

Course Description of ASU Honors 394: *Humor across the Disciplines*

- The class was taught by Don and Alleen Nilsen in the fall semester of 2012 through a fellowship program between Arizona State University's Emeritus College and its Barrett Honors College. The class was taught in a seminar style with 21 upper division students, who met twice a week for 75 minutes and earned three hours of credit.
- The class was repeated in the fall of 2013 through a partnership between ASU's English Department and Project Humanities.
- The Nilsens also taught a revised version entitled Honors 394: *Symbols, Archetypes, and Visual Literacy* in the spring semester of 2015. The idea of focusing on visual literacy came from what the 2012 students taught the Nilsens about the importance of digital humor and how their generation both creates and receives much of its humor through photographs and other pictures.

Textbooks: In the first class, we used our own *Encyclopedia of 20-th Century American Humor* (Oryx Press, 2000, 360 pp.), but we soon discovered that it was too big and too expensive, and also too out-of-date for the "millennials" that we were teaching. Most of them had been in kindergarten the year it was published, so for the second and third classes, we created reading packets, and also relied on the students for teaching each other.

Student Assignments: Instead of writing traditional research papers, the major assignment for each student was to create a "digitally assisted" presentation, which in the last half of the semester they would share with their classmates: Here are the topics they chose:

1. Popular Internet Meme Patterns
2. Rap Music and Its Relationship to Joke Patterns and Changing Comedian Styles.
3. Humor in 140 Characters or Less.
4. Affinity between Laughters
5. What Makes a Video Turn Viral
6. The Humor of Mike Birbiglia
7. Memes as the Evolution of the One-Liner
8. The History of Photoshop and Digital Media
9. D.F.T.B.A ("Don't Forget to Be Awesome): Affiliative Humor in the Nerdfighter Fandom
10. How People Use Humor to Deal with Depression
11. What Makes People Share Clips
12. The Use of Different Voices, Accents, and Props
13. Relatable Posts in Pinterest
14. The Characteristics of Mass-Chained E-Mails
15. Cell Phone Humor
16. What Inspires Pop Language, i.e. The Influence of Viral Video
17. The Rise of Humorous, Internet-Exclusive Shows
18. Humor in the Military
19. Candid Photos on the Internet

20. Modern Professional Sports Humor
21. Humor as Used in Relationships

Power Points that the Nilsens created and showed: Note: These can be downloaded from <http://www.public.asu.edu/~dnilsen>.

1. ISHS History: The ASU Years Plus
2. Humor Theories
3. Political Humor
4. Gender Issues: Humor in Changing Times
5. Humor and Anthropology/Ethnic Humor
6. African-American Humor
7. Humor, Philosophy, and Religion
8. Irony and Paradox
9. Literature and Humor: Modes and Techniques
10. Parody and Other Literary Genres
11. Humor and Sociology
12. Humorous Names in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series
13. Computers and Humor
14. Television Humor
15. Stand-up Comedy with a Bite
16. Humor in American Pop Language
17. Humor in Business
18. Humor in Education
19. Humor and Iconicity in Music
20. Humor in Art and Architecture
21. Humor Connected to Gerontology and Gender
22. Conclusion: What We Learned Teaching HON 394

Other Successful Class Activities

The best part about teaching in the Honors College was the access we had to high quality digital equipment, including not only wi-fi, but also a document camera projector. Students could bring in a cartoon, a news clipping, a magazine cover, or even some symbolic object such as a ring, and set in on the platform. All it took was pushing a button to enable everyone in the class to see what was being talked about. This kind of show-and-tell was a good way to start class and to help students get-acquainted with each other.

That the classrooms were designed for seminar-style teaching was also helpful because we all sat around a big table, facing each other.

In the first class, we were ambitious enough to help the students sponsor an open-mike, joke-telling contest. The students loved it, but it took so much extra work that we didn't suggest the idea to the following two classes.