Anthropology of Humor and Laughter

OSHER 449-001
Dates: Tuesdays, 3/31/15-5/5/15
Times: 9:30AM-11:00AM
Location: Commander's House, Fort Douglas
Instructor: Dr. Wasilewska

Course Overview
Studying laughter is not a laughing matter. Humor is a serious issue. Both are essential for humor survival: physically, emotionally, and socially. Laughter keeps us alive. Humor keeps us informed. Humor not only reflects socio-political values, dynamics, conflicts, and challenges experienced in the multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual complexity of the American “melting pot” but also perpetuates existing stereotypes, inequalities, and perceptions. We will explore the role of both laughter and humor in our modern society, with some references to other cultures.

Disclaimer/warning:
Some of the writings, lectures, films, or presentations in this course may include material that conflicts with the core beliefs of some students. Please review the syllabus carefully to see if the course is one that you are committed to taking. It is understood that the principles of academic freedom permit topics of all types, including those with offensive content, to be part of courses, lectures, and other academic pursuits. Much of humor is inherently offensive. Indeed, it is the offensive aspect that often makes for the humorous nature of a particular setting. The materials in this course consist of offensive content that is used or displayed in an educational setting for educational purposes. This course will present students with objects, pictures, videotapes, audio recordings, computer communications, literature, and lectures that are potentially—even certainly—offensive. Potentially offensive topics which will be discussed in the class include, but are not limited to, race and ethnic humor; hate humor; religion and religious humor; sexual, sexist and gender humor as well as linguistic humor. All topics are listed on this syllabus. Once again, offense or the potential for offense is innate to humor. This course cannot be taught fully or effectively without exposing students to offensive material.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND DATES:

Week # 1
Let’s laugh! Your brain and body on laughter!
Origin, evolution, and benefits of laughter: “Dogs may laugh but only cats get the joke!”

Week # 2
Can we all get along?
Normality, violation and offensiveness. Thank you for insulting … joking relationship.
Week #3
My culture, not yours!
Ethnic humor: its nature and functions. Popularity and demise.

Week #4
“Three clergymen – one Catholic, one Jewish, and one Episcopalian…”
Religious humor: sacred vs secular. Between appropriateness and hostility.

Week #5
“Sex and the City.”
Gender, sexuality and sexual inequality in humor. Aggression and power.

Week #6
Open discussion: what have we missed?

SUGGESTED READINGS:


This book is available through many sellers but… it is really expensive – just a warning.