

Course Description:

This course is centered on the ethnographic field technique or methodology known as the life history. If ethnographies are descriptions of a culture, then the life history is a "person-centered" ethnography. What this method consists of is a rigorous yet compassionate effort to portray the lives of ordinary individuals in specific cultures and contexts.

In anthropology the life history, or personal narrative of one's life, has long been recognized as an important vehicle for learning about how "culture" is experienced and created by individuals. The life history, more than some other forms of anthropological writing, focuses on the expressive side of culture—how people experience the meaningful events and crises of their lives, how they feel about what they do (or at least what they say about how they feel).

The life history is the flip side of the usual anthropological description of a way of life. Instead of how norms, values, and rules shape people's behaviors, the life history reveals how the individual copes with the stream of events, values, and rules his or her culture imposes. It gives voice to the ordinary person, as opposed to the famous.

Life histories have a special significance in our highly technological and fast-paced, complex world. As we have become more isolated from one another, the life history offers a means of putting us back in touch with others: How do people experience adolescence, the discovery of their sexuality, the breakup of a marriage, growing older, the death of a close friend or relative, and other of life's crises? What do people see as the significant events or turning points in their lives? How do younger people view their life experiences differently from older people? How do men and women see their lives differently?

For me, the value of the life history is the intimacy that results from listening to and telling stories. It is the understanding that individuals from diverse cultures share because of our commonalities. The value of this personal theme may be questioned by those who wish for detachment and distance from the objects of their study, and by those who question the subjective nature of fieldwork in the social sciences. It goes without saying that anthropologists must be acutely aware of the relations between "self" and "subject," and of the interactions between the inner life of the anthropologist and the lives she/he is studying.

This course is about lives—the expression of life stories, their collection and recording, and their presentation in written format. We will look at how the life history has evolved in anthropology and oral history; the structure and meaning of life history as a western genre; life stories in non-western form; the life history as a collaborative venture; gender and the expression of life accounts; the life history as an expression of self vs. the life history as a window on culture; and the limitations of life history research.

Equally important, this is a "how to" course. It is a learning by doing course. We will be discussing the selection of life history subjects, building rapport, life history interviewing, being a good listener, the processing of life history interviews, editing, presentation of narrative, and the organization and analysis of life history materials.

Ultimately we are asking the following questions: How does the life history allow us to know and understand another person? What do we seek in life histories? What do we gain from them? How do life histories apply to your particular field of interest?

- Each student will learn first hand about life history by conducting a series of tape-recorded interviews with an individual, with the aim of writing that person's life history in a 75-100 (or so) page paper.
- You are encouraged to find an older person who is willing to disclose the details of his or her life and who has time for 10-12 + hours of interviews.
- There are tape recorders (2) and transcribers which can also be used as tape recorders (12) available for check-out from the Geography - Anthropology Office in Candelaria 2200 (8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.). You will be expected to provide your own tapes. You will not be given a grade for this class if you do not return all equipment that you have checked out.
- The check out period will be from **Monday noon to Thursday noon** and **Thursday after noon to Monday before noon**. If you want to reserve or renew items, please call or email Pepper Mueller at 351-2021 or pepper.mueller@unco.edu
- **Student life histories** are available for your review in the Anthropology/Geography Main Office: Candelaria 2200A (behind Pepper's desk).
- **Class attendance is a requirement.** Your presence and participation in class are essential to your successful completion of the assignments and life history project for this course. Your failure to participate in the class to the fullest extent will result in the lowering of your course grade. Absences will result in 10 points each being taken off your point accumulation.

Course Requirements and Evaluation:

200 Life History Manuscript; 2 copies due no later than **May 4 (Mon) at 4:15**

[+ Fieldnotes/Personal Journal on interviewing process due at time of individual consultation]

100 Short Assignments and Class Participation (late assignments turned into my box without prior approval will not be accepted; one point will be deducted for each day late).

25 3 Short written assignments on Essie's Story and 2 on Life Story Interview; 5 points @ (see syllabus for due dates: listed as #1, #2, #3, #4, #5).

Please put your name, the date, and Chapter # and Title at top of page

A. What is this Chapter or section about? Briefly (1/2 page single space) summarize the content

B. Use a quote or two (give page no.) to describe the one or two most important thing you learned from this chapter or section. That is, what gave you pause; at what point did you stop reading and remark/think/question: that was important! that was interesting! (this can be on method or any component of content) (1/2 page; single space).

10 PERSEPOLIS: Named "Best Comix of the Year" Persepolis is Marjane Satrapi's memoir of growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. In powerful black-and-white comic strip images, Satrapi tells the story of her life in Tehran from ages six to fourteen, years that saw the overthrow of the Shah's regime, the triumph of the Islamic Revolution, and the devastating effects of war with Iraq. The intelligent and outspoken only child of committed Marxists and the great-granddaughter of one of Iran's last emperors, Marjane bears witness to a childhood uniquely entwined with the history of her country. Write a two page (double spaced) reflection on this book. This can be personal, but I'd also like you to reflect on the impact of this style of *life history* writing/drawing: March

5 Partially edited transcription of Steppingstones Assignment (for student exchange): Feb. 2

10 Steppingstones Assignment (final draft): Feb.9

10 Partially edited Transcription of First Interview: Feb.16

20 Two Class Presentations. Each Presentation = 10 pts. Feb 16/23 and April 20/27.

10 Review of Student Life History: Table of Contents: Feb. 23

5 Polished Draft of Background/Introduction: March 9

5 Polished Draft of Chapter One: March 23

300 TOTAL **A = 300 - 270 (100-90%)** **B = 269 - 240 (89-80%)**
 C = 239 - 210 (79-70%) **D = 209 - 180 (69-60%)**

Tentative Course Outline and Assignments

Assignments are listed on the day that they are due: Look ahead in syllabus.

Week #1

Jan. 12

Introduction to Course

Course Requirements; Selecting a Life History Subject

In-Class: truths and lies

- **THINK ABOUT SELECTING A PERSON WHOSE LIFE HISTORY YOU WOULD LIKE TO RESEARCH; YOU MUST MAKE CONTACT WITH PROSPECTIVE LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEWEE WITHIN THE NEXT WEEK; EXPLAIN NATURE OF PROJECT.**

(See: "Student Fieldwork Approval Form.")

Week #2

Jan.19

No Class: Martin Luther King's B'day

Assignment: get started on Persepolis

Week #3

Jan.26

Introduction to Life History Method

Importance of First Interview

Introduction to Tape Recorders and Interviewing Techniques

Bring Your Tape Recorder and a blank tape to class

In-Class: Steppingstones I (practice interviewing, transcribing, writing, etc.)

Assignment: #1 Essie's Story: Introduction; pp. xi-xli

Write one page; single-spaced; divided into two sections (p. 4 syllabus); 5 points.

#2 Life Story Interview pp. 1-53

Write one page; single-spaced; divided into two sections (p. 4 syllabus); 5 points.

- **FIRST INTERVIEW WITH LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEWEE THIS WEEK**

Week #4

Feb. 2

Life History Method: From Speech to Writing (or Transcription to Text)

In-Class: Steppingstones II - Exchange transcription with interview partner for additions, changes, etc. Incorporate suggestions into final draft due next week. (**Assignment continued next page**).

Assignment: Partially edited (delete ums, add words/transitions for clarity...) Transcription of Steppingstone Interview due (5 points).

#3 Essie's Story: Chapter 1-4; Appendix A (pp. 1-60; 159-162). Write one page; single-spaced; divided into two sections (p. 4 syllabus); 5 points.

- **SECOND INTERVIEW WITH LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEWEE THIS WEEK / BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION**

Week #5

Feb.9

Life History Method: From Speech to Writing (cont.)

In-Class: Steppingstone III - exchange final draft with partner; "interviewee" will write a short comment on "interviewer's" accuracy and wordings. Hand in at end of class: (1) transcription, with comment, (2) final draft with comments.

Assignment: Final draft of Steppingstone Assignment due (+ above); 10 pts.

#4 Essie's Story: Chapters 5-8 (pp. 61-140)

Write one page; single-spaced; divided into two sections (p. 4 syllabus); 5 points.

- **CONTINUE INTERVIEWS WITH LIFE HISTORY SUBJECT/TRANSCRIPTION**

WEEK #6

Feb. 16

Life History Presentation #1

In-Class: Presentation on First Interview (1/2 class); 10 pts.

Assignment: #5 Life Story Interview pp. 54-76.

Write one page; single-spaced; divided into two sections; (p. 4 syllabus); 5 points; Essie's Story: Epilogue pp. 141-157 (no written assignment on Epilogue)

Complete partially edited transcription of your first interview due no later than today. This should be about an hour long interview and should be about 10-20 pages (double-spaced); 10 pts.

- **CONTINUE INTERVIEWING/BEGIN ORDERING NARRATIVE**

Week #7

Feb. 23

Life History Presentation #1 (cont.)

In-Class: Presentation on First Interview (1/2 class); 10 pts.

In-Class exercise: Background/Introduction section; Bring fieldnotes to class. (**Assignment continued next page**)

Assignment: Review of a Student Life History due (see hand-out); 10 pts. **PLUS** your Table of Contents

- CONTINUE INTERVIEWING/TRANSCRIPTION

Week #8

March 2

Uses of the Life History: conventional and unconventional genres

Bring in one physical example (other than a published book) which exemplifies how people portray or remember a life or a segment of a life... (theirs or another's).

Assignment: Persepolis Paper due (see p. 4 of syllabus)

- CONTINUE WRITING LIFE HISTORY / NARRATIVE SHOULD BE ROUGHLY PUT TOGETHER / FURTHER INTERVIEWS TO FILL GAPS IN NARRATIVE

Week #9

March 9

Anthropological Importance of Your Introduction

Assignment: Polished Draft of Background / Introduction to your Life History (at least 3 pages); In-Class peer review. 5 points.

- CONTINUE WRITING LIFE HISTORY

SPRING BREAK

Week #10

March 23

Interpretive Strategies

Polished Draft of Chapter One of your life history due. In-Class peer review. 5 points

- CONTINUE WRITING LIFE HISTORY

Week #11

March 30

Progress Reports (shortened class meeting)
(and sign up for Individual Consultations)

- You must bring Fieldnotes/Journal and Table of Contents with you to this individualized session. **WORK ON FINAL DRAFT**

Week #12

April 6

Progress Reports (shortened class meeting)
Individual Consultations (as per sign up)

- **WORK ON FINAL DRAFT**

Week #13

April 13

Progress Reports (shortened class meeting)
Individual Consultations (as per sign up)

- **WORK ON FINAL DRAFT**

Week #14

April 20

Final Oral Presentation (1/2 class) (see hand-out)**Assignment:** Oral Presentation as scheduled; 10 pts.OPTIONAL: Polished draft of Interpretation / Analysis section

- **WORK ON FINAL DRAFT**

Week #15

April 27

Final Oral Presentations (1/2 class) **(cont.)****Assignment:** Oral Presentation as scheduled; 10 pts.

- **WORK ON FINAL DRAFT**

Finals Week

May 4 (M) 4:15 – 6:45

End-of-semester de-briefing/party

Assignment: 2 Copies of Final Life History Papers Due;
be sure to include Student Fieldwork Approval Form