

Spring 2019

History 650 Syllabus: Oral History Theory and Methods

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History 650-A: Oral History Theory and Practice¹

(3 credit hours)

La Salle University

Spring 2019

Times and Days: Thursdays 6:15-8:55 p.m.

Location: Olney 113

No prerequisites or corequisites

Contact Information

Instructor:

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Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/lasalleuniversityhistorydept/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/lasallehistory/>

Fundamental Course Structures

Course Description:

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 they will examine how historians use oral history interviews to construct interpretive historical narratives. The class requires prior knowledge of or the willingness to learn how to use

¹ Last updated January 2019.

digital recording devices, digital playback software, and digital methods of submitting course projects for archival preservation. Students will undertake independent fieldwork that will allow them to apply the methods and approaches studied in class. Field interviews will be either of someone from the community associated with La Salle University or of a U.S. war veteran.

Course Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will learn how to analyze oral history interviews as a source for writing history.
2. Students will develop the skills to professionally design and execute oral life history interviews.
3. Students will learn how to evaluate various approaches to presenting, processing, and analyzing oral life history interviews.
4. Students will process and contribute their oral life history interviews to the Library of Congress or to La Salle University Library & Archives, thus creating primary sources for the study of history.

Instructional methods:

Reading, discussion, writing papers, interviewing, transcribing, abstracting, digital processing

Course Materials

Required readings:

Students must complete the required readings to participate in discussion and to carry out the interviewing projects effectively.*

1. Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, 3rd edition (Oxford, 2014)
2. Studs Terkel, *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War II* (The New Press, 1984)
3. Leslie Brown and Anne Valk, *Living with Jim Crow: African American Women and Memories of the Segregated South* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)
4. *Russia's Sputnik Generation: Soviet Baby Boomers Talk About Their Lives*, translated and edited by Donald J. Raleigh (Indiana University Press, 2006)
5. Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997)
6. Peipei Qiu with Su Zhiliang and Chen Lifei, *Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves* (Oxford, 2013)
7. *After the Fall: New Yorkers Remember September 2001*, eds. Mary Marshall Clark et al (The New Press, 2011)

*Students may drop a quiz grade on one of the books other than Ritchie's *Doing Oral History*, so in practice may choose not to read one of books 2-7.

Recommended reading for La Salle interviews:

John P. Rossi, *Living the Promise* (five copies are on reserve at Connelly Library)

Additional readings, essential documents, and samples of required work are posted on Canvas.

Learning Management System:

CANVAS (log-in required): <https://lasalle.instructure.com/courses/>

Recording equipment and supplies:

1. Digital voice recorder or digital video recorder - You may use your smart phone as a recording device. See field notes from recent interviews on Digital Commons to determine best recording practices.
2. Digital storage media – USB/flash/thumb drives, CDs, or DVDs. You may store interview files on Microsoft OneDrive using your student account.
3. Express Scribe transcription software - Free download from <http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/>. The History Department has a foot pedal for loan.

Oral history websites with technical information and resources:

Oral History Association: <http://www.oralhistory.org/>

H-Oralhist: <https://networks.h-net.org/h-oralhist>

Library of Congress Veterans History Project: <http://www.loc.gov/vets/>

Baylor Institute for Oral History: <http://www.baylor.edu/oralhistory/>

Southern Oral History Program, UNC-Chapel Hill: <https://sohp.org/>

National Oral History Association of New Zealand: <http://www.oralhistory.org.nz/>

Vermont Folklife Center: <http://www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/>

Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, Concordia University:
<http://storytelling.concordia.ca/>

Grading Methods and Evaluation:

Evaluation:

- 10% Participation in discussion (ongoing)
- 15% Quizzes on readings (weekly when readings are assigned)
- 15% Critical analysis of online oral history interview (due February 7)
- 15% Recorded practice interview, 10-min. transcript, field notes, self-evaluation (February 21)
- 5% Oral report about formal field interview (April 18 or 25)
- 40% Field notes, complete log, and recordings of formal field interview(s) and legal releases signed by student and interviewee (due May 2)

Failure to submit the original signed legal releases for the interviewee and the interviewer may result in a grade of F until the student can deliver legal releases, which may necessitate starting over with a different interviewee.

Because the assignments build upon one another (scaffolding), it is important that the assignments be executed in the order indicated in the schedule. No one should execute the

formal field interview before carrying out the practice interview. All work should be performed in a professional manner. Late assignments will result in reduced grades. Significantly late arrivals to class will be counted as absences. **More than three absences for any reason will result in a grade of no higher than a C for the course.**

Participation (10%):

Students must complete all assigned readings and be prepared to discuss them in depth in class, per the schedule in the syllabus. At the graduate level, students should take the initiative in posing questions for discussion and in contributing analysis and observations to discussion. Students are expected to analyze readings and to respond to other students' contributions to discussion. Students are expected to exchange experiences and to offer advice about interviewing to one another. If students do not volunteer comments, I will call on them to speak. Students who consistently have little or nothing to contribute to discussion may receive F's for their participation grades.

Quizzes (15%):

For each week's required reading, you will be take a ten-minute quiz in class. Answers should be in long paragraph form and demonstrate through content and analysis that you have read closely and thought deeply about the reading. A quiz grade may be dropped for one of the books other than Donald Ritchie's *Doing Oral History*.

Critical analysis of online oral history interview (15%) (due February 7):

Write a 1500-word critique of an oral history interview from one of the following collections:

1. La Salle University Oral Histories (<http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/histdeptoh/>)
2. Experiencing War: Stories from the Veterans History Project (<http://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/index.html>)

Choose an interview that is at least one hour long or compare/contrast two shorter interviews. Be prepared to talk about your critical analysis in class. Evaluate the interviewer's technique using criteria based on Ritchie's *Doing Oral History*, Valerie Yow's checklist (Canvas), and your own standards. Use size 12 font; double-space the text. Cite interviews using *Chicago Manual of Style* format and time stamps. Submit the critical analysis through the assignment box on Canvas before class meets.

Practice Interview (15%) (due February 21):

Despite the designation "practice," a high level of professionalism is expected. Interview an adult family member, friend, or work colleague (the older, the better). Interview the narrator for at least thirty minutes, digitally record the interview, and back up your recording. Choose a topic or topics from the Paul Thompson questions, if possible. Transcribe the first ten minutes by typing what you hear into a document formatted according to best practices explained in class. Follow the transcription guidelines in the Baylor University Style Guide (Canvas), but do not use ellipses to indicate pause or hesitation (use a hyphen or period instead). Put a time stamp on each page

of the interview transcript (see examples on Canvas). Compose typed field notes (see examples on Canvas or on La Salle's Digital Commons) and a typed 1000-word evaluation of the interview experience. In the evaluation, discuss what you think were your strengths and weaknesses as an interviewer and how you might improve your technique and preparation in future interviews.

Upload the documents (transcript, field notes, self-evaluation) and audio (wav or mp3) or video files to the designated Canvas drop boxes before class. In class, each student will spend about five to ten minutes discussing what he or she learned from the practice interviews, in terms of content and technique. It is not necessary to obtain a legal release from practice interviewees, unless the practice interview will be contributed to the La Salle Archives of the Library of Congress in addition to the formal field interview project. You should conduct your practice interview in person, but if that is impossible, telephone or Skype-style interviewing is allowed.

Formal Field Interview (40%) (due May 2):

Select an interviewee in consultation with the instructor. Interviewees must be one of the following: 1) Christian Brother, 2) a La Salle University faculty or staff member (including retirees) or alumnus/alumna, 3) a longtime resident of a neighborhood near La Salle (Olney, Germantown, Logan, Hunting Park), or 4) a U.S. war veteran. The product of the fieldwork will be a primary historical source in the forms of an audio or video recording and a complete log with abstract, accompanied by an appropriate signed legal release and field notes. The source will be made available to other historians for research by posting it to La Salle's space on Digital Commons and depositing it in the La Salle University Library and Archives or in the Library of Congress, whichever is appropriate. Students must take responsibility for fully informing interviewees of the interview's purpose and of how the interview will be used and made available. Try to avoid a situation in which the interviewee withdraws consent or desires to seal the interview.

The instructor must approve interviewees in advance and will provide a list of Christian Brothers and La Salle faculty, staff, and alumni who are a priority to interview. Students may propose alternatives to those on the list, if they suit the categories. Students are responsible for setting up the interviews and designing the questionnaires, but may borrow from questionnaires which other students have designed in the past. Interviewees should be older people (over sixty), preferably at or near the end of their careers and possessing an appropriate frame of mind in which to reflect upon their lives. Exceptions to the age requirement may be made for veterans of wars in Iraq or Afghanistan. If you choose to interview a veteran, check his or her name in the LOC database. You should not interview someone who has already been interviewed at length.

The interview should take the form of a life history, but should include at least thirty minutes about the interviewee's experiences as a veteran or at La Salle, as a Christian Brother, or developments in the neighborhood(s) near La Salle (as appropriate). The purpose of the interview is to collect information that would be useful to historians conducting research. Your approach

and questions must reflect familiarity with techniques and approaches discussed in the required readings for the course.

The student should conduct background research into the narrator's work and life to compose interview questions. For veteran interviews, read books and newspaper articles about the context of their military service. For La Salle interviews, read relevant sections of John Rossi's history of La Salle, *Living the Promise* (on reserve at Connelly Library) and conduct research in the digitized yearbooks, newsletters, etc. on La Salle's Digital Commons. You are encouraged to conduct brief informational interviews with people who know the interviewee.

Questions for interviews of military veterans can be selected from the questionnaires on the LOC website. Those interviewing La Sallians should seek assistance from Dr. Allen and relevant faculty and staff in composing questions. Questions about early life and family life may be modified from the comprehensive questionnaire designed by Paul Thompson (see Canvas). You are highly encouraged to submit interview questions to the instructor for feedback before you begin interviewing. Submit the questions well in advance of the interview (at least 48 hours in advance).

You should have a preliminary conversation with the interviewee to explain the project, what will be done with the interview, and to establish a rapport with the interviewee. You may submit questions to the interviewee in advance of the interview, but make clear that you want to record an oral interview, not receive answers in writing.

Conduct at least two hours of recorded interviewing time. You must obtain a signed legal release from the interviewee for each interview session. It is best to have the interviewee sign a release immediately after each session. Formal field interviews should be conducted face-to-face. Choose a quiet location where the interviewee feels comfortable. Do not speak excessively about yourself during the interview, even if the interviewee seems interested, but do so when necessary in order to establish rapport. Do show sympathy if the interviewee discusses traumatic memories. Stop the recording if the interviewee loses composure and resume recording after the interviewee has regained composure. After each interview session, students should back up the original digital recording. Do not edit out (cut or erase) any sections of the recorded interview without advance permission from the instructor.

The interview will be graded based on the following:

1. historical value of the interview
2. interviewer's skill in posing 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
6. accuracy, professional presentation, and comprehensiveness of the log (abstract)

La Sallian Interviews: Audio files should be submitted in WAV or mp3 format to La Salle's Digital Commons (per Rebecca Goldman's instructions); logs and field notes should be submitted in PDF format to La Salle's Digital Common; the original, signed legal releases must be submitted to the instructor (Dr. Allen) on white printer paper in excellent condition (no folding, spindling, or mutilating). For veteran interviews, follow the instructions on the Library of Congress Veterans History Project website. Submit all veteran interview materials to Dr. Allen, who will mail them to the LOC.

Veteran Interviews: All LOC forms must be completed and submitted with the interview materials (see <http://www.loc.gov/vets/> for forms). Write legibly on the LOC forms. Do not submit the LOC interview materials to Digital Commons, unless the veteran had some connection to La Salle. Dr. Allen will mail the interview materials to the LOC. Questions for interviews of military veterans can be selected from the questionnaires on the LOC website. Follow the LOC's latest guidelines, if there is any conflict between them and what is in this syllabus.

Oral report (5%) (April 18 or 25):

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 your approach. You should use visual aids (either PowerPoint or handouts incorporating photographs), outlines, and any other helpful accompanying materials. Play a short excerpt (1-2 mins.) from your interview. Reports should last from 15 to 20 minutes; we should allow 5-10 minutes after each report for questions and answers. Reports that fall considerably below 15 minutes will receive reduced grades. If you talk for much longer than twenty minutes, I must interrupt you, in order to give other students time to deliver their presentations. Your presentation will be graded on the content delivered before I interrupt you.

Field notes (due May 2):

Your field notes must identify the interviewee and yourself, describe preparatory work you did for the interview and preliminary contacts with the interviewee, and describe the setting of the interview and demeanor of the interviewee. Note the 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. For format, follow the examples given by the sample field notes on Canvas. Your choice of information to convey may be adapted to your personality, but the more detail you can provide, the better. Field notes should be 3-5 pages in length.

Interview Log (Abstract): (due May 2)

The log should consist of detailed narrative summary that would be helpful 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. Include in the log your questions and comments that were voiced in the interview. Use direct quotes to render especially illustrative statements by the interviewee. In the log, all names of people, institutions, and places mentioned in the interview must be correctly spelled. Instructions for creating a brief abstract

are at <http://natlib.govt.nz/files/oralhistory/oralhistory-abstractingguidelines.pdf>. For the types of log entries which I find most useful, see examples created by previous H650 students on Digital Commons (ex. Finley, Galante, Grover interviews). If you are unsure of the correct spelling of some words and names, contact the interviewee for confirmation. Do not correct an interviewee's grammar, colloquialisms, or regional dialect. Do not attempt to render foreign accents or nonstandard pronunciations in the transcription.

Logs must include time stamps indicating how much time has passed since the beginning of the interview session. Insert a time stamp at the top of each page or at the left-hand margin next to each of your questions, if answers are very long. At the end of the log, indicate the total length of the interview in hours and minutes. Use a standard font in size 12. Print on one side only of white paper. Save the transcript in PDF (txt for LOC). Students will upload their interview materials to Digital Commons, according to instructions provided by La Salle University Archives (see Canvas).

Legal Release (due May 2):

You **must** obtain an original signed and dated legal release from the interviewee(s) in the formal field interview. You must explain the legal release to the interviewee before the interview begins. Nothing the interviewee says should be "off the record." Obtain the interviewee's signature at the end of the session. Obtain a signature for each session of the interview. In addition to the signed legal release, you must ask the interviewee at the beginning of the recorded interview for oral permission to record. Students must also sign legal release forms for interviewers.

La Salle interviews:

Use the legal release forms provided by the instructor. The interviewee has the right to make changes to the La Salle legal release. If the interviewee balks at signing the legal release, contact the instructor as soon as possible. Interviewees may choose to restrict access to their interviews (for example, for ten years after the interview or until the death of the interviewee). Please discourage the interviewee from placing unreasonable conditions on access to the interview. Interviewees may **not** restrict access until the death of everyone mentioned in the interview. This places an undue burden on the archive. Students must inform interviewees that sealed interviews can be opened by court order.

U.S. Veteran interviews:

For veterans, you must use the LOC legal release forms. The Library of Congress does not permit any restrictions on access to the interviews or modifications to the legal release forms.

For veterans who are also La Salle faculty, staff, administrators, or alumni, please complete both sets of forms and both legal releases.

If legal releases have not been delivered to Dr. Allen, a grade of incomplete may be entered until the student can deliver legal releases, which may necessitate starting over with a different interviewee.

Grading Scale:

A (94-100); A- (90-93); B+ (87-89); B (84-86); B- (80-83); C (70-79); F (0-69).

A = 4 grade points; A- = 3.67 grade points; B+ = 3.33 grade points; B = 3.00 grade points; B- = 2.67 grade points; C = 2.00 grade points; F = 0.00 grade points.

Student Responsibilities:

Please arrive at class on time and do not depart early without the prior permission of the instructor. Please do not use cell phones or other electronic devices during class. Please communicate clearly with the instructor about any planned absences or emergencies. Significantly late arrivals to class will be counted as absences. **More than three absences for any reason may result in a grade of no higher than a C for the course. Any absences may lower the participation grade.**

Essential La Salle Policies

The following policies are posted in the LMS course Help Menu:

American Disability Act of 1990

Academic Integrity Policy

Student Guide to Rights and Responsibilities

University Resources

The following resources are described in the LMS course Help Menu:

Writing Center

Academic and Learning Support Services

Library Assistance

Counseling Center contact information for undergraduate and resident graduate students

Academic Integrity

As a learning community, La Salle University takes very seriously the concept and values of academic integrity. Indeed, the entire enterprise of seeking knowledge collapses if practices supporting truth in research, presentation, teaching and learning are not observed. Naturally, at the core of academic integrity is avoiding plagiarism—the unacknowledged borrowing of other people’s ideas, intentionally or unintentionally. Thus, at La Salle—and all institutions of higher learning—plagiarism ranks among the most serious offenses one can commit. It may result in failure for the course or even separation from the university.

Another vital element of the academic enterprise is freedom of thought and expression. To reap the maximum benefits from this, however, certain rules of behavior need to be observed. We welcome vigorous discussion and debate of **ideas**, but these must always take place in an

atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance for opposing points of view. Thus, personal attacks or blanket condemnations for reasons other than the ideas under consideration violate the basic tenets of classroom etiquette and academic integrity. For more on these issues and other elements of academic integrity, please go to <http://www.lasalle.edu/portal/provost/intprop/AIP.swf>.

Course Content

Schedule:

January 17: Discuss Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* and Paul Thompson's "Life story interview guide" (Canvas) prior to class. The quiz will only be on Ritchie.

January 24: Discuss Studs Terkel, *"The Good War"*

January 31: Discuss Brown and Valk, *Living with Jim Crow*.

February 7: Report on and discuss internet-based oral history interviews and submit written critical analysis of the same. Use interviews from one of the following sites:

1. La Salle University Oral Histories (<http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/histdeptoh/>) 2.

Experiencing War: Stories from the Veterans History Project:

<http://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/index.html>. For interviews by previous H650 students, see <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/search?query=la+salle+university&field=all&digitalCollection=yes>

February 14: Discuss *Russia's Sputnik Generation*.

February 21: Report on and discuss practice interviews (see explanation above). Upload document files (transcript, field notes, self-evaluation) and digital audio or video recording of practice interview to Canvas before class.

February 28: No class. Student must have selected and contacted formal field interviewee by this date. Email to Dr. Allen a typed paragraph (half a page) with the full name of the interviewee, brief biographical information, and an explanation of why this interviewee is appropriate for the project.

March 7: Workshop interview questionnaires. Bring several copies of your draft questionnaire for review by classmates and Dr. Allen.

March 14 – no class (Spring Break)

March 21: Discuss *The Battle of Valle Giulia*.

March 28: Discuss *Chinese Comfort Women*.

April 4: No class – work on interviews.

April 11: Discuss *After the Fall: New Yorkers Remember September 2001*, eds. Mary Marshall Clark et al

April 18: Oral Presentations

April 25: Oral Presentations

May 2: Before coming to class, those who have interviewed La Sallians should upload digital recordings and digital copies of logs and field notes to Digital Commons, per Rebecca Goldman’s instructions (handout and on Canvas). You may also submit digital presentation files, questionnaires, and photographs, if desired. You must bring to class the original signed and dated legal releases for the interview. Those who have interviewed U.S. war veterans should bring the additional forms required by the LOC (submit all these materials in a large envelope). Do not staple logs or field notes; use clips instead. Label the envelope with your name and the interviewee’s name.

Syllabus change policy:

This syllabus is a guide and every attempt is made to provide an accurate overview of the course. However, circumstances and events may make it necessary for the instructor to modify the syllabus during the semester and may depend, in part, on the progress, needs, and experiences of the students. The instructor will give notice when changes to the syllabus are made.

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