Proposal for a class called *The Funnies: Culture of Humorous U. S. Print Cartoons*

By Larry Bush

This class will examine the history of cartoon art from Ben Franklin’s “Join or Die” in 1754 to current comics. This course will cover political cartoons, magazine cartoons, and cartoon strips. The course will stress the interchanging nature of the three forms as technology and culture evolve through the historical eras. There will also be a discussion of the rhetoric used by cartoonists to convey meaning through symbolism. Students will show proficiency in understanding the cartoonist’s intended meaning as well as know the history of the art form.

Proposed Texts:

Donnelly, Liza. *Funny Ladies: The New Yorker’s Greatest Women Cartoonists and their Cartoons*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005. Liza Donnelly is a regular contributor of cartoons to New Yorker magazine. She is also an instructor at Vassar College. This book follows the history of cartooning at the New Yorker magazine from its inception in 1925 to the 21st century through its women contributors. She also reveals the process of publishing and controversies in the industry.

journalism. Unlike other seminal books about editorial cartoons, this one analyzes the cultural aspects of the art form.

Schulz, Charles. *Peanuts, A Golden Celebration: The Art and the Story of the World’s Best-Loved Comic Strip*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1999. Charles M. Schulz is the most successful cartoonist in history as judged by both his income and the number of newspapers that carried his *Peanuts* strip. This book, a compilation of stories of his life and career, was published two years before his death. This is a look at the cultural phenomenon of Peanuts, the impact it had on Americans first, and secondarily, its impact in the many foreign languages in which it was published.

There will be articles from other sources that will be posted for students to read.

**Schedule:**

The following schedule is subject to change and adaptation as needed:

Week 1: Introduction of class, syllabus, and expectations. Discussion/presentation on the prehistory of U. S. cartoons including those from Europe that influenced American artists. Cultural impact will include terminology adopted by society that originated in cartoons (cartoonyms). Students will be instructed to begin reading *Drawn to Extremes* chapters 1 and 3.

Week 2: Discuss chapters 1 and 3 in *Drawn to Extremes*. Presentation on the high points of early cartoons: *Harper’s Weekly* pre-Civil War cartoons, Thomas Nast vs. William M. Tweed cartoons--1871, Blaine vs. Cleveland cartoons from *The World*--1884, Pennsylvania Muzzler
Law cartoons from the *North American*--1903, Art Young and *The Masses* cartoons from WWI.

Students will read an essay on the beginning of cartoon strips.

Week 3: Discuss yellow journalism and the early cartoon strips of *Hogan’s Alley, Mutt and Jeff*, and *Katzenjammer Kids*. Also introduce the term paper project to students so they can consider their options. Students will read *Funny Ladies* pp. 15-74.

Week 4: Discuss women cartoonists from Suffrage to Depression. Present suffrage era cartoons. Also present women’s cartoons from the New Woman Movement. Discuss Dale Messick and Edwina Dumm. Students will read chapters four and five of *Drawn to Extremes*.

Week 5: Discuss editorial cartooning through WWII. Changes in the rhetoric and flow of editorial cartoons by 1960s. Students are to turn in term paper proposals for approval. Students will read pp. 1-59 of *Peanuts*.

Week 6: Go to the library and see the original cartoons in the Mahan Collection. Discuss archiving of cartoons. Also discuss cartoon production and introduce class project of drawing cartoons for publication. Mid-term test. Students will read *Funny Ladies* pages 75-110.

Week 7: Introduce magazine cartoons of the mid-20th century. This includes the cartoons of various magazines including *Collier’s, Playboy, Sports Illustrated, True* and others. Introduce cartoonists Jan and Stan Berenstain, Charles Addams, Peter Arno, and Vargas. Discuss the
cultural implications of magazine cartoons. Present black cartoonists, Jackie Ormes and Oliver Harrington. Students will read *Peanuts* pages 60-139.

Week 8: Present and discuss media representations of humorous cartoons including pop music, “Alley Oop,” “Snoopy Versus the Red Baron,” and “Linus and Lucy;” on-line film of the plays *You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown, Addams Family*, and *Li’l Abner*, and clips from television and movies such as *Peanuts, Doonesbury, B. C.*, and others. Students will read *Drawn to Extremes* chapters 2 and 6.

Week 9: Discuss editorial cartoons from the 1970s and 80s including *Doonesbury* and *Mallard Fillmore*. This includes cartoons in support of and opposition to the War in Vietnam, depictions of the presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan. Students will read *Funny Ladies* pages 111-182.

Week 10: Discuss the rise of women and minority cartoonists during the late 20th and early 21st century. This includes *Cathy, For Better or Worse, Wee Pals, Gordo*, and *Boondocks*. Students will read *Peanuts* pages 140-252.

Week 11: Discuss late 20th and 21st century cartoons and their cultural impact. One class will be spent discussing the integration of cartoons with all-white characters. This includes *Calvin and Hobbes, Beetle Bailey, Peanuts, 9 Chickweed Lane, Garfield*, and *Blondie*. Students will read *Drawn to Extremes* chapters 7 and 8.
Week 12: Discuss current editorial cartoons and their content (Danish Muhammad cartoons). This includes isolating the artist’s voice and a presentation on embedded panels. Students will read *Funny Ladies* pages 183-206.

Week 13: Discuss current magazine cartoons. Assign students to give presentations on their term papers. Set expectations and use of media. Term papers are due.

Week 14: Students will make presentations on their topics.

Week 15: Final exam.

**Grading:**

Students will be graded on a 1000 point scale:

- 900 to 1000 is an A
- 800 to 899 is a B
- 700 to 799 is a C
- 600 to 699 is a D
- 599 and below is an F

Grading is based on the following criteria:

- Class participation is 10%
- Mid-term test is 30%
- Term paper is 30%
Final test is 30%

**Term Paper Guidelines**

Students will write a term paper of four to six pages. Students will compare and contrast two cartoonists, two cartoon strips, or two cartoons. The objective is to research their subjects and discuss the similarities and differences between them. The students will devise a question that they will answer in their research. I will approve all of the students’ proposals by the fifth week of the semester. Students will be allowed to submit a rough draft to me to be corrected by the 11th week. Papers are due during week 13.

**Extra Credit**

Students will be encouraged to draw and submit editorial cartoons to any publication. They will be given 25 extra credit points for every cartoon that is published with their by-line. Submissions must be sent to me as they are submitting to publications. Students will be encouraged especially to draw cartoons satirizing USF issues and submit them to the Oracle. If there is enough interest in drawing cartoons and satirizing campus activities a gallery showing may be arranged.