History 650 Syllabus: Oral History Theory and Methods

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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
- 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week/Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings/Videos</th>
<th>Activities/Assignments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Introduction to Oral</td>
<td>Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A</td>
<td>5/27: Submit paper on *Doing Oral</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/24-28</td>
<td>History Methods</td>
<td>Practical Guide*, 3rd edition, chs. 1-4, 6</td>
<td>History (750-1000 words)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5/28: Zoom meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week/Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Readings/Videos</td>
<td>Activities/Assignments</td>
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| Week 2 5/31-6/4 | Introduction to Feminist Oral History Theory | *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, edited by Gluck and Patai, parts 1-2 and several essays from parts 3-4 | 6/3: Submit paper on Women’s Words (750-1000 words)  
6/4: Zoom meeting |
| Week 3 6/7-11   | Publishing and editing Feminist Oral History Interviews | *A Revolution of Their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History*, edited by Engel and Posadskaya-Vanderbeck, intro, afterword, “on choices,” and several interviews | 6/10: Submit paper on A Revolution of Their Own  
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, *Living the Promise* (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, *Betty Smith: Life of the Author of A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* | 7/8: Submit paper on Betty Smith (750-1000 words)  
7/9: Zoom meeting |
<p>| Week 8 7/12-16  | Field interview research and exercise | Rossi, <em>Living the Promise</em> (Connelly Library); La Salle’s Digital Commons; and self-chosen materials | Work independently |
| Week 9 7/19-23  | Field interview research and exercise | Rossi, <em>Living the Promise</em> (Connelly Library); La Salle’s Digital Commons; and self-chosen materials | Work independently |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Readings/Videos</th>
<th>Activities/Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Oral History of Recent Trauma</td>
<td><em>After the Fall: New Yorkers Remember September 2001</em>, eds. Marshall Clark et al</td>
<td>7/29: Submit paper on <em>After the Fall</em> (750-1000 words)  7/30: Zoom meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>7/26-30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Field interview completion</td>
<td>Rebecca Goldman’s Instructions for uploading files to Digital Commons</td>
<td>8/5: Upload field interview materials (recordings, field notes, transcript, legal release) to Digital Commons</td>
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<td>8/2-5</td>
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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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grade Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100-94%</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>93-90%</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89-87%</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>86-84%</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>83-80%</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>79-77%</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>76-74%</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>73-70%</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>69-67%</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>66-60%</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59-0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 polices 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