

University of Florida, Gainesville/Center for Latin American Studies



LAS 6938: Oral Histories, Testimonios, and Pláticas: Voices of Latin American, Latinx, and Indigenous Communities

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Documenting the histories of the Latin American diaspora necessitates approaches that draw upon the cultural resources within local communities. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) emphasizes, cross-cultural and feminist scholarship must be attuned to the lives and interests of those living on the margins. In other words, our interdisciplinary research designs should focus on capturing the bodies of knowledge that underline the every day, encompassing both the micropolitics of daily life, “as well as the micropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes.” Therefore, this course centers on knowledge sources such as oral histories, stories, pláticas, and testimonios as primary methods of conveying history. These approaches help share cultural memories, challenge dominant narratives, and empower Indigenous, Black, Chicanx, Latinx, and Latin American voices. Together we will explore the powerful literary genre of the testimonio and the rich tradition of oral history and pláticas within the fields of Chicanx, Latinx and Latin American Studies. Students will learn how testimonios, first-person narratives of marginalized communities from Latin America, serve as crucial tools for understanding social, political, and cultural realities often overlooked in mainstream historical accounts. For instance, how Honduran labor activist testimonios offer us access to the inner workings of power and the most inclusive paradigm for thinking about working class struggles in Central America in the 1950s. Additionally, students will engage with both theoretical frameworks and practical applications of these methodologies, gaining a deep understanding of their significance in Latin American and Latinx Studies. Lastly, this course centers on both the methods and the ethics of conducting research. Such as engaging in the following questions: What is involved in collecting oral histories, pláticas, and testimonios that require communication with human beings? What tools can we employ as we face the power relations inherent in this kind of historical practice? These are complicated questions with no easy answers, but we will spend the semester thinking together about how to design interdisciplinary methodologies, how to navigate our roles as researchers and community members, and explore how to produce work that is rigorous and meaningful to different audiences.

The course will feature guest speakers, including community elders, activists, and oral historians, who will share their experiences and expertise. Students will also have the opportunity to visit local archives and community centers to gain hands-on experience with oral history collections.

Required Texts (Draft)

The following books are required and other readings will be on Canvas.

Majority of books will be available on eBooks through University of Florida's Library. Books are, also, available for purchase at the UF Bookstore.

- Chávez-García, Miroslava, ed. *Latina Lives, Latina Narratives*. Routledge, 2021
- Leite, Gabriela. *Daughter, Mother, Grandmother, and Whore: The Story of a Woman Who Decided to be a Puta*. New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2024.
- Otero, Lydia. *In the Shadows of the Freeway: Growing Up Brown & Queer*. Planet Earth, 2021
- Portillo Villeda, Suyapa G, *Roots of Resistance: A Story of Gender, Race, and Labor on the North Coast of Honduras*. University of Texas Press, 2021
- Entin, Joseph, Jeanne Theoharis, and Dominick Braswell, eds. *Until We're Seen: Public College Students Expose the Hidden Inequalities of the COVID-19 Pandemic*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024.

All additional readings will be posted on Canvas as PDFs.

Evaluation

20 Points/Reading Annotations and Response: To facilitate student engagement with the readings students will submit 10 reading responses (1 page/single spaced) and reading annotations, beginning in Week 2.

20 Points/ Facilitation Activity: Beginning in the second week of the semester, students will sign up to take responsibility for organizing the discussion of one of that week's readings. Formal presentations should be brief, well-focused, coherent, and professional. Presenters are responsible for providing their evaluation of the text, raising questions to guide the discussion, and generally encouraging dialogue and debate

20 Points/Small Writing Assignments: Beginning Week 12, students will submit 4 writing assignments (5 points each) that will provide a foundation for their final paper. This not only guarantees that students will not write the whole paper in one sitting but also gives students time to develop their ideas, practice writing, brainstorm with others, and find your writing voice.

10 Points/Paper Presentation: Each student will do a 10-minute presentation covering each of the sections of their paper. Students are allowed to read their papers or use PowerPoint or another presentation software. You should present your work as if you were participating in a panel at a professional conference.

30 Points/Oral History/Testimonios Final Paper: Each student is required to turn in a final paper based on the collective data by the students in the class. The papers should be written in journal article format, as based (loosely) on a sample article of their choosing. including: Introduction, Research Question, Literature Review, Findings, Analysis, Conclusions, and Bibliography.