

• *Editor's Note* •

2019 State of the Section

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My fellow #NewFolk:

The past few years have seen *New Directions in Folklore* grow and prosper, in no small part due to the efforts of former editors Trevor J. Blank and David J. Puglia. As the new editor-in-chief, it is now my job to stand on the foundation they have built and develop the future of the section and journal. Thankfully, with immeasurable help from others, our efforts this past year have proved that the talent, creativity, and enthusiasm is ready, willing, and able to transition our successful 2018 into a successful 2019.

I'll be blunt: 2018 was a very good year for the section. We had a lot of exposure among the larger folklore world, we attracted a lot of attention at the AFS Annual Meeting, and we initiated a variety of projects that will continue to help build the NewFolk community. On New Year's Day, we published Volume 15, the Star Wars Special Issue. "The Folk Awakens: Star Wars and Folkloristics" was a massive success and its articles currently rank at or near the top of the journal's all-time download list. We created a new website to work in tandem with the online journal and facilitate more popular and topical discourse. The new "Section Leadership Series" began in earnest with interviews of past editors and contributors but quickly evolved into a podcast-format interview series of influential folklorists across the field. We sponsored multiple panels at AFS, including our

third annual "New Directions Forum." Memorial's Natalie Dignam won the Ellis Prize for her paper, "The Brewnettes," and on top of all of that, Andrew Peck and Annamarie O'Brien took over as section conveners in November, bringing new energy and ideas to the annual business meeting.

With all of these projects, and more, *NDiF* is in a position today, as both a section of forward-thinking, innovative scholars and as a journal that embraces new technologies and methodologies, to identify and take advantage of opportunities in ways perhaps not yet seen in folk studies. Our goal is a simple one: to help the field of folklore by pushing boundaries and giving scholars room to breathe new ideas into the discipline.

The name is the mission statement.

To that end, the following is a summary of programs and initiatives that are already in the works, or will be as the year progresses:

Special Issues: A new way to do new directions?

I love special issues. Not only are they more useful to readers, in my opinion, but they allow for collaborations between scholars studying similar topics that might not otherwise work together. *NDiF* has published three special issues to-date, and the most recent, [the Star Wars special issue](#), is the single most popular issue of *NDiF*, as measured by unique views. Even the introduction, written by yours truly, ranks toward the top of the list of all-time article downloads. For our purposes, special issues also allow members of

the NewFolk community to address topics in a more comprehensive manner than in a standard publishing format that prioritizes time over topic—and there's nothing wrong with that, of course. However, because of our unique scope and online platform, *NDiF* can afford to break the mold more often and utilize alternative publishing methods and techniques.

We currently have multiple ideas in various stages of pre-production, and are always willing to consider more. Right now, Kim Stryker and Jared Schmidt are planning a special issue merging together various AFS panels from the past few years that focused on the folklife of and around alcohol and drinking communities (clever title TBD). Another special issue is being formulated around retrospectives of influential, or "canonical," folklore texts. Still another is in the very early stages and will focus on the intersection of technology and folk studies. Because *NDiF* is not bound to a specific genre of study, special issues are an ideal way for our members to collaboratively research and analyze a wide variety of topics, all while the journal maintains a unified level of production.

The Section Leadership Interviews/Podcast: An untapped market?

The idea to do a series of interviews was hardly a stroke of divine inspiration. In Spring 2018, I needed content for the new website, and I imagined that doing a slow-roll of transcribed interviews over the summer would be preferable to creating new blog posts each week while I was on the beach earning 20%. It was a win-win, from my perspective: I got to interview important figures from the section's history and I got lots of content at the same time, all for very little work on my end ("all I have to do is write the questions!").

Then a funny thing happened—I started to have a lot of fun speaking with these people, listening to their stories, and learning about the history of the field. Who would have thought a folklorist would enjoy interviewing people?

So the interview series expanded. From [Bill Ellis](#), [Trevor Blank](#), [David Puglia](#), and [Simon Bronner](#) an oral history *New Directions in Folklore* emerged that had previously been hidden from many. After that, I expanded to include people not necessarily in the section's leadership, but had a strong connection to the work we do. Lynne McNeill's [interview](#) is an hour and a half and I'm not sure she stopped to take a breath the whole time. If you don't want to be a folklorist after listening to Lynne speak about it, I don't know what to tell you.

But there have been misfires. Andrea Kitta's work is some of my favorite recent scholarship and if you haven't read everything she's written, you should get on that. Unfortunately, due to various setbacks that are mostly my fault (with a quick detour to a transcription service that never followed through), our three hour conversation has yet to be released. I wouldn't blame her for holding that against me, but the real losers in all of this are you, the audience who has yet to hear her brilliantly deconstruct the field and its future. Similarly, my interview with Tom Mould was a two-hour clinic on how to be a successful folklorist, but... the recording software didn't record. Again, this hurts the audience the most, as we spent a significant amount of time discussing his views on ethnography, fake news, and his life journey as a folklorist.

To remedy this situation, *NDiF* member Cory Hutcheson has taken the reins of the interview series as project leader. Cory is an experienced podcaster and was a panelist on our successful [2017 New Directions Forum](#) about podcasting and folklore. Under his

guidance, the podcast will branch out into other areas of the field and highlight a diverse array of voices, reflecting not only *NDiF* membership, but the field as a whole. Podcasting is a vibrant medium right now and we can offer the audience a fresh perspective on the field of folkloristics simply by facilitating conversations. I genuinely get excited just thinking about the interviews we have planned and are planning for 2019.

Working for Exposure: Increasing visibility when everyone's looking!

At the business meeting in October there was a lot of eagerness over increasing the section's visibility, specifically at the AFS Annual Meeting. One of the more easily actionable ideas was the creation of a Zine, spearheaded by Anna O'Brien. Other ideas are to start providing nametag ribbons (akin to "Editor" or "New Member"), give away merch like stickers, etc. These are all great ideas and we will be moving forward to increase direct engagement with AFS Annual Meeting attendees. Only rarely does academia allow for the overt embrace of creativity, so here's a perfect chance for our members to take a more direct role in the section's activities. If this is something that interests you, we welcome your involvement.

Conventions and other pop culture events: To boldly go!

On a similar note, *NDiF* needs to be involved with local and national fan conventions. Involvement can be as detailed as hosting a panel or as simple as having a folklorist on the ground live-tweeting. Among our peers, the NewFolk community is best-prepared for

more direct engagement with popular culture, and conventions are the perfect vehicle to showcase that. *NDiF* has published articles on cosplaying and fan culture practically every year, and one of the section's founders is Camille Bacon-Smith, who wrote some of the seminal books on performative fandom. Here is a chance for the larger community to have a more direct involvement. Everything about this just makes too much sense.

If you're going to a convention, let us know and live-tweet your experience. If you want to set up a panel or booth at a local convention, let us know and represent *NDiF* to the greater public. We all have our own interests and there's no limit to what we can do working together. Yeah, it's a cliché, but there's a reason for that. Really, I just don't want to read any more op-eds deconstructing the power of comic books by the math professors (yes, this happened). This is our field, so let's make sure everyone knows it.

T-shirts: A success! With an asterisk or three...

Speaking of embracing creativity and increasing exposure... over the summer it was decided that *NDiF* would begin selling t-shirts. On my own, I hired a graphic designer friend and she made a bunch of great designs for us (and if you ever need graphic design work you should hire her because she's great and the designs are great). There was a lot of positive feedback to the t-shirts and potentially having the current designs on other objects, like bags. All of this told me that the audience was there for the creation of a new potential fundraising opportunity. Now, in my enthusiasm to get the project off and running, I did not coordinate with AFS at first, but after we spoke and got on the same page the project moved forward. We distributed the first batch of t-shirts at the AFS Annual

Meeting. We have some remaining from this first batch, in addition to the few that still need to be distributed to those unable to attend AFS.

Despite the uneven results of the first t-shirt project, there still appears to be a strong demand for merch. We have more designs and a reliable printing process, all that we need now is to finalize what this project will actually look like fully realized. The first run was informal, done mostly through email. Ideally, it would be best to create an online storefront so we can take human limitations out of the process as much as possible. That said, there remains a lot of details that need to be worked out in tandem with AFS so we ensure transparency and reliability throughout for our section members and the larger potential audience.

Social media/blog: A few strikes, a few gutters...

In our best efforts to catch up to the 2000s, we started a [blog](#)! More accurately, we created a secondary website to serve as a topical and accessible outlet for members to read about and comment upon current events or research in the field. The result has been a mixed bag. We have been fortunate to have a variety of scholars post on the site over the past year. There have been some remarkable posts that, in their own way, embody exactly what the blog is meant for: folkloristic commentary on topical or current events ([David Rotenstein's post](#) immediately comes to mind). Unfortunately, the number of contributors has been nowhere near the amount necessary to maintain a structured and energetic site.

Other disciplines have tried to incorporate more online engagement with their communities, to a variety of levels of success. Some have found success in publishing highly academic analyses of current cultural trends, while others have tried to tailor their accessibility to a larger, non-academic audience. I believe that folklorists should be engaging with the public more frequently and on the public's terms. That means reacting to current events in near-real-time. That means having the scope of voices available, ready and able to comment on those current events. For example, both [Jeana Jorgensen](#) and the [Library of Congress](#) have excellent online engagement and are great sources of information on folkloristic topics. That does not preclude *New Directions in Folklore* from adding to the scene, however; quite the opposite. The more visibility we have as a discipline, in my opinion, the stronger our position in relation to public culture.

In order for the *NDiF* website to succeed, it needs a committed core of writers who can post on a semi-regular basis and a managing editor or two to make sure it runs smoothly. That may sound daunting, but remember: blog posts are not academic articles, nor are they expected to be. It may be uncomfortable to discuss, but folklorists are regularly being scooped on our topics of expertise by journalists and professionals from other fields. Quick reactions, movie reviews, thoughts on current events, thoughts on non-current events—all of these can be handled in brief posts, couched in fair-use images, and consumed by a general audience. If you're reading this and you believe like I do that folk studies can benefit from such a change in public orientation, I hope you'll consider working with us, or at least writing a hundred-word review of the last movie you saw.

Our social media presence remains strong, and *NDiF*'s twitter account, [@AFSNewFolklore](#), actively participates in the popular #FolkloreThursday and #AskAFolklorist conversations. Please be sure to follow us on twitter. Besides having fun, we also release information on there about upcoming events and projects.

Money: The big green elephant in the room.

New Directions in Folklore has a relatively straight-forward budget. We charge dues for membership and we award the [Bill Ellis Prize](#) for best graduate student essay. Add in some administrative fees and website hosting, and that's about it. You may have noticed that a lot of the projects discussed throughout this "State of the Section" require some sort of fiscal backing. If there is enough support from the section membership to allow the use of funds for specific objectives, we can begin to incorporate those into the yearly budget. More expenses require more revenue, though, so it would make sense to explore non-dues fundraising opportunities. This is a larger conversation that we need to have both with AFS and as a whole section, so please, if you have thoughts on this, we want to know.

Membership and dues are stable, and at times growing significantly. In order to increase the value of membership, it has been suggested that paid members should have some sort of special access or tiered incentive. At the moment, we do not have the mechanism for that type of reward, but it is very easy to picture any of the aforementioned projects being turned into "members only" benefits. This will need to be discussed in more detail at the annual business meeting.

Additionally, there is currently a suggestion on the table to create a new annual award for the best non-graduate student essay. **We will be voting on this idea as a section at the 2019 AFS Annual Meeting.** Presuming the measure passes, and we create a new award, we need to work out the details like the name of the award, the prize itself, the winning standards, and more. Between now and October, we welcome all thoughts and conversation on this initiative.

Outro: Second star on the right, and straight on 'til Baltimore.

Ok, folks, that about wraps it all up for this edition of "State of the Section." *New Directions in Folklore* had a very strong 2018 and with your help is looking forward to an even stronger 2019. Whether one or all of our planned projects materialize, it will be because of the ingenuity and passion of our little community within a community. As illustrated above, there are quite a few moving parts involved with these proposed ideas and plenty of opportunities for those interested to contribute to the future of the section, and the discipline. So, join the team, hop on board, and let's make sure that 2019 is everything we want it to be. If you will it, Dude, it is no dream.

NDiF Resources:

[*New Directions in Folklore*, the journal](#)

[*New Directions in Folklore*, the AFS section](#)

[*New Directions in Folklore*, the website](#)

[The Section Leadership Interview Series](#)

[*New Direction in Folklore* on twitter](#)

NDiF Leadership:

[John E. Price](#): Editor-in-Chief

[Andrew Peck](#): Section Convener

[Annamarie O'Brien](#): Section Convener

[Jared L. Schmidt](#): Review editor

[Cory T. Hutcheson](#): Podcast Project Leader

[David J. Puglia](#): Editor emeritus