CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA  
School of Library and Information Science  
CLSC 561 Oral History  
Spring 2009  
Thursday, 4:30pm – 7:00pm; Library of Congress  
Instructor: Dr. Mary Edsall Choquette  
Office: 247 Marist Hall  
edsall@cua.edu; office phone: 202-319-6277; cell: 215-880-0119  
Office Hours: Tuesday 1:00pm – 3:00pm  
Call or email for an appointment—email questions also welcome

SYLLABUS  
SUBJECT TO REVISION

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course provides an introduction to oral history as a primary source for historical research and documentary writing. Interviewing techniques, oral history program planning, and the topics of standards and principles involved in the creation, collection, evaluation, and organization of oral history projects and programs are included. The course training extends to practical aspects of interviewing and maintaining collections, physically and virtually. The focus of the coursework is on the “doing” of oral history.

The Oral History course experience is designed to introduce students to the uses of oral history programs in cultural heritage information management, specifically within libraries and archives. Through class lectures, guest lectures, readings, writing assignments, in-class performance and presentation of published interviews, and site visits to institutions that house oral history collections and administer oral history programs, the course will provide students with a broad understanding of the functionality, productivity, and visibility (physical and virtual) of oral history programs.

The course will cover issues related to oral history program management including, but not limited to: collection development and management, curatorial responsibilities; public programs; physical, intellectual, and virtual access to information therein; and institutional interaction with oral history research resources held and managed by libraries, archives, and other informational entities. The similarities and differences among the institutions and their relationship to the larger world of library, archival, and information science repositories will be addressed and discussed. Through verbal and written communication assignments, students will demonstrate their understanding of these institutions as related to the core principles of library and information science.

Oral history interviewing is a process whereby researchers seek to create historical evidence and historically memorable recollections. Oral histories provide unique information that can serve as the primary or ancillary record of any specific event. Oral historians are seekers on a journey toward locating meaningful historical phenomena. Oral history is about telling, listening to, and recording stories.
INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS
This course uses a variety of instructional methods and activities:

- Lecture and discussion based on the readings. The required texts provide an introduction to the process and products of doing oral history.
- Experiential learning--individual critical analysis presentation and interpretative performance of a published oral history interview.
- Hands-on exercises for skills development.
- A team project, including student presentation and critique.
- Collaborative learning - students will learn from each other by sharing experiences, knowledge and skills.
- Feedback to and from the instructor. In-class and online feedback is an integral part of the learning and assessment process for both the student and the instructor.

These course activities will be conducted face-to-face (in class) and online (using Blackboard 8). Students are expected to be online frequently. If you do not have daily access to the Internet, please contact the instructor before the first class meeting.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES
By the end of the semester students will:

1. Develop an understanding of the value and significance of oral history to understanding collective cultural memory.
2. Gain an understanding of the major issues and tasks involved in developing oral history programs specifically in libraries and archives.
3. Explore technologies employed currently and historically in oral history creation.
4. Master the techniques required to plan and implement an oral history project.
5. Learn and employ new technological skills used in curating an online oral history exhibition.
6. Enhance critical thinking skills through experiential and analytical writing exercises and assignments.
7. Develop professional communication skills and behaviors through audience participation and performed in-class readings.

PREREQUISITE
There is no prerequisite for this course.

REQUIRED SOURCES
There are two required text for this course, which can be purchased at the CUA Bookstore or online through Amazon or Barnes & Noble.: 


*Blackboard 8 Course Management System:* all students must be trained and able to use the Blackboard online course management system. This is the primary platform for communication, including announcements, course information and documents. Also, students will use the discussion board on Blackboard in planning the exhibition. Students are expected to monitor Blackboard frequently. Updates, administrative information and reminders are frequently posted to Blackboard. Online participation is expected as part of the course. Training on Blackboard is available through the SLIS Computer Center.

**STYLE MANUAL**
This is an accepted style manual for use in research in the arts and humanities. Students are not required to purchase this volume, but must adhere to these guidelines in preparing all written assignments. Additionally, all written assignments must contain a title page as outlined in the manual; must have a professional appearance and not be handwritten; and must be paginated. Any written assignment of more than one page must be securely fastened together with a staple or other metal or plastic paper fastener.

**ADDITIONAL READINGS**
Although there are no other assigned readings, students are encouraged to investigate sources on their own and bring additional sources and found ideas into class discussions. The Ritchie text contains an extensive bibliography of related readings.
*(See Appendix 1.)*

**INSTITUTIONAL WEB SITES**
Students are expected to visit the web sites of the host institutions we will be visiting in advance of each site visit scheduled during the semester. Other web sites of possible interest, including those of local DC institutions, as well as other related sites in the United States are listed as well. Students are encouraged (but not required) to visit as many web sites as possible to develop a comparing/contrasting viewpoint for discussion purposes. The Ritchie text contains an extensive listing of related web sites.
*(See Appendix 2.)*

**ASSIGNMENTS**
Class Participation: 25%
Student In-Class Interview Performance/Presentation: 10%
Oral History Program Web Site Analysis: 15%
The Interview Project: 40%
The SLIS Oral History Program Exhibition 10%
STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND IN-CLASS PRESENTATIONS

Class Participation and Protocol (25%)

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory, in keeping with university policy. Participation is primary to the context of this course.

Late work: Late work will not be accepted except by prior arrangement.

Arrive on time: Chronic lateness can negatively affect class participation grades.

Behave respectfully: Students are expected to behave respectfully while in class. Participation grades will reflect a student’s maturity level and professionalism, and whether the student actively participates in class discussions.

No phone calls during class: Turn off or silence cell phones and pagers. Students leaving the room for calls are not allowed to return to that class session. This especially important to adhere to when we will be visiting other institutions.

No grade discussions in class: Instructor will not discuss grades in class. Please consult the syllabus before asking questions about the course requirements.

Student Performance/Presentation of Interview Analysis (10%)

Students will individually present an analysis of an interview from the Terkel book, giving an overview and evaluation of the interview content and structure and performing parts of the interview to elucidate comments. The class will subsequently evaluate the quality of the presentation and reading, and conversely, the quality of the listening, and identify key historical phenomena represented in each performed interview. Students will present on one of the following dates: January 29; February 5; February 12. (See Appendix 3 for individual student assignment dates and topics.)

WRITTEN AND PRODUCED WORK PRODUCTS

Oral History Program Web Site Analysis (15%) Due Date: February 19

Each student will locate an oral history program affiliated with a library or archives and will evaluate that program as evidenced through the program’s web site. Evaluations will include a program description using functionality, productivity and visibility as criteria. Write a brief paper (5-7 pages) comparing and contrasting the mission, program, holdings, and services, including audio and visual exhibitions of the oral history program based solely on information from their web presence. Please address the following questions:

1) What is your impression of the purpose and mission of the program??

2) Who do you think is the primary clientele?

3) What useful information did you find at the website?

4) What did you expect to find that was not there?
5) How would you evaluate the website in terms of content, services offered, ease of use, and navigation?

The Interview Project (40%)

SLIS Alumni Interview Project: Final Due Date: April 30.

Each student will identify and work with a SLIS alumni (The Instructor working with the CUA Alumni Office will assist in locating SLIS alumni; will provide lists of names and contacts) to plan and implement an individual interview project to contribute to the SLIS Oral History Program and present to the class. (See Appendix 4.)

Each project will require the following components to be submitted to fulfill the assignment:

I. Project Proposal

Locate the subject for the interview and draft a description of the project, identifying the interviewee, including a rationale for the interviewee selection, and outlining a schedule for completion of the interview. Provide evidence of the interviewee’s willingness and ability to complete the interview on schedule.

II. Annotated Bibliography

Prepare an annotated list of source works related to the subject of the oral history. These include any available biographical sources: resumes; curriculum vitae; published biographical or autobiographical works; written texts by or about the subject; and sources in other media, such as documentary or commercial recordings on audiotape, videotape, CD, DVD, or other sources in any medium that represent the life and/or work of the subject.

III. Environmental Design

Provide a description of the environment in which the oral history interview(s) will take place. Description can be written but can also include photographs or other documents that describe the environment. Provide background on how the site was selected and rationale on why this is the best location for the interview(s).

IV. Preliminary Phone Interview Abstract

As required, conduct a preliminary phone interview with the subject: describing the scope of the project; asking permission to interview him (her) including mention of the permission form to be signed; detailing where and when the interview will take place; requesting background materials on the subject; and any other pertinent information. The abstract should document and summarize this conversation; it should not be a full transcription of the phone call.
V. Permission Form

Submit a written copy of the permission form to be used in the project. This will be the standard form used by the CUA Archives and adapted specifically for this SLIS Oral History Program.

VI. Technology Description

List the type(s) of recording equipment used in the project: audio or video equipment and provide written justification for why this equipment is being used in this specific project—(i.e.—why is the interview being audio-taped; videotaped; why using a wireless microphone, etc.)

VII. The Interview Documents

Submit the final products resulting from the interview project:
1. All tapes and other recorded media
2. A full transcription of the interview
3. An edited transcription of the interview

VIII. Follow-up Correspondence

Submit a copy of the correspondence sent to the interviewee thanking him/her for their participation in the project.

IX. Project Evaluation

Provide a brief statement evaluating the project, including information on what worked and did not work and any changes you would make in conducting a future interview. Describe the significance of the project to your LIS education.

SLIS Oral History Program Exhibition Project: (10%)
SLIS Oral History Program Exhibition Design Due Date: TBA
Using the documents and structure already in place for the SLIS Alumni Oral History Program, the class will collectively design an exhibition model for the SLIS Oral History Program. The purpose is to develop a programmatic mechanism for exhibiting SLIS graduates’ stories collected through the SLIS Oral History Program on a continual basis. Students will collaboratively design an exhibition drawing from interviews taken by current class members. Utilizing new and innovative technologies, students will curate the exhibit to be displayed on the wide screen monitors in the SLIS Information Commons. The exhibition will culminate with an opening event planned and run by the class collectively. All resultant materials will be placed in the CUA Archives, where a permanent repository (physical and virtual) for the collection there will be established.
Note: Because of the amount of collaborative time needed to develop the SLIS Alumni Oral History Program Exhibition component, and the individual time required to complete all facets of the individual SLIS Alumni Interview Projects, certain class periods will be devoted to unsupervised group work on the exhibition and certain class periods will be canceled to allow students to work on their SLIS Alumni Interview Projects.

DUE DATES
Thursday, January 29; February 5; February 12; (as assigned): In-class Performance/Presentation of Interview Analysis.
Thursday, February 19: Oral History Program Web Site Analysis—to submit via digital drop box and present analyses in class.
Thursday, March 12: SLIS Alumni Interview Project, Parts I-VI—to submit via digital drop box and present in class for discussion and feedback.
Thursday, April 2: SLIS Oral History Program Exhibition Design—designated leader to submit design via digital drop box and entire class will present the plan in class.
Thursday, April 30: (Assigned alphabetically): SLIS Alumni Interview Project in-class presentations.
Thursday, April 30: SLIS Alumni Interview Projects—complete package of materials to submit via digital drop box.
TBA: Opening event for SLIS Alumni Interview Program exhibition, Information Commons.

All due dates are final; no exceptions. This is a labor intensive course, meaning students will be given class time for project work but also are expected to work outside of each class to prepare for class and complete assignments on time.

ASSESSMENT
Course grade will be based on the percentages listed above using an A-F scale.

University grades:
The University grading system is available at
http://policies.cua.edu/academicundergrad//gradesfull.cfm#II for undergraduates and
http://policies.cua.edu/academicgrad//gradesfull.cfm#III for graduate students.
Reports of grades in courses are available at the end of each term on

ADA ACCOMMODATION
Students with disabilities requiring accommodation under federal regulations must present a written accommodation request to the instructor before the first class meeting. It is strongly recommended that the student contact the Office of Disability Support Services, Suite 207, Pryzbyla Center (202-319-5211; email: cua-disabilityservices@cua.edu). This is the University office responsible for disability accommodation and services, and its staff can answer questions about services and
requirements regarding documentation. Special accommodations or other arrangements cannot be made without documentation approved by this office.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY**

Academic honesty is expected of all CUA students. Faculty are required to initiate the imposition of sanctions when they find violations of academic honesty, such as plagiarism, improper use of a student’s own work, cheating, and fabrication.

The following sanctions are presented in the University procedures related to Student Academic Dishonesty (from [http://policies.cua.edu/academicundergrad/integrityprocedures.cfm](http://policies.cua.edu/academicundergrad/integrityprocedures.cfm)): “The presumed sanction for undergraduate students for academic dishonesty will be failure for the course. There may be circumstances, however, where, perhaps because of an undergraduate student’s past record, a more serious sanction, such as suspension or expulsion, would be appropriate. In the context of graduate studies, the expectations for academic honesty are greater, and therefore the presumed sanction for dishonesty is likely to be more severe, e.g., expulsion. ...In the more unusual case, mitigating circumstances may exist that would warrant a lesser sanction than the presumed sanction.”

Please review the complete texts of the University policy and procedures regarding Student Academic Dishonesty, including requirements for appeals, at [http://policies.cua.edu/academicundergrad/integrity.cfm](http://policies.cua.edu/academicundergrad/integrity.cfm) and [http://policies.cua.edu/academicundergrad/integrity.cfm](http://policies.cua.edu/academicundergrad/integrity.cfm).

**ADDITIONAL CAMPUS RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS**

Student Services: [http://www.cua.edu/centers/students.cfm](http://www.cua.edu/centers/students.cfm)
University Libraries: [http://libraries.cua.edu/welcome.html](http://libraries.cua.edu/welcome.html)
Writing Center: [http://english.cua.edu/wc3/](http://english.cua.edu/wc3/)
Counseling Center: [http://counseling.cua.edu/](http://counseling.cua.edu/)
SCHEDULE OF CLASSES
(Subject to Revision)


Thursday, January 22: ***CLASS CANCELED—FACULTY CONFERENCE*** In lieu of this class students are expected to attend the SLIS Research Symposium, “Bridging the Spectrum: Scholarship & Practice in Library and Information Science,” Friday, January 30, SLIS Information Commons.

Studs Terkel Interview Performance/Presentation topics due—submit via digital drop box.


Thursday, February 12: Topic: “Oral History Programs in Libraries and Archives.” Read: Ritchie, chapters 2 & 6 for discussion. Class meets in the CUA Archives for site visit and presentations by CUA Archives staff: Maria Mazzenga and staff. Student performance/presentations of selected Terkel interviews.

Thursday, February 19: Topic: “Conducting and Recording Interviews.” Read: Ritchie, chapters 3 & 5 and Appendix 2 for discussion. Student performance/presentations of selected Terkel interviews.

All Oral History Program Web Site Analyses due—submit via digital drop box.


Thursday, March 5: ***NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK***

Thursday, March 12: Topic: “Oral History in Education and Learning.” Read: Ritchie, chapter 7 for discussion. SLIS Alumni Interview Project, Parts I-VI presented in class for discussion and peer review.

SLIS Alumni Interview Project, Parts I-VI due--submit via digital drop box.

Thursday, March 19: Unsupervised class—students meet online using the Blackboard Discussion Board to draft the SLIS Oral History Program Exhibition Design.


Thursday, April 9: ***CLASS CANCELED—EASTER BREAK***

Thursday, April 16: SLIS Career Day—all students are expected to attend this event at 5:30 pm in the SLIS Information Commons.

Thursday, April 23: Topic: “Oral History and Community.” Class meets at 4:00 pm at United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Archives and Collections, 100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW, Washington, DC for site visit and presentation by Oral History staff: Stephanie Blyskal. Review the museum’s web site: http://www.ushmm.org/research/collections/oralhistory/ and publication: Oral History Interview Guidelines (available online and a print copy will be distributed in class.)

Thursday, April 30: SLIS Alumni Student Interview Project in-class presentations.
All SLIS Alumni Students Projects Due—complete package of materials to submit via digital drop box.

Date TBA: Opening event for the SLIS Alumni Oral History Program Exhibition; SLIS Information Commons; normal class time.
APPENDIX 1
RESEARCH RESOURCES

RELATED READINGS


**RELATED PERIODICALS**

*Journal of American History.*

*Oral History Association Newsletter.* Published by the Oral History Association.

APPENDIX 2

ORAL HISTORY URLs
Developed by Erin McKinney, Research Assistant and Mary Edsall Choquette

The following list includes a cross section of oral history programs and projects including large institutional oral history projects, corporate oral history projects, oral history programs from academic institutions such as colleges and universities, and other cultural heritage institutions and associations, such as smaller historical societies.

Columbia University Oral History Research Office
http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/oral/
Sample Project: Notable New Yorkers

Library of Congress and the American Folklife Center
http://www.loc.gov (Main LC homepage)
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html (American Memory collections)
http://www.loc.gov/folklife/ (Folklife Center homepage)
http://storycorps.net/ (Story Corps homepage)
http://www.loc.gov/vets/ (Veteran’s History Project)

Oral History Association
http://omega.dickinson.edu/organizations/oha/about.html

The Smithsonian Institution
http://www.si.edu (Smithsonian Institution homepage)
http://siarchives.si.edu/research/oralvidhistory_intro.html (Smithsonian Archives guide to institutional and historical oral and video history collections)

National Archives
http://www.archives.gov/ (NARA homepage)
http://www.archives.gov/legislative/research/special-collections/oral-history/ (Oral histories at the NARA Center for Legislative Archives)
http://www.archives.gov/legislative/research/special-collections/oral-history/senate-program/about-the-program.html (NARA Senate Oral History Program)

New York Historical Society
https://www.nyhistory.org/web/ (NYHS homepage)

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
http://www.ushmm.org/ (Holocaust Memorial Museum homepage)
http://www.ushmm.org/research/collections/oralhistory/ (Oral History collection)

http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/1968/ (a collaborative project between the South Kingstown High School in Rhode Island and Brown University)

National Library of Australia

UC Berkeley Regional Oral History Office
http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/

Carnegie Corporation Oral History Project

The Center for Studies in Oral Tradition
http://www.oralltradition.org/

In the First Person: An Index to Letters, Diaries, Oral Histories and Personal Narratives
http://www.inthefirstperson.com/firp/index.shtml

Milman Parry Collection, Harvard University
http://www.chs.harvard.edu/mpc/ (focus on Southern Slavic song)

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
http://www.dartmouth.edu/~speccoll/Collections/Archives/OralHistory.shtml

The Oral Tradition Journal Online
http://journal.oraltradition.org/

StoryCorps Griot
http://www.storycorps.net/griot/

History Matters
http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/

Oral History Listserv
http://www.h-net.org/~oralhist/

The Legacy Oral History Program, San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum
http://www.sfpalm.org/programs/legacy.htm
## APPENDIX 3

**TERKEL INTERVIEW PERFORMANCE/PRESENTATION ASSIGNMENTS**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Presentation Date</th>
<th>Interview Topic</th>
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Please note: presentation schedule will be assigned at the discretion of the instructor. Names of the interview topics from the Terkel book must be submitted to the instructor no later than January 22.
SLIS ALUMNI INTERVIEW PROJECT PRESENTATION ASSIGNMENTS

Name................................................Presentation Date

Students will submit the name of the project interviewee on the March 12, when the project Parts I-VI are due and presented in class.