Introducing Alumni Oral History Lesson Plan

Rationale

Oral history, as defined by the Oral History Association, “…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 (referred to as narrator), both of whom have the conscious intention of creating a permanent record to contribute to an understanding of the past.” (2009) Simply put, oral history is essentially storytelling that allows history to come alive. (Dean, Despit, & Munro, 1998) This rationale will advocate for the implementation of this Alumnae oral history lesson plan into college survival classes as well as into introductory history courses at Southern University at New Orleans (SUNO). The implementation of this lesson plan into the university’s curriculum would not only be academically relevant to incoming freshmen but would also be beneficial to helping SUNO’s Leonard S. Washington Memorial Library and Center for African and African American Studies repopulate their archival collections after the sustained devastation brought on by hurricane Katrina. Lastly, this project could encourage school pride and the implementation of a new tradition while connecting Alumnae to the future graduates of SUNO. Students will understand the importance of oral history and best principles and practices in conducting oral history interviews. Students will also learn about the history of the university and gain an understanding of the experiences of SUNO’s Alumnae while being able to relate and see hope through those experiences.

The overall goals of this lesson plan are 2-fold. The first goal is to record the stories and recollections about SUNO Alumnae and their experiences at the school throughout the years. The second goal is to highlight the impact of SUNO’s education through first hand narrations of challenges, achievements, events, and relationships by the Alumnae who lived them. The
questions will involve the interviewees discussing their memories of SUNO, including friends, professors, classmates, and classroom experiences. Interviewees will also share how the SUNO affected them, share their careers after college, and advice for future graduates. This lesson plan will provide students with the tools and best practices of conducting oral history interviews and recording them according to methods written by the Oral History Association. Learning these best practices will give students proper instructions on how to conduct a neutral interview while getting information needed to construct a thoughtful interview.

There are 3 main justifications for this Alumnae lesson plan that would entice instructors at SUNO to adopt this lesson plan as according to Peter Smagorinsky’s book *Teaching English by Design: How to Create and Carry Out Instructional Units*. The first justification for this lesson plan would be the relevance it would have on student interest. Smagorinsky argues that students are interested in characters that they can see themselves or their life experiences in. (Smagorinsky, 2008) This Alumnae lesson plan will do that. By giving students the tools necessary to conduct a proper interview on Alumnae during part 2 and 3 of the lesson plan, freshmen students will be able to learn from the academic experiences of an Alumnae student. The alum could offer advice to the freshmen students on their experiences and the freshmen can gain a better perspective on what they should expect in college. Freshmen students will be assessed on their reflections on what they learned throughout the unit. It is likely that students will come away with a fresher perspective on college life at SUNO and gain wisdom from the interviews of the Alumnae.

Another justification for this lesson plan is that it will help teach skills students can use outside of the university as well as skills for success in college. By learning how why and how to practice the cultivation of oral history in parts 1 through 3 of this lesson plan, students will be
able to use those skills to further document their own family histories. Hurricane Katrina devastated many homes that included family mementos. Even though students or families couldn’t recover their mementos such as photo albums, this oral history project will allow students to regain their history by recording and transcribing their loved one’s experiences. The skills that student will come away with from this lesson plan that will benefit them in college (and beyond) are development in writing, research, critical inquiry, listening, and public speaking. Skills gained from this lesson plan will also include teamwork, increased retention in content, and networking abilities. (Dean, Despit, & Munro, 1998)

The last justification of this lesson plan is the establishment of school pride, tradition and identity through the telling of SUNO’s history. Oral history is interdisciplinary and when introduced into the curriculum, it can fulfill objectives in almost every discipline however, some disciplines would be harder to introduce specific oral history topics and themes. (Dean, Despit, & Munro, 1998) This oral history unit will be relevant in establishing pride in at the university by allowing freshmen students to document and publish uplifting narratives from Alumnae and allowing them to see themselves as future Knights (SUNO’s mascot) and finding pride in that. David Desteno and Lisa Williams, professors in the department for Psychology at Northeastern University states the belief in an article from The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology that:

“…the experience of pride serves as a crucial role in providing incentive to pursue success despite short term losses, a belief we call motivational hypothesis of pride. Put simply, when feeling proud about recognized accomplishments, an individual might feel an incentive to pursue further action in that valued domain.” (2008)
Through the instructor’s mock interview and the group interviews freshmen students will undertake with their chosen Alumnae, students will feel pride in the wealth of knowledge that they will accumulate from the interviews. The stories from the Alumnae would inspire action on part of the freshmen student to do their very best at the university by allowing themselves to see where they could be after graduation. Alumnae students will also feel a since of pride in recollecting their achievements during their time at SUNO and find pride in allow thing their experiences to guide and motivate freshmen students into doing their best in their courses.

In an article written in the journal *The Vermont Connection*, Assistant Director of Leadership Programs at Ohio State University Matthew J. VanJura advocates for the importance of traditions on college campuses and their impact on universities. Van Jura states that “traditions play a unique role in the culture of student life. They have the potential to teach students about the history of their institution, provide a means for building community, instill common values that span generations of students and generate pride and enthusiasm.” (2010) This Alumnae oral history lesson plan has the potential to develop into a project that serves all incoming freshmen students if adopted as a permanent fixture in the curriculum. This lesson plan will not only teach students about SUNO’s history through research and narratives but it will instill common values learned by the Alumnae and passed on to the freshmen through the activities in this exercise. Publishing these narratives will build a community by involving Alumnae students in with their school after they’ve graduated while sparking the enthusiasm of students looking to share their stories with the university and greater community.

In conclusion, Introducing this oral history lesson plan with a focus on SUNO’s alumnæ would be academically relevant to both college survival entry history courses because it objectives would provide them with that can use throughout their college career. This unit plan
will introduce students the importance of oral history and skills of conducting an oral history interview while allowing freshmen students to learn and see themselves in the experiences of the Alumnae. SUNO will benefit from this lesson plan if it adopted into the curriculum by generating a new school tradition that emphasizes pride and achievement at SUNO. This lesson plan also has the potential to repopulate the archival collections of various departments on campus that was lost during Hurricane Katrina. This lesson plan has the capabilities to be transformed into an ongoing project that will allow the school to publish the narratives onto their websites to garner attention for the school and potentially influence retention at the university.
Bibliography


Introducing Alumni Oral History Lesson Plan

Target Audience: College Survival Courses Introductory History Courses

Instructional Period: 2-4 Class Periods | 1 Hour Per Class

Big Idea: Introducing oral history as a tool for incoming freshmen students to learn about SUNO’s history, building school pride, and connecting current students with school alumni.

Description: Incoming freshmen students utilizing oral history as a tool for learning about SUNO’s history and building connections between alumni and freshmen. Students will learn briefly be introduced to the history of SUNO while learning the importance of oral history. Students will learn methodologies of interviewing and conduct interviews with alumni. Students will gain an understanding of the way oral histories help us to learn about history, our university, and ourselves.

Goals:

- Record stories and recollections about Southern University at New Orleans alumni and their experiences throughout the years.
- Highlight the impact of a SUNO education through first hand narrations of challenges, achievements, events, and relationships by alumni who lived them.

Objectives:

Students will:

1. Understand that oral history is a way of gathering detailed information on specific event, people, places, and time periods.
2. Identify and honor ethical standards set forth by the Oral History Association.
3. Learn fundamental elements of recording oral history interviews, crafting questions, responding to and analyzing the interviewee’s experiences.

Assessments:

Students Will:

- Turn in fully completed interview and reflection worksheets
- Ask personal interview questions during mock interview
- Participate in class discussions
- Actively participate in oral history practice
- Each group will turn in 20-30 minute oral history recording (video and/or mp3 file) and transcripts

Materials:

- Interview Worksheet
- Reflection Worksheet
- Interview Release Form
- Oral History Association Best Practices
  - http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/
- Brief History of SUNO
  - http://www.blackpast.org/aah/southern-university-1880
- Oral History Videos
  - Conducting Oral History Interviews
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVv_QAFhm1
  - Why do Oral History? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sOmEpj2STM
  - Smith College Libraries Alumnae Oral History Project
    https://media.smith.edu/departments/archives/alumoh/playlists/2010s.html

- Guest Speakers
- Tape and Video Recorder (Cellphone video and voice recorder acceptable if schools can’t provide equipment)
- Timer

**Instructional Procedure:**

- **Instructor Pre-Activity**
  - Gain permission to establish or use established Youtube Channel for Alumni Oral History Project
  - Coordinate with campus archivist and library director to store video files, mp3 files, and transcriptions
  - Contact and arrange prominent alumni for mock interview
  - Prepare interview questions for mock interview and discuss them with interviewee
  - Instructor should contact IT department to borrow and set up video and tape recording equipment for the mock interview

- **Part 1: Intro into oral history and SUNO’s history (55 minutes) (Objective 1-2)**
  - Instructor will introduce concepts of oral history and discuss the value/significance of oral history on SUNO’s campus. Briefly give an overview of SUNO’s history and introduce the theme and lesson plan (20 Minutes)
  - Play video *Why do Oral History* (10 Minutes)
  - Introduce Oral History Association Best Practices (15 Minutes)
  - Homework: Assign students to watch Smith College Libraries Oral History Project and ask them to come up with 3 questions on their interview worksheet

- **Part 2: Conducting a Proper Interview / Activity (55 minutes) (Objective 1-2)**
  - Introduce proper interview techniques (20 minutes)
    - Play video on *Conducting Oral History Interviews*
  - Invite guest speaker from SUNO to simulate a mock proper interview techniques (30 minutes)
  - Open floor for student question and comments (10 minutes)
o Homework: Assign students list of interview questions to rehearse for student led interviews

- **Part 3: Student Interviews (55 Minutes) (Objective 2-3)**
  o Split class into groups of 3 or 4. Assign roles to students (interviewer, writer, camera person. Allow students to select (10 Minutes)
  o Invite alumni into the room and assign them to a station with student group
  o Allow students to conduct interviews, Set timer. (30 Minutes)
    ▪ Walk around to listen in on interviews.
  o After conclusion of interviews, thank alumni. Open floor for questions and comments and assign homework (10 Minutes)
  o Homework: Group to transcribe oral history and turn in mp3 and/or video (5 Minutes)

- **Part 4: Wrap Up and Reflections (55 Minutes) (Objective 3)**
  o Open floor for group presentation of their interviews (40 Minutes)
    ▪ They should address who they interviewed and what they found most interesting
  o Have class reflect on the importance of oral history (15 Minutes)
    ▪ If alumni experiences impact their views, etc.
  o Collect homework
  o Review and post interviews.

**Rubric**

100 Points Total

For passing grade, students will need to complete the following:

- Class participation – 25 points
- Interview Worksheet – 25 points
- Reflections Worksheet – 25 points
- Interview/Transcriptions – 25 points
Interview Worksheet

Directions: Please come up with THREE questions for the mock interview. Questions should allow interviewee to discuss their memories of SUNO, including their friends, classmates, professors, classes, achievements, challenges, careers after graduation, and advice for incoming freshmen. During the mock interview, if your question is answered, write the answer in the field below.

Question:
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Reflection Worksheet

Directions: What are your reflections from our alumni oral history activity? What are some important take away from this activity? Did the interviewee give you any advice that you would apply during your tenure at SUNO? Lastly, do you envision yourself participating in this oral story project after graduation? Be as detailed as possible. Use the back of this sheet for more room.

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Southern University at New Orleans
Alumnae Oral History Project
INTERVIEWEE RELEASE FORM
Audio, Video, and Transcripts

I, _________________________

_____, do hereby give to Southern University at New Orleans
(name of narrator)

(SUNO), all rights, title or interest in the video/tape recorded interviews conducted by the
SUNO Alumnae Oral History Project on _______________.
(date)

I understand that these interviews will be protected by the copyright and deposited into
SUNO’s Leonard S. Washington Memorial Library for the use of future research. I also
understand that videos, tape recordings, and/or transcripts may be used in public presentations
included but not limited to audio or video documentaries and exhibits. This gift does not limit
any use that I myself may want to make of the information in these recordings.

Initial:

Videos, tapes, and transcripts may be used without restriction ________.

Videos, tapes, and transcripts are subject to the attached restrictions________.

________________________________________________
Signature of Interviewee
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Date

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Address
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Email Address
Phone Number