

## **(Un)Fortunate Phallic Phonetics and Their Favorable Functions**

By Gina Garber, Scott Shumate, Elaine Berg, and Christina Chester-Fangman

“Let’s go Peay!” When your university is named after a former Tennessee governor, Austin Peay, you cannot help but chuckle a little. Well, maybe not at first, but when you know how to pronounce his last name, you may at least grin, especially when Peay is pronounced just like the letter “P” or the vegetable “pea” (Austin Peay State University, 2020). However, given the creativity of students, one can certainly understand that phonetically, their pronunciation of “Peay” might sound the same as the vegetable “pea,” but some students really mean “pee,” as in “to tinkle.” The humor associated with our institution’s name is just one way we engage with our students. We use homonyms of the Peay name to bait the hook and catch the attention of our students when providing information literacy instruction.

Although Austin Peay is a regional university, that has not stopped others far and wide from hearing about our school through our academics, as well as our now famously infamous cheer, “Let’s go Peay!” This cheer can be documented back to the 1970s when James “Fly” Williams, a New York City streetball legend, began playing basketball for Austin Peay as a guard on the team. The fans would shout, “The Fly’s open, let’s go Peay!” (Bradley, 2008, p. 153). Over time, students, faculty, and yes, even librarians, have incorporated a liberal phrasing of our University’s name into cheers, chants, coursework, and coaching.

“PEAY-ple” at Austin Peay have manipulated the former governor’s name to make fun of themselves and engage our University community. These “Peay-isms” are so embedded in the local culture that they are rarely even considered for their alternative, more vulgar meanings. When students see it, hear it, or read it, they perk up and then we librarians know we have their attention. Austin Peay is located in the middle of Clarksville, Tennessee, and to find it you need

only follow the large red and white banners that have the slogan “Let’s go Peay!” flying high on the light poles on major roads near the campus. Visitors “PEAY-k” into the bookstore in search of memorabilia to take home and tell others (or their “PEAY-ps”) that “they have gone to PEAY!”

### **Trademarking Your Territory**

CAUTION: If you were offended by the above content, you should probably stop reading at this point, because the following phrases may become even more offensive. Although humor engages students, it can also backfire when it crosses a line by communicating vulgarities. Back in the day before information traveled instantly on the internet, it would slowly creep into the mainstream. For example, some departments within the University had utilized the phrase “Show your PEAY-ness!” without vetting its usage through leadership chains or the department in charge of public relations and branding. Inadvertently, the phrase grew in popularity and a local independent bookstore latched onto the phrase, making t-shirts for promoting the bookstore. However, PEAY was trademarked by the University.

Students and faculty alike were excited to use this phrase for everything from cheers to instruction to show the school’s spirit. However, University administrators were frustrated that the trademark violation had occurred, only to find out it had been perpetuated internally due to the lack of vetting of the slogan. A local parent of young children, who was also offended by the independent bookstore’s promotion, contacted a regional television news reporter, resulting in more publicity to the phrase. The University took immediate action to trademark the phrase resulting in a mark being registered in August 2003. They also sent a cease and desist letter to the business who eventually complied (Austin Peay State University, 2020). Not only was the University trying to protect its reputation, but also the respect for the governor’s surname. After

all, the governor's descendants still live in the region and are highly respected community members.

### **PEAY-ing in the Library**

At this point you may be asking yourself, so what does this have to do with humor in library instruction? A great deal, as far as we are concerned. It is important that instruction librarians consider both the cognitive and affective needs of students who are learning to navigate the research process (Cahoy and Schroder, 2012, p. 74). Students' feelings and attitudes impact their educational experience as well as their ability to successfully demonstrate their knowledge. When librarians can find a hook to engage with their students, everybody wins. In a survey of librarians' perceptions of humor in library instruction conducted by Perret, "respondents noted that humor creates a more relaxed learning environment and alleviates library anxiety" (2016, p. 263). We use humor to establish a level of comfort for students in the classroom. Further, humor "can be a way of making the material relevant to students" (Perret, 2016, p. 263). Librarians utilize "PEAY-puns" to integrate the University's identity with more mundane ideas found in the classroom. Students pay attention, laugh, and remember points because of the humor used during the instruction. "We all know that teaching is serious (i.e., important) business, but teachers do not have to be serious (i.e., humorless) to be effective" (Appleby, 2018, p.11). So, in this case, it's okay to "PEAY" yourself. As you can see, this is especially true if you can find a hook in your school's name, mascot, or town to be creative in establishing a student-teacher rapport like we have at Austin Peay in using the governor's last name to create a sense of PEAY-pride.

Using humor in the classroom helps librarians to humanize ourselves to our students. In a time where information is shared instantly through the web, apps, social media, and live

streaming, many of our students expect to be entertained in conjunction with learning. If instructors are just lecturing without a sense of humor, students can interpret that lecturer to be dull and boring which is perceived to be “reflective of poor teaching” (Bustler et al., 2017, p. 331). Austin Peay librarians know how humor engages our University community because of our unique name. We do not get much time to spend with our students. In some cases, we are spending a single class period with them for a one-shot instruction session. But, as Perret noted, “humor allows the learners to make a human connection with the librarian, which facilitates immediate learning and perhaps makes the librarian seem more approachable in the future” (2016, p. 263).

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Moreover, during the current COVID-19 crisis, librarians are expected to engage with students online via a learning management system or in a video conferencing setting. Using a little bit of humor can go a long way in keeping students’ attention and making the content memorable, even in an unusual environment. As Perret found, “using humor makes students more engaged and alert” (2016, p. 263). Additionally, students are working with an abnormally high level of stress as they adapt to a new style of learning, and humor can be used to diffuse some of the tension caused by this transition on top of the financial, familial, and social stresses of their lives outside the university (Azadbakht, 2019). Using humor can connect us to our students and help them remember content that is otherwise “PEAY-dantic,” but we also want to be credible with the information we present and not allow the humor to overshadow the message.

Austin Peay librarians have used “PEAY” with many words to engage students such as participating in a campus common *PEAY READ*, “PEAY-king” our students’ interest, having an incentive program where people earn PEAY-points to bid on PEAY-bay items, and going a bit

“PEAY-nuts” about information literacy. We are looking to align our students’ identity with university and community. These moments have to be timely and appropriate to create a successful pedagogical tool for instruction. “As we strive to increase student learning, student interest, student satisfaction, and thus, student recruitment and retention, we are encouraged by the attitudes of our faculty toward the use of humor as a pedagogical strategy” (Huss and Eastep, 2016, p. 60).

### **PEAY-ing Yourself**

Here at Austin Peay, we have had great success in integrating our University’s name and its phonetic kin to create an environment that uses humor to develop a rapport with students. Find the humor that works for you and integrate something about your university’s name, mascot, location, or even yourself. Humor is a tool, and a very useful one when employed properly, but not all people are proficient with all tools, so make sure to be comfortable with utilizing humor and use it in a timely and appropriate fashion. Failed humor can be worse than no humor at all. Keep your mind out of the toilet, otherwise you might end up with a real stinker, “PEAY-ew!” Let’s go Peay!

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Gina Garber, Professor of Library Administration at Austin Peay State University's Woodward Library in Clarksville, Tennessee, recently took a brief "PEAY-break" from her 24-year library career to co-author this article with three of her "PEAY-nutty" colleagues. She is the Coordinator of Digital Services in the Woodward Library, teaches the first-year experience course, and teaches an enhanced remedial course for at-risk students. Professor Garber enjoys collaborating, teaching, and mentoring students. However, she also enjoys frustrating her colleagues, teaching students bad habits, and corrupting new faculty members. She is most proud of her three dogs that she uses as an excuse to leave early from faculty meetings.



Scott Shumate is the IT Analyst (read: Technology "PEAY-on") for Digital Services at Austin Peay State University's Woodward Library in Clarksville, Tennessee. At work, he mostly breaks technology and frustrates "PEAY-ple" with tech ideas that are "progressive," "user centered," and "other buzzword here." His colleagues say he makes more work for them, while he himself hates doing work. He would describe himself as "efficient." At home, he is father to one cat, which he uses as license for his near-infinite supply of dad jokes. He loves puns, and considers it an accomplishment to make an entire room groan. His talents include, but are not limited to: coming up with the best reply in the shower three days later; forgetting what day it is; and convincing people he's not a vampire despite preferring the nocturnal life.



Elaine Berg, Professor of Library Administration at Austin Peay State University's Woodward Library in Clarksville, Tennessee, is the Coordinator of Access Services. She is a real "PEAY-ch" to serve as the library liaison to the Department of Languages and Literature. Professor Berg enjoys finding new ways to ensure that students have a valuable experience during library instruction, regardless of any restraining orders currently in place. She has been caught playing "PEAY-k-a-boo" with children in the library. She is a strong proponent of shared governance and is active in the APSU faculty senate, as well as making sure everyone is treated fairly. She enjoys baking for her "PEAY-ps" including "PEAY-ling" carrots and potatoes for a dinner's side item. Secretly, her baking is a loyalty test to see which of her so-called friends will lie and say they enjoyed the dish.



Christina Chester-Fangman is a Professor of Library Administration at Austin Peay State University's Woodward Library in Clarksville, Tennessee. In fact, Christina is an APSU alumna, who has an almost thirty-year history of "PEAY-ing" herself. Christina currently serves as the Coordinator of Research & Instruction and the designated first-year seminar librarian. Among the most worthwhile aspects of her position are helping students make the transition to college life, as well as teaching students information literacy concepts and how to put together the puzzle "PEAY-ces" of research. After working with her colleagues this long, Christina is now a homebody who enjoys the "PEAY-ce" and quiet that comes from snuggling up to watch TV and read with her husband, nine-year old daughter, and one-year old black cat, "Boo."