

Course Syllabus—English 3364W.01 (CRN: 83006)
Folklore
Fall 2017—Tuesday and Thursday 9:00 to 10:20, Evans 251

Prof.: Gene Young

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Office Hours and Making Contact: Office Hours. Evans 416—Tuesday and Thursday 9:00 to 9:30 and 2:00 to 3:00. MW by appointment. NOTE: I encourage you to take advantage of my office hours to see me about anything involving this class, the English major/minor, teaching/career options, or anything else that you need to talk about. If the TR hours aren't good for you, let's make an appointment for Monday or Wednesday. (If you are a veteran, you may want to know that I am a veteran myself, but, more importantly, I am a member of the SHSU Veterans Alliance. I'm available as a resource through that role and would be eager to talk with you.)

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. Also, while folklore is, of course, worldwide, our focus will be on the folklore of North America and in particular the links (and disjunction) between folklore and the literature we read and study in our English classes..

Course Description. We will begin the course by attempting to arrive at 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). For your further information, here is the official university catalogue description: **ENG 3364 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.* 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)
- Folk Art and other folk forms, such as food folklore, folk games, and folk customs.
- Folklore and Literature (folklore in High Art, writers as folklorists, High Art versus low, folklore and film)
- Given time, we may entertain other folk forms, such as folk art and material folklore

Throughout the semester, through class discussion/in-class work, exams, a group project, various online assignments, and a final project, you should be able to 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.

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 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 and methods for collecting and preserving folklore
- To reach an understanding of the connections and disconnects between folklore and the art (especially written literature) that we study in college English courses

Required Texts. There are no specifically required texts for the course. Your course materials will be mostly available on Blackboard. You will each read a novel or fiction collection and report on it as a member of a group, so you will need to have a copy (in whatever form) of the book you choose.

The Readings and Materials. This is a folklore course in an English Department, and the readings will reflect this dual nature. In past years, I've chosen one of the definitive academic folklore texts, Jan Harold Brunvand's *The Study of American Folklore*, to provide the academic folklore foundation, but this time I've decided to deliver that product in a different way, mainly in weekly online readings and viewings. This being an English class, I've also decided to provide a good deal of focus to the intersections (and disjuncture) between folklore and traditional literature. The one novel (or story collection) you will read will be a work that occupies an important place in American literature, but you should not read it or our other readings in the way you read a conventional novel in a traditional English literature class. You should read all these materials as documents of folklore. (They are still required reading, but this should help you enjoy them more than you might if you were going to be tested on their literary content.) Early in the semester, the readings and assignments will be online. Some will be online in Blackboard, and some will be internet sources. I will be loading these materials weekly.

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. I am happy to discuss your grades at any point of the semester. Below is the breakdown of course requirements.

- Attendance and Participation: 10%
- Folklorist Blogs/Discussion Boards/Random Short Essays: 25%
- The Group Project: 25%
- Final Project: 25%
- Final Exam: 15%

Explanation of Requirements.

- Attendance and Participation (10%). Class attendance will figure in your final grade (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). Participation means participating well in group work or activities, and—in general—coming to class prepared and ready to take meaningful part in classroom discussion or daily activities. 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 quizzes over the reading/viewing for the week. Also, you don't have to be gabby to do well in participation. There will be plenty of ways besides classroom talk for you to demonstrate that you're connecting with the material and thinking about it. You won't receive a letter grade for everything we do, but I will be recording it throughout the semester.
- Activities (Folklorist Blogs/Discussion Boards/Random Short Essays) (25%). Periodically throughout the semester, I will be assigning online discussion boards and in class or out of class informal writings. Also, you will do a Folklorist's Blog of your own. I'll explain all of this later. The activities this semester will take many forms, such as answering questions or writing in or out of class about assigned readings, and participating in Blackboard discussions. I will also assign occasional out-of-class papers. In addition to other assignments, you will be asked on occasion to bring examples of folklore (such as folk humor or songs) to class. If I give you a traditional exam, it will be included in this section.
- The Group Project (25%). I will explain this further in class and in further handouts, but here are the basics: You will choose one novel (or story collection) from a list I provide and then, working with a group of classmates, report on the folklore of that book. We will be talking about this early in the semester, so you will have plenty of time to think, read meet, and plan. Right now, some of the possibilities I have in mind include Cormac McCarthy's *The Crossing*, Lucia Robson's *Ride the Wind*, Laura Esquivil's *Like Water for Chocolate*, Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and Daniel Wallace's *Big Fish*. Other possibilities of novels rich in folklore exist, and I am open to suggestions from you, though—in keeping with the focus of the course,—we will be dealing only with works from the United States and Mexico. Bear in mind that these will be group projects, and we will need to narrow it down to six groups.
- 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 (perhaps at 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. (This will not be a traditional research paper, but at the least you will compile a written description of your project and analysis of its consequences.)
- Final Exam (15%). The final exam will be a traditional examination of how well you retained the materials for the course (mostly those posted in the weekly Blackboard folders).

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 an exam, 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).

Required Document for Missed Classes. For any class you miss, you are required to write a two-page summary/response to the assigned Blackboard materials for the day you missed. This is due in hard copy the class meeting you return.

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 T-day classes, means two meetings. I'll give you those two absences, no questions asked (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 two classes, you'll lose points, and if you miss more than five times (without excused absences), you'll lose significant points (taken directly off your participation grade).

Computer Skills and Using Blackboard. We will be making 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. You will also need to make sure that nothing interferes with your ability to access and study the weekly materials. If that means coming onto campus to have computer lab access, then that's what you'll have to do. "My computer would not connect" is a good excuse—one time.

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 is 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 when they go off in class, but what does bother me is students checking their cellphone messages during class. If you make a habit of this, on your phone or any other device, it will come right off your participation grade. Another 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. 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. It is, after all, folklore, and folklore is—fundamentally—anti-authoritarian. While I'm not too fussy about classroom behavior, the university provides formal statements about these things: (See below.)

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. (That having been said, this is my final year of fulltime teaching before I retire, in July 2018. I guess I have to say that course evaluations still mean something to me, but I won't be lying awake at night thinking about what them.)

Student Conduct and Syllabus Guidelines. Refer to the following links for the various university and department statements and policies indicated:

- *The official university Code of Student Conduct and Discipline:*
<https://netreg.shsu.edu/mirror/codeofconduct.html>
- *University guidelines and policies on Academic Dishonesty, Americans with Disabilities Act, Absences for Religious Holy Days, and Visitors in the Classroom:* <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus>
- *University policy on Academic Dishonesty:*
<http://www.shsu.edu/dotAsset/728eec25-f780-4dcf-932c-03d68cade002.pdf>.
- *Students with Disabilities Policy:* <http://www.shsu.edu/dotAsset/187f9029-a4c6-4fb4-aea9-2d501f2a60f3.pdf> *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*

Tentative Schedule

Date	Topics for the Week
First Meeting. Thur, Aug. 24	Get acquainted and launched. The oral tradition.
Week 1 (Aug 29 and 31)	What is folklore, and who are the folk? Who collects folklore? And how? And why?
Week 2 (Sept.5 and 7)	Oral Folklore. The language and speech of the folk; folk dialect, folk rhymes, and folk humor
Week 3 (Sept. 12 and 14)	Legends and Myths. Folk tales—legends and anecdotes; animal folklore; urban legends
Week 4 (Sept. 19 and 21)	Other Forms of Folklore: Folk Customs, Folk Games, Folk Food, Folk Art/Craft
Week 5 (Sept. 26 and 28)	Folk Music. The Folk Ballad; Songs of the Folk; Folk Collectors
Week 6 (Oct. 3 and 5)	Folk Music. Mountain Music: The Fiddle, the Banjo, and the String Band; Music Festivals.
Week 7 (Oct. 10 and 12)	Folk Music: The Folk Revival of the 1960s
Week 8 (Oct. 17 and 19)	Folk Story. The story and story forms; folk narratives
Week 9 (Oct. 24 and 26)	Folklore in Literature: Group Projects 1 and 2
Week 10 (Oct. 31 and Nov. 2)	Folklore in Literature: Group Projects 3 and 4
Week 11 (Nov. 7 and 9)	Folklore in Literature: Group Projects 5 and 6
Week 12 (Nov. 14 and 16)	Folklore in Literature and the Movies
Week 13 (Nov. 21)	Folklore in the Movies. <i>O Brother, Where Art Thou?</i>
Nov. 22-24	Thanksgiving Holidays
Week 14 (Nov. 28 and 30)	Folklore in the Movies. To be decided.
Final Exam	Tentatively 9:30 a.m. Thursday, Dec. 7