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**Hours:** MWF 3:00-4:00 p.m.

**DESCRIPTION:** We use the word *folklore* in two senses. First, to identify a kind of material: traditional, stylized, artful human products like games, proverbs, fairytales, nicknames, jokes, and so forth that people employ(ed) in the course of everyday socializing (especially people who live[ed] in small-scale communities or belong[ed] to tightly-knit groups) and that they've usually learned from other people rather than from institutional sources like the media or the school curriculum. Second, the same word *folklore* denotes the field of study specializing in that kind of material. In short, just as *linguistics* is the study of *language*, and *English* is the study of (anglophone) *literature*, so *folklore* (sense #2) is the study of *folklore* (sense #1).

The title of this course, *Introduction to Folklore*, refers to *folklore* as much in the second sense as in the first sense: it introduces you to ways in which folklorists have conceptualized, analyzed, and interpreted folklore materials over the last 120 years or so. Consequently, the main body of the course is organized according to what folklorists, in their studies, have tried to find out about their subject matter—or, put another way, the kinds of research questions they've asked and tried to answer (thus "doing folklore" in sense #2) about the data of folklore (sense #1). This emphasis on *folklore* as a kind of intellectual practice explains the perhaps-slightly-unfamiliar section headings in the syllabus below: *genetics* (denoting questions about how folklore materials are born, how transmitted and changed over time, how related to similar-but-different materials, and so on); *syntactics* (questions about their consistent, recurring, traditional shapes, designs, forms, structures); *semantics* (folklore materials are human productions, socially shared: what messages are they communicating?); and *pragmatics* (questions about motives, reasons, purposes, effects: what do people hope to achieve—consciously or unconsciously—by playing games, telling stories, and so on, and how do they succeed—or fail—in their purpose?)

**WHAT I HOPE YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS CLASS:** Most obviously, I hope you will learn to take seriously a kind of culture you're no doubt familiar with but probably never consciously "thought about." You almost certainly take fine art seriously—you've probably read *Moby Dick* and can perhaps quote a few lines of Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy. You also take seriously popular culture, having helped to make Michael Jackson a multi-millionaire by buying his albums and even knowing by heart the words of his best-known songs. But these kinds of culture, elite and pop, are only part of the picture: there is a third kind of culture that we tend to take for granted rather than conceptualize, that's mostly stored in memory rather than on a printed page or on the grooves of a compact disc, that we encounter in face-to-face oral communication with significant others rather than visually from reading a book or watching television. This

third kind of everyday, below-the-radar oral culture includes what we call “folklore.”

Second, I hope you will learn that folklore has been and can be studied in disciplined and interesting ways. The best way to do this, in my opinion, is not just to have you read examples of folklore and “discuss” them, but for you to become familiar with the main lineaments of folklore as a professional field of study. Thus we will survey the intellectual history of the field, selecting and examining representative case studies that, taken together, can stand for the last 120+ years of investigation and inquiry.

Third, I hope you will learn that folklore as a field of study has been an organized, coherent endeavor in which historical continuities and discontinuities are logical and must be understood in order for us to grasp a sense of purposefulness and wholeness. Related to this goal is the understanding that each investigation’s results are a function not just of the investigator’s “opinions” or “feelings” or personal experiences or even cultural biases but of the particular problem he or she chooses to investigate, the explanatory theory he or she embraces as being most revealing and applicable, and the analytical instrument he or she constructs in order to establish the fit between data and theory.

Fourth, I hope you will learn to generalize from specific examples, so that you can understand a theory and a set of analytical constructs apart from the particular example that first illustrated them. Thus I hope you’ll be able to confront unfamiliar data and be able to analyze it in terms of an established explanatory theory or with the aid of an established analytical apparatus, but at the same time be able to rethink the theory and method if they don’t adequately map onto the data.

Fifth, I hope you will appreciate the importance of qualities in thinking and writing that will help you do a good job in *all* your endeavors: coherence, clarity, concreteness, accuracy, and thoroughness. I hope you will learn to value these qualities as observers, as practitioners, and as communicators.

**REQUIREMENTS:** Note that *faithful class attendance is required*. I take attendance first thing each class meeting, and more than three absences for the term will adversely affect your grade. And you cannot pass the course with more than five absences. You should also be a thorough, accurate taker of class notes, since there is no textbook of the conventional sort and the information on which you’ll be examined is available only in lectures. Finally, you should also be a competent writer, since all papers and exams require you to write essays that are grammatical, coherent, concrete, clear, and convincing.

**PAPERS, EXAMS, GRADES:** This is a Substantial Writing Component course. You’ll write three papers, all on assigned topics. You’ll have one week in which to do each paper, which must be no fewer than 1,400 words long—between five and six pages, typed and double-spaced. Each paper counts for 25% of your final grade and is

evaluated not only for accuracy of content, for thoroughness in its treatment of the topic, and for the quality of understanding it exhibits, but also for its grammar, its coherency, its concreteness, and its clarity. At semester's end there'll be a final, comprehensive examination, which will count for the remaining 25% of your course grade. Please be realistic in your grade expectations: about half of you will probably get C's (a measure of competence), about 40% B's (a measure of superiority) and A's (a measure of excellence), and about 10% D's and F's. But the grades are not "curved": your grade will reflect (1) your familiarity with and understanding of the course material and (2) how well you communicate that familiarity and understanding in written work.

**TEXTBOOK:** The required textbook is a course packet available at Speedway Copying and Printing in Dobie Mall. This course packet contains only raw data—songs, tales, riddles, and so forth (folklore in sense #1 above). Do not treat it lightly, however, for this raw material is the *raison d'être* of the various concepts, theories, and analytical procedures the lectures emphasize (folklore in sense #2): read the material pertinent to each day's lecture several times, matching it to the relevant analytical apparatus and bring your course packet to class each day. **You must also own a handbook for writers of expository English prose.**

**COURSE OUTLINE** (numbers are keyed to course packet's Table of Contents)

- I. An example of folklore in its natural context of occurrence: the Tuscan *veglia*
- II. Folklore as both field of study and subject matter
- III. Folklore analysis I: genetics
  1. Early studies of folklore genetics
  2. Folklore study as a science: the historic/geographic method
  3. An overview of textual variation in folklore
  4. Agency in folklore genetics: the role of the performer
  5. Folklore change in cultural context
- IV. Folklore analysis II: syntactics
  1. Proto-syntactical study
  2. Fully syntactical study
  3. Syntactics of tribal folklore
  4. Deep syntax: ethnopoetics
  5. Folklore syntax in performance context
- V. Folklore analysis III: semantics
  1. Approaches to meaning in folklore: an overview
  2. Overt meaning
  3. Covert meaning

4. Implicit meaning
5. Emergent meaning

VI. Folklore analysis IV: pragmatics

1. The social work of folklore: an overview
2. Folklore as an agent of cultural continuity and reinforcement
3. Folklore as a cognitive tool
4. Folklore as an instrument of education and social control
5. Folklore as escapism and resistance

PAPERS: #1 set February 15, due February 22

#2 set March 22, due March 29

#3 set April 19, due April 26

FINAL EXAMINATION: May 14, 9 - noon