

Shattering The Myth

At Iowa State U., if a virgin walks under a certain tower, a brick is supposed to fall on her head. However, few, if any, such accidents have been reported to the campus hospital.

At the U. of Wisconsin, senior Eric Fair says, "There's a statue of Abraham Lincoln on Bascom Hill. If a virgin walks in front of the statue, Abe will rise up out of his chair."

"Of course," he adds, "I haven't seen him walking around."

Almost every college has its own stories, its own collection of strange and bizarre campus myths. They begin as rumor and, as they are passed down to incoming classes (full of gullible freshmen), gradually become part of the school's history.

According to Jan Brunvand, a professor of English and folklore at the U. of Utah, any group of people which gets together in one place ends up developing legends. Brunvand began tracking urban legends three decades ago to illustrate to his students that oral culture is alive and well in the information age. "Many of my students thought folklore was something from the past," he says. "I wanted to show them that they knew folklore, too."

Virgin myths are just one variety of legends popular among students.

Sarah Evans, a sophomore at Butler U., heard a story about a fraternity house at her school that was abandoned by its members 99 years ago. "This is a true story," Evans says. "They were more like a cult than a fraternity. They did a lot of weird stuff — rituals and maybe Satan worship. Then they sexually assaulted their house mother and she ended up pregnant."

According to the story, the fraternity was banished from campus for 100 years, making them eligible to return next year.

But Brunvand doesn't think Butler U. has too much to worry about. He says any story that begins, "This is a true story," probably isn't.

Have you heard the one about the lipstick on the mirror? Neil Grant, a sophomore at Iowa State, says "a friend of a friend" told him this one:

A student, returning to her dorm room, finds the door ajar. Nothing seems out of order, except that the closet door is slightly open. Afraid to look inside the closet, the student leaves quickly for the library. Several hours later, she returns to find police and an ambulance outside her building. In her room, she finds the mutilated body of her roommate and a message written in lipstick on the mirror saying, "You should have looked in the closet."

According to Harry Oster, who teaches folklore at the U. of Iowa, "The most popular legends are those that tell of horrifying or extraordinary circumstances. People are always interested in the strange or the horrible."

Oster says these kinds of horror stories may serve a purpose for both the teller and the audience. "From a psychological view they bring out people's deepest fears," he says. "Expressing them out loud takes the edge off the fear."



JOHN FOUNTAIN: WESTERN MICHIGAN U.

Medical students seem to be prime targets for morbid stories. According to one, Boston medical students stole the arm off of a cadaver, put it in a jacket sleeve with a dollar bill sewn between the index finger and the thumb, then extended the arm — with the money attached — to a toll taker on the Tobin Bridge. When the man took the money, legend has it the whole arm fell into the booth. Brunvand says the tollbooth story can be traced as far back as the 1930s.

Students also perpetuate myths related to academics. Ask any group of students how long you have to wait for a professor to show up for class and you'll probably get a variety of answers. "I think it's 10 minutes," says junior Jeff Burke. "It's in some book or something."

Junior Jeannie Young heard differently. "For a professor, I thought it was 15 minutes," she says. "For a teacher's assistant, I think it's 10. The professor gets more time because he might be busier," Brunvand says there is no such waiting limit.

He also says he's never heard of a school that actually implemented the infamous "suicide rule." But don't try telling that to Iowa sophomore Annabelle Garcia, who believes it wholeheartedly.

"If your roommate [commits suicide], you get a 4.0," Garcia says. "I hope my roommate dies tomorrow." ☪

Political watch Correctness

TALLAHASSEE, FLA. — Last fall, Gerald Gee, professor of public relations at Florida A&M, said the phrase "nigger mentality" during a classroom discussion. This fall, he won't be teaching there.

The administration of Florida A&M, a historically black university, has decided not to renew his contract for the next academic year. "In part, his comment had something to do with our decision," says Provost and Vice President Richard Hogg.

Gee, who is white, explains, "I told [the class] I was about to say something and use a term that is offensive to me and I suspect to [students], too. I said, 'A person who does not take advantage of opportunities that are there or who doesn't make opportunities for themselves and others, has a kind of 'nigger' mentality — the sort of thinking that can keep one on the back of the bus, forever.'"

In a letter to the administration, seven of Gee's students said his remarks were "detrimental to his relationship with many students in our class." ■ **Sharla Head, The FAMUan, Florida A&M**

FLAGSTAFF, ARIZ. — White male professors at Northern Arizona U. are crying foul because the university gave raises to minority and female faculty only.

Last May, a university study found that 75 female faculty and 208 male faculty qualified for raises. Of the 75 female candidates, all 11 minorities and 58 of the white faculty members received raises. Of the 208 male candidates, only the 16 minorities received raises.

The raises ranged from \$183 to \$6,945 per year.

Nearly 150 of the white male faculty are pressing a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

"We did it to protect the rights of the affected faculty," says Bob Poirier, a political science professor who filed the complaint. The group is considering filing a lawsuit against NAU for civil rights violations.

Interim NAU President Patsy Reed says that former President Eugene Hughes gave the raises to correct long-standing pay differences between white male faculty and female and minority faculty.

"The university has not found any of the actions to be unlawful," Reed says. She notes, however, that the faculty senate is conducting an investigation to be reported in April. ■ **Lukas Velush, The Lumberjack, Northern Arizona U.**

TUSCALOOSA, ALA. — For most of last football season, the marching band at the U. of Alabama carried flags with crosses on them as part of a halftime show celebrating the Old South. But late in November, they returned from Thanksgiving break to find that the crosses had been removed.

Apparently, some students had complained about the crosses, and several alumni had suggested "that the use of the flags seemed to suggest an endorsement for a particular religious faith in the show," says Don Crump, assistant vice president for academic affairs.

"We felt that we might have been offensive to some people," says Band Director Kathryn Mann. "Since we're there to entertain, we decided to remove them. Our intent is not to preach a message."

Stephanie Aldrich, a senior and captain of the band's color guard, says band members felt the decision was "kind of ridiculous. I think this is kind of taken to an extreme." ■ **Sean Kelley, The Crimson White, U. of Alabama**

By **Tory Brecht, The Daily Iowan, U. of Iowa**