

*George Mason**(photo: Margaret R. Yocom)*

“What We Need are Some Traditions!” The Role of the Northern Virginia Folklife Archive in George Mason University’s Search for Traditions

Margaret R. Yocom

The E-mail flashed across my screen July 18, 2000: “The report of the Southern Association of Colleges’ Sub-committee on Internal Community [at George Mason University] marked the importance of tradition-building..., and [its] first recommendation was for the university to ‘develop a series of university traditions that will involve every segment of the community: staff and faculty, as well as students.’ ... Thus I would like to invite you to participate in a working group that will consider and make recommendations regarding university-wide traditions.” Surveys of graduating seniors from 1995 to 1999 showed that on average, only about half of the students were satisfied with campus life or felt a sense of belonging to the University (Report 2000). GMU administrators with their eyes on national rankings might also have seen that the Fiske Guide to Colleges noted a “quality of life” score of only 2 on a scale of 5 (Argentsinger 2002: C1). So the Office of University Life’s director Karen Rosenblum established the Traditions Committee, a gathering of faculty, staff, and students; and she asked me to join.

“Another committee!” I groaned as I read the E-mail again. I was in Maine doing fieldwork and preparing for my fall semester folklore courses. And I had already gotten messages about other August meetings. I seriously considered declining, but how could a folklorist say no when her university was about to discuss tradition?

After all, I thought, many folklorists have argued that the questions that swirl around the process of tradition are at the heart of our discipline. The words of Simon Bronner and of Richard Bauman

echoed in my mind: “[F]olklore studies ... centrally engages questions of tradition in its mission (Bronner 1998:5), and “There is no single idea more central to conceptions of folklore than tradition” (qtd in Bronner 1998:18).¹

Also, I reasoned, tradition has long been an abiding interest of mine as I write about why a family of Maine loggers and homemakers has kept practicing its carving and knitting traditions for well over 150 years now.

In the end, I composed my E-mail of acceptance, pushed the send button, and began the adventure. I was about to learn just how much power folklore can gather unto itself when it is collected and preserved in a university archives.

Traditions at George Mason?

It’s not hard to understand why George Mason University students see their university as lacking traditions. At George Mason, we have no hoary, quarry-hewn stone buildings lovingly embraced by ivy or sweetened by honeysuckle vines. In fact, we have no buildings older than the late 1960s. Opened in 1957 as George Mason College, a branch of the University of Virginia, the University held its first classes in a revamped department store in Arlington, Virginia, about ten miles west of Washington DC. In 1958 the Town—now City—of Fairfax donated 150 acres for the construction of a permanent branch of UVA. 1972 saw GMU’s independence from UVA, and by the time I came in August 1977, 11,500 students matriculated there. Now, 27 years later, Mason’s three campuses educate 27,000 students; and, three years from now, Mason is slated to serve 30,000.

Along with Mason’s youth comes its commuter culture, for only 3,000 of our 11,000 full-time undergraduate students live on campus (Argentsinger 2002:C1). With a median age of 27, many of our students are older than conventional college students. Many have jobs and families of their own. If they live at home, they have family responsibilities that students living in residential colleges don’t.

And, GMU has no football team.

Those who like to compare colleges in the DC area often place GMU low on the tradition scale. The traditions of older universities—

American, Catholic, George Washington, Naval Academy, and the University of Maryland—often make the pages of our nation's capital paper, *The Washington Post*. "Call it the voodoo of victory," intoned reporter Manuel Roig-Franzia in March 2002. "It is strange. It is powerful. It is downright mystical, and it seduces great swaths of University of Maryland basketball fans around this time of year." Roig-Franzia goes on to detail Maryland students' practices of wearing a lucky shirt or sitting rigidly on a magic bar stool or sliding on their class rings precisely one minute before tip-off to cheer on their beloved Terrapins (B1). Or, listen to Nelson Hernandez from Halloween 2002:

They lurk in the shadows at the U.S. Naval Academy, upholding 90 years of tradition as bad boys of the brigade. Tonight, for one evening only, they step into the light. They are the Black N's, midshipmen who have racked up so many demerits that they wear black emblems as a badge of dishonor—and a parody of Navy athletes' gold N letter sweaters.... (B1).²

Ah, what's an upstart university like George Mason to do?

Colleges and the Promotion of Tradition

Young or old, though, many area universities are sprucing up their campus cultures and becoming newly watchful of traditions. The urban campus of George Washington University has hung GWU banners throughout its fragmented spaces to unify its landscape. Next fall, it will open eight townhouses, now under construction, to give five sororities and three fraternities their own living quarters (Argentsinger 2003: B4). GWU President Stephen J. Trachtenberg sees a thriving Greek system as a plus and would like as much as 25% of the student body to go Greek, up from the current 13%.

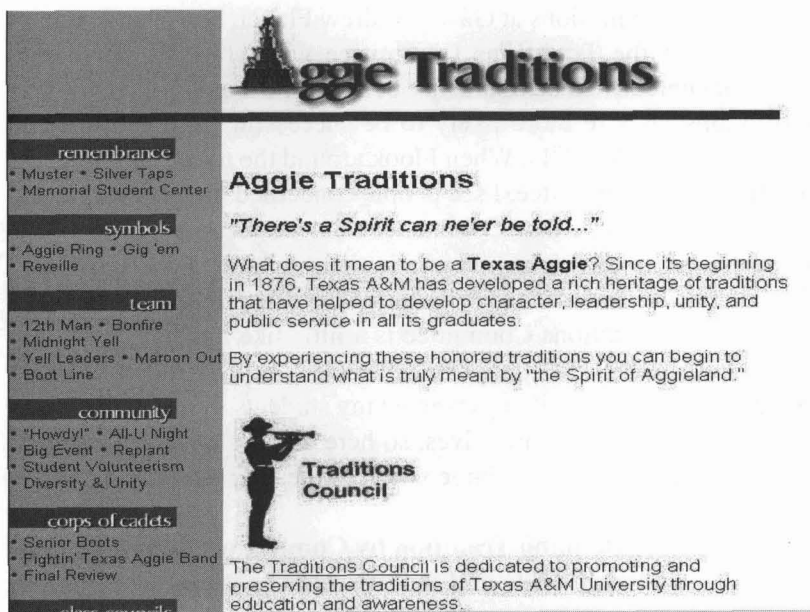
"I've been trying to make people feel they are part of the campus," he explains, "but the fact that we're located in the heart of a city means the creation of campus life has been slow"(Argentsinger 2003: B4). Trachtenberg also notes that Greeks are more likely than other alumni to donate money to their alma maters.

36-year-old University of Maryland, Baltimore County decided to revamp its campus culture after seeing the results of a marketing survey of prospective students. "The good news was we were very much seen as a place with very smart students," said Associate Vice President Lisa Akchin. "The downside was we were not seen as a place with rich student life" (Argentsinger 2002: C1).

Now, UMBC is pouring resources into student programming, recently hosting its second homecoming (Argentsinger 2002: C1). Its dormitories house 3,200 of its 7,200 undergraduates, and it's building more. Also, it just opened the Commons, a \$35 million student center featuring a game room; a food court to seat 700; and a tiered, grassy lawn. "The Commons will be the focal point for campus life," says President Freeman A. Hrabowski III. "We hope it will begin to build a place of community" (Argentsinger 2002: C1).

Similarly, George Mason University built the Johnson Center, a soaring, glass-walled, three-story building with a unique mix of shopping center food court-like eating spaces, offices, meeting rooms, computer rooms, an undergraduate library, a movie theater, a radio station, a restaurant, and more. In addition, GMU established the Traditions Committee.

Such a committee isn't new in the US academic world: Texas A&M, Ball State University, and several other universities have tradition committees or councils, too (see Appendix A). The Texas A&M traditions Web site features practices that, as the splash page indicates, answer the question: "What does it mean to be a Texas Aggie?" (see Figure 1). Most of the traditions featured on the site include all A&M students, and many of the practices arise from sports, especially football—such as the Texas A&M "Gig 'Em" handsignal begun in 1930; the collie mascot Reveille; the "Twelfth Man," the practice of standing through the entire game in case the team needs a 12th man; and Bonfire, a practice that's on hold after the 1999 bonfire collapsed, killing 12 students. Other traditions include memorials for students who die; the wearing of boots by seniors in the Corps of Cadets, headed for military commissions; and dances that celebrate rites of passage in the lives of each freshman, junior, and senior class. Watching over these practices is the Traditions Council, its logo a cadet blowing, appropriately enough, a horn.



Aggie Traditions

"There's a Spirit can ne'er be told..."

What does it mean to be a **Texas Aggie**? Since its beginning in 1876, Texas A&M has developed a rich heritage of traditions that have helped to develop character, leadership, unity, and public service in all its graduates.

By experiencing these honored traditions you can begin to understand what is truly meant by "the Spirit of Aggieland."

Traditions Council

The **Traditions Council** is dedicated to promoting and preserving the traditions of Texas A&M University through education and awareness.

remembrance

- Muster • Silver Taps
- Memorial Student Center

symbols

- Aggie Ring • Gig 'em
- Reveille

team

- 12th Man • Bonfire
- Midnight Yell
- Yell Leaders • Maroon Out
- Boot Line

community

- "Howdy!" • All-U Night
- Big Event • Replant
- Student Volunteerism
- Diversity & Unity

corps of cadets

- Senior Boots
- Fightin' Texas Aggie Band
- Final Review

Figure 1

(screen shot: © 2004 Texas A&M. Used with permission.)

Motivations for Serving on GMU's Traditions Committee

Certainly some campus traditions and their committees are controversial, as Gary Trudeau recently pointed out in his comic strip, *Doonesbury* (2002). Zipper scolds his college roommate, a new CIA-trainee who says he can't "play" an "instigator" in this year's Fall Riot, no matter what the Riot Committee chairman wants. "The Fall Riot is a beloved campus tradition," Zipper exclaims. "Everyone has to do his bit." Then, calling his mother on the phone, Zipper asks, "Do we have a couch that I could burn?" Zipper, his hands permanently attached to Gameboys and TV clickers, doesn't realize that this over-planned tradition he clings to is a mere shell of its former self.

There are monetary implications to this applied work in campus traditions. Most colleges, if not all, use the work of tradition committees in the service of recruitment and retention: hoping to sell their universities to potential students, to retain those students over all four years, and to increase the amount of giving by students who become pleased alumni.

Dean of Admissions at GMU, Andrew Flagel, however, connects his work on the Traditions Committee with students' academic accomplishment: "When students become more connected to their institutions, they're more likely to be successful [in their studies]" (Argentsinger 2002: C1). When I look around the room at all of us on the Traditions Committee, I see people concerned that students enjoy their days at GMU, that Commencement be meaningful to GMU students, that alumni take pleasure in their memories of Mason, and that we faculty and staff have a workplace that is, truly, a place. So serving on a Traditions Committee is a little like having my head in the clouds dreaming of the possibilities and my feet in the muck of commerce. But I have always wanted my students to realize the place traditions have in their own lives, so here was yet another chance to carry my message across a large swath of the entire university.

Defining Tradition by Committee: Large-scale and Small-scale Practices

At our first meetings of the Traditions Committee, we talked about our charge from the SAC Committee and the perceived lack of university-wide traditions; about what traditions were; and about what we needed to do. Our Traditions Committee head, University Life director Karen Rosenblum, is a professor of sociology and no stranger to group processes. She brought in a definition of tradition that stressed the creation of shared values within an entire community. To me, her concept emphasized large-group rituals such as convocation and commencement. When I noted that this view of tradition would exclude many small-group practices, Karen asked me to conduct a workshop on folklore and tradition.

During my presentation, I spoke of tradition's nature as both object and practice, and of its main characteristics: informal transmission, small-group matrix, identity-formation, and dissent and debate. As I spoke about small groups, I asked Committee members to identify the many, small, tradition-producing groups they belong to on and off campus. I suggested that close identity with Mason came not only from everyone practicing the same tradition at once, but also from smaller groups following practices that link them to one another as

smaller bands of students. And, just beginning to understand what use the Archive would be to me, I mentioned a few of our holdings that described the small-scale traditions already alive at GMU.

It was—and is—challenging for me to find the right words for these two types, or scales,³ of traditional practice as I talk with a committee of forty-some people. I considered how Barre Toelken, in his essay on the folklore of academe, counterposes “official activities with formalized rules” with those practices that “grow out of a shared cluster of live experiences, common fears, hopes, and frustrations that have been experienced in common by a substantial number of the group’s membership” (1986[1968]:504). In the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, I mulled over “official culture” versus “unofficial culture,” concepts that discuss medieval festive occasions such as carnival. Official practices delineate hierarchy, are serious in tone, assert stability and continuity. Unofficial practices, on the other hand, celebrate equality and playfulness, and assert freedom and liberation. I also turned to Carl Lindahl’s “great tradition” and “little tradition” of the *märchen*: the “great tradition” for the stories of traveling *märchen* tellers who carried the magic along the open roads, and “little tradition” for those same tales retold around the domestic hearth (1994: xix). Also, I found the language used by post-nationalism scholars helpful, given the distinctions they make between traditions practiced among smaller groups, or local knowledges, versus those practiced by a nation-state or by groups hungry for homogenization and “community.”⁴

My quandary about scale is not a new one, as Simon Bronner’s work reminds me. “The revision of culture theory where traditions describe all classes and situations, but are still associated with social interaction, most notably within small groups,” he writes, “... answers a vigorous scholarly concern for the basis of cultural production.” For Bronner and many other folklorists, “the small group—rather than the bounded nation-state or boundless civilization” is that basis (1998:21). For many college traditions committees, however, the campus-wide group, not the small group, is the only rightful basis of cultural production. What’s at stake in this debate is the authority that the label “tradition” is perceived to carry.⁴

Given these complex issues, the GMU Traditions Committee clearly had a lot to think about. After Karen’s presentation on tradition

as ritual and mine on tradition as small-group practice, our Committee began a dialogue about tradition, and about large- and small-scale practices. Some Committee members value both. Some Committee members, though, emphasize large-scale traditions; for them, small-scale practices are too restricted, too insignificant. Such traditions, if indeed they are traditions, reach too few people to truly matter. What's important to building community at Mason, they believe, are practices everyone can follow. Given these differences, how could we begin?

First Projects of the GMU Traditions Committee

To be as inclusive as possible and to help decide what projects to start first, we on the Committee took stock of those large- and small-scale traditions that we knew were a part of Mason already. We made a list and discussed each one. Student groups hotly compete for the right to paint the benches that line the campus walkways leading toward Fenwick Library. Fraternities and sororities brighten the campus with painted rocks they paint, denoting their founding date. International students decorate the George Mason statue with the bright flags of many nations for International Week. Nursing students, employing stethoscopes, surgical scrubs, and more, change George Mason into one of them for Health Week. The statue has become a gathering place as many students now tell each other "Let's meet at the Statue" as they head off for an evening together. The Spirit Wall, a brick wall outside a classroom building, welcomes chalked messages; many such as "Sorority Recruitment Sept 12," spread the word about fraternity and sorority activities (see Figure 2). Other walls invite budding poets to leave their words for all to see: "Breeze becomes so cool/ autumn approaching swiftly/ farewell to Summer," writes one student. Leafletters such as the converts to maverick politician Lyndon LaRouche hawk their messages on the plaza outside the main student union. During International Week events in April, students exhibit dress, dance, and food traditions from their many home countries. There are Mason Day, Patriot's Day, Homecoming, and all the Graduation activities. And if a person dies while they're studying at GMU, a tree is often planted in his or her honor.



Figure 2: The Spirit Wall at GMU

(photo: Margaret R. Yocom)

The Traditions Committee at Mason decided on a three-pronged approach to university-wide tradition building. First, we looked at symbols, such as the alma mater, class ring, and mascot. Second, we turned to events. We tweaked some we already had, such as Convocation and Commencement; and we established new ones, such as Family Weekend. And third, we considered spaces: how could we urge the creation of spaces that would encourage people to gather in places that could accrue meaning and, possibly, engender traditions? What would such spaces look like? I helped with the first large-scale traditions we worked on: an official class ring and an alma mater. But I kept—and keep—speaking for creating spaces and for recognizing the practices of smaller constituencies on campus, the small-scale traditions.

Advocacy of Small-Scale Traditions and the Archive

My advocacy of small-scale traditions takes two major forms. First, I link already known campus practices to broader traditions to suggest unrecognized depths within the event. For example, when we

talked about the "Take Back the Night" rally for women's safety on campus and for an end to violence against women, I discussed how the walk around the perimeter of campus was reminiscent of pilgrimages, especially those made on Good Friday by Ireland's Aran Islanders who walk the borders of their rocky island home on that day (Robinson 17). In both practices, people make a space intimately their own.

My second strategy has been to promote the recognition of small-group practices detailed by GMU folklore students who have donated their work to the Archive. The Northern Virginia Folklife Archive that I founded and continue to direct houses stories and practices found among residence hall counselors, dancers in the University Company, the members of service and social fraternities and sororities, and more. It preserves the practices of students such as Latrice Mizelle, whose father gave her the quilt he used on his college bed when she came to GMU. I've begun bringing Archive materials to the meetings and mentioning, whenever possible, how small-scale traditions might contribute to Committee projects. I'm sure I'll think of more applications as the Committee continues its work.

At the Traditions Committee meeting of November 6, 2002, for example, as we worked on the Traditions Web site, I brought in a handout of GMU-related folklore from the Archive (see Appendix B). Telling the stories aloud, I hoped to interest some of the Committee members in the small-scale campus traditions. Alpha Phi Omega service fraternity's continuous practice of occupying one spot in the Johnson Center, Chris' story about his embarrassing first day as a freshman, Patriot Center worker Allan's story about Michael Flatley's grand arrival for a concert, and more. After listening, the assistant dean of one of the colleges observed, "I thought we were going to focus on stories that were common to everyone at the University, like how Krug [Building] got its name."

"Librarian Anne Hakes from Special Collections at Fenwick Library is gathering that information," I announced, and I spoke again for the need to include the traditions of smaller groups, student traditions that arise on their own with no help from a committee. The Traditions Web site sub-committee, looking for material, was interested, and they have published these stories now, along with a request for students to send in their own stories and more.

In addition, we at the Archive—my colleague Debra Shutika and my Graduate Research Assistant, J. Michael Martinez—plan to publish on our own Web site some GMU campus traditions that may or may not get put on the Traditions Web site. Also, now that Mason has one of the most culturally diverse student groups in the nation, and nearby towns such as Herndon, Virginia, already have more Latino and Asian residents than they have European Americans, we want our Archive Web site to reflect the multicultural world that forms the matrix of campus traditions.

We are also thinking about constructing a campus map on the web where story texts appear when you move your mouse pointer over them.⁶ And I've begun to talk with members of the Performing Arts Department about taking some of the Mason stories in the Archive and developing them into dramatic pieces for the stage.

Conclusion: Fossils and Futures

From the work of the Traditions Committee, we at Mason now have an alma mater, established after a university and community contest. And I'm told the official GMU class ring is selling briskly. We established the awarding of honor cords for graduating seniors, cords that indicate certain levels of scholarly achievement. At our request, the University now writes "summa cum laude" in Latin, not English, on diplomas. We're talking about rethinking our mascot, painting campus fire hydrants, strengthening our pep band, and more.

Now, almost four years later, I'm glad I signed on to the Traditions Committee. It's a great satisfaction to me to be able to merge my academic and my applied interests in this way. In addition, my work on the Traditions Committee has certainly revealed to me the potential that lives within university folklore archives. Since I had specific examples in the Archive of small-scale traditions, I was able to argue with more authority about these practices that stand in contradistinction to the official rituals of commencement and the invented traditions of the alma mater. In my case, folklore has gathered, not lost, rhetorical power in being collected and preserved in an archives. Certainly written texts are, as performance theory suggests, the bare bones of complex events, but these "fossil records" we archive are also, as Barre

Toelken writes, “real responses to living contexts, ... shared human articulations of irritation, injury, pain, growth, healing, nurturance, and even ... love” (2003:10).⁷ Though some among us may doubt the current usefulness of archives,⁸ folklore materials in our collections can speak with eloquence. Actively and creatively used, they may help us folklorists in institutions keep our discipline and ourselves very much alive. Archives often offer a locus for folklore funding: universities understand the community-related mission of archives and libraries, and often provide internships and assistantships for their work. Archives also provide places for folklore students to gather, research, and volunteer; at an archives, they engage in professional work with their folklore professors. And discussing tradition, local folklore, and on-campus folklore archives in front of staff members from across a university on traditions committees goes a long way toward raising the visibility and importance of folklore study.

The words of Jo Radner echo in my mind, when she said in her American Folklore Society presidential address that “reconceptualizing the folklore enterprise as an integrated discipline of reciprocal theory and application needs to be at the heart of our field’s agenda right now...” (272). She spoke of how folklorists are uniquely positioned to be a part of the growing effort to revitalize democratic missions of research universities, to strengthen the link between universities and the communities they are located in. On the Traditions Committee, I bring folklore with its small-group message to yet another community, the community of students, faculty, and staff of my workplace.

I imagine our Traditions Committee conversations about small- and large-scale traditions will continue. But, for me, work on the Committee and in the Archive is yet another opportunity to speak for what we as folklorists do: seek out beauty in the ordinary and art in the everyday.

Notes

1. For additional comments on tradition, see Simon Bronner (1998), *Following Tradition*. Bronner reminds readers that from 1899 when Englishman Edwin Sidney Hartland first described the professional pursuit of folklore as the 'study of tradition' until today when university folklore programs refer to the study of tradition as one of their hallmarks, the place of tradition seems firm (6,12). Bronner also points out that although Dan Ben-Amos famously defined folklore without using the word tradition in 1972 (Ben-Amos 13), 12 years later Ben-Amos argued that "tradition has survived criticism and remained a symbol of and for folklore" (qtd in Bronner 1998:18). See also the work of Michael Owen Jones (2000) who, after reviewing the literature on tradition and the individual, discusses how Mr. Robertson crafted an identity for himself based on his grandparents' Ukrainian heritage by selecting from traditional elements available to him.

2. All Newspaper articles quoted in the text are available online through *Lexis-Nexis Academic*: <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/> Accessed 14 April 2004.

3. Tuleja (4) notes this difference of scale, too, given his interest in small, subnational, minor entities with local knowledge and Hobsbawm and Ranger's interest in national groups.

4. See Hobsbawm and Ranger. Of course, as groups invent, bring into being official, community-wide traditions, the force of the unofficial, subversive power of small-group tradition pushes against it with creative riffs on the invented tradition. The use of the yellow ribbon in the Gulf War provides a good example: the instant production of ribbons of other colors that quickly appeared in contradistinction to the perceived "Support the Troops" message.

5. In the interest of space, I omit the debates over the usefulness of the term "invented tradition" here. For examples that apply the concept, see Hobsbawm (1983 [1989]) and Pershing and Yocom (1996). For a reformulation of the concept, see Tad Tuleja's view of such practices as not "inventions" but, rather, as "manipulated knowledge" or "creative manipulations" that exist in context with one another, and influence each other (1997, 4-6). See also Bendix (1997).

6. As we go forward with more projects, I'll need to decide how to handle some of the more subversive campus folklore that the Archive houses. For example, students refer to the J and K parking lots, way out on the perimeter of campus, as the JOKE lots: "J and K lots are a joke: still not large enough and so far away they hardly seem part of the University." Then, there are the stories about teachers, and some of the tales don't picture GMU profs in a warm and glowing light. Finally there's the campus sex list of the public places that students dare each other to have sex in and see if they can escape unobserved. Of course, some of the most controversial GMU folklore

never makes it into the Archive. Sometimes the collector or the informants decide that the material would reflect badly on them, and they request that the material not be preserved publicly. One semester, for example, a student collected the pre-game good luck rituals of one of the University teams and declined to submit the work because it was sexual in content.

7. Thanks to Suzi Jones who helped me re-locate this quotation.

8. For a preliminary discussion of the usefulness/irrelevance of archives given folklore's turn in orientation from text to context with the advent of performance theory, see Gabbert (1999).

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Appendix A

Selected Traditions Committee Websites at United States Universities:

Ball State University	http://www.bsu.edu/web/admissions/traditions
Dickinson College	http://www.dickinson.edu/heritage
Lawrence University	http://www.lawrence.edu/about/trads/index.shtml
University of Michigan	http://www.umich.edu/pres/history
Princetoniana Traditions Committee	http://alumni.princeton.edu/~ptoniana/tradition.asp
Purdue University Traditions Quiz	http://www.purdue.edu/PER/quiz.html
Texas A&M Traditions Council	http://aggietraditions.tamu.edu
William Woods University	http://www.wmwoods.edu/Student_Life/handbook/tradition.html

Appendix B

Paper and Handout on College Folklore (abridged):

Collect one item of folklore that comments on some way about life at GMU or life as a GMU student.

Newspaper articles about folklore on the campuses of GWU, U Maryland, UVA have appeared in the Washington Post regularly. One reporter said in a phone interview with me, “Well, GMU is such a young university. There’s probably no folklore at your school.” I disagreed. What can you find? Your challenge is to collect one item of folklore that reflects on life at GMU and describe one of its performance contexts. (You may want to expand this paper and use it for your semester fieldwork project).

Examples of GMU traditions you can collect:

- Leaving home to come to college: festival, rite of passage, gifts.
- Stories people tell repeatedly about themselves.
- Language at the workplace.
- Practices of Residential Assistants
- Classroom practices: how long should you wait for a late professor?
- Alternative names for campus buildings, parking lots, and other spaces
- Traditional practices of GMU clubs: meeting places, folk speech, stories
- Sorority and fraternity traditions
- Performances of traditional dance, foodways on campus
- Good luck rituals of athletes or students before exams
- Informal decorations: chalking, graffiti
- Using the George Mason statue: as a meeting place, etc.
- Decorating the George Mason statue
- Practical jokes
- Festival celebrations on campus: Christmas, Ramadan, Hanukkah, etc
- Planting trees in memory of students who died while attending GMU
- Decorating your cap and gown for graduation
- Gift-giving: what do you give co-workers and teachers?
- Ghostly presences on campus

And much more!

Examples of GMU Folklore from the Northern Virginia Folklife Archive:**Pre-performance Traditions in the GMU Dance Company**

by Elizabeth Reynolds. NVFA#2000-041.

Pre-performance warm-up, each new dancer, dancing with the Company for the first time gets one carnation from the Company president. Some dancers save that first flower: Dan, grad student in the Company: "I have my first flower from my first teacher from my first performance. I hung it from the ceiling, just one rose." Some make collections of petals that signify each performance.

APO Service Fraternity

by Angela Singletary. NVFA #2003-059.

Traditional greeting: "LFS." LFS (Leadership, Friendship, Service), a greeting and a goodbye to members of the group, is also used as at the end of e-mails among members when signing off.

Traditional use of space: The 3rd Floor "hangout" corner is located on the third floor of the Johnson Center over-looking the food court. Even if APO members are absent, their backpacks stake their claim and close-by non-member students joke that they will "guard the APO table" for them. If you're looking for someone in the group, check there first. Members hang out at that table to drink coffee, eat lunch, and chat.

Stories of First Experiences in College

by Paul Livengood. NVFA#2001-011.

Chris who has been at GMU for 2 years tells a story about being late for his first college class: "It was my first day of school. I remember I had to wake up kind of early, around 9:30 because my class was at 10:30. I got dressed like any other morning, ate breakfast, and then hopped in the car and went to school. What I forgot to account for was the time it took to drive to school. I ended up getting to school at 10:40. Of course I had no idea where the class was because I didn't go earlier with you [Paul] and find out where the classrooms were. So finally I find the classroom and walk in. Everyone of course looks at me and the teacher continues with calling roll. [Just] as soon as I sat down, she called my name. I said, 'Here.' She said, 'I hope that this is not a tale of things to come. You are a perfect example of what you can not do in the class if you expect to pass.'"

Paper: Collecting GMU folklore

In an essay format, tell about the time you collected this story or item of folk speech, etc. In your description, include the following:

- (1) Describe the context and performance of the item of folklore that you experienced. Write about the time of day, weather (if applicable), persons present, location, the emotional tone of the situation.

— What is/was your relationship to the teller?

— How did you come to hear the item? If it came up naturally in a conversation without your asking for the item, what was the conversation about? What was being said before and after you heard the item? Did the item encourage or discourage talk on the same subject? Did you overhear it? How did you record the item and when: taperecorder, pencil and paper, etc.

— If you directly asked your informant for folklore s/he knew, describe your interview. Ask your informant to describe a time (or the time) that s/he heard the item performed in its natural context.

— You or your informant may want to use a pseudonym for privacy.

- (2) Present the item. Use the actual words that you heard; don't "clean it up" unless your informant asks you to. Note any such changes in your paper or in a footnote. (Off-color words are often part of folklore performances; you may include them. You won't embarrass or insult me).

- (3) Archive permission. Ask your informant if s/he would allow you to place your paper in the Northern Virginia Folklife Archive. Offer your informant the privacy of a pseudonym.

Requirements.

Minimum length: the item plus one page of writing.

Maximum length: none.

Typed. Double-spaced.

Two copies.

Archive release form and Archive accession form.

(forms available at <http://www.gmu.edu/folklore/nvfa>)