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Interdisciplinary Collaborations: Partnership for MFAP

Collaborations in Arts & Sciences

The Missouri Folk Arts Program (MFAP) is dedicated to building cross-cultural understanding of Missouri's folk arts by documenting, conserving and presenting Missouri's living folk arts and folk life. The most obvious manifestation of our mission statement is Missouri's Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program, which in the past twenty years has paired over three hundred teams of artists to convey folk arts traditions from one generation to the next. However, the MFAP has long been involved in cross-disciplinary programs, in agency-to-agency partnerships and with individual staff members serving as consultants or advisors.

For instance, the MFAP works closely with the Folklore Studies professors Elaine Lawless and Sw. Anand Prahlad in MU's Department of English. MFAP staff provides guest lectures for courses like *Introduction to Folklore*, *Folk Religion & Belief*, *Women's Traditions & Feminist Theory* and *American Folklore*. The MFAP Director, Lisa Higgins, has been an advisor for the Student Folklore Society since its inception in 1999. The folk arts program has also hosted graduate student interns from the Folklore Studies Program since 1993. Interns work at the MFAP offices and in the field with Folk Arts Specialist Debba Bailey for two consecutive semesters and earn course credit.

Since at least 1999, the MFAP has also collaborated with MU's Art Department. With guidance from Professor Deborah Huelsbergen, students in Graphic Design competed to create a new logo for the MFAP in 2000, transitioning the artwork from an image of a finished object (an intricate piece of ironwork) to a logo that evokes the MFAP's focus on people and their interactions with Missouri's cultural and ecological landscape. In the upcoming year, a team of Graphic Design students will work with the MFAP staff in an artist/client setting to design and produce interpretative materials for the program's twentieth anniversary.

New Partnerships with Agriculture

In keeping with our penchant for collaboration, the MFAP recently began a partnership with the Department of Rural Sociology in the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources. Since 2001, the MFAP Director has served on an "Experts Team" for a project that has evolved into the Missouri Regional Cuisines Project. Dr. Elizabeth Barham, Assistant Professor of Rural Sociology, has embarked on a long-term project that utilizes Missouri's wine regions as the nexus for place-based tourism and marketing. Her Experts Team is comprised of specialists in agriculture, forestry, community development, conservation, geography, history and folk arts/folklife. After a year of research and consultation, Dr. Barham and the Experts Team selected the Mississippi Hills region near St. Genevieve for the pilot study. The project's primary goal is to create place-based *appellations* (geography region, hillage or vineyard under which a wine grower is authorized to identify and market wine), similar to those of France and Spain for marketing food, drink and other products unique to an area's cultural history and landscape.

With its focus on place-based culture and traditions, the Regional Cuisines Project is an ideal project for the Missouri Folk Arts Program's participation. To date/our chief role has been to identify a consultant in the field of folklore with expertise in foodways and cultural tourism.



Intern David Allred photographs master blacksmith John Glenn in his St. Joseph workshop.
Photo by Debora A. Bailey



Map prepared by Tim Nigh, Missouri Ecological Classification Project, and Andy

MFAP staff recommended Millie Rahn, an independent consultant who lives in Massachusetts but who has extensive experience in several regions across the country. Ms. Rahn spent eleven days in Missouri this past March where she traveled the Mississippi Hills region, logging 1,211 miles, twelve audio-taped interviews, 134 color slides and numerous leads for future study.

Ms. Rahn submitted a forty-nine-page report, including some conclusions:

"Agricultural knowledge and foodways are still very much part of local life and lore, and also visible in the landscape and environment. These foodways are vitally important now, but they also could become the basis for new streams of sustainable economic development.

Interviews, especially with older people, often drew out a feeling of loss for the ways of the old agricultural life with its home-made entertainment, community social events, seasonal recipes and foods, and marking the year through seasonal cycles and celebrations. Others voiced a growing emphasis on looking to the area's past to help shape its future, led particularly by long-established and newer vintners, along with those wanting to develop new products based on local ingredients and materials, and revive or refine traditions and celebrations."

In addition to the bountiful data that Ms. Rahn collected, she was also able to make recommendations to the Missouri Folk Arts Program by identifying new artists, including Eldon Carron of Bloomsdale, a fourth-generation basket maker who grows, harvests and dries his own willows.

Our work with Dr. Barham and the Regional Cuisines Project has also created another new partnership with Missouri's Department of Agriculture, which invited Higgins to serve on the Missouri Agritourism Council. The Council was organized to advise the Missouri Department of Agriculture and partners in the development of a statewide plan for Missouri's agricultural and tourism efforts. Agritourism is a growing trend that builds an intersection between economic development and niche marketing for small family farms. Missouri is already rich with examples from autumn corn mazes and pumpkin farm hayrides to the now thriving wine industry.

With our knowledge of local and regional traditions and culture, the Missouri Folk Arts Program is uniquely positioned to work with the Agritourism Council, as it works with partners to expand tours from single destinations to a multi-site day and weekend excursions. Additionally, we will continue to work with Professor Barham on the Regional Cuisines Project, especially as she designs an oral history project for 4-H students and develops ancillary programming for the upcoming traveling exhibit. *Key Ingredients: American by Food*, organized by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service in association with the Missouri Humanities Council.

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Vineyards in early spring
at Chaumette Winery
Photo by Dr. Elizabeth Barham