**Queens Memory Project**

**Oral History Module**

**Anahi Viladrich Research Methods**

**Course #334-2 Fall 2012**

**Required reading in advance of Session 1:**

* Hansen, Debra Gold. 2010. Oral History in Libraries and Archives. In *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences, Third Edition*, 1: 1, 4045-4055. Retrieved from: http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t917508581

**Wed. 9/5/12, Session 1: Defining and Understanding Oral History**

* [:30 min] Listening exercise: Partners take turns conducting 5-minute interviews. Once time is up, everyone gathers to introduce their partners to the group.
  + Points of discussion:
    - Did you choose to take notes? What were the benefits and drawbacks of that decision?
    - What did the person introducing you forget to mention?
    - Why do you think you remembered the things you did about the person you introduced?
* [:10 min] Speaker introduction: Mission and purpose of the QMP, Natalie’s background and current role at Queens College and Queens Library
* [:05 min] Examples:
  + Listen to a clip from a Queens Memory Project interview (Laurie Greenwald, “A Politicized Youth” clip)
* [:30 min] Instruction:
  + What IS oral history?.... not journalism, not conversation, not a survey
  + The traditional life history model for oral history interviews
  + Structuring an oral history project around a theme or topic
  + Finding a great source (narrator) for that information
  + Doing a pre-interview and other preparatory research
  + Examples of how oral history has been used in the discipline (specific to each class – Sociology, English, Anthropology, Urban Studies, etc)
  + Objective of this 6-session oral history module: teach interviewing techniques and procedures to produce materials eligible for inclusion in college’s archives (why this is important)
* [:10 min] Equipment round-up: What equipment do we all have that can produce a good audio recording and digital (still) photography? Make a plan for everyone to bring their devices to the next session.

**Required reading in advance of Session 2:**

* Chapter 3 from *Doing Oral History* by Donald Ritchie (freely available on Google books)
* Outline of biographical facts (a nutritional history) about their instructor, Anahi Viladrich, for next session’s listening exercise.

**Monday, 9/10/12, Session 2: Pre-Interview Prep and Interviewing Practice**

* [:10 min] Instruction: Read passages from Donald Ritchie’s Doing Oral History, Chapter 3, aloud to teach concept of closed/open questions, opening questions, and summarizing questions.
  + Points of discussion:
    - Ways to structure an open-ended question
    - Importance of staying quiet and encouraging your interviewee non-verbally to tell you more
    - When closed, or clarifying questions are good
    - When summarizing questions are good, recognizing and discussing themes in interviewee’s life
    - Steering clear of judgment and assumptions that have more to do with your own values than with the values of the interviewee
    - Introduce concept of shared authority
* [:30 min] Listening exercise: Group gathers in a circle. Based on the instructor’s biographical outline, students take turns volunteering questions they might ask in an interview. Moderator gives one positive comment and one note for improvement after each question. Moderator introduces a new visual item (ex: a photograph, map, news clipping, etc) relating to the instructor’s life and asks her/him about it. Instructor provides some answers so students can practice following up on a previous answer, but mostly, the floor is open for questions.
  + Points of discussion:
    - Making good use of both open-ended and clarifying questions
    - Importance of a flowing, logical sequence of questions for the interviewee
    - Importance of using pre-interview information to inform questions
    - Using visual materials in an interview: differences between interviewee’s reaction to her/his own photos vs. new materials
* [:30 min] Listening exercise: Students take about 10 minutes to write their own food and/or healing tradition histories following the instructor’s food history biography as an example. Then students are partnered up to first study their partner’s biography and then each do 10 minute interviews.
  + Points of discussion:
    - Which questions worked, which ones didn’t?
    - Did you discuss everything on the bio sheet, or use one fact as a jumping off point?
    - What did you do to help yourself remember what your interviewee was telling you?
* [:40 min] Instruction:
  + Understanding consent forms
    - Purpose of informed consent
    - The many ways these materials might be used in the future
  + Understanding submission forms
    - Examining the submission form documents
    - Seeing how this information is used in a cataloger’s screen and a finished record
  + Details about interview assignment, including outline of topics to be discussed (if applicable). Research goals, specific guidelines.
  + Students brainstorm about who would be a good interviewee for this project. Everyone is given a packet with a pre-interview questionnaire and consent forms to share with the potential interviewee. Those without a good idea are asked to stay after class. The instructor will have a list of willing interviewees and will talk with each student to figure out which interviewee will be the best match for each student. Arrangements and introductions will happen before the next session.

**9/19/12 Consent forms, pre-interview questionnaire DUE**

**Required reading in advance of Session 3**:

* “A Life-Story Interview Guide” from Paul Thompson’s *The Voice of the Past* p. 309-323

**Monday, 10/1/12, Regular Class + IRB registration**

Class meets in computer lab on campus for regular class session. Walk through creating a user account on IRBnet.org and uploading CITI test results so Natalie can add each student to the IRB protocol as key personnel.

**Monday, 10/15/12, Session 3: Listening & Questions, Using Equipment**

* [:30 min] Instruction: Everyone brings out their recording gear
  + Setting up and operating the digital recorders and cameras
  + Finding a good setting for the interview
    - Room size
    - Eliminating avoidable noise
    - Getting the person alone if possible – otherwise, introducing the other people in the room
      * Information to include EVERY time: Your name, Interviewee’s name, the date, the location of the interview
  + Operating a camera
  + Getting a good shot
    - Going outside for natural light if possible
    - Taking a few pictures
    - Waiting until end of interview
* [:10 min] Examples:
  + Photos and audio clip supporting each other to better tell a story
  + Gathered materials (menus, programs, other ephemera)
* [:05 min] Instructor fields questions about specific assignment for class and confirms that everyone has an interviewee for the assignment.
* [:45 min] Listening exercise: Partners take turns interviewing each other for 10 minutes each using the specific guidelines of their assignment. Followed by group discussion.
  + Points of discussion:
    - Everyone gives their partners one positive note and one note about something they could do to improve their interviewing technique
    - Importance of body language, careful listening for good follow-ups, leaving silence
    - Following the topic met with enthusiasm and emotion – not letting the topic outline take over
* [:05 min] Exercise: Everyone circle back to public list of things they want to learn about oral history interviewing – how are we doing? Anything to add or clarify?

**Wednesday, 10/17/12, Session 4: Practice and Reflection**

* [:40 min] Listening exercise Part 1: Participants divide into partners. Each partner will get a turn to interview and will use their audio recorder during the interviews. The opening statement required for all interviews will be written on the board so interviewers can practice saying it at the start of the recording. The interviewer’s opening question will also be written on the board, “Tell me about a joyous moment in your life.” Interviewers are instructed to jot down minimal notes to prompt follow-up questions and to wait for 5 seconds after their interviewee finishes speaking before asking the next question. Exercise plays out for 10 minutes before the moderator breaks in for discussion.
  + Points of discussion:
    - Effectiveness of silence in getting more information from an interviewee
    - Providing time to think, creating a slowed-down space, our inexperience with being quiet in normal life
    - Picking up on emotion in recounting of joyous memory, learning to follow-up on answers that contain emotion
* [:40 min] Listening exercise Part 2: Partners switch roles. Opening question this time is, “Tell me about your last major project for school.” A short list of topics to cover is distributed, which interviewers are asked to study. The list will read, “1. Course name and department, 2. Time it took to complete, 3. Subject of assignment, 4. Materials turned in for a grade, 5. What you learned from the assignment” Again, use the 5 second pauses, use clarifying questions for unfamiliar names and details, take minimal notes for later follow-ups.
  + Points of discussion:
    - How was this different than the joyous memory question?
    - Did you still encounter emotion anywhere in the answer?
    - These two questions are examples of how the mission of the oral history project impacts the interviews

**Homework (due 11/14/12):** This assignment will be distributed at the end of class. Take your recording home and listen to it. Write out your reflections on the following subjects to turn in at the next session and discuss with the group

* + How is the sound quality? Are there changes you would make for next time? (Sitting closer to the microphone, not tapping the table, etc)
  + Make a list of the questions you asked. What was effective? What wasn’t?
  + What is the best moment in the interview? Why?
  + What do you wish you had asked?

**Wednesday, 11/14/12, Session 5: Looking Closer at Your Subject**

* [:10 min] Discussion: Review homework assignment.
* [:45 min] Practice Interviews: Students divide into same partners as the last session for the interview using the specific guidelines of their assignment. Continue where you left off and ask the follow-up questions you developed. Take turns being the interviewer and using the recording equipment. Follow the guidelines of the assignment as closely as possible. These interviews last fifteen minutes each.
  + Points of discussion:
    - How was the second interview different than the first?
    - Were you able to use those follow-up questions you prepared?
* [:35 min] Discussion: Each student shares something they learned about their assignment interviewees from their pre-interview questionnaire. Students ask questions if there’s something they don’t understand in their interviewee’s answers. Each student commits to researching at least one topic before the interview to understand their interviewee’s background (example: something about the person’s religion or home country)

**Monday, 11/19/12, Session 6: Processing and Follow-up**

* [:40 min] Listening exercise: As a group, we will listen to a ten-minute interview excerpt. Moderator introduces timecode outline templates used for each interview. While we listen, students will fill in a blank timecode outline template and jot down follow-up questions as they come to mind. After the clip, class discussion and review of the completed timecode outline for this interview.
  + Points of discussion:
    - How much to include in a content outline, thinking of the end user, getting down names, dates (access points)
    - How follow-up questions sometimes lead to follow-up interviews
    - Students asked to share reflections from their homework and what they would ask their interview subjects from last week in a second interview.
    - If anyone has a highlight they would like to play for the class, they are invited to plug into the speakers and play it.
* [:25 min] Instruction:
  + Sending interviewees a thank-you note, CD of interview, and scans of visual materials they loaned for digitization (plus the materials themselves)
  + Checking in with your repository. Do they have all your materials and contact info?
  + Students are given a packet of forms to use with their interview subjects and the floor is opened up for questions
* [:25 min] Exercise: Everyone circle back to public list of things they want to learn about oral history interviewing Have learning objectives been met? What has everyone learned? Everyone name the most important thing they will take with them to their interview.

**11/28/12 Interviews, photos and submission forms DUE**

**12/10/12 Timecode outline and triangulating essay DUE**