

OPEN FORUM

A Call for Comments on Job Prospects for Folklorists

Do you remember the first time you gathered up your courage, put on your most determined expression, and confronted your parents with your career choice? If your parents' reaction was anything like my parents', you were probably immediately bombarded with questions — posed in the most exasperated of tones — along the lines of: “Folklore, why folklore? What can you do with a degree in that? How are you ever going to support yourself, let alone a family?” These panicked inquiries may have been followed by the heartfelt advice, “Maybe you should reconsider this decision and think about going into something useful, like accounting.” Anticipating this reaction, you may have immediately rattled off a carefully rehearsed list of the opportunities that an advanced degree in Folklore could offer. While this conversation with my own parents is now a faint memory, I find that their concerns keep creeping to the surface.

Federal cutbacks, coupled with the downsizing of American academia, are generating much discussion among students of folklore, particularly those who have just completed their degree and are seeking employment.

The common thread of these conversations seems to be the fear of not getting a job which would incorporate one's training in folklore. Many students are beginning to wonder if all of this work is really worth it. But the mood does not need to be so dismal. For every hundred gloom-and-doom stories we hear, there are a few shimmering narratives of hope. All of us know at least one person who has actually made it . . . one colleague, friend or mentor who is currently putting his or her folklore degree to work.

What has your own recent experience been? What steps did you take to secure employment? What did you do right — or, where did you go wrong? Could you have found employment with an M.A., or was a PhD. essential? *Folklore Forum* wants to hear your story.

We particularly encourage people who have developed clearly articulated strategies for establishing a career in either public or academic

folklore to write and share their experience with our readers. *Folklore Forum* will feature these short (500 to 2,000 word) essays as part of an ongoing "Open Forum" discussion on the current status of the field of folklore.

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