



GOUCHER COLLEGE

Welch Center for Graduate and Professional Studies

SYLLABUS – Oral History

Course Number CSP 660.001 (Oral History)
Credits 3
Semester Spring 2018: February 12 – May 18, 2018 (grades due May 24)
Instructor: Linda Shopes
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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 (listening to another person’s story) 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 program, we might think of oral history as a form of cultural documentation, a way of preserving local knowledge about the past; as a means of enhancing a community’s sense of place; and as a tool for community development, including the advancement of social justice. 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 voice to those from whom we seldom hear, animate cultural products like exhibitions and films, inform the development of social 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.

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 digital media
10. Oral history and social change
11. Additional selected topics based on student interest

Program Outcomes

The course primarily addressed MACS Program Learning Outcome #3: *Design, undertake, and critique cultural documentation field projects applying diverse research methods such as observation, writing, photography, video, and/or **sound recordings** to identify and nurture traditions of knowledge and practice that are meaningful and valued by communities.* But a case can be made that the course also addresses elements of all MACS learning outcomes.

Learning Objectives

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

1. Develop 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 exigencies and some of the ethical concerns of oral history.
5. Apply oral history in a community setting.
6. Discuss oral history as an interpretive act.
7. Describe some of the ways oral history does/can interface with digital media.
8. Apply oral history to processes of social change.
9. Locate resources for further study and practice of oral history.
10. Develop your critical thinking, reading, and writing skills.

Course Format

The course will include the following elements:

- Weekly live Zoom sessions, as of now scheduled for Tuesday evenings from 7 to 8:30 pm. Most will be introduced prior to the session by the instructor's VoiceThread presentation (located under a given week's Assigned Readings and Viewings on the course Canvas site). You are to review the presentation prior to the class and are invited to respond with questions or comments.
- Individual consultation/s with the instructor.
- Weekly readings, viewings, and listenings, including articles, essays, and book chapters; electronic resources including websites, YouTube presentations, and maybe a few podcasts; and a couple of instructor handouts. These are listed below and noted on both the weekly schedule and course Canvas site. Access is either provided or noted in all three places. There is no single assigned textbook.
- Regular discussion of course topics and readings via a class Discussion Forum.

- 3 short written assignments
- 1 longer interviewing assignment
- Regular Field Notes postings, focusing on the final interview assignment

Assignment Instructions

Participatory elements:

- *Attendance at and participation in 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 10 points from your final point total (see Grade Scale, below); more than two excused absences, the subtraction of 10 points per absence (beyond two) from your final point total. Also, late entrance into a Zoom class session will result in the subtraction of 5 points per late attendance from your final point total—learn how to use Zoom and test your devices in advance! I will issue an invitation to each session a few days in advance—you should be able simply to click on the link I provide to join the session. Instructions for Zoom are under About the Course/General Resources on the course Canvas site and also [here](#).

But beyond these rules, 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 other distractions. I know virtual class meetings don’t have the same chemistry as in-person classes, but 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, including eating, phone calls, family interruptions (except of course for an emergency), and pets.

- *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.
- *Regular weekly Discussion Forums* (located under weekly Activities on the course Canvas site; also on the course schedule), conducted either in writing or orally via VoiceThread. I will initiate each forum with a prompt based on reading and other assignments and will identify whether a given posting is to be in writing or via VoiceThread. The goal is to help you both grasp key concepts in oral history and think critically about them. You are also to respond to at least one other class member’s posting for each weekly Discussion Forum in a way that is substantive and not solely encouraging—help each other think through the material of this course.

Both your own posting and your responses to others should run about 300 words in print or 3-4 minutes in VoiceThread, longer if you wish. For VoiceThread forums, I will initiate the discussion with the prompt and you will respond orally on that thread (don’t set up your own individual thread); your responses to others can be via text box. Instructions for using VoiceThread are available under About the Course/General Resources on the course Canvas site; also [here](#) and [here](#).

While I recognize a certain informality in these forums, for written responses I also expect attention to the basic rules of spelling, grammar, and sentence structure as well as an overall coherence (i.e. there is a logic to what you are saying?). For oral presentations, I expect overall clarity and coherence. I will review, comment on, and assess (i.e. assign points that will count

towards your final grade) on a minimum of 8 of your forum postings and responses. If I assign points to more than 8, I will count only the 8 with the highest points. But, don't try to game this—failure to post a given assignment (either your own response to my prompt or your response to a class member's posting) will result in the subtraction of 10 points (per omission) from your final point total. Rubrics for the Discussion Forums are under About the Course on the course Canvas site.

- *Regular Field Notes (FN) postings*—basically a blog, 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). Here too I will give weekly prompts (located under weekly Activities on the course Canvas site and also on the course schedule), 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. Here too I expect 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 top of the course Canvas site, under About the Course/Field Notes. To get to your own Notes page and respond on others' pages, simply open the appropriate FN page, click "Edit" on the top right, start writing, then click "enter." The system for this is a bit awkward: A person's FN page will become very long, as the owner's postings and others' responses to it accumulate over the weeks. For that reason, I suggest that you include your name and date at the head of each posting, both your own and your responses to others; also that you use the default black type for your own postings and a different color in which to respond to others, using the same color for every person throughout the semester. And try to be patient with this imperfect system.

Written Assignments:

- Assignment 1: Short prospectus for an oral history project. **DUE: Friday, March 9**
- Assignment 2: Brief interview of a class member and peer review of a class member's interview with you. **DUE: Friday, March 23.**
- Assignment 3: A review of a book that either draws substantially upon oral history or is a critical assessment of the oral history method; best done in conjunction with Assignment 4, interviewing project. **DUE: Friday, April 6**
- Assignment 4: Interviewing project, to include two hours of interviewing with a single narrator of your own choosing or two one-hour interviews on the same topic with two narrators of your own choosing. In addition to the interviews, the assignment includes verbatim and edited transcripts of at least fifteen minutes of the (or one) interview and a timed running summary of the remaining forty five, a written critique of your interview/s, regular blog/field notes postings (per above), a signed release form, and preliminary and final presentations to the class. **DUE: Saturday, May 19** (BUT: 10 extra points to your final grade total for each day up to three that you turn it in before the due date. So, for example, if you turn everything in by Thursday, May 17, you will gain an extra 20 points on your final grade total.)

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; 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 the course schedule. Materials are available in one of several ways: through J-Stor (J-S), as electronic book (EB), as a PDF (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. PDFs are included under weekly Assigned Readings and Viewings. URLs are noted below, on the course schedule, and also under weekly Assigned Readings and Viewings.

Articles, Essays, and Book Chapters:

PLEASE NOTE: There may be some additions or subtractions to this bibliography of assigned materials based on student interest, etc.

- Anderson, Kathryn, and Dana C. Jack. "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses." Chap. 1 in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, edited by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, 11-26. New York: Routledge, 1991. (EB, at <https://gouchercollege.on.worldcat.org/oclc/826854704>; please note: only 3 people can access this at the same time.)
- Benmayor, Rina. "'Contested Memories of Place: Representation of Salinas' Chinatown.'" *Oral History Review* 37, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2010): 225-234. (J-S)
- Boyd, Doug. "Designing an Oral History Project: Questions To Ask Yourself." *Oral History in the Digital Age*, at <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/06/designing-an-oral-history-project>)
- Bozelli, Belinda. "Interviewing the Women of Phokeng." In *The Oral History Reader*, 3rd ed., edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 212-222. London: Routledge, 2016. (EB at <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/books/9781317371328/chapters/10.4324%2F9781315671833-22>)
- Bryan, Brooke. "A Closer Look at Community Partnerships." *Oral History Review* 40, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2013): 75-82. (PDF)
- Clark, Mary Marshall, Peter Bearman, Catherine Ellis, and Stephen Drury Smith, eds. *After the Fall: New Yorkers Remember September 11, 2001 and the Years that Followed*. New York: The New Press, 2011. (PDF – selected chapters)
- -----, "The September 11, 2001, Oral History Narrative and Memory Project: A First Report." *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 2 (Sept. 2002): 569-579. (J-S)
- Corbett, Allison. "Listening for Our Times." *Oral History Review* blog, at <http://oralhistoryreview.org/current-events/listening-for-our-times>
- Crosby, Emilye. "White Privilege, Black Burden: Lost Opportunities and Deceptive Narratives in School Desegregation in Claiborne County, Mississippi." *Oral History Review* 39, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2012): 258-285. (J-S)
- Freund, Alexander. "Under Storytelling's Spell? Oral History in a Neoliberal Age." *Oral History Review* 42, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 96-132. (PDF)

- James, Daniel. "'Listening in the Cold': The Practice of Oral History in an Argentine Working-Class Community." In *The Oral History Reader*, 3rd ed., edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 73-91. London: Routledge, 2016. (EB at <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/books/9781317371328/chapters/10.4324%2F9781315671833-13>)
- Kerr, Daniel R. "Allan Nevins Is Not My Grandfather: The Roots of Radical Oral History Practice in the United States." *Oral History Review* 43, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2016):367-391. (PDF)
- Larson, Mary. "Steering Clear of the Rocks: A Look at the Current State of Oral History Ethics in the Digital Age." *Oral History Review* 40, no. 1, (Winter/Spring 2013): 36-49. (PDF)
- Layman, Lenore. "Reticence in Oral History Interviews." *Oral History Review* 36, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2009): 207-230. (J-S)
- Nolt, Jenna. "Archiving Oral Histories from Start to Finish." *Oral History in the Liberal Arts*, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5nOrByPE4U>.
- Perkiss, Abigail. "Oral History and the Legacy of Integration in West Mount Airy, Philadelphia." *Oral History Review* 41, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2014): 77-107. (PDF)
- Portelli, Alessandro. "The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event." Chap. 1 in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, 1-26. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991. (EB, at <https://gouchercollege.on.worldcat.org/oclc/42855671>)
- ----- . "What Makes Oral History Different." Chap. 3 in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, 45-58. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991. (EB, at <https://gouchercollege.on.worldcat.org/oclc/42855671>)
- Sheftel, Anna, and Stacey Zembrzycki. "Only Human: A Reflection on the Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Working with 'Difficult' Stories." *The Oral History Review* 37, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2010): 191-214. (J-S)
- ----- . "Slowing Down to Listen in the Digital Age: How New Technology is Changing Oral History Practice." *Oral History Review* 44, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2017): 94-112. (PDF)
- Shopes, Linda. "Legal and Ethical Issues in Oral History." In *Handbook of Oral History*, edited by Thomas Charlton, Lois Myers, Rebecca Sharpless, 135 - 169. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2006. (PDF)
- ----- . "Oral History." In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research 4*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 451-465. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2011. (PDF)
- Steward, Ruth. Interviewed by Christina Baird, et al, Baltimore '68: Riot and Rebirth Oral History Project, University of Baltimore, at <http://archives.ubalt.edu/bsr/oral-histories/transcripts/stewart.pdf>
- Thomson, Alistair. "Anzac Memories: Putting popular memory theory into practice in Australia." *Oral History* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 25-31. (J-S)
- Yow, Valerie. "Analysis and Interpretation." In *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2nd ed., 282-310. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2005. (EB at https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=246930&site=ehost-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_282)
- ----- . "Oral Interviewing Techniques and Strategies." In *The Oral History Reader*, 3rd ed., edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 153-178. London: Routledge, 2016. (EB at <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/books/9781317371328/chapters/10.4324%2F9781315671833-19>).
- ----- . "Oral History and Memory." In *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2nd ed., 35-67. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2005. (EB, at https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=246930&site=ehost-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_35)

Web Sites, You Tube Videos, Podcasts, and related materials:

- Chicana por mi Raza Digital Memory Project, at <http://chicanapormiraza.org>
- Groundswell: Oral History for Social Change, at <http://www.oralhistoryforsocialchange.org>
- Louis B. Nunn Center for Oral History. "Marshall Webb: Oral History, Archives and Discovery," at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5nOrByPE4U>.
- Minnesota Historical Society. "Conducting the Interview," at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1zinUXYEKs>
- ------. "Preparing for the Interview and Doing Individual Research," at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MYx326QU_oo
- ------. "Writing Interview Questions and and a Script for the Interview," at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RjxqXAT9Jc>
- Oral History Association. "Principles and Best Practices [for Oral History]," at <http://oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/>
- Oral History in the Digital Age, at <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu>
- Salinas Asian Cultural Experience. "Imagining Salinas Chinatown: An Oral History Walking Tour," at <http://salinasace.org/walkingtour>
- York Region District School Board. "Conducting an Oral History Interview," at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVv_QAFhm1A
- <https://www.thepealecenter.org/barnum-seance/>

Instructor Handouts

These handouts are available on the course Canvas site under the appropriate week's Resources.

- Designing an Oral History Project
- Conducting an Oral History Interview

Grading:

Course Elements	Points (or percent)	
Discussion and participation		TOTAL Discussion/ Participation: 300 points (30%)
Discussion Forum Postings and Weekly Responses to Others' Postings	100 points (10%) 50 points (5%)	
Blog/Field Notes Postings & Responses to Others' Postings	150 points (15%)	
Active participation in live Zoom sessions	Bonus!	
Written Assignments		TOTAL Written Assignments: 300 points (30%)
#1: Prospectus for an Oral History Project	100 points (10%)	
#2: Oral History Interview & Critique	100 points (10%)	
#3: Book Review	100 points (10%)	
Final Project (#4)		TOTAL Final Project: 400 points (40%)
Interview, including release form	200 points (20%)	
Transcript and summary	50 points (5%)	
Critique	150 points (15%)	

Class Presentations	Bonus!	
TOTAL		TOTAL: 1000 points (100%)

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 must be the independent work of each student original to this course and stored in their electronic portfolio. Suspected violations of the Honor Code will be referred to the Academic Honor Board. For a description of the code and what constitutes a violation of the code, refer to Goucher College's [Academic Honor Code](#).

Accessibility Services: Please inform me of 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:

- I am regularly on email throughout the day; except for unusual circumstances (which I will apprise you of in advance, insofar as possible), I will respond to queries within 48 hours, preferably sooner. Throughout the course, my Goucher email address (linda.shopes@goucher.edu) forwards emails automatically to my personal account (lshopes@aol.com). You can contact me through either address. I am also available by appointment for a more sustained conversation via telephone or Zoom.
- You are responsible for maintaining regular involvement with me and your fellow students through the Discussion Forum, Field Notes, and live Zoom sessions. Doing so allows you to gain deeper insights into the content, activities, and assignments in the course. Please let me know of any obstacle that prevents your full participation.
- Please feel free to ask questions of me and your fellow students whenever something needs clarification. The only "stupid question" is the one you don't ask.
- For questions pertaining to your own work on assignments, please send an email directly to me.

- But for questions about assignments that may be interesting and helpful to other class members, feel free to post a message to the entire class.
- For problems with technical aspects of the course Canvas 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. This system will 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](#).

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. 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 graduate learning to occur, the pacing of content is critical. I have, therefore, organized the course so that each week's unit builds on the previous weeks. Assignments fit within this frame; completing work late puts you out of phase with the development of the course. Therefore, assignments are to be completed on time. If extreme circumstances prevent you from completing an assignment by the due date, please notify me before the assignment is due so we can determine a new due. Late assignments without such notification will be docked 10% of the point total per day.

Missed Work: You are responsible for material covered in the course. It is your responsibility to obtain any materials missed.

Redoing Assignments: I am reluctant to allow you to redo an assignment for a better grade. I would much prefer that you submit a draft of your work at least several days before the due date for me to review and comment upon. However, in those few instances when I will allow a revision, I will only do so for assignments completed on time.

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](#).