

**Oral History as Journalism:  
Latino Political Engagement—The South Texas Border Initiative  
•Spring 2017•**



Class Meeting Times: MW 10:30 a.m. - noon  
Class Location: BMC 3.208  
For during-class interviews: CMB Studio 4E

**J334F (08125) – undergraduate\***

**J395 (08375) -- graduate**

**MAS 392 (36168) -- graduate**

Instructor: Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, Ph.D.  
Office: BMC 3.380  
Office Hours: Monday 2-4:30 p.m. and by appointment, of course  
Email: [mrivas@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:mrivas@austin.utexas.edu)

\*May be counted toward the University's cultural diversity flag requirement and it also fulfills the Communication and Culture requirement in the College of Communication

**• The University of Texas at Austin •**

## **Course Description**

This course provides an introduction to oral history practice and methodology. In this class, you will learn best practices in conducting and using oral histories. You will contribute to a ground-breaking oral history project about Latino political engagement. In this semester, we will focus on the 1987 Lulac v. Richards lawsuit which ultimately led to the 1993 South Texas Border Initiative. Fortunately for us, we do have some research that will guide our work. But make no mistake: there will be many, many untold stories you will uncover. In this class, you will recover a history that otherwise might have been lost.

## **Goals**

Our goal is for you to reach an awareness of how journalists and oral historians may use their formidable skills to set the record straight. Further, the work you produce in this class will be part of an ongoing effort to capture an important part of American history.

You will learn new skills and build on skills you already have. You will also learn more about Mexican American political engagement during the 1960s through today and you will relate your findings to the present day. By using the comparative method, you will better understand conditions hindering greater participation in our country's educational system, and you will relate those challenges to those struggles of other people elsewhere.

As journalists and/or oral historians, you will develop a sharper sense of the essence of this broader story and find the best ways to arrive at a true and honest understanding (and interview) of this topic. Underlying the entire class will be the circumstances of the period, considering the history of U.S. Latinos, their political and educational status, and how the activism of the times affected them.

You will learn:

- oral history principles
- how to get the most out of your interview
- how to find archives pertaining to various topics
- how to research and prepare for an interview
- how to videotape/audio record your interview
- how to digitize photos
- how to prepare an interview/index for web viewing
- (undergrads and professional masters) how to develop a short multimedia presentation from your interview
- graduate students in more theoretical programs will learn how to use oral history in academic research

By the end of this class, you'll be prepared to coordinate and organize your own oral history project, or to contribute in a substantial way to existing projects. You'll understand the principles of legal and ethical considerations in oral history. You'll appreciate how oral history may affect a general historical understanding, as well as how it might affect individual interviewees' memories. Through the entire class, we'll be analyzing how our perspective as journalists may differ from that of other oral historians.

We will get an overview of several uses of oral history: research, exhibits, film and audio documentaries, multimedia presentations, plays. Stories from your interview will also be included on a website and in a newsletter to be published later this year.

**Required Texts/Readings:**

There are two required textbooks—they are available for **free** as an electronic resource on the UT Library website.

Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, *Texas Mexican Americans and Postwar Civil Rights*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015).

There will also be a small course-pack from Jenn's on Guadalupe.  
All other readings are available on Canvas.

**Required Supplies:**

You will need a 32-gigabyte external hard-drive to accommodate your photos, audio and video files. You will be able to store some of your files on a school server, but you must also have them someplace safe for yourself. Also, you'll need it to transport files to class, etc. If you would prefer to use some other method, let's discuss.

**Grading:**

In this class, we'll use a plus and minus system.

A = 94-100  
A- = 90-93  
B+ = 87-89  
B = 84-86  
B- = 80-83  
C+ = 77-79  
C = 74-76  
C- = 70-73  
D+ = 67-69  
D = 64-66  
D- = 60-63  
F = 0-60

**Undergraduate Student/Professional Masters Grading:**

You will be graded thusly:

Presentation on oral history websites	completion
Story and Glifos index of an existing interview	25 percent
Interview (finding readings, developing questions)	10 percent
Field notes	5 percent
Time-stamped Index of your interview	10 percent
Story from your interview	25 percent
Your multimedia segment	15 percent
Reflection on the interview experience/oral history	5 percent
<u>Class participation</u>	<u>5 percent</u>
Total	100 percent

*There will be a grading sheet for each of these components, so you will understand how you will be graded. To the extent possible, you will also have access to examples of previous work.*

**Doctoral/Hybrid/Theory Graduate Students Grades:**

Your grade will center around the interview you conduct and a research paper. Your paper ideally will include that interview. You will be expected to use additional existing interviews, archival materials and secondary readings to round out your research. I have a few ideas, but encourage you to propose your own as well. You are required to clear your topic with me before proceeding. This paper is one you will be expected to submit for publication to either a publication, or a conference. Possible ideas include:

1. the Aug. 31, 1966 face-off between then-Gov. John Connolly and farmworker minimum wage protestors in New Braunfels (could be coverage of the actual event)
2. the role of religion in the farmworker march; this might be broken down into short profiles of Humberto Sousa Medeiros, who turned around at least one conservative Democrat, Ben Barnes

That paper will be due by the time of the scheduled final exam for this class.

Graduate students will be graded thusly:

Presentation on oral history websites	completion
Analysis of existing interview	10 percent
Interview (finding readings, developing questions, interview)	10 percent
Field notes	5 percent
Glifos index of your interview	10 percent
Reflection on the interview experience/oral history	5 percent
Academic paper (first draft)	25 percent
Academic paper (final draft)	30 percent
<u>Class participation</u>	<u>5 percent</u>
Total	100 percent

**Attendance:**

We'll be covering much ground in short order. We will start punctually. It's in your best interest to be here. If you can't be in class, for some serious extenuating circumstance, please let me know via email beforehand. (Only medical emergencies authenticated with a doctor's note or family bereavement confirmed by a signed letter from one of your parents are excusable absences. Notes/letters must be presented upon return to class. Family reunions, weddings, and holiday travel are not excusable absences from this class. If you will miss a lecture or lab for reasons of religious observance or military duty, you must let me know *two weeks in advance*, not the day before. You will still be expected to submit assignments on deadline.)\* I circulate a sign-in sheet at the beginning of class. It's your responsibility to sign in. I won't sign you in if you forget to do it.

If I attempt to contact you and you are uncommunicative, I will refer you to the College of Communication's Dean of Students Office. This is not punitive. I want to make sure you're well.

**Guest Speakers**

We will interview a few people during class. We will be interviewing some of them, and they will be part of our brief oral history project. When we do interview them, we will be meeting in **CMB Studio 4E**. Students will be in the control room while the interview is being conducted in the actual studio.

We schedule a few guest speakers far in advance, but a few are scheduled just a few days before the class. 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-pager with take-aways of what she/he said, as well as how what they said relates to what we have read in class, or what you have knowledge about outside of class. It is due within 24 hours of the class, via Canvas. This counts as part of "class participation."*

**Out-of-town trips**

There may be a group trip for interviews. This is in development. Hotels, transportation and food will be covered by the Voces Oral History Project. You are not required to travel out of town. If you are unable to make the trip, you will be assigned an interview in Austin or nearby related to our topic. More to come in class.

**Equipment**

You will have access to a variety of equipment to use for your interviews: video and still cameras, audio recorders, microphones and earphones for your work. The equipment will be available on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the CMA. You will learn how to use this equipment – but we will have a veteran videographer/photographer on hand to make sure all goes swimmingly.

**Academic Honesty:**

In journalism, as in academia, the only thing we really have is our credibility. Credibility requires transparency and honesty. Please remember that 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. If you have any misgivings about something you're doing or *thinking* about doing, let's talk. I'll be especially happy if you recognize there might be a possible ethical issue and seek feedback *before the fact*.

I will give an automatic F on any assignment in which I find evidence of dishonesty, and I will report it to our department and college. There may be additional disciplinary action.

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. I take this very seriously and am glad to discuss it with you if you have any questions or doubts. There's a wonderful explanation of the finer points at <http://www.utexas.edu/depts/dos/sjs/>

*\*The section below is boilerplate from other syllabi and from the UT website.*

### **Other Problems, Outside of Class Documented Disability Statement\***

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at: 512-471-6259 (voice) or 512-232-2937 (video phone).

Please let me know if you need any modification/adaptation to accommodate a disability-related need. You will be requested to provide documentation to the Dean of Students' Office in order that the most appropriate accommodations can be determined. Specialized services are available on campus through Services for Students with Disabilities. <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

### **Harassment based on sex or gender**

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources on campus

Students may report incidents of sex discrimination, sexual harassment (including sexual violence) or sexual misconduct to any university administrator, official or unit supervisor, who is then responsible for promptly notifying a Title IX coordinator of the reported incident.

Complaints or allegations of student-on-student sex discrimination, sexual harassment (including sexual violence) or sexual misconduct will be handled by the Office of the Dean of Students. Students may also contact the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (800-421-3481) to complain of sex discrimination or sexual harassment including sexual violence.

Cases of sexual violence may also be reported to the University of Texas Police Department (512-471-4441), the City of Austin Police Department (512-974-5000) and other local law enforcement authorities. The Title IX coordinators can assist individuals with contacting these law enforcement agencies.

Complaints of sex discrimination, sexual harassment (including sexual violence) or sexual misconduct by non-students will be handled by the University's Office of Institutional Equity, 4.302 North Office Building A (NOA), 512-471-1849.

For additional information on Title IX, please visit the Title IX web page:  
<http://www.utexas.edu/student-affairs/policies/title-ix>

### **Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)**

If you are worried about someone who is acting in a disturbing manner, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

### **Emergency Evacuation Policy**

Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.
- If you require assistance to evacuate, let me know during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow my instructions.

Do not re-enter a building unless you're given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office.

### **Q drop Policy**

The State of Texas has enacted a law that limits the number of course drops for academic reasons to six (6).

### **Resources for Learning & Life at UT Austin**

The University of Texas has numerous resources for students to provide assistance and support for your learning.

The UT Learning Center: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/utlc/>

Undergraduate Writing Center: <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>

Counseling & Mental Health Center: <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/>

Career Exploration Center: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/careercenter/>

Student Emergency Services: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency>

### **Enough Already!**

I want you to get out of this class as much as you can. Yep, you can make mistakes here and you will learn from them – but there is an ample safety net. It's not what you know now that will make the difference: it's how you build on what you learn here that will count years from now. If you need help, let me know right away and we'll decide – together – what we can do.