

**History 5304- Studies in Public History (177089) &
MAIS 5360- Contemporary Issues (12665)
Oral History Methodology**

**Dr. Yolanda Chávez Leyva
Liberal Arts 310
Mondays 1:30-4:30
Fall 2016**

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Are you a part of making history?

This class will help answer this question. History 5304 explores the methodology of oral history. Oral history highlights the relevance of history by bringing individual and family stories to the forefront, allowing us to see how all of us are part of making history. The oral historian assists in the creation of new primary sources that will be used by future researchers so in this class you will actually “make history” while learning how to plan and implement an oral history project from the beginning. The class will also delve into how public history can engage the public. The work in this class will be carried out under the auspices of the Borderlands Public History Lab and will contribute to the holdings of the Institute of Oral History.

In this class, students will

- Participate in developing an oral history project.
- Read and research Mexican American history.
- Study and become familiar with the methodology of oral history.
- Conduct oral histories and prepare them for processing.
- Mentor undergraduate students also learning to conduct interviews.

As a result, you will gain experience in

- A significant methodology in the field of public history
- Greater communication skills, written, oral, and digital.
- Collaborative skills through participation in work groups and mentorships.
- Understanding borderlands history.

The Oral History Project—Blackwell School Alliance



This semester's project is part of a larger, on-going oral history project of the Institute of Oral History (IOH) documenting Mexican American education in the borderlands from the late 19th century to the present. For this portion of the class, we will work in partnership with the Blackwell School Alliance of Marfa, a group working to preserve and document the stories of Mexican Americans who attended the segregated school, which functioned from 1889 to 1965. See <http://www.blackwellschool.org/> for more

information.

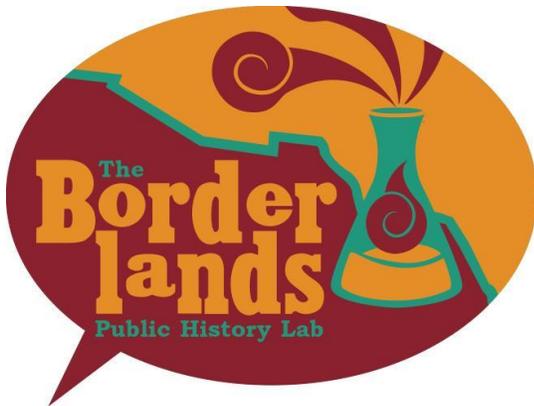
(Left above: Historic photo of Blackwell School courtesy of the Blackwell School Alliance www.blackwellschool.org)

Mentoring undergraduates

This semester's project represents an exciting collaboration with Dr. Meredith Abarca's ENG 3374 class—we will train together in using oral history methodology. I believe that each of us has the privilege and responsibility to help those who follow after us. The Borderlands Public History Lab, described below, works to bring together students at different stages of their academic careers to teach and learn from each other. Dr. Abarca's class will be interviewing senior citizens in the second half of the semester. Part of your mentoring will be to help them develop questions and practice interviewing. See the semester timeline for more information.

The Institute of Oral History was founded in 1972 the purpose of "preserving the history of the region adjacent to the Rio Grande both in the United States and in Mexico." Since that time, the Institute has built one of the largest border-related oral history collections in the United States. While an emphasis has been on the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez region, the collection also contains interviews dealing with the history of communities all along the U.S.-Mexico border. These materials cover a wide range of subjects, spanning social, economic, political, cultural and artistic concerns.





The Borderlands Public History Lab The mission of the Borderlands Public History Lab is to preserve and promote borderlands and immigration histories while mentoring students to develop professional skills in research, public presentation, and working collaboratively in teams.

Readings include:

- Thomas Cauvin, *Public History: A textbook of Practice*
- D. Boyd, *Oral History and Digital Humanities: Voice, Access, and Engagement*
- Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 20th anniversary edition
- Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*
- Joann Mulcalhy, *Remedios: The Healing Life of Eva Castellanoz*
- Gilbert Gonzalez, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation*
- Guadalupe San Miguel, *Let All of Them Take Heed: Mexican Americans the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas, 1910- 1981*

(They may not all be available at the UTEP Bookstore, but they are available online.)

Grading:

- Successful completion and quality of oral history project (60% total)
 - Design interview questions (10%)
 - Successfully conduct 5 oral histories (20%)
 - Summarize and index oral histories (15%)
 - Final presentation (15%)
- Mentor undergraduates (10%)- see timeline for details
- Attend and participate in class discussions (15%)
- Weekly written questions on readings (15%) - By 10 p.m. Sunday night before class, email me 5 discussion questions based on the reading to be discussed the next day. Note the page number(s) from where you drew the question and write questions based on the entire reading, not just one chapter. Please type them in a Word document, 12 point font, Times New Roman, with your name on the document.

Weekly schedule (subject to revision)

Please bring your laptop or table if possible each week.

Week 1 (August 22) Introduction

Introduction to public history and oral history

Best practices in oral history (included at the end of this syllabus)

Watch “The Children of Giant”

We need to discuss the final project today.

Review and analyze oral histories from http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/oral_history/

At 3:30 we will go to Hudspeth 300 to meet with Dr. Abarca’s class

Week 2 (August 29) Introduction to public history

Public History: A Textbook of Practice

Review and analyze oral histories from http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/oral_history/

Week 3 (September 5) UTEP closed- no class (This is a good week to get ahead on reading!)

Let’s find a time this week to visit the exhibit at the El Paso History Museum based on the movie “Giant,” which was filmed in Marfa.

On September 9 at 3 p.m., you are invited to attend the Department of History’s monthly seminar: “From Out of the Archives: Taking Historical Research into the Public Sphere.” Each panelist will discuss how we have utilized our archival research to engage the community in a variety of venues and through a variety of projects, including museum exhibits, community partnerships, historic preservation projects, oral history projects, community publications, and videos.

Week 4 (September 12) Silences in history

Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History

Review and analyze oral histories from http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/oral_history/

Week 5 (September 19) What is decolonization?

Decolonizing Methodologies

Review and analyze oral histories from http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/oral_history/

Week 6 (September 26) Digital Humanities

Oral History and Digital Humanities: Voice, Access, and Engagement

Review and analyze oral histories from http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/oral_history/

Talk by Anais Acosta, technology manager of the IOH

Week 7 (October 3) How to read an oral history narrative

Remedios: The Healing Life of Eva Castellanoz

Review and analyze oral histories from http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/oral_history/

We will discuss the book ourselves from 1:30-2:45, then go to Hudspeth 300 to discuss how to read an oral history narrative with Dr. Abarca's class. They will also have read and discussed the book.

Week 8 (October 10) Mexican American education

Let All of Them Take Heed: Mexican Americans the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas, 1910- 1981 and *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation*

In addition to the regular class discussion, we will begin formulating questions for the Blackwell School project.

Review and analyze oral histories from http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/oral_history/

Week 9 (October 17) Oral history methodology

The first half of the class we will continue formulating questions and discuss articles on Blackwell School. (To be provided by professor.)

*** I am hopeful that by this point we can begin setting up interviews with former Blackwell School students now living in El Paso. ***

Discuss chapter 1 of Dr. Abarca's *Voices from the Kitchen on charlas culinarias*. (Copy to be provided by professor.)

The second half of class, we will attend an oral history workshop with staff of the Institute of Oral History- meet with Dr. Abarca's class in Hudspeth 3-4:30 for the workshop.

Week 10 (October 24) Oral history project- mentoring undergraduates.

We will meet in our regular classroom the first half of the class to continue planning the project.

We will meet with the undergraduates at 3 p.m. to come up with interview questions for the joint interviews. Each graduate student will be paired with 2-3 undergraduates.

October 26: if you are available to meet undergrads at their interviewing site, Bien Vivir on McKinley, from 3-4, it would be great. Undergraduate students will conduct their first interviews. I

Week 11 (October 31) Oral history project- mentoring undergraduates

We will meet at 3 in Hudspeth 300 to discuss our interviewing experiences. Please make sure you have interviewed at least one person by now.

Week 12 (November 7) Workshop 1

Best practices in filming & sound by Janet Hill of Academic Technologies. Meet at 3 p.m. at the Atlas Lab at UGLC 202.

Be sure to be interviewing people this week.

Week 13 (November 14) Workshop 2

Using a story board by Janet Hill of Academic Technologies. Meet at 3 p.m. at the Atlas Lab at UGLC 202.

Be sure to be interviewing people this week.

Week 14 (November 21) Workshop 3

Best film editing practices by Janet Hill of Academic Technologies. Meet at 3 p.m. at the Atlas Lab at UGLC 202.

Be sure to be interviewing people this week.

Week 15 (November 28) Wrap up and preparation for public presentation

Finals week (December 5-9) Public presentation of oral history project- more details to be announced later. Date to be determined.

Important links:

Search for UTEP Institute of Oral History transcripts, etc.:

http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/oral_hist

Bracero Archives (a UTEP collaboration with the Smithsonian, Brown University, George Mason University):

<http://www.BraceroArchive.org>

Oral History Association:

<http://www.oralhistory.org/>

Baylor Institute for Oral History

<http://www.baylor.edu/oralhistory/>

From the Oral History Association

<http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/>

Principles and Best Practices

Principles for Oral History and Best Practices for Oral History

Adopted October, 2009

[Introduction](#)

[General Principles for Oral History](#)

[Best Practices for Oral History](#)

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The **Principles and Best Practices for Oral History** update and replace the [Oral History Evaluation Guidelines](#) adopted in 1989, revised in 2000.

Introduction

Oral history refers both to a method of recording and preserving oral testimony and to the product of that process. It begins with an audio or video recording of a first person account made by an interviewer with an interviewee (also referred to as narrator), both of whom have the conscious intention of creating a permanent record to contribute to an understanding of the past. A verbal document, the oral history, results from this process and is preserved and made available in different forms to other users, researchers, and the public. A critical approach to the oral testimony and interpretations are necessary in the use of oral history.

The Oral History Association encourages individuals and institutions involved with the creation and preservation of oral histories to uphold certain principles, professional and technical standards, and obligations. These include commitments to the narrators, to standards of scholarship for history and related disciplines, and to the preservation of the interviews and related materials for current and future users.

Recognizing that clear and concise guide can be useful to all practitioners of oral history, the Oral History Association has since 1968 published a series of statements aimed at outlining a set of principles and obligations for all those who use this methodology. A history of these earlier statements, and a record of the individuals involved in producing them, is [available to download](#).

Building on those earlier documents, but representing changes in an evolving field, the OHA now offers General Principles for Oral History and Best Practices for Oral History as summaries of the organization's most important principles and best practices for the pre-interview preparation, the conduct of the interview, and the preservation and use of oral histories. These documents are not intended to be an inclusive primer on oral history; for that there are numerous manuals, guidebooks, and theoretical discussions. For the readers' convenience, a bibliography of resources is provided online at the Oral History Association website.

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General Principles for Oral History

Oral history is distinguished from other forms of interviews by its content and extent. Oral history interviews seek an in-depth account of personal experience and reflections, with sufficient time allowed for the narrators to give their story the fullness they desire. The content of oral history interviews is grounded in reflections on the past as opposed to commentary on purely contemporary events.

Oral historians inform narrators about the nature and purpose of oral history interviewing in general and of their interview specifically. Oral historians insure that narrators voluntarily give their consent to be interviewed and understand that they can withdraw from the interview or refuse to answer a question at any time. Narrators may give this consent by signing a consent form or by recording an oral statement of consent prior to the interview. All interviews are conducted in accord with the stated aims and within the parameters of the consent.

Interviewees hold the copyright to their interviews until and unless they transfer those rights to an individual or institution. This is done by the interviewee signing a release form or in exceptional circumstances recording an oral statement to the same effect. Interviewers must insure that narrators understand the extent of their rights to the interview and the request that those rights be yielded to a repository or other party, as well as their right to put restrictions on the use of the material. All use and dissemination of the interview content must follow any restrictions the narrator places upon it.

Oral historians respect the narrators as well as the integrity of the research. Interviewers are obliged to ask historically significant questions, reflecting careful preparation for the interview and understanding of the issues to be addressed. Interviewers must also respect the narrators' equal authority in the interviews and honor their right to respond to questions in their own style and language. In the use of interviews, oral historians strive for intellectual honesty and the best application of the skills of their discipline, while avoiding stereotypes, misrepresentations, or manipulations of the narrators' words.

Because of the importance of context and identity in shaping the content of an oral history narrative, it is the practice in oral history for narrators to be identified by name. There may be some exceptional circumstances when anonymity is appropriate, and this should be negotiated in advance with the narrator as part of the informed consent process.

Oral history interviews are historical documents that are preserved and made accessible to future researchers and members of the public. This preservation and access may take a variety of forms, reflecting changes in technology. But, in choosing a repository or form, oral historians consider how best to preserve the original recording and any transcripts made of it and to protect the accessibility and usability of the interview. The plan for preservation and access, including any possible dissemination through the web or other media, is stated in the informed consent process and on release forms.

In keeping with the goal of long term preservation and access, oral historians should use the best recording equipment available within the limits of their financial resources.

Interviewers must take care to avoid making promises that cannot be met, such as guarantees of control over interpretation and presentation of the interviews beyond the scope of restrictions stated in informed consent/release forms, suggestions of material benefit outside the control of the interviewer, or assurances of an open ended relationship between the narrator and oral historian.

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Best Practices for Oral History

Pre-Interview

1. Whether conducting their own research or developing an institutional project, first time interviewers and others involved in oral history projects should seek training to prepare themselves for all stages of the oral history process.
2. In the early stages of preparation, interviewers should make contact with an appropriate repository that has the capacity to preserve the oral histories and make them accessible to the public.
3. Oral historians or others responsible for planning the oral history project should choose potential narrators based on the relevance of their experiences to the subject at hand.
4. To prepare to ask informed questions, interviewers should conduct background research on the person, topic, and larger context in both primary and secondary sources
5. When ready to contact a possible narrator, oral historians should send via regular mail or email an introductory letter outlining the general focus and purpose of the interview, and then follow-up with either a phone call or a return email. In projects involving groups in which literacy is not the norm, or when other conditions make it appropriate, participation may be solicited via face to face meetings.
6. After securing the narrator's agreement to be interviewed, the interviewer should schedule a non-recorded meeting. This pre-interview session will allow an exchange of information between interviewer and narrator on possible questions/topics, reasons for conducting the interview, the process that will be involved, and the need for informed

consent and legal release forms. During pre-interview discussion the interviewer should make sure that the narrator understands:

*oral history's purposes and procedures in general and of the proposed interview's aims and anticipated uses.

*his or her rights to the interviews including editing, access restrictions, copyrights, prior use, royalties, and the expected disposition and dissemination of all forms of the record, including the potential distribution electronically or on-line.

*that his or her recording(s) will remain confidential until he or she has given permission via a signed legal release.

7. Oral historians should use the best digital recording equipment within their means to reproduce the narrator's voice accurately and, if appropriate, other sounds as well as visual images. Before the interview, interviewers should become familiar with the equipment and be knowledgeable about its function.

8. Interviewers should prepare an outline of interview topics and questions to use as a guide to the recorded dialogue.

Interview

1. Unless part of the oral history process includes gathering soundscapes, historically significant sound events, or ambient noise, the interview should be conducted in a quiet room with minimal background noises and possible distractions.

2. The interviewer should record a "lead" at the beginning of each session to help focus his or her and the narrator's thoughts to each session's goals. The "lead" should consist of, at least, the names of narrator and interviewer, day and year of session, interview's location, and proposed subject of the recording.

3. Both parties should agree to the approximate length of the interview in advance. The interviewer is responsible for assessing whether the narrator is becoming tired and at that point should ask if the latter wishes to continue. Although most interviews last about two hours, if the narrator wishes to continue those wishes should be honored, if possible.

4. Along with asking creative and probing questions and listening to the answers to ask better follow-up questions, the interviewer should keep the following items in mind:

- interviews should be conducted in accord with any prior agreements made with narrator, which should be documented for the record.
- interviewers should work to achieve a balance between the objectives of the project and the perspectives of the interviewees. Interviewers should fully explore all appropriate areas of inquiry with interviewees and not be satisfied with superficial responses. At the same time, they should encourage narrators to respond to questions in their own style and language and to address issues that reflect their concerns.
- interviewers must respect the rights of interviewees to refuse to discuss certain subjects, to restrict access to the interview, or, under certain circumstances, to choose anonymity. Interviewers should clearly explain these options to all interviewees.
- interviewers should attempt to extend the inquiry beyond the specific focus of the project to create as complete a record as possible for the benefit of others.

- in recognition of the importance of oral history to an understanding of the past and of the cost and effort involved, interviewers and interviewees should mutually strive to record candid information of lasting value.

5. The interviewer should secure a release form, by which the narrator transfers his or her rights to the interview to the repository or designated body, signed after each recording session or at the end of the last interview with the narrator.

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Post Interview

1. Interviewers, sponsoring institutions, and institutions charged with the preservation of oral history interviews should understand that appropriate care and storage of original recordings begins immediately after their creation.

2. Interviewers should document their preparation and methods, including the circumstances of the interviews and provide that information to whatever repository will be preserving and providing access to the interview.

3. Information deemed relevant for the interpretation of the oral history by future users, such as photographs, documents, or other records should be collected, and archivists should make clear to users the availability and connection of these materials to the recorded interview.

4. The recordings of the interviews should be stored, processed, refreshed and accessed according to established archival standards designated for the media format used. Whenever possible, all efforts should be made to preserve electronic files in formats that are cross platform and nonproprietary. Finally, the obsolescence of all media formats should be assumed and planned for.

5. In order to augment the accessibility of the interview, repositories should make transcriptions, indexes, time tags, detailed descriptions or other written guides to the contents.

6. Institutions charged with the preservation and access of oral history interviews should honor the stipulations of prior agreements made with the interviewers or sponsoring institutions including restrictions on access and methods of distribution.

7. The repository should comply to the extent to which it is aware with the letter and spirit of the interviewee's agreement with the interviewer and sponsoring institution. If written documentation such as consent and release forms does not exist then the institution should make a good faith effort to contact interviewees regarding their intent. When media become available that did not exist at the time of the interview, those working with oral history should carefully assess the applicability of the release to the new formats and proceed—or not—accordingly.

8. All those who use oral history interviews should strive for intellectual honesty and the best application of the skills of their discipline. They should avoid stereotypes, misrepresentations, and manipulations of the narrator's words. This includes foremost striving to retain the integrity of the narrator's perspective, recognizing the subjectivity of the interview, and interpreting and contextualizing the narrative according to the professional standards of the applicable scholarly disciplines. Finally, if a project deals with community history, the interviewer should be sensitive to the

community, taking care not to reinforce thoughtless stereotypes. Interviewers should strive to make the interviews accessible to the community and where appropriate to include representatives of the community in public programs or presentations of the oral history material.