

Communication 396, Fall 2009  
Folklore as Communication  
Professor Susan Davis  
Tuesday, Thursday 10 – 11:50 a.m.

Office: 217 Oregon Building  
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Office Hours: to be announced in class  
To schedule an appointment: (sgdavis@uiuc.edu)

This section of Communication 396 focuses on the study of unofficial and homemade communication and culture, sometimes called “folklore”. This unofficial communication includes speech, stories, proverbs, rituals and performances. This semester we will be participating in the Ethnography of the University of Illinois initiative (EUI), documenting the unofficial culture of students at U of I.

In this course you can expect to do a good deal of reading on folklore in general and student culture in particular. You will also be asked to practice a variety of cultural description and documentation skills. You can expect to come away from the course with a strong sense of variety, persistence and flexibility of traditional culture as it lives in the present, and a good deal of practice in recording it, writing about it, and analyzing it.

Required Texts:

Rebekah Nathan My Freshman Year: What a professor learned by becoming a student (New York: Penguin, 2005)

A collection of articles is available through the Undergraduate Library's Electronic Reserves service. Go to Communication 396/S. Davis.

Course Requirements: all readings; well-prepared attendance at all class meetings, including field trips; participation in class; careful preparation of all assignments, participation in EUI activities. and Web posting assignments. Please note that there are frequent written assignments but no exams. Pop quizzes, however, are a live possibility.

The written work for this course consists of a series of six reports ( the first four will be about four –five pages long, the last two will be longer) describing and analyzing materials you will obtain from primary research, that is, either field research or archival research. (These terms will be explained in class.)

The final project for the semester is a completed research portfolio comprised of all the semester's assignments, including the final research project. You may be asked to post some or all of your research in the Ethnography of the University of Illinois Web archives.

These required assignments, with due dates, are:

1. Mapping/landscape project: due in class September 17.
2. Slang/ Folk speech project: due in class October 1.
3. Proverb project: due October 13.
4. Legends/legends trip project: due in class October 29.
5. Festival diary and analysis: start this October 22, due November 6.
6. Halloween history research: due December 8.
7. All of the above submitted as an organized research portfolio (in a binder or large folder) due not later than December 11.

Assignment sheets with explanations and instructions will be handed out in class or posted on the Atlas/Moodle website for this class.

**Grading:** all writing assignments are required, unless otherwise noted. You must hand in all required assigned work to get credit (a passing grade) for the course. I do not give partial credit.

The first five written assignments (#s 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) submitted in the final portfolio count for 50% of your grade. Assignment #6 counts for 30% of your grade. The written assignments individually and as a whole will be evaluated for their quality and thoughtfulness and care, as well as their completeness. Individual assignments will be handed back in class with comments and the final portfolio will be handed back at the end of the semester. Late assignments will not be accepted.

Class participation, other short papers, quizzes and preparedness for discussion count for 20% of your grade.

For attendance policy, see the last page of the syllabus.

### Outline of the Course

**Week 1:** August 25-27 Introduction to the Course

August 25: Introduction to the course; new terms: culture, official, unofficial, vernacular and "folk."

August 27: reading: Marquart, Debra. "Signs and Wonders," from *The Horizontal World: Growing up Wild in the Middle of Nowhere* (Counterpoint: New York, 2007), 227-253

**Week 2:** September 1-3 Anthropological Perspectives on The Cultures of Students

September 1: reading: Rebekah Nathan, My Freshman Year: pp.ix-89

September 3: Nathan, continued.

**Week 3:** September 8-10 Historical Perspectives on the Cultures of Students

Sept. 8: Reading: Horowitz, Helen L. "Introduction: the Worlds That Undergraduates Make," "College Men: The War between Students and Faculty," and "Outsiders: the Loyal Opposition." pp. 3 -- 82.

**Week 4:** September 15-17 Thinking about Campus Cultures and how to document them.

Reading: Sept. 15 James Leary, "The Notre Dame Man: Christian Athlete or Dirt Ball?" Journal of the Folklore Institute (15) 1972.

Reading: September 17 Kevin Lynch "The City Image and Its Elements," Kevin Lynch *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press) pp. 46-90.

Landscape Assignment: due in class September 17. (be prepared to share your map project with the class, as well as to hand it in. We'll be putting it "up" on the projector screen.)

**Week 5:** September 22-24 Documenting Campus Cultures, continued.

What landscapes, guides, archives, maps, newspaper reports... etc.... can tell us about campus culture, continued.

Reading: Nathan, My Freshman Year: pp. 90-168.

Reading: William A. Wilson, "Documenting Folklore" in Elliot Oring (ed) *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction* (Logan Utah: Utah State University Press) pp. 225-254.

Discussion of participant observation, ethnographic techniques and informed consent.

**Week 6:** September 29-October 1 Slang: Creating Identity through Everyday Speech.

September 29: Reading: Connie Eble, "Definition," "Effects" and "Culture" in *Slang & Sociability: In-Group Language among College Students* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press) pp. 11-24, 117-130, 131-143.

Bourdain, Anthony Selections from "Kitchen Confidential" (TBA)

Folk speech assignment: due in class October 1. (Use Wilson as your format for your folk speech assignment.)

**Week 7 :** October 6-8 Traditional Wisdom in its Micro-Environment: Sayings, "*dichos*", proverbial expressions, proverbial phrases and true proverbs

Archer Taylor, "The Wisdom of Many and the Wit of One," in Wolfgang Mieder and Alan Dundes (eds) *The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverb* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1981) pp. 3-9.

Mieder, Wolfgang. "Different Strokes for Different Folks," from *Proverbs are the Best Policy* (Utah State University Press: Utah, 2005), 1-15

Proverb assignment: Due Tuesday, October 13. (Use William Wilson's format again.) Make sure you use informed consent forms (available on course website).

**Week 8:** October 13-15 Stories, Legends and Legend Trips

Langlois, Janet "Mary Whales, I Believe in You..." in Linda Degh, ed. Indiana Folklore: A Reader, 1978.

(please read Langlois' texts from the end of the article, then the introductory analysis.)

Degh, Linda, "The House of Blue Lights in Indianapolis." In Linda Degh editor Indiana Folklore: a Reader, (1978).

Begin legend project. Make sure you use informed consent forms. (See Atlas/Moodle EUI Site)

**Week 9:** October 20-22 Legends and Ghost Stories, local and international

October 20: Reading: Jones, Louis C. "Preface," "Introducing the Dead," and " Why They Return." Things That Go Bump in the Night (Syracuse University Press, 1958).

October 22: Reading: Ellis, Bill. "Legend trips and Satanism: Adolescents' Ostensive Behavior As "Cult" Activity." In Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith, editors. Contemporary Legend: A Reader. New York: Garland, 1996.

October 22: prepare to discuss Legend/legend trip assignment in class.

**Start Festival diary project on October 22**, in the run-up to Halloween, Day of the Dead and Homecoming. Diary project is long-term and will be described in class.

**Week 10:** October 27-29

October 29: Legend assignment due in class, including in class presentation.

**Week 11:** November 3-5

November 3 : Bauman, Richard. "Ritual," And "Festival" from Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments (Oxford University Press: New York, 1992), 249-271

November 5: Falassi, Alessandro. "Festival: Definition and Morphology," Time Out of Time: Studies in the Art of the Festival

November 5: Festival diary reports in class

Friday, November 6: Festival diary and write-up due.

**Week 12:** November 10-12

Discussion, and beginning: Halloween History Project

Reading: November 3: Jack Santino "Introduction: Festivals of Death and Life," pp xi-xxviii from Santino, Ed. Halloween And Other Festivals of Death and Life.

Santino, "Homemade Holidays: Making Symbols, Making Meaning," All around the Year

**Week 13:** November 17-19 Developing Research and Documentation Projects

Reading: November 17: Abrahams, Roger D. "An American Vocabulary of Celebrations," in Falassi, ed., Time Out Of Time.

November 19: Marchi, Regina "Day of the Dead and Halloween," in Santino, ed. Spontaneous Shrines.

**Week 14: November 24: Thanksgiving Week**

**Week 15:** December 1-3

Presentations: Halloween History Projects

Reading: to be announced

**Week 16:** December 8:

Presentations: Halloween History Projects

Reading: to be announced

(Final portfolio due December 11)

### Course Policies

**Attendance policy:** It's assumed that your attendance will be 100%. However, I also assume that most of you will get at least one flat tire during the semester. (Or to put it more happily, I assume each of you will attend at least one really great concert during the next three months.) Here's how I will count attendance: More than three absences will lower your grade by a half letter; six absences will sink your grade by a full letter; if you miss nine classes, I will assume you have dropped the class.

Please note that if you're more than 10 minutes late for class, I will count you absent. There will be no opportunity to sign in "late". If you leave more than 10 minutes early, I will count you absent for that day.

If you expect to have to travel, go to a job interview, or attend a family gathering, it makes sense to save one or two of your three "free" absences to use for those contingencies. "Excused absences" for serious crises are negotiated only through the Emergency Dean. No slips from McKinley, please.

**Flu policy:** This semester, the H1N1 virus is expected to hit college campuses hard. Most people who contract it will experience it as a regular "flu" but some people will get seriously ill. Public health officials are recommending that you be vaccinated, both for the regular flu and for H1N1 when that vaccine becomes available. Please do this, if you are able! It is also very important that you stay home from class if you feel ill (especially if you have a scratchy throat, watery eyes and a tight chest) and, if you are diagnosed with the flu, that you isolate yourself for a week. I will happily accommodate late work from anyone who has to take these special measures. Please keep up-to-date on public health information from the University.

**Due Dates:** assignment due dates are found on the syllabus under the course outline, and, following the last week there's a summary table of due dates that you can write into your calendar. Assignments are due when they are due (with the exception of the flu policy, above). Please don't ask for extensions. I will make every effort to get your assignments back to you within a reasonable time.

**Special arrangements:** please see me if you need special arrangements to complete or participate in the work of the class.

**Serious illness and other problems:** if you have a cold, or a minor case of the flu, I expect you to stay home and take care of yourself, but to also keep up with the work of the class. However, if you come down with a whopping case of mononucleosis or something worse (and I hope you don't), that may mean you need to consider taking an incomplete in the course. You have the right to take one if you have a valid excuse, but please don't let it go to the last minute. Speak to me as soon as possible if you are having serious trouble keeping up.

**Academic honesty:** if you're not familiar with the University regulations on academic integrity and honesty, you should go to the university's webpage and familiarize yourself with the section on the Student Code. Basically, submitting work that you did not research and write yourself originally for this course is considered a violation of academic integrity and there are serious sanctions attached, including failure of the course. Plagiarism, a violation of academic integrity and honesty, involves representing someone else's work or words as your own. If you're not checked out on how to credit other authors or speakers with their own words -- that is, on the proper use of quotation marks -- it's your responsibility to inform yourself. But basically, if someone else besides you wrote it or said it, it belongs in quotation marks. And don't forget a citation.

Here's an interesting problem for this course. A lot of what we will be studying circulates as common culture, background understandings, and received wisdom. A great deal of this kind of material, from sayings to stories, circulates in print as well as oral form, and a great deal can be found on the Internet. How, then, do we approach the question of originality and honesty? For example, if I ask you to collect an urban legend, and urban legends circulate on the Internet, why should you not go to Snopes.com, copy one of the urban legends they debunk, and submit it for a course assignment? I hope by the end of the course you will be able to answer that question effectively.

But for now, here are a few reasons, besides the fact that it's a violation of academic integrity. Our focus in this class is on the interactions between people in small groups; your assignments ask you to document some dimensions of that interaction. The interaction is not always available in electronic resources, and when it is, it takes an importantly different form than it does in face-to-face interaction. Second, it's actually faster, easier and more interesting and fun to pick up an urban legend (or a joke, or a proverb, or a saying) from someone you know than it is to dig one out of a website or an encyclopedia and spend time rewriting it. The Internet does have a place as a research source for this course, but on a lot of occasions I will specify that you may not go to a website or Internet database first.

Other resources. Besides the readings for this course, there are many other resources in the library and University archives. We will be discussing in class how to access these resources. I may also point you to more readings, most of which will be available through electronic reserves.

**Human subjects protections:** because we will be documenting the behavior of living people on the University of Illinois campus and in the surrounding area, all our work will take place under the rules and guidelines of the U. of I. governing research on human subjects. We will discuss these guidelines in class, and this will prepare you to follow the procedures in your research assignments. Procedures include obtaining informed consent for interviews and documentation.

**Suggestions for success:** there's a lot of reading assigned in this course, although it is not difficult or tedious. Although the reading is not tested on midterm or final exams (I may give quizzes), it is essential for your participation in class, and for writing the short assignments. You'll note that the reading is assigned by specific days -- that means that the date before the assigned reading (for example: reading: September 15:...) is the day you should be prepared by having completed the reading.

My strongest suggestion for success in this class is **do the reading by the due date, ask yourself what interesting questions and problems it evokes for you, and come prepared to talk about it!** Without a doubt, it's the best preparation for your papers and projects.

**E-mail contact:** in general, I'm not available for consultation by e-mail. Please make an appointment and come to my office hours. I have tried to schedule them generously and conveniently. **Please do not e-mail me papers and assignments** for the course -- I won't accept them in this format -- they must be handed in **in person**.

I will however be suggesting and assigning times when it will be appropriate for you to post your assignments on the Atlas/Moodle webpage.

**P.S.: all writing assignments are required.**