

At Work in America: Oral and Written Histories

Prof. Holly Painter

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Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday, 1:15-2:15pm and by appointment

Course description:

The focus of this course is the jobs people do and how interviews, oral histories, and written histories can uncover, preserve, and present these workers' stories. You will learn and practice field research skills and gain an understanding of large economic forces that shape work in the U.S, as well as how workers' identities and demographic characteristics (e.g., sex, race, age, language) interact with these forces. With this foundation, you will interview workers in the community and present each oral history in a different way in three major assignments: a lightly edited transcription; a magazine-style article that synthesizes field research with database research; and a creative piece. You will work with your classmates to develop and revise your interviews and writing, and each assignment will be guided by readings that both model what you will produce and provide further history and context for the larger theme of how jobs are changing in the U.S.

Learning objectives:

Students will understand:

- how automation, technology, outsourcing, immigration, and shifts in laws and tastes have changed the composition and nature of American jobs
- how national and international economic forces impact individual workers
- how workers' identities and demographic characteristics impact their experiences of work
- the role of oral history and other forms of field research within the wider pantheon of scholarly research
- how 20th and 21st century American poetry, visual art, photography, and comics have depicted work and workers

Students will be able to:

- organize, prepare for, and conduct in-person interviews with community members within a safe, ethical, and responsible framework
- exercise interpersonal skills that support respectful, meaningful, and effective interactions with workers from diverse backgrounds
- demonstrate an awareness of socioeconomic, cultural, and racial diversity in their written work, class participation, and field research
- synthesize their own field research with library and government database research, building on information literacy skills gained in first-year FWIL courses

Required texts & materials:

1. *Field Notes (Luis Vivanco)*
2. *Working (Studs Terkel)*

You should expect to read about 50 pages each week and do homework between most class periods. In addition to the above texts, which you should buy, rent, or borrow, I will post Blackboard links to other readings. You are responsible for reading and bringing these with you to class. However, you don't need to print them if you have them on your laptop or other mobile device. You just need to have them accessible for discussions. You will also listen to some podcasts and view art and photography. These links are on Blackboard.

Finally, you will need MS Office, free here: go.uvm.edu/getoffice.

Office hours & contacting me:

My office hours are 1:15-2:15pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays in Old Mill, office 419. Please sign up in advance for a 15-minute slot at hpainter.youcanbook.me. If you can't make these times, email me and we'll find a time that works.

My email is hpainter@uvm.edu. There's a lot of information in this syllabus, in the course schedule, and on Blackboard. *Before you email me, check whether the answer to your question is in these materials. If not, email a classmate and wait for a reply.* If you've done those two things and still have a question, then you can email me. I'll reply within 48 hours.

Grades:**Grading Scale:**

A	= 93-100 pts	C+	= 77-79.99 pts	D-	= 60-62.99 pts
A -	= 90-92.99 pts	C	= 73-76.99 pts	F	= 0-59.99 pts
B+	= 87-89.99 pts	C-	= 70-72.99 pts	XF	= Failure due to
B	= 83-86.99 pts	D+	= 67-69.99 pts		academic dishonesty
B-	= 80-82.99 pts	D	= 63-66.99 pts		

Note: There is no extra credit. Please do not contact me asking for extra credit. The time you have available for this class is best spent doing the assigned coursework.

Grading breakdown:

Transcribed Interview	20 pts	Attendance & Participation	15 pts
Character Study	25 pts	Homework	15 pts
Creative Representation of Work/Workers	25 pts		

Project 1: Transcribed Interview (due October 8)

After gaining a firm theoretical foundation in safe, ethical, and responsible interview techniques (working with Luis Vivanco's *Field Notes*) and practicing with each other, you will each interview someone in the community in person about their job. You will record, transcribe, and lightly edit these interviews. You will also turn in a short reflection paper on your interview experience.

Project 2: Character Study (due November 12)

You will interview a different person in the community who has been in their job or field for at least 20 years. Then, you will write an engaging magazine-style article that combines your interview material with research about the job and how it has changed over time. This will include library database research, as well as sources like the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. You will also turn in a short reflection paper on your interview experience.

Project 3: Creative Representation of Work & Workers (due December 5)

You will choose either poetry, photography, or comics to depict your third interviewee. You will also provide a brief introduction giving context for the interview and a short reflection paper discussing your interview experience and explaining the choices you made in creating your piece.

Attendance & Participation

I expect you to attend class and participate fully in discussion and in-class activities. Each week, you will earn up to one point for attendance and participation (.5pts per class, with a free point for the week of Thanksgiving). If you're absent, it's your responsibility to find out from your classmates what you missed, complete any *Field Notes* activities we did in class, and check Blackboard for any materials distributed in class. It's not necessary to tell me you'll be out, but if you'd like to talk about what you missed, come to office hours.

If you miss class *for any reason*, you can earn attendance/participation credit for that day by emailing me a 500-word response to the assigned reading/exercise by 11:59pm the following day. This option is available for up to three absences over the course of the semester and is designed to accommodate sports, medical, family, religious, and personal absences.

Homework

I expect you to prepare for class by completing all of your reading and homework. You will submit some homework via Blackboard, and you will do some in your *Field Notes* book. See Blackboard for a further breakdown of homework points.

Plagiarism

The consequences for plagiarism are worse than the consequences of turning in something that is imperfect or unfinished but your own work. *Specifically, if you plagiarize, you will get a zero for the assignment.* This includes the three big projects, homework, and in-class activities. In addition, I will turn over suspected violations of the Code of Ethics to the Center for Student Conduct. If you are not sure what plagiarism is or how to avoid it, come speak to me in office hours or make an appointment with a Writing Center tutor. See UVM's code at uvm.edu/~uvmppg/ppg/student/acadintegrity.pdf.