

This assignment uses the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (OHMS), a free oral history indexing platform developed by the University of Kentucky to connect students to unique primary sources from the past and introduce concepts of subjectivity, authority, and narrative into the classroom. OHMS allows users to break the audio or video recording of an oral history interview into segments, and attach metadata such as keywords, geolocation, and a hyperlink to each segment.

I developed this assignment when I was tasked with teaching Introduction to Digital Humanities at Stockton University, in New Jersey. I wanted to organize the course around a collaborative project, and I remembered that a grad school colleague had worked with students at a nearby institution to conduct oral histories about Hurricane Sandy. I decided to have the students in my course use OHMS to index the Hurricane Sandy oral histories and create a website to showcase their work.

This assignment asked students to make critical choices about how to break the interview down and what metadata to attach to each segment. This raised the question of how to select metadata that balances respect the narrator's understanding of their story with the expectations of different online audiences. This in turn opened up a discussion about the ways that structures of information reflect the power relations of our culture and society. It also taught students the project management skills that are both useful across the curriculum and attractive to future employers.

The best part of the assignment was that we ended the course with a presentable project that some students continued to work on as interns. In the future I would plan more of the project ahead of time, since the need to process some of the interviews once the course was already underway impeded our progress.