AM ST 100, SECTION 4
INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN STUDIES:
AMERICAN HORROR
INSTRUCTOR: JENNIFER DRISSEL

American Studies Program, Penn State Harrisburg
Sem/Time: Spring 2016, MWF 10:10am-11:00am, Room 314 E Olmsted
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Description of Course:
Zombies, monsters, disasters and more! This course uncovers the roots of American horror from its origins in folklore and literature, to the present day fears of the apocalyptic. We will explore how folklore, literature and film display the fears and anxieties of American society. Placing the theme of horror in a historical context, we will reflect upon the social and political significance of these texts. This course provides students with the tools necessary to conduct cultural analysis. Course requirements include active student participation, a midterm exam, two writing assignments, and a cumulative final exam.

Objectives of Course:
By the end of this course,
1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of what folklore is as well as how folklore influenced the development of the horror genre.
2. Students will recount the history of the American horror film through examining key movements and films.
3. Students will demonstrate the analysis of the American Horror film.
4. Students will practice strategies such as textual and historical analysis to identify social and political significance in film and media.
I strive to make learning relevant and exciting by exploring pop culture, media, and technology. Technology is constantly evolving, and as a result, I feel that we must embrace the technologies at hand and use them as critical tools. Forms of media such as film and television provide us with a window to analyze and reflect upon American culture.

Although I view technology as an important tool to guide learning, I feel that providing students with multiple methods of learning is imperative. By connecting mass media resources, such as film, television, and the Internet with more traditional approaches to learning, such as classroom discussions and group work, I enable students to engage with one another in multiple ways.

**Required Books:**


**Electronic Texts (Available on ANGEL)**


**Assignments:**

**Analytical Assignment #1: (15%)** Watch one of the following films: *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997, Jim Gillespie), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez), *Jeepers Creepers* (2001, Victor Salva), or *Urban Legend* (1998, Silvio Horta). All four of these films will be placed on reserve in the library and are also available to rent through Amazon. Write a 3-4 page analysis of how the film exhibits folkloric elements. A guide and sample of the assignment will be provided for students. **Assignment due 2/12/15.**

**Midterm Exam: (25%) 3/16/15**

**Analytical Assignment #2: (15%)** Chose a scene from horror movie and write a 3-4 page analysis of how the segment expresses social/political issues. A guide and sample of the assignment will be provided for students. **Assignment due 4/8/15**

**Final Exam: (35%) TBA**

**Participation: (10%)** Participation is based on constructive participation in class activities. This includes: coming to class having completed assigned readings and being able to discuss them, contributing to group work when placed in groups, remaining attentive during class, and coming to class on time.

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**Course Schedule:**

The schedule and contents of this syllabus are subject to change at any time. I will give you advanced notice should anything listed in the syllabus require change.

**Week 1: January 11, 13, 15**

Introduction/ What is American studies? What is folklore?

For our first class, we will review the syllabi, discuss important dates for the semester, and introduce ourselves. For the remainder of the week, we will first discuss what the field of American Studies is and then begin to discuss what folklore is.

Read: Simon Bronner “American Studies: A Discipline” and Ellis Chapters 1
Week 2: January 18- No Class (MLK Day) January 20, 22
Folklore and Horror
During week 2, we will explore the connection between folklore and horror. We will examine examples of folklore in literature.
Read: Ellis Chapters 2 and 3

Week 3: January 25, 27, 29
Folklore and the Horror Film
During week 3, we will examine examples of folklore as seen in the American Horror film.
Read: “Studying the Urban Legend Film” by Mikel J. Koven (Angel)
Read: Ellis Chapter 6, 7, or 8

Week 4: February 1, 3, 5
What is horror?
During week 4, we will discuss what can be characterized as horror.
Read: Worland Chapter 1
Read: “The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe

Week 5: February 8, 10, 12
The Origins of the Horror Film
During week 5, we will explore the birth of the American horror film.
Read: Worland Chapter 2

*** REMINDER!: First Analytical Assignment due on 2/12. (Assignment guide will be provided)

Week 6: February 15, 17, 19
Horror from the 1940s- 1960s
During week 6, we will discuss the development of the horror film from the 1940s- 1960s while focusing on key films that were released during this period.
Read: Worland Chapter 3

Week 7: February 22, 24, 26
American Anxieties of the 1950s
During week 7, we will examine how the horror genre reflected cultural and social issues of the 1950s
Read: Worland Chapter 8
**Week 8: February 29, March 2, 4**  
Social Reception to Horror  
During week 8, we will investigate the social reception of the horror genre in terms of censorship  
*Read: Worland Chapter 4*

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**Week 9: March 7, 9, 11**  
No Classes- Spring Break!!!  
(The library and offices will be open for limited hours).

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**Week 10: March 14, 16, 18**  
Folklore and Zombies/ Zombies and politics  
During the first half of week 10 we will investigate the origin of the zombie and connect its creation to folklore. During the second half of the week we will discuss the social and political significance of the Romero zombie films.  
*Watch: Night of the Living Dead (1968, George A. Romero) This film is on YouTube for free.*

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*** REMINDER!!! In Class Midterm Exam March 16th (An exam guide will be provided prior to exam)***

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**Week 11: March 21, 23, 25**  
The Exploitation Film  
During week 11 we will examine the gritty side of horror through viewing clips of controversial films of the 1960s and early 1970s.  
*Read: Kevin Heffernan, “Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold,” chapters 8 and 9 (Angel)*  
*Clip: Psycho, (1960, Alfred Hitchcock)*  
*Clip: The Last House on the Left, (1972, Wes Craven)*
**Week 12: March 28, 20 April 1**
The 1970s and the Slasher  
During week 12, we will begin to discuss the American slasher film.  
**Read:** Carol Clover, “Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film.” In *Men, Women and Chainsaws.* (Angel)

**Week 13: April 4, 6, 8**  
A continuation of the Slasher:  
**Read:** Worland Chapter 9  
**Watch:** *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974, Tobe Hooper).

***REMINDER!!! Second Analytical Assignment due 4/8/15***  
(Assignment guide will be provided)

**Week 14: April 11, 13, 15**  
Campy horror of the 1980s  
During week 14, we will take a break from the gruesome and explore the comedic side of horror.  
**Read:** Worland chapter 11  
**Watch:** *Evil Dead II* (Sam Rami, 1987).

**Week 15: April 18, 20, 22**  
Post 9/11 Horror/ Torture Porn  
During week 15, we will investigate how the horror film changed after 9/11, and discuss potential reasons for such.  
**Read:** Steve Jones, “Bend to Our Objectives’: ‘Torture Porn’ as Press Discourse,” in *Torture Porn: Popular Horror After Saw*  
Clip: *Hostel* (2005, Eli Roth)  

**Week 16: April 25, 27, 29**  
The Internet and horror/folklore  
During week 16, we will explore how horror has expanded on the Internet. We will also discuss where the horror genre is headed.  
**Read:** Tina M. Boyer, “the anatomy of a monster: the case of slender man.” In *Preternature: culture and historical studies on the Preternatural* (ANGEL).
REMINDER!! Final Exam TBD!

Policy Statements:

**Academic Freedom:** According to Penn State policy HR64, “The faculty member is expected to train students to think for themselves, and to provide them access to those materials which they need if they are to think intelligently. Hence, in giving instruction upon controversial matters the faculty member is expected to be of a fair and judicial mind, and to set forth justly, without supersession or innuendo, the divergent opinions of other investigators.” See http://guru.psu.edu/policies/OHR/hr64.html.

**Academic Integrity:** According to Penn State policy 49-20, Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception and is an education objective of this institution. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating of information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. The instructor can fail a student for major infractions. For more information, see http://www.psu.edu/dept/ufs/policies/47-00.html#49-20. The instructor reserves the right to use Turnitin as a plagiarism detection tool.

**Attendance:** Students are expected to complete every lesson in the course and are held responsible for all work covered in the course. A student whose irregular attendance causes him or her, in the judgment of the instructor, to become deficient scholastically, may run the risk of receiving a failing grade or receiving a lower grade than the student might have secured had the student been in regular attendance. Participation by students in the course should not be disruptive or offensive to other class members. See http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/42-00.html#42-27. I interpret this policy to mean that students who miss more than one quarter of the course or 3 classes can fail the course even if the student has passed written assignments.

**Cancellations Due to Weather, Emergencies, or Campus Closing:** When the Provost and Dean makes the decision to close the Harrisburg campus or delay the start of classes, the regional media will be notified at least two hours prior to the standard 8:00 a.m. reporting time for staff and before the start of the earliest scheduled class. The college will make its announcement in the following ways:

a. The college’s web page at www.hbg.psu.edu will carry a message regarding the status of classes.

b. The university’s email system will also be used to notify email subscribers about a weather emergency. Additionally, students, faculty, and staff are invited to register for PSUALERT at https://psualert.psu.edu/psualert/. The service features enhanced messaging capabilities and robust integration with the University’s other communications platforms.

c. An announcement will be placed on the college’s AUDIX telephone system at the 948-
6000 and 948-6029 numbers.

d. For information on the campus’s weather emergency policy, including media outlets carrying cancelation noties, see http://www.hbg.psu.edu/hbg/weather.html

**Penn State Harrisburg Emergency Procedures:** Penn State Harrisburg has an Emergency Response Plan for various disturbances and unusual events such as fires, spillage of hazardous materials, and violent behavior. For more information, see [http://www.hbg.psu.edu/EmergencyProceduresflyer.pdf](http://www.hbg.psu.edu/EmergencyProceduresflyer.pdf) (Emergency Procedures-Quick Reference) and [http://phpscripts.psu.edu/dept/lit/hbg/police/erp.php](http://phpscripts.psu.edu/dept/lit/hbg/police/erp.php) (Emergency Response Plan). Note the phone number for Police Services in the event of an emergency: 717-948-6232. In extreme emergencies, call 911. Offices that can provide assistance are Safety/Police Services at 717-979-7976 and Physical Plant at 717-948-6235. For campus safety policies and initiatives, see [http://btmt.psu.edu](http://btmt.psu.edu) and [http://www.police.psu.edu](http://www.police.psu.edu).

**Personal Digital Devices:** Personal digital devices such as cell phones, smartphones and personal digital assistants (e.g., iPods, droids), laptop and netbook computers, iPad and tablet computers can help students in academic settings but can also distract from learning. As a matter of policy, I insist that cell phones be turned off or silenced; texting and other communication on the cell phone are strictly prohibited in class. Laptops, netbooks, and tablet computers enabling notetaking and viewing of course materials are permitted but students must not engage in non-classroom tasks such as emailing, web browsing, e-shopping, and social networking in class. If they do not abide by this guideline, use of their devices in class will be prohibited.