

Paul Needham & Eric White
H-25: Fifteenth-Century Books in Print & Manuscript
27 July–1 August, 2025, Princeton, New Jersey

1) *Were the pre-course reading assignments useful? Are there any readings that you would like to see added or removed in future years?*

1. Very useful, a more comprehensive reading list with (optional) articles would also be helpful as some publications discussed in class were not on the list.
2. I am more familiar with 16th and 17th century literature and history, so I found the Clemens and Graham most useful in my preparation for this course. Compared to the Shailor or de Hamel, it is more detailed and has a useful glossary of terms.
3. All readings were very useful and provided a solid introduction to the themes presented in the course.
4. Readings were useful. A number of the books might serve as reference guides, but all articles were both interesting and useful.
5. Yes, the assignments were useful; more on printed books and less on MS would be helpful. EW's Gutenberg "biography" would be a good addition.
6. Yes, I thought the reading provided a foundation for the course.
7. Yes, it was very useful, but not obligatory.
8. The readings were (are) useful. I would appreciate a selective list of additional titles for further study.
9. Pre-course readings were very helpful, although in some respects redundant! All of the monographs are not necessary if one intends a more complete reading of the materials. It might be useful to annotate the reading list ahead of time, possibly with a note indicating a monograph or two that might go well with the shorter article readings.
10. They were really useful and the content was appropriate to the course topic.

2) *What are your thoughts on the course workbook and/or other teaching materials distributed during class? Was the content appropriate and useful? Will it continue to be useful for you after the course?*

1. The Workbook is essential. It would be helpful to also provide a list of books/manuscripts seen in each session.
2. The course handbook was great — something I plan to return to more carefully. I really appreciated the emphasis on looking at the books at the table rather than emphasizing the handbook. I found the demonstrations more helpful than anything, although I'm very glad to have the handbook to refer to now that the course is over.
3. The course workbook will be very useful to come back to after the course. I very much appreciate the high-quality images provided. {private response}
4. I am so grateful for the course workbook. All supplemental images (and labels!) are going to be useful for referencing what we saw/discussed this week. We saw

dozens of materials so keeping track with only notes would have been impossible. I will use it after the course to reference materials we discussed.

5. The workbook was great because it included most of the items shown; however, it would be helpful to have (a) a list of all items per the order shown in class and (b) a fuller syllabus or list of key principles/topics covered. Some topics appear in the headings of the workbook, but more would be better.
6. Yes, it's an incredibly useful resource that I would consider bringing with me to do research.
7. The workbook is wonderful; I plan on using it all the time. It is a must as the course is intensive and there is a lot of information to retain.
8. I valued the course workbook greatly. I intend to keep it at my desk at home as a constant reference. Other handouts were also helpful.
9. {no response}
10. The workbook is amazing (something that you can't find in a bookshop or online). It will be useful for me even after the course.

3) *Which aspects of the course were most intriguing and relevant for you as an individual? Did you walk away with any new insights, ideas, or project plans?*

1. It was incredible to spend full days looking at objects. Everyday brought new insights and ideas.
2. Where to begin! I wanted to take this course because I am currently doing research for a book chapter that includes some observations about incunables and manuscripts I encountered doing past archival work. This course gave me enough background to answer questions I just didn't have the skills to answer (how to find and understand bibliographic information about the books I'm working with). I don't have plans to do the kind of detective work they do, but I needed to understand where some of the information I do have came from — how did a catalogue know this was from Paris, around 1300? &c. Perhaps more importantly it has helped me think more carefully about the evidence I've gathered, the gaps that remain, and whether the claims I thought I would make are adequately supported by the evidence. The relationship between evidence and claim was an important focus of this course, and it was really useful to watch PN and EW work out in real time how you answer questions about dates, ownership, material production processes, &c.
3. The discussions on paper, especially. size and watermarks, were very intriguing to me and I hope to be able to bring this information to my own incunable descriptions.
4. Understanding the use of binding waste for provenance research was very interesting to me. I also am coming away with a much more nuanced understanding about how truly experimental the fifteenth century was.
5. I now have a much fuller understanding of the diversity of incunables and the “layers” of which they are composed. Also, it is a great course for learning about the very earliest printing out of Mainz and Bamberg.
6. Learning about the bibles and order in which they were printed and how we know that.
7. The most interesting for me was the analyzing of bible production.

8. Seeing so many significant books up close was phenomenal. The various models presented (Typographical Cycle, Intersection of Book Crafts, Pathways of Book Survival, &c) provide a helpful way of thinking about early book history.
9. {no response}
10. Yes, I walk away with a new awareness of the importance of the material aspects of a book; I got many suggestions about the study of a fifteenth-century book.

4) *Did the instructors help you to acquire all the skills and information promised in the course description? Did you learn what you had hoped to learn?*

1. Yes.
2. Yes.
3. Yes!
4. Yes.
5. Yes, though the one thing I hoped to learn more about was types, especially “roman” types. We did touch on this mainly with Jenson.
6. Yes, I feel prepared to conduct research on incurables thanks to knowledge and tools I've learned in this class.
7. I learned more than I hoped to learn on the beginning of printing, but a bit less than I expected on manuscripts.
8. I think I gained a better understanding of both paper and typography, which were among the topics I was hoping to better understand.
9. {no response}
10. I didn't learn all the things I hoped to learn just because we had only five days to cover all the topics, but I know now what I should study in depth.

5) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your time here?*

1. I plan to use my newly acquired skill and confidence in looking at manuscripts/books and analyzing them in the exploratory research phase of my dissertation.
2. I am currently on sabbatical, and this course marks the transition point between research and writing. I plan to take what I've learned and use it to write a chapter that includes sections on the history of reading and of the book between 1400 and 1600. What I've learned here will help me organize and understand some of the photographs I've been taking since graduate school, as I narrow in on two specific books in the chapter.
3. I hope to use the knowledge acquired during this course in my professional work to create more complete and nuanced incunabula descriptions at my home institution.
4. I plan to use the knowledge to further my own research.
5. I will be able to apply the skills and knowledge in my collecting and teaching.
6. I would like to work on a familiar collection with the support of a travel grant or fellowship.
7. I plan on using the workbook and the way of looking at books that we practiced on my own research of book production.

8. I hope to keep looking at and describing fifteenth-century books at my home institution.
9. {no response}
10. I plan to use them for my research project.

6) *Who might benefit the most from taking this RBS course?*

1. Everyone interested in fifteenth-century book history
2. I wish I could go back in time and take this course as a graduate student. But I think it is wonderful that the program is so welcoming to faculty from teaching universities.
3. This course does not require any particular background to be enjoyed. I strongly believe anyone with an interest in the fifteenth century or early print will benefit from this course!
4. Graduate students. I wish I had taken this earlier for a better understanding of the material history of books, how to find information and organize it systematically.
5. Anyone with an interest in the earliest Western printing and how it relates to manuscripts.
6. {no response}
7. Anyone with an interest for fifteenth-century book and print.
8. Any student of book history would benefit from the course.
9. {no response}
10. I think students, scholars and librarians who already know something about typography and manuscripts.

7) *If applicable, what were the most original, powerful, or otherwise noteworthy educational moments in the course? Were there any "aha!" moments you'd like to share?*

1. Many "aha!" moments. One of them being PN's presentation on the Catholicon and returning to his presentation in class, looking at the Catholicon together.
2. The lessons on stratigraphy were probably the most impressive to me. I was very excited about paper and how to identify paper size and folding patterns, but watching EW and PN find evidence for the chronology of the typographic cycle in an individual book was really impressive.
3. The importance of looking at watermarks of paper to investigate the date and provenance of a printed book.
4. It had been bugging me for so long that there were different-sized folio books. I hadn't even thought about paper size until this course!
5. The most powerful aspect was seeing so many foundational books, fragments, &c. The Scheide Library is so comprehensive that it seems like the best possible venue for such a course. The strength of the course is that all the technical, nuts and bolts elements can be directly observed, with expert commentary.
6. Coming back to the bibles after seeing them earlier in the course really helped me understand some of the where/why/how/who aspects of printing in 1450–1470.
7. The order of making a book — searching for what part was written or printed first — was very insightful.
8. Seeing the various fragments of early European printing was awe-inspiring, EW's final presentation on book survival was phenomenal.

9. {no response}
10. The most hilarious moments were the over with Mandy (the dog). We took some photos of her with the Bible. I can remember also some funny anecdotes told by PN and EW about the history of a book or ownership.

8) *Are there any other ways in which the course could have been improved?*

1. I think it would have been helpful to have 10 minutes per session, before or after looking at the objects, to go introduce or summarize or discuss the key points of that session.
2. No, I think this was a well-designed and well-executed course.
3. Perhaps a daily list of items presented in class that can be annotated as we go along could be helpful? }
4. n/a
5. I appreciate it when the instructors help ensure that everyone gets a chance to see.
6. Some additional context on printers ahead of the class and a list of items seen on each session would help.
7. I would have liked to learn more about the making of manuscripts to then compare it to print.
8. No.
9. {no response}
10. No, I don't think so. It was perfect.

9) *Do you feel that you got your money's worth? How likely are you to recommend this course to others? On a 1-10 scale, 1 would indicate that you disagree that you got your money's worth, 5 would indicate a neutral response, and 10 would indicate that you agree that you got your money's worth.*

1. 10
2. 10
3. 10 — I would very much recommend this course to others.
4. 10 — I have already recommended this course to others.
5. 10
6. 10
7. 10 — Would highly recommend!
8. Yes! 10 As a wonderful bonus, I was able during lunch to view an incunabula I had always wanted to look at!
9. 10 — Without question. My colleagues, friends, family, cat, &c. will be hearing about this course at length.
10. 10

10) *If your course made any (virtual) field trips outside of the classroom or had guest speakers, do you feel that they enhanced the course experience?*

1. {no response}
2. {no response}

3. Though unplanned, we visited the Scheide Library on the last day of the course. I found it very interesting to contextualize the collection and how it came to be. Seeing the Bach autograph manuscript was so fun! I'm very grateful for the opportunity to visit it.
4. Yes! It was great to see the Scheide Library!
5. {no response}
6. {no response}
7. {no response}
8. We visited the Scheide Library, which was a tremendous bonus!
9. {no response}
10. {no response}

11) *Do you have any additional thoughts or advice for anyone considering taking this course in a future year?*

1. {no response}
2. I was worried coming in that I wasn't knowledgeable enough about languages or paleography and that I would be lost or embarrassed over the course of the week. This was not the case. The course was welcoming and I felt comfortable asking questions. I learned a lot from the other students, too —I was really impressed with the amount of knowledge that others brought to the course.
3. Taking this course is definitely worthwhile. Any student in any discipline will come away with something!
4. I feel that the readings, although optional, really helped me prepare for the course.
5. {no response}
6. More familiarity with people and places in the fifteenth century will help you contextualize the massive amount of information in this course,
7. You should take a course at RBS, it is of very good quality, and full of insights on book culture.
8. Do the pre-course readings, but do not stress about not understanding everything. The course will make the readings more comprehensible.
9. Do be aware that this experience is further drinking from the intellectual firehose.
10. No.

12) *If you had to sum up your RBS experience with a single sentence, phrase, or haiku, what would you say?*

1. {no response}
2. It's never too late to learn what this course aims to teach.
3. Great class! Thanks so much to the amazing instructors for sharing their knowledge with us!
4. This was by far the most enriching experience of my year.
5. Mind-blowing. It is truly a privilege to be able to take this course, have access to these materials, and learn from these instructors. Thank you!
6. Johannes Canis
7. Incredible amount of knowledge surrounded with an incredible amount of amazing books and artifacts.

8. A tiny fragment can be just as exciting as a complete tome. Many thanks to our instructors, EW and PN, for imparting an immense amount of knowledge this week, and to Mireille, who kept things moving smoothly!
9. A thousand treasures/Each a view to an instant/Tracing eyes over/Waves of light/and particles/Of ink. Centuries aloud.
10. The book and manuscript history is a world where you never stop making discoveries.