



AFS Position Statement on Promotion and Tenure Standards and Review

Preamble

Folklore scholarship embraces a wide array of topics, research methods, and modes of presentation and publication. While folklorists consider this diversity of scholarly practice a great strength of their field, it brings with it potential difficulties as well. Notable among these is the complexity of assessing records of scholarship that include elements not easily captured by the typical categories used in tenure, promotion, and merit review.

The American Folklore Society recognizes, of course, that each case of professional assessment is an internal matter of departments, colleges, and universities with their own evaluative standards. Folklorists expect to be assessed with the same rigor as their colleagues in other fields. This document offers the Society's perspective on the value of scholarly practices that, though distinctive of folklore research, may not be as familiar to scholars and reviewers in other fields.

As preamble to the more specific topics addressed below, there are three broad and highly valued characteristics of folklore scholarship worth identifying:

1. Much folklore research is rooted in fieldwork, which is to say that many folklorists expend great effort to gather their own primary information through direct, extended contact with individuals and communities outside academe. This has implications both for the speed with which folklore scholarship may come to fruition and for the forms in which research findings are recorded and disseminated.
2. Deeply rooted in the scholarly mission of many folklorists is the role of mediator between the communities and individual practitioners they study and the wider public. In fulfilling this mission, many folklorists generate research products that cross the boundary between publication in the narrow sense and service or outreach. Such research outcomes as archival collections, museum exhibitions, and festivals (see below) are familiar and highly valued in the field of folklore.

Also, the explosion of electronic media technologies has greatly facilitated the dissemination of folklorists' work. Audio and video recordings, and the dissemination of research online, have become common in all academic fields. Folklorists have been active in the scholarly use of all such media.

3. It is the nature of much folklore research to be collaborative. This is true both in the fieldwork process, where the scholar engages in direct exchange with traditional communities, performers, and practitioners, and in those forms of research presentation that often require multiple scholars and teams of experts (e.g., exhibitions and festivals).

Like scholars in other fields, folklorists engage in standard scholarly publication of books, monographs, and articles. However, many folklorists also produce work with the above features that, by the accepted standards of the field, are understood as legitimate scholarship worthy of evaluation on the same level as refereed publication.



Guidelines

1. The production of exhibitions, festivals, archives, audio recordings, videotapes/films, and digital media works should be seen as evidence of scholarly research, interpretation, and dissemination similar to the production of books, monographs, and articles. The research is often ethnographic, involving field-based interviews and observations. Interpretations of behavior inhere in the exhibit, festival, or video themselves, and are frequently supplemented by other works (e.g., catalogs or study guides). Such scholarly creations as exhibitions, films, and festivals are juried—similar to peer-reviewed publications—by panels at the institutions sponsoring them and agencies funding their production.
2. The American Folklore Society further considers the application of folkloristic research to be an important form of outreach and the scholarship of service. This might include activities that apply and disseminate scholarly perspectives, such as workshops with social workers and public school teachers on the folklore of minority groups, symposia on folk medicine for health care professionals, panel discussions with arts organizations on the nature of folk arts, and consultation with groups concerning historical and cultural preservation. Such service, owing to the research involved and the extent of interpretations presented, may be considered equal to or greater than a paper given at a professional meeting.
3. The individual folklorist can provide both personal statements and outside evaluations that speak to these folkloristic research and community service activities. The Society can help candidates for promotion and tenure connect with senior faculty members who have indicated their general willingness to serve as outside reviewers; the Society will also assist academic institutions in the identification of other appropriate senior faculty for the purpose of specific evaluations.