

**Oral History as Journalism:
Latino Political Engagement
•Spring 2016•**



Modesto Rodriguez of Pearsall, Texas, 2012.
Photo by Billy Calzada, *San Antonio Express-News*

Class Meeting Times: TTH 9:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
Class Location: [BMC 3.208](#)

J334F (07845) – 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 (08120) -- graduate

Class Meeting Times: TTH 12:30-2 p.m.
Class Location: CMA 4.146

Instructor: Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, Ph.D.
Office: BMC 3.380
Office Hours: TTH 2:30-4 p.m.
Email: mrivas@austin.utexas.edu

• 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. If you don't know much about it, it's because it has not been well documented, or researched. We as journalists and students will document this topic, what led to greater engagement, and the consequences of that engagement. In this class, you will recover a history that otherwise might have been lost. You will be performing an important public service, while expanding and deepening your understanding of our nation.

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 and 1970s and relate it to the present day. By using the comparative method, you will better understand conditions preventing greater participation in our country's electoral system, as well as relate our challenges to those of 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 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
- how to develop a short multimedia presentation from your interview

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 is one required textbook—and you may purchase it at the Coop if you would like. OR, it is available for **free** as an electronic resource on the UT Library website.

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

There will be a coursepack at Jenn's Copy & Binding at 2518 Guadalupe Street, across the street from the BMC (512) 482-0779 available in the early weeks of the semester. In addition, there will be pdfs on Canvas, for you to read.

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 |
| Electronic archival of an existing interview | 20 percent |
| Interview (finding readings, developing questions) | 15 percent |
| Field notes | 5 percent |
| Electronic archival of your interview | 35 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:

You will electronically archive two stories, one from an existing interview and the other from an interview you conduct. You will be expected to write a short academic treatment related to Latino political engagement. **You will be expected to clear this topic with me before proceeding.** Ideally both of the interviews you archive will be a part of that academic paper. This paper is one you will be expected to submit for publication to either a publication, or a conference. Possible ideas include: the 1972 Raza Unida Party vs. Bullock lawsuit and how it fits into the 1975 VRA; News Coverage of the 1975 VRA; Positions of various, key Texas organizations/leaders on the 1975 VRA; Effect of the 1975 VRA on Texas Politics; Coverage of one of various . Ideally, your interview will fit directly into your academic paper. You and I together will determine what that will look like. That treatment 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 |
| Electronic archival of an existing interview | 15 percent |
| Interview prep (finding readings, developing questions) | 5 percent |
| Field notes | 5 percent |
| Electronic archival of your own interview | 20 percent |
| Reflection on the interview experience/oral history | 10 percent |
| Academic paper | 40 percent |
| Class participation | 5 percent |
| 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 need to get assignments in a day before or after the due date.)* 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.

* This section in parenthesis is taken from other journalism syllabi. See *Academic Honesty*.

Guest Speakers

We will interview a few people during class. We will be videotaping some of them, and they will be part of our brief oral history project. We schedule a few 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 go 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: laptops and portable scanners, video and still cameras, audio recorders, microphones and earphones for your work. The equipment will be available on the 3rd floor of the CMA. You will learn how to use this equipment and will always have someone nearby who can help you.

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 doubts 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/>

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, Travis Gill, J.D., Director, 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.

**This section also is boilerplate from other syllabi and from the UT website.*