

# Folk Studies 371: Urban Folklore

**Instructor:** Matt Hale

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## Course Goals:

In this course, we will examine the varieties and characteristics of urban folklore in the United States (as well as elsewhere). Along the way, we will explore urban legends, customs, humor, material culture, viral videos, graffiti, video games, flash mods, fan culture, foodways, music, etc. Put succinctly, we will study human creativity and expressiveness within contemporary life, a life that is globalized, digitally connected, traditional, innovative. . . Well... as we will see throughout this semester, it is complex and interesting. Also, note that this course satisfies general education category C requirements—social and behavioral sciences—on the undergraduate degree program.

## Books/ course materials:

There are no books to purchase for this course (your wallet rejoices). You will be reading a great deal of articles, viewing videos, watching viral videos, that sort of thing, but all materials will be free.

Things should stay on schedule the entire semester, however, if they do not. . . I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus (I will not add things though—only rearrange).

Hi there and welcome to FLK 371, Urban Folklore. I'm Matt, your instructor, or rather a digital representation of Matt... either way, the point still stands... Hi!



### **The Learning Center (TLC):**

Should you require academic assistance with this course, or any Gen Ed course, there are several places that can provide you with help. TLC tutors are available in most undergraduate subjects and course levels. TLC is located in the Academic Advising and Retention Center, DUC A-339. Phone 745-6254, [www.wku.edu/tlc/](http://www.wku.edu/tlc/). Hours: M-TH 8 a.m. - 9 p.m., F 8-4, Sun 4-9.

### **Folklore Minor:**

Students at WKU have the opportunity to take a variety of folklore classes and may also minor in folklore. A folklore minor is fun, challenging, and includes many fascinating topics related to contemporary American life. It will help you develop valuable critical and problem solving skills for use in the complex social, occupational and political environments in which we work and live. These skills will make you a better candidate for employment, for admission into graduate programs in many fields, and for advancement in just about any career path. For more information, visit the Folk Studies web site @ [www.wku.edu/folkstudies/](http://www.wku.edu/folkstudies/).

### **Popular Culture Studies**

This course counts as an elective in the major in Popular Culture Studies. This program offers WKU undergraduates the chance to broaden their understanding of the arts and culture of everyday life including such areas as television, film, music, sports, advertising, customs and rituals. Through innovative interdisciplinary coursework the major helps students critically analyze a wide range of popular cultural forms, their uses by audiences, and their impact on the broader social, political and economic landscape. If you are interested in learning more about this exciting and innovative program, contact your instructor or check out the Popular Culture Studies website at [www.wku.edu/pop](http://www.wku.edu/pop).

### **Websites:**

During this semester we will be viewing a great deal of digital content beyond the Blackboard site itself. This will include websites like Youtube, PhD Comics, Snopes, FolkStreams.org, etc. So be prepared to explore the internet for some interesting and entertaining things.

### **Course Ethics:**

This class is not simply about facts, numbers, or figures (all important things, I assure you). It is about culture, human expression, the creative things that people do, say, make, experience, in everyday ordinary life. At times the class will consider issues of race, class, gender, different ways of being and doing, so please be respectful of one another as you would in a physical classroom.

### **Disability policy:**

Students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids or services) for this course must contact the Office for Student Disability Services, Room 445, at Potter Hall. The OFSDS telephone number is 270- 745-5004 V/ TDD. Please do not request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a letter of accommodation from the Office for Student Disability Services.

### **Cheating & Academic Misconduct:**

Academic integrity is of utmost importance to this university. Academic misconduct/plagiarism (especially relevant for online courses) will not be tolerated nor will it make you any smarter. See the WKU Student Handbook for more information.

### Posting Schedule and Course Participation:

Each week you will have readings, for simplicity's sake, we'll say that the first week of class will have eight readings (it doesn't) and 12 websites that you have to visit (nope, not that many). You will be expected to read those materials and explore those sites within a seven day period and post a discussion question or comment at least every week at least twice within one week. In essence, each week you will read/explore content and post twice each week from one Monday to the next. You may do this work anytime within the week, early morning, late at night, on Sunday, Tuesday, anyway or time of the week as long as you post, at bare minimum, two times each week. That shouldn't be hard though. I will be posting questions, comments, notes, video posts, etc., that correspond to our class materials and that should give us a great deal to mull over as a group. You don't have to have questions each week. If you feel like you get something, fine... post two comments and no questions- I may just play the devil's advocate and try to elicit more from you then. Didn't understand the reading, post questions, ask me, as your fellow students, ask. Do not be afraid to admit you don't understand something or that you had a different interpretation than someone else, all are welcome and all should provide interesting discourse.

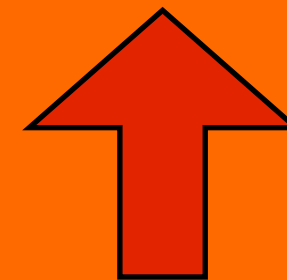
### Contacting me:

I encourage you to use e-mail to communicate with me whenever you need to. Think of me as some form of digital fairy godmother - I will come to your aid when you need me and then. . . poof (**DISCLAIMER: THERE WILL BE NO POOFING AND/OR ANY OTHER MAGIC, QUASI-MAGIC, OR PYROTECHNICAL DISPLAYS WITHIN THIS COURSE**). If you are confused, need help, have an idea about a paper topic, or are dying to discuss things relating to the course feel free to email me at the above listed address. With that being said, I get a great deal of email during the semester (but then again, don't we all?) so please include **FLK 371** or **URBAN FOLKLORE** or something of that nature within the subject line so that your messages get answered more efficiently. For further connivence, maybe even try adding in a topic in the subject line as well. An example is in order:

**EXAMPLE:** Subject: FLK 371--(do Fairy Godmothers, digital or otherwise go poof?)

### Course Requirements:

- 1. Class Participation, Postings, and other Short Assignments** (20 pts- 20% of final grade). This class, like its non-digital counterparts, is not self-paced. There are due dates, and though we don't have a physical classroom where we may meet and conduct the course, we do have a schedule. You should expect to spend between 4-6 hours a week on class materials. Whether reading, posting (see later details for the etiquette of classroom posts), watching videos, clips, or films, this class will, like any other course, require work each and every week. You are expected to have read each assigned reading or have viewed any other audio/visual/interactive digital materials prior to posting (again see schedule for posting etiquette and scheduling).
- 2. Exams:** Midterm and Final- (each 25 pts- thus, each clock in at 25% of your final grade). Both the midterm and the final will be entirely open note. That is not to say, however, that the exams will be any easier simply because you will have your notes handy. Think of the exams as moments of improvisation or synthesis. Yes, you have your notes, and yes, that is a good thing, but I want you to bring these ideas together, mold them, use them creatively, weaving and linking together concepts, topics, issues, etc. With that being said, exams will be **short essays** and **short answers.... NO MULTIPLE CHOICE OR FILL IN THE BLANK.**
- 3. Semester Project: Fieldwork Project or Literature/Media Review** (30 pts- 30% of final grade). For your final project you will have the option of either (a.) creating a 7-10 page fieldwork based paper of a topic of your own choosing (**TOPICS MUST BE APPROVED--- EMAIL ME FOR APPROVAL**) or (b.) creating a 7-10 page review and analysis of a book or film (other items to be analyzed are up for discussion, again just email me ahead of time for approval). \*\*\* A handout with further details will be posted and discussed early within the semester\*\*\*



**IMPORTANT STUFF**  
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# Course Schedule Rubric

Week # (Date range):

**TOPIC of Discussion-**  
Extra details about the specifics of the topic at hand.

**Readings-** Each week we will be completing a number of readings.... Be they book, article, journal, blog, or what have you, (spam possibly?), we will be reading a number of things each and every week (with some exceptions thrown in). You are expected to read everything assigned each week just as you would in a regularly scheduled once-a-weel-meeting-type-of-class.

**Assignment-** Some weeks you'll have a short assignment, don't worry — these will be easy, usually very quick to complete, and they won't ruin your day or your week. For instance, I might ask you to visit a few websites, to watch a youtube video, watch a documentary online, things of that nature, or (a real example) you will be required to submit a paper proposal (1/2 page -1 page in length). So look for the assignment note in each weeks schedule. You won't always have one each week.

**Posts-** Each and every week, unless noted, you are to post at a bare minimum of two times per week. That is, each 7 day cycle (week one for instance) you are to complete all assignments, read all articles, and, before the next 7 day cycle begins, make at least two posts on the topic. I'll make a note for each week on the sort of stuff we may be looking to talk about.

**Handouts-** Or would that be E-outs? Uploads? Not sure, anyway, every so often, I'll be uploading handouts to the Blackboard website. I'll make announcements each time I do that so check Blackboard each week for updates beyond your weekly postings.

**Extra Credit-** From time to time, I will offer extra credit opportunities. This won't be often, nor will the potential points be free, but they will happen.



**EXAMPLE Post Topic**      Why is this syllabus so colorful? What's with overly large red arrows? Does this guy really look like his avatar thingy? Discuss and relate these questions (very good one's indeed) to contemporary globalized culture and/or course readings.



# Course Schedule

**Week 1 (Jan 24-30):**

## **Introduction- What is folklore and why should I care?**

Introductions to one another, course content and goals, syllabus, genres, terms.

**Assignment-** Browse the following websites... find out what is and folklore how one conducts ethnographic research

[What is Folklore?](#) - The American Folklore Society

[What do Folklorists Do?](#) - The American Folklore Society

Also, browse (briefly) the following academic institutions (not comprehensive) offering programs in folklore. (I just want you to get a feel for the discipline and its current state).

[Indiana University](#) BA, MA, PhD

[Memorial University](#) (Newfoundland) BA, MA, PhD.

[The Ohio State University](#) BA, MA, PhD.

[University of California, Berkeley](#) MA, and Phd with designated emphasis in folklore.

[University of Louisiana at Lafayette](#) MA with concentration in Folklore, and PhD.

[University of Missouri](#) Undergraduate concentration in Folklore, MA, PhD.

[University of Oregon](#) Undergraduate certificate in folklore, MA, and PhD.

[University of Wisconsin-Madison](#) Undergraduate certificate in Folklore, PhD minor.

[Western Kentucky University](#) BA (minor), MA, PhD (in progress).

## **Posts for this week!!!!**

Post #1 is simple... Who are you? Where are you from? Why this class? That sort of thing.... Post # 2, what do you think folklore is? Why? Who does/has folklore? Why should we care? What do you hope to get out of this class? That sort of thing?

# Course Schedule

**Week 2 (Jan 31-Feb 6):**

**Who are the folk? What do they do? And, really, why should I care about their lore anyway?**

## Readings-

Dundes, Alan. "Who are the Folk?"  
Dundes, Alan. What is Folklore?  
Miner, Hoarce. Body Ritual Among the Nacirema.  
Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description"

**Digital Handout-** Defining folklore.... a hard thing to pigeonhole.

**Post!!!!:** This week, reflect on the readings and, well, post on it... I'll be asking questions about these works and we can mull them over as a group. Remember, this is all out discourse, communication, talking (or...typing, I guess). So we'll talk (type) it out.

# Course Schedule

Week 3 (Feb 7- Feb 13):

## **Tradition-**

What is it? Why is it important and how can tradition exist in contemporary folkloristic practices?

## **Readings-**

Ferrell, Ann. Tradition.

Toelken, Barre. In *The Dynamics of Folklore*.

Georges, Robert and Michael Owen Jones. Folkloristics as a Historical Science.

**Digital Handout-** Theoretical models and history of folklore scholarship.

**Posts for this week!!!!**

Post #1 is simple... Who are you? Where are you from? Why this class? That sort of thing.... Post # 2, what do you think folklore is? Why? Who does/has folklore? Why should we care? What do you hope to get out of this class? That sort of thing?

# Course Schedule

**Week 4 (Feb 14-Feb 20):**

## **Urban Legends, anecdotes, oral folklore-**

“Stories people tell themselves about themselves”

~ Clifford Geertz

### **Readings-**

Brunvand, Jan Harold. Legends and Anecdotes.

Brunvand, Jan Harold. Richard Dorson and the Urban Legend.

Goldstein, Diane. “Tag You’ve Got AIDS”: HIV in Folklore and Legend.

**Assignment:** Visit the following sites. [Snopes.com](http://Snopes.com)... Specifically the [25 top Urban Legends](#)... [The Hook Decoded](#)... [I Accidentally Ate My Dog!](#) (*feel free to stop at 2:14*)...and finally [The Vanishing Hitchhiker](#). Feel free to watch more and post about those as well.

**Digital Handout-** Final paper guidelines and information on the paper proposal that will be due the week of spring break.

### **Posts for this week!!!!**

Thoughts, feelings, ideas, confusions, anything and everything that you might want to talk about.... Post it. What are urban legends? Why are they urban? I’ve heard of this but, it really happened. A friend of a friend of mine said.... What do you think?



## Course Schedule

Week 5 (Feb 28-March 6):

**Humor, Jokes, Xeroxlore, Doodles, and, in general, those things defined as “funny.”**

### Readings-

Jansen, William Hugh. The Esoteric-Exoteric Factor in Folklore.  
Basso, Keith. Joking Imitations of Anglo-Americans: Interpretive Functions.  
Dundes and Pagter. Folk Cartoons and Drawings, pp. 144-195.  
Preston, Michael. Traditional Humor from the Fax Machine: All of a Kind.  
Thompson, Ben. “Leonidas”

**Assignment:** Immediately after reading “Leonidas” - watch [This Is Sparta!](#), [300 PG Trailer](#), [This is Scrumptious!](#)... THEN [Star Wars Kid](#), [Star Wars Kid VS Yoda](#), [Star Wars Kid VS Agent Smith](#), and THEN [My Spoon is Too Big!](#), [My Spoon is Too Big Live Action Parody](#), [My Fork is Too Small](#), and Finally, [Star Wars Yo Mama Fight](#).. also find and post clips of your own!!!!

**Posts for this week!!!!**

What is funny? What makes things funny in the first place? What makes something distinctly not funny? Why is humor important? What does it reflect about a society, or does it reflect anything at all? Think amongst yourselves.

# Course Schedule

Week 6 (March 7-March 13):

SPRING BREAK!!!

## Readings-

No Readings for this week.

**Assignment:** Submit your paper proposal. I want a less than one page explanation of your topic, goals, methods, theoretical insights, etc. See HANDOUT (will be in information).

**Posts for this week!!!!** No Posts Due This Week.

# Course Schedule

**Week 7 (March 14-March 20):**

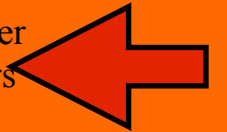
**MID TERM !!!**

## Readings-

No Readings for this week.

**Assignment: Take the Mid Term!!! Do Your Best. The midterm is open note, take all the time you need. With that being said, the test isn't about memorization and regurgitating information back to me, nope, it is about synthesis, thought, your ideas. Be creative.**

There will one bonus question on the mid-term. If you decide to answer the bonus question (you do not have to- though I would. . . it is a bonus question after all) you are giving me, Matt Hale, the right to post your answer (anonymously, mind you) for the class to analyze. In other words, every student who answers this question might see their answer pop up in a discussion..... don't worry, but do be creative and adventurous.



**Posts for this week!!!! No Posts Due This Week.**

# Course Schedule

**Week 8 (March 21-March 27):**

**Ritual, belief, and vernacular religion.**

## Readings-

Van Gennep, Arnold. The Rites of Passage.

Turner, Victor. Betwixt and Between: Liminal Period.

Primiano, Leonard. Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife.

Howard, Robert Gleen. Enacting a Virtual ‘Ekklesia’: Online Christian Fundamentalism as Vernacular Religion.

**Assignment:** Visit the [The Father Divine Project](#) online,

**Posts for this week!!!!**

What is belief? Religion? What is vernacular religion? How has technology changed religious belief systems, has it? Is that even important? What information did you find about the Father Divine Project that relates to contemporary folk belief and urban folklore?

# Course Schedule

Week 9 (March 28-April 3):

**Material Culture, the “things” of human expressiveness, and folk art.**

In other words, stuff.

## Readings-

Glassie, Henry. Folk Art.

Toelken, Barre. Folk Aesthetics.

Roach, Susan. The Kinship Quilt: An Ethnographic Semiotic Analysis of a Quilting Bee.

**Assignment:** Watch [\*Style Wars\*](#). (the whole thing) and visit the [Weavings of War](#) online gallery.

**Posts for this week!!!!**

What is folk art? Is it different from “fine” art? Why/why not? How do you know? What is the difference between art and craft? Is there a difference? Can art be a performance and not just a material thing? How so?

# Course Schedule

**Week 10 (April 4-April 10):**

**Technology, Media, the contemporary, and folklore.**  
Out with the old in with new???

## Readings-

Molnár, Virág. Reframing Public Space Through Digital Mobilization’

Miller, Kiri. Grove Street Grimm: Grand Theft Auto and Digital Folklore.

Howard, Robert Gleen. Electronic Hybridity: The Persistent Processes of the Vernacular Web.

**Assignment:** Watch the following online videos- [The Adventures of Bob and Steve](#), [What is Steampunk?](#), [The Ballad of the Noob](#), [Flashmob](#), browse examples within the [ELFWOOD](#) digital fan art galleries.

**Posts for this week!!!!**

What is technology? How do technology and folklore relate, are they the same, opposites, concentric, entangled, complex “things” in their own right? How can digital culture be understood through folkloristic processes, theories, and methods?

# Course Schedule

Week 11 (April 11-April 17):

The social body/the human body.

## Readings-

Wojcik, Daniel. *Punk and Neo-Tribal Body Art*.

Brunvand, Jan Harold. Folk Costume.

Laude, Jan. Body Rhetoric.

Hale, Matthew. Crafting the Referential Body.

**Assignment:** Visit [dragoncon.org](http://dragoncon.org), be sure to check out a few on their online galleries. Next, watch the documentary [\*Rize\*](#) (the entire film).

**Posts for this week!!!!**

How are bodies social? What the heck does that even mean? Do we learn our bodies? To perform in certain ways? Yes, no, and more importantly why, why not, and why is that/is it important?

# Course Schedule

Week 12 (April 18-April 24):

Gender, sex, and performing gendered categorizations

## Readings-

Clair, Erin. Gender.  
Mendoza-Denton, Norma. Muya Macha.  
Weems, Micky. The Circuit.

**Assignment:** Watch *Paris is Burning*. (The whole thing).

**Posts for this week!!!!**

What is gender? What is sex? How are they different? How do we perform our gender(s)? Can you think of examples of gendered behavior on the internet, in the classroom, at work, clothing, children's toys, anything? How do we learn to be gendered?



# Course Schedule

Week 13 (April 25-May 1):

**Ethnography: Juggling culture, tradition, technology, and the individual.**

## Readings-

Van Maanen, John. Fieldwork, Culture, and Ethnography.

Brady, Erika. Introduction.

Brady, Erika. A Spiral Way.

Westbrook, David. What?

**Digital Handout:** Concerning “slippage,” postmodernity, the individual, and culture.

**Assignment:** Discussion of midterm bonus question answers: group and culture versus the individual.

## **Posts for this week!!!!**

I'll post a few questions this week on the board. . . Mainly centering around the notion of ethnography within a postmodern society. . . how do we do ethnography in a new age? That sort of thing. . .

## Course Schedule

**Week 14 (May 2-May 8):**

**Review week and paper due date.**

**Assignment: FINAL PAPER DUE!!!!**

**Post for this Week!!!!**

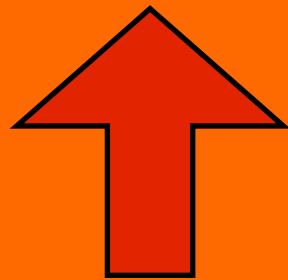
Questions, comments, concerns, what was folklore again? We'll work on fortifying the concepts that we've learned to date for the final. Just post anything that you need help with or want to talk about. Things you were interested in, found on the internet that seemed relevant, anything. You do not have to post this week, but feel free to. Honestly, use this time to ready yourself for the final exam.... it will be comprehensive.

## Course Schedule

Week 15 (May 9-May 13):

**FINAL EXAM!!!**

**!!!!!!Exam must be turned in before midnight, on May 13th. No late exams will be accepted!!!!!!**



**IMPORTANT STUFF**  
(note very large red arrow)

**Post: No posts due.... The class is over!**