**OHMA Thesis and Capstone Requirements**

OHMA offers two options for culminating MA projects. To complete the MA degree, each student must produce either a thesis or a capstone project.

As a program, OHMA seeks to develop effective and innovative ways of communicating academic work to the public and encourage interdisciplinary scholarly work that is both creative and intellectually rigorous. In their culminating projects, students have the opportunity to produce a substantial piece of work that synthesizes their learning at OHMA and paves the way towards the next steps in their career. We support projects that use newly created and/or archived oral histories. Culminating projects may use oral histories as a raw material and/or take the oral history process itself as an object of study.

Most students complete a thesis, but some students may elect to complete a capstone project instead.

The thesis may incorporate a blend of publicly engaged and academic work, and may range from traditional scholarly writing to experimental creative production, but it must make a substantial and original contribution to the field and discipline of oral history. A thesis, which can be academic or creative in genre, is characterized by a sustained critical engagement with a body of scholarly literature in order to answer a defined research question. While many thesis projects are also publicly engaged, capstone projects are characterized by their use of oral histories primarily to contribute to public life. Students producing capstone projects write a short reflective essay explaining their goals and process.

All students will identify and work closely with a member of the OHMA faculty to guide their thesis or capstone work. Students may also include invite another scholar and/or artist working in a relevant field to serve on a thesis or capstone committee with their OHMA advisor.

The thesis and capstone processes are also supported through OHMA’s coursework.

* All OHMA students take a required fall course in Oral History Method and Theory: an intellectual orientation to the field and the discipline of oral history that concludes with a theoretical paper that will contribute to the writing of the thesis.
* All OHMA students also take a yearlong fieldwork seminar in which they are guided through the process of developing, executing, and presenting an original oral history project. As the culmination of this course, at the end of the spring semester the students create an interactive, multimedia public pop-up exhibit of their work and write essays reflecting on their process. For many students who elect to produce a capstone, the work they create for this exhibit will form the core of their capstone project. Students doing a capstone are expected to graduate in May.
* In addition to the required fieldwork and method and theory seminar, students who elect to complete a thesis will enroll in a co-taught spring thesis workshop in which they will work intensively with each other and OHMA faculty to develop their thesis work in creative and scholarly genres. They may graduate in May and in some cases continue writing over the summer and graduate in October.

***Examples of Thesis and Capstone Projects:***

**Theses:**

A scholarly paper on the 2001 economic collapse in Argentina, which critically summarizes literature on the event, identifies unanswered questions in existing research, poses a research question, and uses oral histories analytically to address the question.

A play based on oral histories with jazz musicians in New York City, accompanied by an essay explicating the play’s intervention in the traditions of oral history and documentary theater.

A scholarly paper and visual presentation that focuses on the relationship between memory, history and visuality in the field of oral history focusing on the migrant body, arguing for the role of visual history in understanding the fraught odyssey of the migrant.

A series of podcasts presenting edited oral history interviews with participants in the 1968 student uprising at Columbia, accompanied by a scholarly paper which critically summarizes literature on editing oral history, orality, aurality, and podcasting as a form and makes an argument (illustrated by the podcasts created) for podcasting as a powerful new way to share oral histories.

A scholarly paper which critically summarizes the literature on paths out of homelessness, focusing on the plight of homeless disabled people in New York City, incorporating fieldwork with disabled homeless people to explore the role of stigma in the provision of policy and services.

Curated online archive of oral histories with doctors who treat cancer, accompanied by a substantial online multimedia essay critically describing the state of the fields of narrative medicine and oral history and using the oral histories in conversation with doctors’ own writing to produce an analysis of the contrasts between, strengths of, and potential synergies between oral history and narrative medicine as modes of inquiry.

**Capstones:**

An audio documentary based on interviews with African American midwives, accompanied by a reflective essay on the process of creating the documentary.

An interactive exhibit presenting interviews with residents of a gentrifying neighborhood, accompanied by a reflective essay on the process of creating the exhibit.

A curated online archive of oral histories with veterans of the war in Afghanistan, accompanied by a reflective essay on the process of creating the archive.

A memoir which draws on oral histories about growing up in rural Nigeria, with an afterword on the process of researching and writing the memoir.

An audio walking tour of Rockaway Beach, based on oral histories, accompanied by a reflective essay on the process of creating the walking tour.