

HIST 597 Oral History
GMU Spring 2024

Thursdays 7:20 – 10:00pm
January 18th Only in Horizon 3001
Remainder of Semester in Horizon 3225, The History CoCreative Space

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Thursdays 3-5pm or by appointment

Syllabus

Note: Please refer to BlackBoard for updates.

Prelude

It's like if you were to take a beautiful rose with drops of dew on its petals and then you were to describe it to us. And then let's say we didn't hear that. And so then another person is there and is going to describe what he has seen. And yet another. Well, we are all talking about the very same thing, but it would be much different words from each of us as we describe the beauty and everything about that rose...it's always the same, but it's never word-for-word. It's always living in the moment. – Tom Porter Sakokwenionkwas, Bear Clan Elder of the Mohawk Nation, 2008

Overview

We all move through times that become history. Oral history records living memories of people – famous or everyday - who create and contour how our most recent past came to be. Interviews open access to the troves of knowledge that anyone might carry through their life course in historical context. In this class, you will learn how oral history provides diverse insights to events. Specific methodologies for planning, recording, preserving, and analyzing knowledge gleaned from oral historical documentation will be practiced within ethical guidelines. As a class, you will engage in an oral history project focusing on a local Indigenous community history. As an individual emerging scholar, you will develop and implement an oral history centered paper to exercise new skills.

Learning in Relationship Ethic

Please always know that you can always reach out to me and any of the support services at George Mason. We enter this journey as an intellectually centered, ethical, and accountable

community bringing our good minds together. You will be travelling with thoughtful narrators who will share their experiences with you, their courage and memories, their concerns and thoughts.

Texts (All Online via Mason Libraries)

Nagel, Joane. *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture*. Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1997. Print.

Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: 30th Anniversary Edition*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge, 2013. Web.

Perks, Robert., and Alistair. Thomson. *The Oral History Reader*. 3rd ed. London ; Routledge, 2016. Web.

Ritchie, Donald A. *Doing Oral History*. 3rd ed. Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2014. Web.

Thompson, Paul. *Voice of the Past: Oral History*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2000. Print.

Trimble, Charles E, Barbara W Sommer, and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The American Indian Oral History Manual: Making Many Voices Heard*. Taylor and Francis, 2016. Web.

Assignments (Due Dates on Schedule)

Reading Groups - Each student will be responsible for leading one 30-minute group discussion on the readings between Week 2 and Week 5. We will schedule your rotation at the first class. When it is your turn to lead a discussion, be sure to compose 3 questions probing the roles, relevance, and value of oral history in the pieces to guide your group. All students should be entirely present and engaged in reading group.

Thought Papers – A weekly thought paper (500 words) that shares your analysis and reactions on the assigned readings. These papers should not summarize points but delve into critique, applications, and questions that the readings inspire in you. They are due before class so that you are prepared to participate in the reading group.

Guest Interview Collaboration – Each student will collaborate with me to interview a narrator for the For a Sovereign Generation Project. These interviews will be done in the presence of our class, most likely with a remote oral history platform called TheirStory. You will develop questions for an Indigenous activist narrator and assist me with the one-hour in class session. When it is your week to collaborate, be prepared to interact with me outside of class via email and text to prepare for our interview.

Topic Prospectus – Submit a 500-word proposal for your final paper topic. Focus on the oral history component, including plans for working with narrators. The paper will center on one or two interviews totaling two hours. Literature research should contextualize your paper.

Draft Emails and Permissions – Draft a formal email invitation to your narrator(s) for an interview following guidelines learned in class. Develop a permissions form. Once I approve these pieces, you can send them to your narrator(s).

Annotated Bibliography - Specific to your topic and narrator, write annotations for five primary and three secondary sources. Your final paper bibliography can include more sources.

Interview Schedule – Draft questions that will guide your interview. I will review these with you in class when you submit them before class on BlackBoard.

Final Presentation - Share your research findings and oral history experience in a 10-minute presentation in class. Slides, visuals, media, and recordings are encouraged. This material is part of your final paper project.

Final Paper – See description on the May 3rd syllabus entry below.

Grading

On a 500-point scale:

Attendance/Participation	75
Reading Leader	70
Thought Papers (4 x 15pts)	60
Interview Collaboration	50
Topic Prospectus	25
Draft Email/Permission	20
Annotated Bibliography	30
Interview Schedule	20
Final Presentation	50
Final Paper	100
Total	500

Part 1: Oral History Theory and Methodologies

1/18 Week 1 Introduction and Course Overview

Skill: Topics

Class: Syllabus Review

Application: For a Sovereign Generation Project

1/25 Week 2 Situating the Field and Ethics

Skill: Permissions

Application: Review Permission Form and Invitations

Student-Led Reading Group #1

Reading:

Ritchie Chapters 1 and 2

Thompson Chapter 1 and 2

Perks and Thomson – A chapter of your choice in Part I

Assignment:

Thought Paper #1

2/1 Week 3 The Interview

Skill: Questions

Application: Review Question Themes

Student-Led Reading Group #2

Reading:

Ritchie Chapter 3

Thompson The Interview

Read a chapter of your choice in Perks and Thomson Part II

Ong Chapter 1

Assignment:

Thought Paper #2

2/8 Week 4 Oral History Theory

Skill: Listening Relationships with Narrators

Application: Analyze and Review Example

Student-Led Reading Discussion #3

Reading:

Thompson (Chapter 5)

Ong Chapter 2 and 3

Read a chapter of your choice in Perks and Thomson Part III

Assignment:

Thought Paper #3

2/15 Week 5 Evidence

Skill: Recording and Documentation

Application: Equipment Practice

Student-Led Reading Group #4

Reading:

Thompson Chapter 7

Ritchie Chapter 4, 6, 8

Chapter 1 in Trimble, Charles E, Barbara W Sommer, and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The American Indian Oral History Manual: Making Many Voices Heard*. Taylor and Francis, 2016. Web.

Assignment:

Thought Paper #4

Part 2: Oral History Practices

2/22 Week 6 Indigenous Oral History Launch

Skill: Transcription

Application: Review Previous Transcriptions, Transcribe 10 minutes Guest

Guest 1 Interview Collaborators

Reading:

Nagel, Joane. *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture*. Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1997. Print.

Assignment: Topic Prospectus

2/29 Week 7 Preservation and Archives

Skill: Archiving

Guest 2 Interview Collaborators

Assignment: Submit draft emails and permissions form for narrator(s). Once approved, you are ready to launch your interviews. Schedule your interview

3/7 Week 8 Spring Break

3/14 Week 9 Oral Histories as Sources

Skill: Products

Assignment: Annotated Bibliography.

Guest 3 Interview Collaborators

Part 3: Oral History Applications

3/21 Week 10 Evaluation

Skill: Evaluation Tools

Assignment: Draft Interview Schedule (Questions)

3/28 Week 11 Reciprocities

Skill: Maintaining Relationships

Individual Project Progress Check In

4/4 Week 12 Themes

Skill: Tagging

Individual Project Progress Check-In

4/11 Week 13 Memory

Skill: Interpretation and Public History

Individual Project Progress Check-In

Part 4: Oral History Synthesis

4/15 Week 14 Presentations

Assignment: Share your research findings and oral history experience in a 10 minute presentation in class. Slides, visuals, media, and recordings are encouraged.

4/25 Week 15 Closing the Circle

5/3 Week 16 FINAL PAPER DUE

A 15–20-page topic paper using secondary and primary sources. The main source will be your already transcribed interview. This paper should include a methodological section with a clear and well-supported statement of your approach to the interview (including comments on your preparation; relationship between interviewer and subject; description of the location where the interview took place; the personal characteristics of your subject; the general climate of the interview and the behavior of the subject.)

Technology Requirements

Hardware: You will need access to a Windows or Macintosh computer with at least 2 GB of RAM and access to a fast and reliable broadband internet connection (e.g., cable, DSL). A larger screen is recommended for better visibility of course material. You will need speakers or headphones to hear recorded content and a headset with a microphone is recommended for the best experience. For the amount of Hard Disk Space required taking a distance education course, consider and allow for:

1. the storage amount needed to install any additional software and
2. space to store work that you will do for the course.

If you consider the purchase of a new computer, please go to [Patriot Tech](#) to see recommendations.

Software: This course uses Blackboard as the learning management system and Zoom for synchronous class meetings. You will need a browser and operating system that are listed compatible or certified with the Blackboard version available on the [myMason Portal](#). See [supported browsers and operating systems](#). Log in to [myMason](#) to access your registered courses. Some courses may use other learning management systems. Check the syllabus or contact the instructor for details. Online courses typically use [Acrobat Reader](#), [Flash](#), [Java](#), and [Windows Media Player](#), [QuickTime](#) and/or [Real Media Player](#). Your computer should be capable of running current versions of those applications. Also, make sure your computer is protected from viruses by downloading the latest version of Symantec Endpoint Protection/Anti-Virus software for free [here](#).

Students owning Macs or Linux should be aware that some courses may use software that only runs on Windows. You can set up a Mac computer with Boot Camp or virtualization software so Windows will also run on it. Watch [this video](#) about using Windows on a Mac. Computers running Linux can also be configured with virtualization software or configured to dual boot with Windows.

Note: If you are using an employer-provided computer or corporate office for class attendance, please verify with your systems administrators that you will be able to install the necessary applications and that system or corporate firewalls do not block access to any sites or media types.

Course-specific Hardware/Software

This course will use Blackboard and Zoom. Hardware or software required for your course or program may be available for purchase at [Patriot Computers](#) (the University's computer store that offers educational discounts and special deals).

University Policies and Resources

- a. **Academic Honesty:** You are expected to be familiar with and abide by the University's Honor Code. The Code can be found [here](#). It is your responsibility to see me if you have questions about these policies. George Mason University has an honor code that states the following:

To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the

desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the University Community have set forth this:

- b. Students must follow the university policy for [Responsible Use of Computing](#)
- c. Student services: The University provides range of services to help you succeed academically and you should make use of these if you think they could benefit you. I also invite you to speak to me (the earlier the better).
- d. Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.
- e. [The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance. Counseling Center: Student Union I, Room 364, 703-993-2380.
- f. Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the [George Mason University Office of Disability Services \(ODS\)](#) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. Please note that accommodations MUST BE MADE BEFORE assignments or exams are due. I cannot adjust your grade after the fact.
- g. Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.
- h. [The George Mason University Writing Center](#) staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. University Writing Center: Robinson Hall Room A114, 703-993-1200. The writing center includes assistance for students for whom English is a second language.
- i. Diversity: George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth.