

## History 5304 (27867)/ 6304 (27868) Studies in Public History Oral History Methodology

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Class: Monday, 3- 5:20 p.m.  
Library 200 the Borderlands Digital  
Humanities Center)  
Office hours: Monday, noon-2:50  
And by appointment

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### *Are you part of making history?*

History 5304/ 6304, Studies in Public History, explores the methodology of oral history. Oral history brings 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 utilized by future researchers. 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 and, most importantly, what community members can teach us.

### **In this class, students will**

- Participate in developing and completing an oral history project.
- Engage with community members and organizational partners.
- Study and become familiar with the methodology of oral history.
- Conduct oral histories and prepare them for processing.
- Reflect on the connections/ disconnections between reading about oral history methodology and firsthand experiences.

### **As a result, you will gain experience in**

- A significant methodology in the field of public history
- Greater communication skills, both written and oral.
- Collaborative skills through participation in work groups.
- Understanding the border and El Paso history.

### **UTEP Edge**

- “Students enter UTEP with many talents, great strengths, and big dreams. The UTEP Edge is a framework that aims to develop these assets through High-Impact Practices, or Edge Experiences, that are made possible by the expertise and

dedication of our faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners.” This course supports the UTEP Edge by providing experiences that will foster and develop:

- [Community engagement](#)
- [Research and scholarly activities](#)
- [Creative activities](#)

### **The Oral History Project- Stories from the Chamizal Library**



“Stories from the Chamizal Library” is a new oral history project of the Institute of Oral History (IOH). This class will design and implement the project by conducting oral histories with patrons of the library and Chamizal residents.

These oral histories will allow us to record a rich history that will contribute to the IOH’s collection.

In partnership with the Chamizal Express Library, we will invite patrons of the library (residents of the Chamizal area) to share their stories with us. We will schedule these oral histories at the library with the assistance of Rebecca T. Calderon, Chamizal Express Library Manager. After you have conducted the oral histories and prepared them for deposit in the collection of the Institute of Oral History (IOH), Tatiana Rodriguez (IOH research assistant) will upload them to our website focusing on South Central. You can see it [here](#). We will plan a community celebration of the project at the library later in the semester. A separate document will be provided with more detailed information.

### **Where is the Chamizal area?**

The boundaries of the Chamizal area are Alameda to the north, Gateway South to the east, Paisano and the Border Highway to the south, and Laurel St. to the west. The Chamizal Express Library is in South Central El Paso in the area centered around the Chamizal National Memorial. The park memorializes the peaceful settlement of a boundary dispute lasting one hundred years between the U.S. and Mexico, caused by the meandering Rio Grande.

### **Why is it important?**

Barrio Chamizal is one of El Paso’s oldest neighborhoods, yet the research on it is limited. The history of this neighborhood has much to teach us about migration, the history of education, urbanization, and industrialization along the border.

**South Central Website** <https://www.southcentralep.com/>

## The Institute of Oral History (IOH)



The IOH was founded in 1972 with 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 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.

Please review both the website [here](#) and the searchable data base [here](#).

### Readings include:

- *Doing Oral History* by Donald Ritchie
- *The Vulnerable Observer* by Ruth Behar
- *They Say in Harlan County* by Alessandro Portelli
- *Mexicana Roots and Routes* by Vanessa Fonseca-Chávez
- *Memories of Chicano History* by Mario T. Garcia
- *Oral History Theory* by Lynn Abrams
- *Beloved Land* by Patricia Preciado Martin
- *The Unexpected in Oral History* by Ricardo Santiago
- *Oral History in Latin America* by David Carey

### Optional:

*The Oral History Manual* by Barbara Sommer

### Articles:

- Alessandro Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History."
- Marla Ramirez, "Gendered banishment: Rewriting Mexican repatriation through a transgenerational oral history methodology."
- Others as posted on BlackBoard Ultra.

**Grading:**

- Successful completion and quality of oral history project (60% total)
  - Design oral history project (5%)
  - Design interview questions (5%)
  - Successfully conduct five oral histories (30%)
  - Summarize and prepare oral histories for deposit in the IOH (20%)
- Attendance and participation in class discussions (20%)
- Discussion leader (10%)
- Reflection paper (10%)

**Artificial Intelligence**

AI is with us to stay, but as an educator, I have been struggling with helping students use it ethically. Because of this, no AI is allowed in the class.

**Incompletes**

I will not give students an Incomplete in this class unless they meet the following criteria:

- There is a verifiable exceptional situation that does not allow you to complete the class (medical, familial, etc.)
- You have completed at least 75% of the course requirements.

My experience is that students do not do well with Incompletes and often they turn in to F's because the students don't complete the work in time (up to a year).

If something is happening that is affecting your performance in the class, please speak to me to see what we can do.

## Weekly schedule (subject to revision) <sup>1</sup>

Week 1- No class because UTEP starts on Tuesday, January 20.

Week 2 (January 26) Introduction to public history & oral history

- What is oral history?
- What is its purpose and significance?
- How do we conduct oral histories?
- We will review *Doing Oral History* (3rd edition). This book will serve as our oral history manual during the semester.
- Discuss Alessandro Portelli's essay, "The Peculiarities of Oral History."

Week 3 (February 2) Reflecting on our position as oral historians

- Discuss Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer*.
- View Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The danger of a single story"
- Begin planning the oral history project.

Week 4 (February 9)

- Oral history workshop- Basics 101
- Discuss <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principle-and-practices/>
- Planning the oral history project

Week 5 (February 16)

- Tentative visit to the Chamizal Library.

Week 6 (February 23)

- Discuss Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County* by Alessandro Portelli
- Planning the oral history project

Week 7 (March 2)

- Discuss Fonseca-Chávez, *Mexicana Roots and Routes*
- Discuss Ramirez, "Gendered banishment: Rewriting Mexican repatriation through a transgenerational oral history methodology."

Week 8 (March 9)

- Discuss Garcia, *Memories of Chicano History*
- Project work.

SPRING BREAK March 16-20

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<sup>1</sup> Since we are collaborating with the Chamizal Library, dates may change.

Week 9 (March 23)

- Project work.

Week 10 (March 30)

- Discuss Abrams *Oral History Theory*
- Project work.

Week 11 (April 6)

- Discuss Martin, *Beloved Land*
- Project work.

Week 12 (April 13)

- Discuss Santiago, *The Unexpected in Oral History*
- Project work.

Week 13 (April 20)

- Discuss Carey, *Oral History in Latin America*
- Project work.

Week 14 (April 27)

- Project work.

Week 15 (May 4) Wrap up

Finals week (May 13) Reflection paper due May 15, 2026 by 11:59.