

Course Outline

FOLK/FINA 113: Introduction to Folklore II

Folk Genres and Analysis

Ian Brodie
Jan. 6 – Apr. 6, 2010
T & Th, 1:00-2:15

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Calendar Description

*This course surveys various genres and analytical approaches in folklore study.
Maritime Canadian materials are emphasized.*

Course Description:

Building on the questions, “What do folklorists study?” and “Why do they study it?” this course will introduce you to basic concepts, theories and genres related to the discipline of folklore. Students will gain an overview of the discipline and some of the questions it raises, exploring possibilities that are provided through folklore study. We will cover some of the major genres within folklore as a subject. Another goal of the course will be to develop reflective and critical thinking as well as academic writing skills. Fieldwork and course materials will enhance lectures given in class.

This Outline:

Although this appears thick, please read this through: it describes all the assignments and expectations in remarkable detail. It should also prevent us from having untold additional handouts throughout the semester, saving trees, future generations, etc.

Evaluation (for details, see page 3)

Feedback	20%	(weekly) 10 @ 2% each
Paper proposal	15%	February 2
Paper	40%	March 23
Presentation	5%	March 23, 25, & 30
‘Coda’	5%	April 1
Final exam	15%	TBD

Textbooks (new and used copies are available at the bookstore)

Oring, Elliott. *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1986.

Oring, Elliott. *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: A Reader*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1989.

Facebook Group

I have created a Facebook group, “FOLK/FINA 113 - Winter 2010.” I have already sent invitations to join to everyone for whom I have an email address. There will be links to copies of the syllabus and assignment handouts, and that is where answers to the feedback questions will need to be posted (see below). Once everyone has joined the group I will make it ‘secret’ so it need not be seen by the entire planet. If you do not have a Facebook account, get one.

Reading Schedule and Course Breakdown

The two texts work in concert: the *Introduction* provides a basic overview, while the corresponding section in the *Reader* is chock-a-block with illustrative articles. So, for Tuesdays we read the chapter from the *Introduction*, and for Thursdays we read a selection from the *Reader*. I make one digression from this pattern: I skip Chapter 3 (“Religious Folklore”) because I don’t think the chapter in the *Introduction* is very good but without it the selections from the *Reader* are hard to follow.

	Tuesday (<i>Introduction</i>)	Thursday (<i>Reader</i>)
January 7		First day business
January 12 and 14	Chapter 1 On the Concepts of Folklore	Wilson, “Herder, Folklore and Romantic Nationalism”
January 19 and 21	Chapter 2 Ethnic Groups and Ethnic Folklore	Paredes, “Folk Medicine and the Intercultural Jest”
January 26 and 28	Chapter 4 Occupational Folklore	Frank, “The Last Forty-Niner”
February 2 and 4	Chapter 5 Children’s Folklore (Proposals due)	Goldstein, “Strategy in Counting Out”
February 9 and 11	Chapter 6 Folk Narratives	Allen, “Personal Experience Narratives”
February 16 and 18	Chapter 7 Ballads and Folksongs	Buchan, “History and Harlaw”
February 23 and 25	<i>A week’s reprieve, spent reading, I am sure</i>	
March 2 and 4	Chapter 8 Riddles and Proverbs	Leary, ““The Land Won’t Burn””
March 9 and 11	Chapter 9 Folk Objects	Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Memory”
March 16 and 18	Chapter 10 Documenting Folklore	Oring, “Documenting Folklore: The Annotation”
March 23 and 25	Presentations (Papers Due)	Presentations
March 30 and April 1	Presentations	Review / Evaluations
April 6	Study break (hem, hem)	

Course Requirements

Feedback (20%)

Every week, on Thursday, I will be asking a question for reflection. These questions will be on the general theme of the following week's topics. By no later than the following Monday, you are to submit a *brief* (50-100 word) written answer. These will be compiled and used as examples for the following lectures. For example, the first week's question will be to identify two things you imagine a folklorist might study (and why). Over the course of the semester, I expect ten from you, worth 2% each: doing it will earn one mark, and anything more than a half-assed effort will earn the second, so think of it as a (virtually) free 20%.

How to submit: After Thursday's class I will post the question as a discussion thread on the wall of the Facebook group: answer by posting a reply. Do so by midnight on the Monday.

Primary Assignment, comprising a Proposal (15%), a Paper (40%) a Presentation (5%), and a 'Coda' (5%)¹

For your major paper (due March 23rd) you should discuss the practices of a "folkgroup" of your acquaintance, although not one of which you are an immediate member, and identify an individual who is a "tradition-bearer" for that group. In your paper you should describe and delimit the folkgroup involved and what makes this individual a tradition-bearer in that group. It is helpful to use the broad categories suggested by Oring in the various chapters of the *Introduction*. You should do some sort of **fieldwork** (interview and ethnography), and use some **library** sources.

Proposal (due February 2nd)

For the proposal you need three things:

1. **Some semblance of an idea:** by this time in the semester, you hopefully have some insight into what constitutes 'folkloric' or 'vernacular' behaviour. You should have been 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 it is performed 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 (a Mi'kmaq basket maker, for example), they are representative of a larger group and work in a particular context.
2. **Some background information on that idea:** once you settle on a potential project, go to the library and find out a little more about it: you want to look at similar activities as they occur elsewhere (which is a little bit synchronic), or maybe the history of it within the same context (synchronic), 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 attempt to locate studies of residence life as they occur elsewhere, histories of CBU residence life, and histories of CBU, industrial Cape Breton, etc.

¹ Students who have taken FOLK 101 will note a remarkable similarity in the assignments for the two classes. However, whereas 101 emphasised the use of ethnographic research in your study, this assignment emphasises the use of a technical vocabulary to discuss the groups. Please note too that the group is one of which you are *not* a member.

3. **A tentative plan for finding out more information through primary research:** you now have an idea and a little knowledge: what else do you need to do to find out that little extra bit? Ideally, identify someone who is a tradition-bearer who you can interview, and arrange, however tentatively, to experience this group engaged in its activity first-hand (which is the basis of ethnography).

These three things translate into the body of the proposal, which is:

A brief (200-300 words) 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 how you plan to do the primary research (your tentative plan), and give (through a brief list of potential additional sources) evidence of some library work.

The Paper (due March 23rd)

The essay will be seven-eight pages long. The essay locates the folkloric activity you are studying within a larger tradition (informing influences) and in relation to similar activities (parallel examples); it offers new evidence (in folklore, we are assuming a new study with primary data based on fieldwork); 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, 2007, Glace Bay (for example).

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 and organising 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.

A Suggested Outline

Here's one possible way:

- **Introduction:** describe what you are going to do by
 - Identifying the group;
 - Naming some of the activities you will be describing in detail;

- Identifying your source (the person you are interviewing) and their relationship to the group;
- Describing how you are organising the materials (this can be chronological, or moving from smaller to larger groups, or something as simple as ‘I want to talk about this, then this, then finally this’: just impose some order.
- **The group:** tell me something more about the group; a history, a membership, etc. Sometimes groups are so large (in terms of ‘a community’ that you don’t know everybody, and some don’t lend themselves to a headcount, so be prudent.
- **The activities:** describe, using your own experiences and also the words or ideas of your source, the activities engaged in by the group. This is probably the bulk of your paper. These will be organised according to the principals you laid out in the introduction. You should be attempting to use the terms from the course (ritual, custom, narrative, *to name just a very few*) that you are encountering in the readings.
- **Synthesis:** what do these activities do? How do they shape the group? Are they specific to the group or do similar groups do similar things? This is where you would bring in secondary sources, comparing and contrasting you group to the groups other researchers have studied.
- **Conclusion:** more or less summarise what you have written.

Handy tip: Write your introduction last. This is the 21st century: writing in order is no longer necessary

Please note: A portion of the mark for the final paper (20% of the assignment, which equals 8% of your final grade) will be for the technical aspects of writing: organisation, spelling, grammar, etc.

Presentation (on March 23rd, 25th, or 30th)

The last two weeks of classes will be spent on presenting your folk group to the class. The presentation will be a very casual affair (no PowerPoint, no poster board), describing the group and its activities. As the presentations progress, as patterns emerge, we tend to devolve into a larger discussion, and something you said on Tuesday will resonate with what someone else says on Thursday.

I am a nasty and miserable human being: **questions on the exam are actually based in part on the presentations** of your peers. (In years past I didn’t tell my class about this, so I must be getting kinder in my doddering old age.) They are also pertinent for the ‘Coda’ assignment discussed below. So, for self-preservation, do not think of presentation time as an opportunity to not come to class.

‘Coda’ (due April 1st)

This is something new this year. This will be a one page addendum to your paper where you get to address anything new that may have arisen through the presentations, whether that be a question raised by me or one of your classmates, or an observation made by or about one of the other presenters that you think might have resonance with your paper. This will allow you to begin the process of synthesising the course materials and prepare yourself for the exam.

Final Exam: (15%)

As a rule, I don’t like exams, either writing them or marking them. For me, exams should only be used to measure that you have picked up the terminology of the discipline, and can use it correctly. As this is an introductory course, I want you to leave knowing the technical terms and historical developments of the

study of folklore so you can be prepared for more advanced study. Therefore, the exam is based on terminology, definitions, some famous names, and so forth. Questions will be multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, or short answer (i.e. one sentence), along with two slightly longer essay-type questions (aimed at *synthesis*, not *regurgitation*, of material). Regular attendance and reading the material is all that is required to do well.

General Policies

Attendance:

After the first week or so I don't take attendance, because you are not seven years old. (I do it in the first week really only to learn your names.) However, regular attendance is expected. Although I will post the occasional note about class on the Facebook page, they are not an adequate substitute for attendance (since they assume that you knew what happened in class that day). You are responsible for any material you may have missed.

Assignments:

All assignments must be completed in order to pass this course. Furthermore:

Paper format:

Assignments must be typed: please use black ink and a standard font. Double-space throughout, and print on white paper. Folklorists typically use MLA style for assignments, but as long as you are consistent you may choose any style you wish (APA, Chicago, etc.). **If you do not understand this, come see me.** Paper-clip or staple your pages together – in order, please! – or put in an appropriately sized envelope.

Submitting papers after class:

Assignments can be dropped off at the Centre for Cape Breton Studies, or you may lovingly slide them under my office door. *Door-slider-unders: use an appropriately-sized envelope, or I can not be responsible for footprints.*

E-mailed papers:

I will accept assignments by e-mail in Word (my preference) or as a PDF. They will not be printed off: instead, I will save them under a different name, mark them directly on the file, and return them to you by email. For some reason, the CBU mail system hates many addresses (hotmail especially), so it blocks messages with attachments but doesn't tell the sender or the anticipated recipient that it has done so. *If I don't send you a confirmation that I received it, I didn't receive it.*

Late or missed assignments:

Assignments are expected in class on the dates given above: they are absolutely due by no later than 5pm on the day following. Anything later than that will be penalised at one mark per day. No paper will be accepted after two weeks: it will be considered incomplete and will result in a failing grade for the course.

Three feedback questions are due promptly. They are no good to me or the class if they are not answered by the time class discussion occurs. So, no answering them all in the last week and fishing for that twenty percent.

Missed exam:

If you know you are going to miss the exam for a documented reason, please provide me with at least two weeks notice so that alternate arrangements can be made. If you miss the exam due to illness or personal emergency, you must provide a documented reason within five days so that alternate arrangements can be made.

About the Library...

Go there. The Library of Congress Number for Folklore begins with "GR": hang out in that section.

About the Internet...

Still for losers. If you must use it, at the very least use Google Scholar to start your searches. And remember, if you can find something, cut and paste it, and claim it as your own, I can certainly find it again and expose you. Academic integrity is like Britney Spears' underpants: in a perfect world, they are both always on.

Plagiarism:

See the next page. I hope you find it offensive that I even feel the need to mention it.

A word about plagiarism and essay-writing

Plagiarism is defined by the university calendar as follows:

Plagiarism is the act of representing the intellectual work of others as one's own. Such misrepresentation is treated as a serious violation of academic standards and principles. When a student submits work for a course, it is assumed that the work is original except where the student properly acknowledges the use of other sources. Of course, good scholarship often requires drawing on the work of others, but any borrowed material – including words, ideas, data, statistics, graphics and other intellectual matter, whether drawn from print, electronic, or other non-print sources – must be fully acknowledged according to the accepted practices of the relevant discipline. (CBU Calendar)

This means that when you use sources, whether they are from the library, from the internet, or (as is often the case in folklore) from interviews with people, you must clearly distinguish both (a) what are someone else's **ideas** as opposed to your own, and (b) what are someone else's **words** as opposed to your own.

I have found that many students leave themselves open to the charge of plagiarism by either doing little to clearly make the distinction between their own work and someone else's, or (more often) not quite grasping the concept of what the essay is. An essay is more than a number of sources interwoven with some linking material: it is an effort at expressing an original idea which is more often than not based *in part* on other peoples' own efforts at expressing similar or parallel ideas.

So, of course (as the policy says) you will be quoting and drawing ideas from other people, but remember:

- There is nothing wrong with quoting somebody, even quoting them extensively, **provided that** you recognise and indicate in the text that this is not your idea or words but those of someone else.
- There is nothing wrong with paraphrasing somebody, **provided that** you recognise and indicate in the text that, although they may now be your words, it is someone else's ideas.
- A list of references (bibliography, works cited, etc.) is simultaneously **both mandatory and insufficient** for citing.

Finally (and this is the critical part), the object of the essay is that you are **actually trying to say something**. An essay is not much different from saying:

Let me tell you what I think. First off, so that we're clear, here's the thing I'm talking about, with some data I got from this guy and this guy. Second, here's what a couple of other people say about it: this guy says this, but this guy says that (and she says it so well that I'm not going to put it in my own words). Now, here's what I have to say about it: see how it's kind of the same but also kind of different from those other guys? So there, that's what I think.

So, practice safe essay-writing: clearly indicate how you are using sources, and hand-in something that goes beyond an artful compilation of other people's ideas and aims at some kind of synthesis between what others have said and what you have to say. *It will make you strong like bull.*

I used to go through my day with the idea that no student ever intends to commit an act of plagiarism: it may have been naïve of me but I'm okay with that. But I have now been burned too many times, and I have had to change my tune to a **zero tolerance policy**.

Any student who plagiarises will automatically receive a mark of zero on the assignment: he or she will not have the opportunity to resubmit; and the Dean of Arts and Community Studies and, if different, the student's Dean, will be informed.