

## **Creating and Interpreting Oral Narratives Spring 2011**

### **Instructor: Emilio Zamora**

Garrison 2.104B, 475-8706 (office), 739-0168 (cell)

[E.zamora@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:E.zamora@mail.utexas.edu)

Office Hours: Tues: 2-3, and by appointment

Class: 10-11, Garrison 2.128

### **Course Description**

The course will introduce students to the theory and practice of oral history and oral narratives. It will provide students an opportunity to read and discuss important written materials, conduct oral history interviews, analyze their interviewing experiences and findings, and prepare an oral history paper. The major purpose of the course is to provide you with the skills to research and write an oral history paper and to appreciate oral history as an important professional undertaking.

Course materials, including a copy of my resume, this syllabus, lecture notes, bibliographies, and notes on interviewing techniques, will be available on Blackboard, UT's course management site. Call the ITS help desk (475-9400) if you have problems with the site.

### **Course Requirements**

The course requirements are not excessive, but they appear throughout the semester and require continuous attention. Written assignments should be submitted electronically by the end of the day on the date noted. I will provide detailed instructions during our first class meeting and encourage inquiries in class, in my office, or by email.

Process Report (10%). The students will be expected to prepare a 2-3 page report that describes their preparation for the interview. The report should include a biographical statement on the interviewee and a preliminary account—based on a preliminary conversation with the interviewee—of the focus of the planned interview. I encourage students to select a family member as the interviewee and to focus on gender relations, a relationship, an experience, or a central event in the interviewee's life. This report is due on March 7.

Recorded Interviews (10%). Each student will be responsible for conducting two semi-structured interviews (at least one hour each) with a person they wish to study and to submit sound or video tapes of the interviews.

Oral History Paper (20%). Prepare a 5-page narrative that discusses a central theme that emerged in the interview. Students will have decided on a tentative focus before

the interview and this might result in a central and binding theme in the interview. On the other hand, unexpected themes may emerge that will require a refocused treatment of interview.

A Reflective Analysis (20%). This writing 5-page requirement will provide the student an opportunity to use our readings to discuss how he/she benefitted from conducting an oral history. For example, how did generational differences between the student and the interviewee influence the interview, and what does the interviewee emphasize and what does this emphasis say about his views, values, and/or interests.

Reading Reports (25%). Throughout most of the semester, I will assign teams of students to read chapters and articles. For instance, when we read *Silencing the Past*, I will divide the class into 5 teams of 3 students and assign each team one of the five chapters from the book. The 6<sup>th</sup> reading team will be responsible for reading and reporting on the Preface and Epilogue and for reading relevant biographical and review essays. This means that students will only be responsible for reading and reporting on one chapter from *Silencing the Past*. We will read the assigned chapters from *The Oral History Reader* and the articles listed above with the same approach. This will mean that each student will be responsible for preparing a report on each of five chapters and articles that they will have read. Each of the reports should be two pages long and they should discuss a central point, the supporting evidence or arguments, and its possible relevance to the Oral History Paper and the Reflection Analysis. The reading reports are due on February 2, 9, 23, April 1, 8.

Discussion (15%). I expect a reasonable amount of participation by the students in the class discussions, especially when we discuss the readings.

Attendance. More than three unexcused absences will result in a five-point deduction on the final grade, and one more point deduction for every class missed after the three unexcused absences. Also, you are expected to be on time for class and to remain in the classroom for the duration of the class. I will be checking attendance and will reward students who attend regularly (with an allowance of two unexcused absence) with one or two points if this can help you reach a higher letter grade for the course.

## Grading

I will use the following grading scale:

A	93-100	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	59 and Below

## Readings and Viewings

### Books

Perks, Robert and Alistair Thomson. The Oral History Reader. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past; Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.

### Articles

Linda Shopes, "Making Sense of Oral History," *History Matters; The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/search.php?function=find>.

Sally Chandler, "Oral History across Generations: Age, Generational Identity and Oral Testimony," *Oral History*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Autumn 2005): 48-56.

Linda Shopes, "Oral History and the Study of Communities: Problems, Paradoxes, and Possibilities," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 89, No. 2 (September 2002): 588-98 (Search in Jstor).

### "Handouts"

Emilio Zamora, "Guide for the Planning and Conducting Interviews."

Emilio Zamora, "Love Stories That Tell; Interpretations of Accounts Collected by University of Texas Students."

### Internet Videos

Achimamanda Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," *TED Talks, Ideas Worth Spreading*, <http://www.linktv.org/programs/ted-talks-chimamanda-adichie>

"Personal Stories," *Story Corps, Every Voice Matters*, <http://storycorps.org/>

### Other Internet Sources

"Principles and Best Practices," *Oral History Association*, <http://www.oralhistory.org/do-oral-history/oral-history-and-irb-review/>

"Human Subjects and IRB Review," *Oral History Association*, <http://www.oralhistory.org/do-oral-history/oral-history-and-irb-review/>

### Film

*Hill Country*, Produced and Directed by Tony Cherian

## Course Schedule

I will initiate the classes with general remarks based on outlined notes that I will have posted on Blackboard prior to each class meeting. These remarks or lectures are noted as topics in the schedule.

### **First Week: Introductions and Expectations, January 19, 21, 24**

I will introduce the course with a presentation on its purpose, texts, requirements, course schedule, and expectations and will provide detailed instructions on the Oral History Project, the major research and writing assignment. We will also devote time for student introductions, including professional and research interests.

### **Second Week: The Process of Historical Production, January 26, 28, 31.**

We will be reading and discussing Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past* to arrive at an understanding of the process of historical production. The purpose is to begin to place oral history within its immediate intellectual domain. Submit your first report on February 2.

### **Third Week: What is Oral History?, February 2, 4, 7**

I will again assign the following readings to five teams of students. Our class discussions will be based on these reading. Submit your second report on February 9.

Linda Shopes, "Making Sense of Oral History," *History Matters; The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/search.php?function=find>.

Paul Thompson, "The Voice of the Past: Oral History," pp. 21-28, In Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*.

Ronald Grele, "Movement Without Aim; Methodological and Theoretical Problems," pp. 38-52, In Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*.

Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," pp. 63-74, In Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*.

Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and The Use of Oral History," pp. 87-100, In Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*.

### **Fourth Week: The Art and Method of Telling, February 9, 11, 14**

Oral narratives secured through interviews carry glimpses of a person's self-awareness or autobiographical consciousness. This self-awareness functions as a lens through which the narrator recounts an experience and gives it meaning. This week we will focus on personal stories that can serve as an important basis for understanding a narrator's outlook and interpretations. We will also discuss our own "personal stories" that say something important about our values, interests, concerns, etc. Everyone will be responsible for reading and viewing the cited works. Reports are not required from these readings.

Alex Haley, "Black History, Oral History, and Genealogy," pp. 9-20, In Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*.

Achimamanda Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," *TED Talks, Ideas Worth Spreading*, <http://www.linktv.org/programs/ted-talks-chimamanda-adichie>

Emilio Zamora, "Love Stories That Tell; Interpretations of Accounts Collected by University of Texas Students."

"Personal Stories," *Story Corps, Every Voice Matters*, <http://storycorps.org/>

### **Fifth Week: Interviewing, February 16, 18, 21**

We will assign teams to read the first three articles. Everyone will be expected to read the last two. We will also devote some time to a discussion on the family history projects. Reports will only be required on one of the three articles read by teams. Submit your third report on February 23.

Charles T. Morrissey, "On Oral History Interviewing," pp. 107-13, In Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*.

Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson, "Ways of Listening," pp.114-25, In Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*.

Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, "Learning to Listen; Interview Techniques and Analysis," 157-71, In Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*.

"Principles and Best Practices," *Oral History Association*, <http://www.oralhistory.org/do-oral-history/oral-history-and-irb-review/>

"Human Subjects and IRB Review," *Oral History Association*, <http://www.oralhistory.org/do-oral-history/oral-history-and-irb-review/>

### **Sixth Week: Oral History Workshop, February 23, 28, March 2**

(I will be attending a conference on Friday, February 25 and will not be in class).

We will practice using a video camera and conduct mock interviews in class. We will also view and critique parts of videotaped interviews that I will make available in class.

### **Seventh Week: Oral History Project, February 28, March 2, 7**

(I will be attending a conference on Friday, March 4 and will not be in class).

We will make our last preparations for the interviews that the students will be conducting during the Spring break. I will advise the students on preparing questions for their semi-structured interviews. The students should have already conducted a preliminary conversation with at least one of their interviewees to make tentative

decisions on the questions and the themes that the interviews will be addressing. Submit process report on March 7.

### **Eighth Week: Film and Discussion, March 9, 11, 21**

We will view the film *Hill Country* on March 19 and March 11. The one-hour class is not long enough to view the film. The film's director and producer, Tony Cherian is a doctoral student in the School of Information at the University of Texas at Austin will be a guest speaker on March 21. His interviewing technique in the film is instructive. My hope is that his relaxed style of interviewing will help you see the interview in a different light and that this will help you be successful.

### **3-14/3-18 Spring Break**

### **Ninth Week: Interpreting Oral Narratives, March 23, 28, 30**

The readings will again be conducted by teams of students. Students are expected to submit reports on the single article they read. Submit your fourth report by April 1.

Katherine Borland, "'That's Not What I Said', Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research," pp. 320-332, In Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*.

Kathleen M. Blee, "Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan," pp. 333-343, In Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*.

Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, "Telling Tales: Oral History and The Construction of Pre-Stonewall Lesbian History," pp. 344-55.

Sally Chandler, "Oral History across Generations: Age, Generational Identity and Oral Testimony," *Oral History*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Autumn 2005): 48-56.

### **Tenth Week: Community and Oral History, April 1, 4, 6**

The readings will again be conducted by teams of students. Students are expected to submit reports on the single article they read. Submit your fifth report by April 8

Linda Shopes, "Oral History and the Study of Communities: Problems, Paradoxes, and Possibilities," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 89, No. 2 (September 2002): 588-98 (Search in Jstor).

Joanna Bornat, "Oral History as a Social Movement: Reminiscence and Older People," pp. 190-205, In Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*.

William Westerman, "Central American Refugee Testimonies and Performed Life Histories in the Sanctuary Movement," pp. 224-34, In Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*.

Irina Sherbakova, "The Gulag in Memory," pp. 235-45, Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*.

Nigel Cross and Rhiannon Barker, "The Sahel Oral History Project," pp. 246-57, In Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*.

### **Eleventh Week; Guest Speakers and Discussion, April 8, 11, 13**

We will hear from two speakers: Dr. Virginia Raymond, *Texas After Violence Project*, <http://www.texasafterviolence.org/>, and Gloria Espitia, Neighborhood Liaison, Austin History Center. They will describe the history and operations of their oral history projects, including the way that they have interpreted oral narratives that they have generated. They will speak on April 8 and 11 and we will devote April 13 to a discussion of the relevance of their work to the students' projects. Submit your Recorded Interviews and Transcription on April 13.

### **Twelfth Week: Guest Speakers and Discussion, April 15, 18, 20**

We will hear from two speakers: Dr. Andrés Tijerina, Professor of History, Austin Community College, and an officer of a federation of Mexican American genealogical societies in Texas; and Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez, Director, Latino and Latino WWII Oral History Project, University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Tijerina will talk about the extensive genealogical archival and oral history research that is occurring throughout the state. Dr. Rivas-Rodríguez will speak about one of the most successful oral history projects in the country that focuses on WWII veterans and their families.

### **Thirteenth Week: Transcribing and Individual Consultations, April 22, 25, 27**

We will dedicate this week to finishing the narrative on an aspect of the life of the person interviewed; and a reflection on what the students learned through oral history. We will schedule individual consultations so that I can assist in the preparation of these papers. Your Oral History Paper and Reflective Analysis are due on April 29.

### **Fourteenth Week: Oral Reports, April 29, May 2, 4**

We will spend this week discussing reports on the Oral History Projects. The reports will address the findings of the projects and the experience of conducting oral history research and writing. I will schedule between 5 and 6 presentations for each day.

Each presentation will have ten minutes. We can continue with the reports on May 6 if we need more time.

**Last Class Meeting: May 6**