The following guidelines were prepared for use by staff in Special Collections. They reflect the workflow of the department and are not necessarily definitive or exhaustive. They may, however be useful to you as you plan future oral histories. If you have any questions please contact Special Collections staff at 404.413.2880 / archives@gsu.edu

PRE-INTERVIEW PREPARATIONS

Pre-interview telephone call / meeting with interviewee

- Provide a background of the project and briefly describe what an interview might entail, as well as the interviewee’s rights. If the interviewee agrees to do the oral history, either e-mail or direct them to the interviewee packet which can be found in the Women’s March Research Guides. Alternatively, arrange to send a copy of the packet via snail-mail. Ask the interviewee to let you know if they have any questions. Be sure to use laymen’s terms / non-academic language throughout your interactions.

- Ask the interviewee to complete and return the biographical data form along with any other information they have about themselves (e.g. vita / resume / news clippings). Note, some interviewees may not correspond via e-mail. In those cases, mail the biographical data form, and include a stamped, addressed envelope for them to return it to you. If they live locally, you may also offer to pick up biographical materials from their home.

- Offer to meet to discuss the interview process further after the interviewee has had time to look over the information packet. If you feel that the Archivist needs to be part of the conversation, don’t hesitate to contact her.

- During your discussion, ask the interviewee if they have ever done an interview before, either for academic purposes, for Story Corps, or by a journalist. A general explanation could be:
  - Oral history is a one-on-one interview that is meant to document the history of a person, organization, movement, or event. It is different from an interview conducted by a journalist, and it is longer than an interview conducted for Story Corps. The oral history interview is meant to fill gaps in the written record. It is more of a life history.
  - The interview, unless otherwise stipulated in the agreement form, will be open to the public. It will be promoted on the Internet, so people will know that it is accessible at Georgia State University. It will not be confidential.
  - By being interviewed, the interviewee is greatly contributing to the historical record, and adding to the body of knowledge about the Marches.
  - A release form that is to be signed immediately following the interview, transfers all rights to Georgia State University. The interviewee, however, will be free to use her/his own interview in whatever way they wish.
The audio/video will be made available online shortly after the interview takes place. If and when the oral history is transcribed, the interviewee will have the opportunity to review the transcript. Georgia State University will provide them with copies, and they will be encouraged to correct any errors and add clarifications.

Discuss where the interview is going to take place

- Encourage the interviewee to come to campus, as the environment can be more controlled. Generally, on-campus interviews take place in the Colloquium Room in Special Collections, on the 8th floor of Library South. Explain that free parking can be provided in a parking deck close to the Library.
- If the interviewee cannot come to campus, and the interview will have to take place in someone’s home or office, let her/him know that you have to avoid kitchens (clicking appliances), and rooms that are close to the street. If windows are normally open, you should ask if they can be closed during the interview. Dens or living rooms that are carpeted work best. Ask the interviewee to turn off or silence phones, ensure pets are removed from the vicinity, and avoid having guests or visitors.

Discuss what the interviewee should wear

- If you are conducting an audio interview, casual comfortable clothes are advised.
- If you are videotaping the interview, be sure to let the interviewee know so that s/he can decide if s/he would like to be more professionally dressed for the camera. Also, tell her/him not to wear narrow stripes?

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Background research

- Use the information provided by the interviewee to begin your research.
- Use the internet to find out all you can about the interviewee as well as the organizations/ causes they have been involved with.
- Review printed publications, perhaps look for interesting articles featuring the interviewee or the subject matter at hand. Review other oral histories or archival collections about the same subject.
- You will be provided with a list of questions, If you discover information that would be helpful to include in the oral history, feel free to add your own questions to the list.

Schedule the interview:

- Discuss possible dates with interviewee.
• If interview is to be conducted in interviewee’s home or some other off-site location, go ahead and schedule, then check in with the archivist to ensure that equipment will be available.
• If interview is to be conducted on campus, contact the Archivist so that she can book the location and arrange recording.

Immediately before the interview:

• Prepare two release forms (you will find all forms in the Oral History section of the March Research Guides). One will go on file in Special Collections and one will be given to the interviewee.
• Gather together bottles of water and tissues for the interviewee to use during the interview.
• Prepare your equipment.

EQUIPMENT

Audio Only Interview

• For the majority of oral histories, we use the TASCAM digital recorders.
  o If multiple digital recorders are available, take two with you, so that you have a spare one as a back-up. Otherwise, use your phone as a back-up recorder.
  o Make sure that the recorders are charged. Do this by plugging the USB cord into the recorder and then into a computer that is switched on. You can also charge the recorder using a wall socket. You will know that the recorders are fully charged when the rectangular box shows that it is full.
  o If you have not used a digital recorder before, find someone who has, ask them to show you how to use it, and then practice. Make sure that you know how to record, pause, and review recording.
  o Use the recorder in a battery-only mode: if the recorder is plugged in, you may hear a low hum on the recording.
  o Each recorder can record for 2.5-3.5 hours without being plugged in. If you are using a recorder for the first time, test the battery’s charge time before conducting an interview.
  o Clear printed directions are provided with each piece of equipment.

• A MARANTZ recorder is also available for use in Special Collections only. It must not be loaned out.

NOTE: Special Collections equipment is available for Special Collections projects only. It is not to be loaned out.

Be aware that the microphones that are attached to the digital recorders record in stereo, so they need to be directed at both you and the interviewee. They do not pick up sound in a
circular manner. The microphone with the MARANTZ recorder is omni-directional, and will pick up sound regardless of direction.

**Video Interview**

- If the interview is being videotaped, you still need to use an audio recorder as a backup. Follow instructions for digital recorders above.
- A videographer will manage on-campus videotaping. If you are videotaping off-campus, make sure that you have had adequate training and know how to use your equipment. Clear printed directions are provided with each piece of equipment.

Before you begin the interview, do a sound check with your equipment to make sure that it is recording properly and that both the interviewee and the interviewer can be clearly heard.

**THE INTERVIEW ITSELF**

**DURING THE INTERVIEW**

- Make sure that the interviewee is comfortable.
  - Give him/her water and place tissues within reach.
- Start the interview with the following statement: My name is [_______], and I am interviewing [__________] for Georgia State University’s Women’s March Oral History Project. The date is [___________] and the interview is taking place at [__________].
- Listen and maintain eye contact
  - Oral history is a very special experience. Very few times in our culture are we listening so intently to someone else. Listening is important.
  - Try to remain focused on the person, instead of taking notes or checking the equipment.
  - Before the interview begins, tell the interviewee that you may look down at your notes from time to time, but that you are still listening.
  - Also, explain that you want them to enjoy being interviewed and that if, at any time during the interview, they do not want to answer a question, they just have to tell you that they would rather not.
- Try to avoid interrupting or verbally responding too much:
  - Nod instead of saying, “right, right” or “yes, interesting.” This prevents a crossover of voices on the recorder.
  - If you need to ask a clarifying question, wait until the interviewee has finished their thought.
- Ask open-ended questions
  - “Do you remember” versus “when did x take place,” so that the interviewee distinguishes between stories the interviewee has been told or what she/he has read, and what she/he actually experienced.
“What was the experience like” versus “Were you ever discriminated against?” There are different ways to ask the same question

- Stay on track...
  - Keeping in mind the purpose of the interview, let the interviewee “roam” a little. You don’t want to lose an interesting aside, so let the interviewee finish their aside and then get them back on track.

- Silence is okay and can be important.
  - It’s okay to have a long pause, if someone is thinking. This is sometimes hard to maintain, but don’t rush to move on to another topic right away if you think that someone has more to say.

- It’s okay to take breaks.
  - Breaks can be edited from the transcript and/or recording – this is not a live interview. Explain this to the interviewee ahead of time.
  - If you need to use the restroom, get a drink of water, or have to cough, etc., pause the recorder and resume when you can.
  - Periodically, ask the interviewee if s/he needs to take a break – usually after an hour of talking.

- Personal questions help people get back memories,
  - So it is ok to start with basic background questions if the interview is meant to be about a particular event or movement, instead of personal lives.
  - Personal stories can be good ice breakers.

What to do if you think that something is untrue:

- Leaving it alone.
  - It’s okay to have different perspectives – oral history is a raw source, but is also a subjective piece of history.
  - You might consider telling the person that, “in another interview, so and so presented X this way...” and see how s/he responds.

How to handle the disclosure of sensitive information
Work with interviewee -- check with archivist.

For disclosure of criminal activity – we don’t want to keep a record of names, dates, etc.

Third party privacy issue – if you are uncomfortable, move on when it is appropriate then discuss with Archivist.

POST INTERVIEW

Paperwork:

- Immediately after the interview is finished, have the interviewee sign and date two release forms. Interviewer should do so too.
  - Explain to the interviewee that s/he can decide whether their interview can be made available on line and in the reading room or in the reading room only, and
also, that we can redact personal information if the interviewee has concerns about privacy.
  o If the interviewee is a minor, a parent must also sign the release form.
• Give one of the forms to the interviewee to keep for her/his records; the other is for Georgia State University.

Interviewer:

• Return digital recorder to the Archivist.
• Send a thank you letter/card/e-mail or call the interviewee to thank them for their time.
• Transcribing and/or editing your interview is certainly an option – talk to the Archivist if you are interested.