

# **-SYLLABUS-**

## **AM ST 105 – POPULAR CULTURE & FOLKLIFE**



**Room: TBD**

**Sample Syllabus**

**Monday, Wednesday, & Friday**

**8:00am-8:50am**



### **Course Summary**

Today we experience the world through screens, or at least that is what many people believe. Yet we also rely on regular interpersonal interactions to shape our lives at work, at home, and at play. Complaints from one generation about the “distractions” of modern technology are not, in fact, particularly new, and have existed for well over a century. Similarly, while many people think of “folklore” as something leftover from the past, we can point to the proliferation of memes, the informal rules of texting, and the use of digital space for political protest or public mourning as contemporary manifestation of “tradition,” the heart of folklore. This course is designed to look at the patterns of culture that exist among groups of people. How do we create our culture, or respond to a culture that is created around us? How does that connect with the ways we’ve responded to culture throughout American history? How do technology and media impact our interactions with others at a personal and a social level? By the end of the course, students will see deep connections between levels of culture and be able to shape, interpret, and use culture more effectively. In a world where Twitter hashtags swing elections and binge watching shapes social interactions, understanding folklore and popular culture is vital to the intellectually engaged person.



## Structure of the Course

We will be looking at American culture in terms of its history, its communities, its productions, and its uses. To that end, we will be divvying up our time in a few different ways.

Classes are divided between lecture & discussion days, activity days, and three assessment days. **Lecture & Discussion Days** are days on which I will present information or perspectives on American culture, either in theory or practice. **Activity Days** are days on which students will discuss or present findings from their own collecting and research in various subject areas or perform cultural studies activities and fieldwork in class. There are six fieldwork days built into the syllabus schedule. You will need to turn in your fieldwork to the class dropbox before we discuss the assignments in class. We will also have **Assessment Days** on which the periodic tests for the course are administered. There are three Assessment Days.



## Your Instructor

Lecturer Cory Thomas Hutcheson ("Mr. H")

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## **Instructional Method**

This course is offered with a widely varied content selection, including PowerPoint lectures, audio recordings, video screenings, group discussions, and online materials. Class assignments and activities are centered on the idea that students learn best when engaged and challenged. Lectures generally also attempt to leave time for discussion, but we also set aside separate time for discussion days as well. Students are encouraged to ask questions after lectures and to arrange for meetings during office hours as needed in order to gain the maximum benefit from lessons.



## **The Role of General Education Courses**

The course you are taking fulfills one of the General Education (GenEd) requirements that the University requires of you as part of your broader education. According to the official University position on GenEd courses is as follows: "The study of the Humanities should develop competency in interpretive understanding of the human condition and of the values inherent in it. This interpretive understanding should evolve into the development of insights and a critical evaluation of the meaning of life, in its everyday details as well as in its historical and universal dimensions. Through this development students should acquire knowledge of and concern for the humanistic values that motivate and inform all humanistic studies." What that means is that taking a course like this one should help to make you the type of person who can relate your education to your life, the lives of others (both today and throughout history), and the questions that give our lives meaning. In short, courses like this one make you better thinker, one with a mind bigger than your own perspective and your own voice to express educated, intelligent ideas.



## My Expectations

My basic expectation is that all students are here because they have at least some interest in the subject, and are willing to do work to understand that subject better. Beyond this fundamental expectation, I also have specific expectations of all students:

1. I expect that students will complete all required readings. Reading assignments are not long (usually between 30-50 pages per week, around 6-10 pages per weekday), and you are in college, so you can handle it. If you have not read, your attendance will not benefit you. You will be quizzed on readings periodically, and they do factor into your assessments, too, so doing the reading is of primary importance.
2. I expect all students to complete assignments, essays, and activities in their entirety, and to contribute substantially to the class's understanding of the topic.
3. I expect students to be mature and intelligent when problems arise, including conflict and frustration. If a student needs my help to resolve a problem, I will be happy to help, but I am not a mind reader, and I expect students to communicate problems to me.
4. I expect that students will be respectful of other students, the instructor, and the University.
5. I expect that students will *try* in class, both by giving the best efforts they can and by experimenting with new ideas.

If you have any questions about these expectations, please contact me and I will be glad to discuss them further.



## Required Texts

**BOOKS** (available through the bookstore or via online purchase)

1. Brunvand, Jan. *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003. ISBN 978-0393951691. [REQUIRED]
2. McNeill, Lynne S. *Folklore Rules!: A Fun, Quick, & Useful Introduction to the Field of Academic Folklore Studies*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0874219050. [REQUIRED]

3. Santino, Jack. *New Old-Fashioned Ways: Holidays & Popular Culture*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996. ISBN 978- 0870499524. [REQUIRED]



**ONLINE/OUTSIDE TEXTS** (available through the class Canvas site or the University Library)

The following book excerpts, articles, and essays are available on the class Canvas site:

- Adams, Henry. "The Dynamo & the Virgin," in *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918)
- Holmes, Kathryn A. "Exhibiting American Studies at Disney Theme Parks," from the Exhibiting American Studies Forum (2015).
- Jenkins, Henry. "Get a Life!": Fans, Producers, Nomads," in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 9-49.
- Johnson, Steven. "Watching TV Makes You Smarter," in *The New York Times Magazine* (24 April 2005) (Link: <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/24/magazine/watching-tv-makes-you-smarter.html>)
- Levine, Lawrence. "William Shakespeare and the American People," in *The American Historical Review* 89(1), 34-66.
- Marling, Karl Ann. "Somebody Else's Christmas," in *Merry Christmas!: Celebrating America's Greatest Holiday* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), 243-83.
- ---. "Olde Christmas: Dickens, Irving, & Christmas Charity," in *Merry Christmas!: Celebrating America's Greatest Holiday* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), 121-59.
- ---. "Santa Claus is Comin' to Town: Store Santas, Kettle Santas, Coca-Cola Santas," in *Merry Christmas!: Celebrating America's Greatest Holiday* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), 197-242.
- ---. "Dreaming of a White Christmas: How Bing Crosby and the Grinch Almost Stole Christmas," in *Merry Christmas!: Celebrating America's Greatest Holiday* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), 321-58.
- Marston, William M., & Harry G. Peter. *Wonder Woman Chronicles, vol. 1* (DC Comics, 2010). [SELECTIONS]
- Mechling, Elizabeth W., and Jay Mechling. "The Atom According to Disney," in *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (1995), 436-53.
- Meley, Patricia M. "Adolescent Legend Trips as Teenage Cultural Response: A Study of Lore in Context." *Children's Folklore Review* 14.1 (1991), 5-24.
- Norman, Marc. "Episode 1: Slenderman - with guest Dr. Andrea Kitta," on *The Folklore Podcast* (15 July 2016) (Link: <http://thefolklorepodcast.weebly.com/episodes/episode-1-slender-man-with-guest-dr-andrea-kitta>)

- Schmidt, Leigh Eric. "Shopping towards Bethlehem: Women and the Victorian Christmas," in *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995), 148-58.
- ---. "Magi, Miracles, & Macy's: Enchantment and Disenchantment in the Modern Celebration," in *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995), 169-74.
- ---. "Putting Christ in Christmas and Keeping Him There: The Piety of Protest," in *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995), 175-91.
- Siegel, Jerry, & Joel Schuster. *Superman Chronicles, vol. 1* (DC Comics, 2006).  
[SELECTIONS]
- Steiner, Michael. "Frontierland as Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Architectural Packaging of the Mythic West," in *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 48:1 (1998), 2-17.
- Sternheimer, Karen. "Do Video Games Kill?," in *Contexts* 6:1 (2007), 13-17.



## Assignments, Quizzes, Activities, & Grading

The class grade will be based on the completion of all assignments, including a participation grade derived from in-class activities and quizzes (with some outside work required in some cases) and a series of three comprehension assessments.



**READING QUIZZES** - When we have readings due, you will have brief online quizzes covering some aspect of the reading that you must complete BEFORE the class session in which we will be discussing the reading. These quizzes are not designed to “get” you, but to prompt you into thinking about the material covered in advance of our in-class discussions. The quizzes will be available online through the class Canvas site, and equate to roughly half of your Participation grade (see **Participation** below).

**ASSESSMENTS** - Throughout the course, approximately every five weeks, students will take an in-class comprehension assessment. These assessments will cover material learned in previous class periods, as well as material drawn from required course reading. They will generally be a mixture of 20-30 multiple choice, fill-in the blank, and short response questions. Students will have around 45 minutes to complete these assessments. These assessments are intended to demonstrate students’ understanding of the forms of American culture; key movements, ideas, and figures; and American Studies methods. **(30 percent of final grade, 10 percent per assessment)**.



**ACTIVITY DAYS** - Students will work individually or together to create several different types of presentations or complete in-class activities. The work required varies in length and depth, but usually requires additional reading and the creation of a graphic or oral presentation, but may also include short analytical essays examining a particular aspect of American popular culture or folklife. Additional information about the specific scope and topics for the activities reports will be provided in separate handouts during class. **Activities MUST be completed to receive credit. Please see course schedule for specific due dates. (30 percent of final grade)**.



**SPECIAL PROJECT** – Students will turn in a specialized project selected from a project list provided on a separate handout during the first few weeks of class. The project will offer you a chance to use original methods to present ideas and information related to American folklore and folklife, and is designed to help students find creative ways to communicate about difficult subjects in an intelligent, thoughtful way. Projects may be individual or collaborative. **This project MUST be turned in as part of the Popular Culture Fair held during the last few weeks of class). (20 percent of final grade).**



**PARTICIPATION** – Since this course is designed to give you theoretical and practical knowledge of American folklore, you must participate to get anything out of the class. Participation requires that you attend class, complete reading quizzes, take an active role in discussing reading and class activities like fieldwork, online class discussion, and in-class activities. You also must meet deadlines for turning work in. You may also be called upon to participate in other class activities, such as online discussions of particular folk or popular culture materials or productions. If you do not think you can meet some aspect of the participation requirements, you **MUST** see me before assignments or activities are due. (20 percent of final grade).



**EXTRA CREDIT** – I try to make a number of extra credit assignments available throughout the semester. Extra credit must be completed and turned in by the due date provided for each assignment to receive full credit. Extra credit can **ONLY** be used to improve your lowest assessment score OR replace one (1) missed class activity OR to replace two (2) online discussions. Extra credit does not count towards your final project, and you cannot use extra credit to replace multiple low assessment scores or activities/assignments. If you have questions about extra credit, please see me as soon as possible.



## Policies - University & Class

\*NOTE: ALL POLICIES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

***POLICY STATEMENTS: (1) Academic Freedom; (2) Academic Integrity; (3) Attendance; (4) Cancellations due to Weather, Emergencies, and Campus Closing; (5) Confidentiality; (6) Disability Services; (7) Penn State Harrisburg Emergency Procedures; (8) Personal Digital Devices***

- 1. Academic Freedom:** According to Penn State policy HR64, "The faculty member is expected to train students to think for themselves, and to provide them access to those materials which they need if they are to think intelligently. Hence, in giving instruction upon controversial matters the faculty member is expected to be of a fair and judicial mind, and to set forth justly, without supersession or innuendo, the divergent opinions of other investigators." See <http://guru.psu.edu/policies/OHR/hr64.html>.
- 2. Academic Integrity:** According to Penn State policy 49-20, Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception and is an education objective of this institution. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating of information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. The instructor can fail a student for major infractions. For more information, see <http://www.psu.edu/dept/ufs/policies/47-00.html#49-20>. The instructor reserves the right to use Turnitin as a plagiarism detection tool.
- 3. Attendance:** Students are expected to complete every assignment, project, written essay, and activity in the course and are held responsible for all work covered in the course. A student whose irregular attendance causes him or her, in the judgment of the instructor, to become deficient scholastically, may run the risk of receiving a failing grade or receiving a lower grade than the student might have secured had the student been in regular attendance. Participation by students in the course should not be disruptive or offensive to other class members. See <http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/42-00.html#42-27>. **I interpret this policy to mean that students who miss more than four (4) classes can fail the course even if the student has passed written assignments. In addition, if a student is absent, that student is responsible for catching up on any material covered in the class he or she missed.**
- 4. Cancellations Due to Weather, Emergencies, or Campus Closing:** When the Provost and Dean makes the decision to close the Harrisburg campus or delay the start of classes, the regional media will be notified at least two hours prior to the standard 8:00 a.m. reporting time for staff and before the start of the earliest scheduled class. The

college will make its announcement in the following ways:

- a. The college's web page at [www.hbg.psu.edu](http://www.hbg.psu.edu) will carry a message regarding the status of classes.
  - b. The university's email system will also be used to notify email subscribers about a weather emergency. Additionally, students, faculty, and staff are invited to register for PSUAlert at <https://psualert.psu.edu/psualert/>. The service will feature enhanced messaging capabilities and robust integration with the University's other communications platforms.
  - c. An announcement will be placed on the college's AUDIX telephone system at the 948-6000 and 948-6029 numbers.
  - d. For information on the campus's weather emergency policy, including media outlets carrying cancellation notices, see <http://www.hbg.psu.edu/hbg/weather.html>
- 5. Confidentiality:** The right of students to confidentiality is of concern to your instructor and to the University. According to Penn State policy AD-11, "The Pennsylvania State University collects and retains data and information about students for designated periods of time for the expressed purpose of facilitating the student's educational development. The University recognizes the privacy rights of individuals in exerting control over what information about themselves may be disclosed and, at the same time, attempts to balance that right with the institution's need for information relevant to the fulfillment of its educational missions. Student educational records are defined as records, files, documents, and other materials that contain information directly related to a student and are maintained by The Pennsylvania State University or by a person acting for the University pursuant to University, college, campus, or departmental policy. Exclusions include: Notes of a professor concerning a student and intended for the professor's own use are not subject to inspection, disclosure, and challenge." For more information, see <http://guru.psu.edu/policies/Ad11.html>.
- 6. Disability Services and Accessibility:** Any student who cannot complete requirements of the class because of physical disabilities should make circumstances known to the instructor. In cases where documentation of disability is available, alternative ways to fulfill requirements will be made. For more information, see Penn State's disability services handbook at <http://www.hbg.psu.edu/studaf/disability/dshandbook.htm>
- 7. Penn State Harrisburg Emergency Procedures:** Penn State Harrisburg has an Emergency Response Plan for various disturbances and unusual events such as fires, spillage of hazardous materials, and violent behavior. For more information, see <http://www.hbg.psu.edu/EmergencyProceduresflyer.pdf> (Emergency Procedures-Quick Reference) and <http://php.scripts.psu.edu/dept/iit/hbg/police/erp.php> (Emergency Response Plan). Note the phone number for Police Services in the event of an emergency: 717-948-6232. In extreme emergencies, call 911. Offices that can provide assistance are Safety/Police Services at 717-979-7976 and Physical Plant at 717-948-6235. For campus safety policies and initiatives, see <http://btmt.psu.edu> and <http://www.police.psu.edu>.
- 8. Personal Digital Devices:** Personal digital devices such as cell phones, smartphones and personal digital assistants (e.g., iPods, droids), laptop and netbook computers, iPad and tablet computers can help students in academic settings but can also distract from learning. As a matter of policy, I insist that cell phones be turned off or silenced; texting and other communication on the cell phone are strictly prohibited in class. Laptops, netbooks, and tablet computers enabling notetaking and viewing of course materials are

permitted but students must not engage in non-classroom tasks such as emailing, web browsing, e-shopping, and social networking in class. If they do not abide by this guideline, use of their devices in class will be prohibited.

**Policy Sources**

For other policies relating to campus life and academic participation, see <http://guru.psu.edu/policies>.



## Class Schedule

(Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays, 8:00am-8:50am)

*Readings are due by the Friday of the week in which they appear, and are underlined to help you find them. Days on which there will be no class are highlighted in **green**. Days on which fieldwork reports or online Canvas discussions are due are highlighted in **blue**. Assessment days are highlighted in **yellow**.*

### WEEK 1

- Topics: First Day. Syllabus review. Course objectives. Definitions.
- Read: Levine, "Shakespeare and the American People," (on class Canvas site) (30 pgs.)
- Due: None
- Add'l Notes: None

### WEEK 2

- Topics: Levels of Culture. Cultural Hierarchy.
- Read: McNeill, *Folklore Rules!*, Ch. 1 (p. 1-19)
- Due: None
- Add'l Notes: **Jan. 16<sup>th</sup> - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day - NO CLASS;** (Regular Drop Deadline).

### WEEK 3

- Topics: Cultural Process and Products.
- Read: McNeill, *Folklore Rules!*, Ch. 3 (p.37-64)
- Due: **CANVAS DISCUSSION #1.**
- Add'l Notes: None

### WEEK 4

- Topics: Cultural Groups.
- Read: McNeill, *Folklore Rules!*, Ch. 4 (p. 65-88)
- **DUE: ACTIVITY #1 - FAMILY TRADITIONS.**
- Add'l Notes: None

## WEEK 5

- Topic: Interpreting Culture. Using Culture. Pre-Assessment Review.
- Read: Sternheimer, "Do Video Games Kill?" (via class Canvas site) (5pgs); Listen: Marc Norman, *The Folklore Podcast*, Episode 1 - Slenderman w/ Dr. Andrea Kitta (~30 mins).
- Due: **ASSESSMENT #1.**
- Add'l Notes: None.

## WEEK 6

- Topic: Sharing Culture: Urban Legends Introduction.
- Read: Brunvand, *Vanishing Hitchhiker*, "Preface" (p. xi-xiv); Ch. 1 (p. 2-17).
- Due: **CANVAS DISCUSSION #2.**
- Add'l Notes: Sign up for group-led chapter discussions of Brunvand's *Vanishing Hitchhiker*.

## WEEK 7

- Topic: Sharing Culture: Urban Legends - Class Presentations
- Read: Assigned Chapters from Brunvand, *Vanishing Hitchhiker*
- Due: **ACTIVITY #2 -CLASS PRESENTATIONS OF BRUNVAND CHAPTERS/LEGENDS**
- Add'l Notes: None.

## WEEK 8

- Topic: Sharing Culture: Urban Legends - Legend Trips. Rites of Passage.
- Read: Brunvand, *Vanishing Hitchhiker*, "Afterword" (p.187-91); Meley, "Adolescent Legend Trips" (on class Canvas site) (19pgs). In-Class Viewing: "Salamanders"
- Due: **ACTIVITY #3 - LOCAL LEGENDS.**
- Add'l Notes: **Final Project Approval due by end-of-class March 1<sup>st</sup>.**

## WEEK 9

- **SPRING BREAK - NO CLASS**

## WEEK 10

- Topic: Participating in Culture - Holidays Introduction. Pre-Assessment Review.
- Read: Santino, *New Old-Fashioned Ways*, "Introduction" (p.xv-xviii); Ch. 1 (p.1-26).
- Due: **ASSESSMENT #2.**
- Add'l Notes: Sign up for Group Presentations of "Holiday Variations"

## WEEK 11

- Topic: Participating in Culture - Holidays, part 1.
- Read: Santino, *New Old-Fashioned Ways*, Ch. 3 (p.55-100).
- Due: **CANVAS DISCUSSION #3.**

- Add'l Notes: None

#### WEEK 12

- Topic: Participating in Culture - Holidays, part 2.
- Read: Santino, *New Old-Fashioned Ways*, Ch. 3 (p.55-100); Assigned articles for Class Presentations: "Holiday Variations".
- Due: **ACTIVITY #4: CLASS PRESENTATIONS - HOLIDAY VARIATIONS**
- Add'l Notes: None

#### WEEK 13

- Topic: Creating Culture. Fan Culture. The Folk Song Process.
- Read: Jenkins, "Get a Life!" (on class Canvas site) (40pgs).
- Due: **ACTIVITY #5 - MY FANDOM.**
- Add'l Notes: None

#### WEEK 14

- Topic: Creating Culture - Heroes & Villains.
- Read: Siegel/Schuster, *Superman Chronicles* (Selections - on class Canvas site); Marston/Peter, *Wonder Woman Chronicles* (Selections - on class Canvas site). (~25pgs). Selections on Disney for Canvas Discussion #4.
- Due: **CANVAS DISCUSSION #4.**
- Add'l Notes: Final chance for tweaking/input on Final Project.

#### WEEK 15

- Topic: Creating Culture - Tricksters & Fakes.
- Read: In-class viewing: "Johnny Appleseed," "Paul Bunyan," & "John Henry" (Disney).
- Due: **POPULAR CULTURE FAIR - FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATION**
- Add'l Notes: **LAST WEEK TO TURN IN EXTRA CREDIT**

#### WEEK 16

- Topic: Re-Creating Culture: The Case of Jayne's Hat. Folk/Commercial Process. Pre-Assessment Review.
- Read: Johnson, "Watching TV Makes You Smarter" (on class Canvas site) (~7pgs).
- Due: **IN-CLASS ACTIVITY #6 - FANDOM FAIR. LAST DAY. FINAL ASSESSMENT.**
- Add'l Notes: Withdrawal deadline. No Final Exam.