# Chapter 20. The Sound(s) of Sustainable Stewardship: Composing Audio Essays with the JHFE

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Featuring Madison Cissell, Hannah Thompson, Hannah Newberry, and Laura Will

Since 2013, I have worked with Doug Boyd, Director of the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky (UK hereafter) and Sarah Dorpinghaus, UK Director of Digital Services, to develop pedagogical strategies for introducing undergraduates to oral histories, primary archival research, and the production of audio essays composed to share such primary materials with broader, public audiences. Early collaborations detailed in our 2015 *Oral History Review* essay "Indexing as Engaging Oral History Research: Using OHMS to 'Compose History' in the Writing Classroom" (Boyd et al., 2015) showcased the value of teaching students to create digital indexes for oral histories using the cutting-edge, open-source platform designed by the Nunn Center, OHMS (the oral history metadata synchronizer). Since 2015, our team has expanded to include Dr. Beth L. Goldstein and to further develop this pedagogical model for undergraduate research engagement alongside our design and establishment of the Jewish Heritage Fund for Excellence (JHFE) Jewish Kentucky Oral History Project. Although the JHFE-funded project was initially imagined to collect, archive, and index 55 oral histories of Jewish Kentuckians over three years, we've now collected 120+ oral histories representing the diversity, depth, and complexities of Kentucky Jewish experiences across the Commonwealth, and the project continues to grow.

To enable this tremendous growth, our team built "sustainable stewardship" into the project's design. Described more fully in our 2018 *Oral History Review* article, "Sustainable Stewardship: A Collaborative Model for Engaged Oral History Pedagogy, Community Partnership, and Archival Growth" (Fernheimer et al., 2018), sustainable stewardship engages undergraduates in "original knowledge production while simultaneously fostering archival access and growth" while also providing a method "to connect the classroom, community, and the archive in enduring, mutually beneficial, and transformative ways" (p. 321). With sustainable stewardship guiding our pedagogy, students are involved at every step of the oral history process, from making extant interviews more searchable and accessible by creating digital indexes using OHMS, to conducting their own

original oral histories with Jewish community members, to contextualizing those interviews with further research to create compelling audio essays to introduce a broader public to the interviews and the issues they raise. At each step, students became attuned to the power and importance of critical listening—to make content more accessible, to generate strong interviews, and to create engaging audiocasts which contextualize the oral histories for broader public audiences. The sustainable element hinges on students' work with us to both index extant interviews and conduct their own original oral histories which then become part of the collection (to be indexed by another set of students at a later date). We found that the indexing work attunes their ears and sensibilities to the sounds of successful interviewing, thus enabling them to conduct better original oral histories themselves. The research they perform both to conduct and contextualize these interviews also prepares them to produce the "sounds of sustainable stewardship," evoked in this chapter's title: a 10–15-minute collaboratively authored, *This American Life*-style, audio essay final project. Student work from this project was presented at the Southern Jewish Historical Society in Cincinnati on November 5, 2017, the Kentucky Jewish Historical Symposium at the University of Kentucky on April 12–13, 2018, and the Kentucky Jewish History Symposium 2 in April 2019. By learning to compose with the "sounds of sustainability," students engaged with oral histories in a variety of ways, becoming increasingly aware of their own active participation in the creation and processing of public, living history. By approaching first-year writing in this way, with attuned focus on listening through sustained immersive work with oral histories from a specific local community students might not otherwise encounter, our team aimed to increase their critical listening and awareness of the way writing shapes history, who has access to it, and how those historical narratives in turn shape other types of collective identities. We also aimed to facilitate ethical interactions with the local Jewish community, thus allowing students to learn by listening, interacting, and collaborating with their peers and local community members.

What follows here is a brief explanation of the assignment sequence, introduction to select assignment prompts, and, on the book's companion website, some sample student work produced for the final audio essay. The overall course design, syllabus, and daily schedule for this honors, first-year writing course Writing Jewish Kentucky can be found at http://wrd112.fernheimer.org. The assignment sequence was designed to provide students with an introduction to the various ways composition and rhetorical selection work across several genres and media, including oral history, print-based rhetorical analyses, public oral presentation, oral history interview protocols and interviews, public audio essays, and print-based, individually authored, self-reflective essays. First, students worked with a peer to engage in important listening exercises to authenticate a professionally produced written transcript and create an index for an oral history interview. Next, students used the collaborative indexes they created to aid them in individually authoring a rhetorical analysis of the identity work that oral histories perform.

## In-Class Collaborative Invention Interlude

After students completed draft indexes and rhetorical analyses, I introduced Projects 3 and 4. The whole class engaged in a "speed-teaming" activity for collaborative rhetorical invention, where they shared themes, issues, and/or questions that arose and determined research questions and queries they might pursue in larger teams. After speed-teaming, students formed larger teams (of at least four students) to complete Projects 3 and 4, with the idea that the original oral history they conduct would further develop the research questions (or context) guiding their final audio essay.

## Project 3: Original Oral History Interview and Collaborative Annotated Bibliography

In these projects, students work in teams of two or three to select an interviewee, schedule a time, create an interview protocol based on the JHFE project template but tailored to their interviewee, and conduct an original oral history interview, which elicits and records an abbreviated life-history style "primary document" from the interviewee that then becomes part of the JHFE collection housed at the Nunn Center. They also work in larger teams of four to six students to generate an annotated bibliography to research issues they are interested in presenting in their final, team-authored audio essay. Then they individually reflect on the process of working with each other and a community member to conduct an original oral history and further research.

## Project 4: Final Audio Essay

In this final project, students work in larger teams (of four to six) to create a 10–15-minute *This American Life*-style audio essay that combines and contextualizes at least four oral histories the students engaged with over the course of the semester; they then reflect individually on the composing and collaboration processes for creating this final project. Additionally, they give a final team presentation to the class to share their composing insights from this project with a broader audience. This team presentation forms the basis for more public presentations when students are selected to participate in national conferences.

    The sustainable stewardship model mutually benefits students, the Nunn Center, and the local Jewish community through its facilitation of engaged interactions based around the shared responsibilities of listening, storytelling, collaborative composition, and public history preservation and access. Although this chapter focuses specifically on the way this method was used in partnership with the local Lexington Jewish community and the University of Kentucky, the sustainable stewardship model for introducing oral history and composition into the classroom could be used in any classroom where the instructor has strong community ties to facilitate

student-community member interactions. Teaching writing through critical listening, summary metadata authoring, and the creation of public oral histories enables students to interact with community members one-on-one and to recognize that their own writing has real impact on historical preservation and access. Whether through listening to and indexing already recorded interviews or conducting their own, students encounter the voices of others within and outside the class confines. This opportunity to engage others ethically (especially community members they might not otherwise encounter) asks them to listen carefully and is one they often describe as transformative. Hearing the actual voice of another and then later working in an interview to elicit another's stories changed how these students thought about research, history, writing, and the role of listening and representation in each. Focusing on how metadata tells stories about stories and how interviewing relies on listening to elicit compelling narratives teaches students about the way voices and listening matter. Such critical listening and careful attention to the intimacy of voice helps students find their own on issues of historical representation and local public histories while also allowing them to contribute to the historical record beyond the classroom confines. They emerge from class with well-honed composition skills in summary, information literacy, and local history along with familiarity with new communities fostered by the intimate interactions working with voice facilitates. Such interactions highlight human connection and emotion and bring public history into the lived, experienced, high impact pedagogy of undergraduate research.

# Assignments

Here I provide the explanation for the final project(s) overview and separate, detailed assignment prompts for Project 3, Project 3B, Project 4A (the Draft Script), and the Final Reflection. Note: As the instructor of record and as a member of this community, I reached out to individuals before the class began to make sure they were both willing to be interviewed and able to work within the tight time constraints of the semester rhythm. I also provided a list of these individuals that included their names and topics I thought they might be able to address, so that students could select an individual based on their own research interests.

## Final Project(s) 3 and 4 Overview: Going Public with Oral History

Final Group Audio Essay Assignment due in Week 15 (Projects 3 and 4)

This project is worth 55% of your total grade for the course broken up in these ways:

**Project 3: Oral History Interview Collection: 20%**

- Interview/questions: 10%
- Collaboration: 5%
- Reflection of three to four pages: 5%

**Collaborative Oral-History Based Final Project (either audio essay or short video documentary): 30%**

- Team Contract/Plan: 5%
- Project 3B: Annotated Bibliography/Research: 5%
- Project 4A: Draft Script 5%
- Project 4B: Rough Cut 10%
- Final Reflection: 5%

**Final Team Oral Presentation: 5%**

### Overview

Working in teams of four to five, you will produce a 10–15-minute *This American Life-* or *Radiolab*-style audio essay. Initially, you will work as a group to discuss the interviews you worked on during the semester, decide on some themes/ideas/issues that they touch upon and that you will research further together, decide on a target audience (or audiences) for your podcast, strategize how to frame them in a cohesive way, and create a schedule and series of task assignments for group members. In order to produce this collaborative work, you will work together on several smaller steps.

First, you will further divide into smaller groups within your whole team. Each smaller group of two to three will work together to create questions and conduct an original oral history interview, write an annotated bibliography, and write individual reflective essays on this process. Once each smaller team has completed annotated bibliographies, you will work as a larger team to create the collaborative final audio essay project.

At two points in the project, you will turn in reflective essays—after conducting the oral history interview/drafting the annotated bibliography essay and at the end of the project. These essays will reflect on the process of transforming audio interview into narrative audio story, researching historical context, working with a partner or two to conduct an oral history interview, and working with others to make these stories truly publicly accessible. There are separate prompts for these reflective essays.

### The Rationale

We've been working with these oral history materials all semester, and though they are fascinating in and of themselves, they will reach a much broader audience if you can interpret them to tell a story. Now that you've both indexed and rhetorically analyzed them, your job in this assignment is to work with your team to create a compelling audio or video narrative that features them. Your team will work to deepen a public audience's understanding of the interviews by carefully combining them both with other interviews and with the narrative segues and historical context that will make them into a cohesive story. Though they appear to you "out of context," your job is to work with your team to enable a broader audience to make sense of them by putting them in context. This is no easy feat, so I've broken it into several smaller, more manageable chunks, as indicated by the list of assignments above and the "nitty gritty" below.

The important skills you're working to develop in this project are research, collaboration, and synthesis for a specific, public audience.

### The Nitty Gritty

Your first step will be to think about the things that make your interview interesting and think about the larger stories it helps to tell. To help you identify team members, you will have a chance to "showcase" your interview and listen to your colleagues in some "speed-teaming" style mixers. Once you form teams of four to six, together your group will create a work plan to help you complete the necessary research and composing for your final project. Your next step will be to research and write your team-authored annotated bibliography based on the oral histories you indexed and the original oral history interview you conducted, placing them in a broader context that reflects the theme or idea that your group has chosen to explore in the podcast. (You'll find more specific instructions for completing these smaller group assignments under Project 3: Original Oral History Interview and Project 3B: Annotated Bibliography). Once you've completed your original oral history interview and your annotated bibliographies, you will work with your larger group to create a cohesive radio show episode. To complete this task successfully, your group will write a title for your podcast, a short introduction to your show, short transitions between the pieces in the show, and a conclusion to your show. You will be allowed some class time for the planning, but you should use this time to create a schedule of deadlines for these parts of the assignment and divide up the labor evenly between group members.

You will download Audacity (it's free!) onto your computer and use it to record and edit your audio essays. The podcasts will incorporate sound bites from the interview as well as other sound effects that add depth, dimension, affect, or comic relief to your stories.

(Credit to Emilee Egbert for coining the term "speed-teaming.")

### Tips for Getting Started (Invention!)

Since you're likely pretty familiar (and in fact a resident expert!) on the interview assigned to you, you may already know how you want to approach this project and which aspects of historical context you wish to research. I suggest that you read through and complete the Project Speed-Team handout and that you read through and think about the questions raised by the Turning Interview into Story Handout. We will formally complete this exercise later in the semester, once you've done some research, but you may find it helpful in shaping the way you approach your research. Since you all have listened to more than one interview from the Nunn Center's Jewish collections, feel free to choose which one you want to focus on for these final projects.

### Your interview will be assigned from following list:

- Ethnicity in Lexington (Multi-Culturality) Oral History Project
- Lexington Jewish Community Oral History Project
- JHFE Jewish Kentucky Oral History Collection

**Research**

Since a large part of this assignment depends on the strength of the contextualizing research you complete, you might begin to investigate the following resources put together by Sarah Dorpinghaus in Special Collections: https://tinyurl.com/SCRCJewish

## Project 3: Original Oral History Interview and Interviewing Reflection[1]

**Overview:** Working in small teams of two or three you will work together to do two types of original research. First you will identify a community member to interview, contact him or her, and schedule a time to conduct the interview. Then you will create an original interview protocol based on the template I provide and tailored to meet the needs of your group and the experiences of your interviewee. Second, you will follow the directions for creating an annotated bibliography to further research the questions your larger team is investigating to better contextualize the interviews you indexed and you conducted.

**The Basics**

**Pair Portion:** In order to produce this collaborative work, each small group of two to three students will do three important things.

1. Conduct an original Oral History Interview that will become part of the JHFE Jewish Kentucky Collection.

2. Research and write an annotated bibliography of no less than six to eight contextual, scholarly resources to help you develop knowledge and shape your perspectives on the research topic questions. (Each person is responsible for a minimum of two sources.)

3. Write an individual reflection essay about the process of collaborating with your peers on the interview/research/writing of this portion of the project.

First, you will identify some issues that you wish to explore/include in your collaborative piece, then you will identify an appropriate interviewee from the provided list, and next you'll conduct an oral history to deepen the context. You will work together to both create the interview questions and schedule/conduct the interview.

**The Rationale**

You've been working with oral history interviews all semester, and I hope by now you've realized how valuable they are for complicating the historical record. Now it is your chance to conduct an original oral history interview that will become part of the JHFE Jewish Kentucky Oral History Collection. This assignment serves two important functions:

1. It helps you conduct necessary outside research to contextualize and

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1.   The Interview Protocol that Janice W. Fernheimer provides to students can be found on the book's companion website.

deepen our understanding of the oral histories you've been working with all semester, thus enriching the narrative you'll tell in the final audio essay.

2. It helps build and sustain the collection itself by furthering the scope of material included within.

**For this small-group interviewing assignment,** the goal of the assignment is to help you learn more about primary and secondary research, to create and conduct an original oral history interview, develop the ability to synthesize and analyze resources in order to better contextualize interviews, and eventually create a compelling, contextualized narrative for a public audience.

### The Nitty Gritty

*Resources/Potential Interviewees*

The Nunn Center recording studio is available to you as are several professional-quality audio recorders. To schedule a time to use the professional recording studio, email Kopana Terry and Doug Boyd in the Nunn Center with your scheduling requests. In addition to allowing for professional quality audio, the Nunn Center staff will work with you to ensure that the recording devices are set up and used properly. The interview you collect must be accompanied by a signed Nunn Center release form (downloadable from our Canvas site under files), so it can be added to the Jewish Kentucky Oral History Collection, thus building and expanding the repository. (You will not be tasked with indexing it, but future students will, so it will become searchable and accessible.)

A list is available on our Canvas site of local community leaders and participants have already agreed to make themselves available for an oral history for the purposes of this class and the larger JHFE Jewish Kentucky Oral History Project. You are not limited to selecting from this list, but I did want to provide you with contacts who are already amenable to participating in the project. If you have other ideas of potential interviewees, please discuss them with me and we'll determine if it is feasible to complete the interviews in the timeframe you need.

*Possible themes to flesh out with the interviewees:*

- Jewish community life in Lexington
- Experiences as a rabbi in a mid-size, Southern town
- Contemporary perspectives on Jewish student life at UK (Hillel, Jewish fraternity/sorority life)
- Women's leadership roles
- Generational issues within the Jewish community: attitudes toward Israel, Holocaust memory/education, others?

*Other possible lines of inquiry:*

- Hadassah and Lexington Jewish women's national prominence in this organization
- Jewish summer camp in Kentucky
- B'nai B'rith Organization

## Scheduling

It is best for your team to find several times that work for your group first, then reach out to Kopana Terry at the Nunn Center to reserve these slots in the studio. After you have a tentative hold on the studio times, reach out to your interviewee to see what (if any) of the slots work for them. Use the template below to contact them by email. Note: you want to reach out as soon as you can, as scheduling is often a challenge for all parties involved.

## Template for Contacting Potential Interviewee:

Dear Mr./ Ms./ Dr. /Professor /Rabbi_____:

Hello, we are A and B, students in Dr. Fernheimer's WRD 112: Writing Jewish Kentucky course this semester. We've been listening to and learning from interviews in the Lexington Jewish Community and Jewish Heritage Fund for Excellence Jewish Kentucky Collections all semester, and as part of our final project, we hope to conduct an oral history with you that will become part of the JHFE Jewish Kentucky Collection. Our group is interested in contextualizing X issue, learning more about Y, hoping to learn more about Q. . . . [tailor to your needs!]

We would like to schedule a morning or afternoon with you to conduct what we hope will be a 1.5–2.5-hour interview to take place in the Nunn Center for Oral History's professional studio on the UK campus. Which of the following windows is most convenient for you? [You should find some slots that work for both students and the Nunn Center's availability and offer a minimum of three windows for the interviewee to choose from.] If none of these times work with your schedule, please provide some windows that do.

Sincerely,

Student A and Student B

*Note: You can offer the interviewee a free parking space on campus if you coordinate with Marie Daley in the Nunn Center and/or with me, as I have an arrangement with the Boone Center. It is important that if your interviewee parks on campus, one representative from your team should meet him/her in the parking lot and escort them to the recording studio, as they are not likely to be familiar with how to navigate campus.

Once you've scheduled the interview, you want to begin working on the protocol right away.

## How to Get Started

You may have noticed that all interviews for the JHFE Jewish Kentucky Oral History Collection incorporated some similar questions. I'll provide you with the general protocol template we used for developing the first section of questions based on Jewish life and community. Usually, the second part of the interview was focused more on the person's unique professional or communal contributions. You will be responsible for working with your peers and creating a complete protocol (selecting and reformulating appropriate questions for Parts 1 and 2), which is due in class on October X. You will receive feedback

and revise the questions (if necessary) before you conduct the interview. In our experience, such interview protocols are revised at least two to three times before Dr. Goldstein and I sign off on them. Of course, if you end up scheduling your actual interview earlier than that, you'll want to make sure you get your protocol approved by Dr. Jan before the interview takes place.

## Project 3B: Annotated Bibliography

In order to be well prepared to draft your transcript for the final audiocast, you'll need to conduct some research to help you better understand the context (historical, cultural, etc.) of the research question your group hopes to answer with your project.

Each large team will turn in one big annotated bibliography as a Google Doc that is shared with me.

Each person is responsible for authoring two annotations of 250–500 words each. The annotations should include a full MLA citation for the source (and a link or PDF attachment posted to the appropriate forum on Canvas), a summary of the scholarly argument made in the source, a description of the way the information or argument helps to advance your project, and one to two sentences about how you hope to use/cite the material in your project. Alternatively, if after reading it, you feel it is no longer relevant to your project, please explain why.

Groups of four will provide no fewer than eight annotated sources. Groups of five will provide no fewer than 10 annotated sources, and groups of six will provide no fewer than 12 annotated sources. You are welcome to include additional annotations as two per team member is the minimum.

## Project 4A: Final Audio Essay Script

For this assignment, you want to create a full-length working script for the audio essay you will record. For a 10–15-minute audio essay, you will need approximately five to seven written pages. (Most people read one typewritten page of about 250 words every 2 minutes.)

Before you begin drafting, you'll want to answer the following questions as part of your group *invention*:

**Topic:**

**Research Question:**

**Way that your proposed audiocast or short documentary answers the research question:**

**What is your rhetorical purpose in making the audio essay?** Do you hope to inform a specific audience about a particular issue or little-known fact about Kentucky Jewish communities? Do you hope to raise awareness of a specific Kentucky Jewish custom or practice? Something else? Specify.

**Who is your audience?** What can you presume they might reasonably know or understand about what you hope to communicate? What will you have to teach/explain? What is the best arrangement/organization of the material to ensure listenability and audience engagement?

Remember, in order to make life easier for yourselves when it comes time to actually record the audio essay, you want to have the most well articulated script you can. You want to make notes about what types of sounds you want to include, what kinds of voice emphasis you hope to have, what pacing/tempo you want to use for both, and what other audio effects you plan to include—music, sound effects? Which ones?

You have the added requirement that your audio essay needs to include clips from some of the interviews you indexed or conducted (clips from a minimum of four to five separate interviews), and they need to be appropriately introduced and framed to show how they fit into the larger story your group is telling. You also want to draw from the research you conducted for the annotated bibliography and include it as well. It is likely you will need to do additional research once you have a more clearly defined idea of your audio essay and how you want to frame it.

Remember all the things you noted when we listened to audio essays/podcasts in class and keep them in mind as you plan:

- Voice emphasis matters—both the way it emphasizes (is it monotone, does it get louder, softer, something else?) and how fast someone speaks (i.e., tempo).
- The tempo, pacing at which someone speaks and information is included
- The use of silence or audio space to create emphasis
- The length and introduction of audio clips
- Conversations were more engaging than one person talking.

## Final Reflection Assignment

This final reflective essay asks you to reflect back on the various assignments you've completed (and are in the process of completing) this semester and connect what you're learning in class to what you are learning in other courses and to what you will need to do for your future, both in academe and beyond. In this final reflective essay, you are invited to discuss the following:

- What you have learned from the experience of working with your team to create a collaborative radio show addressing a specific audience for a specific purpose.
- What you have learned about audience and rhetorical situation from moving across different genre/media conventions (rhetorical analysis, indexing, radio audio podcast/audio essay, oral presentations, oral history, interview, research).
- What you have learned about the rhetorical affordances of one media/genre

over another. How has this impacted the way you think about writing, presenting, rhetorical situation, and audience?

- You may also use this essay as an opportunity to reflect on what you have learned about your writing process, presentation skills/anxieties, and collaboration strengths/weaknesses.
- You are invited to think about the way engaging with the course material has helped you learn about academic research, Jewish culture/history/practice in KY, the US, globally, and perhaps why it is important for non-Jewish audiences to learn about this culture/history/practice and different cultural ideas and practices more generally.

The essay should be four to five pages long, double-spaced in 12-point font. You will submit it both electronically and in hard copy.

## Sample Student Projects

1. Untitled by Team Hillel (Lizzie, Mary, Bilal, Cameron, Madison, and Laura). In this audio essay, six students explore the organization Hillel International.[2]
2. "The F-Word" by Team Feminism (Emma, Emilee, Ashton, Veronica, and Lindsay). This audio essay explores the role modern conservative Jewish women in Kentucky play in the larger context women's liberation movements.

## Reflection

**Janice Fernheimer**: Let's see, is everything moving?[3] It looks like we're a go. *[laughs]* Okay. The Sounds of Sustainable Stewardship: Indexing and Composing Audio Essays with the Jewish Heritage Fund for Excellence, Jewish Kentucky Oral History Repository, and Undergraduate Researchers. Hello! My name is Janice W. Fernheimer, and I am Associate Professor of Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies and the Zantker Charitable Foundation Professor and Director of Jewish Studies at the University of Kentucky in Lexington. I'm here with University of Kentucky undergraduates Madison Cissell, Hannah Thompson, Hannah Newberry, and Laura Will, who were students in two different sections of Writing Jewish Kentucky, a special section of WRD 112. This course is a special section of an honors version of first-year writing that I've been developing and implementing with the support of the broader Jewish Heritage Fund for Excellence Jewish

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2. Two student examples (audio files and descriptive transcripts) can be found on the book's companion website.

3. The audio version of Janice W. Fernheimer's reflection can be found on the book's companion website.

Kentucky research team, which includes Dr. Beth Goldstein, my co-researcher, Dr. Doug Boyd, Director of the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, and Sarah Dorpinghaus, University of Kentucky Digital Archivist. In this audio reflection, we hope to illuminate the ways our broader research team's model for sustainable stewardship for collection growth and accessibility engages undergraduates from across the disciplines as researchers and public authors attuned to what we call the "sounds" of sustainable stewardship.

**Madison Cissell**: So, Dr. Jan, before we go any further, can you explain what sustainable stewardship is and how our class, WRD 112, helped your research team develop this concept?

**Jan**: Sure, thanks, Madison! Sustainable stewardship is a concept Dr. Goldstein, Dr. Boyd, Sarah Dorpinghaus, and I coined for the work we did to innovate a new approach to both oral history collection design and an accompanying pedagogy that enables student researchers to participate in every step of oral history collection from creation to curation. It's a pedagogical practice we developed to engage undergraduates in original knowledge production while simultaneously fostering archival access and growth. It builds on some of the theory that Charlotte Nunes (2017) articulates in her essay "'Connecting to the Ideologies that Surround Us': Oral History Stewardship as an Entry Point to Critical Theory in the Undergraduate Classroom," where she advocates for postcustodial stewardship as an approach that "represents a significant break from the tradition of archival custody . . . [that] connotes an ongoing collaborative relationship in which a repository manages but does not own a community's archives" (p. 351). In her article she argues that "Oral history stewardship, then, is an effective conduit to theoretically engaged pedagogy" (2017, p. 355). And we agree! While the collection we've built is not postcustodial in the way that she defines it, because we work directly with the Louie B. Nunn Center, we are building on the stewardship model she introduces with its emphasis on "ongoing collaborative relationship" (2017, p. 355).

**Hannah Newberry**: Okay, so how does "sustainable stewardship" work?

**Jan**: Excellent question, Hannah! By indexing an extant interview, and thus making it more searchable and accessible and then later conducting an original oral history interview that becomes part of the collection to be indexed by future students, this model produces a sustainable model for both collection growth and increased access. Students participate in making interviews, [rather] indexing interviews that might otherwise not become digitally searchable and available to a public while also conducting an interview to get indexed by a future group of students.

**Hannah Thompson**: So, how did this shape out in our assignments, Dr. Jan?

**Jan**: Well, the assignment structure, as you all well know, included the following: First, students were asked to use the Nunn Center's open-source platform OHMS (the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer) to create a searchable, digital index for an extant oral history conducted by someone else. In our case these were interviews that were already part of the Jewish Heritage Fund for Excellence

Jewish Kentucky Collection. Then students authored a rhetorical analysis of the identity work that the oral history helps to perform. Next students worked in small teams to conduct an original oral history interview that became part of the Jewish Heritage Fund for Excellence Jewish Kentucky Collection. I'm gonna call that JHFE from now on. This interview is one that gets indexed by future students, and then with a larger small team, students work to create a final audio essay that put the oral histories in context and created a narrative addressed to a public audience. The lynchpin for sustainable stewardship thus hinges on the way that students both learn to listen critically to an interview in order to create a usable digital index, which includes things like keywords, segment synopses, contextualizing hyperlinks and GPS coordinates, and then, through this more engaged listening learn to become better interviewers themselves when it's their turn. At least that's our hope.

So, tell me, from your perspective as students in two different versions of the course, from both spring and fall 2017, how did this play out? How did this sustainable stewardship model of indexing/followed by interviewing/followed by audio-essay authoring help you become better attuned to "sound" and its place in the composition process across media?

**Madison**: Hi, I'm Madison Cissell, first-year political science major and Jewish studies minor here at UK. I think that when we are taught about storytelling or rhetoric in public education, the oral and digital component of these elements is often left out. Our class introduced these elements right off the bat, however, and they continuously expanded off of each other as the semester progressed. When working with indexing, students are often still on the "audience" side in a sense that they're listening to media and producing work that complements the interview. By listening to our interviewees, we can feel their emotion and recount their stories more accurately. Once we got into conducting our own interviews and producing a team podcast, I felt more like a facilitator of the new research. It was a great feeling to be incorporated into the digital storytelling aspect and vocally representing my findings and ideas. My excitement came from hearing these people share their stories and the memories pertaining to life in the modern Jewish community. I enjoyed hearing how reminiscent or excited the interviewees were to share details they recollected, no matter how important the memory was to the research itself. Seeing how passionate they became about a story was what made it worth it. I felt a duty to relay this passion to others because of the unique situation we had. I feel like not many college students, or Kentuckians in general, have much knowledge on Jewish Kentuckians and their impact. So, being able to relay the sounds and details I was picking up was very exciting. I loved being able to share their memories with those interested in listening.

**Hannah Newberry**: Thanks, Madison! It was really exciting to relay the sounds of our interviewees. Hi, I'm Hannah Newberry, and I'm a second-year biology student at the University of Kentucky. From the beginning, you had a blank slate that you had to think about in terms of composition and how things went

together in a nearly two-hour long, sometimes jumbled and rambling interview. I probably listened to my entire two-and-a-half [hour] interview five times in the span of a few weeks. When listening to someone talk about their life like that, in an unprepared and slightly less professional environment than giving a speech or writing an autobiography, you can hear in their voices the emotions behind their stories. You can hear the excitement behind them recounting a memory of their wedding, and the fear and apprehension of recollecting an event where they were called a racial slur or faced discrimination. These emotional elements often do not translate in more prepared speeches and in books. Being able to use these more emotional fragments in the audio essay made it more powerful and allowed their stories to be told more effectively than if the quotes were pulled from a script.

**Hannah Thompson**: Wow! Thanks, Hannah! I think the emotional elements of interviews are also very important. Hi, I'm Hannah Thompson, and I'm a second-year biology student at the University of Kentucky. If you would've asked me a year ago what came to my mind when I heard the word media, I would've said videography, which combines images with sounds. This form of media is the one I had the most experience with previously. We're introduced to movies, documentaries, and the news at a very young age. However, this experience of indexing followed by interviewing gave me a different perspective of media. I no longer think of movies or documentaries, but I think of storytelling. With indexing, you categorize the interview into different parts and each part has its own purpose in the bigger story. I think of it like the chapters of a book. Each chapter has its own meaning, described by experience the character has. When I began to think of questions to ask my interviewee, I remembered how the interview I indexed flowed naturally and shared an interesting story. I strived to do that with my own interview. The interviewee's answer to a question may lead to another question that wasn't planned and that was okay because it was her story to share. The model of first indexing and then interviewing made the interview process much easier and more natural. I learned that "sound" was more than just noises, but also included the voice of the interview and the stories that were shared. We all have a voice to share, but sometimes people don't use them, and as a result, their experiences, knowledge, and wisdom are lost. It's extremely important to share your voice with others. I indexed the interview of Madeline Abramson (2016), a woman who was raised Catholic and had a unique experience converting and integrating into the Jewish community. She used her voice to explore her identity, faith, and family throughout the interview, telling a story of self-growth and acceptance. Her emotional expression described to listeners that it was difficult at times, however, the support of her family and community made the transition much easier. While listening to her voice, I realized she seemed truly happy and proud to be part of a community that welcomed her with open arms and made her feel comfortable. She used her voice in a way that elicits emotion and as a result, others could relate to her feelings.

**Laura Will**: Wow, thanks, Hannah! It's so fascinating to hear about your experience in the WRD 112 class. I'm Laura Will, and I'm a first-year accounting and finance major at the University of Kentucky. I actually had a similar experience coming into the fall 2017 section of this WRD 112 class. I was completely oblivious to the whole concept of "sound" within the composition process across media. On top of that, I knew nothing about indexing, conducting oral history interviews, or creating an audio essay. Reflecting on the class now, I am so proud of my work and my group's work, having completed an index for an interview that recounted a person's life and contribution to the Jewish history of Kentucky, in addition to conducting our own interview that will be permanently available to the public. This process taught me so much about the value of oral history and the necessity to preserve it. Just listening to stories from interviewees and how they built their lives is so amazing, and to think that if it hadn't been for this process of recording, cataloguing, and indexing them, we would never know! This course made me more aware and appreciative of all the work that goes into documenting histories and preserving them, and I am so glad that I had this experience.

**Jan**: Thanks Laura, Hannah, Hannah, Madison. I'm really glad to hear about how you connected with the emotions and the sounds of the interviews that you were working with, and I'm wondering if you can talk to us a little more now about how your experience in composing in these different ways increased your awareness of sound and voice and helped you maybe even reimagine or redefine how you thought about research, or yourself as a student and a researcher, or even maybe, as Laura just started to suggest, your understanding of how history works?

**Madison**: Well, I've always enjoyed my history courses in the past, and I've also had a passion for Jewish history, so getting involved with the historical aspect of oral interviews added more interest to the class. And like Laura stated above, you know, the whole concept of sound within the course was kind of oblivious and new to me, so something I learned when indexing was just how important these elements in the interviews themselves were. I had a great deal of responsibility to the—to index the interviews to the best of my ability because I realized how important it was to share these stories with the Jewish community and members outside of the Jewish Community too. I found that indexing and interviewing are both great methods to share these stories. With indexing, you're providing great . . . you're providing information that can lead to more discoveries. Dr. Fernheimer told us early on that researchers could be using our indexes to look . . . for researchers to look at their specific interests, so attention to detail was imperative. You wanted to make sure that if you could provide a connection, that it was there. In the interviewing process, it's almost like you're creating the information itself. You get to decide what is asked, discussed, elaborated, and disregarded, which is really cool! By having the power to direct conversation, you also want to make sure to bring out and emphasize the most important parts of the story being told.

**Hannah Newberry**: Thank you for sharing, Madison. I agree with you that it was very new to me as it was to y'all—elaborating and making information out

of the interviews. As a biology major, if you had asked me two years ago what I thought research was, I probably would have said something about working in a lab trying to cure cancer or digging at an archaeological site in Egypt or Mexico. I never imagined this type of work with oral histories and conducting interviews. This work is so exciting to me because I am working with living history. History is dynamic, and we are capturing the history from the recent past or the present. We are taking snapshots of a person's life as it is at the time of the interview and collecting their thoughts and stories and memories. This isn't some dusty history lesson. This is real-life people talking about their experiences, and you are hearing it first-hand. This is so important because oftentimes history is "cleaned up," and you lose the voices of people, especially those in the minority, like the Kentucky Jews we focused on. They are in the religious minority of the state and living in the geographical minority for people of the Jewish faith. Their histories and stories would have likely been lost if not for these efforts. I had always heard the old adage "History is written by the victors." But I had never considered it in this manner before. Historians often focused on the majority, and we lost the history of so many others. From hearing the real voices of Kentucky Jews, we hear an alternate history that differs from so many others but is also similar to the experiences of other Kentuckians. Without them, we could not accurately analyze the real history of the state. From the recollections of a Jewish Kentucky sharecropper who remembers his mother fixing traditional Jewish food for other sharecropper families, to stories of menorahs being placed in windows facing away from Christian pastors in order to not offend them, these are the voices that come through when oral histories are made.

**Hannah Thompson**: Like Hannah explained, when I think of research, I also think of bench research in the lab due to my experiences, and as a result I think of research in a scientific perspective. However, through this class I learned that research in the humanities and history is also extremely important. We might not be following the scientific method the same exact way, but we followed our own method of understanding the history, adding a first-person voice that could provide their own perspective of the historical events, and relating real-life experiences with historical importance. I believe it's incredibly important to connect something that's written about in textbooks to the voices and stories of the people that experienced those events unfold in front of them. For example, Rachel Adler (1973), a Jewish studies scholar and woman of Jewish faith, elaborated on the stereotypical responsibilities of Jewish women of the 17th through 20th centuries and once said, "It was to cry down our doubts that rabbis developed their prepackaged orations on the nobility of motherhood; the glory of childbirth; and modesty, the crown of Jewish womanhood" (p. 77). Adler bucked these expectations and explained how the Halacha, Jewish law, must be interpreted differently so that women can participate in Jewish traditions typically reserved for men. Fast forward to the 21st century, and women are able to become rabbis. I had the pleasure of interviewing Rabbi Cohen (2017), the first female rabbi of Lexington's

conservative synagogue Ohavay Zion. She reflected on her work as a rabbi and specifically a female rabbi. Rabbi Cohen's perspective shined a light on the progress Judaism has made to accept women in leadership roles. Perspectives like hers are important to understand our history. It is clear that interdisciplinary research is necessary to advance our knowledge of the past and future.

**Laura**: Thanks, Hannah! I completely agree. One of the first assignments we had in this class was to read an article about the pros and cons of oral history and its credibility in regards to research. This really stuck with me throughout the semester as I indexed an interview and conducted one of my own. It wasn't until my group and I had to develop a research question to base our own audio essay off of that I was able to experience for myself what this article summarized. As my group explored written documents, including journals, newspapers, pamphlets, and articles, in addition to searching through previously conducted interviews, I began to realize that I actually valued the oral histories more. They were so personal and so genuine, from the way they phrased specific events to the emotion behind their words that I could feel as if I was there, in that moment. These oral histories gave me a completely new perspective on research and "history," because I know that I would not have felt as connected or invested in the stories and evidence for my research, even if I was reading the same interview in a transcript. I am so used to searching through books and online sites for evidence, but this was different. This was listening to someone's life stories, and I loved it!

**Jan**: What Laura is pointing to is some of the intimacy that comes with working with oral history. Working not just with a person's words, but with the sounds of their voice, the spaces in between those sounds, the cracklings, the laughter, the uuhhhs and the aaahhhs, of spoken utterance—students and I got a sense for what it means to hear the sounds of history composed one person's story at a time. As Hannah and Hannah point out, history is a research method that expanded how they conceived of research and knowledge, and as Madison chimed in, working with such oral histories enabled her and other students to feel responsible to both the interviewees and to the stories they told. This type of responsible research, which allows students even in their very first year to contribute to the growing body of knowledge, engages us in part because of its sounds. Investigating the specifics of which sounds and which voices are included helped us to better understand and prompt more questions about the relative inclusivity or representational nature of history. Who *is* part of the record? Whose voices get counted? Why or why not? Who gets to decide?

The work of sustainable stewardship we're engaged in—making those voices that are already part of the record more searchable and accessible for others, and making sure that we are not just indexing those interviews and increasing access, but also adding additional voices to the record, and ensuring the growth of the collection, increasing inclusivity and access simultaneously through our acts of public authoring—these too are the sounds of sustainable stewardship. At times harmonious, at times cacophonous, at times something still in process,

the sounds of sustainable stewardship are multi-faceted. They allow more voices to become part of the symphonic, historical record, and in so doing, they allow more authors to become part of the process of making them part of the record and making that record so much more available. These are exciting moments in connecting first-year writers with public writing that does work inside and well beyond the writing classroom, and through the work of sustainable stewardship continues to resound beyond the constraints of any one particular semester. We are very grateful to the Jewish Heritage Fund for Excellence, which helped to fund the project, and to the Nunn Center for allowing us to use their studio, and of course to all of the amazing students, some of whom you got to hear from today: Hannah, Hannah, Laura, and Madison, who participated in helping us develop this model. Thank you!

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