

Course Syllabus—English 364W.01 (Folklore) Fall 2007—Tuesday 6:00-8:50—Evans 417

Prof.: Dr. Gene Young

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Office Hours and Making Contact: Evans 416—Tuesday and Thursday 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Tuesday 4:00 to 5:00. NOTE: My Tuesday hours are essentially for this class. My afternoon hours are officially 4:00 to 5:00, but the fact is, I'll probably be there (and available) right up until class time; In fact, I'll generally be in my Evans office most of the day on Tuesday. Feel completely free to drop in with problems, questions, or just chit-chat. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday hours are pretty much reserved for the Honors Program, which I direct. I could see you on those days, but I generally won't be in my Evans office.

Required Texts:

- Jan Harold Brunvand. *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction*. 4th Edition. Older editions won't do, but this one has been out since 1998. There should be plenty of used copies around.
- Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing*. Besides being one of our great novelists, Cormac McCarthy makes substantial use of folklore. This novel is practically a textbook example of the creation of folk legends, besides treating other folkloric subjects, such as mythic beasts, superstitions, story, and folk music. It's also a great story.
- In addition, there will be various other resources, some on electronic reserve in the Newton Gresham Library and some online on Blackboard. I'll be announcing these and placing them online throughout the semester.

Introduction and Background. In most respects, this is not going to be a typical English course. In the discipline of English, we tend to focus on High Art that is written down for formal presentation, generally as a refined, finished product of a single named author. Folklore is different. It is not generally High Art; it does not rely principally on being written down; it may be rough rather than refined; it is fluid and changeable; and it is typically anonymous or the result of communal rather than individual invention and composition. (In fact, "composition" may not be the right word for what happens in the "folk process.") We will spend much of our time trying to define what is meant by folklore (or folklife), why it is important or worthy of being collected, and the question of who the "Folk" are in the first place.

Course Description. We will begin the course by attempting to arrive at careful and categorical definitions of folklore and folklife. We will probably fail in most respects, but we'll try. While every culture in every time and every place has its folklore, our focus will be on the folklore of North America (and specifically the United States and Mexico). The course will be divided into the following basic categories, each with selected parenthetical sub-divisions:

- Oral Folklore (dialect, jokes, ethnic and gender humor, sports lore, internet lore)
- Legends, Stories, and Myths (folk legends, tall tales, story-tellers, urban legends, legendary creatures, folk belief)
- Folk Music (ballads, Mexican *corridos*, instrumental folk music, the 60's folk revival, folk collecting, performance, folk dance)

- Folklore and Literature (folklore in High Art, writers as folklorists, High Art versus low, folklore and film)
- Material Folklore (food, folk architecture, folk arts and crafts)

Throughout the semester, through class discussion/in-class work, exams, a group project, various online assignments, and a final collection project, you will demonstrate your well-read and thoughtful consideration of the basic definitional concepts of folklore as they emerge in our study and our discussions of these folkloric subjects. For your further information, here is the official university catalogue description: **ENG 364 Folklore.** The study of folk motifs of various cultures throughout the world. Recommended for certification program in Language Arts (see Secondary Education Requirements). Prerequisite: 9 hours of English. Credit 3.

Course Goals.

- To attempt definitions of the basic concepts of folklore and folklife
- To understand the dynamics behind oral culture and how it is to be distinguished from the literary tradition that we generally study in English
- To examine the processes of folklore and to study how it is produced
- To consider the question of authenticity as it applies to the material we are studying
- To be open to folklore around us, to be found in our own families and our own lives
- To understand the reasons for collecting and preserving folklore and to understand and practice the methods which ensure authenticity in these processes

The Readings. This is a folklore course in an English Department, and the readings will reflect this dual nature. To impart a disciplinary aspect to the course, I've chosen one of the definitive academic folklore texts, Jan Harold Brunvand's *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction*, the 4th edition. To repeat, you must have the 4th edition. It should be available used for around \$35 (\$36.50 at Amazon.com and maybe less if you shop around a bit). This is textbook reading, but much of it is very interesting stuff for you. This being an English class, I've decided to provide a good deal of focus to the intersections (and disjuncture) between folklore and traditional literature. The main literary text we will read is Cormac McCarthy's *The Crossing*, which is rich with folkloric elements (story-telling, animal folklore, and Mexican *corridos*). In addition, there will be a variety of online readings, which I will make available as we go along. Some will be online in Blackboard, some will be internet sources, and some will be available through electronic reserve in the Newton Gresham Library. Some of the literary texts which you will read online are "The Big Bear of Arkansas" and selected Zora Neale Hurston stories. Another example is selections of Americo Paredes' *With His Pistol in His Hand*. None of these online readings will be very long, but all of them will be interesting.

Course Requirements and Evaluation. For each component of the course, you will be provided a description of both the assignment and the evaluation criteria I will be using. The breakdown for letter grades is as follows:

- A – 90% or above
- B – 80% to 89.9%
- C – 70% to 79.9%
- D – 60% to 69.9%
- F – Below 60%

Extra credit is not available. All of the course grades except daily grade components will be posted on Blackboard. (Go to "My Tools" and then "Grades.") I am happy to discuss your grades at any point of the semester. Below is the breakdown of course requirements.

- Classroom Activities and Participation: 20%
- Group Project and Presentation 10%
- Assignments: 25%
- Collection and Analysis Project: 25%
- Exams (mid-term and final): 20%

Explanation of Requirements. (Some of these requirements, such as the Collection and Analysis Project, will be explained later in detailed handouts. Each handout will include information on evaluation criteria and the evaluation process.)

Classroom Activities and Participation (20%). The activities this semester will take many forms, such as answering questions or writing in class about assigned readings, taking part in classroom activities, participating in Blackboard discussions, participating well in group work or activities, and—in general—coming to class prepared and ready to take meaningful part. Some of this will be observable in the typical manner, such as ready participation in discussions, but there will be some more traditional and numerical assessments, such as reading quizzes, which will not be a huge part of the class but which you should be ready for each week. Class attendance will be figured in (see below). You will lose points for excessive absences or for poor class performance (such as falling asleep, studying for another class, or other disengaged behavior). In addition to other daily work, you will be asked on occasion to bring examples of folklore (such as folk humor or songs) to class. This is a part of your participation, too. You won't receive a letter grade for everything we do. At mid-term and during the final week, I'll review your participation record and reach a holistic judgment of your participation and your grade for it.

The Group Project and Presentation (10%). In groups of three or four, you will give an informal 20-minute presentation of some comparative aspect of folklore (such as the different versions of a folksong, a collection of baseball lore, a review/presentation of the folkloric aspects of a movie, a comparative study of a particular family holiday tradition, recipes and the stories behind them, or language/dialect variations in your families) that you have examined as a group. Obviously, you'll need to work together, all the way from defining a topic to working out the details of your presentation. When you present, you should not simply read from a text. There should be some element of performance (vocal, verbal, taped, electronic, recited, or acted out); however, if you use media, do not simply let the media do your presentation. You need to present the context. Also, it should be a team presentation. You might have a moderator or lead presenter, but do not allow one person to do all of the presenting. If you have trouble identifying a topic, compare and contrast how your three families practice some aspect of folklore/folklife. We will begin these about the third week of the semester and have about one a week, each week, until they're done. It would be nice if the topic were connected to the readings for the week of the presentation, but it's not required.

Assignments (25%). Throughout the semester, I will place assignments in the "Assignments" section of Blackboard. They will be brief—two to three pages, double spaced and in a standard font and format. Rather than put these all up at once, I will let them be determined by the directions our discussions take. I already have some of them mapped out, but most are yet to be determined. Some will be very informal personal reflections, some will be more formal essays (likely in response to issues raised in the Brunvand text), and some will be focused, self-contained research problems ("conundrums"). There will be, I think, around 6 of these during the semester, one every few weeks. To do these, you'll need to know how to do "assignments" in Blackboard. These assignments will unfold week by week, and I'll announce them in class, probably about a week before they are due. (This is a good reason for you to make sure you are in class every time.)

Collection and Analysis Project (25%). This will be a folklore fieldwork project. You will compile a collection of folklore (such as jokes, songs/ballads and tunes, games, beliefs, or stories) which you have collected at some celebration, festival, or "gathering" (such as holiday festivities, church functions, home or

family gatherings, school or club activities, or community events). You will need to consider how you collect and record this material (tape? voice recorder? written record?) and then how to present it to me. (A traditional research paper may or may not be the whole of it, but at least you will compile a written description of your project and analysis of its consequences.)

Exams (20%). There will be two exams, a mid-term (which will take half the class meeting on October 9th) and a final (on the night of the last class meeting, December 4th). The exams will come from both the text readings and classroom discussions (another good reason to attend class). They will consist of short open-ended responses and essays, about half and half.

Make-up Work and Late Work. I do not give make-ups for missed quizzes and daily work though you are required to write a “make-up” for any class you miss (see below). If you miss one of the exams, you may be allowed take a make-up if you are able to produce a documented excuse. I might or might not accept late assignments. If you turn in late work, it is subject to late penalties (10% for being late in the first place and then 5% per day after that).

Attendance Policy. All public universities are now under federal directives for keeping track of attendance. I will take attendance every time. University policy allows you three hours of absences, which for a night class means only one class meeting. I’ll give you that one absence, (although this does not excuse you from any work for that week, especially online assignments). If you don’t miss at all, you’ll get a boost in your participation grade. If you miss more than one class, you’ll lose points, and if you miss more than three times (without excused absences), you’ll lose significant points. *Finally, for any absence—whether or not it is excused—you are required to write a one- to two-page (if double-spaced) paper in which you (1) summarize the reading for the night you missed and (2) write an analysis of the reading and response to it. Label this “makeup for _____” and drop it in the “Makeups” section of Blackboard.*

Computer Skills and Using Blackboard. We will be making fairly considerable use of “Blackboard” this semester. I have already loaded some websites and other material, and I’ll be loading quite a bit more as we go along. You should go online and begin to familiarize yourself with the features of Blackboard, if you’re not already familiar with it. None of the computer skills necessary for this course is very difficult, and you’ll have plenty of help.

Plagiarism. Plagiarism means taking words or ideas from a source without giving proper credit. Plagiarism ranges from relatively innocent to serious. The opportunities and temptations to plagiarize (especially on the internet) have become much more available, but there are also increasing ways for plagiarists to be caught at it (and this is not my first day at the rodeo). Whatever the case, plagiarism is a serious academic offense, and I do not take it lightly. (Neither does the University. See the student guidelines for a discussion of the penalties of plagiarism.) The long and short of this message is simple: Don’t do it. If you work hard and do the work yourself, I’ll give you every benefit of the doubt. It won’t be hard to write your own papers, and you’ll have plenty of help with them. Just sweat it out and do the work yourself. I guarantee it’s better that way. Besides, what’s the point of plagiarizing in a folklore course, for Pete’s sake?

Classroom Policies. I’m not too fussy about classroom behavior. There will be, I hope, a fairly informal atmosphere in the class throughout. I don’t mind if you bring food or drink into the classroom. Try to be on time for class, but if you are late, make sure that you check to see that I got you marked present. Cell phones don’t bother me much (though the rule in my classes is that I get to answer them). One recent issue that I have had to consider is the use of laptops in class. Despite the technological coloration of this class, I’m not sure that the use of a laptop during class is a good thing. If you make good use of it, meaning that you do things related to class, that may be fine, but our class time is not time for checking

your mail or surfing the internet. It's a long class. Most nights we'll probably take breaks, but not always, and sometimes they may come later than usual. If you have to "go" during class, then go. (But come back promptly. The one thing that does bother me is students who leave and don't return.) I'd like your polite attention, and you should give polite attention to other students, but if the class devolves toward hubbub every so often, that's not a bad thing. In other words, I'm not too fussy about classroom behavior. However, the university provides formal statements about these things.

Course Assessment. Toward the end of the term, you will do an "IDEA" assessment of the course. These evaluations are a part of our faculty evaluation system, but even if we didn't do them, I take student evaluation seriously. In addition to the formal university teaching evaluation, I will be seeking feedback from you about the course. I never begin planning a course until I have considered student feedback from previous classes.

Guidelines for Academic Conduct and Classroom Procedures. Below are official University statements on other aspects of academic conduct and classroom procedures (with a link to the full guidelines). The material in italics is official university language. The non-italicized material is my own clarifications or comments on these policies. If you have any questions about any of this, please ask.

Student Syllabus Guidelines: Following are some official university guidelines for students to know about. There are more detailed descriptions online, as well as links to the specific university policy or procedure:

<https://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>

Academic Dishonesty: *All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.* See also the statement on plagiarism, above.

Classroom Rules of Conduct: *Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Students are to treat faculty and students with respect. Students are to turn off all cell phones while in the classroom. Under no circumstances are cell phones or any electronic devices to be used or seen during times of examination. Students may tape record lectures provided they do not disturb other students in the process.* Besides these university rules, I have some guidelines of my own. I am not too much bothered when a cell phone goes off (though the rule in my class is that I get to answer it). What does bother me is students who leave class early. I have also had some issues with laptops in class. If you use a laptop in my class, just don't let me discover you checking your e-mail (or, worse yet, surfing the internet). Don't be offended if I ask you for an explanation or justification of your laptop use. You definitely may not use laptops, cell phones, or any other electronic device during exams. For the university statement on classroom conduct, see the following:

<https://www.shsu.edu/students/guide/dean/codeofconduct.html>.

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days: *Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.*

"Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.

Students with Disabilities Policy: *It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.*

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that may affect adversely his/her work in this class, then the student is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how best to deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center.

Visitors in the Classroom: *Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom. This policy is not intended to preclude visitors altogether. If you want to bring a visitor with you to class, please just check with me first.*

Tentative Class Schedule
English 364 (Folklore)—Fall 2007—Gene Young
Tuesday 6:00-8:50 p.m.—Evans 105

August 21st Course Introduction
Discussion: What is folklore? Who are the folk? Is this important? Folklore in the Movies
August 28th Folklore and Folk: Are You One?
Readings: Brunvand, <i>The Study of American Folklore</i> (SAF): Chapter 1 (The Field of Folklore); Chapter 2 (The Study of Folklore); Chapter 3 (Folk Groups). Topic: Folklore defined (maybe)
September 4th Oral Folklore
Readings: SAF Chapter 4 (Folk Speech and Naming). Chapter 5 (Proverbs and Proverbial Lore); Ch. 17 (Folk Gestures)
September 11th Folksongs and Ballads
Reading: SAF Ch. 11 (Folksongs); Ch. 12 (Ballads). Topics: Authenticity; Ballads New and Old.
September 18th Professional Folk Performance
Readings: SAF Ch 13 (Folk Music); Ch. 16 (Folk Dances and Drama). Invited Performance/Lecture: Suzanne and Jim Hale.
September 25th Language, Dialect, and Humor

Readings: SAF Chapter 6 (Riddles); Chapter 7 (Rhymes and Folk Poetry). Topics: Language and Dialect; Folk Humor. Group Presentation
October 2nd Animal Folklore and Myth
Readings: SAF Ch 9 (Legends and Anecdotes); “The Big Bear of Arkansas” and excerpts from <i>The Bear</i> (both available online); Begin The Cormac McCarthy’s <i>The Crossing</i> ; Topics: Urban Legends; Folklore of the American West. Group Presentation
October 9th Storytelling
Mid-Term Exam (1 st hour of class). Readings: SAF Ch. 10 (Folktales); Mark Twain: “How to Tell a Story” (online); continue <i>The Crossing</i> , Book I. Topics: Jokes and Ethnic Humor; Storytelling; Folklore in the Internet Age. Group Presentation
October 16th Mexican Folklore and The Corrido
Readings: <i>The Crossing</i> , Book II. View representative <i>corridos</i> (Course Documents). Topics: Mexican folklore; the <i>Corrido</i> , from revolution to drug lords. Group Presentation
October 23rd Gregorio Cortez and Other Desperados
Amerigo Paredes. Excerpts from <i>With His Pistol in His Hand</i> (on electronic reserve). Film: <i>The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez</i> ; Reading: <i>The Crossing</i> , Book III
October 30th Folklore and Literature
Reading: <i>The Crossing</i> , Book IV; selections from Zora Neale Hurston (available online)
November 6th Are You Superstitious?
Readings: SAF Ch. 14 (Superstitions); Ch. 15 (Customs and Festivals). Topics: Folk Revivals: The 1960’s. Group Presentation
November 13th The Sixties
Readings: SAF Ch. 18 (Folk Games); Ch. 19 (Folklife). Topics: Sports Lore; Continue examining and discussing the Folk Revival of the 1960’s. Group Presentation
November 20th You Are What You Eat
Readings: SAF Ch 23 (Folk Foods). Topics: Continue the Folk Revival of the 1960’s.
November 27th O, Brother
Topic: Folklore in the Movies, a re-visitation
December 4th: Final Exam