, etc.) is simultaneously both mandatory and insufficient for citing.

So, practice safe essay-writing: clearly indicate how you are using sources, and hand-in something that goes beyond an artful compilation of other people’s ideas and aims at some kind of synthesis between what others have said and what you have to say.

Any student who plagiarises will automatically receive a mark of zero on the assignment: he or she will not have the opportunity to resubmit; and the Dean of Arts and Social Sciences and, if different, the student’s Dean, will be informed.