

SYLLABUS – Oral History

Instructor Amy E. Skillman
Course Number: CSP/HP 660.001 (Oral History)
Credits 3
Term and Dates Fall 2024; August 19 to December 6, 2024
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Class Meeting Time: Monday, 6:00 – 7:30pm ET (with four missed weeks)
Zoom Meeting Room <https://goucher.zoom.us/j/4103376415>
Office Hours By appointment. Email me with some suggested times.

Welcome to Oral History

Oral history is both a process (doing an interview) and a product (the recorded interview); both a document (a source of information/data) and a text (a construction of memory and language); both fun (learning about another person's life) and challenging (making sense of another person's story). It is a form of first-person, personal narrative, both similar to and different from other forms of first-person narrative, including ethnography, storytelling, and memoir.

Within the context of the MACS and HP programs, we think of oral history as one of several methodologies for documentation, a way of preserving local knowledge about the past; as a means of enhancing a community's identity or sense of place; and as a tool for community development. An oral history project can be used to open up discussion of a community's history and values, its commonalities and differences, what it's proud of and what its challenges are. Interviews can give public recognition to the voices seldom heard, animate cultural products like exhibitions and films, and/or inform the development of policy. So, it is my hope that through this course you will learn something about the practice of oral history and consider oral history's value for your own work. I encourage students to tailor assignments, including the major interviewing assignment, to their on-going research interests. Successful completion of the course will also give you a valuable tool for your professional tool kit - many historical and cultural organizations are interested in developing oral history projects, and you will know how to do so.

The course is divided into three broad topics: doing oral history (project planning and interviewing), interpreting oral history (issues of memory and narrative), and using oral history (putting oral history to work in the world). Legal and ethical issues, digital media, and activism are also important aspects of oral history as it is practiced today, and discussion of these topics will be addressed throughout the course.

About me: I am a folklorist who has been working for more than 30 years with artists and communities to bring attention to their stories and their artistic traditions in order to meet community needs. Much of that work has been at the intersection of culture and tension, where connecting to culture can address social justice concerns. In particular, I have worked with newcomer communities to document their stories of leaving home and reestablishing home in a new country. Together we have created exhibitions, theater productions, and educational programs that use those oral histories to break down barriers of misunderstanding. Recently, I have been gathering oral histories of women sea captains to document their storm stories and better understand how those experiences impact their relationship to the elements. I am excited to bring these practical experiences into this course, to puzzle through the challenges, and to make sense of the work. Much of this course was developed by Linda Shopes, a nationally recognized scholar and practitioner of oral history. I am grateful for her vision in this course and humbled to make it my own.

About you: The structure of the class is intended to create space for us to collectively expand our conceptions of oral history as a methodology and a resource for responding to critical needs in the communities and places you care about. I encourage you to bring yourselves and identities to this course; don't be shy about bringing up and naming content and perspectives that may be missing from this syllabus and the course generally. We are all teachers and learners.

Course Topics

1. Defining oral history—what it is, and isn't; locating oral history within genres of personal narrative and distinguishing it from other forms of interviewing
2. The history of oral history
3. Planning an oral history project
4. Doing an oral history interview
5. Oral history and memory
6. Oral history as narrative
7. Interpreting an interview
8. Legal and ethical issues in oral history
9. Oral history and social change
10. Oral history and digital media
11. Trauma-Informed oral history
12. Additional selected topics based on student interest

Program Outcomes

This course is aligned with two of the four MACS Learning Outcomes and one of the five MAHP Learning Outcomes:

MACS 2: Community-Based Research: Design and implement projects using diverse methods that apply knowledge of cultural practices to contemporary issues in cultural sustainability with results that are meaningful and valued by communities.

MACS 3: Ethical Action: Evaluate ethical actions, programs, and policies that honor local voices, foster community self-determination, and empower community efforts towards cultural sustainability.

MAHP 4: Provide *credible documentation and interpretation* of a variety of historic places, from individual buildings to cultural landscapes, as the basis of people-centered work.

Course Objectives

Assuming faithful participation in and successful completion of the course, at the conclusion you will be able to:

1. Give a working definition of oral history, locate it historically within genres of personal narrative, and explain how oral history interviews are different from other kinds of interviews.
2. Plan an oral history project from beginning to end, according to best practices in the field.
3. Plan, conduct, and follow up on an oral history interview, according to best practices in the field.
4. Apply the legal requirements and ethical concerns to the practice of oral history.
5. Discuss oral history as an interpretive act.
6. Describe some of the ways oral history does/can interface with digital media.
7. Apply oral history in a community setting.
8. Apply oral history to processes of social change.
9. Apply oral history to your particular area of study/interest.
10. Locate resources for further study and practice of oral history.
11. Develop your critical thinking, reading, and writing skills.

Course Format

Please note: You will need to have access to a recording device.

The course is organized around three broad themes – doing oral history, making sense of oral history, and using oral history. These are organized around sixteen topical weeks of instruction and will include the following elements, delivered via the course Canvas site:

- Near weekly readings, viewings, and listenings, including articles, essays, and book chapters; electronic resources including websites and YouTube presentations; and a couple of instructor handouts. These are listed on a separate document in our Canvas course website under About The Course and links are offered for all the readings in the relevant Module. Access is either provided or noted in both places. There is no single assigned textbook.
- Facilitation of class discussion on three articles from our Assigned Readings list.
- Six to eight (6-8) Discussion Forum postings and responses to course topics and readings, where I will offer a prompt to get you thinking.
- Regular Field Notes entries reflecting on the progress you are making on your final interview assignment and in response to the instructor's prompt.

- Twelve 90-minute live Zoom sessions over the 16-week semester, including a few with guest speakers.
- Individual consultation/s with the instructor.
- 3 short written assignments
- 1 longer interviewing assignment

Please Note: Guidelines from Department of Education state that “graduate students should expect to spend a *minimum* of eight hours per week engaged in activities for a 3-credit course.” Clearly this is subjective: one person’s eight hours is another person’s seven, another person’s ten. Here’s my point: If you are having difficulty keeping up with the course work, please let me know. We will work something out. I also know that we all have multiple responsibilities, and sometimes we must make strategic decisions about where to focus our time and attention.

Assignment Elements and Instructions

Participation (25%):

- *Attendance at and participation in all scheduled live Zoom sessions, unless I am informed in advance of your inability to be present because of an unavoidable conflict.* An **unexcused** absence will result in the subtraction of 3 points from your final 100-point total for the course (see Grade Scale, below); more than two **excused** absences, the subtraction of 3 points per absence (beyond the two) from your final point total. Please make every effort to be on time. You are responsible for knowing the schedule of classes and for finding the link in the course module to join. A link to my Zoom room is also available at the top of this syllabus. Instructions for Zoom are embedded in the page with the link.

As part of your participation in our zoom classes, you will select three articles from our reading list and take the lead in class on presenting the key points as well as posing questions that lead to an engaging conversation. A sign-up sheet and instructions can be found in the Canvas course website under About The Course.

But beyond these expectations, I hope you will regard these Zoom sessions as something of a “sacred space;” that is, a place where we give each other full attention and talk freely and respectfully with each other without distractions. These conversations are our best way of integrating new knowledge, supporting each other’s learning, and building a classroom community. So I ask you to do your best to make them meaningful. To this, I ask that you turn off your other devices, don’t read and answer email while class is meeting, don’t carry on side chats on Zoom, and try to minimize distractions.

- *Regular Field Notes (FN) postings*—basically a journal, and I may use these terms interchangeably. Field Notes are a way for you to record progress and reflect on the process of your own interviewing project (see below, Assignment #4). I will give prompts (located under Activities in the relevant Module), but you are free to use these Field Notes in a way that is most helpful to the progress of your work. There is no preferred length. Response to the Field Notes of others is encouraged and expected, within reason. As with responses to others’ discussion forums postings, these should be substantive and helpful. Please pay attention to the formal rules of writing and overall

coherence. I will respond to your Field Notes postings/responses regularly and assign a grade at the end of the semester.

Individual Field Notes have been set up for you; they are located at the bottom of the course Canvas site, after Week 16.

- *Completion of all assignments by the due date*, including readings and viewings, Discussion Forum and Field Notes postings, and written assignments (see below). Thoughtful, critical engagement with these assignments is key, not only to your own learning but to the development of meaningful class dialogue. See Late Policy below for further details.

Short Reflections (20%):

- *Periodic Discussion Forums* (located under Activities in each Module in Canvas) conducted via the Discussion Forum function. I will initiate each forum with a prompt based on readings and other assignments. The goal is to help you grasp key concepts in oral history, think critically about them, and facilitate interaction among the students, and between the students and instructors. Your posts will address the assignments but may also bring in ideas and applications that may not be addressed directly in the assignment.

Your own posting should run about 300 words; your responses to others should run about 200 words. These are guidelines only. If you are satisfied that you have fully responded to a prompt, don't add unnecessary words to make the word count. While I recognize a certain informality in these forums, I expect attention to the basic rules of spelling, grammar, and sentence structure as well as overall coherence, i.e. there is a logic to what you are saying.

Your responses to your peers should provide constructive critiques that will help them improve and advance their work. Think about the Discussion Forum as if you are having a conversation in the classroom. Talk with each other, be respectful of each other's ideas, critique without criticizing, use a professional writing style, stay on topic, and participate in a timely manner so others can read your work and respond.

Tip: Write your response in a word document before you post. This allows you to review your response before you "go live" so you can check for spelling, tone, and quality. Then use cut-and-paste to post your final response.

Your comments to your peers should include at least one of the following:

- Share and/or compare a connection with a peer's response.
- Explore a difference of opinion related to a peer's response.
- Exchange resources and information related to a peer's response.
- Generate a solution to a problem related to a peer's response.

Your comments to peers should have the following effect on the discussion:

- Broaden the scope of the discussion.
- Reference assigned readings or other resources.
- Communicate respectfully with those who express dissenting views.
- Promote sustained dialogue with peers.
- Demonstrate ability to provide feedback to peers.

Written Assignments (30%):

- Assignment 1: Short prospectus for an oral history project. **DUE: September 20**
- Assignment 2: Brief interview of a class member, brief interview of you by the same class member, and a critical assessment of your own interview with that person. **Due: October 18**
- Assignment 3: Listening to a publically accessible oral history interview and offering a critique and reflection. **DUE November 15.**

Final Project (25%)

- Assignment 4: Interviewing project: planning, conducting, and following up on 90 minutes to two hours of interviewing with a single narrator and on a topic of your own choosing. In addition to the interview, the assignment includes verbatim and edited transcripts of at least fifteen minutes of the interview and a timed log of the remainder of the interview, a written critique of your interview/s, regular field notes postings (per above), a signed release form from the narrator/s, and a final presentation to the class. **DUE: December 7**

Detailed instructions for each written assignment with accompanying rubrics are available under About the Course/Assignments on the course Canvas site. And a word about rubrics: These are general guidelines for the criteria I will use to assess each assignment, according to several levels of accomplishment. For a number of reasons, I am not assigning a number of points to each criterion/level; rather, I keep these in mind as I assign a total number of points per assignment. Frankly, I find it hard to quantify at that level of specificity for work in the humanities; in addition to the quality of the work, I take into account perceived level of effort, discernible improvement over time, and other qualities related to student work.

Required Readings, Viewings, Listenings . . .

Weekly readings, viewing, and related materials are located under the weekly Assigned Readings and Viewings on the course Canvas site and also on a document called CSP660 Readings by Week, found at the top of the Canvas site. Materials are available in one of several ways: through J-Stor (J-S), as electronic book (EB), as a PDF, or via a URL. You can access J-Stor and E-books directly through the Goucher College Library website; you will need to enter your Goucher credentials.

Grading Rubrics

Assignments during the semester will be graded as Complete or Incomplete. An assignment that is Incomplete, means it needs some improvement. You can either submit a new version using the feedback offered, or accept it as is. The following thumbnail sketch outlines the expectations for performance in this class. Please refer to the Grading Agreement for more information about how your final grade will be determined.

A: Excellent attendance and participation in class activities, thoughtful feedback consistently offered to classmates in peer reviews and comments, all work turned in on time, discussion and informal writings are excellent in quality overall, comprehensive, creative, and make contributions that move the learning forward. The writing and discussion shows serious engagement with the material, including thoughtful introspection on field encounters, detail, good observation, and respect for diverse ideas. Oral presentation of work is compelling, serious and insightful.

A paper in the A range demonstrates a high degree of mastery over the material and advances an interesting, arguable thesis. It establishes a clear rationale or motive to suggest why the thesis is original or worthwhile; employs a logical and progressive structure; analyzes evidence insightfully and in depth; draws from well-chosen sources; and is written in a clear, sophisticated style. All claims contribute to developing the idea, exploring its complexities (raising interesting complications) and subtleties of interpretation. The essay progression matches the essay's purpose with elegance of expression. Imagination is demonstrated in the carving out of topic and the development of the thesis. No errors of grammar, usage, punctuation, or typography will be found. By definition, the grade of "A" is reserved for superior work, and in the context of this program, such work may actually break new ground or represent truly original ideas.

B: No problems with attendance, good participation in class discussions and in peer feedback. B-level participation consists of less insightful and less detailed comments to peers; exercises and journals are judged to be good in quality overall. Oral presentation is adequate. Participation that is B level often does not demonstrate a willingness to take intellectual risks, to expand or challenge one's perspective, or to offer contributions that moves the conversation forward. May receive Incomplete as a grade, with the option for resubmitting.

An essay in the B-range may present an interesting idea in an organized manner, with carefully laid-out claims and well-chosen use and placement of examples and evidence. The language is clear and effective, with no pervasive errors of sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, or usage. The B-range essay's weaknesses generally relate to what has not been done sufficiently; namely, the thesis may not be especially ambitious or be fully focused; claims may not be fully elaborated; analysis or interpretation may stop short or not go deeply enough. Some sentence structures may be repetitive or wooden. A B-range essay is one that may be ambitious but only partially successfully, or one that achieves modest aims well. May

receive Incomplete as a grade, with the option for resubmitting.

C: Participation in class and in peer review work is absent without prior notice, mediocre or weak, showing little enthusiasm for thinking critically; exercises are judged to be only passable in quality overall. Forum entries and journals are perfunctory. Oral presentation is lackadaisical. A C-range paper resembles a B-range paper in some ways, but may also feature a confusing, simple, or descriptive thesis. It may provide a simplistic motivation or none at all; lack a coherent structure; fail to present enough evidence, or present evidence that is insufficiently analyzed. Recourses may be used without properly contextualizing or citing them; and be written in a generally unclear, simplistic, or technically flawed style. C-level work will receive Incomplete as a grade, with the option for resubmitting.

F: The bulk of a student's participation is substandard, student misses class more than permitted, does not turn in work at all or on time. Discussion forum entries and journaling are disrespectful of the process. Unethical practice may be involved at all levels, and in the final research project in particular.

A note about feedback: I do my best to offer feedback on your work in a timely manner, typically within a week of submission. But please understand that this is a difficult, time-consuming process—I try to give detailed, substantive comments on your work to enhance your learning. In general, will return assignments via Speed Grader in the Canvas gradebook. For longer writing, I may send it to you as an email attachment. Of course, if you have any questions about a given response, please feel free to discuss with me. **I want you all to do well!**

Grading:

Course Elements	Points/percent	Late or Missed work
Participation (25%)		
Active participation in live Zoom sessions	10 points (10%)	-3 points for unexcused absence
Field Notes entries & responses to colleagues' posts	9 points (9%)	- 1 point for each one missed
Student Discussion Leadership	6 points (6%)	-2 points for each one missed
Discussion Forum Posts (20%)		
Discussion Forum posts and responses to your colleagues' posts	20 points (10%)	-5 points for each missed entry; 2-day grace period with prior approval
Written Assignments (30%)		
#1: Prospectus for an Oral History Project	10 points (10%)	-5 points for each missed entry; 2-day grace period w/ prior approval
#2: Oral History Interview & Critique	10 points (10%)	-5 points for each missed entry; 2-day grace period w/ prior approval
#3: Listening	10 points (10%)	-5 points for each missed entry; 2-day grace period w/ prior approval
Final Project (25%)		

Interview, including release form	10 points (10%)	
Transcript and summary	5 points (5%)	
Critique	10 points (10%)	
Class Presentations	Bonus!	

Grade Scale

A	93 % or higher
A-	90 - 92 %
B+	87 - 89 %
B	83 - 86 %
B-	80 - 82 %
C+	77 - 79 %
C	73 - 76 %
C-	70 - 72 %
D	60 - 69 %
F	59 % and below

Course Policies

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

All final work products are to be the independent work of each student original to this course. Suspected violations of the [Academic Honor Code](#) will be referred to the Academic Honor Board.

ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES:

Please inform your instructor about any accommodations you need to participate fully in the course. Goucher College makes reasonable academic accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students requesting accommodations must make their request and provide appropriate documentation to the Office of Accessibility Services (OAS). Because classes change every semester, eligible students must obtain a new accommodation letter from the Disabilities Specialist every semester and review this letter with their professors so the accommodations can be implemented. The Director of OAS is available by appointment to answer questions and discuss any implementation issues you may have. For more information, please visit Goucher College's [Academic Accommodations](#) site.

COMMUNICATION:

- Faculty will be available at their Goucher email address and will respond to queries within 24 hours.
- Course participants are responsible for maintaining continuous involvement with faculty, fellow students and student groups. In particular, participation in all online discussions is required. Ongoing communication allows you to gain deeper insights into the content, activities and assignments in the course. Please give notice of any obstacle that prevents this.
- You are encouraged to ask questions whenever information needs clarifying.
- For questions pertaining to your assignments: send an email directly to the instructor (please do not post personal questions in a discussion forum).

- For questions about assignments that may be interesting and helpful to other class members: please use a discussion forum.
- For problems with technical aspects of the Canvas course website: chat with [Canvas Support](#).

E2CAMPUS EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM:

In an ongoing effort to better disseminate information during emergencies and campus closings, Goucher has implemented the e2Campus Notification System. The notification system will only send information regarding emergencies and campus closings as text messages to your mobile phone. To receive these messages, you must be registered in the system. Click the following link for information about how to create your [E2Campus account](#).

GRADUATE VIRTUAL WRITING CENTER

The Welch Center provides free writing support for all graduate students. Visit the [Graduate Virtual Writing Center](#) for information on requesting a writing tutor and accessing drop-in tutoring to assess and improve your academic writing. Services include:

- Initial writing assessment with free ongoing tutoring for up to four hours per semester
- Free drop-in tutoring for specific assignments
- Free half-semester writing course - GRW601: The Writing Studio

Writing assistance may include any or all of the following components: planning, organizing and using evidence in academic writing and thinking; making supported arguments; reading for content by workshopping writing; and proofreading, editing, revision, and reviewing writing for clarity and effectiveness.

INCLEMENT WEATHER:

Online courses will not be cancelled for inclement weather when the college campus is closed. Students and faculty are expected to access their courses just as they would if the campus were open. Each faculty member and student is expected to have a contingency plan for attending online courses in case their primary computer is unavailable or out of service. Additionally, the online component of a residency or hybrid course is not affected when the college campus is closed for inclement weather, although if the residency or hybrid course has a face-to-face meeting scheduled on the closed campus, the meeting will be rescheduled for another day. The course instructor will notify students of the makeup day and time. Only in extreme situations, such as wide spread power outages, may exceptions to this policy be made by the Office of the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs. In such severe cases, an official statement concerning online activities will be issued via normal emergency channels.

LATE POLICY:

For proper graduate student learning to occur, pacing of content mastery is critical. Therefore, assignments are to be completed on time. If circumstances prevent an assignment to be completed in a timely fashion, please **notify me before the assignment is due** so a new date can be negotiated. Only follow-ups completed by the due date can be accepted. Late assignments without such notification will be docked according to the chart above.

MISSED WORK:

You are responsible for material covered in the course. It is your sole responsibility to obtain any materials missed. You are expected to attend all Zoom meetings and will lose participation

points if you miss one, unless you notify the instructor at least 24 hours **in advance**. Advanced notice will allow us to record the meeting for future review.

NONDISCRIMINATION POLICY:

Goucher College does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, sex, age, disability, marital status or genetic information in its programs and activities. The college has adopted a [Nondiscrimination Policy](#). Further details and contact information for the college's Title IX coordinator can be found on [Goucher's Nondiscrimination Notice and Policy page](#).

RELIGIOUS OBSERVATION POLICY:

If you need to request accommodation for religious observance, fill out the [Religious Observation Form](#) and submit it to your instructor as soon as possible and at least two weeks before the observance. If you communicate in a timely manner and complete any mutually agreed upon make-up work, any such absences or schedule changes will be excused and will not adversely affect your grade.

RESOURCES:

Students in Goucher College's graduate programs are provided with and encouraged to use the following resources:

- [Academic Accommodations](#)
- Academic Assistance and Advising - contact your program director
- Library Services 410-337-3289
- [Scott Farquhar](#) Financial Aid Counselor 410-337-6142
- [Career Education](#)
- [Student Support and Outreach - Cameron Cox](#)
- [Writing Center](#)
- [myGoucher](#) Registration, Classes, Schedules, Transcripts
- [Distance Learning Resources](#)