

HIS 581-01: ORAL TRADITIONS AND ORAL HISTORY

Fall 2011, Thursdays, 3:30 - 6:20, 1213 MHRA Building

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Office Hours: 11 am to 12 noon, T & W, and by appointment

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Course Objectives: This course is an introduction to ‘orality’ – oral primary sources in and for history, the nature of those sources, and how they are to be gathered, analyzed, and interpreted for historical research. Hence this course is about historical methods and historical methodology, and is not restricted to any particular geographical area or time period. Students will be engaged in the very practical matters of research design and procedures, as well as the theoretical implications and issues raised when using oral primary sources of various kinds. Along the way, we will develop a greater awareness of and appreciation for the history of history itself.

We will also be examining literacy more critically. Why do we tend to believe what is written, even if it is speculation or hearsay? Why are we oftentimes ‘graphocentric’ – valuing written over oral information? Why would a society prefer to remain oral and reject literacy?

Student Learning Goals

At the completion of this course, students should be able to:

- § Identify different types of oral sources used in historical research and compare their relative strengths and weaknesses;
- § Demonstrate greater skepticism and improved skills in evaluating all historical sources, including written ones;
- § Explain the rules of historical evidence and why they are important.

Undergraduate Course Requirements:

8 short position papers (1 p. typewritten) based on course readings, to be used in class discussions and then handed in (together, worth 25% of the final grade); 6 short papers (2 pp. typewritten) on research exercises, to be presented in class and also handed in (together, worth 30% of the final grade); attendance, participation in discussions, and written summaries of graduate student presentations (worth 10% of the final grade); and an original analytical research essay based on the oral sources gathered during the semester, focusing on your research design, interview process, and evaluation of evidence, including an Appendix of properly documented interviewees (maximum 10 pp. of text, plus appendix, together worth 35% of the final grade).

Graduate Course Requirements:

8 short position papers (1 p. typewritten) based on course readings, to be used in class discussions and then handed in (together, worth 25% of the final grade); 6 short papers (2 pp. typewritten) on research exercises, to be presented in class and also handed in (together, worth 30% of the final grade); attendance, participation in discussions, and formal presentation to the class on a course reading (worth 10% of the final grade); and an original analytical research essay based on the oral sources gathered during the semester, focusing on your research design, interview process, and evaluation of evidence, including an Appendix of properly documented interviewees (maximum 20 pp. of text, plus appendix, together worth 35% of the final grade).