

Michael F. Suarez, S.J.
H-90: Teaching the History of the Book
28 July–1 August, 2014

Detailed Course Evaluation

- 1) *How useful were the pre-course readings? Did you do any additional preparations in advance of the course?*
1. Useful as refreshers—I did a few of the additional readings, and found the list of them useful in itself.
 2. The pre-course readings offered a very useful overview of bibliography and book history, and I expect to return to readings for both research and teaching. With that said, the immediate connections between readings and the class weren't always clear. I was a bit annoyed to learn one reading had been assigned, essentially, to model *poor* book history work, though that intention wasn't specified in the reading list. I realize it could be problematic to signal such a poor assessment on the RBS website, but without it, I read assuming it was assigned as a positive exemplar.
 3. Many of the pre-course readings were already familiar to me. I didn't really spend a lot of time studying the ones that were new to me, though I did acquire them all and brought them to Charlottesville. Reading the books/essay in advance was not necessary to the experience of the course, although they are all good things to have read for history of the book pedagogy.
 4. I did all the reading ahead of time, and found it useful as an exercise of reading examples of what I might assign.
 5. Excellent.
 6. I found the pre-course readings extremely useful for my own purposes; however, they only minimally informed our in-class work.
 7. They were useful. I was also reading *Five Hundred Years of Printing* and various reference sources in advance of the course.
 8. Useful—I had read or taught a number of them already.
 9. The list was long, and I didn't get all the way through it, but what I did manage to read was helpful.
 10. Most of the pre-course readings were helpful, but we didn't spend much time discussing them in class.
 11. Helpful transition to classroom.
 12. Very useful!
 13. I did all the required readings and some of the others. I found most of them helpful, especially Williams and Abbot, Tanselle, McGann's "Socialization," and some essays in Hawkins.
 14. Useful in establishing theoretical grounds and historical foci. We did not engage with most of these in the course directly. Specific issues, concerns, questions to address would thus have been useful in pre-reading to make sure MFS's reasons for inclusion were clear.
 15. I read all the pre-course readings and parts from the "additional list." They were all useful as background, and in building a base of understanding to be called upon later. Some I'll keep for occasional reference, some reread.

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. Yes, immensely. I will be spending significant time with the workbook as I refine my book history courses.
3. Absolutely. The online workbook (more properly a sourcebook) is a huge archive of materials that I will use a great deal in the future.
4. The course workbook is worth its weight in gold many times over, and will be useful for well into my future career, as both teacher and scholar.
5. Yes.
6. Yes, I was incredibly pleased with the course workbook. It has a diverse range of material—all quality (by nature of the editorial decisions made by the instructor for including in the workbook)—that will have many applications. Although there is a lot of content in the workbook, frankly, I would love even more.
7. Yes, and yes!
8. YES, YES, YES! Workbook will be a teaching and syllabus-development tool for years to come.
9. Yes! Very helpful. We received an electronic workbook from the instructor, and a teaching booklet from the RBS curators. Worth the price of the course!
10. The workbook is a great resource for now. I am going to create my own version based on many of the resources available in my own library and academic community.
11. Yes.
12. They were a necessity, and will be heavily used on my return to work.
13. Yes, I expect them to be useful, especially once classmates share their syllabi and references to other articles, books, and teaching materials.
14. Yes. However, the workbook is somewhat out of date, and could be updated with more current resources.
15. The workbook looks like a resource that will be deeply helpful as I plan programs/courses.

3) *Have you taken one or more RBS courses before? If so, how did this course compare with your previous coursework?*

1. This is one of the best I've had, and certainly the most serious.
2. This class was an immense improvement over the course I took last summer.
3. No, this is my first course.
4. No, this is my first course.
5. RBS never disappoints.
6. No, this is my first course.
7. I was amazed by how different this course was from "DesBib," which I took last year. Both were invaluable, but it is nice to see such pedagogical variety.
8. No, this is my first.
9. I took one course in 2009. I think that this course was better organized than that one, and allowed for more discussion. Although I enjoyed my previous course, this one will be more useful to me in my day-to-day work.
10. I took "DesBib" last year. Both courses are very different, but they complement each other in many ways.

11. No.
12. Yes. Hard to compare since the two courses have/had completely different goals.
13. N/A.
14. N/A.
15. This is my first course.

4) *What aspects of the course content were of the greatest interest or relevance for your purposes?*

1. Direct discussions of pedagogy; class discussions; experiences in SC.
2. {No response—RBS staff}
3. Everything except specific printing technologies that are outside my period.
4. Moving through concepts and paying attention to both content and technique was extremely helpful.
5. The readings and the workbook.
6. Discussions on how to frame difficult (typically “boring” to uninitiated audiences) topics in the history of the book in such a way that one can create a doorway to engage those audiences.
7. It is hard to choose. I think everything has the potential to be relevant, even if I don’t see how it will fit into my teaching now. I am perhaps most grateful to have a network of teachers on whom I can for advice, discussion, &c.
8. Tips and tricks on how to utilize special collections resources. Trip to Lower Tibet to talk about developing our own teaching collections/resources.
9. I valued the straightforward lessons (and exercises) on how to teach books.
10. I truly enjoyed MFS’s honest approach to teaching and learning. We had difficult and long discussions during this week, and I learned so much just by taking note of how MFS and other students facilitated these conversations.
11. Discussions with others facing similar challenges in teaching this subject.
12. Approaching the history of the book from nearly every angle imaginable.
13. I am trying to insert pedagogy in book history into my courses in non-book history, and I therefore found most useful those moments in the course when I could see how to make bibliographic analysis speak to bigger social, cultural, and other questions.
14. The incredible breadth and depth of MFS’s knowledge of the subject—he is an amazing resource. If we had a “living treasure of Book History,” he would be it. The greatest relevance for my purpose is gaining a more specific knowledge of pairing texts to provoke critical discussion. Pedagogical exercises were also illuminating.
15. The several “tattoo,” or basic, principles that would underlie and frame all study/teaching about the “book.” These surfaced recursively in class discussion, and in special collections considerations.

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. 1) Yes, absolutely, and helped us acquire much more. 2) This is the most difficult thing to gauge; when MFS goes into dramatic mode, or anecdotal mode, the aim is sometimes a little low—I’ve seen this in some of his public lectures as well. But this

- changed over the course of the week and the level rose, I thought, after Wednesday morning.
2. Yes, for the most part. My primary aim for this course was to help me improve my book history classes, and I'm leaving with many concrete ideas and exercises I will begin using in only a few weeks, when the fall semester begins. I feel much more empowered to spend significant time in archives working with students on specific books, which is for me a laudable outcome.
 3. The course was more of a seminar or a "methods" course than a course where a specific body of knowledge was meant to be transmitted. The group was diverse, but everyone was well informed in different areas, and all brought their particular expertise to the table. The intellectual level of the discussion was very appropriate, unsurprisingly since it was dictated in part by the participants. MFS was attentive to the need to steer discussion back onto the point when it got too diffuse.
 4. I think the course was successful in achieving its aim of discussing these issues with a diverse audience.
 5. Yes, on both counts.
 6. Yes, I believe the instructor laid the philosophical foundation for us to teach the history of the book. However, the intellectual level—as far as requiring work on the side of the students—could have been raised.
 7. Yes, MFS was incredible. His philosophy of teaching is a great model on which I will rely for years to come. I especially appreciate his balancing the class among professors, librarians, and other professionals. I think we all learned from each other—it is so important for us to collaborate on this subject.
 8. Yes. One of the top two or three best intellectual experiences I've had post-B.A. The level was appropriate, although I think I might have benefitted from a "Part B" aimed more at those already more familiar with material culture and bibliographical methods. Would happily take a follow-up course.
 9. Yes to both.
 10. I am going back to my institution with a deeper understanding of the pedagogical challenges present in book history and bibliography. I feel as if I have a better idea now where to go and what to do to create a better teaching experience for my students.
 11. Yes.
 12. Yes, and yes.
 13. Hard to say, without more detailed knowledge of the intentions behind the course. I am certainly departing with new information, knowledge, and skills. But I wish the intellectual level had been "higher" in the sense of involving more explicit, probing discussion of texts (such as the assigned ones), as well as more systematic discussion of the course's main themes.
 14. The intellectual level covered both breadth and depth of content. At times student interest determined depth, and as a result breadth suffered. For example, our discussion of twenty-first-century digital books was truncated. How can you quash critical delight in engaged, critical discussion, though?
 15. The intellectual level of the course was constantly high, focused, and—a real achievement—I think appropriate to the varied backgrounds of the students.

6) *What did you like best about the course?*

1. Working with burnt books; SC visits, especially the 1717 Pope; visit to Lower Tibet and the exercise there; MFS's kindness and graciousness.
2. Both our time in SC and the specific exercises we worked through in class. These moments modeled not only what book history is, but how to convey complex historical ideas to students through material objects. I expect these kinds of activities will translate well to the classroom and help my students grasp the significance of archival objects in ways they never did when we were simply tourists.
3. The mini-demos of teaching with SC materials in SC. The group itself—I think this was a really exceptional group in the diversity of our scholarly backgrounds and level of knowledge we brought in. The advice on building a personal teaching collection of non-precious items. The exercise in Lower Tibet.
4. Healthy movement between kinds of learning (modeled and practiced).
5. Range of discussion; span of theoretical to practical.
6. The input from so many people with different backgrounds and perspectives was wonderful and useful. The instructor is also informative/entertaining, which simply made the course a pleasure to attend.
7. The hands-on work with books always brought me the most insight. It helped me imagine what it is like to be a student learning book history and bibliography.
8. Hands-on exercises and materials.
9. The visits to SC that gave us a chance to watch the instructor teach the books were immensely useful. Our group was collegial, thanks in large part to the encouragement of the instructor, and that led to lively and engaging discussions.
10. I learned new ways to present materials to my students.
11. Seminar format: the give and take of open discussion.
12. Seeing MFS in action, teaching by example.
13. I found it very productive to understand and think critically about MFS's opening question ("How do books make their meanings?"), for which the class was an ideal opportunity. And MFS (in my opinion) provided us with a very compelling model of pedagogy in his own way of leading discussion and presenting rare books.
14. The combination of theory, strategy, and artifact in teaching. The class dynamic was also fabulous. MFS can put students at ease while also pushing them to think further regarding significance of texts.
15. Hard to say—there was nothing I did not like. I particularly liked hearing the different venues in which people planned to teach the history of the book and how they would incorporate the takeaways from this class. Also, I liked the individual exercises. Best was the unvaryingly welcome way in which the teacher encouraged questions.

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

1. In general I think it could be harder. I would have liked to have a substantive discussion of one of the readings, almost any one of them—just one period, or even part of a period, devoted to discussion of text, early on. I do think a written requirement would be useful for the students, though this may well not be possible.

2. This is a difficult course to manage because its mandate is so wide and the students so diverse in needs and desired outcomes. We were at times an introduction to bibliography, at times a teaching workshop, and at times an engaged group of book history nerds. At times, the tangents led us too far afield, and I do wish we'd spent a bit more time moving through sets of possible classroom exercises, despite the inherent difficulty of keeping our group on such a track.
 3. Reserving a small unit of time to discuss the pre-course readings—not because I think we “should” discuss them, having bought them, but just so that we might make a more informed/developed decision when choosing one or more of them to assign to a class of our own. Also, more of a detailed walk-through of the workbook—it's a huge archive and it would be nice to explore it afterwards with more of a roadmap.
 4. I would have loved for the week's rhythm and goals (on a period by period or day by day basis) to be articulated a bit more clearly.
 5. Hard to imagine.
 6. Perhaps daily reading assignments that suggest various approaches or perspectives in the subject, and which are then used in the next day's class to inform a discussion on the best way to teach each topic. (For example, teaching history of the book from the perspective of authorship, or censorship, technology, acquisition of knowledge, &c.)
 7. I wouldn't change it.
 8. {Private comment—RBS staff}
 9. At times, the content and examples leaned heavily toward book history as it applies to literature. As someone who does not work with literary collections, I would have liked examples that I could more easily relate to.
 10. I think we could have benefitted from more hands-on teaching experiences from the students.
 11. N/A.
 12. A teensy bit of more structure would have been beneficial, since a couple of the discussion digressions were very time-consuming.
 13. I did not find the course as intensive as I had hoped. I personally would have preferred to be enlisted in the course's aims by seeing at least a rough syllabus at the start, and I wish we had talked more explicitly and systematically about the variety of different approaches to the subject. Assigning homework, discussing and comparing readings, and testing more hypothetical lessons could have helped me in this respect.
 14. {No response—RBS staff}
 15. Maybe extended another few days—maybe include more non-book “texts.”
- 8) *Did you learn what the course description/advertisement indicated you would learn?*
1. Yes; I was glad I'd seen the course evaluations.
 2. {No response—RBS staff}
 3. Yes.
 4. Absolutely, though I think that the different approaches/angles were a bit underdeveloped, or it was presumed that we all had a firm sense of our own commitment to an angle (true mostly of me, unclear on whole).
 5. Yes.

6. For my purposes, yes. Not in terms of now having mapped out an entire course on teaching the history of the book, but in terms of feeling I now have the tools to create courses according to my needs.
7. Yes.
8. Yes.
9. Yes.
10. Yes. This course will help you model your own teaching very effectively.
11. YES.
12. Yes.
13. Yes, in a general way, and much more. But the description promised a comparison of different approaches, and this did not happen explicitly and in detail.
14. Yes. A syllabus would be helpful.
15. Yes.

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

1. I'm going to be more ambitious and more thorough in what I teach at my institution (a library, not a school), and am going to look for more opportunities to teach this.
2. As specified above, I will apply the knowledge gained in this course almost immediately and develop these ideas in a course I teach yearly.
3. To teach a new course in my home department—for the first of what I hope will be many times.
4. Absolutely.
5. Will implement both certain philosophies and goals, as well as hands-on tips and tricks in new courses and old.
6. As a central concern: what I learned in this course will inform my thinking while I brainstorm and structure different ways to teach my audience.
7. I hope to develop new teaching models at my home institution in a special collections setting. We are very much stuck in the show-and-tell model. I want to make my teaching more innovative and interactive for the students. This course has given me plenty of ammunition.
8. Develop my own teaching collection of materials (add to), recruit local colleagues to help me teach, revise syllabi, revise class exercises, develop new courses for undergrads.
9. I look forward to incorporating more book history into the many show-and-tell/one-off sessions I do with my collection, as well as revising the way I have taught book connoisseurship to students at my institution.
10. I intend to continue learning and revising many of the topic we discuss this week to be able to create better courses for my students.
11. Teach/share.
12. What I've learned will definitely help me gain a better connection with my students, and I now have the resources at hand to field difficult questions.
13. I will use it to develop new syllabi, revise old ones, and plan visits to my college's rare book library, as well as add some new dimensions to my research.
14. I will apply both in designing and teaching my own course in book history.
15. Immediately—to design a series of displays in the school library over the course of this year. My ideas have changed over the course of the week as to the types. Maybe libraries, ancient to modern; plagiarism/piracy/copyright/authorship.

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

1. Absolutely.
2. {No response—RBS staff}
3. Absolutely. Trips to SC and to Lower Tibet were among the best parts of the course.
4. Yes—SC time, and especially time in an exercise involving discussing how we would use a book pulled from the collection.
5. Yes.
6. Yes.
7. The trips to SC and to Lower Tibet were excellent. It was good to move out of the classroom space for a change of scenery.
8. Yes, absolutely.
9. Our three or four (or more?) trips to SC were very useful.
10. Yes, I love the time spent in SC.
11. None.
12. Yes! The time spent in SC was invaluable.
13. Yes, especially our trip to RBS's stacks, where we proposed lessons based on books in the collection.
14. Yes!!
15. SC visits were very well spent.

11) *If you attended the evening events (e.g., RBS Lecture, Video Night, RBS Forum, Booksellers' night), were they worth attending?*

1. All worthwhile, though the Paper Museum was the best (besides Booksellers' Night).
2. {No response—RBS staff}
3. {No response—RBS staff}
4. Yes.
5. Yes—Basbanes was great, and I really enjoyed getting to the bookstores with my classmates.
6. Yes, I was very pleased by the lectures. It feels a little odd to be around all these great scholars and not be able to take advantage of their expertise because you are focusing on the one subject of your course. The lectures allowed us to step out of that a bit in a structured way that didn't distract from the course.
7. The lecture on paper was excellent. I wish I had had the energy to attend more events.
8. {No response—RBS staff}
9. Yes. I attended the Monday night lecture and enjoyed it.
10. Yes.
11. Yes.
12. Yes. Helped build a sense of community across all the RBS attendees.
13. Yes, RBS Lecture and Booksellers' Night.
14. Yes. The RBS Lectures were disappointing—I expected a more scholarly talk in the first. The second lecture was delivered by a stand-in (speaker returned home due to death in family), so there was no question-and-answer.
15. Enjoyed the lectures, the Moser film, and Booksellers' Night.

- 12) *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. I wasn't worried about anything's safety.
 2. {No response—RBS staff}
 3. {No response—RBS staff}
 4. I understand the care and caution with materials, but given the audience for this course I wish that our time in SC had felt a little less moderated. Given that half the class was peopled with heads of collections, I think we might have been trusted to handle materials a bit more.
 5. Seems fine.
 6. {No response—RBS staff}
 7. All the handling I saw was up to the best professional standards.
 8. {No response—RBS staff}
 9. {No response—RBS staff}
 10. {No response—RBS staff}
 11. {No response—RBS staff}
 12. None.
 13. {No response—RBS staff}
 14. {No response—RBS staff}
 15. I am curious about why gloves were not required when handling SC items.
- 13) *Did you (or your institution) get your money's worth? Would you recommend this course to others?*
1. You bet!
 2. Yes, unreservedly.
 3. Yes, and yes, absolutely.
 4. Yes.
 5. Yes to both.
 6. Yes. I would recommend it for those who feel they need instruction in the philosophical underpinnings of why teaching the history of the book is important, but perhaps not so much for those who want to finish the course hoping they will have created their entire future seminar and they're done.
 7. Yes, and yes.
 8. Yes. Yes. Absolutely.
 9. I sure did, and I certainly would. I would even take the class over again if that were allowed.
 10. Yes! This is a great course for those who wish to reflect on their own teaching methods.
 11. Yes.
 12. Yes, and yes.
 13. I did not pay, so of course. But if I had to make the choice again, I think a more intensive, clearly structured class about bibliography and/or book history might have met my needs better.
 14. Yes. But be prepared to be flexible in expectations of coverage.
 15. Yes, and definitely yes.

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

1. I'm just very grateful that RBS exists, and am very glad to see it prospering and growing.
2. {No response—RBS staff}
3. It's a joy and a privilege to get to hang out with MFS for a week and watch him work. He is brilliant, funny, and humane. The pleasure of this week will really carry me forward into teaching this fall with extra energy and spark.
4. I had a generally positive experience, and this is a course that I think has really helped solidify my commitment to current pedagogical practices and beliefs, while giving me lots of tools to better meet my goals in the classroom.
5. Nope.
6. {No response—RBS staff}
7. This is an incredible course for anyone teaching history of the book in any venue or fashion. It is not only for professors, but for all professionals who teach students and other audiences about books history.
8. Again, one of the two or three best intellectual/educational experiences I've had, post-B.A. Very reassuring—to someone who has few nearby colleagues in this area— that I'm moving in good directions in my teaching and research. Very generative of new ideas and methods for teaching *and* research.
9. {No response—RBS staff}
10. {No response—RBS staff}
11. {No response—RBS staff}
12. Come with clear goals of what you need/why you want to teach the history of the book. If you are unable to articulate them, they may not be addressed given the diverse needs/wants of the other attendees.
13. I would recommend, based on the very useful class discussions about money, a class on “the business of books.” Also perhaps a class linking bibliography to reading practices.
14. Attend all events; go to the evening orientation—this is referred to quite a bit by MFS.
15. Read the catalogue, be honest in your personal essay, and do not hesitate to ask questions when applying.

Aggregate Statistics

Number of respondents: 15

Leave

Institution gave me leave: 7 (46.67%)

I took vacation time or unpaid leave: 1 (6.67%)

N/A: self-employed, retired, or had summers off: 7 (46.67%)

Tuition

Institution paid tuition: 9 (60%)

Student paid tuition: 2 (13.33%)

Exchange or barter: 1 (6.67%)

Fellowship from RBS (Mellon): 3 (20%)

Housing

Institution paid housing: 9 (60%)

I paid for my own housing: 1 (6.67%)

Fellowship from RBS (Mellon): 2 (13.33%)

N/A: stayed with friends or lived at home: 3 (20%)

Travel

Institution paid travel: 6 (40%)

I paid my own travel: 3 (20%)

Institution and student shared travel cost: 1 (6.67%)

Fellowship from RBS (Mellon): 3 (20%)

Fellowship (Mellon) and student shared travel cost: 1 (6.67%)

N/A: I had only local travel expenses: 1 (6.67%)

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

Antiquarian bookseller: 1 (6.67%)

Librarian with some rare book duties: 2 (13.33%)

Rare book librarian: 5 (33.33%)

Teacher or professor: College: assistant professor: 2 (13.33%)

Teacher or professor: College: full or associate professor: 1 (6.67%)

Teacher or professor: University: assistant professor: 3 (20%)

Other: Book designer: 1 (6.67%)