

Course Outline

FOLK 101: Introduction to Folklore I

Concepts and Fieldwork

Sept. 14 – Dec. 4, 2009
M & W, 1:00-2:15
B 228

Ian Brodie
office: CE-263C
e-mail: ian_brodie@cbu.ca
office hours: M & W, 2:30-4:00, or by appointment

Calendar Description (which is largely useless):

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 death metal 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 concepts and techniques of field research, culminating 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.

Evaluation

Paper Proposal	20%	Oct. 14	(see page 4)
Primary Research project	25%	Nov. 4 / Nov. 18	(see page 5)
Supplementary Research project	15%	Nov. 4 / Nov. 18	(see page 5)
Essay	30%	December 2	(see page 8)
Presentations	10%	November 30 & December 2	(see page 10)

Why you should take this course:

- There is no final exam;
- There are no books to buy;
- I am fairly awesome, and sometimes needed elsewhere, so there are a number of classes I will be missing;
- People of the gender to which you are attracted will in turn find you attractive for taking such a fascinating subject: it is a good icebreaker ("Folklore? Wow: tell me more!");
- All that stuff you have to put to the side in order to focus on your coursework? You get to study it. Booyah!

Why you should **not** take this course:

- There is a fair amount of writing;
- I expect a fair amount of independent research;

- c. Fieldwork can be difficult if you are shy (despite appearances, I'm terribly shy and I therefore suck at fieldwork);
- d. Cape Breton oral and material traditions are not really emphasized (or emphasised, for that matter);
- e. I talk fast; I don't use PowerPoint; and my handwriting is terrible;
- f. There will be very little discussion of fairies, goblins, or vampires. Maybe some, but very little.

This Semester's Plan

This is the fifth time I've run this course. Each time previous I have been dissatisfied with the way it turned out, largely because there is a certain cart-before-the-horse feel about doing a course that is both research methods and introduction at the same time. I am asking you to go out and research something from a certain disciplinary perspective without having the chance to tell you much about what that disciplinary perspective is. There are also issues of access to proper equipment (recorders, cameras, etc.) that often prevents people doing the fieldwork efficiently: it is like teaching chemistry but asking you to bring in some pots and pans from home to use in the labs. The ethics approval process is slow and murky, and the board that reviews knows little of qualitative, ethnographic research. There is also no good textbook to use: in a manner of speaking, reading about how to do an interview is nowhere near as useful (or interesting) as doing an interview, however badly, until you get the feel of it.

So this year I am actually going to look at the title of the course and plan it that way. We begin by examining a few key concepts: **Group**, **Context**, **Tradition**, **Narrative**, **Custom**, and **Material Culture**. The first three sort of encompass the "who and where" of folklore; the latter three are the "what." We do this fast, because you need to start thinking about your research projects.

Then we turn to fieldwork, the "how": although folklorists do read (a lot; an awful lot. A painful amount, really), the primary materials on which they base their research are collected in the field through **interview** and **ethnography**, alongside other recording techniques such as photography, film, and sketching.

Together you will use these concepts and techniques to research, describe and analyse the folkloric practices of a specific group of individuals. That is the assignment (although it's broken down into smaller chunks).

Although I have not ordered a specific text from the bookstore, readings will be distributed over the semester, probably not more than one a week. **You are expected to read them.** I have readings in mind already, and others will emerge as the course progresses. If, by the time of your proposals, half of you are doing something on, say, university folklife, then I will get you a reading on doing research in university settings (and I'll make sure it will still be relevant to the second half of the class). **You are also expected to do library research and find some other readings relevant to your assignment.** I'm serious.

With no need to spend money on textbooks, this will give you extra cash to (a) take the bus to go do fieldwork, or (b) buy the professor nice shiny things.

Some readings that I already know I'll want you to look at:

American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. *Folklife and Fieldwork: A Layman's Introduction to Field Techniques*. Available at <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/fieldwork/pdf/fieldwkComplete.pdf>.

American Folklore Society. "Statement of the American Folklore Society on Research with Human Subjects." Available at <http://www.afsnet.org/aboutAFS/humansubjects.cfm>.

Cape Breton University Office of Research. *Human Subjects Utilization Ethics Review - Application and Guidelines*. Available at <http://www.capebretonu.ca/research/forms.htm>.

Tri-Council Policy Statement: *Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. Available at <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/english/policystatement/policystatement.cfm>. (DON'T READ ALL OF THIS: I'LL TELL YOU WHAT'S RELEVANT)

Class-by-Class Breakdown

September 14 & 16 Getting to know me; getting in touch with your vernacular self (are you 'folk'? Yes, you are); getting this paper; getting an idea of what the semester will be like; getting an opportunity to get the hell out.

Unit one Introducing some folklore concepts

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. But not so much information as to spoil you from taking FOLK 113 in the winter semester. Throughout these few weeks you should begin to think about what sort of group you would like to study and how these various concepts apply (this might best be achieved by thinking about these various concepts and seeing how they resonate in your own experience, and then build on that to identify a group).

September 21 & 23 Group, Context, and Tradition: three overlapping concepts that inform most of folklore's study. The emphasis is on folklore as a *process*, not as an *item*.

September 28 & 30 Narrative, Custom, and Material Culture: in rough form the three general areas that folklorists study. They too overlap.

Paper proposal Getting started on your 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.

October 5 Library instruction: how to use databases for article searches | **Meet in the Library**

October 7 The proposal. Coming up with an idea; Developing a project; Annotated Bibliography; The ethics of folklore research; Putting it all together.

October 12 **Thanksgiving [no class]** and thus a long weekend to work on your proposals!

Unit two Interview

Not the only tool, but perhaps the principal tool of "data collection" for the folklorists. A mix of practice and theory: how folklorists go about getting data that is actually useful.

October 14 Interview 1: What is an interview? | **Proposals due**

October 19 Interview 2: Practice. From setting up microphones to asking decent questions. Good opportunity to book your digital recorders. | **Meet in the Rotary Music Performance Room**

October 21 **Out of town** – I will be at a conference in Idaho (!?) on this day, so there will be **no class**. I will be making arrangements for the Centre for Cape Breton Studies digital recorders to be made available exclusively to FOLK 101 students starting on the 19th until November 2nd.

October 26 Interview 3: Transcription. From speech to text: tricky little thing

October 28 Interview 4: Incorporation. Using interviews in your writing

Unit three Ethnography

When you need to go beyond someone else's experience, when the interview, however rich, is insufficient, and when you are collecting active moments and not recollections, you need a different set of tools

November 2 Ethnography 1: What is Ethnography? (Best ever answer: *Deep hanging out*)

November 4	Ethnography 2: Practice. "Field trip" to the cafeteria, to make you feel awkward in front of your friends Interview project due
November 9	Ethnography 3: Writing. From notes to text
November 11	Remembrance Day [no class]

Unit four Putting it all together: Essay and presentation

You've got a pile of stuff, but what are you going to do with it?

November 16 & 18	Assessing what you have, and what you don't; what you know about this particular practice, and how you are going to communicate it; how to think about and use your research data; revisiting your initial premise, using secondary sources, and writing Ethnography project due on the 18th
November 23 & 25	Catch-up breather days – If things external to this class go according to plan, I will be out of town on one or maybe both of these days. I will know for certain closer to the time. If I <i>am</i> in town on one or both of those days, I will hold class as a general question and answer session about the final assignment, the presentation, folklore in general, etc. Not that I take attendance anyways, but attendance would not be mandatory on these two days.
Nov. 30 & Dec. 2	Presentations Final papers due on the 2nd

Assignment(s)

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. In effect, you have one assignment, broken down into its component parts: a **proposal**; your **primary research method**; your **supplementary research method**; your **essay**; and a **presentation of research and findings**.

Paper Proposal October 14 (20%)

By the end of the fourth week of classes you hopefully have some insight into what constitutes 'folkloric' or 'vernacular' behaviour. You should have be able to recognise such patterns of behaviour in some aspect of your day-to-day life (or that of your friends, neighbours, etc.). Something that is (a) part of the activities of a group (however defined) which (b) is communicated through informal means (oral, by example, through regular exposure, vernacularly produced 'guides') and (c) is based in part on a precedent (i.e. something happened before, and you do it again because of and in the manner of that previous occurrence). It somehow defines the group: the 'group-ness' is revealed through that activity. Even if you intend to study an individual (an Acadian rug-hooker or a Mi'kmaq videographer, for example), they are in part representative of a larger group and work in a particular context.

You will also need some background information on that idea: once you settle on a potential project, you go to the library and find out a little more about it: you want to look at similar activities as they occur elsewhere, and about the context in which your particular activities take place. If (for example) you were doing something on residence customs at CBU, you would look at both studies of residence life as they occur elsewhere, and at histories of CBU, industrial Cape Breton, etc. If you were doing something on a transplanted celebration of an international student community, you could look at university groups, extended-stay communities, and how that celebration is practiced in the originating context. If you were looking at a sports team as a group, well, look for studies of sports teams as groups.

Finally, you will need a tentative plan for finding out more information: through interview (who would know something about the specific activity and the specific group you wish to write about? Why them and not someone else? Are they available? What would you ask them?); or through ethnography (can you observe or participate in the activity? Does the site present difficulties or problems? What would you look for?)

Remember that you'll pick a primary research method (interview or ethnography) which you do in detail, and then supplement it with a brief version of the other one.

So 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 identification of a primary informant.

These three things translate into the two components of the proposal:

A brief (200-300 words) thesis statement: it should define the parameters of the group and the activity(-ies). In other words, shape your semblance of an idea into a coherent piece of writing. It should also indicate who you are going to interview, why, and how (i.e. what questions you will start with), **or** where you are going to do an ethnography, why, and how (will there be difficulties in recording observations).

An annotated bibliography of no less than three sources: Take three items (articles or books) that you have come across in your library research, **READ THEM** (in case that wasn't clear), and, in about fifty words per item, explain their basic position and why they are relevant to your research. 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). (You should consult a standard style guide – MLA, Turabian, etc. – for how to do a citation.)

By the time you submit your proposal you should have thought through your project: you should have

- a. identified an informant for an interview, ascertained if and when they will be available for an interview, and explained your project to them;
- b. developed an initial set of questions to ask them in the interview;
- c. identified an occasion for you to do an ethnography;
- d. ascertained if you are able to attend that event (both anyone's permission and your own availability); and
- e. considered whether your primary research method should be the interview or the ethnography.

See an example of a proposal on page 11.

Primary Research Project (25%) and Supplementary Research Project (15%)

Based on your proposal, you will have ascertained whether you wish to concentrate your efforts on the interview or the ethnography. You will conduct one of each, but one will be better suited for your project and thus something to spend greater energy on. Interviews are effective for, among other things, the collection of oral materials like stories or jokes, or to record a person's experience of events in the past, or to gain insight into someone's particular and distinct perspective on an event. Ethnography is effective for communicating your experience of an event or a place to a third party.

Doing these will set you in good stead for any future folklore courses (or anthropology, sociology, and even – increasingly – contemporary historical studies). They are also both great skills to have and develop an appreciation for: once you develop an 'ethnographer's eye,' for example, you never quite see a place the same way again.

The Interview

November 4

Whereas photography is a medium suited for material culture study and certain aspects of custom, and ethnography is a medium suited for the exposition of performances of everyday life, interview is the medium best suited for discovering the insights and repertoire of other people.

The purpose of this project is to conduct a 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. Eventually, you are going to use your interviewee's words to complement your findings, incorporating them into your writing.

The interview 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.

How to do the interview

1. **The interview is to be recorded.** You should use the best recording equipment available to you. Avoid those tiny hand-held recorders, as they have terrible microphones: the tiny cassettes are of limited usefulness, and the digital ones have proprietary technology that makes it virtually impossible to get the digital file off of it. Nowadays one can often record onto a laptop directly, but use an external microphone if you can. When in doubt, the desktop cassette recorders (again, with an external mike) are pretty solid recording devices.
2. **Test your recording equipment:** set up the equipment in a manner which strikes a balance between clarity and unobtrusiveness. Play back the recording and make sure that both your interviewee and you are audible.
3. As the interview begins, remind the interviewee(s) about the nature of your project and **ask them if they are comfortable with being recorded.**
4. **Remember to keep it as a guided conversation.** Consult Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater's "The Interview" for ideas.
 - a. If you are doing it as your **primary research project**, your interview should be at least **twenty** minutes long;
 - b. If you are doing it as your **secondary research project**, your interview should be at least **ten** minutes long.
5. You should also **take notes** about things you might want to ask about later on in the interview but can't at that moment, or about anything that might help you with the eventual transcription (gestures, if they point to something or pick something up and say "like this thing", etc.).
6. **As soon as you** can, transcribe a section or two of the interview, using the framework suggested by Ives in "Processing." Pick a section that you would like to quote from for your final paper.
 - a. If you are doing it as your **primary research project**, you should transcribe about **four** minutes of the interview;
 - b. If you are doing it as your **secondary research project**, you should transcribe about **two** minutes of the interview.
7. In a **headnote**, describe the interview context and give a brief biographical sketch of the person you are interviewing. Explain your rationale for transcribing the way you did (what conscious decisions did you make about smoothing over hesitations, rendering accent, dealing with interruptions and outside noises, etc.).
8. **Do a reflection on the process**, what you did well, what you wish you did differently, and what strategies you discovered along the way. *This is perhaps the most important part of the exercise, so take it seriously.*
9. **Hand in** the recording, the transcription, the headnote, and the reflection.

Students like page lengths, so...

The **headnote** should be about **one page**: half a page for the biographical sketch (a healthy paragraph) and half a page for the interview context (an other healthy paragraph).

The **transcription** will be **as long as it needs to be**.

The **reflection** should be about **two pages if it is your primary research**, or **one page if it is your supplementary research**.

Relevant Readings on Reserve

Ives, Edward D. 1995. "Processing." *The Tape-Recorded Interview: A Manual for Fieldworkers in Folklore and Oral History*. 2nd ed. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press. 74-88. **Reserve Envelope 684**

Sunstein, Bonnie Stone & Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater. 2002. "The Interview: Learning How to Listen." *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research*. 2nd ed. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's. 374-393. **Reserve Envelope 804**

The Ethnography November 18

The purpose of this project is to conduct observational fieldwork in a particular setting or during a particular occasion. The aim is not simply to provide a rote or sequential list of what happened, but to try to communicate what that setting or occasion is like. Your goal is to be not only descriptive but evocative. Eventually, you are going to use this description as you move towards explanation of the cultural phenomenon, incorporating it into your writing.

There is a connection between ethnography and creative writing: unlike the essay, where you are arguing a point, the ethnography is a communication of an experience. You can employ metaphor or simile, describe the sensory experience of being in that particular place (sight, touch, taste, scent, sound), how it relates to your other experiences of other places, and so on.

On fieldnotes: sometimes, if you are actively participating in the event, you won't be able to take notes at the same time. How do you manage to record these observations? I'm not answering that question, but you may need to reflect on how to balance surreptitious note taking with active participation.

How to do the ethnography

1. Plan to **be present at the event** or place for at least two to three hours if it is your primary research project, or one to two if it is your supplementary research project.
2. **Take fieldnotes** about what happens, how people act in the space, what it is like to be there, etc. (See Goldstein, esp. 91-93)
3. Remember to record both **your observations** – things you experience through your senses – and **your impressions** – questions, feelings, interpretations that that sense experience encourages. You may want to develop a note-taking system that separates your observations from your impressions. (See Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater, esp. 87ff)
4. Using these notes as your reference, **write a descriptive piece** about the place or event. The reader should get a sense of what it was like to be there at that time: it is a snapshot of an event.
 - a. If you are doing it as your **primary research project**, it should be about 750-1000 words;
 - b. If you are doing it as your **secondary research project**, it should be about 400-800 words.
5. **Do a reflection on the process**, what you did well, what you wish you did differently, and what strategies you discovered along the way. *This is perhaps the most important part of the exercise, so take it seriously.*
6. **Hand in** your fieldnotes, your descriptive piece, and your reflection.

Students like page lengths, so...

The **fieldnotes** will be as long as they need to be, **but** you should probably be able to get at least **three to four handwritten pages** (if it is your primary research), and a good page or so (if it is your supplementary research).

The lengths of the descriptive pieces are given above.

Like the interview assignment, the **reflection** should be about **two pages if it is your primary research, or one page if it is your supplementary research.**

Relevant Readings on Reserve

Goldstein, Kenneth S. 1964. "Observation Collecting Methods." *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore*. Hatsboro, PS: Folklore Associates. 77-103. **Reserve Envelope TBD**

Sunstein, Bonnie Stone & Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater. 2002. Excerpts from "Writing Self, Writing Cultures." *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research*. 2nd ed. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's. 79-101. **Reserve Envelope 158**

Research Essay December 2 (30%)

This entire course has been a slow and (hopefully) methodical presentation of how to do a folklore essay. Folklore essays do not, for the most part, vary from "regular" essays: all are efforts at demonstrating the presence of a particular phenomenon within a particular field of inquiry. The principal difference is that the primary data under consideration are collected ethnographically, in the field. The implication is that when you are studying a group (or a person within a group) it is in the foreground. So, perhaps a little different from other courses in the liberal arts is how folklore papers anticipate both secondary research – the things you read at the library – and primary research, your interview and ethnography.

By the time it comes to writing the essay, you will have:

- looked around for an aspect of 'tradition' from your life/environment;
- read up on similar situations;
- read up on local context;
- framed a question;
- plotted a course of research;
- thought through the ethical implications of said research;
- done the original research; and
- begun the process of mining, organising, and processing said research.

And you are now in the position to write up your findings. You have been thinking about this for two months now, so it's practically just typing.

So, for this essay, I expect evidence of

- library research – which means you have to quote secondary sources;
- primary research: both interview and ethnography – which means
 - you have to take something from your interview and incorporate it into your text, and
 - you have to take something from your ethnography and incorporate it into your text.

Presumably, you will have done all of these three things already, as there have been assignments for each. That is why you don't have a huge amount of time between the ethnography assignment and the essay / presentation assignments: you've done all the work save for the writing, so this should be the easy part.

However, as I will say in class, I try to approach each assignment as if the other ones didn't exist. I mark your proposal based on its strength as a proposal; your interview on your grasp of the techniques of interview; your ethnography based on your grasp of techniques of ethnography; and your essay based on the strengths of the presentation of your ideas backed up with sufficient research.

This effectively means that you could have switched topics for each assignment, including this one. However, this would have been a profoundly silly thing to do, as you still need to conduct library research, an interview, and an ethnography. With two weeks to do it, no less. Very silly indeed. But who am I to judge?

What I Want From an Essay: A Diatribe by Ian

Say, for example, I am looking at a group of men who get together every winter for a big hunting trip. The bulk of my essay would be on these few men: their stories (how they got together, their individual first times among

the group, infamous occurrences on previous trips), their joking behaviour (which serves to underscore how they relate to each other), their material culture, their foodways while on the trip, and what they think about hunting in general, what it means to them. This would be my primary data, and I would probably use a blend of **interview** (not an oral questionnaire but a guided conversation), **ethnography** (the observed experience rendered in my own words in the form of fieldnotes and subsequent revisions), and **documentation** (photography, video, audio recordings, even measurements if I were looking at things like shack construction).

In the body of my paper, I would cite these in the same way as I would cite a quotation from a book, quoting them either directly or indirectly, and I would list them as references in my works cited. (Most style guides – MLA, Chicago, APA – would have a preferred way of citing these materials: consult one. Better yet, by the one best suited for your major concentration, since you'll be doing this a lot.)

But I wouldn't stop there: I also want to locate this group within a larger context. Their activities may be **distinct**, but not necessarily **unique**. Furthermore, other people have likely studied similar activities, albeit in different contexts: could I not get insight from their work, and associate it with my own? This is where you cite what other people have said. You may want to look at other studies about (a) the culture in which the activity occurs (rural Cape Breton), (b) the activity itself (hunting), (c) the constitution of the group (men at leisure), and/or (d) theoretical perspectives to help frame the activity (feminism, Marxism, post-modernism). This last one might start to be asking too much from an intro-level paper, but that is the direction that you, budding folklorist that you are, might be heading.

So, like any essay, you have a point that you're trying to make. Say what it is ("hunting is important to these men"), locate it within a larger context ("recreational hunting is common throughout North America"), describe what they do (be specific, and show similarities and differences to the larger phenomenon), and struggle with the question of *why*.

Simply put, an essay is an effort at establishing an argument about a particular something. It locates the argument within a larger tradition (informing influences) and in relation to similar arguments (parallel examples); it offers new evidence (in folklore, we are assuming a new study with primary data based on fieldwork, but in other disciplines we refer either to (a) primary data based on some other discipline-related means of data collection or (b) a confluence of perspectives which in concert offer a new perspective); it connects the new evidence to the larger tradition, allowing for either reaffirmation or challenge to what the tradition tells us; and it allows for a personal voice to speak both from and to that larger tradition, occasioned by the privileged perspective of being an 'expert' on the subject, even if the subject about which one is expert is a fairly narrow slice of the universe.

Because you are the producer of primary data, you are the (or 'an') expert on whichever topic you have studied: someone has likely done a study on something similar before, but as you look at a distinct occurrence of that phenomenon, you have a particular contribution to make. A gajillion people have studied Halloween traditions before you, but they have not looked at Halloween, 2009, Glace Bay (for example).

Some more very basic rules to doing an essay (very basic, nothing of insight, but pure 'this is sound advice which you might not like much but which every prof you will ever have will appreciate someone having told you and telling you early'):

- double space; type; 12 point font; clear font (Arial, Times (New Roman), Helvetica, Courier, etc.); and black ink.

Excerpt from an imaginary essay

When I entered the cabin, my first sensation was of encountering a pile of dirty laundry: there was a smell that hinted at stale air, body odour, and meat (Fieldnotes). This shouldn't be surprising: Simon Bronner has written, about his fieldwork among hunters in Pennsylvania, that "Part of the tradition is to emphasise manliness by braving the elements and refraining from shaving or bathing" ("Menfolk," 6). Frank agrees: "Yeh... it's no place to bring a lady, but it's not meant to be, right?"

Works Cited

Brodie, Ian. Fieldnotes. 10-12 Nov. 2009.

Bronner, Simon J. "Menfolk." *Manly Traditions: The Folk Roots of American Masculinities*. Ed. Bronner. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2005. 1-58.

Mulcahy, Francis "Frank". Interview with author. 2 Nov. 2009.

- Take advantage of your word processor's spell check option, and do it slowly: don't simply accept the first option that comes along without thinking it through. See Jon Stewart's appendix to *Naked Pictures of Famous People* for a list of what Microsoft Word offers as possible corrections.
- Avoid exclamation points, italics or bold or colour or uppercase for emphasis, etc. This rule may be slightly disregarded: on occasion, an exclamation point or italics (only) can be used as a rhetorical device, but I caution you to do so judiciously.
- Be informed about your readership, even if it is a 'pretend' readership. You should be aiming to communicate your findings to a first-year university, North American, Canadian, Cape Breton-familiar but not -centric audience, so you should expect a certain level of 'common sense'. Provide context and definitions (your own are fine: this isn't an 'according to Webster's' thing) for terms that you can reasonably expect people not to know, and skip definitions for terms that you can reasonably expect people to know. (For example, it is not unreasonable to assume that your reader knows what cheerleading is, but it would be unreasonable to assume that your reader has an understanding of Sydney-area high school rivalries.)

Students like page lengths, so...

Apparently, in the past, I have assigned papers much longer than anything the other profs assign to a first-year class. So this year I am asking for **6-8** pages, or about 1500-2000 words, exclusive of bibliography.

Relevant Readings on Reserve

There are a number of student papers that have been published in the graduate student journal *Culture & Tradition* (which I encourage you all to look at). Although some of them are a bit longer than this assignment, they will give you a general feel for the kind of thing I'm looking for. I will add some more to the reserve list, but currently there are

Kettle, Shannon. 2004. "Sessions in the Dark: Legend Telling Events in Residence." *Culture & Tradition* 26: 122-126. **Reserve Envelope 1653**

Pike, Robyn. 2004. "'44 Bottles of Beer on the Wall': An Analysis of the Collection of Three Students." *Culture & Tradition* 26: 116-121. **Reserve Envelope 1655**

Robbins, Matthew. 2004. "Libations and Nosh: The Role of Food and Drink in University Dating Intimacy." *Culture & Tradition* 26: 108-115. **Reserve Envelope 1654**

Williams, Carley. 2004. "Stitch and Bitch: The Occupational Folklife of Costume Studies Students." *Culture & Tradition* 26: 26-37. **Reserve Envelope 1652**

Presentation November 30 & December 2 (10%)

This will comprise a four-to-six minute presentation on your topic. Please keep audio-visual materials to a minimum. This should be something other than simply reading your paper out loud: (a) your paper will be too long to read in its entirety anyways, and (b) certain things (like extended quotes from other sources) are not particularly interesting to the audience. You should also be prepared to answer questions from me and/or from other students. As of this writing there are a nice number of you (less than 20). If this class expands, we might alter the presentation to accommodate. But we will cross that bridge when we come to it.

FOLK 101 – Paper Proposal and Annotated Bibliography

Please, in the name of all that is good and holy, remember that this is an **example of**, not a **template for**, a proposal. It covers key areas, to be sure, but don't slavishly follow it.

Laim Sue Doenim
20051418
Folklore 101
Ian Brodie
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Proposal

For my paper this semester I am interested in demonstrating how my friends and I constitute a folk group. We share many things in common – we're all from the same community, all attended the same high school, and are now all students at CBU – but the thing that seems to bind us closest together is that we were all at one time on our high school's girls volleyball team.

Although we no longer play volleyball, certainly not competitively and rarely even for fun, our shared time on the team made us bond together in a way that I feel was different from other groups I belonged to. Obviously there were the physical demands of volleyball: practices, drills, learning our positions, and so forth. We all had a love-hate relationship with our coach, and tried our best not to disappoint her. Ultimately, however, it was not the volleyball court that defined us as a group, but our time off the court.

Jennifer was the captain of the team in my first year, and she would lead us in drills and practices when the coach had to step out. But she was also the team leader outside of practices and games. She taught us all the chants and cheers and was the one who did all the "initiations." Although she no longer has a formal position, whenever we get together she is the one who tells the best stories. We all know them, we've all heard them hundreds of times, and many of us were there when the events

happened, but she is the one who tells – or is asked to tell them – when we inevitably want to relive those times. As such, I have determined her to be a good person to interview, and she has said it would be fine for me to do so. I can also, of course, use my own experiences as a source for this paper.

There are a few things I want to look at. First of all, there is the initiation process: how we introduced new girls on to the team. I remember what it was like to go through it and what it was like to lead it. Many of Jennifer’s stories involve initiation, and it is interesting to compare what we did the same and what we did differently. I also want to look at some of our team chants: we had cheers and chants for on the court (which were clean) and some for bus trips (which were very dirty). A look at the bus trips themselves would be interesting, as we had some routines and rituals that we felt made us unique, and it was always a time for pranks. These trips are also a source of stories.

Finally, I want to look at our group today. There are eight of us who came to CBU from my time on the team: some came last year with Jennifer and some came this year with me. We are now this large group of girls who spend a lot of time together, despite some of us being in the Business, some of us in Arts, and one of us in Geology. As I said above, although none of us are on the team anymore, our shared experience keeps us a “folk group.”

Because the events took place mostly in the past, I will be choosing an interview as my primary research approach. But I will also do a small ethnography (for my supplementary research) of one of our inevitable “storytelling” sessions when we reminisce about our volleyball days.

Annotated Bibliography

Bearley-Nöer, Plower. 2002. “Initiation into discipline: between welcoming and hazing.” *New Issues* 11: 45-66.

I thought this article might be useful because it deals with initiation. However, I was really surprised by the harsh tone she (?) took. I don't think all initiation activity is "an exercise in power" or "enforced humiliation." I know that my paper isn't focusing too much on initiation, but I thought I would try to stress that for many of us it was actually a positive experience.

Hands, Randy. 2008. "Bitching: an emic approach to women's talking sessions." *Contemporary Ethnolinguistics* 8.1: 9-18.

Kalcik, Susan. 1975. "... Like Ann's Gynecologist or the Time I Was Almost Raped': Personal Narratives in Women's Rap Groups." *Journal of American Folklore* Spec. Issue Women and Folklore 88.347: 3-11.

Although these two articles take very different approaches, they are very much on the same topic. Hands is looking, from an outsider's perspective, at how women's talking sessions (by which he means groups entirely composed of women) often employ terminology that they would not want men to use when talking to them or about the same topic. His idea is that there is a "private" and "public" language. I thought it was neat how he did the research, but he admits that by attending these sessions he likely affected the talk that occurred. Kalcik, on the other hand, is looking at how women employ a "shorthand," a "kernel narrative," when they talk: an entire episode that everyone knows can be alluded to in just a few words. Among my friends, we can say something like, "Like in Wolfville," and everyone knows exactly what that's supposed to mean. I think they will both be useful, especially when I think about how weird – and coarse, sometimes – our stories might seem to an outsider.

Hugankiss, Amanda. 1998. "'Ladies Night': An ethnography of female-centered socialization among university-aged women." *Modern Issues* 22.3: 19-34.

I found this article useful because I wanted to see how others study our kind of group. It makes the argument that, even by calling it "Ladies Night" or "Girls Night" there is an explicit 'framing' or the

event in terms of not only gender but, specifically, “youthful effeminacy.” The example is more urban than CBU (it’s in Chicago), but I think it some points that I can use.

MacOnyew, Ivana. 1974. “The role of chant and song in varsity sports.” *Journal for the Sociology of Sport* New Series 12.5: 567-576.

This article is a little old, and is based mainly on American high school football. One of the things that it focuses on is how there are specific chants or songs for specific rival teams. I thought this was interesting because, although we didn’t have a song for every other team, there were certainly one for our main rivals. She also makes it clear that she is not talking about cheerleading, which has its own traditions: she is talking about chants at practice and songs sung on the bus, in private and away from crowds.

P.S. Only one of these articles is real: the rest are made up. But don’t **you** go making up sources: I will randomly check, because I am so mean and nasty.