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Overview

Oral history is used by a wide array of practitioners at Virginia Tech as a means and method of gathering, interpreting, and preserving personal histories, memories, and perspectives from narrators as varied as Appalachian quiltmakers, the first African American students to attend the university, and legendary football coach Frank Beamer. In pursuit of continued and directed excellence in this important research field, the University Libraries, in collaboration with the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences and the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, established a college level research center for oral history in October 2021.

The Center for Oral History at Virginia Tech (COH) brings together an interdisciplinary group of faculty, professional staff, students, and community stakeholders to provide leadership in the advancement, creation, use, and preservation of oral history and digital storytelling content, methodologies, research, and scholarship. As an institutional hub facilitating the creation and stewardship of oral history research, content, and scholarship, the COH serves primarily as a research center; but in engaging faculty and students in experiential learning opportunities with diverse groups and persons from within and beyond the university community, it also supports and provides instruction and outreach.

The mission of the center is: 1) to improve the accessibility and quality of oral history content, research, and scholarship at the university through the alignment of related efforts, resources, and services across campus; 2) to develop, inspire, model, and support inclusive, community-based, experiential education using high-impact practices and strategies from oral history and digital storytelling pedagogies; and 3) to devise and employ operational and outreach policies and practices consistent with the university's commitments to service and to the equitable inclusion and just engagement of diverse ideas, persons, and groups.

As society turns ever more toward the digital world, with social media, text messaging, e-mail, and the like, the COH seeks to serve as a bulwark against the erosion of the art of conversation. In the 2015 book *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*, Sherry Turkle called for a return to conversation to promote self-reflection, empathy, and collaboration. The COVID-19 pandemic has created further barriers to direct one-on-one conversation, but the rise in conversation-driven programming like podcasts demonstrates the great interest in having access to the spoken word. The

COH is designed to promote, document, and share conversations of historical significance. Those recorded conversations have many purposes, such as transferring knowledge, supporting research, and entertaining while at the same time educating listeners. Just as important, the COH promotes deeper societal values like fostering trust, intimacy, and empathy between various individuals and groups, which are the keys to reclaiming conversation.

Vision Statement

The Center for Oral History at Virginia Tech aims to be a global leader in the coordination, development, dissemination, preservation, and promotion of oral history and digital storytelling content, methodologies, research, and scholarship.

Objectives

Short-term objectives and recent action steps:

- Identify and arrange related services and resources across campus, virtually and physically
- In 2020, Special Collections and University Archives (SCUA) and the Department of History launched an online research guide for oral history at Virginia Tech, listing campus collections, resources, and practitioners, as well as formatting and style guidelines.
- Identify and facilitate ongoing oral history research projects
- In December 2020, the VT Stories Project administratively relocated to the University Libraries as part of the Special Collections and University Archives department. As background, VT Stories began in 2015 as a project supported by the Office of the President and managed by a Project Manager in coordination with faculty and staff in the Departments of History and English, the University Libraries, Technology-Enhanced Learning and Online Strategies, the Alumni Association, and University Advancement, the VT Stories Oral History Project collects and examines the stories and memories of VT alumni, faculty, staff, students, and community members in order to tell a more inclusive history of the campus history as public history. As part of the Council on VT History, VT Stories also provides oral history content to numerous members and groups on the council in order to fulfill their mission of acknowledging and recognizing a more complete history of Virginia Tech as the university approaches its 150th anniversary in 2022.
- Since 2015, SCUA has partnered with the Department of History to conduct over 50 oral history interviews with notable LGBTQ+ alumni, faculty, staff, and students.
- Since 2018, SCUA has partnered with University Advancement, the LGBTQ+ Resource Center, and HokiePRIDE to conduct nearly 20 oral history interviews with notable alumni who were involved with the events around Denim Day in

1979 and subsequent Denim Days at Virginia Tech.

- In 2018, the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine launched the Healthstorian, a mobile audio booth and recording studio, to record and preserve health stories from all backgrounds in Southwest Virginia.
- Since 2019, SCUA has partnered with University Advancement to plan an oral history project focused on queer and trans people of color in the New River Valley and Southwest Virginia.
- In 2019, SCUA partnered with the Department of History to collect oral history interviews at a series of public events celebrating the town of Fries, Virginia and the Fries Textile Mill collection.
- Identify and facilitate opportunities for oral history research outcomes and outputs
- Ren Harman, Tarryn Abrahams, Andrew Kulak, David Cline, Adrienne Serra, Ellen Boggs, Shannon Larkin, Jessie Rogers, Ashley Stant, Quinn Warnick, and Katrina Powell. "(Co)Constructing Public Memories: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Creating Born-Digital Oral History Archives," *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals*, 13 (June 2017): 123-32. Doi:10.1177/155019061701300207.
- Tamara Kennelly, "The Quiet Path of an Invisible Man: Irving Linwood Peddrew III and Desegregation at Virginia Tech," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 126, no. 4 (2018): 422- 66. At, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26538018>.
- Voices in the Stone, <https://strategicaffairs.vt.edu/CouncilonVTHistory/voices-in-the-stone.html>
- Identify relevant internal research funding and partner with funding sponsors to offer guidance for applicants
- Identify relevant external research funding and partner with the Office of Sponsored Programs and funding sponsors to offer guidance for applicants
- Develop a centralized digital platform or access point for all oral history content and research at Virginia Tech
- Develop collection development priorities and digital preservation policies
- Identify and organize existing oral history content and research • Offer a central office for oral history consultations, training, and workshops
- Advise of the use of equipment, best practices for interviewing, the IRB process, rights of the interviewees and the COH, and depositing completed interviews with the University Libraries
- Develop efficient and accessible workflows for the creation, preservation, processing, and dissemination of oral history research and content • Partner with the Human Research Protection Program and Institutional Review Board to identify and explore the center's role and responsibilities in informed consent, human research protection, and other processes
- Partner with the Office of Scholarly Communication to provide guidance on copyright, licensing, and other intellectual property rights issues

- In early 2020, SCUA began development of an adaptable release form tool in Google Sheets to simplify property rights and metadata management for oral history practitioners and participants
- Work with community and campus partners to offer experiential and service-based learning opportunities

Long-term objectives:

- Identify, develop, and secure funding for staffing necessary to lead and support center initiatives
- Identify, develop, and secure funding for facilities, resources, services, or tools necessary to enhance oral history accessibility, collections, practices, and research at the university
- Develop a beginning-to-end oral history research project toolkit for new and experienced practitioners and participants
- Inspire, develop, and support inclusive participatory research models incorporating high-impact practices and strategies from oral history and digital storytelling pedagogies
- Explore professional and scholarly opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students in and around Blacksburg and the National Capital Region
- Create internship and experiential learning opportunities for students to conduct oral history research and submit that content to Special Collections and University Archives
- Partner with Technology-Enhanced Learning and Online Strategies and the Professional Development Network to offer short-course educational programming in oral history practices, pedagogy, research, and scholarship
- Develop external project cost models and strategies in compliance with relevant university policies

Nature of Faculty and Student Groups Involved in the Center

The center serves the faculty and students of all disciplines and domains represented at Virginia Tech as well as the communities surrounding the university in its various contexts.

Faculty and professional staff from a variety of departments and colleges at Virginia Tech through this center aim to assist interested scholars in: 1) developing a central question, framework, and goal for their project; 2) identifying and applying for relevant internal and external funding; 3) implementing a rights management strategy; 4) identifying and reaching out to potential narrators; 5) determining and acting on responsibilities pertaining to informed consent and human research protection; 6) choosing documentation, equipment, and software that will best serve project goals; and 7) planning workflow for researching, interviewing, transcribing, editing, audiovisual materials production, and long-term archival storage, preservation, and access.

The stakeholders committee includes College Deans, Academic Department Heads, Center Directors, and subject experts in oral history and digital humanities. The advisory committee includes representation from the undergraduate and graduate student bodies as well as campus cultural and community centers.

The governance structure below is intended to provide a sense of the entities and programs considered prospective stakeholders and advisors. Many of these already are involved, but not all have been contacted.

Governance of the Center

Center activities will be overseen by an appointed director from one of the participating colleges. The director provides the vision for the COH, creates an annual report, convenes meetings, and works with the administrator, financial officer, and an associate director to manage fiscal, administrative, fiduciary, and programmatic and scholarly functions of the center. An associate director, also appointed from one of the participating colleges, is responsible for supporting COH activities such as the research awards program, training for students and faculty, and promoting scholarly research in the field of oral history.

The Stakeholders Committee guides the COH, reviews its financial and administrative functions, and receives annual reports from the director as well as internal audit reports. These fiscal oversight responsibilities will be at the strategic level, whereas the administrator and director will be responsible for fiscal oversight and accountability at the operational level. The Stakeholders Committee will meet regularly during each Fall and Spring semester of each academic year.

The Stakeholders Committee is comprised of (1) director and associate director of the Center (2) the administrator, (2) the fiscal officer from the administrator's college, (3) the academic department heads involved in the entity, and (4) additional members as appropriate, particularly if their units provide sustaining financial and/or programmatic support.

The Advisory Board provides recommendations and guidance for scholarly and programmatic affairs.

The Advisory Board typically consists of colleagues, community partners, faculty, practitioners, and agents of organizations concerned with the technical direction and development of the COH. Membership may change over time but the goal is to have a wide representation of voices, perspectives, and research aims.

Forecast of External Funding Sources

The COH will manage the university's existing oral history resources and services more

effectively to build a name and reputation over time and will work with University Advancement to pursue donors to commit funds for center initiatives.

The center also will pursue internal and external funding through grant-making agencies. Internally, COH stakeholders will seek a Science, Engineering, Art, and Design (SEAD) grant from the Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology (ICAT), as well as any other relevant grants awarded by Virginia Tech's Investment Institutes. Further funding available through external agencies like Virginia Humanities, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) will be identified and pursued for the successful execution of center initiatives.

Finally, leaders of the center will work with the participating deans and department heads to secure stable funding for staffing, equipment, programming, and other associated costs. Should essential long-term funding not be secured from either external or internal sources, the stakeholders committee will reassess the center's mission, scope, and resource needs.

The University Libraries and other partners will work with the Office of Sponsored Programs on any external grants from private foundations or federal entities. The expected breakdown of indirect costs for each project will be distributed according to the standard overhead distribution policy:

30% to the State

8.57% to OVPR

40.29% to the College/Dept

11.14% to Central Capital Account

10% to the Capital 2 account

Administrative Category of the Center

The Center for Oral History at Virginia Tech is a college-level research center under the administration of the University Libraries college.

Relationship of the Center to Other Entities at the University

The universal reach of oral history suggests that the COH has the potential to partner with multiple university entities. However, the COH prioritizes partnerships that serve its mission and objectives, as well as entities that share similar areas of focus.

The center will strengthen and build upon the successful relationships and partnerships advanced by ongoing oral history collaborations between and among the following university entities: the Office of the President, Technology-Enhanced Learning and

Online Strategies, the Virginia Tech Alumni Association, the Virginia Center for Civil War Studies, University Advancement, the Departments of History and English from the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, the Office of Community and Culture from the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, Special Collections and University Archives and the Athenaeum from the University Libraries, the LGBTQ+ Resource Center, Hokie PRIDE, the Center for Rhetoric in Society, the Center for Refugee, Migrant, and Displacement Studies, the Institute for Society, Culture and Environment, Virginia Cooperative Extension, and the Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology.