

A STORYTELLING TRAINING GROUND:
ORAL HISTORY IN THE JOURNALISM CLASSROOM

Roxanne Foster

Jacqui Banaszynski, Committee Chair

ABSTRACT

When journalism students engage with the world of oral history, they step into a semi-controlled training ground for storytelling. Using oral history methods in journalism courses offers an opportunity for students to hone their skills in an arena where time constraints are expanded, interviewees expect you to stay awhile and your curiosity is allowed to wander into hidden areas not normally probed for publication. Through conducting a 14-week oral history project on the desegregation of Columbia's public high schools in the 1950s, during which I interviewed 11 people who were students at the time, I was able to experience and examine, first-hand, the intersection of journalism and oral history; what aspects they have in common, how they are different and what could each potentially learn from the other. In addition, for my professional analysis I interviewed five journalism professors from across the U.S. to determine how and why they use oral history in their curricula. Their responses confirm that oral history methods are excellent for not only teaching students research, interviewing and storytelling skills but also enabling them to explore "the other," deepen their understanding of history and engage with communities.