BCN 589/HIS 589  
Doing Visual History  
Mondays 3:30-6:20  
Carmichael 002

(3:3)  
No prerequisites/corequisites

This course is intended as an elective for Broadcasting & Cinema students interested in aspects of documentary production and visual history. It is also intended for advanced undergraduates in History or related disciplines or for students in the MA program in History.

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Office hours: 10:00-12:00 Mondays, or by appointment.

Catalog Description: This course explores the interstices of history, documentary production, and personal narratives.

Student Learning Outcomes: Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Define what oral history is.
2. Recognize the variety of ways in which personal narratives are used in documentary history work.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship of personal narratives within the various genres of documentary filmmaking.
4. Discuss the legal issues and ethical considerations surrounding the collection of personal narratives, as well as the role of memory and recall in personal testimony.
5. Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of various interviewing techniques.
6. Demonstrate that they can conduct both an oral history and video history interview.
7. Demonstrate that they can do a nonlinear edit of oral/visual recordings.

Teaching Methods and Assignments for Achieving Learning Outcomes:

Study of written materials (SLO # 1, 2, 3, and 4); in-class discussions (SLO # 1, 2, 3, and 4); essays (SLO # 1, 2, 3, and 4); completion of oral/video history interviews (SLO # 5); completion of menu-driven DVD from raw interviews (SLO # 6); completion of final project (SLO # 2 and 3).

Grading and Evaluation (Undergraduates):

- Completion of Oral History Interview  10%
- Completion of Two Video Interviews  20%
- Production of Menu-Driven DVD from Raw Interviews  15%
- Short essays on Working and Let Us Now Praise Famous Men  15%
Class Participation 15%
Final Paper 25%

Grading and Evaluation (Graduate Students):
Completion of Two Oral History Interviews 10%
Completion of Three Video Interviews 15%
Production of Menu-Driven DVD from Raw Interviews 15%
Short essays on Working and Let Us Now Praise Famous Men 15%
Class Participation 10%
Final Paper 25%
Research paper on oral/visual history w/oral presentation 10%

Required Texts/Readings:
Agee, James and Walker Evans, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, (Houghton Mifflin, 1988)


Studs Terkel, Working (New Press, 1997)

Though some of these books are older than five years, all are standard works in the field.

Additional required course readings are included on the course schedule and are available through blackboard.

Topical Outline/Calendar:

August 20: Introduction

August 27: Oral History: Definition and Theory


September 10: The Oral History Interview: Conducting Audio and Video Recordings


Clips from documentary interviews
Discussion: video operations, the Sony PD 170 camera, Digital formats, time code, manual operations of the camera, tripod operations, focus, iris, zoom, white balance, viewfinder systems, operating the onboard menu system, manual vs. automatic audio levels, the lavalier mic, xlr cables, manual white balance, color temperature. Aesthetic issues (camera placement, vectors, headroom, leadroom, zoom shots, camera movements).

September 17: The Oral History Interview: Conducting Audio and Video Recordings

Readings: Doing Oral History, 57-63 and ch. 5; Sipe, “The Future of Oral History and Moving Images”

Discussion: Aspects to be covered: 3 point lighting, fresenel/open-faced lights, eye light, scrims, diffusion materials, placement of interviewer.

September 24: The Oral History Interview: Conducting Audio and Video Recordings

Readings: Slim and Thompson, “Ways of Listening”; Kikumura, “Family Life Histories”

The Art of Interviewing
Finding the subject
Narratives within interviews
The interview as an end product in and of itself
Practice interview techniques

October 1: The Oral History Interview: Conducting Audio and Video Recordings


Writing the questions
Doing the interview—it’s not a conversation.
Logistics—camera set-up time, tear down.
Explaining the purpose of the interview
Writing of treatments
Creative listening
Communication with the videographer
Filming objects, documents

October 8: Legal Matters and Ethical Considerations

Readings: Neuenschwander, Oral History and the Law; Blee, “Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics”; Doing Oral History, 75-78, 182-183, 215-221, Appendix 1, and Appendix 2; K’Meyer and Crothers, “If I See Some of
This in Writing, I’m Going to Shoot You.”

The Institutional Review Board. The IRB Certification Test. Consent forms.

October 22: Memory and Recall in Personal Narratives


Discussion: History from the ground up. A new view of history and the social sciences. Visual culture, the shift from the word. The power of images

October 29: Memory and Recall in Personal Narratives.

Discussion of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. The relationship of visual history and documentary filmmaking. Discussion about various documentary genres and their relationship with interviews. Documentary Clips

November 5: Preservation of Oral/Visual Narratives as Archival Data

Nonlinear Editing of Oral and Visual Recordings

Readings: Wilmsen, “For the Record: Editing and the Production of Meaning in Oral History”

Introduction to the Final Cut Pro Edit System. Digitization, logging, Transcribing

Readings: Doing Oral History, 64-74 and ch. 6; Wallot and Fortier, “Archival Science and Oral Sources”

The Shoah Foundation for Visual History. The Southern Oral History Program at UNC-Chapel Hill. The Library of Congress. Internet-based archives


The Final Cut Pro. Organization of material, timelines

November 19: DVD Production. In class demonstration by Tom Lipscomb

November 26: DVD Production. In class demonstration by Tom Lipscomb
December 3: Presentation of edits, in-progress projects

December 10 Student Presentations

Academic Honor Code:

Each student is required to sign the Academic Honor Policy on all major work submitted for the course. For additional information, see the UNCG Undergraduate and Graduate Bulletins.

Attendance Policy:

Since this class meets once a week, attendance at and participation in all class meetings is essential. Any unexcused absences will adversely affect a student’s grade.