

# Blobaum Finds Meaning in Milo Festival

## Faculty

**E**ve Blobaum, adjunct associate professor, sociology, follows the old adage about writing what one knows – and that includes

her dissertation.

Blobaum, who hails from a small town in Nebraska, is looking at the ways in which community festivals function as ritual reproductions of traditional values, symbolic constructions of community identity and, in the case of small rural towns passing from existence, a means to cope with social change. While Blobaum's ethnographic observations of her hometown's annual milo festival are certainly academic, her writings about milo pancakes, a pork chop supper, a parade, milo queen, threshing demonstrations and who is assigned what job are also entertaining and have a common thread for anybody with rural roots.

Blobaum's research has already garnered national attention. She recently presented at the annual conference of the American Anthropological Association, Washington, D.C., with her paper, "And the Women Are in the Kitchen: Gender Roles as Public Face at a Rural Community Festival."



4

Eve Blobaum, adjunct associate professor, sociology, is looking at how a small Nebraska community defines itself through a milo festival.

Because the conference had an inequality theme, Blobaum adapted an earlier paper about the festival, which looks at collective labor as a social response to economic vulnerability (the more general nature of her research).

"A lot of rural communities work together because that is their way of surviving," Blobaum said. "Farming is very risky, to farmers and to agriculturally-based communities, and these festivals, right around harvest time, can be viewed as a collective celebration."

Blobaum, who has taught at JCCC since 2004, is concentrating on small communities because "for starters, notions of community are changing."

"In the past, communities were based on geographic similarities – shared space," she said. "Communities are more and more based on shared ideologies. You look at communities on the Internet, and you see that people can form a community with someone they have never met."

As a sociologist, Blobaum values the understanding of an evolving definition of community and how we connect to one another. But what led Blobaum to studies of rural communities in the first place were interests in crime and deviance. She earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Nebraska and a master's degree in criminal justice and criminology from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, where she also is ABD (all but dissertation) in sociology.

"Communities do so much to define normality and deviance," Blobaum said. "At first, I started looking at the social control of communities and how they exert pressure to keep undesirable people out of their community. But my research has morphed, and now I am focused on the collective process that defines a community and how people work together to construct an idea of what that community is and what it means to them."

As an interesting sidebar, Blobaum's mother, Patti Jensen, a Ph.D. student in education at the University of Nebraska, also presented at the American Anthropological Association conference. 🌿