Oral History Project

What is Oral History?
Simply put, oral history documents and preserves the memories of people who lived through significant events. Oral historians prepare well-informed research questions that seek to provide future researchers, educators, and the public with first person accounts of the past. For more information, see the Oral History Association on Principles and Best Practices. You will also be required to watch training videos and take quizzes on those videos.

Whom Should I Interview?
You must do the work to identify, contact potential narrators (interviewees), and craft well-informed interview questions. I will try to come up with a list of potential people. The topic of the oral history project should focus on a theme relevant to the Vietnam War, broadly conceived. You don't need to interview a famous person or an eyewitness to a major historic event, but the oral history interview should be focused on topics of historical significance. Most people will say that their experiences were not as important as others. Encourage them anyway and consider their unique perspective. Their memories may offer important and interesting insights. Oral histories seek to capture a person's lived experiences, memories, and participation in their community. Your questions should be informed and probe beyond someone's personal opinions. The interview should focus on this person's life experiences during and after the Vietnam War era, and you should form your questions based on course materials or other credible sources.

Safety Guidelines
Considering the restrictions due to COVID-19, students may record video/audio interviews via Zoom or some other safe and reliable technology. For more detailed advice on recording Zoom oral history interviews, please consult this resource: "Remote Interviewing for Zoom," by the Berkeley Oral History Center.

Multi-Part Assignment

Veterans History Project Field kit: This resource provides all of the documents necessary to participate in the Veterans History Project. I explain the various forms below and list the individual documents necessary for the Library of Congress to archive the oral history interview, indicated below with an asterisk. (*)
https://www.loc.gov/vets/pdf/vhp-2018-fieldkit-accessible.pdf

Training: By April, watch the Following Oral History Training Videos: Episode 3 and "Episode 4" and "Episode 5" and then complete the quiz. I will also offer a lesson on interviewing veterans and survivors of trauma in class.

Proposal: This assignment will be considered a journal. You should identify who you are interviewing, propose dates for the interview, and whether or not they wish to participate in the Veterans History Project.

Pre-interview: You should schedule a quick phone call (off the record) or a visit in order to introduce yourself, get relevant background information (to inform your interview questions), discuss accessibility issues, and plan/schedule the formal interview. This is an opportunity to build rapport with the narrator and for you to answer any questions they may have. It is also another opportunity to discuss informed consent. *For the Veterans History Project, you should have the veteran fill out the biographical data and veteran's release forms.*

Questions: Develop a list of approximately 20 thoughtful interview questions that are formed from historical and pre-interview research. The questions should include a variety of open-ended questions (tell me about x) and short answers, such as biographical details. You might not ask every question, but it's best to be over-prepared and then set the questions aside and actively listen. The questions should be considerate of issues of privacy and traumatic memories. Most importantly, your questions should encourage the narrators to share stories from their life, to probe memories, and to capture the significance of someone's life experiences. *The Veterans History Project offers examples here: https://www.loc.gov/vets/kit-generalquestions.html

Informed Consent or Release form: This is a legal document that the narrator should sign which gives you permission to record the interview and use it for educational purposes. *You must complete the veteran's release form and the interviewer's release form to participate in the Veterans History Project.*

Final interview file: Interviews should be recorded in a **MP4 (video) or .wav (audio)**. Be sure to copy and save the file immediately after the interview**.** You should duplicate it and save it to the cloud or email it to me. The oral history interview should be between an hour or an hour and a half. *The Veterans History Project requires interviews to be at least 30 minutes.

Index/Metadata: Most oral history interviews that are not indexed properly are never utilized. Every five minutes or so, insert a **time stamp** (indicating the time of the interview in the margin) and then provide a brief description of the content. This allows us to locate key moments in the oral history interview. *For the Veterans History Project, please complete the audio and video recording log.*

Biographical Abstract (300-500 words): The abstract should synthesize the oral history interview, discussing its most important content. It should provide biographical information and a summary of the interview. The abstract will help make the interview accessible to others. A great abstract will incorporate quotations, key moments from the interview, photographs, and highlight the significance of the interview. *The Library of Congress requires a cover letter and the veteran's biographical data form.*

Important Due Dates and Points Assigned

Oral History Interview Proposal: 10 points **(**journal)
--Mar. 18

Pre-interview: You should ask about biographical information, explain informed consent, and get permission to record interview.
--Recommended before Apr. 8

Training Video Quizzes: 25 points

Interview Questions: (15-20 well developed questions) 25 points
--Due Apr. 11

Informed Consent/Library of Congress Veterans and Interviewer's Release forms: (signed before interview) 25 points

Oral History Interview: record the interview by Apr. 25

- Audio/Video/photos file: 50 points
- Abstract/Cover letter: 25 points
- Biographical Data: 25 points
- Index/audio and video log: 25 points

Total 200 points

Final due date: May 6