

U-Publore Convening
(University-Based Public Folklore Programs)
A Report on a convening held at the Kentucky Folklife Program
April 4 - 5, 2014

Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

Brent Björkman, Director - Kentucky Folklife Program, Western Kentucky University

Lilli Tichinin, Graduate Assistant, Kentucky Folklife Program, Western Kentucky University

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Introduction and Overview: Affiliations and Central Mission of the U-Publcore Group

The shift from the public-academic split to the public-academic hybrid is increasingly evident across our field, including to those in attendance at (or who read the recent “white paper” from) the 2012 American Folklore Society pre-conference “Meeting with Public and Academic Programs,” a three-and-a-half hour session chaired by the AFS president and attended by over thirty members of the organization. “U-Publcore” is currently a loose cohort of public folklorists, whose programs are housed on university campuses, working to dovetail public sector folklore missions with those of higher education. Such programs include recent additions at the University of Wyoming, University of Oregon, and Western Kentucky University with predecessors having been established for several years, even decades, at universities like Arkansas State University, Indiana University, University of Maine, Frostburg State University in Maryland, Michigan State University, University of Missouri, University of Virginia, Fairmont State University in West Virginia, and the University of Wisconsin. From an informal survey of other AFS colleagues in other states, it appears that more of these hybrids may develop in the near future.

Over the years, university-based public folklorists have consulted with one another most often nurturing their relationships informally and behind the scenes at professional meetings but never creating a time and place for a dedicated convening to share our collective concerns and needs as well as our contributions to the field. Starting in 2012, several folklorists from the above group participated in a breakout session at a Folk Arts Coordinator Peer Group session at the convention of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies in Washington, D.C., then came together again in October of that year during an organized forum at the AFS Annual Meeting in New Orleans. Based on these interactions, participants agreed to more formally communicate and established a dedicated listserv called “U-Publcore” that is hosted by the Oregon Folklife Network at the University of Oregon. Two major activities have emerged via this list: 1) cohort members organized and came together in a second forum for AFS 2013 in Providence, and 2) building upon these talks, members of this group organized a dedicate peer-to-peer consultancy for the spring of 2014.

Throughout this report we will use the term “university-based public folklorist” to refer to the membership of the U-Publcore group. Within the context of this report this term refers to folklorists based at universities doing state-wide programming work including the creation of public exhibits, ethnographic community engagement projects, and a variety of educational outreach often with a connection to a number of state agencies to varying degrees (arts and humanities councils, historical societies, and museums).

Objectives

With the help of funding from the AFS Consultancy and Professional Development Fund, a core group of U-Publore members convened on April 4-5, 2014 in Bowling Green, Kentucky on the Western Kentucky University campus. The convening was envisioned as the first in a series of annual gatherings with on-campus faculty and student colleagues for the purpose of professional development and peer-to-peer consultancy, shifting locations each year to different campuses. The core group in attendance gathered with the intention of providing peer-to-peer consultancy on a number of initially identified “building-block” topics.

- Navigating university culture and policies
- Exploring fundraising models (old and new)
- Engendering student development in public practice/service learning
- Collaborating with colleagues in our own departments and creating partnerships across campus.
- Exploring ways in which we can best partner with one another on regional and national levels to achieve common cause.

In order to address these objectives the convening planners designated themes for specific sessions of the convening. Two of the sessions involved presentations by attendees. The “Exploring Fundraising Models Old and New” encompassed two presentations:

- Marsha MacDowell and Kurt Dewhurst, Michigan State University Museum, Michigan State University
Endowed Apprenticeships: how they define it, how it works, and who to contact?
- Brent Björkman, Kentucky Folklife Program, Western Kentucky University
One Pager Project to WKU Development: the virtues and challenges of working with development and alumni foundations, laying out funding ideas/needs.

Both presentations sparked engaging discussion about the need for creativity regarding funding.

On Saturday, two presentations in “Engendering Student Development in Public Practice/Service Learning” focused on the connection of university-based public folklorists with students:

- Riki Saltzman, Oregon Folklife Network, University of Oregon
Teaming independent consultants and student folklorists for field surveys

and professional development

- Lilli Tichinin, Kentucky Folklife Program, Western Kentucky University
WKU Graduate Student and her personal experiences with Kentucky Folklife Program

These presentations led to an in-depth discussion of the needs of students and the forms of incorporating students into public folklore work. During the first day of the convening, twelve Western Kentucky University Folk Studies graduate students joined the U-Publlore group for lunch. The graduate students were paired with folklorists based on their interests, creating an opportunity for them to learn more about a specific folklorist and their work. Both the students and folklorists benefitted from spending this time together as the experience enhanced the later discussion of student engagement.

Major Themes and Trends Identified

To begin the two-day convening, each folklorist gave an overview and update of their position within the university, organizational history, and current work. The similarities and differences of each program and position became apparent from this initial reporting and through further discussion. Each university-based public folklorist in attendance functions in ways specific to their university system—with differences in home departments, position titles and roles, and varied degrees of both teaching and involvement with outside agencies (such as state arts councils). What we as group share in common is that we are all navigating a university system in order to do public folklore work.

As a result of the varied interests of individuals and opportunities available within each university, the work of these public folklorists covers a wide range of topics including: music, material culture, languages, health, environmental and cultural sustainability, and occupational lore. One of the most prevalent commonalities across the group was the building of partnerships—both internal partnerships within the home universities and external partnerships within home states, nationally, and internationally. Within universities, U-Publlore members have forged partnerships with libraries, archives, museums, offices of Academic Extension, Academic Technology, Cultural Initiatives and Cultural Enhancement, and with specific institutes and programs at each university. External partnerships include continued connections to state agencies, especially arts councils, other universities, national organizations and agencies, and even international collaborations.

The role of teaching and direct connection to students is a distinctive aspect of the university-based public folklore positions. Balancing the role of teaching with other work was a major component of the discussion the convening. Within the group of folklorists in attendance, there is a range of involvement with teaching. For some, teaching undergraduate and graduate courses it is a major component of their

position, for others, teaching occurs informally through mentorships or workshops and specialized course projects.

While acknowledging that each of us in a unique position within our respective universities and states, we were able to identify common trends and opportunities as well as obstacles and challenges that are unique to doing public folklore work within a university. We collectively generated a list of these opportunities and challenges.

The first portion of the list focused on the opportunities available to us as a result of being placed in universities, and trends that we recognize in programming and scholarship within universities with which folklorists should be involved. Use of media is one such trend, including developments in new media, documentary studies, and connection to university-based local radio or television. The increased interest in creative humanities, public humanities, and digital humanities at universities presents potential for the inclusion of public folklorists; similarly, trends in multidisciplinary studies and a growing narrative focus in numerous disciplines open the possibility of involvement. There is potential for internal emerging partnerships at universities while maintaining and sometimes rethinking external partnerships. U-Publore members see the possibility for collaboration in the areas of community and civic scholarly engagement, arts and health care, sustainability, and working with museums, libraries and archives.

The majority of the shared challenges identified during the meeting are specific to our positions within universities, including: the Internal Review Board process, the complexity of position titles, and learning to work with sponsored programs and university development. Those doing public folklore work must contend with the trend of High Theory and the universities' expectation of research output in the form of publication. University-based public folklorists also face challenges that are relevant to the broader field. The decline of funding of state arts agencies forces us to restructure partnerships and think creatively about funding. The fragility of folk arts is on the minds of those for whom a change of one individual in a position of administration can drastically alter the organizational stability.

Through the course of two days of discussion, two over-arching categories of opportunities emerged that relate specifically to working as public folklorists within universities. The first are the numerous possibilities to collaborate with other departments and programs within universities. Placement within a university means having connections and possible partnerships readily available. While significant work must be put in to developing these relationships, the potential for collaboration with colleagues in other departments is more accessible.

The second overarching opportunity is working with students. This can take many forms and we should continue to be creative about the ways that we interact with, incorporate, and teach the students at our universities.

Moving Forward

Four points emerged out of the presentations and discussions as areas of immediate need and relevance moving forward from the convening, including:

- *Continued communication and creation of a network of university-based public folklorists, regionally and nationally.*

The convening was conceived as the first of a series of annual meetings of university-based public folklorists. Regular gatherings on the national or regional scale will facilitate the refining of a network of those navigating similar university-based positions. Meetings provide a setting to update each other on current work, to workshop specific challenges, and to brainstorm future possibilities.

As we move forward it will be essential that we not only continue to communicate as a whole via our list-serve, but that we also forge relationships regionally, identifying opportunities to partner on specific projects. Being entities who are not distinctively or solely aligned with, for instance, state arts agencies, give us greater flexibility to enter into new discussion about partnering with one another across state boundaries in new and innovative ways.

- *Finding additional partnerships within our universities.*

As public folklorists within universities, we are uniquely positioned to identify and take advantage of partnerships with other programs and offices within our universities. All of the folklorists in attendance are already engaged in partnerships of this kind to some degree, but after hearing examples from each other, we as a group recognize that there is potential for increased collaboration.

One strategy for initiating collaboration is to work with programs that are already happening at our universities. We should identify programs in our universities that have some connection or overlap with what we do, and identify where and how a public folklorist can fill gaps in existing programming. During the concluding portion of the convening, we compiled a list of graduate certificates offered by our universities. Graduate certificate programs represent some of the possible areas for multi-disciplinary collaboration and partnership within our universities.

In a university setting we have the opportunity to immediately partner with organizations, programs that can make it possible for us to get involved in projects that we may not have the resources to pursue on our own. Several of the university-based public folklorists are currently pursuing or intending to pursue projects or research in partnership with university medical schools, focused on arts and health, and arts and aging. In addition to providing opportunities for a wider range of work, partnerships across the university strengthen our positions within the university, demonstrating the versatility and benefits of public

folklore work in this setting.

In the spirit of serving as examples to one another, we plan to collect a list of current and possible future inner-university partnerships pursued by those in attendance. We discussed several of the ongoing and intended partnerships during the course of the convening and found that a comprehensive list would be useful as we each identify possibilities in our universities. The list will encompass what has worked, what is currently working, and who are we thinking of working with in the future.

- *Collaborative regional field schools*
Creating regional field schools will allow university-based public folklorists to pool resources and expertise in order to provide much-needed training to students from multiple universities. This goal represents part of our ongoing concern with training students both within and beyond the university setting. We have a collective belief that there is a need for recent graduates to gain experience in the field. This is an opportunity for students to work with experienced public folklorist as mentors. We are thinking about 21st century models for careers in folklore, ours and the students, ensuring that students graduate with the skills and mindset needed to work in public folklore, and making sure that our legacies continue.
- *Post-graduate fellowship for public folklore*
A notable concern regarding the next generation of public folklorists is the lack of opportunity for work experience through which they can further develop and refine their skill set. During the discussions stemming from presentations on student engagement (Riki Saltzman and Lilli Tichinin) and use of endowments (Kurt Dewhurst and Marsha MacDowell) we explored the concept of creating a post-graduate fellowship for public folklore students. A year-long fellowship at a public folklore program/organization would help to fill the gap in opportunities for recent folklore graduates pursuing public folklore work and would provided the much-needed setting in which they could continue to develop their skills with continued guidance. Annually rotating the fellowship to different organizations would provide varied experiences and opportunities for recent grads and would benefit multiple public folklore institutions. The development of an endowed fellowship of this kind will be a topic for continued discussion and consideration. After investigation of similar fellowships in humanities, Marsha MacDowell suggested that we approach Mellon Foundation and present the idea to Tim Lloyd. As we concluded the initial exploration of the idea, we proposed that a smaller group of those in attendance spearhead the continued investigation of possibilities for this fellowship.

Regardless of future developments, the convening provided this core U-Publlore group with the opportunity to collectively discuss our work, to identify challenges we face, and to serve as examples to one another. The ability to come together and

share experiences was helpful to the participants in understanding how they and others are navigating the unique position of the university-based public folklorist.

A special thanks to the American Folklore Society for funding this convening through its Consultancy and Professional Development Program. Thanks also goes to folklorists Lisa Higgins, Director of the Missouri Folk Arts Program, University of Missouri and Jon Kay, Director of Traditional Arts Indiana, Indiana University for partnering with the Kentucky Folklife Program to conceptualize, plan and develop this professional gathering.

Participating Folklorists:

Brent Björkman is the director of the Kentucky Folklife Program at Western Kentucky University. Previously, he served as the director of the Vermont Folklife Program and as associate director of the American Folklore Society.

Kurt Dewhurst serves as the Director of Arts and Cultural Initiatives and Senior Fellow, University Outreach & Engagement; Director Emeritus and Curator of Folklife and Cultural Heritage at the Michigan State University Museum; and Professor of English, MSU. He is the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the American Folklife Center, Library of Congress and a former President of the American Folklore Society.

Janet Gilmore is an assistant professor of Landscape Architecture at the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures at University of Wisconsin. She has extensive public sector experience, especially researching occupational lore, material culture, and foodways.

Andrea Graham is a folklife specialist in American Studies at University of Wisconsin. She has extensive public sector experience, especially in the Intermountain West. In addition to fieldwork for projects like “The Art of the Hunt,” she assists students with folklife and oral history projects.

Lisa Higgins is the director of the Missouri Folk Arts Program, a collaboration between the University of Missouri and Missouri Arts Council. She manages grants and projects, as well as graduate internships and assistantships with students from the Department of English.

Jon Kay is the director of Traditional Arts Indiana, a partnership between Indiana University and the Indiana Arts Commission. Previously, he worked a series of contract positions in Kentucky and Florida, then directed the Florida Folk Festival at the Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center.

Jim Leary is the co-director of the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures, in addition to being Professor of Folklore and Scandinavian Studies and

Director of the Folklife Program—all at University of Wisconsin. He has published extensively and produced numerous programs for the public.

Marsha MacDowell is Curator of Folk Arts and Professor of Art and Art History at Michigan State University, where she most often focuses her research and public programs on material culture; public arts and arts in education policies; and the role of museums. She has also been a leader in collaborations with organizations and artists nationally and internationally.

Ruth Olson is the Associate Director of the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures at the University of Wisconsin. She has taught at Wisconsin, Harvard University, and Penn, as well as serving as the Local Folk Arts Program Coordinator for the Wisconsin Arts Board.

Riki Saltzman is the inaugural executive director of Oregon Folklife Network at the University of Oregon. Previously, she worked as folklife coordinator, grants administrator, and accessibility coordinator for the Iowa Arts Council for seventeen years. She recently published the award-winning book *A Lark for the Sake of their Country*.

Lilli Tichinin recently graduated with a Master's degree in Folk Studies with a focus on Public Folklore from Western Kentucky University. She previously received a certificate in Folklore with her undergraduate degree at the University of Oregon and interned at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. At the time of the convening she was serving as the inaugural Graduate Assistant for the Kentucky Folklife Program.

Katie Wynn curates the Maine Folklife Center's digital collection and aids patron requests as well as bringing her public folklore expertise to help the Center fulfill its mission. She has past experience working with a variety of organizations including Traditional Arts in Upstate New York (TAUNY), the Vermont Folklife Center, and the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

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Friday April 4th, 2014

7:30-8 am Breakfast at hotel

9:00 am **Navigating University Culture and Policies**

Everyone provides a **Five**-minute overview (this is who I am and this is ONE thing that I am excited about that I do because I am at a university). Then, let's all explore topics like: our different roles, our physical and institutional locations, as well as the ways we cultivate and maintain relationships between state arts agencies and the public folklore programs at universities.

12:00 pm **Lunch – Meet the Folklorists** – Several WKU Folk Studies Graduate have been invited to join us for lunch to meet with you. It will be a chance for them to find out more about you and your work.

1:30 pm **Exploring Fundraising Models Old and New**
Let's explore strategically topics that include: sources for university funds, community foundations, other organizations, individual donors, collaborations with campus colleagues, and nurturing partnerships with unlikely collaborators outside the university setting.

3:00 pm **Presentations**

Marsha MacDowell and Kurt Dewhurst (15 minutes)
Topic: Endowed Apprenticeships: how they define it, how it works, and who to contact?

Brent Björkman (15 minutes)
Topic: One Pager Project to WKU Development: the virtues and challenges of working with development and alumni foundations, laying out funding ideas/needs.

5:00 pm Adjourn for the day – Back to Hotel

7:00 pm Dinner with Colleagues in Bowling Green

Saturday April 5th, 2014

8:00 am Breakfast at hotel

9:00 am **Engendering Student Development in Public Practice/Service Learning**

Riki Saltzman (15 minutes): Teaming independent consultants and student folklorists for field surveys and professional development

Lilli Tichinin (15 minutes): WKU Graduate Student and her personal experiences with Kentucky Folklife Program

Open discussion of the topic

- 11:30 am **Lunch at Taqueria Sinai**
- 1230 pm **Visit to the Kentucky Museum Quilt Collection** – Sandy Staebell,
Curator
- 1:30 pm **Meeting Summary, Wrap-up and Take Aways:** What are our future
needs as a group? For required AFS white paper, it is crucial to
collectively provide input now before we adjourn. Lilli Tichinin will
be given a small stipend for creating the white paper for the AFS
website.
- 5:00 pm Adjournment – Back to Hotel
- 7:00 pm **Dinner at Brent and Ann’s House.** 1324 Walnut Way