Oral History Project Guidelines

Introduction:

The first major assignment introduced you to a variety of digitized oral histories, as you learned how to evaluate collections, analyze oral history interviews, and understand both their potential and their limitations. At this point, you should have a deeper understanding of oral history best practices, interview techniques, and familiarity with oral history as a methodology and a creative process. The next major assignment includes multiple steps, designed to scaffold the oral history project. You have several recommended due dates, which will facilitate your training and help you complete the project, with sufficient time to produce an accessible, thoughtful, and informed oral history interview.

Let's Review

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.

Safety Guidelines:

Considering the restrictions due to COVID-19, students should consider recording 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.

Whom Should I Interview?

You must do the work to identify, contact potential narrators (interviewees), and craft well-informed interview questions. The topic of the oral history project should focus on a theme relevant to social change and community engagement, 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 social or historical significance. Most people will say that their experiences weren't as important as others. Encourage them anyway and consider their unique perspective. Their memories may still offer interesting insights. The interview may focus on the present, so long as it makes connections to the past and provides a valuable perspective on significant events. 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.

Multi-Part Assignment

Invitation letter: You will write a formal, individualized letter to a potential narrator, inviting them to participate in your oral history project and highlighting the key topics. Letters should

clearly explain what oral history is, what they should expect, how long the interview should take. This is also an opportunity to explain informed consent, the purpose of the interview, and what to expect.

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. We will do a practice pre-interview activity with a classmate.

Questions: A list of 15-20 well-developed interview questions that are formed from historical and pre-interview research. The questions should include a variety of open-ended questions and short answers, such as biographical details. You may not ask every question, but it's best to be over-prepared. The questions should be considerate and thoughtful of issues of privacy or even 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. We will conduct a peer-review activity designed to improve interview questions.

Final interview file: Recorded in a **MP4 (video) or .wav for 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 approximately an hour or an hour and a half at most. (Processing, transcribing, and archiving large files can be very expensive and labor intensive).

Transcript: Most oral history interviews that are not transcribed or indexed properly are never utilized. To make the interview accessible, it must be transcribed. For this step, I recommend using the Zoom closed captioning feature, which can be edited (but it still takes time) or you could download a free version of Express Scribe here: https://www.nch.com.au/scribe/index.html Every five minutes or so, insert a **time stamp** (indicating the time of the interview in the margin). This allows us to locate key moments in the oral history interview. Transcripts should be edited for spelling and follow standard rules of the English language.

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.

Final Presentation: 5%

You are encouraged to explore different options for a short class presentation, using PowerPoint; Adobe Audition or Audacity for a podcast-style program; a printed pamphlet; a digitized collection using Omeka; a short video clip; infographic; or digital story project on Scalar.

Important Due Dates and Percentage of Total Course Grade

Oral History Interview Proposal (10%)
- Peer review: Mar. 21
- Final draft: Mar. 25

Invitation letter (5%)
- Peer-review: **Mar. 30**
- Final draft: **Apr. 1**

Pre-interview 5% (should record biographical information, explain informed consent and get permission to record interview)
- Recommended **before Apr. 8**

Interview Questions (15-20 well developed questions)
- Peer-review: Apr. 8
- Final draft: Apr. 11

Oral History Interview
- Complete interview **by Apr. 25**
- Audio/Video file: 10%
- Abstract: 5%
- Transcript: 10%
- **Final due date: May 2** (*I cannot accept submissions after May 4*)

Final presentation: 5%
- Wednesday, May 11 from 10:05-12:05.