

Ghost Folklore at Ripon College

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Abstract

Ghost folklore has existed in most cultures throughout history. While many would consider the days of ghouls and superstitions to be long gone, it seems that ghost stories are thriving. In fact, ghost stories are of great importance to contemporary culture. This case study of a small, purportedly haunted, Midwestern college, provides insight into the phenomenon of American college campus folklore. Using various anthropological theories, this study explores the prevalence of belief in ghosts, various ghost stories and, more importantly, what these stories reflect about campus culture.

Special Thanks

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Introduction

Of all the horrors, ghosts scare me the most. Ghosts, unlike so many other monsters, are uniquely human. They are our dead, our ancestors, our past. They are us. Ghosts do not follow the laws of our world, because they only partially belong in it. They do not obey the laws of space and time, you cannot harm them, you cannot fight them, you cannot run from them. You can only face ghosts and, in so doing, face human mortality. This uncertainty of what lies beyond death is humankind's greatest fear. It is no wonder that ghost folklore proliferates virtually all cultures across all times and that college campuses are no exception. However, college campus ghost stories do differ significantly from typical ghost folklore. In these stories, ghosts are "no longer on the foggy moors or in old stone castles but instead in the office next door, in the microchips of our printers, in our mobile phones, and wandering aimlessly about in the heads of both [professors] and our students" (Kochhar-Lindgren 2009:5-6). Moreover, "these stories told among young people [...] show the emergence of an autonomous youth culture" (Bosco 2007:785-786). Ghost lore are a rite of passage, a way to share information, to build group solidarity, to cope with a liminal stage of life between adolescence and adulthood, and to share in the historical background of the college (Tucker et al 2007). It is made all the more relevant because of the connections between ghosts, history, rapid social change, technological change, tradition and uncertainty in a university setting (Kochhar-Lindgren 2009).

A well-known ghost folklorist, Elizabeth Tucker, says "the intricacies of college storytelling, embedded within the matrix of campus life and cultural history, suggest a need for analysis with a social, psychological, and cultural orientation" (Tucker 2007:5). That is the goal of this research. Ghost stories connect us to our past by bringing it to our present. It helps us to

connect to places and times that are no longer our own. Ghost stories also let us explore anger, fragility, pain, suffering and the darker aspects of our personal and collective past. They help us confront pain, mortality, morality and daily struggles. Ultimately they help us to individually and communally form a sense of identity. (Herrmann 2014). This research explores exactly how Ripon College ghost lore accomplishes all of these tasks and its significance for the campus, anthropology, and folklore studies.

Theoretical Framework

“Anthropology... is simply the attempt of human beings to study and hence to understand themselves at all times and all places” (Mohamad Diah, et al. 2014: 155) That is why anthropology is well suited to the study of ghost folklore. Ghost stories, by their very nature, transcend time and place. The borders between past and present become blurred and different ways of life collide. Moreover, anthropology provides several different theories through which ghost lore, and its significance, can be analyzed. The theories that seem most applicable to this case study are post-structuralism, symbolic interactionism and functionalism.

It seems most appropriate to explain the application of these three theories through an example of a ghost story given me by a professor of the Ripon College Sociology and Anthropology Department. The story is about a young female servant who is unfairly punished by her master. Her master kills her by dragging her behind his horse, and her angry and tormented spirit haunts the place where it happened. In the earlier version of the story, she is a white indentured servant, in the version told around the American Civil War era, she is a black slave, and in the late 1800s and early 1900s she is again a white indentured servant.

Initially, this is just the story of an unfortunate servant who is abused and killed by a cruel master, an isolated and specific incident. Yet, the impact of the story lies not in the specific

incident but, rather, the symbolic meaning it has for both audience and story teller. The events of the folktale symbolize larger issues of power struggles, justice, cruelty, mortality and suffering. As the audience hears the story, they are forced to confront and consider these topics. In general, the specific details of ghost stories are rife with symbolic meaning. This personal experience of the story, charged with symbolic meaning, is the source of its intrigue and horror.

Some of the symbolism depends on context. Post-structuralist theory emphasizes context, which is crucial to understanding ghost stories. The time and setting of the story as well as the time and setting in which the story is told make a huge impact. The language used and the opinions of the people probably changed. The changes to the story, however, do not make the story any less valid. While there may be objective facts, there is the subjective telling of ghost stories over time. For instance, the context of the Civil War era story is the civil war and the abolitionist movement, explaining the change in the ghost's race. In the 1800-1900s, factories notoriously took advantage of workers, and labor unions were starting to form as workers struggled to assert their rights. This context probably changed the way the story was told and the way it was received, which connects with the functionalist approach.

As seen in the previous example, the context modified the story and its perception. However, a deeper analysis also reveals a change in the function of the story. The earlier version served as a criticism of indentured servitude or, at the very least, of cruel masters. Later, the story turned into an objection to the enslavement of African-Americans. Afterwards, it was most likely used as an analogy for the abuse of working women in the industrial era. In this way, one of the functions of the story was changed over time to adapt to changes in society while consistently being a commentary on the abuse of power. In these ways, functionalism, as well as post-structuralism and symbolic interactionism, reveal that ghost stories are more than

“superstitions...opinions which stand over from a lower into a higher state of culture... vestigial opinions no longer held as valid” (Powell 1900:1)

Field Site Description

The field site for this study is Ripon College. It is a small liberal arts college situated in the town of Ripon, Wisconsin (PIM 2016). It was founded in 1851 as a college preparatory school and, in 1963, it was into a four-year college. The first class consisted of four female students who graduated in 1867 (PIM 2016). The campus has twenty-five buildings located on 250 acres of land. The three original buildings (East Hall, Smith Hall, and West Hall) are still in use (PIM 2016). In 1995, these three buildings, as well as seven others, were listed in the National Register of Historic places (PIM 2016). The college is also adjacent to a graveyard. In fact, the cemetery and the college were built towards each other, and it is now located in the center of the campus. Many of the graves are from the 1800s onward, with some, according to one informant, dating back even earlier. At the college, there are approximately 800 undergraduate students and 64 full-time faculty (PIM 2016).

The site was chosen for this study for several reasons. Accessibility of the site is an essential part of fieldwork (Angrosino 2007, Bosco 2007). As a student, I have full access to the campus and most of the buildings. This allows for casual conversations with students, staff and faculty about ghosts and spur-of-the-moment pursuits of potential leads, such as a late-night excursion to a graveyard with an informant who felt it essential that I get a “feel for the spirits” in order to better understand the culture and folklore. Moreover, the small size of the college makes it a manageable case study for one-person research. The site is also ideal because of its long history and “ghostly” setting. Generally speaking, sites that are rumored to be haunted are usually older (Tucker 2007). Additionally, the historical nature of the campus and its proximity

to the cemetery makes it ideal for ghost centered folklore. Most importantly, Ripon is well known as a haunted college. As of 2014, Mysterious Heartland declared Ripon the second most haunted college in the Midwest. These factors make it an ideal location to study ghost folklore at a college campus.

Methodology and Data Collection

The methodology for the research was multifaceted in order to obtain a more accurate and complex picture of the roll of ghost folklore at Ripon College (Angrosino 2007; Bosco 2007; Donovan et al 1998; Guerin & Miyazaki 2006; Noymer 2001; Lipka and Pew Research Center 2015; YouGov and The Huffington Post 2012). Research consisted of interviews, focus groups, surveys, and scholarly sources (Angrosino 2007; Bosco 2007; Donovan et al 1998; Guerin & Miyazaki 2006; Noymer 2001; Lipka and Pew Research Center 2015; YouGov and The Huffington Post 2012).

Three interviews were carried out with four informants. The first interview involved two women, who asked to be interviewed together since they are friends and felt they could jog the other's memory. Their names had been giving to me by various professors because of their extensive experience with ghosts and ghost folklore and their openness on the subject. Both were former employees of the college and one woman had also been a student. Both have been and continue to be involved with the college, college events, and ghost folklore. The other two interviewees were students, one male and one female. The purpose of the interviews were to get firsthand, in-depth information about ghost experiences and folklore, the experience of that aspect of Ripon College culture, and to hear the ghost stories told in the words of members of the culture.

Focus groups were conducted in order to analyze the meaning of some of the most popular ghost stories at Ripon. Two focus groups were conducted. For the focus groups, typed Ripon College ghost stories (provided by a professor of the Sociology and Anthropology Department of Ripon College) were used. Then, participants were asked to discuss the story and the questions as a group and to write down anything they agreed with. The focus group read and analyzed the same three stories. The first group consisted of five students with all grades and both genders being represented. The second group consisted of three males, all of whom were upperclassmen. (See Figure 3)

This project also made use of surveys. Two surveys were prepared, with minor differences. One survey was sent out to staff, faculty, and retirees. The other was sent out to the student body. The staff, faculty, and retiree survey had fewer demographic questions in order to protect identity. Also, it excluded certain questions that were not relevant (See Appendix). The surveys were used to gather data on general beliefs about ghosts and opinions on ghost folklore at Ripon College. (See Figure 4 and 5)

Last of all, scholarly articles were used in order to categorize and analyze the data. These sources greatly informed questions asked during interviews and surveys. They also provided examples, both overtly and implicitly, of the application of the aforementioned anthropological theories and explored themes that were noticed within Ripon's own ghost lore. Additionally, sources provided explanations for oral traditions and how they are transmitted. Perhaps most importantly, the sources explained the importance of this sort of research and the influence it can have towards understanding campus culture, history, interconnectedness, reality, death, change, and human narrative.

Findings and Analysis

The sample size for the surveys from the faculty staff and retirees were 64 participants while 92 students participated in the student survey. Of those who responded, approximately 18% of FSRs (faculty, staff, and retirees) were not aware of any ghost stories or that Ripon is rumored to be haunted. In contrast, only 2% of students were unaware of the ghost folklore and haunted status of the college with 78% of students knowing at least some of the specific ghost stories. Despite this, 64% of faculty, staff and retirees also know some ghost stories. Casual conversation seems to be the primary method/medium through which ghost stories are shared, especially among FSRs, but other significant mediums are online articles and in class. The most well-known ghost stories among students seem to be the basketball player and Raphael the theater ghost while among FSRs, it is Raphael the theater ghost and the Lane library archive ghost. (See Figure 4 and Figure 5)

Interestingly, many of the FSRs skipped the question concerning knowledge of specific ghost stories as well as which buildings were haunted, with some indicating in the comments that the reason is that they did not know of any stories or haunted buildings. In contrast, almost all students filled out these two questions on the survey. Another interesting pattern is that knowledge of buildings that were haunted, both academic and dormitories, were selected more or less equally by students while professors were far less likely to be aware of any of the dorms being purportedly haunted (only between 2% and 4%). Possibly, this reflects the FSR's limited involvement in non-academic buildings such as dorms. According to the survey, 50% of students are not likely to pass on Ripon College ghost stories. Some of the common reasons listed for not doing so were being uninterested, not wanting to scare others, and not knowing any of the stories in detail. (See Figure 4 and Figure 5)

Despite this, 67% of students are somewhat interested or very interested in Ripon College ghost stories. 51.5% of students believe in ghosts. This is particularly interesting since only 16% of students claim to have had any ghostly experiences. In contrast, only 35.5% of FSRs believe in ghosts and almost 79% have not had any ghostly experiences. For comparison, two national polls say about 45% of Americans believe in ghosts, with about 28% claiming to have had an experience with a ghost (Lipka and Pew Research Center 2015, YouGov and The Huffington Post 2012). Based on these figures, it seems that the Ripon College community is similar to the rest of America, with more students and less FSRs believing in ghosts than average. It is interesting to note that, according to one study “going to college increases students’ belief in ghosts” though the source was not able to explain why this might be the case (Tucker 2007:6). (See Figure 4 and Figure 5).

When asked what purpose they believe these ghost stories serve, some common responses were: entertainment, bonding and historical connection. Survey taker #32 said that they are “To explain some things that are hard to explain in other ways. To explore the unknowable things that lie beyond death. To feel the thrill of safe fear. To share it with others in a community. To participate in a long heritage of people associated with a common institution.” Another answered “They represent the circle of life and connect past generations to those who are presently on campus and those who will be in the future.” They make us feel connected to the history of the College, not the objective history of facts, but the history of individual people who lived their everyday lives on this campus and to whom we may feel an emotional connection”. Not all were so enthusiastic, with survey taker #23 saying the purpose was “None. I think it's silly, to be blunt. We should be focusing on reality, not supernatural goofiness.” Others just

explained the stories as a way to scare people or just a consequence of having such an old school and a graveyard.

According to the focus groups, the first story read (that of a student who died in a car crash haunting a fraternity) had several layers of meaning. They noted that the tragic component seemed to lie in the “loss of youth and potential” which is the main goal of going to college. The group discussed the ghost story as a way to cope with mortality and death anxiety as well as keeping the memory of the student alive. They also noted that the events of the story “seem to happen late at night or while studying” which may show that “stress and tiredness may play tricks on the mind”. They went on to discuss other, more scientific explanations for the events such as mental illness, pranks, and faulty heating systems. They also noted that, being a fraternity ghost, it might be a way to bond fraternity members together.

The second story the focus group read is one where students in a lounge use a Ouija board to contact the spirit of a dead boy from the 1800s. The students asked the ghost several questions about himself and about academic subjects. The groups noted that, once again, there was the theme of a young person dying, and other tropes, like the skeptical student being proved wrong and the dichotomy of good and evil spirits. Overall they saw relatable themes such as “the idea of experimentation, learning, and trying new concepts” in college as well as camaraderie and rule following. The second focus group also mentioned the commercialization of horror and “cheap supernatural entertainment” reflecting both the thriftiness of cash-strapped students and contemporary consumerism.

“This is why we don’t get candles” was the first moral one of the focus groups got from the third story. In the story, a demon is accidentally summoned due to a mispronunciation during a ritual in a dorm hallway. The demon proceeds to haunt the college after it is freed when a candle

for the pentagram is knocked over as the students run away. The focus groups noted how making mistakes had grave consequences and the importance of rule following and careful preparation. They also mentioned that the demon, and other ghosts, functioned as a scapegoat for unexplained experiences or mental illness. One of the groups noted the fantasy like nature of the story (a clear end goal, rules, and an evil opponent) as well as the ability to “exert power and will, having power and control, venting the frustration of feeling powerless” a feeling the focus group felt was universal among college students who have debts, deadlines, professors, jobs and family pressures.

Most experts think that oral traditions, like ghost stories, are transmitted because of the cognitive inclination to search for meaning (Guerin and Miyazaki 2006). The listener analyzes and searches for the meaning in the story being told. The stories are meant to impart important relevant information and alleviate anxieties and are modified to best suit this purpose (Guerin and Miyazaki 2006). Two researchers, Guerin and Miyazaki disagree. They suggest that the stories are mainly meant to entertain and thereby enhance social relationships (Guerin and Miyazaki 2006). Indeed, many students and FSRs also had this opinion. One interviewee said that ghost stories “draw people together” even if it is only “a subset” who take an active interest. Another interviewee said it allows for “an opening up, a bonding” among students. It is undeniably a core purpose of ghost stories that should not be underemphasized.

However, many in the Ripon community disagreed. As mentioned in the focus groups, many students were able to relate to aspects of the story and found ways it resonated with their experience of campus culture and the problems they face. They recognized lessons on caution, preparedness, rule following, but also the importance of experimentation, questioning beliefs, and relying on friend groups to overcome difficult situations. In these ways, the stories go

beyond entertainment and a bonding activity to a reflection of cultural characteristics with intricate, sometimes metaphorical meaning.

Many dismiss ghosts and ghost tales on the ground that it is superstition, but “whether or not ghosts exists, they are psychologically real” (Tucker 2007:15). And in many ways, ghost stories reveal much about the psychology of Ripon college students both individually and collectively. One interviewee said “ghost stories provide a little glimpse into the unknown” and that it resonates with young people because ghosts, like them, are in a “liminal stage” while it resonates with older people because of mature understanding of mortality that is lacking in youth. A student in a focus group emphasized how it seemed that the stories read were ways to cope with both practical and existential anxieties. In a practical sense, ghosts explained changes or unexpected events, could tell students their grades or explained an otherwise ambiguous sense of fear. Existentially, they are used to cope with death and what may happen after. The stories were also noted as a way to alleviate frustrations and feelings of powerlessness experienced by some students. The students in the stories had some degree of control over the spirits they interacted with and could summon, chase, dismiss, and even banish them. College students have to obey professors, staff and employers, follow rules, pay debts, take tests, etc, which can, according to the focus group, cause a sense of powerlessness and entrapment. Ghost stories create a safe place in which to explore these feelings.

Many participants in the surveys, interviews, and focus group mentioned the importance of the historical connection ghost folklore provides. While studies note that college oral tradition suffers from the “short-term collective memories of a student body” where each generation lasts only four years, they nonetheless are a key way to preserve historical identity and knowledge and to feel connected to individuals of the past (Noymer 2001: 23). In one interview, a student noted

that ghost folklore seems to be dying out probably due to skeptics, while another said that people are sharing these stories more openly than in the past. This brought up the issue of transmitting these stories and what it means for the future of Ripon College folklore. Some ghost stories can last years and even generations while others die out quickly and vocal skeptics more often contribute to the continuation of an urban legend rather than to its decline (Noymer 2001). Additionally, stories with negative aspects or consequences are the most likely oral traditions to be transmitted, making ghost stories ideal candidates for continuation (DiFonzo and Prashant, 2007)

Overall, Ripon College folklore seems to be a mostly oral tradition, with the stories passed down in occasional casual conversation. However, technology is playing an increasingly important role as many students reported reading articles about the stories (Fernback 2003). Regardless most students were not planning on passing down the folklore to future students, which could mean the eventual erosion or loss of these stories. This makes the documentation of them all the more important historically and culturally so that the connection with the past can be maintained.

Positionality and Reflexivity

I have always had a strong interest in the macabre, particularly in ghost stories. I believe in the soul, and therefore I think ghosts are not completely out of the realm of possibility, though I am a skeptic when it comes to ghost stories. Yet, I intensely enjoy them. It is possible my interest started watching shows like *The Twilight Zone* and reading Edgar Allan Poe stories as a kid. As I got older, I got into similar and darker movies, YouTube channels and shows like *American Horror Story*. When I am very bored, I will occasionally watch a ghost hunting show. My interest, while casual, did not stop there. I also enjoyed reading firsthand accounts of haunted

places or hearing stories from people who claimed to have experiences. It struck me that ghost stories often had similar themes, similar ways of being told, yet still managed to have unique cultural variations. Once I realized I was attending one of the most haunted colleges in the US, I decided that a project exploring those features would be interesting and challenging, and could possibly contribute to documenting a fragment of the cultural heritage of the college.

I believe my positionality is overall an asset to my research project. While I am a skeptic, I approach the subject and my informants with an open mind. I can relate to and build rapport with believers and non-believers alike. Moreover, I am open to their suggestions on how to further my research. For instance, I hiked to allegedly haunted areas and spent some time in the graveyard with a research participant who told me they felt that seeing and experiencing these places is essential if I am to understand the folklore and the facet of culture it reveals. Another benefit of my positionality is being a student. This allowed me to talk easily with other students and gave me plenty of opportunities to strike up casual conversations and find leads. In this way, I found a few students who were useful participants and very knowledgeable about ghost stories and the sub-culture of Ripon made up of students interested in ghosts. Students were also more likely to be candid and explain their opinions and experiences in their own words. If interviewed by a professor, for example, they would have probably been more formal or left out certain details. As a student, I was also able to interact with professors who were eager to assist a student in her research.

Despite the benefits of my positionality, there are some limitations and potential biases. As a student, I am a member of the culture I am studying. Being a member of the society limits one's ability to be objective and/or notice nuances that seem common to insiders but are notable to outsiders. Additionally, as a member of the Ripon community, I may be biased when I

emphasize the significance this case study has on the study of folklore. My own interest in the topic may overemphasize the importance of ghost stories at Ripon College. Another bias could also be my extensive experience with English courses and literary analysis. While this can be an asset when analyzing ghost stories, it could also lead me to project certain themes and purposes that are not perceived by the larger student body. However, this may also be true of anthropological theories. In other words, my interpretation of the folklore and its function may not be consistent with the reality. These biases and the ways in which I have attempted to mitigate them are explored further in the section “Limitations and Further Study.”

Ethical Considerations

Threats to participants were no more than those encountered in everyday life and no deception was used in my research. It is possible that some of my interview questions could have been perceived as intrusive or caused discomfort to the subject. Additionally, topics that could arise during interview or focus groups could also cause discomfort or become intrusive. I mitigated this risk by reminding the participants that they did not have to answer my questions and by remaining attentive to signs of distress throughout the interviews and focus groups. There is also the threat to privacy since some information given during the interviews might be considered personal. In order to mitigate this, I have coded my notes on the interviews and focus groups so names cannot be traced to specific individuals. The notes taken during the interviews were typed up and the original handwritten copies were disposed. The typed notes are stored on my personal password-protected computer. My field notes are also stored on my password-protected computer.

During the course of my work, a significant ethical concern did arise. After I had made my survey, but before it was sent out, the campus received the tragic news that a student had

passed away. Under the circumstances, I deemed that it was not appropriate to carry out the survey about ghosts at the time. I felt that the implicit topics of death and some of the questions could cause additional harm to some students. In particular, I was concerned about a question asking about feelings of communicating with the dead. With this in mind, and after consulting with my professor and classmates, I decided to delay sending out my survey for almost three weeks and add a disclaimer reinforcing that survey participation is voluntary and that participants may stop at any time. In short, I attempted to mitigate the risks as much as possible.

Limitations and Future Study

The study, while it has some significant limitations, still provides valuable data as a case study for college campus ghost folklore. One limitation is my personal position. As a current student at Ripon, and one interested in the ghost lore of the campus, there is a degree of bias and I may not notice some key features that would stand out to an ‘outsider’. There are also some limitations in the way the research was conducted. Due to time constraints, I was only able to conduct a limited number of focus groups and interviews. In order to have more substantial results, more interviews and focus groups with students, faculty and staff would be required. Because of this, my study is only indicative of the possible reality of ghost lore and Ripon College culture. The survey was also imperfect and, in a future study, modifications to the questions could be made in order to attain more complete and comparative data. For instance, a “does not apply” answer would be added to several of the questions. Some features of the research were beyond my control but are also notable limitations. For instance, the artificial nature of the interviews and focus groups do not coincide with the typical, more casual environment for the sharing of ghost stories. Another limitation is the lack of information available on Ripon College ghost lore. While I was provided with some articles and archives that

contained ghost stories recorded by students, there was only one version of each ghost story with varying degrees of detail. Also, many students are unfamiliar with specific stories and simply know the campus is rumored to be haunted. This made finding informants who could tell me ghost stories in their own words more difficult than had been anticipated. Another concern in any fieldwork is honesty and completeness of information. I cannot be completely certain that all answers given in the survey, interviews or focus groups are accurate or complete. While it is important to consider these shortcomings, the research still lends some valuable results and, perhaps more importantly, documents additional information on ghost folklore at the college that can be used for future research.

Future research could and should be done in several areas. First and foremost, more of the ghost stories and several versions of each should be documented in writing if possible. This would allow for greater analysis and comparison. Additionally, I would recommend a data base where students can report ghost activity or stories they have heard, creating a community resource. This record would allow for comparisons over time and increase the amount of first-hand information available. More focus groups and interviews should also be done, and transcriptions made or detailed notes taken. Similar research should be done at other American colleges (or even internationally) in order to form national, international and cross-cultural comparisons of the phenomenon of college campus ghost lore. Lastly, experts in the field of anthropology and folklore studies should be consulted on the case studies. This would provide additional, case specific, professional opinions.

Conclusions

Historically, opinions about ghost stories varied from labeling a waste of time, a way to teach morality, a tool to corrupt the minds of the young, a warning against dangerous behavior or

a form of entertainment (Kendrick 2009) Ripon Campus is unique, and it has a unique folklore to match. However, I would argue that these ghost “narratives help us look more closely and analytically at culture, the environment, and the personal” (Goldsteing et al. 2007:26). The lore help us form bonds to a place we spend a short yet influential stage of our lives as students, to pass on information, to form a shared identity and history, to cope with practical and existential struggles, to experience danger or a fantasy, and simply because telling stories is part of the human experience. Ripon College ghost lore provides all of this to the canny listener and is a significant part of the culture of Ripon. To conclude, I would like to cite Kochhar-Lindgren, who poses a question: “What might that university, then, look like, feel like, if we were occasionally able to withstand our fear and greet the specters[...] If our classes included [...] working through the symbolic that un- and redoes the rational, in which imagination, ethics, and aesthetics become rebound with rationality, as important as the quantifiable paths that open a future?” (Kochhar-Lindgren 2009: 10)

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Appendix

Figure 1: Interview Questions

Interview questions

Name:

Connection to college:

Duration:

- 1) Can you tell me, in as much detail as possible, some of the ghost stories you have heard?
- 2) How did you hear about these ghost stories? In what context (what brought them up)?
- 3) Are these stories important? Why?
- 4) What do these stories mean to you?
- 5) What do they mean to the students?
- 6) Do you think the ghost folklore is an important feature of Ripon college? (positive or negative?)
- 7) What impact does it have on the college?
- 8) Why do you think these stories continue to be told?
- 9) Have you had any personal experiences or know anyone who has had one? How has this impacted you?

Figure 2: Focus Group Questions

Ghost Stories Observations

Ghost Story #1 Title: _____

- 1) What themes, morals or lessons do you notice in this story?
- 2) Can you relate to this story at all? Is it relevant to you? If so, how?

- 3) How does this story fit into college culture?

Ghost Story # 2 Title: _____

- 1) What themes, morals or lessons do you notice in this story?
- 2) Can you relate to this story at all? Is it relevant to you? If so, how?
- 3) How does this story fit into college culture?

Ghost Story #3 Title: _____

- 1) What themes, morals or lessons do you notice in this story?
- 2) Can you relate to this story at all? Is it relevant to you? If so, how?
- 3) How does this story fit into college culture?

Figure 3: Ghost Stories

STORY 1: BROCKWAY

“In the 1970s, numerous residents of Brockway reported experiences with supernatural presences in the Delta Upsilon (presently LDA) fraternity.

One—a respected student and football player—heard loud knocking at his door while he was sleeping. Opening the door he found no one there, he went back to bed and heard the knocks a second time. Again, he opened the door and no one was there. So he waited near the door until he heard the loud knocking a third time. There was no shadow under the door, so he flung open the door. Still no one was there.

Another student was studying in the DU lounge that same fall. He heard his name being called, but all the curtains were closed. All of the windows were shut to the outside and he saw the curtains move but no one was around. The call couldn't have come from outside because the quality of the sound suggested it was inside. His name was called a couple more times, and he left the lounge.

Yet another student experienced something else strange. November, 1974, on the third floor, second room from the stairwell on east end of the building. DUs were having a big party that night. He walked a girl back to her room and he got back to his room at 1:15. When he got back he locked his door, cracked his window, and went to bed. He had just laid down when he heard his door open half way. He popped out of bed and felt a slight breeze and asked who's there? The door closed slightly to about 6 inches. Then it opened almost all the way (no wind could do that and curtain was not moving). He heard footsteps in his room, then the door closes almost all of the way. He ran to the door, and heard steps moving away from him (moving west) down the hall. The swinging doors opened and closed. He went through them, and heard the steps in front of him, going down, the stairs to the second floor. He didn't follow.

Another student knew the ghost was around a lot because he was awakened on several occasions about 2:30 a.m. when he experienced a coldness, which would disappear when he opened his eyes. On one evening, he awoke unbearably hot, and he went back to sleep. Thirty minutes later, he awoke freezing, and saw an image of a person in his mirror. he yelled “Get out” and room returned to normal.

The ghost is believed to be that of a DU student who had been killed in a car crash. A memorial plaque hanging in the DU lounge had an unnerving habit of suddenly falling to the floor during meetings. A DU who regularly studied in that lounge once heard his name being called, looked around, saw no one, checked the windows and the doors and still finding no one in sight left, never again to study in that lounge”

STORY 2: BOVAY, 3RD FLOOR

Oct. 28, 1993 THROUGH MIDNIGHT

This is a dialogue between a group of students using a ouija board and the spirit, David, that they contacted.

The students turned off the lights and lit two candles – one on each side of the board. The handpiece of the ouija board was being held by four people and the board was on the floor, and the thing was moving aimlessly. Then they asked, “Are you confused?” and it darted to yes, so they read the directions on the box. They started by asking questions like “what grade will we get on tomorrow’s test?” and it went to a letter grade. They put the board on two peoples laps and it went in ovals then stopped. It did this on and off repeatedly. Now will be the dialogue between the students and spirit. St.= Students and Sp = Spirits.

St: Is there a spirit here?

One thing the spirit did was spell everything

Sp: Yes.

right, which is not normal. Usually spirits are

St: Are there two spirits here?

bad spellers.

Sp: Yes?

St: Were you educated?

St: Is the other more powerful than you?

Sp: No.

Sp: Yes.

St: Did you learn to read?

St: What is your name?

Sp: No.

Sp: David.

St: How old were you?

St: Are you a good spirit?

Sp: Sixteen.

Sp: Yes.

St: What is the year of your birth?

St: What is the color of the sky?

Sp: 1854.

Sp: Blue.

St: Where did you live?

St: What is the color of the ground?

Sp: Paris.

Sp: Green.

St: You lived in Paris?

Sp: No.

St: Paris, WI?

Sp: Yes.

St: Do you know where you are?

Sp: No.

St: You are at Ripon College. Are you in the room?

Sp: Yes.

St: Have you ever helped us?

Sp: Yes.

St: Who did you help?

Sp: Can't say.

One student didn't believe in the ghost and so the student asked the spirit some questions concerning the student who didn't believe.

St: Do you know ____?

Sp: No.

St: Do you life us?

Sp: Yes.

St: Do you like ____?

Sp: No

St: Why don't you like him?

Sp: Doesn't believe.

St: What were you when you were born?

Sp: Orphan.

St: What happened to your parents?

The spirit started spelling out K.. I..

St: David don't do it.

Sp: OK.

The hand piece stared moving slower.

St: Are you tired?

Sp: Yes.

St: Do you want us to let you go?

Sp: Yes.

St: OK, you can go.

After that, the hand piece stopped moving.

STORY 3: MAPES HALL 1984-1985

At this time, second floor had no carpet. There was a group of students who were interested in the occult, so one night on Halloween, they decided to summon a small poltergeist. Between rooms 203 and 204 they painted a red pentagram on the floor, and placed black candles at each of the five points of the pentagram. The colors black and red have to be used and no other colors, when dealing with the occult. The candles were to secure the poltergeist to the pentagram as a sort of protection device. The students were using a "dimestore" grimoire, which is a book of spells, based on the Grand Grimoire, which is an all powerful spell book. To show its power, there is a word in the book, which, if in the hands of the right person, can be extracted from the book and said backwards, which will undo creation. It is the same word which God used to command creation, thus its amazing power.

With the "dimestore" grimoire, they were going to summon a poltergeist. But, on the last part of the spell, they mispronounced it. Upon mispronunciation, they opened a portal which summoned a big demon. When they saw the demon, they got scared and ran away. Upon retaliation, one of the students knocked over one of the candles, which broke the binding spell of the pentagram. If they hadn't run they could have reversed the spell and pushed the demon

back through the portal. Now instead of the demon being tied to the pentagram, he was bound to Mapes.

Shortly after this happened, the plant department erased the pentagram and this action allowed the demon to run free throughout the entire Ripon College Campus. However, there are two tree statues—one in the cemetery near Merrimen House and one in the cemetery near President Scott's house. They are talismans, which are foci of good, and the demon cannot go near them. Spirits can go in the cemetery because it is a place of the dead, except for one place—the Garden of the Cross. This is usually place of good, however, this is not the case in the Ripon Cemetery because the cross is transversely aligned. This means that instead of the cross facing East, which it is supposed to, it faces North. Because of this, the magic is twisted and only spirits of true neutrality can only exist there. An example of this type of spirit is the Will o' the Wisp, which are dancing lights whose origin is from the Black Forest of Germany. The legend is that these lights existed in the Black Forest and men would see them. The lights would lure the men into the forest until the men would get lost and die of hunger. These spirits are considered neutral because they neither hurt or help the men. Things such as this have been seen before by other people [...]. These three places are safeguards from the demon which is called "Black Walker" or "shadow Walker".

Black Walker does have his weaknesses which work to our advantages. First, he's stuck to this campus. Second, he's stuck between dimensions, which means he can't physically hurt us. He can, however, play with our minds and make us hurt ourselves. He is only seen by sensitives and can only affect sensitives, so the majority of the campus is unaffected.

Black walker is usually seen as a two dimensional, 15 foot-tall black figure with red eyes. He has no specific features, and is usually seen as a shadow-like figure.

There are some specific stories of Black Walker told by certain people. Fall of 1990 was reported as the worst, when one particular person got him mad because the person challenged him. So after that, Black Walker went after this person. One night, when the person went to bed, the demon ca[me] out of the closet and stood above [the student], which is enough to scare anyone. This happened in 204 Mapes before the pentagram was erased.

There have been accounts of him scaring people into amnesia. One person asked a friend who was a sensitive to stay in his room all night for when Black Walker came back. His friend was stubborn about it and thought he would be able to fight of the demo. When he finally did come back, they used their minds together and pushed him back out of the room. The only type of power that is useful against the demon is a type of mind power similar to telekinesis, except you're not moving something concrete, you're pushing away the demon.

In 1991, there was also activity in 104 Mapes. This time i[t] was the friend of the person that got assaulted in 1990 and another person. The first night of the first semester the demon came for the friend. The student that roomed with the friend was awake one night, and demon came into [the] room. This particular student had had a runin with the demon before an beat the demon, so when the student pulled out the blood crystals, the demon left without a fight. Blood crystals act as a source protection and power against evil spirits.

Then, the same student was working at Roadhouse and heard the demon chuckling. He said hi to the demon and the demon threatened him. And the student made a smart remark. Immediately after, the student got a headache that lasted only a few minutes. When the student was done with work, he went to his apartment and got his friends who were sensitives and went to look for the demon on campus, since he couldn't leave campus. They found him in the sandpit in the quads and fought him as described before.

Two weeks later one of the students heard him and went to investigate. He went down to the Quads and saw the demon in the third story of Mapes. The student approached the demon to challenge him, and was no match for the demon. He was pushed backwards and almost knocked out. So he went to get his friends and they found the demon in a circle of trees by Rodman. This was bad because a man made circle in nature is twisted magic, and can give the demon more

power, and he knew that. Since the students couldn't do anything against the demon, the[y] ran to the Garden of the Cross to stay for a while, because the demon couldn't harm them there.”

Figure 4: Faculty, Staff and Retiree survey results

Have you heard of any ghost stories about Ripon?

- Answered: 61
- Skipped: 1

Yes, many stories
 Yes, a few stories
 Yes, a few stories but not in detail
 No, I've heard of the campus being haunted but not anything specific
 No I haven't heard anything

Answer Choices

- Yes, many stories and in detail
- Yes, a few stories
- Yes, a few stories but not much detail
- No, I've heard of the campus being haunted but no specific stories
- No I haven't heard anything about it.

Total

Q2

Do you know of any locations on campus that are rumored to be haunted?

- Answered: 47
- Skipped: 15

West Hall
 East Hall
 The Library
 Mapes
 Anderson
 Bovay
 Brockway
 Scott
 Johnson

Other (please specify)

Answer Choices

West Hall

East Hall

The Library

Mapes

Anderson

Bovay

Brockway

Scott

Johnson

[Responses](#)

Other (please specify)

Total Respondents: 47

Q3

Are you familiar with any of the following ghost stories?

- Answered: 32
- Skipped: 30

- Raphael in Rodman
- The person falling down the stairs in West
- The Demon summoning in the Quads
- The basketball player
- The lights in the graveyard
- The archive ghost in the Library
- The student who died in a car accident

Answer Choices

Raphael in Rodman

The person falling down the stairs in West

The Demon summoning in the Quads

The basketball player

Answer Choices

The lights in the graveyard

The archive ghost in the Library

The student who died in a car accident

Total Respondents: 32

51.06%

Q4

Do you believe that ghost stories contribute to the culture of Ripon college?

- Answered: 59
- Skipped: 3

- Yes
- Only sometimes
- Not really
- Not significant at all

Answer Choices

Yes

Only sometimes

Not really

Not significant at all

Total

Q5

If you have heard ghost stories, who have you heard them from?

- Answered: 46
- Skipped: 16

- Faculty
- Staff
- Students
- Other (please specify)

Answer Choices

Faculty

Staff

Students

43.75%

Answer Choices

[Responses](#)
Other (please specify)

Total Respondents: 46

Q6

In what context or through what medium were the Ripon ghost stories you know of told?

- Answered: 47
- Skipped: 15

- Casual conversation
- A campus event
- Late at night with friends
- On social media
- Online
- In an article (news or otherwise)
- Other (please specify)

Answer Choices

Casual conversation

A campus event

Late at night with friends

On social media

Online

In an article (news or otherwise)

[Responses](#)
Other (please specify)

Total Respondents: 47

Q7

Do you believe there is existence after death?

- Answered: 62
- Skipped: 0

- Yes, there probably is
- Not sure
- No, probably not

Answer Choices

Yes, there probably is

Answer Choices

Not sure

No, probably not

Total

Q8

Do you believe in ghosts, or that the spirits of dead people can come back in certain places and situations?

- Answered: 62
- Skipped: 0

- Yes, probably
- Not sure
- No, probably

Answer Choices

Yes, probably

Not sure

No, probably

Total	2.13%
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Q9

Do you believe you have ever seen, heard, of felt yourself to be in the presence of a ghost here at Ripon?

- Answered: 61
- Skipped: 1

- Yes, probably/definitely
- Not sure
- No, probably/definitely not

Answer Choices

Yes, probably/definitely

Not sure

No, probably/definitely not.

Total	40.32%
	25

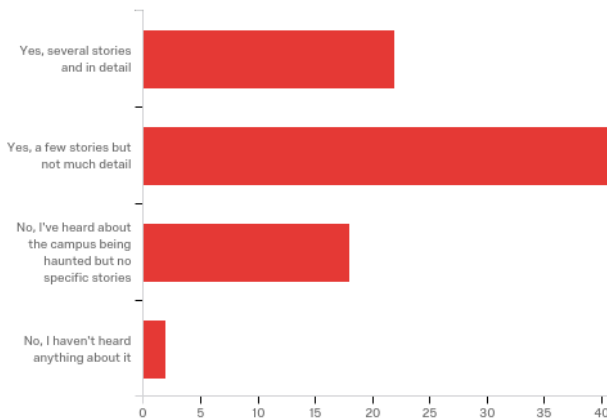
Figure 5: Results from Student Survey

Report

Ghost Form

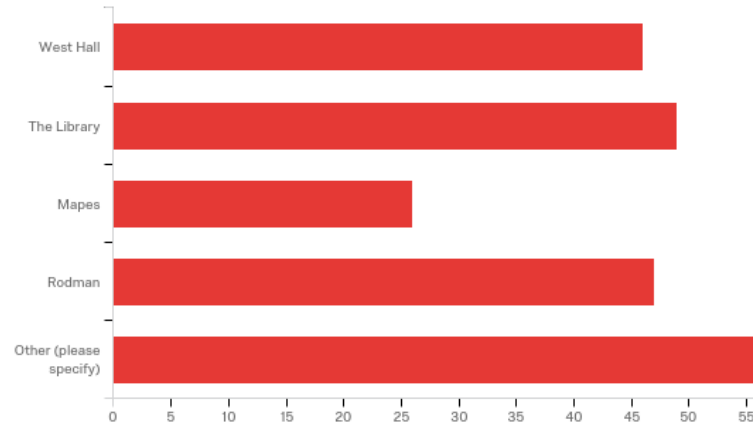
December 13th 2016, 7:19 pm MST

Q1 - Have you heard of any ghost stories about Ripon?



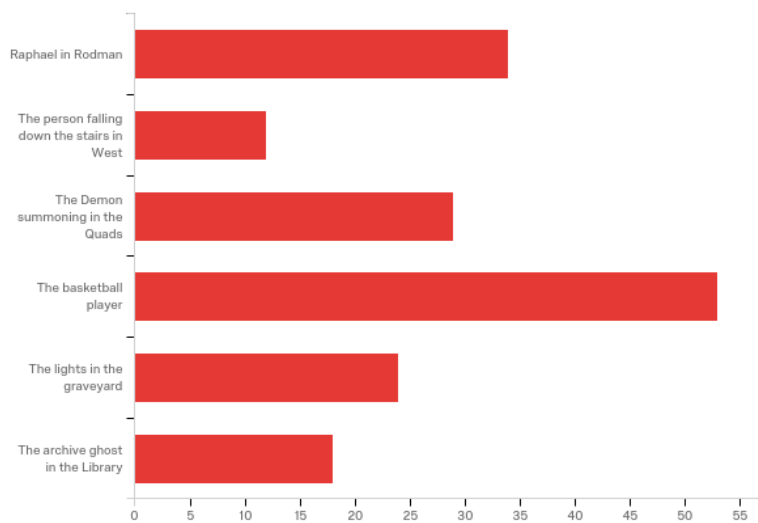
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes, several stories and in detail	24.18%	22
2	Yes, a few stories but not much detail	53.85%	49
3	No, I've heard about the campus being haunted but no specific stories	19.78%	18
4	No, I haven't heard anything about it	2.20%	2
	Total	100%	91

Q2 - Do you know of any locations on campus that are rumored to be haunted?



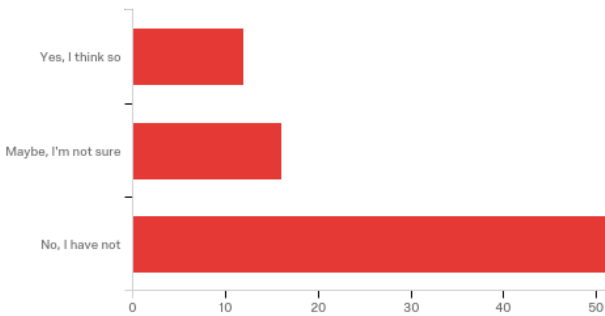
#	Answer	%	Count
1	West Hall	51.11%	46
2	The Library	54.44%	49
3	Mapes	28.89%	26
4	Rodman	52.22%	47
5	Other (please specify)	63.33%	57
	Total	100%	90

Q3 - Are you familiar with any of the following ghost stories?



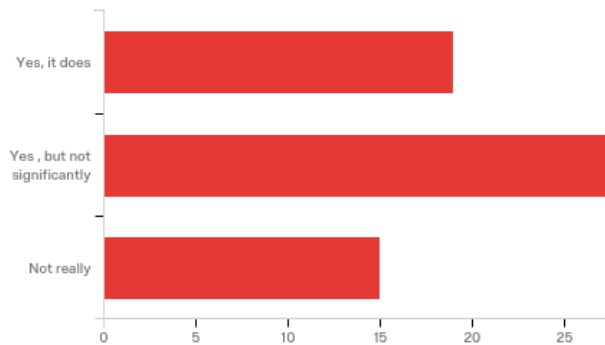
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Raphael in Rodman	43.04%	34
2	The person falling down the stairs in West	15.19%	12
3	The Demon summoning in the Quads	36.71%	29
4	The basketball player	67.09%	53
5	The lights in the graveyard	30.38%	24
6	The archive ghost in the Library	22.78%	18
	Total	100%	79

Q4 - Have you personally had any strange experiences on campus?



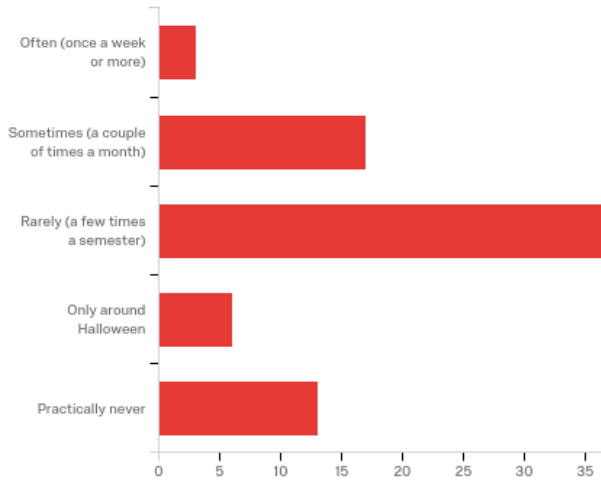
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes, I think so	13.19%	12
2	Maybe, I'm not sure	17.58%	16
3	No, I have not	69.23%	63
	Total	100%	91

Q5 - Do you believe that ghost stories contribute to the culture of Ripon college?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes, it does	26.76%	19
2	Yes, but not significantly	52.11%	37
4	Not really	21.13%	15
	Total	100%	71

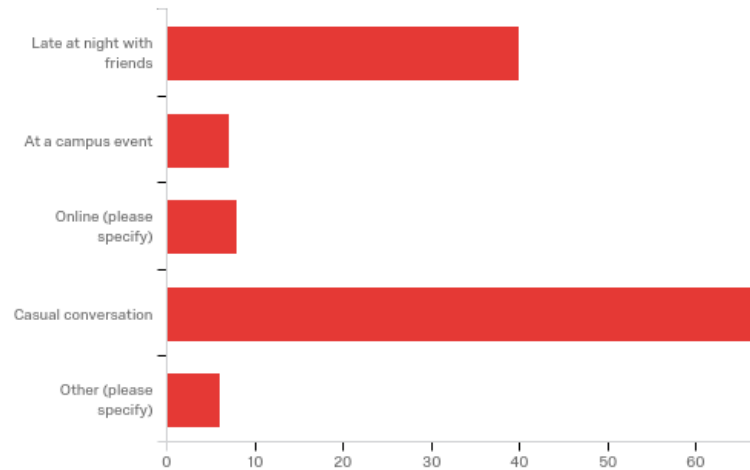
Q6 - How often do you hear people talk about ghosts in Ripon?



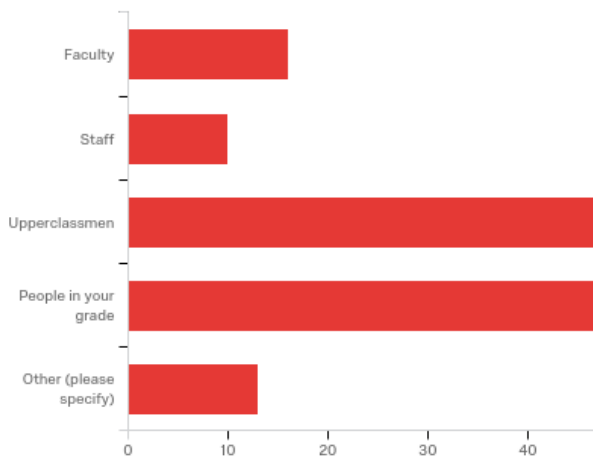
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Faculty	18.18%	16
2	Staff	11.36%	10
3	Upperclassmen	70.45%	62
4	People in your grade	78.41%	69
5	Other (please specify)	14.77%	13
	Total	100%	88

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Often (once a week or more)	3.30%	3
2	Sometimes (a couple of times a month)	18.68%	17
3	Rarely (a few times a semester)	57.14%	52
4	Only around Halloween	6.59%	6
5	Practically never	14.29%	13
	Total	100%	91

Q8 - In what context or through what medium were the Ripon ghost stories you know of told?

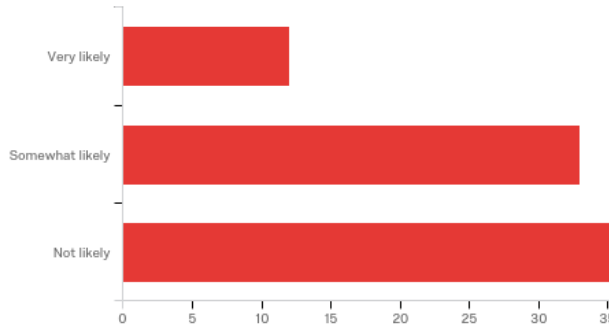


Q7 - If you have heard ghost stories, who have you heard them from?



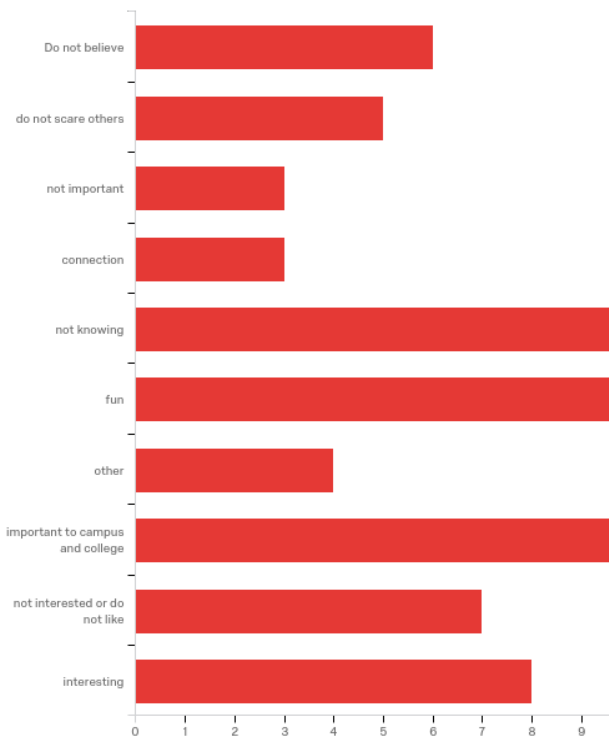
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Late at night with friends	44.44%	40
2	At a campus event	7.78%	7
3	Online (please specify)	8.89%	8
4	Casual conversation	84.44%	76
5	Other (please specify)	6.67%	6
	Total	100%	90

Q9 - How likely are you to tell ghost stories to incoming students?



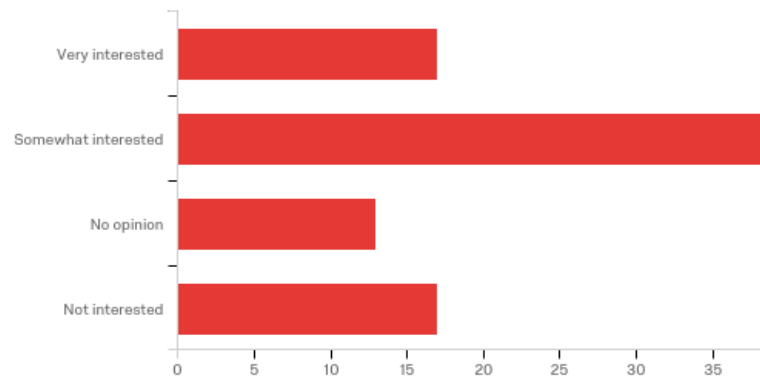
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Very likely	13.33%	12
2	Somewhat likely	36.67%	33
3	Not likely	50.00%	45
	Total	100%	90

Q10 - Why are you likely/unlikely to tell ghost stories to incoming students?



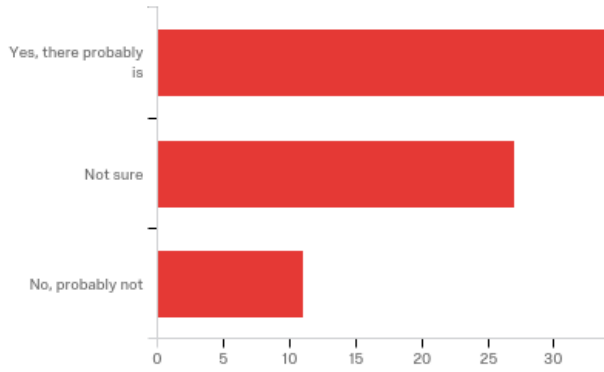
Answer	%	Count
Do not believe	9.23%	6
do not scare others	7.69%	5
not important	4.62%	3
connection	4.62%	3
not knowing	16.92%	11
fun	16.92%	11
other	6.15%	4
important to campus and college	16.92%	11
not interested or do not like	10.77%	7
interesting	12.31%	8
Total	100%	65

Q11 - Is ghost folklore at Ripon College of interest to you?



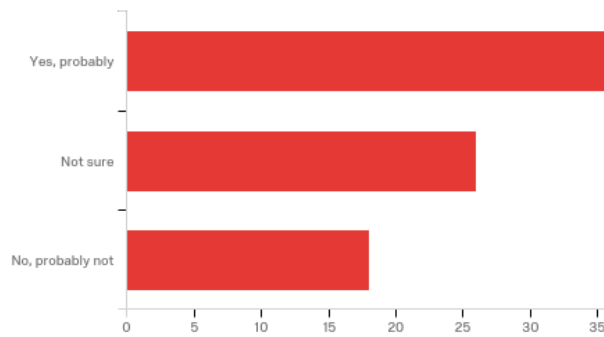
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Very interested	18.68%	17
2	Somewhat interested	48.35%	44
3	No opinion	14.29%	13
4	Not interested	18.68%	17
	Total	100%	91

Q12 - Do you believe there is existence after death?



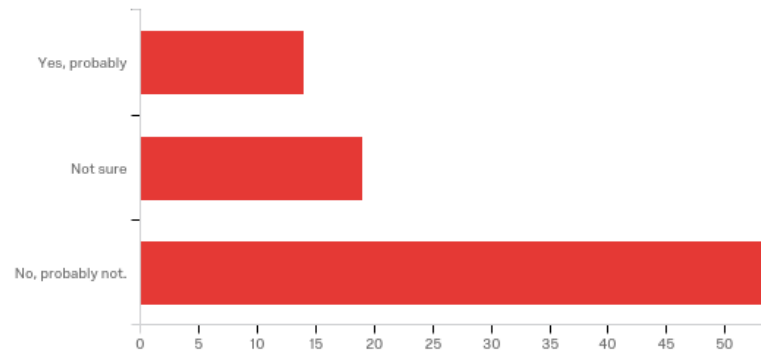
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes, there probably is	57.78%	52
2	Not sure	30.00%	27
3	No, probably not	12.22%	11
	Total	100%	90

Q13 - Do you believe in ghosts, or that the spirits of dead people can come back in certain places and situations?



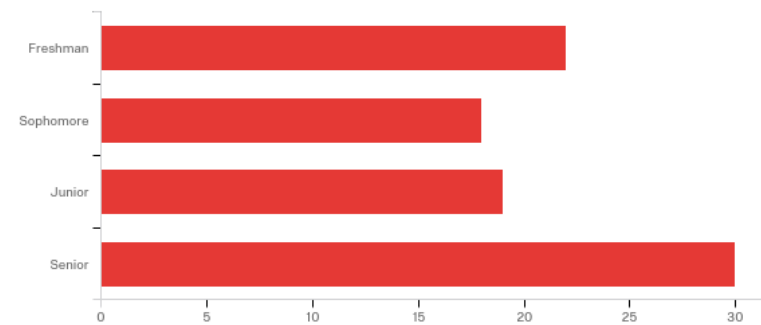
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes, probably	51.65%	47
2	Not sure	28.57%	26
3	No, probably not	19.78%	18
	Total	100%	91

Q14 - Do you believe you have ever seen, heard, or felt yourself to be in the presence of a ghost here at Ripon?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes, probably	15.56%	14
2	Not sure	21.11%	19
3	No, probably not.	63.33%	57
	Total	100%	90

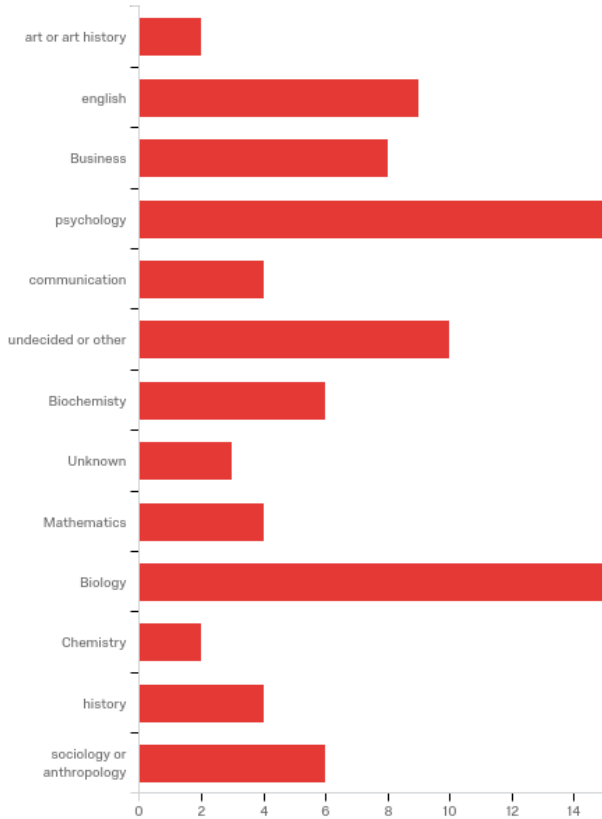
Q16 - What grade are you in?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Freshman	24.72%	22
2	Sophomore	20.22%	18
3	Junior	21.35%	19
4	Senior	33.71%	30

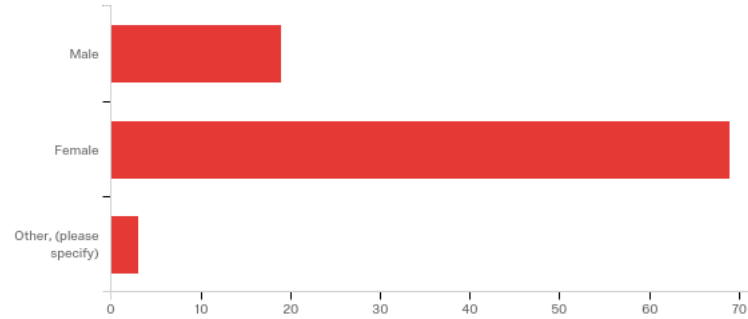
	Total	100%	89
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Q17 – Majors



Biology	20.73%	17
Chemistry	2.44%	2
history	4.88%	4
sociology or anthropology	7.32%	6
Total	100%	82

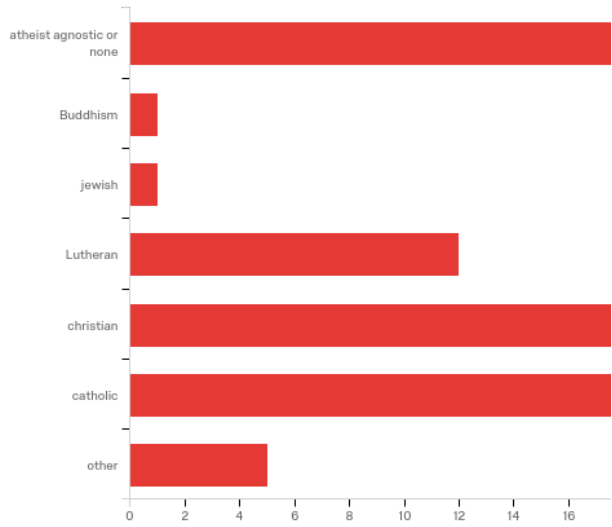
Q18 - What gender do you identify as?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Male	20.88%	19
2	Female	75.82%	69
3	Other, (please specify)	3.30%	3
	Total	100%	91

Answer	%	Count
art or art history	2.44%	2
english	10.98%	9
Business	9.76%	8
psychology	24.39%	20
communication	4.88%	4
undecided or other	12.20%	10
Biochemistry	7.32%	6
Unknown	3.66%	3
Mathematics	4.88%	4

Q19 - What is your current religion, if any?



Answer	%	Count
atheist agnostic or none	25.64%	20
Buddhism	1.28%	1
jewish	1.28%	1
Lutheran	15.38%	12
christian	26.92%	21
catholic	24.36%	19
other	6.41%	5
Total	100%	78