

2006

History 650 Syllabus Spring 2006

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History 650
Oral History: Theory and Practice
La Salle University
Wednesdays, 6:00-9:15 p.m.
Spring 2006

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Catalog description:

Theme-based readings and practice in oral history (e.g., family history, labor and class history, gender history, African-American history, military history)

Purpose:

This seminar will provide you with the foundation for designing and executing oral history research projects. We will read and discuss literature about oral history theory and methods and we will examine how leading oral historians use oral history interviews to construct historical narratives. You will undertake fieldwork that will allow you to test the methods and approaches we study in class. The goal of fieldwork will be to produce a collection of interviews of La Salle faculty, staff, and alumni that will contribute significantly to preserving the history of La Salle University.

Requirements:

Attendance at all class sessions is obligatory. More than three absences will result in a grade of C and any unexcused absences will affect the grade for participation. Absences will be excused only in cases such as a death in the immediate family or an illness requiring your own hospitalization. Evidence in the form of official documentation must be provided when appealing for an absence to be excused. Students must complete all assigned readings and be prepared to discuss them in class when they are due. At the graduate level, students should not depend on the instructor to lead discussion, but should frequently take initiative in posing questions for discussion and in taking discussion in new directions.

Supplies:

Students should have at their disposal a good and reliable audio tape recorder with a microphone attachment (a built-in microphone is **not** adequate). Students should also be prepared to purchase four or five high quality 60-minute audiotapes and up to ten other audiotapes. More detailed information will be provided in class.

Readings:

Students should purchase the following readings:

Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, ISBN 0192893173

Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, ISBN 0791404307

Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, ISBN 075910655X

Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, James Leloudis, Robert Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones, and Christopher Daly, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*, ISBN 0393306194

Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds. *The Oral History Reader*, ISBN 0415133521

Ronald Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, ISBN 0275941841

Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, ISBN 0791401332

Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, ISBN 0195154347

Willa K. Baum, *Transcribing and Editing Oral history*, ISBN 0910050260 [we will not discuss this book in class, but you will need to consult it during the course of your fieldwork]

Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History, ISBN 0415903726

I have placed copies of some of these books on reserve at the library and have ordered copies of others to be purchased and placed on reserve. In addition, I have placed on reserve a copy of *Conceived in Crisis: A History of La Salle College, 1863-1965*, by Thomas Donaghy, F.S.C. You might find it useful to consult this work while preparing for your field interview.

Fieldwork:

Before students begin their formal fieldwork, they should conduct a thirty-minute practice interview of a family member or friend. This interview should be recorded to better enable the student to critique his or her method of interviewing. Students will interpret their practice interviews in class.

For fieldwork, each student will interview one La Salle university faculty member, staff person, or alumnus (narrator). I will provide a letter of introduction and legal release form, which you should take to the interview. We will discuss in class how to design field interviews. The interview should focus on the narrator's experience at La Salle University, but should also include relevant aspects of the narrator's life story and other relevant topics. The interview should take place in two separately scheduled one-hour sessions. The purpose of this is to allow the interviewer to listen to and critique the first session and make improvements during the second session. Another purpose would be to allow the interviewer to ask new questions and for the narrator to introduce new information that might have arisen during the intervening period between first and second interview sessions. Nevertheless, if an interview acquires sufficient momentum to extend to two hours at the first session, then it is permissible to complete the entire interview in one session. Students must obtain a signed legal release from the interviewee. After each interview session, you should make a copy of the original audiotape recording and conduct all further work on the project using that copy or subsequent copies of the copy.

Upon concluding fieldwork, students should prepare an edited transcript of the first hour of the interview. It is preferable that students perform their own transcriptions, but use of professional transcription services (at the student's own expense) is not prohibited. No matter which transcription option the student chooses, he or she must edit the transcript in accordance with a method or methods suggested in class readings. Originals of both taped interview sessions, a copy of the edited transcript, and an original legal release should be submitted to the university archive for preservation. If a student prepares during the course of his or her fieldwork other useful materials, such as a table of contents for the tapes or an index of names mentioned during the interview, it would be most helpful to present copies of these to the archive as well.

Students will prepare and submit to me: 1) a ten-page interpretive analysis of their interviews, using both their own experience and theories discussed in class readings; 2) a copy of both sessions of the taped interview; 3) a copy of the legal release; 4) a copy of the edited transcript; and 5) a receipt from the university archive for materials submitted. Use the traditional essay format with references to quotes and passages from the transcript; use footnote citations when referring to our class readings or to archival material. Use style and formatting conventions in the *Chicago Manual of Style*. I prefer students to use the humanities style of documentation.

Finally, students will report in class on their interviews, using the interpretive analysis as a basis. There will be time for questions and answers.

Grade distribution:

Participation:	20%
Oral report on practice interview:	5%
Oral report interpreting field interview:	20%
Interpretive essay about field interview:	25%
Edited transcription of interview, accompanied by legal release	25%
Sound quality of recorded interview	5%

Schedule:

Class discussions might be supplemented by special talks delivered by experts in oral history and by videos of oral history research. On an ongoing and somewhat informal basis, we will take time in class to discuss fieldwork.

January 18 Introductions, review of syllabus, presentation by university archivist Brother Joe Grabenstein

January 25 Discuss Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*; select narrators; discuss presentation of project during initial contacts with narrators; discuss design of family or friend interviews; discuss issues that might arise in regards to the legal release form

February 1 Discuss Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*; discuss design of La Salle field interviews

February 8 Discuss Yow, *Recording Oral History* and present ten-minute analyses of family or friend interviews, with questions and answers

February 15 Discuss *Envelopes of Sound* and present ten-minute analyses of family or friend interviews, with questions and answers

February 22 Discuss *Oral History Reader*, parts 1-3 and present ten-minute analyses of family or friend interviews, with questions and answers

March 1 Discuss *Oral History Reader*, parts 4 and 5

Spring Break

March 15 Discuss *Like a Family*

March 22 Discuss Portelli, *Death of Luigi Trastulli*

March 29 Discuss Frisch, *A Shared Authority*

April 5 Discuss *Women's Words*

April 12, 19, and 26 Presentations and discussions of field interviews

Audio recordings, transcripts, legal releases, interpretive essays, and archival receipts are due to me by May 1 at noon