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Class of 2022
Professor Joseph Mbele
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Draft 5

The major I propose is **Folklore Studies**. This major aims to gain an understanding of the academic study of folklore, including mythology, fairy tales, folk music, and urban legends. Through a variety of academic courses at St Olaf (and Carleton if necessary), independent research, and study, I aim to investigate the significance of folklore in world cultures and its relevance in today's world, as well as the intersections between folklore and religion, and between folklore and contemporary literature. Ultimately, I want to understand and help to preserve cultural traditions, and to help the average reader critically understand and appreciate these traditions as well.

The major operates under a broad definition of folklore, considering classical myths and legends, fairy tales, religious stories, urban legends, and other stories with cultural significance to fall under the definition of "folklore." As such, classes in the major will emphasize examination of a large variety of folklore genres and traditions, and techniques for analysis.

The main questions I aim to answer are:

- What are common roles of storytelling across cultures?
 - Why are certain narratives attractive to certain groups of people?
 - How do people tell stories? What techniques do they use?
- How do universal aspects of the human experience appear in the stories we tell?
 - What aspects of religion are universal?
 - What motifs, themes, and characters are common in stories across cultures with little contact?
- How are cultural narratives formed? Why are cultural narratives formed?
 - Why do stories evolve? What drives their change and in what ways do they change?
- How have aspects of certain ancient traditions manifested themselves in today's world?
 - How have cultural interactions allowed ancient traditions to change and blend with each other?

The classes required for the major are divided into four categories, based on the major's guiding questions (some classes fall into multiple categories):

- Roles of storytelling-- These classes address broad questions about storytelling across cultures
 - *English 258: Folklore*
 - *Religion 320: Interpreting Sacred Texts*

- ~~History 395: Oral History Seminar~~
- Music 239: Javanese Gamelan
- Common motifs and universal themes-- These classes examine stories and traditions in comparison with each other
 - English 108: *The Hero and the Trickster in Post-Colonial Literature*
 - Great Conversation 113: *The Tradition Beginning: The Greeks and the Hebrews*
 - English 258: *Folklore*
- Cultural narratives-- These classes investigate specific cultures' traditions in depth
 - Classics 241: *Greek and Roman Myth*
 - ~~German 247: *Fairytales and Folklore*~~
 - English 243: *Arthurian Legend and Literature*
 - Norwegian 240: *Vikings Past and Present*
 - Russian 250: *Fairy tales in Russia*
 - Music 239: *Javanese Gamelan*
 - Great Con 280: *What is Europe? The Grand Tour*
- Ancient traditions in today's world-- These classes look at traditional stories within contemporary cultures
 - English 223: *Old and Middle English Literature: The Weird and the Wonderful*
 - Norwegian 240: *Vikings Past and Present*
 - Asian Studies 333: *What is a Hero?*
 - Great Con 280: *What is Europe? The Grand Tour*

There are 11 classes required for the major, plus a senior project. In chronological order, they are:

- Great Conversation 113: *The Tradition Beginning: The Greeks and the Hebrews*
 - This class examines influential biblical folklore such as the *Book of Job* and *Song of Solomon*, as well as classical epics such as *Gilgamesh* and *The Odyssey*. It provides the major with an examination of the ways in which folklore influences culture and religion, and vice versa
 - Fall 2018
- Norwegian 240: *Vikings Past and Present*
 - Not only does this class directly tie-in to German 247 through discussion of *The Nibelungenlied*, it thoroughly examines Norse mythology and the way that that tradition has influenced contemporary literature, as well as its interaction with religion.
 - Fall 2019
- English 243: *Arthurian Legend and Literature*
 - Because the story of King Arthur is one of the most pervasive in the

English-speaking world, it is important to understand the legend itself, as well as its influences and the stories it has influenced, to understand Northern European and American folklore.

- *Spring 2020*
- English 258: Folklore
 - This class is of the major. As well as providing the basic skills to academically analyze folklore, it is also a major source of exposure to diverse stories and types of folklore. The techniques and perspectives taught in this class inform the rest of the work within the major.
 - *Fall 2020*
- English 108: The Hero and the Trickster in Post-Colonial Literature
 - This class will examine not a specific culture's folklore tradition, but the prevalence of archetypes across the world. This will provide insight into the similarities and differences of various cultural narratives.
 - *Interim 2021*
- Religion 320: Interpreting Sacred Texts
 - This course will use an understanding of religion as folklore to gain an understanding of analysis of folklore, and to understand ways in which religion and folklore intersect.
 - *Spring 2021*
- Classics 241: Greek and Roman Myth
 - This class explores some of the most well known manifestations of folklore-- classical mythology. This class will provide specific and concrete stories to analyze within the academic framework of folklore.
 - *Spring 2021*
- English 223: Old and Middle English Literature: The Weird and the Wonderful
 - This course will examine the roles of magic and fate in literature. The examination of the early influence of folkloric elements on literature will shed light on modern influence of folkloric elements on literature.
 - *Spring 2021*
- ~~● German 247: Fairytales and Folklore~~
 - ~~○ This class will be useful due to the texts examined, as well as interpretation techniques used. The Brothers Grimm are a source for many well known folktales, which will make the major relevant to real-world interests. In addition, *The Nibelungenlied* is studied in Norwegian 240, providing interdisciplinary coursework. This class will also teach techniques of folklore interpretation.~~
 - ~~○ *Fall 2021*~~
- Asian Studies 333: What is a Hero?
 - This course will examine how the universal folkloric figure of the hero has sustained itself in modern popular culture through a multicultural Asian lens. Not

only will this help answer the questions of what motifs and characters are common across cultures and how ancient themes are manifested in today's world, it provides a non-western look at world narratives.

- *When offered*
- Russian 250: Fairy Tales in Russia
 - This course will investigate Russian fairy tales, as well as their adaptations to and from literature and performance. In doing so, it will answer the guiding question "How do people tell stories? What techniques do they use?" It will also tie into ENGL 223, ENGL 108, and ENGL 243 through its analysis of folklore as literature.
 - *Fall 2021*
- Great Con 280: What is Europe? The Grand Tour
 - This course expands on the content in GCON 113 and the other courses in the Great Con track to thoroughly investigate the Western European tradition in context. Through examination of artifacts, art, and places themselves, the course will integrate the role of folklore in the philosophies and religions of Western Europe. It will also prepare me for potential graduate work in Museum Studies.
 - *Interim 2022*
- ~~● History 395: Oral History Seminar~~
 - ~~○ Because most folklore traditions were originally transmitted orally, it is essential to understand conceptual issues in transmission and narration. This class also teaches techniques of transcription and evaluation of oral histories.~~
 - ~~○ *When offered*~~
- Music 239: Javanese Gamelan
 - This course will
- Independent Study 391: Senior Project
 - This class will synthesize the skills and knowledge I gain through completion of the major. It will serve as a capstone for the major.
 - *Spring 2022*

The classes recommended for or related to the major are:

- Sociology/ Anthropology 234: Native North American Cultures and Religions
- Great Conversation 115: The Tradition Continuing: The Romans and the Christians
- Great Conversation 116: The Tradition Redefined: The Medieval Synthesis
- Great Conversation 217: The Tradition Renewed: New Forces of Secularization
- Great Conversation 218: The Tradition in Crisis: Dissenters and Defenders
- Art and Art History 259: The Arts of China
- Art and Art History 260: The Arts of Japan
- Art and Art History 269: African Art History

Supplementary Carleton classes to be taken if necessary include:

- English 208: The Faerie Queene
- Music 140: Ethnomusicology and the World's Music
- Arabic 185: The Creation of Classical Arabic Literature
- Religion 234: Angels, Demons, and Evil

Rationale for the Major

Although certain other colleges and universities offer programs in folklore, St Olaf does not, even though the major is created relatively easily. Folklore is a field of study that combines aspects of and skills taught in Anthropology, Literature, World Languages, Religion, History, and Classics, but does not rely exclusively on any of these fields. For instance, without understanding the historical and cultural context of a certain story, it would be impossible to perform in depth literary analysis on it. Luckily, St Olaf offers numerous related classes across departments that provide the skills needed to understand folklore. This amalgam of areas of study upholds the values of St Olaf's liberal arts education.

Personal Interest

Throughout my whole life, I have loved reading myths and fairy tales. My favorite book as a child was *d'Aulaires Book of Greek Myths*-- a systematic illustrated retelling of the most well known stories from Classical Hellenistic culture and Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. As I grew older, I discovered more stories from around the world, including Norse and Irish myths, and two richly illustrated copies of *Rapunzel* and *Hansel and Gretel*. Eventually, I got my hands on a book of classic fairy tales, annotated with explanations of folkloric motifs and historical context. I decided that I wanted to study folklore, but I eventually gave it up as a pipe dream, due to the scarcity of undergraduate folklore programs. But when I got to St Olaf and discovered the possibility of designing an independent major, I rediscovered my dream.

Senior Project

For my senior project, I would like to compare stories from around the world, and make them accessible to the modern reader. I want people to take folklore as a genre more seriously and to understand its themes and nuances better. My projects ideas have all grown from this goal.

My first idea, inspired by the book of fairy tales I read as a child, is to collect similar stories from disparate traditions and annotate them with explanations of common themes, characters and motifs, as well as notes on what we can learn about cultures based on their stories, in order to help the average reader understand and enjoy the rich worlds of folklore. For instance, a retelling of Cinderella could include discussion of the evil stepmother archetype, the significance of impractical attire within the economic context of the story's characters, the evolution of the story from the oral tradition to Disney's interpretation, etc. The goal of this project would be to help readers expand their understanding of the intricate and interwoven details of various stories and traditions.

My second idea is to write a series of essays, formatted as introductions to stories or books of folklore, analyzing the storytelling culture of and significant aspects of various stories. These essays would explain the contexts of the stories and what makes them interesting to

folklorists. In essence, they would tell the reader why they should care about these specific stories.

My third idea is to do an in-depth analysis of two particular stories, answering all of the guiding questions for the major in relation to these stories. These stories would have particular significance to the same or different cultures, but they would contrast each other in genre and motifs, history, role within the tradition, and other characteristics.

Consultations

I had a peer review session with Sophia Anderson on February 19, 2020. She recommended that I revise my guiding questions to give them both more variety and more focus. She also gave me suggestions for organizing the major proposal. She complimented the description and course selection sections of the proposal. I took her suggestions into account and added more guiding questions and re-formatted the proposal. I talked to Danny Barry on the same day, and he gave me similar suggestions.

I consulted with Professor Sequoia Nagamatsu on March 3, 2020. He recommended that I include a question about how stories change, so I added a bullet point under “How are cultural narratives formed?” He also recommended that I give my second and third senior project ideas more details, which I did. I also clarified some wording on his recommendation.

Professor Nagamatsu’s most significant suggestion was to create a mechanism to explore more geographical areas’ stories. He noticed that the classes that are currently listed are almost all focused broadly on the West, which was an issue that I had noticed, too, but I wasn’t sure how to fix the problem. He suggested adding an individual study in which I read and analyze stories from various areas of the world. This is something I’d like to do and I will look into it, but it will take more time and effort than simply changing aspects of the proposal.

I had my final review consultation with Susan Carlson, Karil Kucera, and Joseph Mbele on October 19, 2020. Susan suggested that I change the order of a few sections, that I clarify the structure of the document with headings, and that I expand on one of the senior project ideas, which I did. We also discussed Professor Nagamatsu's feedback on incorporating more non-Western regions and cultures. We talked about looking at classes in the Art, Spanish, and Asian Studies departments for opportunities to explore those cultures. We also discussed forms of art such as visual art, music, and dance, that have been used to tell stories and pass on folklore traditions within cultures. After the meeting, I added ART 259, ART 260, and ART 269 to the list of classes recommended for the major. Unfortunately, the topical classes in the Spanish and Asian Studies departments are all taught in their respective languages, none of which I know or have studied.

I met with Jason Paul, the librarian assigned to this major, on October 23, 2020. We discussed senior project ideas and fleshed out the idea for the annotated retelling of stories. I decided that I'd like to focus on stories that are not generally well known or told in modern American culture for my project. He noticed that the majority of the classes for the major are focused on the literary analysis aspect of folklore rather than anthropological examination, which

means that whatever my project is, I will be restricted to literary analysis. We also briefly discussed resources for research, such as Catalyst and library databases. Because I've done a fair amount of research for classes in the humanities already, we didn't go too in depth here.