Overview

This graduate seminar will introduce and survey the diversity of expressive cultural forms practiced in Native North American societies. Cultural materials considered will include visual art and material culture, architecture, verbal art (including oratory, storytelling, and sacred narrative), cosmology, dance, musical performance, public celebrations, games, and other topics customarily approached under the rubrics “folklore”, “folk music” and “folklife.” In undertaking this survey, the seminar will also confront the work of key thinkers whose Americanist scholarship has influenced scholarly work in folklore, anthropology and ethnomusicology beyond the field of Native American studies. Thus, study of Native North American materials will enable us to engage with general theoretical and methodological issues in areas such as ethnomusicology, cultural history, mythology, ethnopoetics, performance theory, and art history.

In the folklore graduate curriculum this course fulfills area or theory requirements.

Books and Readings

The course will include consideration of several key texts in the history of the study of American Indian folklore and expressive culture. These works have been ordered through the IU bookstore and are also available directly from the publishers and from online used book dealers. Two titles marked * below have been assigned as texts for the companion undergraduate course to this one FOLK F352. They will provide participants in this course with basic background information, together with a sampling of texts and images for discussion and comparison. Article length works to be read are noted in the course schedule below. A copy of Frank Speck’s Midwinter Rites of the Cayuga Long House will be provided in class.


• Frank G. Speck (1995) *Midwinter Rites of the Cayuga Long House*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. (Original edition 1949) [A copy will be provided.]


**Assignments**

Each student will complete one major (12+ pages) and one minor (5+ pages) project. The category “a” project must be chosen as either the major or the minor project.

(a) A substantive (major) or preliminary (minor) study of a particular object of material culture or visual art, a recorded musical performance, or a “folkloric” text. With approval of the instructor, this assignment can focus on a relevant and related group of materials.

(b) An evaluative review of the ethnographic literature pertaining to expressive culture in a particular native community. A major review would survey most extant work, would cover the interrelations between various expressive domains, and would incorporate a time-perspective. A preliminary (minor) study would examine a narrow domain or assess a small set of key works.

(c) An assessment of the work of a prominent student of American Indian expressive culture. A major study of this type would review and evaluate all or most of the
published work by the researcher selected. A minor study would evaluate a logical subset of work by the chosen scholar.

One of the two assignments should be completed and turned in by week 9. The remaining assignment should be completed and turned in prior to May 4.

In addition to these research projects, each student will complete a book review of Barre Toelken’s *The Anguish of Snails: Native American Folklore in the West*. This review will conform to the book review guidelines of the *Journal of American Folklife*. These reviews should be submitted electronically before or during week 8. They will be collated and distributed as a collection to the class. An online class discussion of the book will follow.

**Course Schedule**

1  **1/10 Frameworks and Resources for Study**

In our first class meeting, I will sketch the scope and goals of the course, as well as introduce some resources for the study of Native American expressive culture. We will begin thinking about the history of the field, including its institutional history at Indiana University.

2  **1/24 Narrative, Comparatively**

We will begin our efforts in earnest by dipping into the extensive literature on American Indian narrative grounded in historic-geographic, comparative, and culture history perspectives. We will read the following works together.


Each student will also be assigned one work listed on the week one supplement. In addition, each student should also read one of the Franz Boas selections listed on the supplement.

3. **1/31 Franz Boas on Native American Art**

In our third meeting we will grapple with Franz Boas’ contributions to American Indian art studies. What problems was Boas trying to address? How do his studies of American Indian art articulate with his larger scholarly project? What legacies did Boas bequeath to his students and to us?


In addition to these two common readings (above), each student will discover, read and report on, one early work on American Indian visual art or material culture (pre-1940) written by one of Boas’ students or one of their students. Use JSTOR for this assignment.

4. **2/7 Music and Dance—An Overview and an Iroquois Example**

In our fourth meeting, we will examine music and its links to material culture, ritual and American Indian community life. Iroquois culture will provide a specific focus for detailed study.


5.  2/14 Music and Dance—Case Studies Since 1950

During the fifth meeting, we will examine a diverse set of case studies related to American Indian music. I will present my own research on Woodland Indian music and cultural performance in detail.


6.  2/21 Architecture

We will devote a week to exploring vernacular architecture in Native North America. I will discuss my own work on Yuchi ceremonial ground architecture and we will review
an account of Pueblo architecture by Santa Clara scholar Rina Swentzell. Each student will also consult Paul Oliver's Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World and, on the basis of this consultation, prepare a brief class summary of one North American Indian architectural tradition. The EVAW is on reserve both in the folklore collection and the fine arts library. The Handbook of North American Indians can also be used for this purpose.


7. 2/28 Games—Case Studies

During a week devoted to games, we will survey the topic, examining especially the place of games within larger American Indian cultural performance traditions.


8. **3/7 Material Culture Studies**

In the eighth week we will return to material culture studies, examining some classic case studies that illustrate a range of findings, methods and concerns. We will be joined in our discussion of *The Pueblo Potter* by Dr. Karen Duffy, a folklorist and expert on Pueblo pottery traditions.


9 **3/21 Morphological (Syntagmatic) Structuralism**

Beginning with the 9th week, we will more explicitly explore general theoretical perspectives born out of studies of American Indian expressive culture. We will begin with Alan Dundes’ extension of Vladimir Propp’s work on the formal structure of folktales.


10 3/28 Trickster Psychologies

In the 10th meeting, we will consider Paul Radin’s classic study of the trickster. We will also encounter a classic Freudian interpretation, by Alan Dundes, of a creation story found in Native American and beyond.


11 4/4 Paradigmatic Structuralism

During week 11, we will explore classic structuralism in one of Claude Levi-Strauss’ most recent and accessible works on Native American narrative.


12 4/11 Ethnopoetics

Ethnopoetics is one cornerstone of contemporary work in folkloristics and linguistic anthropology. In week 12 we will examine the roots of, and contemporary state of, ethnopoetic work as it relates to Native North America, the cultural context within which the perspective was initially developed. We will give special attention during this meeting to foundational essays by Dell Hymes. The chapters in “In vain I tried to tell you” that will be discussed will be announced in class prior to this week. During this week in particular, we will be making reference to the collection *Voices from Four Direction*, which is a required text in Folklore F352 and an optional text for this class.


13 4/18 Performance and Discourse-Centered Research

During the 13th class meeting we will sample recent work on American Indian expressive culture, particularly on “verbal art”, that is rooted in current performance and discourse-centered theory and method.


14 4/25 Studying Native American Expressive Culture Today

In our final class meeting, we will discuss the current state of ethnographic work conducted in collaboration with Native American communities. Ethics, methods, funding, community interest, and new research topics will be among the issues considered. We will also discuss the major and minor projects.

5/6 2nd Paper Due