All things Strange and Beautiful

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It is a widely held belief that going to university is the key to a successful, financially stable life which is why parents spend many sleepless nights wondering if their offspring will make it to college. Traditionally students opt for studying medicine, engineering or business management. These are safe subjects to study as they ensure a lifetime of adequate cash flow and thus peace of mind for worried parents. But many young people are just not cut out for the staid, conventional path and may want to go into fields that are just, well, different. Fortunately there are a strangely large number of universities abroad offering courses that may not guarantee six figure salaries, yet they are certainly far from being dull and drab.

Music is something that seems to be a common factor that preoccupies the mind of the average young person even more than junk food and members of the opposite sex. What could be more enjoyable than to study a course called 'Politicizing Beyonce'? This course is offered by New Jersey's Rutgers University. While many (especially young men) may be getting all excited at the prospect of watching sultry music videos of this unreasonably attractive woman for homework, this is a serious course people – you will also have to study the work of authors/activists Alice Walker and Sojourner Truth to pass the tests. University of South Carolina, meanwhile offers a course on Lady Gaga and the Sociology of Fame exploring no doubt the socio-cultural upheavals of modern day isolationism that has lead to Gaga's meteoric success. Perhaps a psychology course will be added to examine the psychosomatic factors behind the outrageous attire of this eccentric diva.



Oberon Zell-Ravenheart

We know that it's not just children who want to go to Hogwarts and live there forever. Many young and old adults would just love to take The Harry Potter and the Age of Illusion module, available as part of the BA in Education Studies at Durham University. This may not teach how to zap a human bully into a rat but includes 22 lectures and 11 seminars that look at how JK Rowling's novels 'reflect prejudice and citizenship in modern society'. For those who are far more serious (read fixated) about this world of the cute, bespectacled wizard, there is the Oberon Zell-Ravenheart's Grey School of Wizardry, the first school of wizardry to be officially recognized and founded by Oberon Zell-Ravenheart, a muggle in his 60s yet a real life Dumbledore. The Grey School teaches 16 departments, including Alchemy, Beastmastery, Horse-whispering, wand-making and spell casting. To make it even more Hogwarts-like the students are categorized under four houses – Winds, Undines, Gnomes and Salamanders.

Football fans and David Beckham fans, whether they like the beautiful game or just the beautiful man will be thrilled to know that they can actually study a 12-week module on the legendary sportsman at Staffordshire University offered as part of the BA in Sports, Media and Culture. Apparently pop quizzes are given on the evolution of Beckham's hairstyles over the years and his marriage to Spice Girl Posh.

No matter how disturbing the fact, we have to admit that there are a frighteningly high number of 'zombie films' in the market indicating an unhealthy level of interest in the 'undead' that seem to have nothing better to do than groan incessantly and eat the remaining few normal humans. University of Baltimore teaches a course on zombie phenomenon; students learn to write horror scripts (*grrr, grrr, h-u-n-g-r-y*), watching zombie films and drawing storyboards of their ideal monster movies.

Television, no doubt, has become the greatest influencing factor of modern times and The Simpsons is one of the most unique TV shows that make fun of practically everything – from successive American Presidents to Bollywood mania. The University of California at Berkeley offers a rigorous two unit philosophy course on this wildly popular cartoon series that possibly focuses on the incorrigibly obnoxious Homer Simpson, representing the antithesis of the American Hero and the ultimate phiolosophical question: Do we really need to be pretty, politically correct and have a minimal amount of decency to attain happiness?

This is just a tip of the iceberg of the extraordinary subjects people can choose from if they are disinclined towards 'normal' courses their parents would not be embarrassed to mention to their friends. Subjects like – turf management, Star Trek and Philosophy, butcher skills, funeral services and mortuary science and so on. ■