Course Outline

**FOLK 101: Introduction to Folklore I:** Concepts and Fieldwork

Ian Brodie
Office: B-177B (for the time being)*
Office hours: Wed. & Thurs. 9:00 – 11:00
Phone: 563-1418
e-mail: ian_brodie@cbu.ca
web: http://faculty.cbu.ca/ibrodie
blog: http://folklore101.blogspot.com/

Tuesdays, 1:00 – 2:15
Thursdays, 11:30 – 12:45
September 12 to November 30, 2006
CE 327 (for the time being)*

**Calendar Description**

An introduction to fundamental concepts and fieldwork in folklore study. Cape Breton oral and material traditions are emphasized.

**What this means:**

‘Folklore’ is the study of informal culture: the behaviours, activities, texts, and customs that exist among the more formally structured and institutionalised modern living. It is a study of ‘traditions’ only inasmuch as (a) these items are often repeated and (b) a previous occurrence is given as a sufficient basis and rationale for this repetition. As such, a tradition may date back before recorded time or from the beginning of the semester. The locus of any item of folklore is the ‘group,’ which likewise can exist on a scale of scope and time-depth ranging from, on the macro-scale, an ancient globally-situated people (‘The Celts’; ‘First Nations’) to, on the micro-scale, recently formed ad hoc locally-situated small groups (‘three people from Sydney Mines I carpool with’; ‘Margaree Chamillionaire fans’).

As a consequence of studying living traditions, folklorists do much of their research ‘in the field,’ in addition to the research tools of the library and the archive. This course is an introduction to the basic techniques of field research, cumulating in a short essay which draws on both primary sources (the student’s own fieldwork) and secondary sources. By the end of the course, students will be able to apply these tools to any ethnographic project.

**Required Texts**

At the bookstore:

This is not so much a ‘textbook’ as it is a useful guide for basic fieldwork techniques. If you keep up with folklore it will become an invaluable reference for you. Think if it like you would a dictionary: it’s not something you really read so much as turn to when an answer eludes you.

* The spanky-new Folklore and Ethnomusicology Wing, originally slated for opening by the beginning of term, will not be ready until later in the semester. When it opens, my office will be moving and, quite likely, so too will the classroom.
Available online:


On library reserve
This list will expand as the semester progresses, and readings will be assigned based on student interest and expectations. The reserves process will be discussed on the first day of classes.


Evaluation
(See detailed descriptions below)

Paper Proposal
(inc. Ethics Review and Annotated Bibliography) 20% October 5
Collection Project (One of the following) 40% November 9
Photography Project
Ethnography Project
Interview Project
Research Essay 30% November 21
Reflective Essay/ Archiving Project 10% November 30

There is no final exam in this course.

Equipment
Students should have access to an audio recorder and a camera (preferably a digital camera). I will make an effort to provide access to this equipment for any student unable to procure them on his or her own, but university resources are at this time limited.

Course Breakdown and Reading Schedule

Introduction The Very Basics of Folklore
A bare-bones approach to what the contemporary folklorist studies, how they differ from previous generations of folklorists, and what they do with the data they collect.
September 12  Getting in touch with your vernacular self: are you ‘folk’? Yes, you are. (Oh, not you, I was talking to the person behind you.)

September 14  What folklore isn’t (just) (anymore)

Unit one  Getting started on a project
So you know a little bit about folklore, and want to get started. What to do to go from an idea to a proposal.

September 19  The ethics of folklore research: Like all researchers, folklorists can’t just go around grabbing stuff that comes their way. Who ‘owns’ folklore, and how do we gather it ethically?

September 21  The ethics review: The wonderful world of paperwork

September 26  Libraries and archives: Folklorists read too.

September 28  Library Tour: A tour, of the library (rather self-explanatory, really)

Unit two  Data collection
A mix of practice and theory: how folklorists go about getting data that is actually useful. The meat of the course.

Photography
October 3  Photography 1: what is a photograph?: start with the self-evident and think on the imponderable

October 5  Photography 2: taking a photograph: a guest to explain basic things

October 10  Photography 3: describing a photograph: if the proverb is correct, it should take you a thousand words

October 12  Special guest: Dr. Margaret Bennett: internationally renowned Scottish folklorist will grace us with her insights into the fieldwork process. (There may be a room change, if a whole whack of people wants to sit in.)

Ethnography
October 17  Ethnography 1: What is ethnography? (Hint: short answer is sitting someplace and staring at something until you notice someone doing something.)

October 19  Research day: class time may be used for your projects at your own discretion. This is code for I’m out of town and don’t trust other people to take good care of my little charges: fly, hatchlings, fly.

October 24  Ethnography 2: Practice. Field trip to the cafeteria, to make you feel awkward in front of your friends.

Interview
October 26  Interview 1: W hat is an interview?
Assignments

This course is largely concerned with how folklorists (and, to a certain extent, any researcher dealing with ethnographic materials) collect and generate data for subsequent analysis. Students will be exposed to the three principal ethnographic techniques, and will choose which is the best option for their research project. Pending the archivist’s approval, all material will be deposited in the archives of the Beaton Institute for potential use as primary and secondary data for future researchers.

Paper Proposal October 5 (20%)
By the end of the fourth week of classes, identify a ‘folk tradition’ which you would like to explore further. The proposal should detail:

a) The composition of the folk group and the context in which it can be found;

b) The tradition you would like to document; and

c) The method of documentation;

Accompanying the proposal will be an annotated bibliography of no less than five sources (articles or books) which will be used as secondary sources. You should be able to use these sources to provide information on the group (or groups very much like it) and on the activity (or activities very much like it).

Also accompanying the proposal will be a completed Human Subjects Utilization Ethics Review - Application and Guidelines. The Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving
Humans, first published in 1998, is the standard by which all research involving humans in Canada must be measured. Accordingly, the Cape Breton University Office of Research must vet all research projects, including assignments done by students for classes, which involve direct interaction with human participants (interview, documentation, etc.).

**By the time you submit your proposal** you should have thought through your project: if you are going to document a ‘private’ event with ethnography, you should seek permission of the participants or a representative; if you are documenting material culture, you may also deem it necessary to seek permission; if you are conducting an interview, you should have a reasonably firm commitment that they will be available for interviewing. (Marks will not be affected by an unsuccessful review by the Office of Research.)

The proposal is the principal assignment for the first unit of the course: as such, there will be plenty of opportunities to discuss this in class time.

**Collection Project November 9 (40%)**

The collection project is the focus of the course. Based on the paper proposal, it will constitute sufficient primary data to subsequently explore a tradition as it is ‘performed’ within a folk group. You have three options.

**Photography**

Taking no less than twenty photographs, students are to identify the contents of each photograph, providing as much data as possible (camera model, date of photograph, location, owner, materials, maker, provenance, transcriptions of any text, etc.).

You will need access to a digital camera set to its highest resolution. You should hand in (a) a CD-Rom with each photograph in its own file and with its own file name; (b) a document, either in Microsoft Word (*.doc) or plain text (*.txt), consisting of a list of all the files and a description of each photograph (examples will be given in class) burnt onto the same disk; and (c) a print-out of this document. You do not need to print off the photos. **Do not submit the project as a PowerPoint presentation.**

**Ethnography**

The purpose of this project is to produce a set of fieldnotes based on your attendance at a “cultural scene.” Students should spend at least two hours observing and recording with notepad and pen what transpires there. The objective is to observe: do not interview or solicit information, nor do any mechanical recording or photography. Hand in the original fieldnotes (and – not ‘or’ – a typed transcription if your handwriting is bad enough to require it).

**Interview**

The purpose of this project is to conduct a brief recorded interview with one particular person. In preparation, you should have a list of questions and a general anticipation of what your interview subject will say, but **the interview itself should not be an “oral questionnaire”:** rather, it should reflect actively listening to your subject and following the flow of where his or her responses lead you.
You will need access to a good-quality sound recorder, preferably digital. The handheld personal digital recorders are typically terrible in terms of quality and resolution, and the sound files cannot be burned off to a disk. There is no limit to the length of the interview, but it should be at least fifteen minutes long. You are to provide a transcription of no less than five minutes of the interview, following the guidelines for transcription discussed in class. You should also prepare a brief biographical note of the interview subject. Hand in the recorded interview (on tape or disk) and the transcription.

For all projects:
A brief write-up (500 words) should accompany the assignment, with a description of the fieldwork context, what problems you faced, what you would do differently, what more data you wished you could collect, what are the relative strength and weaknesses of the approach, how you felt during the process, and so forth.

Research Essay  November 21  (30%)
Now that you have both primary and secondary research materials, the object is to ‘translate’ these materials into an original research essay, wherein you: (a) identify the folk group and the behaviour you are investigating; (b) locate the group in historical context; (c) describe the behaviour, citing your own research materials; (d) compare and contrast it to similar behaviours occurring elsewhere (in time or in place), drawing on your secondary research; and (e) have some sort of conclusion that addresses, however fleetingly, the reason why this behaviour is performed by this group.

Reflective Essay / Archiving Project  November 30  (10%)
Folklorists deposit their primary research materials, whether that be audio or video recordings, photographs, or fieldnotes, in archives so that it can be drawn on by future researchers. In order to make the archiving process go smoothly, it is important to identify all your materials, and provide descriptions of where and when it came from, why it was conducted in the way it was, and so forth.

The purpose of this assignment is to go through the process of depositing your data at the archives of the Beaton Institute at CBU. Using the forms for deposit, you will itemise the contents of your research project and submit everything (i.e. your proposal including the ethics review and bibliography; the photographs and their descriptions or the fieldnotes and typed up version or interview recording and transcript (depending on which one you did); the respective write-ups; and the essay. Accompanying all this will be a brief reflective note on the process of taking a project from idea to completion.