

Oral History as Journalism: Latina/o Political Engagement



Spring 2018

J 334F (07430) undergraduate

- May be counted toward the University's cultural diversity flag requirement.
- Fulfills the Communication and Culture requirement in the College of Communication.

J 395 (07675) graduate

MAS 392 (35725) graduate

Class Meeting Times: MW 2:00-3:30 PM

Class Location: CMA 4.150

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Office hours: Wednesdays 11-2 p.m.

Also by appointment

The University of Texas at Austin School of Journalism

Course Description

Oral history is an essential tool to chronicle and document the stories of under-chronicled people. It is often, in fact, history from the bottom up, rather from the top down. Journalism is a natural partner for oral history: from doing background research before the interview, to interviewing, and finally to creating a publicly accessible treatment of the interview. There are significant differences, too. You'll learn about those.

In this class, you will learn about oral history practices, including recording, editing and developing a multimedia component. We will think deeply and critically about all aspects of the interview, including your role as the interviewer, your own background, how you ask questions, how to get the most out of your interview.

You'll learn about Mexican American civil rights and political engagement. You will apply what you've learned to a project on the 1975 Voting Rights Act. You will also learn more about the period during which the original Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965, and its extensions and expansion in 1975. In essence, the topic is not only about the VRA itself, but also about the political changes of the time. You will develop a sharper sense of this broader story and will find the best ways to get a true and honest understanding (and interview) about this topic.

Goals

You will become an oral historian. That is to say, you will conduct your own interview for inclusion in the Voces Oral History Project archives at the Nettie Lee Benson Collection. Your name will be on there for posterity.

Prerequisite for Undergraduate Students

Journalism 310F and 311F with a grade of at least B in each.

Required Texts/Readings

A coursepack will be available in early February for purchase at Jenn's Copy & Binding at 2518 Guadalupe Street, across the street from the BMC (512) 482-0779.

There will also be other required readings assigned on Canvas.

Suggested Texts for Graduate Students

Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, eds. *Oral History and Public Memories* (Temple, 2008).

Equipment

You will get a short tutorial from him about making sure all is operating correctly (tip: if audio or video starts having problems, make sure to stop recording and summon help!). And you will help set up backdrops and lights. But, unless you feel confident that you can shoot your own video AND in situations when the interview is not during our Multiple Individual Interview Session (MIIS), you need not worry about equipment.

Meets with

This class includes both graduate and undergraduate students. Graduate students will have slightly different assignments and grade weights. Other than that, the expectations are the same: all are expected to contribute to discussion, etc.

Graduate Students

Doctoral students will be required to write a paper related to their interview, for possible presentation at the Oral History Association conference in Montreal in October 2018, or to another academic conference.

Professional journalism masters students will complete a second interview and index. We will provide you with an interview subject.

Random question on a syllabus

Do you all use UTBox?

Who will you interview?

We will be interviewing men and women who were involved in efforts to secure better electoral participation for Mexican Americans in Medina County, Texas, after the passage of the 1975 Voting Rights Act. Voces will find interview subjects. I will make those available as soon as possible. Some interviews will be conducted in the Neil Spelce Studio (aka Studio 4E) in the CMB. Most, however, will be conducted in Medina County in April.

Guest Speakers

We will interview some people during class, sometimes via Skype, sometimes in Studio 4E. We will be videotaping some of them, and they will be part of our oral history project. I welcome your participation in suggesting good possible speakers/interview subjects. *When we do have a guest speaker, you will be expected to write a 1-graph headline of the most important thing she/he said – by the next class time -- and to participate in discussion. This counts as part of “class participation.”*

Out-of-town trips

We are expecting, as of this writing, to do a class trip to Medina County, Texas, south of San Antonio. This is in development. You are not required to go out of town. We will discuss this further in class.

Multimedia

It's up to you to figure out how you want to tell your multimedia story. You may do a video or audio short (no longer than 5 minutes), you may do an Omeka exhibit (if the interview subject has enough photos – or you have some taken of her/him from the interview).

We will not teach you video editing in this class. But, if there is a demand for it, I would be glad to conduct a weekend workshop on audio editing, if you chose to use that. Some of you will learn how to scan photos during the MIIS. You may use those photos in your multimedia package.

You do have access to other resources, including Lynda.com, as part of the UT community, which provides a ton of tutorial videos that are quite good. Also, there are proctors in the fourth floor CMA multimedia labs who can give you short spurts of help. You have many resources available at your fingertips.

Grading

This is the system we use:

100%-94%= A
 93%-90%= A-
 89%-86%= B+
 85%-83%= B
 82%-80%= B-
 79%-76%= C+

All assignments will have a grading form. *To the extent possible, you will also have access to examples of previous work.*

Here's how you will be graded:

Grades for Undergraduate Students

Group presentation on oral history web sites	completion
Index from existing interview	15 percent
Analysis of existing interview	10 percent
Interview prep (finding readings, developing questions)	10 percent
Your interview (recording, the indexing , photo scans)	25 percent
Field Notes	10 percent
Your multi-media segment	25 percent
Class participation	5 percent

Grades for Theory Graduate Students:

Group presentation on oral history web sites	completion
Index of existing interview	15 percent
Analysis of existing interview	10 percent
Interview prep (background research, developing questions)	10 percent
Your interview (pre-interview form, recording, index)	25 percent
Field Notes	10 percent
Academic paper	25 percent
Class participation	5 percent

Grades for Professional Journalism Masters Students

Group presentation on oral history web sites	completion
Index from existing interview	15 percent
Analysis of existing interview	5 percent
Interview #1 prep (finding readings, developing questions)	10 percent
Interview #1 (recording, the index , photo scans)	15 percent
Interview #1 Field Notes	5 percent
Interview #2 prep (finding readings, developing questions)	10 percent
Interview #2 (recording, the index , photo scans)	15 percent
Interview #2 Field Notes	5 percent
Your multi-media segment (only 1 required)	15 percent
Class participation	5 percent

Cell phones/laptops

Please stash your cell phones in your backpacks during class. If you take notes on your laptop, that's fine. But absolutely no FaceBook, emails, or browsing the web for hair products during class. (Aw, do I really have to say this?)

Attendance

We'll be covering much ground in short order so we need to make the most of our time. We will start punctually. Tardiness will be reflected in your attendance grade. If you can't be in class, for some serious extenuating circumstance, please let me know via email *beforehand*. An after-the-fact excuse is not acceptable. I circulate a sign-in sheet at the beginning of class. It's your responsibility to sign in. I will not sign you in if you forget to do it.

If I attempt to contact you and you are uncommunicative, I will refer report this to the College of Communication's Dean of Students Office, as a safety precaution. (Yep, I care about you.)

Academic Honesty

In journalism (and in life), the only thing we really have is our credibility and we can't do that without transparency and honesty. There is simply no excuse for turning in *anything* that is not your own work. Cutting and pasting from the web, using someone else's words or ideas without attribution, fabricating—any kind of dishonesty: wrong, wrong, wrong. It's also wrong to do work in one class and submit it for a second class. All your work in this class, and, indeed, in journalism, must be original and yours. If you have any doubts about something you're doing or *thinking* about doing, let's talk. Better to be safe....

I will give an automatic F on any assignment in which I find evidence of dishonesty and I will report it to our department, college and university. You may be expelled from the journalism program.

There are University rules on the subject of plagiarism and academic dishonesty. Basically, the University and your instructors want you to do your own work. There's a wonderful web page that explains the finer points at <http://www.utexas.edu/depts/dos/sjs/> ([Links to an external site.](#))[Links to an external site.](#)

Enough Already!

I want you to get out of this class as much as you can. This will be a safe, nurturing learning environment and I expect you will teach me a thing or two, if the past is any indication. It's not what you know *now* that will make the difference: it's how you build on what you learn *here and now* that will count years from now. That said, you will be held to high standards. If you need help to succeed in this class, let me know right away and we'll decide – together – what we can do.

I would love it if you fell in love with oral history and the concept of recording stories of amazing, unheralded people. But even if you don't, I hope you love this class. Now let's have some fun.