

2007

History 650 Syllabus Spring 2007

Barbara Allen

La Salle University, allenb@lasalle.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/histdeptohall>

Recommended Citation

Allen, Barbara, "History 650 Syllabus Spring 2007" (2007). *All Oral Histories*. 41.
<http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/histdeptohall/41>

This Background Information is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral Histories at La Salle University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of La Salle University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact careyc@lasalle.edu.

History 650
Oral History: Theory and Practice
La Salle University
Spring 2007
Mondays, 6:00-9:15 p.m. Olney 324

Dr. Barbara C. Allen
Office: Olney 344
Tel. (215) 951-1179
E-mail: allenb@lasalle.edu

Purpose:

This seminar will provide students with the foundations for designing and executing oral history research projects. Students will read and discuss literature about oral history theory and methods and will examine how historians use oral history interviews to construct historical narratives. In addition, students will undertake fieldwork that will allow them to apply the methods and approaches studied 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. Most oral history projects are organized around a common theme; organizing the class project in such a way will enhance students' understanding of oral history theory and methods, facilitate problem-solving related to methodology, and give students a better appreciation for the history and mission of La Salle University. The study of oral history is a collaborative effort that challenges traditional hierarchies. Therefore, the instructor encourages a collegial approach to discussing readings and methods. Nevertheless, she assumes sole responsibility for evaluating the quality and professionalism of students' work.

Requirements:

The primary requirements of the class are to read, discuss, write, conduct interviews, and organize interview materials for archival preservation and further examination by historians. Attendance at all class sessions is obligatory. More than two absences will result in a grade of B and more than three absences will result in a grade of C. Any unexcused absences will affect the grade for participation. Absences will be excused only in cases such as a death in the immediate family, work-related emergencies, or an illness requiring the student's hospitalization. Evidence must be provided when appealing for an absence to be excused. Consistent tardiness will also affect the participation grade. Students must complete all assigned readings and be prepared to discuss them in class when they are due. At the graduate level, students should be prepared to take initiative in posing questions for discussion and in taking discussion in new directions.

Readings:

Students should purchase the following readings:

1. Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd edition, ISBN 0192893173
2. Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, ISBN 0195154347
3. Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and*

- Meaning in Oral History*, ISBN 0791404307
4. Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2nd edition, ISBN 075910655X
 5. 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*, 2000 reprint with new afterword, ISBN 0393306194
 6. Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, ISBN 0791401332
 7. *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ISBN 0415903726
 8. *Russia's Sputnik Generation: Soviet Baby Boomers Talk about Their Lives*, translated and edited by Donald J. Raleigh, ISBN 025321842X
 9. Thomas Dublin, *When the Mines Closed: Stories of Struggles in Hard Times*, ISBN 0801484677

Please purchase the most recent editions of the works above. Earlier editions might lack crucial chapters. Copies of all books except *When the Mines Closed* are on reserve at the library. *When the Mines Closed* has been ordered and will be placed on reserve as soon as it arrives. *Conceived in Crisis: A History of La Salle College, 1863-1965*, by Thomas Donaghy, F.S.C., is also on reserve. Other potentially useful books are on reserve under Dr. Allen's sections of Honors 122: Western Civilization II. On WebCT, students will find study questions for the required readings, technology tips, and sample transcripts, indexes, field notes, etc. Students may post their own tips and questions on the WebCT discussion board.

Recording equipment and supplies:

Students should be prepared to purchase blank compact disks and to use digital voice recorders when recording interviews. La Salle University Media Services loans digital voice recorders to students. If you wish to purchase your own digital voice recorder, be advised that suitable versions are available in stores for \$50 or less. It is not necessary to use a microphone with a digital voice recorder. Please use *wav* recording format. Voice audio files are far smaller than music audio files, so you should have no trouble fitting your interviews onto a single disk. Please use the highest quality setting when recording and turn off the voice recognition feature, as it is inconvenient for oral history interviewing.

Grade distribution:

Participation in discussion.....	20%
Recorded practice interview, question list, and transcript of ten minutes from practice interview.....	10%
Preliminary list of questions for formal field interview.....	10%
Field notes, final list of questions, index for formal field interview.....	15%
Book reviews (two).....	15%
Oral report on formal field interview.....	10%
Recorded formal field interview.....	20%

Failure to submit required materials (including a signed legal release) by the final deadline may result in a grade of "incomplete" for the course. Dr. Allen evaluates students' work and assigns grades for it. Brother Joe Grabenstein, the university archivist, is very enthusiastic

about the class project and offers very valuable research assistance, but he plays no role in formally evaluating students' work or in assigning grades.

Practice Interview:

Before students begin their formal fieldwork, they should conduct a practice interview of a family member or friend (the older, the better). This interview must be recorded and should last about forty-five minutes. For the practice interview, choose one or several themes, such as work, leisure, childbirth/childrearing, education, religion, community involvement, or other topics that might be of interest to historians. A copy of the recording, a typed list of prepared questions and a typed transcript of ten minutes from the interview should be submitted to me by the dates indicated in the syllabus. Students will discuss their practice interviews in class.

Transcription:

When transcribing from the recording, do not include filler words such as “um and ah.” The filler phrases “like” and “you know” may be omitted entirely or only a few may be included to indicate that the speaker uses these words. Allow time to replay the recording and edit the transcript for accuracy. If you are unsure of the correct spelling of some words and names, please contact the interviewee for confirmation. Do include your questions and comments in the transcription. Do not correct an interviewee's grammar, colloquialisms, or regional dialect. Do not attempt to render foreign accents or nonstandard pronunciations in the transcription. Please do your own transcriptions, rather than turning to a professional or to a friend or relative.

If you plan to engage in further oral history research after completing this class, you are encouraged to develop your transcription skills by transcribing more of your interviews than is required for this class. You may obtain free transcription software from the web site <http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/>. This software slows down the recording; you have to purchase a foot pedal for use with it. “Dragon Naturally Speaking” and other types of speech recognition software have to be trained to recognize the user's voice. In most cases, there will be no time to train narrators' voices to permit your use of this software.

Formal Fieldwork:

For formal fieldwork, each student will interview one La Salle university faculty member, staff person, or alumnus. Students will choose an interviewee (a.k.a. “narrator”) from a list compiled by Dr. Allen and Brother Joe Grabenstein. 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 purpose of the interview is to collect information that would be useful to historians conducting research. Students definitely **should not** undertake interviews with the intent of providing material for university public relations.

The student must conduct background research into the narrator's work and life in order to compose his or her interview questions. The student may conduct his or her own research and/or rely upon materials collected and copies made by Brother Joe Grabenstein at the university archive. Students should take the initiative in contacting Brother Joe and should contact him as soon as possible. A preliminary list of interview questions must be presented

to me by at least two weeks before the first scheduled interview session. I will try to return these to you, with my comments, at least three days before the first scheduled interview. Brother Joe might suggest interview questions to you, but you should also take into account what sorts of questions would be of interest to an historian who might listen to your archived interview.

The interview should take place in two separately scheduled sessions of about one hour each. 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. If a narrator strongly prefers to wrap up the entire interview in one session, it is permissible to do so. If the complete interview amounts to significantly less than two hours, however, it might be necessary to interview an additional person. Interviews may extend longer than two hours. Students must obtain a signed legal release from the interviewee. After each interview session, students should make a copy of the original digital recording.

The interview will be graded on the basis of the following:

1. interviewer's skill and facility in posing prepared questions
2. interviewer's skill and facility in asking follow-up questions
3. avoidance of errors such as interrupting the interviewee or failing to pursue potentially productive new avenues of inquiry
4. audio quality of the recording
5. interviewer's professionalism in conducting the interview

An original signed legal release and two sets of copies of all recorded interview sessions, interview questions, field notes, and index should be submitted to Dr. Allen. The recorded interview sessions should be submitted on compact disks; please also save *pdf* or *doc* files of the questions, field notes, and index on the disks. Dr. Allen will submit the original legal release and one set of the remaining materials to the university archive for preservation. She will keep one set for grading purposes and for possible instructional use in the future. If a student prepares other useful materials during the course of his or her fieldwork, he or she is encouraged to present copies of these to the archive as well.

In summary, students will prepare and submit to Dr. Allen: 1) two sets of copies of the field notes, interview questions, and the index; 2) two sets of recordings of interview sessions; and 3) an original legal release.

Oral reports:

Students will report in class about their formal field interviews. Discuss the interview design, preparation for it, significance of information gleaned during the interview, and strengths and weaknesses of the interviewer's approach. You are encouraged to use visual aids, outlines, and any other helpful accompanying materials. Reports should last about twenty minutes; we should allow ten minutes after each report for questions and answers.

Field notes, index, legal release:

Please make field notes describing all preparatory work you do for the formal field interview. In addition, record all contacts you make with the interviewee and assess the tone of these contacts. Most importantly, describe the setting of the interview, the demeanor, mood and mannerisms of the interviewee, and any other information that might be of interest to an historian listening to the recording and attempting to interpret it. The index should include time measurements from the recording and should list all names of people, institutions, and places mentioned in the interview. Be sure to obtain correct spellings of names and terms. Ask the interviewee to help you, if necessary. The index should consist of narrative summary or lists of topics that would be pertinent to a historian conducting research on any of the usual topics of historical inquiry: gender, labor, politics, institutional history, social history, ethnicity, culture, religion, etc. You may incorporate your final list of questions into the index, or you may submit a separate list of questions. I will provide you with a blank legal release; you should explain the legal release to the interviewee before the interview begins. Obtain the interviewee's signature at the end of the session. If the interviewee balks, contact me as soon as possible.

Book reviews:

Students must write two book reviews. Each review must be of a book required for class and must be submitted by the time when we are scheduled to discuss the book in class. The first review must be submitted by February 26th and the second by April 23rd. Reviews should explain the book's argument, purpose, and contribution to the field, placing the work in historiographical context. Assess the work's strengths and weaknesses in a manner that is thoughtful, balanced, and respectful. Book reviews should be from 1000 to 1500 words. Use the humanities style of documentation and other formatting conventions prescribed in the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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 basis, we will take time in class to discuss fieldwork.

January 22 Introductions, discussion of syllabus; discuss Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*;

January 29 Meet Brother Joe; discuss Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*; select narrators for La Salle interview project; view documentary of oral history interviews with centenarians

February 5 Discuss Yow, *Recording Oral History*; view documentary about La Salle University and discuss differences between oral history, journalism, publicity

February 12 Discuss *Women's Words*; discuss transcription and design of practice interviews.

February 19 Discuss practice interviews; everyone should be prepared to speak about the

interview as a learning experience (practical and intellectual aspects); submit list of questions asked during the practice interview and recording of the interview

February 26 Discuss research for formal field interviews. Submit transcript of practice interview. You are encouraged to submit to me a list of formal field interview questions on this date.

Spring Break

March 12 Discuss *Like a Family*; please present a list of formal field interview questions to me by this date; the first book review must have been submitted by this date.

March 19 Discuss Portelli, *Death of Luigi Trastulli*

March 26 Discuss Frisch, *A Shared Authority*

April 2 Discuss *When the Mines Closed*; presentations and discussions of field interviews

April 9 Presentations and discussions of field interviews

April 16 Presentations and discussions of field interviews

April 23 Presentations and discussions of field interviews; discuss *Russia's Sputnik Generation*; complete course evaluations; the second book review must have been submitted by this date

The following are due by 10 a.m. on May 1, 2007:

- 1) Two copies of audio recordings of the field interview(s) on disks in *wav* format; save these so that they can be played on a personal computer
- 2) Two printed copies of field notes, final list of questions, and index; *pdf* or *doc* files of all these materials should also be saved to the disks on which audio recordings are preserved;
- 3) Signed, original legal release

You may submit these materials to Dr. Allen in person in Olney 344, by leaving them in her mailbox in the History Department office in Olney 341, or by sliding them (in an envelope) under her office door.