

# **HIST 441: Oral History and Social Justice**

**Spring 2009 • Jackson Hall 107**

**11:00 am - 12:15 pm (Tuesday and Thursday)**

Professor: Dr. Daniel Kerr

Office: ROOP G8

Office Hours: Tu – Th 12:45 – 3:15 pm

E-mail: kerrdx@jmu.edu

Office Phone: 568-4673

## **Course Description**

In 1948 Alan Nevins established the first university sponsored oral history project at Columbia University, focusing his attention on white male elites. Since then the field has flourished and dramatically shifted attention towards documenting the experiences and perspectives of people who have largely been “hidden from history.” Not only have oral historians sought out the “voices from below,” they have also used interviews to document particular aspects of historical experience that have largely been left out of the written record (personal relations, domestic labor, family life, sexuality, etc.) The active relationship between oral historians and their sources has challenged the discipline of history’s orthodoxies about evidence and objectivity and has raised questions regarding the connection between memory, narrative and history. In participatory projects the interviewees themselves can become active historians as they offer their own interpretations of the past – a process that some argue democratizes the discipline of history. Furthermore, many practitioners of oral history have used their projects as an avenue of empowerment for social groups and individuals – emphasizing the value of the process of interviewing over the historical product. Throughout this course we will examine each of these themes in detail and also immerse ourselves in the nuts and bolts of oral history as students will conduct their own interviews.

## **Learning Objectives:**

Students who complete the course will have a solid understanding of the theoretical and methodological issues that are central to the field of oral history. They will be capable of working with Institutional Review Boards, know how to design consent and legal release forms, and understand the ethical complexities of working with human subjects. They will be able to design and conduct their own oral history projects from the planning process through the archiving of the interviews. Students will have the skills to be accomplished interviewers; they will understand the process of transcription; and they will be aware of the wide variety of ways through which this material can be presented to a larger public. In preparing their final presentation, students will also learn how to use basic digital audio editing tools.

## Requirements

### ***Classroom Participation: (25%)***

This course will be structured around student led discussions. Students will be expected to come to each class having read the material assigned for the day and prepared to analyze it. In class, we will first develop a complex understanding of the author's argument, then address the implications of this argument towards our larger understanding of history and the world around us, and finally evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of this argument. Informed participation can include summarizing core aspects of the argument, drawing attention to key passages in the text, asking for points of clarification, presenting questions and conclusions about the larger implications of the reading, and offering critiques of the author's argument. You may also choose to summarize or refocus the classroom discussion. Informed participation not only demands you speak, but that you actively listen to the issues that your classmates raise. Uninformed speaking coupled with an inability to listen to your classmates will be graded just as harshly as if you choose not to speak at all. Dr. Kerr reserves the right to randomly ask follow-up and probing questions to determine if students have done the reading. If you have problems speaking or listening in class, meet with Dr. Kerr as soon as possible to strategize about how you can effectively participate in discussions.

### **Course Assignments: (15%)**

Throughout the course of the semester there will be several assignments that students will be required to complete. Detailed descriptions of the assignments will be given to you over the course of the semester.

### **The Shenandoah Valley Oral History Project: (30%)**

In the Shenandoah Valley Oral History Project students will plan, individually conduct and transcribe **two hours of interviews with at least two people** from marginalized communities. Prior to conducting the interviews, students will prepare and submit an interview guide for approval. An average typist should expect to spend approximately eight hours transcribing a one-hour interview. The transcriptions will each range between fifteen and twenty pages in length. Students will also maintain and turn in a background journal with their final materials. Transcripts will be delivered to the interviewees, and when possible students should obtain release forms. Assuming the interviews are of acceptable quality, the recordings, transcripts, background journals, interview guides, field notes, photographs and release forms will be deposited in the Special Collections Department of Carrier Library. The transcripts will be uploaded to the course Blackboard discussion page so other students can use the materials for their final projects. When release forms allow, recordings will be posted on the public history server. More detailed guidelines will be presented throughout the semester.

### **Class Presentation: (10%)**

Students will prepare a powerpoint presentation for the class based on their interviews. The presentations should include original recordings, photographs, an in-depth overview of the content of the interviews, and a discussion of the overall dynamics of the relationships established between the narrators and the interviewers.

### **Final Project: (20%)**

Students will have a choice between different types of final projects. Each of the projects can draw upon the transcripts, photographs and actual recordings produced by any of the course's participants or from the SVOHP website. (1) Students write a ten to twelve page final paper. These papers can either address the substance of the interviews or address methodological issues related to the interview process. The papers must draw upon themes that are discussed in the course readings. (2) Students prepare a 29 minute broadcast quality radio documentary that could potentially be aired on WXJM-FM or WMRA-FM. The documentary must include clips from the recorded interviews of at least four individuals, interpretive narration, and appropriate background sounds and/or music unless permission is granted otherwise. (3) Submit a proposal and get approval for an alternative final project – such as a play, website, audio walking tour, exhibit design, etc.

### **Grading Policy**

(A) means genuinely outstanding, mastery of the subject, near flawless exposition, and incisive interpretation. (B) means well above average achievements in mastery of the subject, exposition, and interpretation throughout the course. (C) means comprehension of the basic concepts, competent exposition, and interpretation. The grade of C indicates that the student has learned the subject at an appropriate university level. (D) means unsatisfactory but still barely passing. (F) means failure. These grades are earned by the student and reflect student performance.

### **Plagiarism and the Honor Code**

Academic integrity is part of the James Madison University Honor Code. This means students may not give or receive help during examinations. A student must do all the work on a paper bearing his/her name. JMU defines plagiarism as “the deliberate copying, writing or presenting as one's own the information, ideas or phrasing of another person without proper acknowledgment of the true source.” In the following cases, such a misleading impression is given:

1. Failure to give credit in a footnote for ideas, statements of fact, or conclusions derived from another writer.
2. Failure to use quotation marks when quoting directly from another writer, whether an entire sentence or only a phrase is quoted. In addition, all quotations must always be footnoted.
3. Close and extended paraphrase of another writer even if credit is given in a footnote.

4. Footnoting directly to a source that is quoted or cited by another author but that has not been examined by the writer of the paper, unless proper credit is given in a footnote. Plagiarism need not be deliberate; it may be committed unintentionally through carelessness or ignorance. Since accidental plagiarism in a paper is indistinguishable from deliberate dishonesty, a student must be alert to avoid the sort of carelessness or ignorance that may leave him or her open to a charge of having plagiarized another's work. Students who are suspected of violating the Honor Code will receive a failing grade and be brought before the Honor Board. For further information see: <http://www.jmu.edu/honor/>

### **Required Readings, Blackboard and Course Webpage**

#### ***Blackboard***

This course will have a Blackboard Page. The page will include a discussion board, access to the supplementary readings and folders to submit your review essays. Instructions for logging on are located at: <https://blackboard.jmu.edu>

#### ***Available at the Bookstore***

Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Second Edition

Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, Second Edition

Hamilton and Shopes, *Oral History and Public Memories*

#### ***Course Webpage***

<http://people.jmu.edu/kerrdx/>

### **Registration and First-Week Attendance Policy**

#### ***JMU Course Registration Policy***

Students are responsible for registering for classes and for verifying their class schedules on e-campus. Late course additions will not be permitted. The deadline for adding and dropping a fall semester class without instructor and academic unit head signature is Tuesday, January 20, 2009. Between Wednesday, January 21, 2009 and Thursday, January 29, 2009, instructor and academic unit head signatures will be required to add a class for Spring Semester 2009.

#### ***College of Arts and Letters First-Week Attendance Policy***

At the instructor's discretion, any student registered for a class in the College of Arts and Letters who does not attend the first two (2) scheduled meetings of the class (or does not attend the first scheduled meeting of a class that meets once a week) may be administratively dropped from the class. Students dropped for non-attendance will be notified via e-mail by the Associate Dean of the College. Students who fail to attend the

first two meetings of a class for which they are registered but who do not receive an e-mail notification have not been administratively dropped by their instructor. Unless those students drop the course on their own, they will receive a grade at the end of the semester. All students are responsible for verifying the accuracy of their schedules and changes made in their schedule via e-mail and through the web.

**Please Note:** This class will be conducted under the aegis of the AAUP 1940 statement of Academic Freedom, the essence and spirit of which is affirmed in the current JMU Faculty Handbook. The syllabus is subject to amendment or change at the discretion of the professor.

### Course Plot

*Tuesday, January 13:* Introduction

#### **Part I: What Is Oral History?**

*Thursday, January 15:* *SVOHP Project: Define Marginalized Groups to Interview*

Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History*, Chapters 1 & 2.

*Tuesday, January 20:*

Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, Chapters 2 & 3  
Portelli, “Research as an Experiment in Equality” (BB)

*Thursday, January 22:*

Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, Chapter 4  
Stacey, “Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?” (BB)  
Patai, “US Academics and Third World Women” (BB)

*Tuesday, January 27:* *SVOHP Project: Submit Strategic Plan for Identifying Narrators*

Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History*, Chapters 3 & 4, Appendix A  
Read C. Miller, Patterson, and Weaver Interview Guides (SVOHP)

#### **Part II: The Interview**

*Thursday, January 29:* *Assignment: Evaluate Crabtree Interview of Lefa Weaver*

<http://publichistory.jmu.edu/SVOHP/Interviews.htm#W>

*Tuesday, February 3:* *Assignment: Complete JMU IRB Module*

Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History*, Chapter 5, Appendices B, C, D, F

CHOHP Release Forms (course website)  
Cary Nelson, "Can E.T. Phone Home?" (BB)

*Thursday, February 5: Assignment: Map Your Social Position*

Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History*, Chapter 6

*Tuesday, February 10: Assignment: Complete One Hour Interview with Classmate*

Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, Chapters 10,12,13,16 & 25

### **Part III: Interpretation and Memory**

*Thursday, February 12: SVOHP Project: Submit Interview Guides*

Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, Chapters 7,17,18 & 19

*Tuesday, February 17: **Student Assessment Day – No Class***

*Thursday, February 19: Assignment: Evaluate Your Interview with Classmate*

Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, Chapters 22,23 & 24

*Tuesday, February 24:*

Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History*, Chapters 10 & 11.

### **Part IV: Transcribing and Editing Interviews**

*Thursday, February 26: Assignment: Post a Response to the H-Oral Transcription Debate*

Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, Chapter 27  
H-Oral Transcription Debate

*Tuesday, March 3: Assignment: Download and Familiarize Oneself with Audacity*

Read Audacity Manual: <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/manual-1.2/>

*Thursday, March 5: Assignment: Prepare Clips from Classmate Interview*

Listen to Clips and Discuss Selection Criteria

### **Spring Break: (March 9 - 13)**

*Tuesday, March 17:*

Hamilton and Shopes, *Oral History and Public Memory*, Chapters 1,2 & 3

**Part V: Uses of Oral History**

*Thursday, March 19:*

Hamilton and Shopes, *Oral History and Public Memory*, Chapters 4, 5 & 6

*Tuesday, March 24: SVOHP Project: Submit Interview I Materials*

Hamilton and Shopes, *Oral History and Public Memory*, Chapters 7,8 & 9

*Thursday, March 26: Assignment: Analyze Radio Diaries Mexico '68*

<http://www.radiodiaries.org/>

**Class Does Not Meet**

*Tuesday, March 31:*

Hamilton and Shopes, *Oral History and Public Memory*, Chapters 10 & 11

*Thursday, April 2:*

Hamilton and Shopes, *Oral History and Public Memory*, Chapters 13 & 14

*Tuesday, April 7: Final Project: Submit Proposal for Your Final Project*

Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, Chapters 28, 29, 32 & 33.

*Thursday, April 9:*

Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, Chapters 38,39,40 & 41

*Tuesday, April 14: SVOHP Project: Submit Remaining Interview Materials*

Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, Chapter 37

Hamilton and Shopes, *Oral History and Public Memory*, Chapter 12

Riordon, "Keep Asking Questions" (BB)

*Thursday, April 16: Student Presentations*

*Tuesday, April 21: Student Presentations*

*Thursday, April 23: Student Presentations*

*Tuesday, April 28: Student Presentations*

*Thursday, April 30: Student Presentations*

Tuesday, May 5th, 1:00- 3:00 pm: Submit Final projects in Dr. Kerr's office