

UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

**HISP 206-01 INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN FOLKLORE**  
**Fall Semester 2010**

Mr. Stanton  
MWF 11:00-11:50  
Combs Hall, 112

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Historic Preservation 206, *Introduction to American Folklore* surveys the unwritten traditions of the United States and the theories that folklorists have developed to explain the continuation of ancient oral traditions in a culture that is highly literate. The course is a survey of the genres of folk tradition both historically significant and currently vital in American culture. Oral traditions and material culture as well as the use of oral history interviewing will be examined with examples and analysis and discussion of how both the cultural traditions and the techniques of fieldwork are important for historic preservation professionals.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- (1) Foster a basic understanding and awareness of American Folklore and the discipline's content, purposes, methods, and philosophy.
- (2) Foster basic knowledge of the complimentary actions of historic preservation and folklore.
- (3) Acquire a working familiarity with techniques of oral history interviews in relation to the study and interpretation of American history and culture.

This class is designated speaking intensive. This approach to learning focuses on the techniques of oral performance that improve your ability to form and deliver effective oral presentations. Another consequence of focusing on the act of oral presentation is that one better understands the processes and decisions that people whom we study use to create their oral performances.

**CLASS REQUIREMENTS**

**TEXTS**

The following books are required and will be available in the College Bookstore:

Martha C. Sims and Martine Stephens. *Living Folklore: An Introduction to the Study of People and Their Traditions*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005.

Valerie Raleigh Yow. *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*. Second Edition. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2005.

## TESTS

The student is responsible for all required readings and lecture materials. Any handouts in class with the exception of lecture summaries should be considered materials that will be tested. Examinations will test your knowledge concerning basic terms, concepts or significant examples from in-class discussions, films, or required readings. The tests will include fill-in-the-blank and short answer questions. There will be two tests: Test 1, Wednesday October 6<sup>th</sup> and the Final Examination, Monday, December 6<sup>th</sup> from noon to 2:30pm.

## CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

### In class assignments

From the first day until the last day of class we will be thinking, speaking, and writing about talk. This class focuses upon preparation for verbal interaction and improvement of your ability to speak effectively both in a personal interview and in public presentation. To this end our class will involve your total participation and a portion of your grade directly relates to how thoroughly you participate and how well you prepare to participate. There are three in-class presentation activities that are directly speaking-related.

In the first assignment the effort is being an effective interviewer not on holding forth before an audience. Notice the assignment does not seek the text as a prescriptive ingredient that a performer may deliver well, or not, but had few degrees of freedom to manipulate. In this assignment you will collect information about a personal experience of your informant, something that happened to them and which they may describe in many different levels of detail and narrative forms. Your task is to make them feel at ease and to ask the question in an open way that allows them the greatest flexibility of response and will, with your help, generate the fullest response. We will be breaking into teams of two (the party of the first part and the party of the second part). You will receive the “question” or interview topic the class period before the interview. The topic for one group might be “The time I almost died!” or “The funniest thing I ever saw!” During your interview you’ll want to do four things: set the equipment up correctly, slate the recording with all the appropriate information, introduce the topic, and ask follow-up questions to more fully explore the topic. You’ll have about five minutes for the interview. Both the interviewer and the interviewee will complete an evaluation form. Then the tables will be turned and you’ll be the person interviewed by one of your classmates (on a different topic) and we’ll give time to complete the evaluation forms from that encounter. I’ll ask you to transcribe the recording (good practice) and then briefly write about both your strategies going into the interview and how effective your questioning techniques and approaches were using the evaluation sheet from your informant and your own response. You’ll be turning in the interview transcription, the evaluations and your commentary for a grade. The grade is based upon completing the assignment (following instructions), evidence of preparation, use of good questioning technique, and analysis for improvement. You will be participating in this assignment either, **September 8<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup>** in class.

In the second assignment you will prepare and present a favorite poem before the class. Your presentation will tell us why the poem is special for you, where you first heard the poem, and what messages the poem reinforces for you. This is a mandatory assignment, but not graded on what you choose, rather how you prepare and present the piece. We will each stand to perform our poem and we’ll videotape these performances. In the next class period we’ll discuss as a group both what we felt and the differences between our self-image of the performance and the videotaped

version. This corporate critique is not about embarrassing anyone and you will be viewing yourself on tape outside of class. Rather the goal of this interaction is to give us all the opportunity to experience the power and the trepidation of public performance. Inevitably, someone will ask “how long the poem must be?” It will be best if the poem is at least three stanzas (just like a good country song), but if you can take us through a longer rhymed work like “The Cremation of Sam McGee,” “Richard Cory,” or “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” we’ll gladly listen. Many songs make quite good recitations and you may have a favorite song that works just as well without music. You may want to include the theme of dangerous collusions, we’ll be performing our poetry right before Halloween, **Friday, October 29<sup>th</sup>** or **Monday, November 1<sup>st</sup>**.

The final speaking assignment in class will be a formal report that you give drawing on your Veterans oral history assignment. In order that we can all learn from your experiences in interviewing you are asked to make a five-minute presentation to the class in the last week of class, **November 29<sup>th</sup> through December 3<sup>rd</sup>**. Make your presentation from notes prepared specifically for the assignment. Explain who your informant was, and how you contacted the informant, along with the what, why, where, and how of the military experience that you focused upon in the interview. Provide an assessment of what the strengths and problems of the interview were and what you might do again, or differently next time. Because this is a timed performance, you’ll want to practice before the day of your presentation. Pictures or maps may be useful in describing the location where the military experience took place, but these support materials are not essential to the presentations. The oral report is part of your grade for the class and these presentations come in the closing days of our class, so there will not be time for a rescheduling. Students who are not present when their name is called to present will receive a failing grade the assignment. If you know you have a conflict with one of these dates tell me as soon as possible.

### **Out of class Assignments**

Two writing assignments are required for the course. The first is the written evaluation from your in-class interview.

For the second project our class is participating in the Veterans History Project. The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress has developed a program to collect and preserve audio- and video-recorded oral histories from America's war veterans of World War I, World War II, and the Korean, Vietnam, and Persian Gulf Wars. Each student will identify and request an interview with a veteran, men and women, those who served in war or in support of combat operations, all ranks in all branches of service--the Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, and Navy, as well as the U.S. Coast Guard and Merchant Marine interview about their experiences. Before completing the interview send me an email with the informant's name, branch of service and time frame of military participation (there will be a biographical form provided in the Assignment #2 web page). Prepare for your interview by reading the guidelines and resources located on the American Folklife Center's webpage at <<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/vets/kit.html>>. Develop general questions that you wish to ask, before you conduct the interview. Record the interview and transcribe the interview completely. The transcription of interview material is often problematic and guidelines will be provided in class. Finally, prepare a short paper (two--four pages) about the varieties of defining activities, stories, equipment, crafts--that were described by the informant during the interview about their military experiences. Please also critique your interview

techniques, point out where you found strengths and weaknesses in your preparation and completion of the interview. How effective were your questions and follow up responses? Reflect on what you would do differently in the next interview that you undertake. This paper **and** the transcribed interview are due **Monday, November 8<sup>th</sup>** at the beginning of class. I will return your work with my comments **Monday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>**.

Final copies of the project should be *typed, double spaced*, using a computer. I will provide a location to save your electronic transcription. This file, along with a clean copy of the transcription (corrected typographic errors and formatting problems), the signed release forms and supporting materials (pictures, maps, etc.) will be forwarded to the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress as part of your submission of the interview. Your summary paper will not be forwarded to the Library of Congress and should be treated as any student work. I take the Honor Code very seriously and insist that all written work that you submit for my evaluation include the Honor Pledge and should be signed. **The complete, corrected material is due in the last week of class.**

## **GRADING**

In an effort to be open about the scoring of writing projects so that we are all clear about how a grade is achieved the following comments are provided:

Grades have two parts, (1) an evaluation of the content and the considerable intellectual effort that goes into the creation of a student project, and (2) the skill with which this material is integrated into a coherent thoughtful presentation that reflects student control of the subject. With each graded assignment the scoring will be done with a grading sheet that will be available to you before the assignment is due.

Letter grade descriptions and quality point conversions are taken from the *Academic Catalog*. This and the *Dictionary of Academic Regulations* should be consulted for further explanation of these and all other grading details and other academic regulations.

The Office of Disability Services has been designated by the University as the primary office to guide, counsel, and assist students with disabilities. If you receive services through that office and require accommodations for this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss your approved accommodation needs. Bring your accommodation letter with you to the appointment. I will hold any information you share with me in the strictest confidence unless you give me permission to do otherwise.

If you need accommodations, (note taking assistance, extended time for tests, etc.), I would be happy to refer you to the Office of Disability Services. They will require appropriate documentation of a disability. Their phone number is 540-654-1266.

## **FINAL GRADE**

Your final grade will be based on the following scores--Test I, 25%; In-class oral interview project 10%; Recitation 5%; Project Two 25%; final oral presentation 10%; Final Examination 25%. The Out-of-Class Assignments will be marked down by ten (10 points) for each day later than the beginning of class on the date due.

**MY OFFICE HOURS** Monday-Wednesday-Friday 2 p.m.; Tuesday-Thursday 1p.m.  
**OFFICE** Combs 128 Phone: 654-1313

I will be in my office for *set* office hours (that is, I'll be there and you can drop in whether you

have an appointment or not) every weekday, as noted above. If I must attend a meeting with a faculty committee during one of those periods, I will announce this in class. I will also be in the office at many other hours (including some evening hours each week). I am happy to make an appointment to see you at some specific time that suits your needs.

### **SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS, TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS**

This class schedule tells you how we will proceed with our discussion of American Folklore. I reserve the right to alter the topic of any lecture, but the day on which tests, papers and books are scheduled will not be changed. Study guides are provided for each topic.

Monday 23 August 2010

What is American Folklore?

Reading: Living Folklore, preface, Pp. 21-29.

Wednesday 25 August 2010

Approaches to folklore in America

Reading: Folklore, Pp. 134-141.

Friday 27 August 2010

You are how you talk: Dialect in America

Monday 30 August 2010

Doing Oral History Fieldwork

Required Reading: Recording Oral History, Pp. 1-23.

Wednesday 1 September 2010

Learning How to Ask

Required Reading: Oral History, Pp. 92-116.

Friday 3 September 2010

Preparation and conducting the oral interview

Required Reading: Oral History, Pp. 68-88.

Monday 6 September 2010

Know Your Equipment, use it well

Wednesday 8 September 2010

**In-class interviews, assignment 1**

Friday 10 September 2010

**In-class interviews, assignment 1**

Monday 13 September 2010

Transcribing the Interview

Required Reading: Oral History, Pp. 315-324.

Wednesday 15 September 2010

Tradition

Required Reading: Folklore, Pp. 64-74

Friday 17 September 2010

Musical traditions in the Family Context: Folksongs, and Dance Tunes

Film: Sprout Wings and Fly

Monday 20 September 2010

Inventing Tradition

Required Reading: Folklore, Pp. 82-93.

Wednesday 22 September 2010

Performing folklore

Required Reading: Folklore, Pp. 127-136.

Friday 24 September 2010

Folk Groups

Reading: Folklore, Pp. 30-55.

Monday 27 September 2010

Folk Belief

Required Reading: Folklore, Pp. 56-63

Wednesday 29 September 2010

Festival and Ritual

Required Reading: Folklore, Pp. 94-110.

Friday 1 October 2010

Types of Ritual

Required Reading: Folklore, Pp. 110-126.

Monday 4 October 2010

Aesthetics

Reading: Folklore, Pp. 155-169.

Wednesday 6 October 2010

***Midterm examination--Y'all Come!***

Friday 8 October 2010

Genre and Focus

Reading: Folklore, Pp. 12-20.

**Fall Break starts at 5pm.** Classes resume Wednesday 13 October

Wednesday 13 October 2010

Playing with Language  
Intentional Connotation: Imagery

Friday 15 October 2010

Connotative Structure

Monday 18 October 2010

Emergence: Breaking Away  
Reading: Folklore, Pp. 146-153.

Wednesday 20 October 2010

Technology and Worldview

Friday 22 October 2010

Problem solving in a material world  
Required Reading: Claude Levi-Strauss "Bricolage" **Reserve**

Monday 25 October 2010

Fieldwork and Collecting  
Required Reading: Folklore, Pp. 202-217.

Wednesday 27 October 2010

The Intentional Folklorist and the ethics of collecting  
Required Reading: Oral History, Pp. 121-149. Folklore, Pp. 218-224.

Friday 29 October 2010

**In class recitation**

Monday 1 November 2010

**In class recitation**

Wednesday 3 November 2010

Folklore Fieldwork  
Required Reading: Folklore, Pp. 202-222.

Friday 5 November 2010

Public Folklore: Making Folklore available

Monday 8 November 2010

Folklore Interpretation: Functionalism and Structuralism  
Reading: Folklore, Pp. 174-186.  
**Out of Class Assignment Two Due at Beginning of Class**

Wednesday 10 November 2010

Post-Structuralist Approaches to Interpretation

Reading: *Folklore*, Pp. 187-201.

Friday 12 November 2010

Folklore and Oral History

Required Reading: *Oral History*, Pp. 35-58, 282-307.

Monday 15 November 2010

Public Sector Folklore at the National Level: National Endowment for the Arts

Elizabeth Peterson, *The Changing Faces of Tradition*. Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 1996. **Reserve**

Wednesday 17 November 2010

Folklore and Public Education

Friday 19 November 2010

The Folk Festival as a Public Folklore Context

Please review the Virtual Exhibition materials of the Smithsonian Folklife Program (**Reserve**)

Monday 22 November 2010

Studying American Foodways

Required Reading: Adler, Thomas. "Sunday Breakfast Was Always Special With Us: A Report on Foodways in South Central Georgia." *Folklore Preprint* 7:1(February 1979). **Reserve.**

Wednesday 24 November 2010

No Class Traditional American Festive Event

Monday 29 November 2010

Student Reports on Final Projects

Wednesday 1 December 2010

Student Reports of Final Project

Friday 3 December 2010

Student Reports of Final Project

Monday, December 6

Noon-2:30 p.m. final exam HISP 206-01