

THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

**RUTGERS**

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## **FESTIVAL PROVIDES UNDERGRADUATES A UNIQUE LEADERSHIP & LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

In a one-of-a-kind course extending far beyond classroom instruction, a team of Rutgers University undergraduate students will spend the spring semester planning and executing the annual New Jersey Folk Festival. The team of 12 students is responsible for organizing the display of over 20 musical groups and acts, 25 food vendors, and 75 craft vendors at this one-day, eight-hour event to be enjoyed by 15,000 visitors on the University's campus.

The New Jersey Folk Festival has been student-run in each of its 35 years in existence. This free family event is the end result of a unique class offered by the American Studies Department at Rutgers in New Brunswick. In the class, Folk Festival Management, students are educated in the numerous aspects of producing a folk festival, from academic portions such as folklore and historical studies, to practical components like booking acts and stage management, handling finances, and effective public speaking skills. The students are responsible for continuing the festival's mission of celebrating the diverse multi-cultural and indigenous folk life of New Jersey and the surrounding area.

The 2009 committee includes Elizabeth Halgash, Festival Manager; Rachel Daddino, Finance Coordinator; Sagar Agrawal, Food Vendor Coordinator; Lauren Saxer, Crafts Coordinator; Mark DiGiovanni, Skylands Stage Coordinator; Alexandria Daniels, Demonstration Area Coordinator; Andy Glaser, Shore Stage Coordinator; Stacey Balkun, Pinelands Stage Coordinator; Megan Hansen, Children's Specialist; Catherine Rossi, Media Coordinator; Michelle Yasay, Graphics Coordinator; and Tania Drootin, Program Book Coordinator. The student coordinators are led by Faculty Advisors Angus K. Gillespie, professor of American Studies, and Erin Clarke, Associate Director and a former coordinator.

Each student coordinator is designated a specific job or function, but only through working together can the committee achieve its final objectives, as they form a close-knit bond on the way to putting together the event. Class assembles once a week in a conference-style atmosphere, with the first half of the session devoted to the teaching of folk studies as well as strategies for publicizing the event, managing contacts with performers, and other production details. The final 90 minutes are set up as a business meeting in which

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deadlines, tasks, and problems are discussed and resolved. Through this process, students are continually improving their abilities in time management, problem-solving, organization, written and verbal communication, and countless other skills to carry with them after graduation. With a staff composed predominantly of young women, working as a member of the folk festival committee provides real-world leadership experience that proves to be valuable to the lives and careers of all those involved in whatever field they may enter.

Saturday, April 25, 2009, is the date for the annual New Jersey Folk Festival, which is celebrating its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. Musical acts include “The Mother of Folk” Jean Ritchie and Atzilut a ten-member high energy ensemble that features Arab and Jewish musicians in concert together to make a powerful statement about peace through shared music. Throughout the day, over 20 performers will sing, dance, and play at the festival, held rain or shine, 10 a.m. - 6 p.m., on the grounds of the Eagleton Institute on the Douglass Campus of Rutgers University, George Street and Ryders Lane, in New Brunswick.

In addition to the four stages of music, dance, workshops, and a wide array of American and ethnic food vendors, the festival offers a diverse craft market of approximately 75 booths, craft demonstrators, and a folk marketplace – where performer CDs and information on area folk organizations are available. For children, there is a designated activities area with games, a clown, and crafts to make and take.

The New Jersey Folk Festival is the oldest and largest continuously-held festival of its kind in the state. Wheelchair accessible, it offers selected programs with ASL interpretation; large-print program books and audio assists are also available.

The 2009 New Jersey Folk Festival is presented by Rutgers University and Douglass Residential College. It is sponsored in part by the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission and the Office of the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs of Rutgers, Picture-It Awards, Inc., the City of New Brunswick Department of Parks. The festival is produced by the Department of American Studies at Rutgers, The State University, under the technical direction of Angus K. Gillespie and Erin Clarke.

The New Jersey Folk Festival is proud to be a key component of Rutgers Day, a day of learning, exploration, and fun at New Jersey’s State University. The Folk Festival is the main attraction of Rutgers Day on the Douglass Campus, but visitors are encouraged to check out the many workshops and live performances at the other Rutgers campuses throughout the day – all designed to demonstrate the impact and value of our world-class university. Admission, parking, and on-campus bus shuttles are all free. For further details, including stage schedules and directions, visit the web at [njfolkfest.rutgers.edu](http://njfolkfest.rutgers.edu) or call the festival office at (732)-932-5775 or Rutgers Campus Info Services at (732)-445-INFO.