Course Description

The seminar will introduce students to the method and theory of oral history. The course will include reading assignments on the method of oral history, the preparation of oral history projects and the evaluation of oral narratives. Students will also be responsible for writing exercises in the form of readings reports and an oral history research paper.

The readings will provide the students the necessary methodological and conceptual grounding for planning and preparing the research paper. Everyone will be expected to prepare weekly reports on the readings and to participate in the discussions. Class meetings will also be devoted to planning the research project and reporting on the progress and the results of the research papers. Time will also be set aside for individual consultations and the review of drafts of the research papers.

Most of our class meetings will be devoted to discussions on the assigned readings and the research papers. Beginning on September 18, we will devote at least one half of our class meetings to the readings and the rest of the class to planning activities on the papers.

During our class discussions, I will offer guidance in developing a questionnaire, constructing an interview schedule, conducting the interviews, taking abbreviated and extended field notes, transcribing the interview, and conducting preliminary analysis of the interview and the oral narrative.

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

Requirements:

- **A three-page report** on *Silencing the Past* that engages the author’s major thesis, his corresponding evidence and ability to provide a clear and convincing argument. The report will be worth **15 points** in calculating the final course grade.
- **Three, three-page reports** on assigned articles and corresponding oral reports that address overarching themes in the weekly readings (such as memory, shared authority, the interview, and ethical issues in interviewing). Students are required to conduct all five weekly reading assignments but only report on three. Each report will have a value
of 15 points (for a total of 45). Students should use the readings to prepare their research plans and papers.

- **A 3-page research plan** and corresponding oral report. The plan should contain a purpose statement that notes a central research problem and corresponding research questions, issues and hypothesis, a statement on how oral history will help reach research goals and expand knowledge, a review of the pertinent literature, biographies of persons to be interviewed, and a statement of expected findings and their significance. The plan—to be submitted on October 16—will guide the research activities and undergo changes as the project progresses. The plan will be worth 5 points.

- **A 12-15-page oral history paper** (based on at least two, 2-hour semi-structured interviews, as well as preliminary interviews or conversations with the informants) that addresses the interviewing process and findings. Students should engage the assigned readings as models for their papers. I will accept drafts of the research papers before its final due date on December 2. The paper is worth 35 points. A student could select the optional requirement (in lieu of the research paper) of creating and displaying a digital collection of the interviews conducted by the rest of the students. Another option could be a research paper based on existing oral narratives, like the ones found in Voces, the oral history collection at the University of Texas at Austin.

**Texts**


Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past; Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995 (Electronic copy is available at library).

**Course Schedule**

9-11 Introduction of course

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

**Assignment: Truillot, Silencing the Past**

9-18 The Process of Historical Production
We will discuss *Silencing the Past* to arrive at an understanding of the process of historical production and the role that power relations plays in . The purpose is to place oral history within its immediate intellectual setting.

**Submit Report on *Silencing the Past***

**New Reading Assignment**


**What is Oral History?**

Our discussion will center on oral history as a research method that is much like other approaches that identify and assesses data for purposes of understanding and explaining the past. Oral history, however, has its unique characteristics and offers singular opportunities to engage the historical experience.

**Submit Report on Previous Reading Assignment**

**New Assignment**


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

10-2 The Art and Method of Telling

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.

Submit Report on Previous Reading Assignment

New Reading Assignment


10-9 Interviewing

Submit Report on Previous Reaching Assignment

New Reading Assignment


10-16 Interpreting Oral Narratives

**Submit Research Plan**

**Submit Report on Previous Reaching Assignment**

**New Reading Assignment**


10-23 Community and Oral History

We will discuss the topic of collective histories with the use of multiple interviews. I will use my experience in planning and implementing a plan for such a project.

**Submit Report on Previous Reaching Assignment**
10-30  Open. I have not made assignments for this meeting to accommodate unanticipated developments like the need to devote more time to the preparation of the research papers.

11-6  Creating Digital Collections. If a group of 2-3 students agree to prepare the digital assignment, we will devote this class to a discussion of their project. If no one volunteers, I will provide non-required readings and a presentation on the creation of such a digital collection on oral history.

11-13  Individual consultations with students on their oral history projects.

   I will schedule students to meet with me so that we can review a draft of their papers and to discuss ideas that they might want to incorporate.

11-20  Collective review of research papers.

   The students will exchange draft of their papers for a collective review. Reviewers should return the papers with suggested revisions. The authors will come prepared to discuss their papers during the next two meetings, making note of the suggested revisions by a fellow student.

11-27  General discussion on research papers

12-4  General discussion on research papers

Submit Research Papers