HIST 5401: Theory and Practice of Oral History  
T/TH 3:30-4:45  
Pafford 206

Instructor: Dr. Julia Brock  
Email: jbrock@westga.edu  
*note: please email me through the UWG account, not CourseDen (I’m quicker to respond that way!)

Phone: TLC office—678-839-3087; Center for Public History—678-839-6141  
Office hours: Tuesday, 8:30-10:30, Center for Public History (Ingram Library); Thursday, 12-2, TLC 3210

Course Description
The purposes of this course are twofold: to expose you to the theory, major conceptual themes, and methodologies that oral historians around the globe use to frame and implement their work, and to hone your skills as an oral history practitioner.

Oral history has become especially common since the 1970s, when scholars who wanted to write “history from below” had trouble constructing those histories from traditional archival sources. Since then the field has exploded, from the growth of oral history collections around the world to popular forms of story collecting, such as StoryCorps. With the digital ‘revolution’ of the 2000s, there are now even more ways to collect, preserve, and disseminate oral history interviews. The readings and assignments of this course will deepen your understanding of how the field has grown and changed, and how practitioners have reconceptualized and redefined oral history practice over time. More specifically, we will cover the following themes: the connection between memory, history, and narrative; ethics; oral tradition and oral history; interviewing across cultural, age, gender, and ethnic bounds; power in the oral history interview; advocacy and oral history; oral history and public history; the effect of digital humanities on oral history practice, and more. Most importantly, you will conduct, transcribe, and analyze an oral history interview, putting theory, in effect, to practice.

Learning outcomes:

Course-specific
1. Demonstrate knowledge of the major theoretical concepts within oral history scholarship  
2. Demonstrate knowledge of the work of key scholars in the field of oral history  
3. Demonstrate understanding of ethical complexities of working with human subjects  
4. Demonstrate understanding of a variety of methods of interpreting oral sources  
5. Demonstrate ability to plan for, conduct, transcribe, and analyze an oral history interview

Department-specific:
1. Demonstrate knowledge and theory of the practice of public history

Required texts:
• Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds. The Oral History Reader, 3d ed. New York: Routledge, 2016. (hereafter referred to as OHR)  
• additional readings will be posted on CourseDen (hereafter CD)

**Participation: 25%**

**Due weekly**
The course will be conducted as a seminar in which everyone contributes to the conversation—you are thus expected to attend class weekly and be prepared to discuss readings. If you are sick or need to miss class for any reason, you should alert me in advance by e-mail or by phone. If an absence is deemed justifiable (medical or family emergency), you will be given an opportunity to make up the work by having a separate reading discussion with me during office hours. If you miss more than two classes without excuse, your final grade will be reduced by 5 points. The participation grade consists of two components:

- **In-class discussion: 15%**
The course depends on the insights you bring from the readings and from your own experience with oral history fieldwork. Your comments should clearly draw from the readings, and you should be ready to pull out specific passages to analyze. I expect all voices to be present in the discussion, and also know that full participation leads to richer engagement with the material for us all.

- **Reading précis: 10%**
You will produce six reading précis over the course of the semester—a useful tool to summarize and synthesize main arguments, themes, sources, and methodologies of the readings. You can turn them in on the weeks of your choosing by Thursday’s class. I will give you a guideline for what’s expected in terms of content and structure.

**Listening exercises: 10%**

**Due weekly until week 7**
The key skill to a good interview is critical listening. To help train your mind and ear, I’ve assigned listening exercises for the first seven weeks. Each prompts you to sit down with a partner of your choice (friend, lover, spouse, parent, co-worker) and conduct a short interview, each time with a different focus. You should reflect on these exercises in 250-300 words in discussion threads I’ve created on CourseDen (the discussion threads, along with the listening exercise prompts, are located in folders on CourseDen).

**Interview: 25%**
Choice of interviewee due Feb. 13; research brief with bibliography due March 3; interview questions due March 15; interview to be completed by April 9; field notes due April 26
You will conduct oral history during the course of the semester that relates to your research interests. The interview should reflect an understanding of and engagement with best practices, critical listening, informed consent, and other ethical issues related to human subjects research. You will be expected to create your own consent form and biography form for your narrator, as well as to make explicit to me your research process. You’ll also be expected to write up any associated field notes after the interview (I’ll provide guidance on all of these components).

*A note on technology: for me, one of the best parts of oral history is how accessible of a practice it is. Smartphone apps, for example, are perfectly fine to use for recording an interview that you will use for research. But, if your interview may become part of a public project—radio or film documentary or exhibit, for example—you’ll want to use higher-grade equipment. The Center for Public History has digital voice and film recorders that you can check out for this purpose.

**Transcript:** **10%**
**Due April 26**
Is it tedious? Yes. Is it still necessary to know how to create a useful transcript? Yes! Though we will encounter debates in the field that surround transcribing (if oral history is essentially oral, then what does it become once translated into written word?) it’s still an important part of the way that researchers access and use oral histories. I’ll give you guidelines for best practices in transcribing your interview.

**Final paper:** **30%**
**Due May 3**
You will finally write a 12 to 15-page research paper that uses your oral history as a central primary source. Though I will give you a more detailed assignment in class, expect to be able to bring theoretical debates and methodological approaches to bear in your analysis.

**Grade turnaround:** Shorter assignments and assessments will normally be graded within a week after the deadline. Longer assignments may take two weeks to grade. I will keep you updated on my progress!

**Make-up policy:**
Assignments are due on the dates indicated in the course schedule. Failure to turn in assignments on time will result in a “0” for each missed assignment.
*You must turn in every assignment to pass this course.
***There is no extra credit assigned or accepted in this course.

**Grading scale**

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<th>Grade</th>
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<td>A</td>
<td>90%-100%</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>80-89</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60-69</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>0-59</td>
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Grades are based on student performance and capability. Simply turning in every assignment does not guarantee that a student will receive a “good grade.” To receive a higher grade, a student must demonstrate proficiency in the material. For different students, gaining that proficiency requires different levels of work, because not all students walk into the class with the
same aptitude for history. I will give you a rubric for each assignment so that you have clear expectations for how grades are determined. Also, you must turn in every assignment to pass this course.

Course policies:
Course communication
I will use your UWG email to communicate course news, so please check your email regularly. I will also post any changes to CourseDen content on the CourseDen news feed function. Because the university requires all communication between faculty and students to take place via UWG email, please communicate with me using your UWG--not personal--account. Please do not use CourseDen to email me.

University policies and academic support
Please carefully review the following Common Language for all university course syllabi at this link: UWG’s Common Language for Course Syllabi
It contains important material pertaining to university policies and responsibilities. Because these statements are updated as federal, state, university, and accreditation standards change, you should review the information each semester.

Academic honesty
***Any form of academic dishonesty (including but not limited to cheating and plagiarism) will result in a failing course grade as well as possible additional action. Full definitions of academic dishonesty and plagiarism are defined in student handbook, so please be familiar with them. Here is a link to the student handbook: http://www.westga.edu/handbook/

The University defines plagiarism as: “Includes, but is not limited to, the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment. It also includes the unacknowledged use of materials such as term papers or other academic materials prepared by a person other than the submitting student.” All of your work should be your own with appropriate citations when you draw from the work of others (including textbooks, website, or another student’s work).

Disability Act/accessibility for the course
I am very happy to accommodate all students. Students with ADA-defined disabilities needing academic accommodation should; (1) register with and provide documentation to the UWG Office of Accessibility Services; (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. You can contact to the Office of Accessibility Services at 678-839-6428

Student Conduct
Students are obligated to abide by the guidelines detailed in the university catalog. Respect and courtesy are required of all students while in the classroom. The following is also mandatory:

1. No arriving late or leaving early for class meetings (unless you have checked with me in advance). Arriving late or leaving early will count as against your participation grade. Arriving late is defined as arriving after I have begun the course plan for the day.
Leaving early is defined as leaving once class has started and is in process. If you habitually arrive late or leave early, you will be asked to leave. Any disruptive behavior will result in your expulsion from the room. If disruptive behavior persists, you will receive a minimum of one grade-letter deduction from your overall grade (depending on the severity of your behavior), as well as possible action.

2. Cell phones, headphones, iPods, and all other electronic devices other than those you use to take notes must be turned off during lectures and individual/group activities. Continued use of these devices during inappropriate times will result in you being tossed from the class. Use of laptops is permissible, but if you are caught using laptops for non-class purposes, you will not be allowed to use a laptop for the remainder of the semester. Also, you may not record any portion of the class. If you have any documentation needs, please let me know.

3. I will use both your UWG email accounts and CourseDen to communicate with you. Please check both regularly.

Important note on changes: I reserve the right to modify this syllabus at any time during the course of the term, particularly regarding the course schedule. If such a modification is substantial, I will reissue a revised syllabus.

Important note on content: In this course we will discuss sensitive histories and a full range of life experiences, including those shaped by racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia. I expect the classroom to remain a civil place during these discussions, and it is paramount for us to attend to these themes with informed comments and respect. If you anticipate that this content may be emotionally difficult for you, please do not hesitate to let me know immediately.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics/Assigned Readings/Homework</th>
<th>Major Assignments and Deadlines</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/9</td>
<td><strong>Week 1: Re-engagement with the Human Voice</strong>&lt;br&gt;Introductions to each other and to the class</td>
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<td>1/11</td>
<td><strong>Reading for today’s class:</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different” (OHR, 4); Alistair Thomson, “Four Paradigm Shifts in Oral History,” <em>The Oral History Review</em> vol. 34, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 2007), 49-70. (CD)&lt;br&gt;<strong>Additional graduate readings:</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Frisch, “Oral History and <em>Hard Times</em>: A Review Essay” (OHR, 3)&lt;br&gt;• Sangster, “Politics and Praxis in Canadian Working-Class History” (OHR, 5)</td>
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<td>1/16</td>
<td><strong>Week 2: Oral History and Oral Tradition</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Guest discussant: Dr. Molly McCullers, History Dept., UWG</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Reading for today’s class:</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Molly McCullers, “Chapter 6: Paramount Chiefs and Potemkin Homelands, 1965-1973,” in “Lines in the Sand: The Global Politics</td>
<td>First listening exercise</td>
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of Local Development in Apartheid Era Namibia, 1950-1980” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2012); McCullers field notes and images

- Selections from Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin, 1985) (all on CD)

Additional graduate readings:


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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>1/18</td>
<td>NO CLASS, Dr. Brock at Georgia Association of Museums and Galleries conference</td>
<td>Precis</td>
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<td>1/23</td>
<td><strong>Week 3: Oral History and Memory</strong> Read for today’s class</td>
<td>Listening exercise</td>
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<td>1/25</td>
<td>Read for today’s class:</td>
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<td>- Alessandro Portelli, “The Death of Luigi Trastulli,” (CD)</td>
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<td>Additional graduate readings:</td>
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<td>- Smith, “Remembering in Groups: Negotiating Between ‘Individual’ and ‘Collective’ Memories” (OHR, 13)</td>
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<td>- Roseman, “Surviving Memory: Truth and Inaccuracy in the Holocaust Testimony” (OHR, 21)</td>
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<td>1/30</td>
<td><strong>Week 4: Uncovering Histories</strong> Read for today’s class</td>
<td>Listening exercise</td>
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<td>- Kennedy and Davis, <em>Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold</em> (chapters 1-5)</td>
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<td>2/1</td>
<td>Read for today’s class:</td>
<td>Precis</td>
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<td>- Kennedy and Davis, <em>Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold</em> (chapters 6-10)</td>
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<td>2/6</td>
<td><strong>Week 5: The Interview</strong> Read for today’s class:</td>
<td>Listening exercise</td>
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<td>- Don Ritchie, <em>Doing Oral History</em>, chps. 2-5</td>
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<td>2/8</td>
<td>Read for today’s class:</td>
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<td>- Oral History Association, “Principles and Best Practices,”</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/">http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/</a></td>
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|       | - Doug Boyd, “Designing an Oral History Project,” *Oral History in
- the Digital Age, [http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/06/designing-an-oral-history-project/](http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/06/designing-an-oral-history-project/)
  - Yow, “Interviewing Techniques and Strategies” (OHR)

Additional graduate readings:
- Bozzoli, “Interviewing the Women of Phokeng: Consciousness and Gender, Insider and Outsider” (OHR, 14)
- Layman, “Reticence in Oral History Interviews,” (OHR, 16)

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| 2/13 | **Week 6: Oral History and Ethics**
  - The Boston College/IRA case
| 2/15 | Reading for today’s class:
  - Blee, “Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan” (OHR, 28)

Additional graduate readings:
| 2/20 | **Week 7: Undergraduate Midterms and Beginning Research**
  - Undergraduate midterms |
| 2/22 | Research Day with Jessica Crittent
  - *Meet in the Mac Lab in Ingram Library on the third floor* |
| 2/27 | **Week 8: Oral History as Evidence**
  - Guest discussants: Dr. Emily McKendry-Smith (Sociology, UWG) and Dr. Marjorie Snipes (Anthropology, UWG)
  - Reading for today:
    - TBD (CD) |
| 3/1 | Guest discussant: Dr. Robin Morris (History, Agnes Scott College)
  - Reading for today:
    - TBD (CD) |
| 3/6 | **Week 9: Oral History and Public History**
  - Read for today’s class:
    - Mireya Loza, “From Ephemeral to Enduring: The Politics of Recording and Exhibiting Bracero Memory,” *The Public Historian* |
### Additional graduate reading:

- Sarah Lowry and Alison Duke, “Foundling Voices: Placing Oral History at the Heart of an Oral History Exhibition” (OHR, 33)

### 3/8

**Watch in class:**

### 3/13

**Week 10: Oral History and Digital Humanities**

**Read for today’s class:**

**Explore before today’s class:**
- Bracero Archive: [http://braceroarchive.org/](http://braceroarchive.org/)

### 3/15

**Read for today’s class:**
- Boyd and Larson, *Oral History and the Digital Humanities*, chaps. 6-7

**Explore for today’s class:**
- Denso: [https://densho.org/](https://densho.org/)

### 3/20-22

**Week 11:**

**SPRING BREAK**

### 3/27

**Week 12: Interviewing and the Arts**

**Read for today’s class:**
- TBD

### 3/29

**No Class: Dr. Brock at the University of Kentucky Preservation Symposium**

**Precis**

### 4/3

**Week 13: Oral History and Social Justice**

**Read for today’s class:**
- Daniel Kerr, “‘We Know What the Problem is’: Using Video and Radio Oral History to Develop Collaborative Analysis of Homelessness” (OHR, 40)

**Additional graduate readings:**
- Sean Field, “Imagining Communities: Memory, Loss and Resilience in Post-Apartheid Cape Town” (OHR, 37)

### 4/5

**Read for today’s class:**
- Erin Jessee, “The Limits of Oral History: Ethics and Methodology Amid Highly Politicized Research Settings” (OHR, 43)
- Alicia J. Rouvelot, “Trying to Be Good: Lessons in Oral History and Performance” (OHR, 41)
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<th>Details</th>
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| 4/10 | **Week 14: Transcribing, Preparing, and Preserving Oral Histories** | Read for today’s class:  
  - Francis Good, “Voice, Ear and Text: Words, Meaning and Transcription” (OHR, 30)  
  **Additional graduate readings:**  
  Interview to be completed by April 9; bring sound file and laptop to class this day |
| 4/12 | Guest discussant: Prof. Shanee’ Murrain, University Archivist, UWG Special Collections | Read for today’s class:  
  - Doug Boyd, “I Just Want to Click on It to Listen: Oral History Archives, Orality, and Usability,” in *Oral History and the Digital Humanities*  
  **Precis** |
| 4/17-4/19 | **Week 15: Transcription**  
NO CLASS, Dr. Brock at the National Council on Public History conference |  |
| 4/24 | **Week 16: You as the Oral Historian** | Class presentations  
Class presentations  
Class presentations |
| 4/26 | Class presentations | Transcripts due  
Field notes due |
| 5/3 | Final papers due |  |