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History 650 Syllabus: Oral History Theory and Methods

Barbara Allen Ph.D.

La Salle University, allenb@lasalle.edu

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Oral History Theory and Methods

Course Information

Course Number and Section: HIS 650 X

Semester and Year: Summer 2021

Credits: 3

Class Meeting Times: Fridays 10-11:30 a.m.

Pre-requisites: none

Instructor Information

Instructor: Barbara C. Allen, Ph.D., Associate Professor, History Dept.

Email: allenb@lasalle.edu

Phone: (267)984-3627 (9 a.m. – 9 p.m.)

Office Location: Zoom personal meeting room

Office Hours: By appointment

Best way to contact me: e-mail

Course Structures

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

Supplemental 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 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 of people with long associations with the La Salle University community.

Covid-19 Statement: *For the safety of the interviewer and interviewees during the pandemic, interviews may be recorded over Zoom. Likewise, any synchronous class meetings will be held over Zoom.*

Course Objectives/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 La Salle University Library & Archives, thus creating primary sources for the study of history

Course Materials

- Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, 3rd edition (Oxford, 2014) – chapters 1-4 and 6 are required; other chapters are optional
- *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, edited by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (Routledge, 1991) – parts 1-2 required; read several essays of your choice from parts 3-4
- *A Revolution of Their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History*, edited by Barbara Alpern Engel and Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck (Westview Press, 1997) - read intro, several interviews, afterword, and “on choices”
- Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Betty Smith: Life of the Author of A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (Southern Sky Press, 2010) – read front matter, back matter, and a few chapters of your choice
- *After the Fall: New Yorkers Remember September 2001*, eds. Mary Marshall Clark et al (The New Press, 2011) – entire book required
- John P. Rossi, *Living the Promise* (Connelly Library) - optional
- Materials uploaded to Canvas (Yow’s interviewing checklist, Thompson’s Life History Questionnaire, Rebecca Goldman’s Instructions, & other materials)

Course Schedule

This course begins on 5/24/2021 and ends on 8/5/21. The last day to withdraw from this course is 7/14/2021.

Weekly Schedule

The chart below provides an outline of the general schedule of course activities. See above for required and optional parts of readings.

Week/Date	Topic	Readings/Videos	Activities/Assignments
Week 1 5/24-28	Introduction to Oral History Methods	Donald Ritchie, <i>Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide</i> , 3rd edition, chs. 1-4, 6	5/27: Submit paper on <i>Doing Oral History</i> (750-1000 words) 5/28: Zoom meeting

Week/Date	Topic	Readings/Videos	Activities/Assignments
Week 2 5/31-6/4	Introduction to Feminist Oral History Theory	<i>Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History</i> , edited by Gluck and Patai, parts 1-2 and several essays from parts 3-4	6/3: Submit paper on <i>Women's Words</i> (750-1000 words) 6/4: Zoom meeting
Week 3 6/7-11	Publishing and editing Feminist Oral History Interviews	<i>A Revolution of Their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History</i> , edited by Engel and Posadskaya-Vanderbeck, intro, afterword, "on choices," and several interviews	6/10: Submit paper on <i>A Revolution of Their Own</i> 6/11: Zoom meeting
Week 4 6/14-18	Analyzing Oral History Interviewing Technique	Oral histories of Lasallians on La Salle's Digital Commons (https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/histdeptoh/); Yow's interviewing checklist (Canvas)	6/17: Submit critical analysis of Lasallian interview from Digital Commons 6/18: Zoom meeting
Week 5 6/21-25	Practicing Oral History Interviewing Technique	Thompson's Oral Life History Questionnaire (Canvas)	6/24: Submit practice interview materials (recording, 10-minute transcript, field notes, legal release, 400-500 word self-assessment) 6/25: Zoom meeting
Week 6 6/28-7/2	Planning the Oral History Field Interview	Rossi, <i>Living the Promise</i> (Connelly Library); La Salle University website	7/1: Submit plan for field interview and work independently
Week 7 7/5-9	Researching & Writing a Woman's Life	Yow, <i>Betty Smith: Life of the Author of A Tree Grows in Brooklyn</i>	7/8: Submit paper on <i>Betty Smith</i> (750-1000 words) 7/9: Zoom meeting
Week 8 7/12-16	Field interview research and exercise	Rossi, <i>Living the Promise</i> (Connelly Library); La Salle's Digital Commons; and self-chosen materials	Work independently
Week 9 7/19-23	Field interview research and exercise	Rossi, <i>Living the Promise</i> (Connelly Library); La Salle's Digital Commons; and self-chosen materials	Work independently

Week/Date	Topic	Readings/Videos	Activities/Assignments
Week 10 7/26-30	Oral History of Recent Trauma	<i>After the Fall: New Yorkers Remember September 2001</i> , eds. Marshall Clark et al	7/29: Submit paper on <i>After the Fall</i> (750-1000 words) 7/30: Zoom meeting
Week 11 8/2-5	Field interview completion	Rebecca Goldman's Instructions for uploading files to Digital Commons	8/5: Upload field interview materials (recordings, field notes, transcript, legal release) to Digital Commons

Assessment Methods (Assignments)

Detailed instructions are provided in Canvas modules & assignment boxes

- 20% Papers (750-1000 words each) about assigned readings due 24 hours before Zoom meetings; and participation during Zoom meetings
- 10% Critical analysis of online oral history interview (750-1000 words)
- 20% Recorded practice interview (30 mins. to 1 hr.), 10-min. transcript with header info and time stamps, field notes (3-5 pages – see example on Canvas), self-assessment (400-500 words), and legal release signed by interviewer and interviewee (release form is on Canvas)
- 50% Field notes (3-5 pages – see example on Canvas), complete transcript including time stamps and header info, and recordings of formal field interview(s) with logical file names; and legal release(s) signed by student and interviewee.
- ***Failure to submit the original signed legal releases for the interviewee and the interviewer will result in a grade of incomplete for the course.***

Grading Scale

A	= 100-94%	= 4.0 Grade Points
A-	= 93-90%	= 3.67 Grade points
B+	= 89-87%	= 3.33 Grade Points
B	= 86-84%	= 3.0 Grade Points
B-	= 83-80%	= 2.67 Grade Points
C+	= 79-77%	= 2.33 Grade Points
C	= 76-74%	= 2.0 Grade Points
C-	= 73-70%	= 1.67 Grade Points
D+	= 69-67%	= 1.33 Grade Points
D	= 66-60%	= 1.0 Grade Points
F	= 59-0%	= 0 Grade Points

Responsibilities and Expectations (Course Policies)

Changes to the Syllabus

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 faculty member to modify the syllabus during the semester and may depend, in part, on the progress, needs, and experiences of the students. The faculty member will give notice when changes to the syllabus are made.

University Policies and Resources

You will find links to important policies and resources in our Canvas course. See the links below or go to Canvas and click on **Help** at the bottom of the global navigation menu or on **Getting Help** in the course navigation menu.

- [American Disability Act of 1990](#)
- [Academic Integrity Policy](#)
- [Student Guide to Rights and Responsibilities](#)
- [Technology Help and Support](#)
- [Classroom Accommodations](#)
- [Center for Academic Achievement](#)
- [Connelly Library](#)
- [Student Counseling Center](#)