Oral History Assignment Guidelines

PSU UNST 421

LGBTQ History Capstone

Pat Young

**Assignment:**

Conduct an oral history interview with a LGBTQ community member(s) and produce a written transcript for donation to the Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest (GLAPN). Students work in pairs for this assignment.

**Expectations:**

Depending on the person you interview and the topics you cover, the interview should last a minimum of one hour and a maximum of two hours. This may happen in one session with the person or two sessions.

If you have difficulty or get stuck, please ask for assistance. If for some reason you can’t complete the oral history – for example, the person gets sick or decides not to do the interview, please see me immediately.

**Transcription:**

You must transcribe the entire interview. Since you are working in pairs, you decide which half of the interview to transcribe. Place the two parts together in one WORD file for the final version.

It may take 5 to 8 hours to transcribe one hour of interview. Once you have completed the transcription, have the person you interviewed review it. Then make any necessary changes to the transcription.

Before you start the transcription, you **must** make a backup copy of the audio file before you start transcribing the interview.

**Final product**:

* Interview- audio.  
  Turn in two electronic copies (one on each disc) of the interview.
* Transcription  
  Make one hard copy of the transcription.   
  Please make the hard copy one sided.  
  Email me a copy of the transcription file (usually a WORD file).

In the WORD file, please **number the pages** and use double spacing or 1.5 line space.

* Make a list of key words for researchers. Put the list at the end of the transcription.
* Permission slip.  
  Turn in three copies of the permission slip. One for each copy of the transcription.
* Presentation.  
  Give a 5-minute presentation to GLAPN and your classmates during the final class. Discuss what you did and what you learned.

**Steps to a successful project**

1. Choose a person to interview. GLAPN has a list of folks who are looking forward to talking to you.
2. Learn some things about the person before you interview them. You can ask GLAPN members about the folks.
3. Draft questions. Start with a list of about 10 questions that are mainly “open ended” (lots of possible responses) rather than “closed questions” (one response). Some of your questions will be “closed” such as “Where were you born?”  
   Review the questions with your teammate. Narrow the list down to about 5 or 6 questions and save the rest as backup.
4. Call to set up an appointment for the oral history.
   1. Arrange a place to meet.
   2. Exchange contact information
   3. Give the person some idea of what you would like to discuss during the oral history.
   4. Try to meet the person as soon as possible so you will have more time to transcribe the interview and get it reviewed.
5. Borrow a digital recorder from GLAPN.
6. Make sure you know how to use the equipment. Practice with it before you do the interview. Check the volume. Make sure the batteries are good.
7. Review the permission slip with the person BEFORE you start the interview. Have the person sign the permission slip.
   1. Be up front with everything. Tell the person the purpose of the project and that you intend to transcribe the tape. The oral history plus transcription will be stored at the Oregon Historical Society.
   2. Most folks are fine with the provisions and will sign the slip. Sometimes a person may want to put a restriction on the interview and not let the public access it for ten years.
8. Conduct the interview.
   1. TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONE. NO texting during the interview.
   2. Meet in a mutually agreed upon location. Meet on time.
   3. Start the interview by stating your name, your teammate’s name, name of interviewee, date, place of interview, purpose of interview.
   4. Take a few notes to the interview – try to know what you want to ask without having to read the questions to the person. Simply have a conversation. Let your intuition guide you.
   5. You may need to get the spelling of places and names that the person mentions. You can do that during the interview – or take notes and ask them when you finish talking.
   6. Wrap up. Come with a strategic way to end the interview.
9. Send a thank you note to the person right away.
10. Transcribe the interview.

At the beginning of the transcription, please include a paragraph or two that describes the interviewer, interviewee and the topics you covered. Follow the example given for the first page of the transcription.

1. Make a list of key words for researchers. Key words / topics covered in the interview. Sort of like a short index. Put these at the end of the transcription.
2. Turn in the final product.

Tips for LGBTQ History Capstone students

From the students who took the class – Winter 2009

Student one.

* Do your interview as soon as you can,
* Put headphones on when transcribing. Helps block background noise.
* Have a paper to write down names and page numbers so you can go back to that page later.
* The readings in this class are really good. Enjoy them.
* Practice with the recorder before you get there.

Student two.

* Do the interview as soon as possible.
* Send general questions to interviewee before the interview.
* Do as much research as possible on the person prior to interview.
* Send a thank you note immediately after the interview.
* Familiarize yourself with some of the major milestones in Portland gay history.

Student three.

* Read the LGBT timeline carefully. This more than anything helped determine what questions to prepare for the interview and who I wanted to interview.
* In the transcription process, I began with an audio program that did not allow me to control playback manually, so I had to use the mouse to start and stop. I switched to Windows Media Player, which lets you start and stop the computer externally.
* The extra second and not having to take the cursor off the WORD document made the process at least twice as fast.
* If the interview subject has a stipulation in their “gift of deed” make sure you are clear on exactly what they want.

Student four.

* Try not to talk too much while collecting oral history, including the normal “yeah, yeah, uh huh, right, “ that you normally do in conversation. Try simply nodding instead.
* Even if you think the interviewee is going off topic or not talking about what you think is important, LET them talk. You’ll get a better story and might be amazed at what you learn.
* Pace yourself when working on the transcription. Set little goals like “I’m going to transcribe ten minutes every day.” Don’t try to do it all in one sitting.

Student five.

* When interviewing your person, try not to talk too much.
* Maybe just use a few bulletin points. It makes it a lot easier for transcribing in you just let your person talk and you can avoid leading the interviewee.
* Give yourself plenty of time for transcribing because although it is easy, it does take a lot of time and it can drive you insane if you sit and do it for long periods of time. Split up the transcribing into small periods --- 2 to 3 hours.

Student six.

* Windows Media works really well for transcription. Use the “mini window” and the “always on top” function and it’s relatively painless then to go back and forth between the audio and the transcription.
* Decide on a way to hand the pauses, “ums” and “ahs” at the beginning of your transcription and stick to it. If you get three or four “ums” in a row, type in two and then use ellipses. Just make sure that whatever you do, you’re consistent.
* Have way more questions than you think you’ll need. If you get someone who doesn’t necessarily like to talk a lot, you’ll run out of material too quickly.
* Think of the interview as a conversation with someone you really want to get to know. Most people enjoy telling you about themselves.
* Twenty minute chunks were good for transcribing. Give yourself plenty of time to do the transcription.
* Sometimes you have to let them tell you the story they’re used to telling before you can get them to give you any new information.

Student seven.

* Prepare questions ahead of time for your interview. The more the better.
* Practice with the recorder beforehand so you know how to use it properly.
* Do what background research you can on who you’re interviewing.
* There is no reason to be nervous about the interview if you’re prepared. You’re taking an oral history and almost everyone like to talk about themselves.

Student eight.

* Some of the recorders have a “high quality” recording option – use it! It does make a difference.
* Start transcribing ASAP, it may not take a long time for some people, but it took me about 5 hours to do 29 minutes so everyone is different.
* Don’t be afraid to contact the person you interviewed afterwards with any questions. For the most part, they are happy to help.
* If the person is involved with an organization, ask it there’s a website. This can help later with name or place spelling during the transcription.

Student nine.

* The interview process was pretty interesting because there are different ways to do it. I wrote down all of my questions and asked new ones as he (the person I interviewed) answered them. By this, I mean, if he would answer my question and bring up a new topic while doing so; I would ask more about it or how people reacted to it. This worked really well for me.
* My partner chose instead to write down a general idea of what he wanted to say and adlib from there. Both methods work really well. It just depends on what kind of style you are more comfortable with.
* One thing that we did not do is wrap up our interview. The person we were interviewing received a phone call and instead of turning the tape recorder back on to end the interview, we finished off record (with the recorder turned off). If this happens to you, remember to get the ending on record.
* Also, sit down with the recorded version and do a trial run of transcribing even if it’s before you plan on rally doing it just to get a feel for what it is going to be like so you can plan according. I did this and heard that some other students did this too and it was a good way to know what to expect with you actually start the transcription process.
* The last think I’ll say is be patient with yourself and you may find that even if the transcribing is a pain, you will really absorb the interview this way.

**SAMPLE: format for transcription**:

This is a sample of how to start the transcription – and how to place the “key topics/words” at the end of the transcription.

Interview with Sally Cohn

February 8, 2011

Interviewed by Jxxx Dxxx and Exxx Bxxx

For the Portland State University LGBT History Capstone

Winter Term 2011

Instructor: Pat Young

JD = Jxxxx Dxxxx

EB = Exxx Bxxxx

SC = Sally Cohn

Sally Cohn is a lesbian activist who has been involved with many organizations in Portland, Oregon since the 1970s. She discusses several topics including her involvement with the Lesbian Community Project, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, lesbian stereotypes, women’s softball, and what it was like to fight anti-gay ballot measures. She also talks about her appearance on national television doing her “hand whistling.”

JD: Today is February 8th it’s a Monday. We are at Sally Cohn’s house today. My name is Jxxx.

EB: And I am Exxxxx.

JD: And we are here to interview Sally Cohn.

SC: Is it actually Monday or is it Tuesday?

JD & EB: Yes! It is Tuesday!

( …… sample text …….)

SC: Well…. Softball? I never actually played softball. But ahh in my final years before I left Portland in the early 60’s I used to go a lot of. . . ballgames and the teamt was, ahh . . sponsored by a florist that used to be near Lloyd Center. I think it’s no longer around and the guy how owned it passed away. His business was Irv Lind Florists. But a lot of lesbians, ahh, ahh played for that team. And of course they had to be closeted and all that stuff. Oh, I would, I would watch, you know I would go out and watch the team and barrowed someone’s stopwatch or something… ahh… not stopwatch but, ahh, clicker counter. And, ahhh, I would read the sports section about each game and, ahh, it would say what the attendance wa. And then I would, you know, press my clicker. I’d click for ever body who I thought was one of ME. I would click. And then I would figure the percentage. [Chuckling]

EB: All right.

SC: The lesbian percentage in the softball audience. I’d work to find that. But, no I never actually played softball.

(End of interview)

Key words:

America’s Got Talent

Lesbian Community Project

Ballot Measure 9

*Ladder* Magazine

OLOC: Old Lesbians Organizing for Change

DOB: Daughters of the Bilitis

Old Wives Tales

Portland Town Council