

Video Biography Project

Psychology 427 ♦ Social Gerontology

For this activity you'll have the chance to get to know an older adult here in St. Louis and help them tell their life story in a video biography. In small teams, I will match you up with a resident living at a local nursing home. Throughout the semester you'll be visiting the residents, interviewing them about their life experiences and perspective on the world. With your team, you will edit your video footage and put together a video biography. And at the end of the semester we'll return to the nursing home and you can deliver a copy of the video biography to the resident you've come to know.

With this project you'll have the opportunity to learn about an older adult in greater depth than you might have before, by interviewing them about their life and some topics that might not come up in ordinary conversation. In the process, you're likely to learn about what it was like to grow up at a different time in history and what the process of aging is *really* like, apart from what you've read about and talked about this semester. In addition, you'll have the opportunity to provide some companionship and kindness to an older adult who may not have the same social connections they used to have.

Who you'll interview

This semester we're partnering with a local nursing home:

Parkside Towers Nursing Home
4960 Laclede Avenue
St. Louis, MO 63108
(314) 361-6240

Out contact there is Ms. Zana Monk, a social worker and Director of Social Services . Please direct questions about your work at Parkside to me. But if you're at Parkside and questions come up, you can ask to speak with Ms. Monk.

Parkside Towers is located in the Central West End, convenient to both the Central West End Metrolink train stop and the Gold bus route. The bus route is closer. You can find details on the WU Transportation website (<http://parking.wustl.edu/>).

The schedule

Initial Visit. We'll travel together, as a class, during class time, to make our initial visit to Parkside Towers and introduce you to the residents and the residents to you. You'll have a chance to talk briefly with the resident you are going to interview. At that meeting you can discuss general days and times when you might return for your interviews, taking into account your schedule and the preferences of the resident.

Interview Visits. You can schedule these visits whenever you like, in conjunction with your other team members and the resident you are interviewing. 2-4 visits during the semester should give you sufficient time to complete your interview. During these visits you'll be conducting your life review interview, videotaping your conversation. You may choose to make more visits to complete your interview; the number of visits is negotiable with the resident, but I expect you to make at least two visits.

Self-Assessment and Video. After you have completed the interviews with the resident, I would like each team member to tape themselves and add a postscript to the biography, describing what they learned about themselves and about aging.

Video Editing. You'll work as a team to import your digital video footage into iMovie and create a coherent biography of the resident. You have complete control over format, sequence, titles, music, etc., but you should keep your final product under 90 minutes. For help, you can visit the extensive Apple iMovie support website (<http://www.apple.com/support/imovie/>). Once finished, you'll burn the video to DVDs to share with the resident and with the class. iMovie is video editing software that is available on most computers throughout campus, including the computer labs in most residential halls, in the computer lab in the basement of Eads Hall, and in Humanities Digital Workshop, also in the basement of Eads Hall. Staff at the Humanities Digital Workshop (<http://hdw.artsci.wustl.edu/>) can provide a brief iMovie tutorial and answer questions while you're working on iMovie.

Final Visit. We'll return together as a class for a final visit and a small party to deliver the videos and celebrate with the residents.

What information to gather from the resident

During the interview your job will be to learn as much about the resident as possible. Reflecting the multidisciplinary approach of this class, I would like you to gather information about their biological functioning, their psychological functioning, and their social functioning. More generally, learn about their personal history, the events in their lives that were important to them, and the challenges and joys they face in their contemporary circumstances.

In class we'll work together to develop an outline for the information you might obtain, but don't feel obligated to restrict yourself to these topics. The goal is to learn enough about the person so that you can paint a comprehensive picture in your biography. You may choose to spend more time on some areas, less time on others, depending on what interests you and what your older friend wants to reveal. Remember that one theme of the course is thinking about aging from a lifespan perspective. Therefore, when painting the portrait of the resident think about how events and experiences early in life may have influenced subsequent events and experiences. Think about how experiences throughout life affect the trajectory of a person's experience and their ultimate experience of aging.

If you find that certain interview questions generate particularly useful information or seem particularly informative, you can add them to the Interview Question Discussion on Telesis. Likewise, if you discover that certain questions or topics generate a negative reaction, you can share that experience as well. Or if the residents bring up a topic or theme we didn't think about, add that to the discussion. Feel free to include anything you think might help your classmates in their own interviewing.

Grading

The Biography Project is worth 100 points toward your final grade (25% of your final grade). I will assign 25 of those points myself, based on your finished video biography. The remaining 75 points will be awarded by your other team members. Each person on the team will grade each other person on the team, and I'll average those grades to come up with a final tally. Grading

criteria are listed below.

Criteria for team participation

Points	Criterion
/ 10	Contributed to the development of interview questions
/ 10	Demonstrated respect for and genuine interest in the resident
/ 10	Incorporated knowledge about lifespan development and gerontology into the interviews and editing
/ 20	Participated in a meaningful, valuable way during the interviews
/ 20	Provided significant input and assistance during video editing
/ 5	Overall, made an equitable contribution to the project workload and was a collegial collaborator
/ 75	TOTAL

Criteria for final video product

Points	Criterion
/ 5	Interview questions are sensitive and demonstrate genuine respect for the resident
/ 10	Biography is comprehensive and addresses all major bio-psycho-social-spiritual facets of life
/ 5	Video is well edited (under 90 minutes), presents a logical narrative and engaging life story
/ 5	Student postscripts demonstrate careful synthesis and analysis about the life presented and its relation to broad issues in gerontology
/ 25	TOTAL

Topics you might investigate during your interview

1. Demographic information
 - a. age, gender, place of birth
 - b. ethnicity/cultural/racial identity
 - c. socioeconomic status
 - d. religious affiliation and spiritual identification
 - e. education history
 - f. work history
 - g. military service
2. Family history
 - a. parents
 - b. siblings
 - c. significant intimate relationships
 - d. children
 - e. grandchildren
3. Social relationships
 - a. friendships
 - b. social activities and involvements
 - c. comparisons of aging with their peers
4. Leisure activities
 - a. hobbies and interests
 - b. travel experiences
 - c. sexuality
 - d. political interests
5. Health
 - a. health status
 - b. medications or illnesses
 - c. effects of health on daily functioning
 - d. ability to complete daily life tasks
6. Current perspective on what it's like to be their age
7. Miscellaneous
 - a. goals and dreams for the future
 - b. regrets about the past
 - c. significant changes they have seen in the world during their lifetime
 - d. things they are proud of
 - e. how they feel about growing old
 - f. how they feel about death
 - g. how they feel about changes they have witnessed during their lives
 - h. how they feel about the younger generation