Indexing as Engaging Oral History Research: Using OHMS to "Compose History" in the Writing Classroom

Douglas A. Boyd, Janice W. Fernheimer, Rachel Dixon

➡ For additional information about this article
   http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/ohr/summary/v042/42.2.boyd.html

Indexing as Engaging Oral History Research: Using OHMS to "Compose History" in the Writing Classroom

Douglas A. Boyd, Janice W. Fernheimer, and Rachel Dixon

Abstract: This article presents a case study about a recent collaboration between the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky Libraries and a professor at the University of Kentucky to use the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (OHMS)—an open source, free online application originally designed for enhancing archival access to oral history—as a pedagogical tool to elevate student engagement with oral history in the classroom. The authors—the oral history center director and creator of OHMS; a professor in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies (WRD); and an undergraduate WRD student assigned the task of using OHMS to index oral history—reflect on this collaboration from their own perspectives. This collaboration between the archive and the classroom at the University of Kentucky provides an innovative, experiential learning model for engaging undergraduate students in the critical thinking and research aspects of working with oral history, and the article reflects on the impact and potential for future applications of this model.

Keywords: archive, digital humanities, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, OHMS (Oral History Metadata Synchronizer), pedagogy, students, University of Kentucky

For decades, teachers have used oral history in the classroom to engage and inspire students, most often by involving students in the practice of interviewing. However, digital innovations such as free and easy-to-use multimedia editing, production, analysis, and dissemination technologies create a multifaceted, collaborative context where student intersections with oral history, digital history, and the digital humanities are no longer limited to the interview experience. Students can now seamlessly explore the interpretive, analytic, and compositional roles of editors, digital storytellers, and documentarians using oral histories to tell new or

untold stories in innovative ways. Emerging scholarship reflects on how oral history is "shaping pedagogical practices in the 21st century classroom";[1] however, a discussion of teachers and faculty engaging archival partners to use oral history in course design is nearly absent from the current scholarly conversation.

Although archived oral histories possess tremendous opportunity for teaching and learning, this potential is tempered by the challenges posed by their comparative lack of accessibility compared to other types of primary sources. Generally, archived oral histories that lack comprehensive metadata or transcripts remain difficult to discover and time-consuming to use, especially in the classroom environment where efficiency is so crucial. This article presents a case study of a recent collaboration between the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky Libraries and a professor in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies (WRD) at the University of Kentucky to use the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (OHMS)—a digital tool originally designed for enhancing archival access to oral history—as a pedagogical tool. We reflect on the collaboration from the perspectives of the oral history center director and creator of OHMS, the professor, and one of the undergraduate students assigned the task of using OHMS to index oral history.

In their article "Using Online Video Oral Histories to Engage Students in Authentic Research," Jill Goodman Gould and Gail Gradowski question current pedagogical models for teaching with oral history, stating they have found "little evidence that professors are developing sophisticated assignments that ask for effective critical interpretation and require rigorous research skills."[2] The Nunn Center-WRD 112/205-OHMS collaboration at the University of Kentucky provides an experiential learning model for engaging undergraduate students in the critical thinking and research that Gould and Gradowski advocate. We argue that using OHMS to index archived oral histories, both video and audio, provides a compelling way to answer their call for university professors "to take fuller advantage of . . . oral history's inherently engaging properties."[3]

Dr. Douglas A. Boyd, Director, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History

I became director of the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky Libraries in 2008. In an attempt to address and overcome oral history's archival challenges of discovery and usability, I led the team that created OHMS, a new digital system for enhancing access to online oral history. The

---

[1] Glenn Whitman, "Guest Editor's Introduction," *Oral History Review* 38, no. 1 (2011): i–ii.
[2] Jill Goodman Gould and Gail Gradowski, "Using Online Video Oral Histories to Engage Students in Authentic Research," *Oral History Review* 41, no. 2 (2014): 341–350.
[3] Ibid., 345.

OHMS Indexing Module allows the archivist to create metadata at the segment or story level, including "time stamp (auto-filled), title, partial transcript, keywords, subjects, description, hyperlinks, and GPS coordinates."[4] With an index, users are given an efficient, integrated browse-and-search mechanism that connects to the corresponding moment in the online digital audio or video interview. Perhaps the most familiar metaphor comes from the navigational structure of a book. As demonstrated in Figure 1, the OHMS index provides the browsability of a table of contents combined with the nuanced searchability of a digital index.

Since the creation of the OHMS Indexing Module in 2011, indexing has become the primary focus of the Nunn Center's access strategy. In 2014, the Nunn Center indexed over nine hundred hours of oral history interviews, for one tenth the cost of transcription. Yet the advantages of indexing go far beyond just cost savings. Since the creation of an index involves intense focus, critical thought, and the mapping of complex natural language to understandable concepts, an index created in OHMS, presented to the user via the OHMS Viewer, yields an effective discovery and navigation tool for the online researcher when compared to the transcript. The key-word search of a verbatim transcript points only to what was said, not necessarily to what was meant. Since indexes attempt to account for both the natural language and what was meant by it, the resulting index of an online oral history interview becomes a more meaning-focused archival access point for the online user.[5] In case examples where the interview is discussing important historical moments (segregation, for example) but is not using the exact language, an index provides greater access to the content and historical connections than a verbatim transcript would.

When designing the OHMS indexing functionality, I focused my attention on the creation of a back-end system that trained archivists and information professionals so they could log in and create segment-level metadata to enhance access to their online oral history interviews. In retrospect, I realize that I did not initially conceptualize OHMS with the idea of anyone other than trained professionals utilizing the OHMS indexing process. Based on my experiences with undergraduates and graduate assistants employed by the Nunn Center and trained to use OHMS, I began to sense the potential outreach and experiential learning opportunities the system offered. Many of these student employees hired to index had previously worked primarily with transcripts. These students were not metadata professionals, yet, when trained to use OHMS, they produced comprehensive and insightful indexes. Additionally, they provided valuable feedback while I was grappling with the construction of indexing best practices.

---

[4] Doug Boyd, "OHMS: Enhancing Access to Oral History for Free," *Oral History Review* 40, no. 1(2013): 95–106.
[5] Doug Lambert and Michael Frisch, "Meaningful Access to Audio and Video Passages: A Two-Tiered Approach for Annotation, Navigation, and Cross-Referencing within and across Oral History Interviews," in *Oral History in the Digital Age*, ed. Doug Boyd et al. (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2012), http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/06/meaningful-access-to-audio-and-video-passages-2/

Interview with William S. Reid, February 19, 1985

UK

Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries
Arthur Graham, Interviewer | 1985OH037 KH 304
Ethnicity in Lexington (Multi-culturality) Oral History Project | Ethnicity in Lexington (Multi-culturality) Oral History Project

0:12:19 0:35:33

11:22 - Playing in parades and ceremonies in Lexington

TRANSCRIPT   INDEX
Search this Index
Keyword
Search

Play segment   Segment link

Partial Transcript: Now, the, the Pipers here are now ten years old. Can you give me something of the history of the Pipe Band?

Segment Synopsis: Reid talks about the events in Lexington at which his pipe band plays.

Keywords: Bagpipe bands; Bagpipes; Band member turnover; Band members; Band uniforms; Christenings; Entertainment; Fourth of July Parade; Funerals; Music; Parades; Parties; Patriotism; Tates Creek High School; The Lexington Pipe Band; United States Navy; Weather; Weddings

Subjects: Bagpipe music. Bagpipers Immigrants--Kentucky--Lexington. Lexington (Ky.). Pipe bands. Scottish Americans--Ethnic identity. Scottish Americans--Kentucky Scottish Americans--Societies, etc. Scottish Americans.

15:39 - Childhood trips to Scotland and life there

24:50 - The Highland Games and music competitions

28:34 - Scottish bagpipes

30:41 - The Scottish Games

32:53 - Keeping his Scottish heritage alive

33:57 - Religion and the Scottish ethnicity

View Rights Statement   © 2015
View Usage Statement   Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History
                                  University of Kentucky Libraries
Contact Us: nunncenter@lsv.uky.edu | http://www.nunncenter.org
                                        powered by
                                        OHMS

Fig. 1. Sample index segment in the OHMS Viewer.

Repeatedly, student employees would convey to me that they enjoyed engaging in the OHMS indexing process far more than working with transcripts.

Given student employees' positive reactions to indexing, in 2012 I began to experiment with using OHMS indexing as a pedagogical tool in my graduate and undergraduate courses. I began assigning students the task of indexing unprocessed oral history interviews. Both undergraduate and graduate courses yielded excellent results, suggesting a new model for using OHMS to engage students with oral history, providing a platform for students to interact with primary sources in exciting new ways. As the creator of OHMS, I found it easy and natural to design classroom assignments that paralleled preexisting Nunn Center workflows. I created the assignment, I adapted the syllabus, and I knew the workings of OHMS better than most. Recognizing that there would be challenges for implementing the use of OHMS as a pedagogical tool in classrooms other than mine, it was time to seek out a campus partner to prototype the model.

Dr. Janice W. Fernheimer, Associate Professor of Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies

As a rhetorician interested in teaching students to write for public audiences, I was attracted to the public nature of an assignment associated with OHMS

because of the many possibilities it provided for learning about local cultural contexts, anticipating audience needs, and engaging with a digital public sphere in an intellectually meaningful way. I have been teaching first-year and required writing courses for more than a decade, and one of the key challenges of these courses in general and at University of Kentucky in particular is to get students excited about the course objectives: to better understand that writing can have real consequences within and beyond the classroom, to help students become rhetorically aware of their own writing and research processes, and to become better equipped both to analyze targeted audiences and to address their writing to those audiences to accomplish specific goals. I have wrestled with a variety of approaches, but have often found that it can be very challenging to get students to recognize that writing does important work in the world. This is especially true in required writing courses where students from all across campus end up in a class that they have selected based on the meeting times that fit with their schedule and the need to fulfill the requirement rather than on a deep-seated interest in the course material. It is even harder to convince them they are capable of doing this type of work with their writing and that such work is worth doing. In an attempt to have students generate a more public type of writing, I began to look for ways to interject such required writing with much-needed real-world assignments and consequences.

After connecting with Douglas A. Boyd, director of the Nunn Center, we launched a plan to have students in two different lower-level writing courses work with archived oral histories in several ways. One of the courses, WRD 112, was an accelerated/honors version of the two-course, first-year writing sequence condensed into one semester, and the second course, WRD 205, was a sophomore-level writing class designed to fulfill students' graduation writing requirement. Both courses are designed to prepare students to produce rigorous academic writing that requires research and rhetorical savvy; consequently, they are designed to teach information literacy skills and emphasize writing as a recursive process involving revision. Each course was paired with one of the following collections of oral histories related to ethnic or multicultural experiences in Lexington:

- *Ethnicity in Lexington (Multi-culturality) Oral History Project* (http://www.kentuckyoralhistory.org/series/18815/ethnicity-lexington-multi-culturality-oral-history-project)
- *Voices from behind the Counter Oral History Project* (http://www.kentuckyoralhistory.org/collections/voices-behind-counter-oral-history-project)

The former consisted mostly of interviews with Lexington immigrants from a variety of backgrounds as well as interviews with individuals from religious and ethnic minority communities. The latter collection of interviews was created by

author Rosie Moosnick, whose book, *Arab and Jewish Women in Kentucky: Stories of Accommodation and Audacity,* is based on the oral histories she collected from Jewish and Arab shopkeepers in Kentucky. A third set of interviews, the *Lexington Jewish Community Oral History Project,* http://kentuckyoralhis tory.org/collections/lexington-jewish-community-oral-history-project, which includes twenty-four interviews from the Lexington Jewish community members of Temple Adath Israel (the local Reform synagogue), provided an opportunity for students who enjoyed and skillfully accomplished their initial oral history indexing assignment to earn extra credit by indexing an additional interview or portion of an interview. By using a combination of required and extra-credit assignments, we were able to get three collections, and the seventy-five interviews contained within them, indexed, processed, and made publicly available within a semester's time. Given the disparate, albeit related, content of the collections and the limitations imposed by a sixteen-week semester, the completion of seventy-five interview indexes in such a short period of time suggests that this model offers a mutually beneficial undergraduate research experience. First- and second-year students, who normally might not have the opportunity to interact with primary resources until they reach more advanced courses in their respective majors, are introduced to the richness of oral history, while the Nunn Center benefits from an increased number of indexes and the access they provide.

Although the students enrolled—honors first-year writing students and students who needed to fulfill the writing requirement to graduate—constitute two different student populations, the assignment sequence was the same for both courses because they were both required lower-division writing courses. The sequence was designed to fully integrate the oral history collections into the overall writing course goals:

1. The first assignment required students to listen to and rhetorically analyze the oral history interview. This assignment asked students to interpret the archive and get familiar with a specific interview—they listened closely for the rhetorical choices made by both interviewer and interviewee and employed traditional rhetorical terms such as ethos, pathos, and logos as tools for analysis to determine how the interviewer and interviewee collaborated to construct the interview and the stories it related.[6]

2. The second assignment required students to use OHMS to index the oral history they worked on for the first assignment. This assignment expected students to become researchers and listen to the interview from a researcher's point of view. What information would be most important for

---

[6] Ethos, pathos, and logos are the rhetorical appeals based on Aristotelian rhetoric. While writing textbooks and instructors vary in how they introduce these concepts to undergraduates, usually they are explained as, respectively, appeals to character/credibility/ethics, appeals to emotion, and appeals to logic or reasoning.

researchers to know about? They had to make choices and translate the interviewee's many rapid subject changes into broader conceptual terms that connected to larger historical narratives.

3. The final assignment was collaborative and asked students to join forces with other students who had worked on topically related interviews to historically contextualize them and create a short, "This American Life"-style audiocast aimed at a public audience. This assignment required students to synthesize what they had learned from the first two assignments and present the material in an accessible way for a broad audience.

Since the overall learning outcomes for the course were writing-focused, the assignments were designed to help students acquire a deeper understanding of audience by asking them to become familiar not only with the interviews themselves, but also with the larger historical and contextual issues they raised, and ultimately to make both more easily searchable and accessible for various publics. Specifically, the second assignment asked students to imagine an audience of researchers who might be interested in the interview and to index the interview with this audience in mind, thus making the finer-grained historical points available and searchable for a broad audience. Students thus had to put themselves in the place of the researcher, imagining and calling attention to the information they deemed most important in the interviews. What types of information might be valuable and for what types of scholars? Student reflective essays suggest this assignment was unfamiliar, challenging, and yet also rewarding. One student, Jessica Kidwell, calls attention both to the challenges and rewards of such an assignment:[7]

> The biggest challenge that I faced while indexing was categorizing the transcription of the interviews into key words and phrases. I was unsure of how to take the words that were being said and turn them into something searchable. Often times a lot of information was given in a matter of thirty seconds and I didn't know how I was going to make it easily accessible for researchers. To solve this problem I ended up using a couple [of] exact words from the segment along with categorizing those words into a larger concept.[8]

Kidwell goes on to detail her process:

> I would then look at what was being talked about and turn it into a larger concept. . . . Overall, while the indexing ended up being a bit harder than

---

[7] All student work has been included with students' permission.
[8] Jessica Kidwell, "The Struggles with Indexing," Student Paper, WRD 112 (University of Kentucky, October 8, 2013), 3.

I imagined it being, it was a project that I really enjoyed doing. It is a really amazing feeling to know that by doing this, I am helping someone else's story be told. Without indexing, a lot of interviews would never be discovered. It is extremely fulfilling to know that I had a hand in changing that.[9]

Another student, Joel Parker, focused on the responsibility that such an assignment demanded:

Deciding which parts of someone's life story are most important to show others is an incredibly intimidating idea. Not only did I have to create logical separation to make the interview easy to navigate—I had to decide that certain parts of the interview weren't as important as others.[10] Specifically, though the interviewee thought his time at Rice University could be one of the most important times in his life in his opinion, I had to decide that it wasn't as important because he only mentioned it a few times, whereas he talks about Scotland and visits throughout his interview.[11]

Parker concluded the reflective essay with the following insight:

Both the difficulty of condensing an hour and twenty minutes that detailed most of Fairweather's [the interviewee's] life into fifteen short titles and deciding which parts of his life were important to tag made this seemingly easy task a challenge that made me think about the importance that words play in describing someone's life—especially when they are limited.[12]

Another student, Sarah Coffman, reflects on the challenges that "mapping natural language" presents:

I encountered my first problem when trying to select keywords that would represent the major themes being discussed within the segment (http://goo.gl/fSq2Xl). I had to think critically about the larger concepts Bologna and Ocelli's comments related to, and decide what topics would be most beneficial to the public audience.[13]

---

[9] Ibid., 3.

[10] Joel Parker, "Representing a Lifetime with a Few Lines of Text," Student Paper, WRD 112 (University of Kentucky, October 9, 2013), 2.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Sarah Coffman, "Making Oral History Accessible with OHMS," Student Paper, WRD 112 (University of Kentucky, October 10, 2013), 1–2.

Coffman continues,

> For example, when Bologna is referring to his grandfather's "fruit business" I had to recognize that he was actually referring to his grandfather's participation in the economy as a small business owner. I was able to establish this connection by adding "small business," and "Detroit, Michigan" as keywords, therefore, creating the metadata necessary to link researchers to this point in the interview.[14]

Overall, students found it most difficult to determine appropriate key words and to do the "translational" work that enabled them to understand and communicate the broader themes via key words, but they found the time invested to be well spent. As one student, Jon Fish, put it, "The value that this indexing has in the preservation and dispersion of this oral history makes the work involved a worthwhile endeavor."[15]

Another student, Ashley Cutshaw, elaborates even further:

> Despite the challenges I faced while doing this assignment, it was rewarding to complete it. My work, and my classmate's work, is going to be available for everyone to use. By completing this assignment, our class could have helped someone write a newspaper article or a book. It makes it worthwhile to know that we are making these interviews accessible to everyone to really take advantage of.[16]

She went on to point out

> when choosing keywords, you can't just think about what *you* found important. You have to be somewhat objective and ask yourself, "If I was a researcher, what in this section would I find useful?" You have to listen over and over again, think about what the interviewee is really talking about and sum that up into just a few words. Not only was it hard to find what was important, but it was also hard to be the person defining the "important" parts of someone's story. . . . Everyone will have different opinions on what is significant so it was difficult to differentiate between the things that I personally found important and the things that could be important for everyone.[17]

---

[14] Ibid.

[15] John Fish, "Honesty in Indexing," Student Paper, WRD 112 (University of Kentucky, October 9, 2013), 1.

[16] Ashley Cutshaw, "My Issues with Oral History Indexing," Student Paper, WRD 112 (University of Kentucky, October 12, 2013), 1–2.

[17] Ibid. Emphasis in original paper.

If the assignments sound ambitious, it is because they were. They required students not only to think about their own writing but also to work on the meta-level, categorizing the topics someone else spoke about. Students engaged in meaningful writing with real-world implications beyond the classroom, and as suggested by the student reflections above, like most things in the so-called real world, such writing is messy and requires the careful negotiation of competing interests. Yet if student reflective papers are any indication, students in the honors section enjoyed the public aspects of the work, even if the assignments brought a unique set of challenges to instructors, the Nunn Center director, and students alike.

Rachel Dixon, Undergraduate Student, University of Kentucky

I originally registered for Dr. Fernheimer's WRD 112 class as a way of fulfilling my university's first-year writing requirement. When I walked in the classroom on the first day, I knew very little about the content of the course, aside from my assumption that it would entail drafting a lot of papers and honing my writing skills. I imagined days filled with textual analysis, research summaries, and paper editing—days that would prove to be, I was certain, familiar and within the bounds of everything I had experienced before in an English class. However, I was surprised to soon discover that our semester's work in *Writing Ethnic Lexington* would focus less on the written word as I understood it and more on the rhetorical choices that go into crafting a written artifact. The bulk of the course focused on oral history and its methods, and we were tasked with analyzing, indexing, and thereby increasing the accessibility of the Nunn Center's interviews for future researchers. The benefits of this new course were many and varied. Through this process, I not only discovered new aspects about my hometown but also revised my perceptions of what constitutes research.

The opportunity to see a new side of my native Lexington really stood out to me while in Dr. Fernheimer's course. After spending eighteen years in the same house, on the same street, in the same city, I thought I knew all there was to know about Lexington, Kentucky, and the Bluegrass State. However, the Nunn Center's *Ethnicity in Lexington (Multi-culturality)* collection completely revised my perceptions. When first assigned the 1985 oral history of William Sutherland Reid (https://goo.gl/JRy6zx), a Scotsman who started Lexington's first bagpipe band in 1975, I had no idea that Scottish culture is alive and well in Lexington. I was oblivious to the fact that his namesake band contributes to a lot of the traditions we Lexingtonians hold dear, like the annual St. Patrick's Day parade. As I poured over Reid's interview to pull out key words for the OHMS index, I discovered my own connections to local Scottish history. I saw that though

the larger perception of Lexington in Reid's interview was quite different from my own, many of the names, events, and geographic markers his oral history repeatedly emphasized are the same things connecting me to the city. Places I had visited many times in a personal context, such as Bryan Station High School and Mary Queen church, were suddenly tied to Reid, his band, and my understanding of history. Lexington was illuminated in a new light as a result of the attention to detail required by the indexing process.

Although my hometown ties to the oral history project initially hooked my interest, the lessons that I learned about OHMS and its place in the research process were the takeaways that enriched my experience with indexing even more. The task we were entrusted to complete was both innovative and challenging. It forced me to learn about the OHMS system and use it to create an index that would make Reid's interview more searchable and accessible. Though I was initially terrified by the prospect, I found the system to be more user-friendly than I anticipated. The end goal of the project was to produce a written representation of the verbal hallmarks of this man's interview—an index which functions, simultaneously, as a table of contents as well as a set of segment-level tags and annotations, connecting researchers to the insights within the interview.

It was empowering to have the agency to locate key terms and themes within an oral history and clarify them for future listeners. I had the power to create the map of the interview and knew that it was my job to perfect its guide so that individuals would be interested in and steered towards Reid's story. Though audience members across the United States and beyond may not initially tune into an interview from a little-known Kentuckian, they may be more intrigued if its index shows that it includes music references or descriptions of ethnic communities in cities outside the Bluegrass. Suddenly, through such key terms, the audio interview becomes both searchable and accessible. By mapping Reid's natural language to broader concepts, I was able to garner wider appeal and flexibility for his oral history. Eventually, the interview was not just specific to Lexington, but also had a virtual script of larger contexts and terminologies affecting multiple avenues of research simultaneously: immigration, cultural preservation, Scottish heritage, intergenerational assimilation, and more.

The value gained from completing this project appeared just as much in abstract concepts like a change in my personal academic mindset as it did in concrete benefits like the creation of a tangible index for the interview. Through learning about oral history and OHMS, I witnessed the mutability and subjectivity of the entire research process. When dealing with humans and their interviews, stories differ widely. I saw this most clearly when teaming up with three other classmates to create a collaborative podcast about the larger narrative told by our four oral histories. Each recording contained the story of a man from Lexington, each of whom was a member of a specific ethnic group that called

Lexington home. However, their individual views on the community and cultures within varied a great deal. While one Scotsman argued for the importance of the pipe band to help achieve cultural preservation, another (Graeme Fairweather; https://goo.gl/pb431w) dismissed the music group as a potential detriment to the "authentic" Scottish identity. Additionally, while many of the men favored the expression of their ethnic roots, one (Michael T. Romano; https://goo.gl/LftBi5) preferred to keep his foreign heritage hidden—hinting, perhaps, at latent external racism or pressure to assimilate during the 1980s when the interview was conducted. With all of these competing narratives, it is difficult to discern a single truth. Putting the various interviews and indexes in conversation with one another illuminated this fact.

The final lesson that I learned from the indexing process came as a commentary on argumentation in general. In choosing what to highlight about Reid's interview, it became clear that I could never completely divorce my perceptions from the message the man was trying to communicate. What indexers deem important about these oral histories is a rhetorical act in and of itself. Though some key words used in the indexes are objective—geographical labels, foreign terms, and holiday names, to name a few—other labels are crafted solely by the indexer. When I chose to frame a specific segment of the Reid interview in terms of "assimilation" or "cultural preservation," for example, I was not using words directly from the interviewer or interviewee. In many cases, such outside categorization can be dangerous because it can feel as though the indexer is putting words into the interviewee's mouth, and yet, this translational move is necessary so that the concepts the interviewee describes (perhaps without using words that would be familiar to a broader audience) are what make the interview most valuable from a researcher's perspective. This tension between the demands of the assignment (to find and create valuable key words) and my desire to stay true to the person's words and the identity claims they represented made the assignment both challenging and valuable. It ultimately underscored the importance of the indexer's job to interpret the message within any given clip and translate it as accurately as possible onto the final index. Indexers, then, engage in an act of translation, for they both distill a message that they hear and create an index that uses personal decisions and arguments to fill in any lexical gaps.

The responsibility to accurately represent Reid's story was one that did not fade at the close of my WRD 112 class. My semester-long interest in this musician's tale blossomed into an independent research project that led me to his surviving daughter and grandson, Sandy and Will Reid.[18] I now know that the

---

[18] To read more about this project, see Rachel Dixon, "More than Just Hot Air? Oral History, Cultural Rhetoric, and the Creation of Lexington's Scottish Bagpipe Heritage," *Young Scholars in Writing: Undergraduate Research in Writing and Rhetoric* 12, no.1 (2014): n.p.

greatest benefit of indexing is one that is perhaps too easily overlooked—that of the real connections forged between students and history through the medium of analyzing everyday voices.

Conclusions

OHMS enables professors, students, and archival professionals to learn more about how each participates in both the process of producing and representing knowledge and making such knowledge available and searchable to public audiences. Not surprisingly, these parallel paths intersect in the act of indexing. Students' involvement in the creation of indexes helps to both shape, represent, and make others aware of the topics the interviewees discuss while also making the students more aware of the way such knowledge is produced. The indexing assignment(s) put students in the position of those who process historical information, and this position enables them to think about the way micronarratives are connected to macronarratives and historical trends. Consequently, indexing encourages students to think critically about what and how they write, which causes them to reflect upon and be more aware of the ways writing is epistemic. Just as the process of creating indexes helped students to become more aware of the ways writing participates in the production of knowledge, the incorporation of OHMS in the classroom allowed the Nunn Center to learn from and with the students about how such work can be done on a larger scale with more diverse groups of students. While it would not be surprising to have students in history or library science classes engaging with oral history archives in this way, the incorporation of first-year writers shows that OHMS and its pedagogical appeal are broader than initially imagined.

From the Nunn Center's perspective, much was learned from working with Professor Fernheimer and WRD 112 and 205 with regard to effectively utilizing OHMS in a pedagogical context. The Nunn Center needs to be more nimble and efficient in working with professors on campus who are interested in using OHMS as a classroom exercise. We experienced challenges in quickly preparing the requisite collections and making them accessible for student indexing. Specifically, both collections were originally recorded on audiocassette and they needed to be digitized before they could be indexed in OHMS. In fall 2013 when the collaboration took place, the importation of metadata records into OHMS was a manual process, slowing down the time necessary to prepare interviews for indexing in OHMS. Based on our experiences in this collaboration, the Nunn Center made workflow, programming, and design adjustments to the OHMS system. Such adjustments included enhancements to the import module as well as enhancements to the workflow management aspects of OHMS, which allow it to more easily become a platform for wide-scale, sustainable, pedagogic implementation. In other words, if faculty wanted to make oral history and

indexing the focus through which an entire first-year writing curriculum taught high-level information and digital literacy, for example, OHMS is now equipped to serve more than two sections of writing courses at a time. Finally, the Nunn Center greatly enhanced documentation about the indexing process, publishing its evolving guide, "Indexing Interviews in OHMS: An Overview" on *Oral History in the Digital Age* (http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2014/11/indexing-interviews-in-ohms/), and producing numerous training videos made available on the OHMS website (http://www.oralhistoryonline.org), including *Using OHMS to Index Oral History: A Detailed Tutorial* (http://youtu.be/PvfweBl586g), to facilitate training and efficiently communicate important nuances implicit in the process of indexing oral histories.

Such documentation enables professors to teach the value of indexing without requiring the presence of OHMS's creator, Douglas A. Boyd, to present such material each time. Consequently, OHMS can become a pedagogical platform that reaches beyond the University of Kentucky, available for use by any faculty member who wishes to include indexing and OHMS in his or her classroom.

From the pedagogical perspective, students were exposed to and gained access to otherwise little known aspects of Lexington history. More than that, they actively participated in making this history broadly accessible to a wider audience of scholars, researchers, and interested laypeople by completing indexes and audiocasts. Perhaps most importantly, they learned how writing can be used effectively and how to make writing accessible to a broader audience, while also making connections to the constructed nature of history that is expressed in language. In the honors version of the course, WRD 112, more than fifty percent of the students' projects were accepted for broader presentation at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR), which was held at the University of Kentucky in Spring 2014. These first-year students, most of whom were not writing or English majors, were able to participate in the broader scholarly conversation themselves when they presented the oral history-based work they did for class at this national conference. As detailed above, at least one student went on to continue work with oral history, ultimately learning more about its methods and conducting interviews of her own. The independent research inspired by this initial exposure led to her publishing her findings in the University of Missouri-Kansas City journal for undergraduate research and writing, *Young Scholars in Writing*.

As demonstrated in the student responses above, students using OHMS to index oral history interviews in a classroom setting are not just tagging interviews with disparate key words. Indexing involves critical engagement with content at the segment or story level of a lengthy narrative, requiring deep listening and understanding as well as critical assessment, interpretation, and interpolation. It is an ideal way to engage students in a careful consideration of audience,

Fig. 2. OHMS: Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (http://www.oralhistoryonline.org/documentation/).

as they both imagine and become researchers thinking about the myriad ways such oral histories could prove valuable to a scholarly audience. Employing the OHMS indexing module in the undergraduate classroom places students into the position of actively and collaboratively researching, critically interpreting, and publicly representing individual narratives. More than that, OHMS helps them to better understand the ways that historical narratives are based on access, representation, and a series of complex choices that affect the composition of history.

In the introduction of the book *Oral History and Digital Humanities: Voice, Access, and Engagement,* the editors Douglas A. Boyd and Mary A. Larson state that "new models" are emerging "providing contextual frameworks to encourage

more meaningful interactions with researchers as well as with community members."[19] In the chapter, "'I Just Want to Click on It to Listen': Oral History Archives, Orality, and Usability," Boyd underscores the need for "archival access to oral history . . . to be granular and precise in order to be most useful." To best accomplish this outcome, "the archival community must work together with the oral history community to explore, adapt, and innovate."[20] When students become part of this community, they are no longer limited to being consumers or interviewers of oral history. Instead, the integration of OHMS into the classroom provides an innovative model for encouraging students' deep listening and critical engagement with oral history, offering educators an experiential learning model that effectively connects students to the archive. More importantly, this pedagogical model engages students in actively producing knowledge, composing history, and participating in the metaprocesses through which we come to know what we know.

Douglas A. Boyd directs the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History in the University of Kentucky Libraries. He is the coeditor of the book *Oral History and Digital Humanities: Voice, Access, and Engagement*, he led the *Oral History in the Digital Age* initiative, and he is the designer and creator of OHMS. E-mail: doug.boyd@uky.edu

Janice W. Fernheimer is associate professor of writing, rhetoric, and digital studies and director of Jewish studies at the University of Kentucky. She is the author of *Stepping into Zion: Hatzaad Harishon, Black Jews, and the Remaking of Jewish Identity* (2014) and the coeditor of *Jewish Rhetorics: History, Theory, Practice* (2014). In collaboration with author/illustrator J. T. Waldman, she is currently researching and writing a historical fiction graphic novel, *America's Chosen Spirit*, based on oral histories that detail the Jewish influences of the Kentucky bourbon industry. Along with her research collaborator Beth L. Goldstein, she is collecting oral histories for the Jewish Heritage Fund for Excellence (JHFE) Jewish Kentucky Oral History Project, a repository of oral histories for Jewish Kentuckians. E-mail: jfernheimer@uky.edu

Rachel E. Dixon is a junior at the University of Kentucky, with a triple major in English, Spanish, and writing, rhetoric and digital studies. A native Lexingtonian, she is deeply interested in the diverse stories found within Kentucky and the modes of preserving them for future generations. Upon completing her undergraduate study, she plans to pursue a master's degree in the field of rhetoric and composition. E-mail: rachel.dixon1@uky.edu

---

[19] Douglas A.Boyd and Mary A. Larson, "Introduction," in *Oral History and Digital Humanities:Voice, Access, and Engagement*, ed. Douglas A. Boyd and Mary A. Larson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 5.

[20] Douglas A. Boyd, "'I Just Want to Click on It to Listen': Oral History Archive, Orality, and Usability," in *Oral History and Digital Humanities:Voice, Access, and Engagement*, ed. Douglas A. Boyd and Mary A. Larson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 94.