



Jewish Humor and History

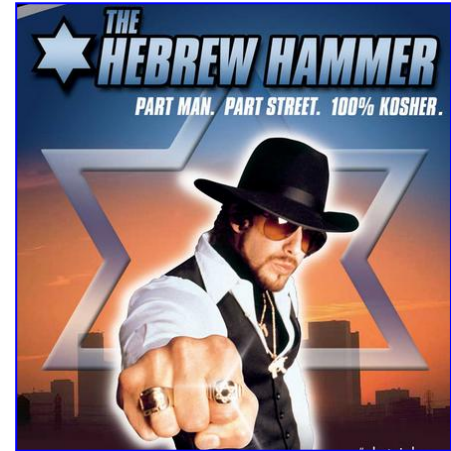
HST 495

Wed 6:30-9:15pm – Morton 212

Instructor: Dr. Jarrod Tanny, Fall 2010



Instructor: Dr. Jarrod Tanny
Phone: 910-962-7580
Email: tannyj@uncw.edu
Office: Morton 254
Office hours: Monday, 2:00-3pm
Tuesday, 3:30-5pm
Wednesday, 9:30-11am
Friday, 9:30-11am
Or by appointment



I encourage you either to drop by my office or to get in touch with me as often as you like. I am ready to help you with any problems or questions that you may have pertaining to the course. If there are other personal or academic related problems that may be affecting your performance or your attendance, do not hesitate to contact me. I am here to help you learn.

About this Course

Why are the Jews so funny? What is unique about Jewish humor? Why are so many comedians, satirical novelists, and film directors Jewish? And why do Jews ask so many questions?

This seminar will explore the rich universe of Jewish humor. We will trace its evolution from the Yiddish culture of the 19th-century shtetl all the way to 21st-century cinema and television, where Woody Allen, Jerry Seinfeld, Mel Brooks, and others have made American humor Jewish, and Jewish humor American. We will probe the significance of the schlemiel, the schlimazel, and the schnorrer, and why these cultural archetypes which emerged centuries ago in Eastern Europe still have such resonance today.



Jewish Humor and History
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Disclaimer – some of the material covered in this course may be deemed **racist, sexist, homophobic, excessively violent, sexually explicit, or politically incorrect**. This material **does not reflect** the beliefs of the instructor. If you are uncomfortable reading about, watching, or discussing these things then this course may not be for you. Such is the nature of ethnically based humor. Neither Jewish humor nor its cultural historical context can be understood without a close look at all its facets.

Grading and Course Requirements

Your final grade will be based on the following:

Presentations	30 %
Response Papers	20 %
Class participation	20 %
Research Paper	30 %

Attendance: Attending all classes is mandatory. If you miss more than two classes, your final will be reduced by 10% for every subsequent absence. If you are having a serious issue that is affecting your ability to come to class, please come and speak with me.

In order to pass the course, you need to complete **every assignment**. Please retain an **extra copy** or an electronic version of each written assignment until the instructor returns the one you submitted.



Jewish Humor and History
HST 495
Wed 6:30-9:15pm – Morton 212
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Written Assignments

Each student will complete a total of four written assignments.

1. First response paper, **due** in class on Wednesday, Sept. 1 (3-4 pages)
2. Second response paper, **due** in class on Wednesday, Oct 13 (4-5 papers)
3. Research paper proposal, **due** in class on Wednesday, Nov. 3 (1-2 pages)
4. Research paper, **due** on Tuesday, December 7 at 12pm (15-20 pages)

All written assignments must be submitted in Hard Copy. A **late assignment** will incur a penalty of 1/3 of a letter grade for each day that it is late. No assignments will be accepted after December 10, 12pm.

*****Your Final Paper is due on Tuesday December 7 at 12pm*****

Further details concerning the assignments will be provided over the course of the semester

Leading the Discussion / Presentations

Each student (usually in teams of two) will be given the task of leading the class discussion on two occasions. As discussion leader, your job is not to summarize the weekly material in an extended presentation. **Rather, your objective is to formulate questions based on the material and present them in class as a means of generating and guiding discussion.** Your goal is to get the other students to think about the material in the context of the course's larger themes and then voice their own opinions in an intelligent manner.

Each presenter needs to meet with the instructor at least **five days before** (by the **Friday** the week before) his or her presentation and should have completed the assigned readings by that



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HST 495
Wed 6:30-9:15pm – Morton 212
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day. The presenter(s) must also circulate some (but not all) of their discussion questions to the entire class via **email** no later than **three days before** (by the Sunday before) class.

Class Participation

Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the weekly course material even when it is not their week to present. This is a seminar, not a lecture course. Class participation will count for 20% of your grade.

Joke telling

This is a course on Jewish humor and this is your opportunity to become a Jewish comic! **Each student is expected to bring a Jewish-related joke to class each week.** You need not make up the joke (though if you do, all the better!), but it must come from a source outside of the assigned material. We will create a “joke bank” on Blackboard and then vote on the best one at the end of the semester. You should post your joke on the **Blackboard Wiki** for that particular week before the class meeting.

Academic Integrity

All members of UNCW’s community are expected to follow the **academic Honor Code**. Please read the UNCW Honor Code carefully (as covered in the UNCW **Student Handbook**).

Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated in this class.

Please be especially familiar with UNCW’s position on **plagiarism** as outlined in the UNCW Student Handbook. **Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty in which you take someone else’s ideas and represent them as your own.**



Jewish Humor and History
HST 495
Wed 6:30-9:15pm – Morton 212
Instructor: Dr. Jarrod Tanny, Fall 2010



Disabilities and Special Needs

Students with diagnosed disabilities should contact the **Office of Disability Services** (962-7555). Please give me a copy of the letter you receive from the Office of Disability Services detailing the class accommodations you may need. If you require accommodation for test-taking please make sure I have the referral letter no less than three days before the test.

Required Readings, Audio and Video Recordings

Students are expected to come to class each week having completed the assigned readings and the audio/visual material.

Books for purchase

The following required readings are available for purchase at the university's bookstore

- Mordecai Richler, Barney's Version.
- Sholem Aleichem, Tevye the Dairyman and The Railroad Stories.
- Philip Roth, Portnoy's Complaint.
- Joseph Telushkin, Jewish Humor: What the Best Jewish Jokes Say About the Jews.
- Laurence J. Epstein, Haunted Smile: The Story of Jewish Comedians in America
- Sarah Silverman, The Bedwetter: Stories of Courage, Redemption, and Pee
- Simcha Weinstein, Shtick Shift: Jewish Humor in the 21st Century
- Shalom Auslander, Foreskin's Lament
- Laurie Graff, The Shiksa Syndrome: A Novel
- Michael Wex, Born to Kvetch: Yiddish Language and Culture in All of Its Moods



Jewish Humor and History
HST 495
Wed 6:30-9:15pm – Morton 212
Instructor: Dr. Jarrod Tanny, Fall 2010



Readings and sound recordings on Blackboard

The other required readings and the audio material will be available for download as **pdf** files (for readings) and **MP3** files from **Blackboard (9.1)**. Material available on Blackboard will be marked with an asterisk (*)

Films and video recordings on reserve

Some weeks, the assigned material will include films and television shows. You are also responsible to watch these before class. They will be available on reserve at **Randall Library**. If there are assigned videos for the week you are the designated discussion leader/presenter, then I can loan you my copy well advance of your week.

Weekly Breakdown

Week 1 – Introduction (Wed. August 18)

Discuss the goals of the course and the assignments:

- Assign weekly discussion leaders

Week 2 – What is Jewish humor? (Wed. August 25)

Required Readings for Week 2

- Joseph Telushkin, Jewish Humor



Jewish Humor and History
HST 495
Wed 6:30-9:15pm – Morton 212
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- Sarah Cohen, “The Varieties of Jewish Humor” (Blackboard*)
- Jay Boyer, “*The Schlemiezel*” (Blackboard*)
- Emanuel S. Goldsmith, “Sholem Aleichem's humor of Affirmation and Survival” (Blackboard*)
- Richard Raskin, “The Origins and Evolution of a Classic Jewish Joke” (Blackboard*)
- Laurence J. Epstein, Haunted Smile (Appendix, pages 287-307)

Week 3 – The Shtetl (Wed. Sept. 1)

Readings for Week 3

- Sholem Aleichem, Tevye the Dairyman and The Railroad Stories (**Selections**)
- Stephen J. Zipperstein, “Shtetls There and Here” (Blackboard*)
- Solomon Simon, excerpts from The Wise Men of Chelm (Blackboard*)
- **Film** – Fiddler on the Roof

Assignment – Response Paper # 1, due in class

Week 4 – Class Cancelled – Rosh Hashannah (Wed. Sept. 8)

Week 5 – Yiddishkeit (Wed. Sept. 15)

Readings for Week 5

- Michael Wex, Born to Kvetch: Yiddish Language and Culture in All of Its Moods
- Sholem Aleichem, excerpt from Menakhem-Mendl (Blackboard*)
- Jackie Mason, excerpt from How to Talk Jewish (Blackboard*)
- Leo Rosten, excerpt from The New Joys of Yiddish (Blackboard*)



Jewish Humor and History
HST 495
Wed 6:30-9:15pm – Morton 212
Instructor: Dr. Jarrod Tanny, Fall 2010



Week 6 – Becoming American (Wed. Sept. 22)

Readings for Week 6

- Laurence J. Epstein, Haunted Smile (Intro., ch. 1-6, pages ix-xxii, 1-154)
- **Film** – The Frisco Kid
- **Film** – Brighton Beach Memoirs
- **Audio** – Mickey Katz, Greatest Shticks (Blackboard*)
 - [**Note** – Zip file includes Lyrics to “Duvid Crocket”]

Week 7 – Breaking Free (Wed. Sept. 29)

Readings for Week 7

- Laurence J. Epstein, Haunted Smile (ch. 7-9, pages 155-252)
- Lenny Bruce, excerpt from How to Talk Dirty and influence People (Blackboard*)
- Lenny Bruce, “The Jews” (Blackboard*)
- Sanford Pinsker, “Lenny Bruce” (Blackboard*)
- **Audio** – Lenny Bruce, selections (Blackboard*)
- **Audio** – Jackie Mason, selections (Blackboard*)

Week 8 – Anti-Semitism, Self-Hatred, and Inadequacy (Wed. Oct. 6)

Readings for Week 8

- Philip Roth, Portnoy's Complaint.

Week 9 – The Jew in a “Goyishe” World (Wed. Oct 13)

Readings for Week 9



Jewish Humor and History
HST 495
Wed 6:30-9:15pm – Morton 212
Instructor: Dr. Jarrod Tanny, Fall 2010



- Kristina Grish, excerpt from Boy Vey! (Blackboard*)
- **Film** – Annie Hall
- **TV Show** – Bridget Loves Bernie, “Pilot”
- **TV Show** – Curb Your Enthusiasm, “The Baptism” (Season 2, Disc 2)
- **TV Show** – Curb Your Enthusiasm, “Mary, Joseph and Larry” (Season 3, Disc 2)
- **TV Show** – Seinfeld, “The Conversion” (Season 5, Disc 3)
- **TV Show** – Seinfeld, “The Serenity Now” (Season 9, Disc 1)
- **Newspaper clippings** – Bridget Loves Bernie (Blackboard*)

Assignment – Response Paper # 2, due in class

Week 10 – Oh God! (Wed. Oct. 20)

Readings for Week 10

- Shalom Auslander, Foreskin’s Lament
- Shalom Auslander, “Prophet’s Dilemma” (Blackboard*)
- Henry D. Spalding, Encyclopedia of Jewish Humor, pages 59-67 (Blackboard*)
- Woody Allen, “The Sacrifice of Isaac” (Blackboard*)
- **Film** – A Serious Man

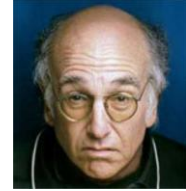
Week 11 – Holocaust and More Persecution (Wed. Oct 27)

Readings for Week 11

- S. Hanala Stadner, excerpt from My Parents Went Through the Holocaust and All I Got Was This Lousy T-shirt (Blackboard*)
- Tova Reich, excerpt from My Holocaust (Blackboard*)



Jewish Humor and History
HST 495
Wed 6:30-9:15pm – Morton 212
Instructor: Dr. Jarrod Tanny, Fall 2010



- Henry D. Spalding, Encyclopedia of Jewish Humor, pages 177-183, 201-206, 184-200 (Blackboard*) (in **2 pdf files**)
- **Film** – The Producers [**Note** – the 1968 version]
- **Film** – Life is Beautiful

Week 12 – The Jewish Family; The Jewish Mother (Wed. Nov. 3)

Readings for Week 12

- Dan Greenberg, How to be a Jewish Mother (Blackboard*)
- Laurie Graff, The Shiksa Syndrome: A Novel
- Henry D. Spalding, Encyclopedia of Jewish Humor, pages 378-394 (Blackboard*)

Assignment – Research paper proposal, due in class

Week 13 – Kosher at Last? The Jewish Female Comic (Wed. Nov. 10)

Readings for Week 13

- Sarah Cohen, “The Unkosher Comediennes” (Blackboard*)
- Laurence J. Epstein, Haunted Smile (ch. 10, pages 253-269)
- **Video** – Joan Rivers, Joan Rivers: Live at the London Palladium
- **Video** – Sarah Silverman, Jesus in Magic
- Joan Rivers, The Life and Hard Times of Heidi Abramowitz (Blackboard*) (in **2 pdf files**)

Week 14 – Swindlers, Renegades, Schnorrers (Wed. Nov. 17)

Readings for Week 14



Jewish Humor and History

HST 495

Wed 6:30-9:15pm – Morton 212

Instructor: Dr. Jarrod Tanny, Fall 2010



- Mordecai Richler, Barney's Version.
- **Film** – The Hebrew Hammer
- Isaac Babel, excerpts from Odessa Stories (Blackboard*)

Week 15 – The Future; The End of Exile? (Wed. Dec. 1)

Readings for Week 15

- Laurence J. Epstein, Haunted Smile (ch. 11-12, pages 270-285)
- Simcha Weinstein, Shtick Shift: Jewish Humor in the 21st Century
- **Film** – Borat

Assignment – Research Presentations

*****Your Final Paper is due on Tuesday December 7 at 12pm*****

Grading Standards

A	93-100	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	0-59



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Work in the A range displays clear excellence and will make clear, cogent historical arguments that demonstrably engage all reading materials.

Work in the B range displays solid effort and thoughtfulness if not clear excellence. It makes clear arguments that engage most if not all of the reading materials.

Work in the C range is fair. It may make solid arguments, but suffers from a lack of engagement with reading materials and perhaps lack of context as well.

Work in the D range is poor – It has some redeeming features but suffers from lack of sustained effort, lack of context, and lack of most engagement with reading materials.

Work in the F range is failing. It does not meet credit standards for a university level course.

The University Learning Center

Westside Hall, first floor, office #1056

910.962.7857

<http://www.uncw.edu/stuaff/uls/index.htm>

The University Learning Center's (ULC) mission is to help students become successful, independent learners. Tutoring at the ULC is NOT remediation: the ULC offers a different type of learning opportunity for those students who want to increase the quality of their education.

ULC services are free to all UNCW students and include the following:

--Learning Services (Basic Studies) <http://www.uncw.edu/stuaff/uls/tutoring.htm>

--The Math Lab <http://www.uncw.edu/stuaff/uls/math.htm>

--Study Skills <http://www.uncw.edu/stuaff/uls/study.htm>



Jewish Humor and History
HST 495
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--Supplemental Instruction <http://www.uncw.edu/stuaff/uls/si.htm>

--The Writing Center <http://www.uncw.edu/stuaff/uls/writing.htm>

ULC operating hours: <http://www.uncw.edu/stuaff/uls/hours.htm>

ULC Identity Statement and Vision: <http://www.uncw.edu/stuaff/uls/ULS-About.htm>