

UNC Folklore MA Requirements—the Critical Literature Review

The Critical Literature Review is an extended bibliographic essay (15-20 pages), based on readings that students have encountered in coursework and those they are exploring in research for their theses. Writing the CLR offers students an opportunity to reflect upon and consolidate what they have learned in their first-year courses and to situate their own emerging interests and thesis focus in relation to the discipline. We expect that in the Critical Literature Review the student will:

- outline historical and intellectual connections among those issues and ideas that have most strongly influenced the student's own developing interests and research trajectory, setting these ideas in conversation with each other, and
- situate these issues within the broader disciplinary context, demonstrating the student's critical grasp of the discipline.

Goals and Timing

- The Critical Literature Review invites students to conceptualize the field of Folklore and their emerging place in it synthetically; this synthesis, in turn, will ground the writing of an original thesis that contributes significantly to our discipline.
- We encourage students to work on their Critical Literature Review during the summer between the first and second years of coursework. Each student should be prepared to submit the document—along with their thesis proposal—to their thesis committee chair by mid-September of the second year, to make revisions if requested by the committee chair, and to submit the revised document to all committee members by the end of September.
- The thesis proposal “defense” will include a discussion of the critical literature review, inviting the student to demonstrate that they are prepared to embark upon a thesis project that will contribute to the discipline of Folklore.

Detailed Requirements

In writing the Critical Literature Review, the student should:

- review the history of three (or possibly four) critical concepts or methodologies relevant to their thesis research;
- demonstrate how these apply to the research and how this research extends the scholarly discussion;
- discuss how the student's research informs future directions in the field of folklore.

The review should take the form of a bibliographic essay--opening with a framing statement, moving into a critical discussion of ideas and sources that sets these in *conversation* with each other (rather than just compiling them in a list), and closing with a synthesizing and forward-looking conclusion.

The critical literature review thus becomes an opportunity for the student to develop an intellectually generous and methodologically informed assessment of that part of the field most closely tied to the student's research interests. We intentionally do not specify the exact number or provenance of the readings to be covered. Each student should work out their selection of sources with their advisor. The faculty will evaluate the bibliographic essay in relation to the courses that the student has taken and the student's own emerging interests in theory, methodology, and specific topics.