



Groundswell: Oral History for Social Change Six-Session Introductory Online Class Syllabus

Thursdays starting September 26th to October 31st from 12 pm to 2 pm
with *first class beginning at 11 am.*

Course Overview

We are living in a time of great uncertainty. Our communities are confronting serious challenges around justice, opportunity and human rights. The recent US presidential election, the Brexit vote, Standing Rock, Charlottesville and many other events have made more visible stark divisions in our values and goals. How might oral history help us build the movements we need in this moment?

Groundswell: Oral History for Social Change knows that oral history and narrative can be used to promote equity and empathy that challenge oppression and racism. If you are looking for new ways to address social justice challenges in your work and community, the practice of community-based oral history can offer you important new insights and methods to further positive change.

Groundswell is offering a six-session online class, introducing participants to oral history for social change and movement building. This class will provide you with skills and insights needed to build projects that incorporate oral history and narrative in order to advance justice, build empathy, and move social justice projects forward. Participants will learn about how narrative and oral history methods are being used to build alliances, center marginalized voices and identify real strategies for change. In this introductory class you will learn basic skills needed to do community-based, anti-oppression oral history.

Each class is two hours long and includes time for group discussion on the week's theme. Participants will be provided access to a recording of each class as well as a private FaceBook group for connecting with each other, sharing resources and between class conversation. Weekly course readings encourage a deeper exploration of the material.

Syllabus

Session One: Intro to Community Oral History

Sept. 26th

Alisa Del Tufo and Shefa Nola Benoit

This first class will help everyone to become comfortable with the framework of the class, get to know each other a bit and to dig into the basics of Community Oral History and how it can support and strengthen social change and social justice. We will discuss what community oral history is and how it differs from traditional oral history. We will also look at some examples of community oral history projects, and explore the impact they have had.

Before the First Class:

1. Look at Groundswell's web site: <http://www.oralhistoryforsocialchange.org>
2. Read [Chapters 1, 2 & 3 of Introduction to Community Oral History](#) (by Barbara W Sommer, Mary Kay Quinlan, and Nancy MacKay) and be prepared to discuss them.
3. Read ["Teaching to Listen: Listening Exercises and Self-Reflexive Journals"](#) by Martha Norkunas
4. Think about a community oral history project you'd like to carry out/are working on, and be prepared to talk about that during the session.

Outline of Session

- Introductions
- Overview of the course, logistics of documenting the classes, and any other questions.
- Share your ideas on a project you would like to do. Give a brief description, discuss whom will be interviewed, who will do the interviewing, what impact(s) you are hoping to have and how you'd like to share
- Discussion on reading

Some Additional Resources:

- Groundswell's MixTape: <https://www.createspace.com/5021072>
- Threshold Collaborative's Story Gathering Toolkit: <https://www.createspace.com/4635430>
- Working Narrative's Toolkit: <http://workingnarratives.org/story-guide>
- Dan Kerr, "We Know What the Problem Is" (In folder)

Session Two: Developing a Community-Based Oral History Project Oct. 3rd

Benji de la Piedra and Shefa Nola Benoit

This session will introduce students to considerations and challenges of complete community-based oral history project design—“soup to nuts,” so to speak. Because project design is so contingent on envisioned outcomes, this class will be oriented towards practical discussion of participants’ particular ideas and situations.

Before the Class:

1. Complete assigned readings (see below)
2. Fill out “Sketching Out a Vision” worksheet, and be prepared to discuss in class
3. Brainstorm topic areas/research questions and interview questions for your particular project

Outline of Session.

- Introductions
- What do we mean “community-based”?
- Discussion of possible outcomes of projects
- Project personnel and workflow
- Discussion of possible challenges and opportunities

Readings

- Alvarez, Mario and de la Piedra, Benji (Columbia Life Histories Project). “GSAS Interview Guide.”
- Botkin, B.A. “Applied Folklore: Creating Understanding Through Folklore.”
- de la Piedra, Benji (DC Oral History Collaborative). “Selecting a Narrator”
- de la Piedra, Benji (DC Oral History Collaborative). “What We’re Interested In.”
- de la Piedra, Benji. “Sketching Out a Vision.”
- de la Piedra, Benji. “Vital Roles and Responsibilities.”
- Portelli, Alessandro. “Trying to Gather a Little Knowledge.”

Session Four: Ethics

Oct. 10th

Amy Starecheski and Shefa Nola Benoit

This session will provide an overview of core ethical principles in oral history, address some of the unique ethical issues that can arise in social justice/community oral history projects, and explore strategies for addressing them. We will also touch on what it means to bring an explicit anti-oppression framework to doing oral history.

Before the Class:

1. Read the Oral History Association's Principles for Oral History and Best Practices for Oral History: <http://www.oralhistory.org/oha-principles-and-best-practices/>
2. Read: Sheftel, Anna and Stacey Zembrzycki, "[Who's Afraid of Oral History? Fifty Years of Debates and Anxiety about Ethics.](#)" *Oral History Review* (Summer/Fall 2016) 43 (2): 338-366
3. Fill out Ethics Class Worksheet (link will be sent to you the week before class)

Outline of Session

- Introductions
- Overview of core oral history ethical principles
- Principles & guidelines in practice: community & social justice applications
- Introduction to anti-oppression in oral history
- Group activity: confronting our fears and identifying strategies for addressing ethical dilemmas

Additional reading:

- High, Steven. Research Ethics. <http://storytelling.concordia.ca/toolbox/ethics>
- Denis, P. (2008). [The Ethics of Oral History](#). In D. Philippe and Ntsimane, R (Eds.), *Oral History in a wounded country. Interactive Interviewing in South Africa* (pp. 63-84). Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Portelli, Alessandro. (1997). [Tryin' to Gather a Little Knowledge: Some Thoughts on the Ethics of Oral History \(Chapter 4\)](#), *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Erin Jessee; [The Limits of Oral History: Ethics and Methodology Amid Highly Politicized Research Settings](#). *Oral Hist Rev* 2011; 38 (2): 287-307. doi: 10.1093/ohr/ohr098
- Lassiter, Luke Eric, "[Ethics and Moral Responsibility](#)" in *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*, The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Session Three: The Interview

Oct. 17th

Fanny Garcia and Shefa Nola Benoit

This session will explore a range of issues related to preparing for and conducting an oral history interview, particularly for a project with social justice commitments. Given the open-ended structure of the oral history interview, the success of the interview depends not only on the dynamic between the interviewer and interviewee, but also on substantial pre-interview preparation and research. Effective preparation demonstrates both an ethical respect to the person being interviewed and creates a lively and engaging dynamic during an interview. This class will explore the conventions of the life history interview, pre-interview communication with interviewee, drafting an interview guide, framing questions, and structuring the interview.

Before the class:

- Review assigned readings (see list below), sample interview guides, and sample interviews (in class folder).

Outline of Session:

- Introduction
- What is the Life History Approach?
- Structuring a Life History Interview Guide
- Areas of inquiry and questions
- Pre-interview communication
- During the interview
- Ending the interview
- Post-interview communication
- Questions

Readings:

- Clark, M.M., Frazier, T., Kangas, B., and Taminian, L. (co-editors) "Documenting and Interpreting Conflict Through Oral History: A Working Guide." Columbia University Libraries (New York, NY). 2013.
- Ganz, Marshall. 2009. "Why Stories Matter: The Art and Craft of Social Change." Sojourners (March).
- Grele, Ronald. Oral History Interviewing: The Good Interview
- Perks, R., & Thomson, A. (Eds.). (2006). The oral history reader (2nd ed.), 129-142. New York: Routledge.
 - Anderson and Jack. "Learning to Listen: Interview techniques and analyses."
- Portelli, Alessandro. "What Makes Oral History Different." In The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History, 45-58. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.

Session Five: Oral History Technology

Oct. 24th

Helyx Chase and Shefa Nola Benoit

This class will examine the technical components of an oral history interview. Participants will learn about the different environmental conditions that affect audio recording, how to set up recording to get the best possible sound quality and review technical solutions to suit their needs.

Before the Class:

1. Take a notebook and phone or other recording device. Find a quiet space. Spend 20 minutes sitting quietly in the space, record the space and take notes about the sounds that

you hear.

2. After 20 minutes, play through the recording and make note of any discrepancies between what you observed and what was picked up in the recording.

Reference Material

- <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/06/microphones-and-room-effects/>

Outline of Session:

- Review observations from recording exercise
- Discuss ideal recording environments/How to deal with less than ideal environments
- Discuss components of audio recording set up - microphones and audio recording devices
- Quick discussion about the use of video

Session Document: https://docs.google.com/document/d/12sORTx9RAfAdvwl0enLQMGBFxpI9CN4mXhmWli7x_zo/edit?usp=sharing

Session Six: What Happens After the Interview

Oct. 31st

Mark Menjivar and Shefa Nola Benoit

In this final class we will discuss how you imagine activating the interviews from your community oral history and we will discuss and look at examples. Participants will be lead through some of the processes involved and considerations once the interview has been recorded. Come ready to share your visions for the future!

Before the class:

- Please read these articles and go through the websites:
 - [“Oral History for Building Social Movements: Then and Now”](#) by Sarah K. Loose (with Amy Starecheski)
 - [“Social Practice Artists in the Archive: Collaborative Strategies for Documentation”](#) by Maggie Schreiner and Claro de los Reyes
 - [“Forging an Indigenous Counterpublic Sphere: The Taller de Historia Oral Andina in Bolivia”](#) by Marcia Stephenson (Read as much as you can, particularly pg. 101-111)
 - <https://www.antievictionmap.com/>
 - <https://queer.newark.rutgers.edu/>
 - <http://www.queensmemory.org/>
 - <https://www.pathhomeproject.org/>
 - <http://c4sr.columbia.edu/projects/we-can> (not much to see, but you can get a sense of what it will be)
 - <http://eastnewyorkoralhistory.org/index.html>
 - <http://mothavenhistory.org/home/>
 - <https://jacksoncenter.info/northside-stories/soundwalk-of-northside/>

And come prepared to:

- Discuss how this class series/process has impacted your vision of your community/social justice oral

history

- Your plans on moving forward with your project

Outline of Session.

- Introduction
- Reflections on past projects
- Discussion on readings and websites
- Factors to consider in sharing the oral histories
- Questions
- Your vision for the future
- Comments and Reflections on class