

Michael F. Suarez, S.J.
G-70: Advanced Seminar in Critical Bibliography
16–20 June 2014

Detailed Course Evaluation

- 1) *How useful were the pre-course readings? Did you do any additional preparations in advance of the course?*
 1. Readings were really interesting and added breadth to my understanding of bibliographic practice. Nice to read a few of the classic articles like McKenzie that I knew about, but had never actually read.
 2. The range of pre-course readings was well suited to the topic. I'm glad that participants also contributed readings to the list.
 3. Pre-course readings were mostly helpful, but I would have appreciated discussing some of them directly during the class. We covered some of the material tangentially, and I'm glad I read them, but some of them I might have gotten more out of with extra discussion (especially given all were, more or less, out of my field). Also, it would have been helpful to have more instruction/direction for preparing the presentation. I know the idea was to leave the format, &c., up to us, but explaining a bit more would have helped me to be able to prepare better ahead of time.
 4. The pre-course readings were useful in general, but were not well integrated into the work of the course. It would have been nice to—not necessarily have structured discussions on them—but at least to talk about them and their relationship to the course.
 5. Some, of course, were more useful than others, but I would have loved something like a syllabus or some hints as to what each reading was supposed to do—i.e., why did MFS select it?
 6. The readings would have been useful if I had known what they indicated: bad examples or good examples?

- 2) *Were the course workbook and other materials distributed in class appropriate and useful (or will they be so in the future, after you return home)?*
 1. Yes!
 2. N/A. But I will be looking up books MFS and my peers recommended.
 3. The few materials distributed in class were really helpful. I'm thinking especially of the example folio sheets (to be folded to show how watermarks work, &c.).
 4. Yes.
 5. Very few materials were distributed in class.
 6. N/A.

- 3) *Have you taken one or more RBS courses before? If so, how did this course compare with your previous coursework?*
 1. Yes. This was a slightly different experience because it was all Mellon Fellows. It was great to have the class be so focused on sharing our own work.
 2. Yes. Very different, but great.

3. Yes. The two classes were so different, I'm not sure I can compare! Both were great.
 4. Yes. This course was different, being the required RBS-Mellon seminar. It was less about practical training, and included larger discussions about the state of the field, than the previous course I took.
 5. Yes. My previous course was much more highly structured, but predictably so. This course was more about critical discussion and ideas generation; the other courses focused more heavily on technical knowledge.
 6. Yes. Good.
- 4) *What aspects of the course content were of the greatest interest or relevance for your purposes?*
1. It was wonderful to have the chance to present my work to a wonderful group of colleagues and to workshop with them.
 2. This course did a wonderful job of showcasing fellows' current research and creating community. We had powerful conversations about methodology and pedagogy that I will be thinking about for a long time.
 3. Talking about teaching and teaching techniques was particularly helpful. Also, I really appreciated our discussions about navigating our fields/positioning ourselves in our fields. That is all really helpful in terms of thinking strategically about our work and how to get it the best audience.
 4. I was most interested in the hands-on work we did thinking about how to describe particular objects. I liked connecting this hands-on work to the larger discussions about how to enhance and expand the "field" of critical bibliography.
 5. Object analysis: when we worked on a few objects collectively, discussing their significant and points of interest, before expanding out our observations to more general bibliographical concerns.
 6. Intellectual discussions.
- 5) *Did the instructor successfully help you to acquire the information, knowledge, and skills that the course was intended to convey? Was the intellectual level of the course appropriate?*
1. {No response—RBS staff}
 2. As always, MFS brought energy, anecdotes, and examples to the table.
 3. Yes, definitely.
 4. Overall it was appropriate, and there was a great level of discussion among the students. There could have been more specific discussion of the readings and other academic works given the academic level of the participants.
 5. Yes.
 6. N/A.
- 6) *What did you like best about the course?*
1. Class presentations and group pedagogy sessions in SC.
 2. The opportunity to have a week-long conversation with my fellow fellows and MFS.
 3. I particularly enjoyed learning more about the processes involved in book making

and paper making, and learning about the economics behind book making. It has been interesting to think about how the world of printed books is similar to and different from that of manuscripts.

4. I feel much more confident in assessing books as physical objects, knowing how/where to answer questions and concerns, and conveying my understanding of “critical bibliography” to others. The student presentations were also excellent in both offering individual case studies and reflecting on the larger intellectual project.
5. Again, the object analysis.
6. My conversation with MFS.

7) *How could the course have been improved?*

1. A clearer schedule circulated ahead of time would have been helpful.
2. I hope the course continues to evolve to suit the interests and needs of the fellows enrolled.
3. It could have been nice to have a few more examples/case studies of material closer to what I work on, but at the same time, I really enjoyed being exposed to information and objects I don't normally think about, so I'm not sure I would actually want to change the course content to be more manuscript oriented.
4. The course could use more structure. It would be nice to spend a bit more time on specific bibliographical areas and techniques, so that the course combines meta-discussion about critical bibliography with more acquisition of skills and tools in analyzing material texts. It would also help to have a separate day/period on teaching, rather than trying to incorporate teaching into other conversations. Overall, a pre-circulated syllabus and more of a schedule throughout the week would help.
5. A bit more structure, a clear syllabus or timeline, and slightly shorter presentation and Q&A (perhaps thirty minutes for presentations, and twenty/thirty for Q&A?).
6. I think the objective of the course should be to answer these questions: what is critical bibliography and why is it important? Not entirely clear how to do critical book history or critical bibliography. For future seminars, there should be four case studies distributed in advance and discussed in seminar sessions: 1) bad bibliography; 2) good critical bibliography; 3) bad book history; 4) good book history. This class constantly stayed inside specifics and did not abstract to broader trends. The seminar should focus on abstracting general principles from these case studies; objective should be to create “guidebook” for future scholars. Presentations should be shorter (twenty minutes) and the presentations should be prepared in advance for non-specialist audience; this means that presenters need to identify far more information. For examples, every name should be identified with a date, place, and brief bibliographical description. In addition, every student should explicitly identify the critical bibliography principle s/he used. The class was too focused on professional development and not focused enough on intellectual questions and engagement to balance with the bibliographical training we were exposed to through the morning sessions on specific bibliographical issues and the afternoon sessions in SC.

8) *Did you learn what the course description/advertisement indicated you would learn?*

1. Yes.
2. Yes.
3. Yes.
4. Yes.
5. Yes.
6. Yes, to a certain extent. I think more time could have been spent with practical tools and techniques.

10) *How do you intend to use or apply the knowledge or skills learned in this course?*

1. The input on my own research has been invaluable. I also feel like I left this week in a much stronger position to teach bibliography.
2. This course is part of a conversation that began at the opening colloquium, continued this week, and I hope to continue for the rest of my career.
3. Both in my future research and most especially in my teaching (for undergraduate and graduate students).
4. I'm planning to do more in incorporating special collections and physical objects into my courses. I'll also continue my work using material texts in my book project.
5. Not directly, but as part of my thinking about both my research and my pedagogy.
6. I don't know yet.

11) *If your course left its classroom, was the time devoted to this purpose well spent?*

1. N/A. Our course made no extra trips.
2. Yes. The four sessions in SC were wonderful and it was great to do them at the end of the day.
3. Yes, seeing materials in SC was great. I especially appreciated our last visit's focus on techniques of teaching in special collections.
4. As always, SC was great: very informative and frankly fun.
5. Yes, all of the time in SC was invaluable.
6. N/A. Our course made no extra trips.

12) *Which of the evening events (e.g., RBS Lecture, Ornament Night, Video Night, Booksellers' night), did you attend? Were they worth attending?*

1. Monday Lecture, Tuesday Ornament Night, Thursday Booksellers' Night. Ornament Night blew me away!
2. Monday Lecture, Tuesday Ornament Night, Wednesday Lecture. Lectures were really super this week. Ornament Night was fun and instructive.
3. I attended none.
4. Monday Lecture, Wednesday Lecture. Great speakers, interesting topics broadly conceived, and much learned.
5. Monday Lecture, Wednesday Lecture, Thursday Booksellers' Night. Yes, the lectures were interesting, and I think the reception for Mellon Fellows and instructors is a great way to build cross-course community.
6. I attended none.

13) *We are always concerned about the physical well-being both of the RBS teaching collections and of materials owned by UVA's Special Collections. If relevant, what suggestions do you have for the improved classroom handling of such materials used in your course this week?*

1. {No response—RBS staff}
2. Everyone was very careful—it's wonderful to use such great materials and know that they are being well cared for.
3. {No response—RBS staff}
4. None.
5. N/A.
6. N/A.

14) *Did you (or your institution) get your money's worth? Would you recommend this course to others?*

1. Yes.
2. Yes. Thank you, thank you to RBS Mellon for making this happen!
3. Yes.
4. Yes. My expectation is that this course will gain focus with repetition—it was a great start and I'm sure will only get better.
5. Yes.
6. Yes.

15) *Any final or summary thoughts, or advice for other persons considering taking this course in a future year?*

1. {No response—RBS staff}
2. {No response—RBS staff}
3. {No response—RBS staff}
4. I heard it again and again from other RBS students and wholeheartedly believe it myself: There is no better one-week learning experience in the world. This is my second course here, and the amount of knowledge I've taken home each time is unbelievable. In a perfect world, I would take an RBS course every summer for the rest of my life.
5. {No response—RBS staff}
6. MFS should stop shying away from explaining his ideas. We want to know what he thinks critical bibliography is through actual examples. See my recommendations above.

Aggregate Statistics

Number of respondents: 6

Leave

N/A: student, retired, or had summers off: 6 (100%)

Tuition

Fellowship from RBS: 6 (100%)

Housing

Fellowship from RBS: 6 (100%)

Travel

Fellowship from RBS: 6 (100%)

Which one category most closely defines what you do for a living, or why you are at

Full-time student: Ph.D. (humanities): 3 (50%)

Postdoctoral scholar: 1 (16.67%)

College assistant professor: 1 (16.67%)

University assistant professor: 1 (16.67%)