Oral History Fieldwork, Production and Archiving (G5020), Fall Semester 2018

Wednesdays, 10:10-1 PM, 308 Lewisohn Hall
Professor: Amy Starecheski
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Office hours: Thurs 10-12 and by appointment
Office: 404 Burke Library, in Union Theological Seminary

Course Description
This seminar is a year-long practicum in which students will learn and practice the skills required to conceptualize, conduct, analyze and disseminate oral history interviews.

In the Fall semester, we will learn project design, interviewing, audio recording, transcribing, indexing, and digital archiving. Students will have the option of working on oral history projects conducted in partnership with New York City groups or working on their own projects. We will weave together several strands of inquiry through the fall semester, some of which we will follow into the spring:

- nuts and bolts (audio recording, project design, transcribing, indexing)
- interview strategies (peer interviews, balancing life history and a research focus, using research in an interview, working with embodiment in the interview, doing interviews in public)
- power (legal and ethical issues, the interview relationship, oral history from an anti-oppression standpoint)
- archiving (digital archiving, and this strand will carry over into the spring)
- oral history and anthropology (comparative approaches to fieldwork, anthropological studies of oral history)

By the Spring semester course on Curating Oral Histories, students will be expected to be primarily working on their own projects. In the Spring we will focus most of our attention on the analysis and dissemination of oral histories, including audio editing, online presentation, museum exhibits, and other public oral history genres. Our spring work will culminate in a collaboratively curated public multimedia exhibit.

Course Requirements
This course requires active engagement in both in-class and out of class activities. Students will be required to conduct at least five oral history interview sessions, and to share their work with the class in various ways.

All assignments should be submitted via the assignments feature on Canvas. Please name your files in the following format: lastname_assignment_date. For example, Choe_PeerInterview_Sept12. For most assignments, I have set the deadline on Canvas for 9 AM the day AFTER the due date, as I will not be reviewing your work overnight and I know some of you work late.

Each student should select two interview sessions from the five done for the class to be submitted for feedback from the instructor. When you submit an interview for evaluation, please include a short description of the context of the interview, some of your reflections on it, and areas in which you would like feedback. Note that you may not be able to send audio files via Canvas due to file size limits. If this happens, please use Dropbox or another file sharing service to share MP3 audio files with us (not .wavs), and include links to the files with the interview context via Canvas. You may choose any two interviews you want and can submit as soon as you like. The deadline to submit a first interview for evaluation is Nov 7, and the deadline to submit a second one is Nov. 21. Submit your first interview through the assignment
called “Interview #1 for Feedback” and your second interview through the assignment called “Interview #2 for Feedback.”

The semester’s work will culminate in a final project, the exact details of which will be determined by the project design you create. The final project will incorporate your work over the course of the semester, and will be evaluated based on how well you apply what we have discussed in class, whether you achieve what you planned in your project design, and (if applicable) whether you deliver what you promised to your project partner.

The work in this course builds cumulatively on previous assignments as the semester continues. In-class work depends on fieldwork and assignments conducted out of class. Because of this structure, late assignments will disrupt the entire class, and it is essential that you complete assignments on time. I understand that some of these assignments depend on the cooperation of interviewees, over which you do not have control. Please plan ahead to allow time for schedule changes. If you want to request an extension on any assignment, you must contact me at least 3 days in advance of the due date to discuss it.

As this class requires ongoing, active fieldwork, there will be less reading than in a typical graduate seminar, but the readings assigned are crucial. Please come to class prepared to discuss them on the day they are listed in the syllabus. There are four required books for the course (for the whole year):


These books are available at Book Culture, 536 West 112th Street and are on reserve at Butler Library. All other readings are online, will be supplied as PDFs through Canvas, or are available for download from the library.

You are also required to download InqScribe for transcribing and install it on your computer. You may use the free trial version or purchase the software. If this will present any problems for you, speak to me immediately.

**Class Conduct**

I expect all students to arrive on time and ready to participate. Please do not be late. I generally prefer that laptops, phones, or tablets are not used in class. I expect all students to be actively engaged in our collective work, and research and experience shows that these devices can be extremely distracting both to those using them and to others. We will discuss and agree on a more specific technology policy in the first weeks of class. Texting, browsing the internet, using social media etc. in class are of course not allowed.

**Disability Accommodations**

If you have been certified by Disability Services (DS) to receive accommodations, please either bring your accommodation letter from DS to my office hours to confirm your accommodation needs, or ask your
liaison in GSAS to consult with me. If you believe that you may have a disability that requires accommodation, please contact Disability Services at 212-854-2388 or disability@columbia.edu.

Academic Integrity
Columbia’s intellectual community relies on academic integrity and responsibility as the cornerstone of its work. Graduate students are expected to exhibit the highest level of personal and academic honesty as they engage in scholarly discourse and research. In practical terms, you must be responsible for the full and accurate attribution of the ideas of others in all of your research papers and projects; you must be honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet source. Graduate students are responsible for knowing and correctly utilizing referencing and bibliographical guidelines. When in doubt, consult your professor. Citation and plagiarism-prevention resources can be found at the GSAS page on Academic Integrity and Responsible Conduct of Research. Failure to observe these rules of conduct will have serious academic consequences, up to and including dismissal from the university. If a faculty member suspects a breach of academic honesty, appropriate investigative and disciplinary action will be taken.

Grading and Assignments
I will give qualitative feedback rather than letter grades for individual assignments for this course. Your letter grade for the course will be determined based on the overall quality of your work. The emphasis in the course is on process, learning and reflection, meaning that if you have a flop of an interview your grade will not suffer. If you seriously engage with the class discussion and assignments and hand your work in on time you will do well. I expect all students to participate in class discussion – if this is an issue for you please let me know right away. Please speak with me if at any point you are concerned about your performance in the class.

Class Participation (including attendance, preparation, timeliness, and engagement): 30%
Interviews and Accompanying Assignments: 70%

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Interview Part 1</td>
<td>9-12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Design Draft</td>
<td>9-17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Design Final, with Legal Release and Explanation</td>
<td>9-26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Interview Part 2 with Field Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recording to Evaluate for Audio Quality</td>
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<td>Peer Review 1</td>
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<td>Conduct Interview 3</td>
<td>10-22</td>
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<td>Transcript and Index</td>
<td>10-24</td>
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<td>Conduct Interview 4</td>
<td>11-7</td>
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<td>Deadline to Submit 1st Interview for Feedback</td>
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<td>Archiving Plan</td>
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<td>Peer Reviews 2 and 3</td>
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<td>Conduct Interview 5</td>
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<td>Deadline to Submit 2nd Interview for Feedback</td>
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<td>Revised Project Design</td>
<td>12-5</td>
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<td>Final Project</td>
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<td>Reflective Essay</td>
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September 5  
**Nuts and Bolts: Audio Recording**  
**Interview Strategies: Introduction to Oral History**  
Introduction to course and classmates; syllabus review; planning for peer interviews. Audio recorder training.

Assignment: Before our next class, record a 1.5-2 hour first session of a life history interview with a peer from the class, and allow them to interview you. Several of our readings for next week are about interviewing – you may read these before or after your peer interview – your choice. You do NOT have to hand in this interview unless you want it to be one of the two you submit for instructor feedback.

**NOTE:** This first session will include a basic introduction to audio recording. Please bring your full recording kit to this first class session, including batteries and headphones.

September 12  
**Nuts and Bolts: Project Design**  
Discussion of peer interviews; project design. Audio recording trouble-shooting.

Readings:


**Optional:**

Assignment: Working with your assigned partner group or thinking about your thesis or capstone, create a draft project design for your semester’s work. In this project design, you will need to balance the needs of your partner group or the end goals of your research with the requirements of the course. You should submit a complete draft by Sept 17. We will discuss the drafts in class on the 19th and final drafts are due Sept. 26. Please include the following information and documents as a single word document.

- Project Title
- Partner Group (if applicable)
- Project Goal(s) – Why are you doing this project?
- Who will you interview and why?
- What kind of research will you do to prepare? Be specific.
- How will you approach interviewees and explain the project to them? Include invitation materials.
- What will you ask about in the interviews? (This is your interview guide.)
- What are the final products of the project? (Archive? Edited audio? Transcripts? Abstracts? Indexes?) Why did you choose these final products?
- What will you give back to narrators? Project partners? The community in which you’re working?
- Legal release and explanation (note that this need not be a part of the first draft)

September 19

*Power: Legal and Ethical Issues*

Discussion of project designs; field notes; interviewing protocols. IRB.

Readings:


Optional:


Assignment: Create a legal release for your project, with a short preface explaining why you structured it as you did or, if it came from your partner, a critical analysis of it. Due with project design Sept. 26.

Assignment: Schedule and record a second session of your peer interview. Have them sign a consent form (to be distributed in class). Take field notes, submit them via Canvas assignments, and come prepared to share an excerpt from them in class. Due by Sept. 26. NOTE: You do NOT have to hand in this interview unless you want it to be one of the two you submit for instructor feedback.

September 26
Nuts and Bolts: Transcribing and Indexing
Interviewing Strategies: Self-Care
Discussion of peer interviews; workshop on transcribing and indexing; self-care for oral historians.

Readings:

Transcribing and Indexing:


Self-Care:


NOTE: We will be using InqScribe transcription software. Please bring headphones and a laptop to class with this software installed and the audio from your first interview uploaded.

Assignment: Bring in a recording you would like to have evaluated for audio quality on October 3. Prepare to play a short (no more than 1-2 minutes) clip for the class. If you are worried about your audio quality, I suggest you also bring in your kits, so we can troubleshoot.

Assignment: For October 17, listen to another student’s two session peer interview. Share written feedback directly with your peer AND submit it to Amy via Canvas. You may comment on your partner’s interviewing techniques and audio quality as well as your own reactions to the interview. I suggest being detailed, and including at least some feedback related to specific moments in the interview, noting time codes, and also including some more general feedback.

Assignment: Schedule and record an interview by October 22. By October 24, index this entire interview and transcribe at least five double spaced pages of it. Introduce your transcription with a paragraph describing your approach to transcribing, citing the course readings, and annotate it to show places where you made important choices about how to transcribe.

October 3
Nuts and Bolts: Audio Recording Troubleshooting
Sharing and discussion of audio recordings; fine-tuning our recording skills.

Reading/Listening:


NO CLASS OCTOBER 10 – ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING

October 17
Power: Doing and Teaching Oral History from an Anti-Oppression Standpoint
Decolonizing Oral History
OHA debrief. Discussion of peer reviews. Workshop on anti-oppression approach to oral history; oral history and the work of decolonization.
Readings:

Espinosa, Fernanda and Amy Starecheski, interviewing Maria Cotera and Shane Bernardo. “What are the Roots of Your Radical Oral History Practice?” in Radical Roots of Public History, Denise Meringolo, ed. (manuscript under review, Amherst Press)


Additional Resources:
http://aorta.coop/resources/

Assignment: Schedule, prepare for, and conduct an interview by November 7.

October 24
Archiving: Digital Archiving
What is metadata? What are the archiving best practices for oral history, and how can we plan to meet them?
Guest: Dr. Kimberly Springer, Curator, Columbia Center for Oral History Archives

Readings:


Assignment: Create an archiving plan for your thesis, capstone or fieldwork project. Reach out to potential repositories. Describe if, where and when the interviews will be archived, what other documentation will accompany them, and why you have made the (admittedly tentative) decisions you have. You should also include a metadata collection plan. This could look like a table or spreadsheet, and should indicate what kind of metadata you will collect and how it will be organized. Include the metadata for interviews you have already conducted. If you are planning to archive with the Columbia Center for Oral History Archives, you can just use all of their forms. Due Nov. 7.

October 31
Nuts and Bolts: Transcribing, Indexing and Archiving: OHMS Workshop with Doug Boyd

Readings:


Assignment: Listen to and comment on two of your peers’ interviews. What do you notice about their styles? What does listening to others teach you about your own style? Come prepared to share at least one important moment from your listening. Share written feedback directly with your peer AND submit it to Amy via Canvas. Due Nov. 14.

November 7
Nuts and Bolts: Sustaining Our Work: Fundraising and Developing Support for Oral History Interviewing Strategies: Balancing Research and Life History; Using Research in Interviews

Readings:

Sustaining Our Work:

Review successful oral history grant applications, filed in a folder in the readings section of Canvas. There are a lot here – look at them all, and read at least a few in depth. PLEASE DO NOT SHARE THESE BEYOND THE CLASS. I COMPILED THEM ONLY FOR THE USE OF CURRENT OHMA STUDENTS.
Review these successful oral history crowdfunding sites and an essay on crowdfunding:


Review applications for the Schlesinger Library Oral History Grant, the OHA Emerging Crises Research Grant, the Charlton Oral History Research Award, and Humanities New York.


**Research and the Life History:**


**Assignment:** By November 21, conduct one more interview for your project.

**November 14**

**Power: Becoming an Interviewer: The Oral History Relationship**

Sharing and discussion of peer reviews.

**Readings:**


Optional:


NO CLASS NOVEMBER 21 – THANKSGIVING BREAK

November 28

Nuts and Bolts: The Iterative Process of Project Development

Interviewing Strategies: The Embodied Interview

Revisiting our project designs; planning to complete the projects. Planning for thesis and capstone work; discussion of Spring semester. Discussion of embodiment and oral history.

Reading:

Project Development:


Embodiment:


Assignment: Revise your project design to reflect your work over the semester and your deliverables for your partner groups. Use track changes and comments and/or include a cover letter to explain how and why your plans have evolved since September. Due Dec. 5.
December 5

Oral History and Anthropology: Fieldwork and Ethnography of Oral History

Discussion of relationship between participant observation and interviewing and between anthropological life histories and oral histories. Discussion of anthropological approaches to the study of oral history as a social practice.

Readings:


Optional:


Assignment: Write a short (3-5 pp) essay reflecting on your development as an interviewer, the development of your project, and your plans for the Spring. Hand in with your Final Project. Due Dec. 13, 9AM.

By December 13, 9AM:

- Submit final projects to partner groups (if applicable) and to Amy. The content of your final project depends on your project design. You should be submitting everything you said you would produce for your project, including signed legal releases. You may want to use Dropbox if you’re submitting audio files – you could even share the same Dropbox folder with me and with your project partner. Please organize all of your materials, name your files in a coherent way, and include a cover sheet showing what is included.