

Joel Silver
L-25v: Reference Sources for Researching Rare Books
22–26 May, Online Only

Narrative Course Evaluations

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. {no response}
2. Yes, there could have been more. It was not a long list.
3. These were fine.
4. H.P. Kraus' video was fascinating. I'm experienced in the field, so I only glanced at the others.
5. {no response}
6. Pre-course readings, and one film, were interesting and helpful, were provided in PDF form and were not at all burdensome. They were carefully chosen by JS to have everyone (experienced researchers and newbies) start with some introduction to descriptive bibliography and to the categories of core reference materials. I ended up buying the Tanselle book to add to my library.
7. Pre-course reading assignments are useful for historical context.
8. Yes, they were.
9. The pre-course assignments were very useful. I wonder if adding excerpts of some of the reference sources discussed in the course as pre-course reading would also be helpful for students taking the course in a more introductory capacity.
10. The readings were all very reasonable and useful! I enjoyed getting a broad overview before class started.
11. Yes.
12. The pre-course readings were extremely helpful.
13. The course reading was helpful; JS frequently referred to it in class.
14. Very helpful and helped set the tone for the course—covered a lot of background information. I am unfamiliar with book trade and ended up reading the whole book out of which only a few chapters were recommended.
15. The pre-course readings were very helpful. I enjoyed them!
16. Very useful.
17. The pre-course reading was very doable and my "absolute novice" status didn't hold me back at all, particularly because I did the reading.
18. {no response}
19. {no response}

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. {no response}
2. It was fine.
3. The content of the workbooks was helpful. The content of the workbooks was appropriate. Yes, the material will come in handy after the course.
4. Yes, it was essential to have the editable Word document for taking notes on the resources as they came up, and I will continue to refer to it often. Having the PDFs of pages from selected resources was extremely helpful, and I'll continue to refer to them as a way to get a sense of what's in which resource. I especially liked being able to see a sample page on my screen while JS held up the book itself (so that we could get a sense of its size, of the density of the contents on random openings, and even what to look for on the shelf). It would have been even better to have had a sample page from everything we looked at (e.g., the books too big for a copier could be a phone photo of the page) and a more recent screen-shot of each current online resource (it looked like some were print-outs of the pages rather than screen shots?). Ideally, future iterations of the PDF for the online course (where there isn't a printed coursebook) could be made from new high-contrast images of black-and-white pages, or continuous tone monochrome or color images where appropriate. Many of the current pages are from photocopies, including some that appear to have been faxed at some point. Perhaps RBS staff could help JS put this together, since RBS owns so many of the books that are used?
5. The list of citations that JS shared is very useful, and I certainly expect to keep consulting it!
6. The 45 page master list of reference sources was our working tool. I printed it out and wrote class notes and annotations directly on to each section; I will put it in a binder and keep it on my shelf for easy access. The reference source list (the master list and two workbooks with sample entries from the majority of the sources), category-by-category, was carefully curated by JS to present the most useful and best sources; his anecdotes and annotations were priceless, and kept the week-long Zoom moving with great energy.
7. The workbooks are essential to getting the most out of the course. Many examples of different references, so the strengths and weaknesses of each could be seen while JS discussed them.
8. They were very useful. I learned a lot during the class. My M.L.I.S program did not have a course like this one so I now have a resource that I can use and reference.
9. The course workbook was extremely helpful and created a very easy format to follow for note taking. The content was incredibly informative and will continue to be useful in my further education.

10. I found it useful to have printouts of full pages of a lot of the sources he walked us through. It was helpful to get an idea of what reference materials look like and how they differ.
11. The first workbook page reference numbers did not seem to correspond with the instructor's own notes, so that it was often a little confusing until the specific entries were discussed; this made me concerned that I was on the wrong page and my frantic scrolling distracted me from what was being said. I also hope that some of the excellent sources cited by participants might be incorporated into future workbooks. They were extremely helpful!
12. The amount of course material that we got through was incredible. The content was appropriate and useful and it will be helpful in disseminating this knowledge to faculty and students.
13. The course workbook was great! A fillable PDF format might be nice for students to download, too. I will definitely use this material throughout my career.
14. Very useful.
15. The course workbook and teaching materials are invaluable. I feel so grateful to have eternal access to these materials. They alter my ability to fulfill reference requests in the future.
16. Yes, and yes.
17. EXCELLENT. JS clearly put a lot of effort and thought into the materials.
18. {no response}
19. {no response}

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. {no response}
2. It was an entirely different way to look at what I'm doing. I never considered collectors and their collections to any degree as they relate historical library collections. Mostly because I work in areas where they are not as common.
3. {no response}
4. Too many to list! We'll be dedicating a section of our library's "staff reference" section to books that can be short-cuts for giving tours at short notice (both in terms of fact fodder on Greatest Hits, and on rare books related to particular topics for when we have a heads-up about a prospective donor's personal interests or background). Personally, I was most interested in resources that are helpful to librarians for cataloging and for answering reference questions, but I also enjoyed learning about resources more useful to dealers and collectors. One of the things that surprised me was re-discovering books I already knew about, but had forgotten or mis-remembered (this is especially true of books where the titles make them sound more rudimentary than they are, or where there are useful indexes, appendices, and other content outside the

bibliographic descriptions themselves, e.g. knowing about the annual overviews for the years 1700–1715 in Morgan was a game-changer). I also enjoyed JS's anecdotes throughout the course. Even in cases where they didn't directly relate to the content of the resources, they made things memorable and entertaining.

5. As a library cataloger, I am reinvigorated to investigate contributing our holdings to shared catalogs, such as ESTC and ISTC. I plan to expand my repertoire of sources of citations that I regularly record in catalog records, and I would like to undertake a project to add citations in WorldCat for bibliographies compiled by librarians at my institution.
6. I was intrigued to find out that with the right bibliographical research sources, you can answer just about any question about just about any book, and have fun doing it. And you don't have to be intimidated by the process—it's about knowing where to start looking. New insight: that like any skill, the more you do it, the more you familiarize yourself with the sources and understand how to read the entries, the better you'll get. Project plans: to take the master list and jump into research on my private collecting interests.
7. Even after being an antiquarian bookseller for years, I learned a great deal about references and different strategies for searching out new, relevant sources of bibliographic material. I bought several new references that should be directly relevant to my work after hearing about them in class. I came away with a newfound respect for reference librarians as well.
8. I learned a lot about rare books, auctions, bibliographies and how I might answer reference questions.
9. I greatly enjoyed the discussion of more genre and subject specific reference sources as a basis for continued learning and exploration. JS's engagement with student discussion, both through questions regarding sources he mentioned and students' suggestions regarding sources they use in their own work, was very enlightening and one of my favorite aspects of the course.
10. As someone who oversees a rare book collection, this course was very useful! I'm walking away with a wealth of knowledge to carry back to my work (and a long list of books I'd like to get for researching our collections).
11. I appreciated how certain references could be used in searches not directly related to the main subject matter (i.e., I might use a travel reference to find a work of early Americana) and was intrigued to rediscover essays or indexes within titles I've known for years but never read or didn't appreciate how helpful they might be. I also loved how JS's vast knowledge of the works' creators, which he shared, made me appreciate the connections throughout the history of bibliography, such as librarians at major institutions or important collectors who authored or contributed to a work. Many names and puzzle pieces were connected for me!
12. The most relevant section was at the end of the course: "The Book Arts." It gave me greater insight into the specialists in this area. It will also help inform the creation of a

LibGuide for students taking “History of the Book.” This course has also helped me realize I need greater experience and knowledge in bibliography (collation) and provenance before I attempt to catalog the rare books in our collection that are attached to brief MARC records. I will also be looking at acquiring some of the reference materials for our collection.

13. I really enjoyed the sample questions JS distributed at the end of several classes so we could practice with what we'd learned over the day. I walked away with a lot of new resources to consult and learned a lot about rare book history as well.
14. I took about two legal pads worth of notes just listening to JS talk. His manner of instructing is very knowledgeable and enjoyable. His lectures were the best part because he would sprinkle in fun facts or personal anecdotes that provided valuable insight to the material we were reviewing.
15. Everything about this course was relevant and applicable to my work as curator of rare books. I have new ideas for enhancing reference services and developing research guides for undergraduate students.
16. Practical focus. I have plenty of ideas and insights after the course, and I appreciate it immensely.
17. I walked away having bought about 30 multiple volume reference materials ... poorer but happier. I really do feel like being a collector and/or book dealer without taking this course would be very difficult. JS made so many things I see in catalogs and seller descriptions much more clear, quickly and in an interesting way.
18. {no response}
19. {no response}

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. {no response}
2. Yes, and more.
3. I learned things I didn't know, but that said, this class was difficult to engage with. Straight talking from the instructor for five days while scrolling through PDFs is a lot for anyone. I don't think this is an issue with the online format. A class of this same format in person would be just as difficult to remain engaged with.
4. Yes! There wasn't a wasted moment.
5. {no response}
6. Yes, and more so. My familiarization with the sources grew during the week as we often circled back to sources already covered; I grew more comfortable reading the sample sheets from the various sources, as JS walked us through the samples and highlighted the components; It was fun when many of the seasoned people in the class chimed in with thoughts, recommendations, and experiences in dialogue with JS. I hoped to learn where to start researching in my collecting interest, and I did!!

7. Yes. Very much.
8. Yes to both questions. JS is extremely knowledgeable.
9. Yes, most definitely! I learned everything I wanted to and so much more.
10. Yes—and then some.
11. I think so. I'm still a little uncertain if there are more current titles or online resources that might be important supplements to the canon, but I appreciate that these are the foundational works that everyone should know and still consult, which was the focus of the course.
12. This course covered more and I learned more than what I gleaned from the course description.
13. Yes! The professor was fantastic and not only taught the course materials but also provided a lot of historical context for the reference sources and the rare books field in general. I learned even more than I had hoped to learn!
14. Yes.
15. JS is an amazing instructor. He does not bypass any details, and he answers everyone's questions with patience and interest. I learned everything I hoped to learn. I just wish this was a two-week course!
16. 100%
17. Yes.
18. {no response}
19. {no response}

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

1. {no response}
2. As I expected, to enrich what I know and find information I didn't know existed.
3. {no response}
4. In addition to everything that will make doing my job easier and make what I do better, there are all sorts of resources that I want to look at just for fun. I'd forgotten how much I enjoy dipping into reference books for relaxation. Online resources are great when you want to find particular pieces of information: you can quickly get straight to what you need. What you lose is all the interesting (and often amusing) pieces of information you stumble across while flipping through pages of a book to find the entry you need.
5. {no response}
6. Researching my collecting interest; adding historical/bibliographical information to book-repair client treatment reports.
7. I plan to spend some quality time not only looking at new references, but understanding the ones I already own so I can better use them in my work.
8. I will use them once I find a library job. I now have another skill set.
9. I plan to use the knowledge gained and the reference sources I was introduced to

during this course as a jumping off point for the rest of my education in the world of rare books and book history research. Every text we discussed was fascinating in its own way, and together they will form a very strong foundation for my future studies and exploration.

10. I hope to better understand the rare book collection I manage and also have the proper tools to assess potential accessions to that collection.
11. I will definitely revisit old, familiar titles and now have an arsenal of new sources I didn't know about that will help me research, catalog, and describe material to our clients. The skills will also help me converse better with colleagues in the book field.
12. I will be using this knowledge to create a LibGuide as well as look for opportunities to collaborate with faculty and students.
13. I plan to use this knowledge to provide better public service to the patrons who consult my library.
14. Yes.
15. I plan to update my "Researching Rare Books" guide for undergraduate students with the new knowledge that I acquired. I also plan to do a review of the reference library at my institution and make recommendations for acquisitions.
16. I will apply all I've learned in performing my regular tasks and in improving our standard procedures for cataloging and acquisitions.
17. I think it did scare me off from selling books a bit but made me a more educated collector.
18. {no response}
19. {no response}

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

1. {no response}
2. Mid-career collectors and librarians, you need time to absorb this, but also time to realize you need this.
3. Rare book librarians.
4. Catalogers, reference librarians, bookdealers, scholars, curators, obsessive-compulsives, dilettantes
5. {no response}
6. Anyone who wants a comprehensive introduction to rare book research reference sources; and anyone who is already skilled in the field but wants to grow from hearing JS's fascinating annotations and anecdotes from a lifetime of doing the work.
7. Anyone who has a need to utilize bibliographical references will benefit from the course. Even if (as in my case) you are a specialist, the thought process that JS conveys about how to approach using references will improve the speed and accuracy of the work you do.
8. M.L.I.S students.

9. I think this course is well suited to those needing an introduction to the world of rare books as they figure out where to start searching in an ocean of information, as well as to those who may be pivoting to a new area of study within the field and who are in need of a new batch of sources with which to begin.
10. Library professionals who work in special collections, rare book sellers, and collectors.
11. Definitely those beginning in special collections or bookselling. I took it as a refresher/fill-in-the-gaps course and got a lot out of it, but I wish I had taken it when I was starting out as a book specialist, rather than discover these sources in a more ad hoc manner.
12. I would say reference/subject librarians working with special collections and metadata librarians who are cataloging rare materials.
13. Anyone! I think both early-career librarians and long-term librarians/booksellers would benefit from this course. It's extremely comprehensive!
14. Early career librarians and archivists. Reference work with bibliographies is no longer taught in library school—even classes on online databases are not as prevalent as they could be. This was a valuable class that filled in some gaps for my education and will really be helpful to me in my reference work.
15. Anyone who needs to research or answer reference questions about rare books.
16. Me, my institution, patrons, students, researchers.
17. Anyone who is interested in really understanding book descriptions of rare and antiquarian books.
18. {no response}
19. {no response}

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

1. {no response}
2. The moment I realized: that collectors fill a vital role by gathering and saving materials that libraries have not covered, or couldn't cover due to cost, history or age. Sadly I always thought private collecting was sort of a competitive/vanity activity and the collection after death was just a great byproduct for historical and academic collections. I completely missed the depth of scholarship of collectors, and don't feel so bad now when rare collections disappear into private hands—hands that may appreciate them better than anyone else on earth, and may contribute to their understanding and survival better than anyone else and end up back in public hands with value added.
3. Discussions, questions, and helpful links from classmates were useful.
4. This was a hugely important reminder not to judge a book by its title. For example, I've seen "Contemporaries of Erasmus" on the shelf, and ignored it because I thought it meant "Other famous people from Erasmus's time"—now I know it means "Pretty much anyone Erasmus interacted with or mentioned in the many, many volumes of his

letters", so very useful for figuring out not-famous people, including probably quite a few former owners of books who wrote their name inside but never published anything or had a book written about them.

5. It may seem mundane, but the fact that bibliographies are not a monolith. They really do represent the beliefs of their creators, from the information that is included and the way that it is presented, and the intended audience. Bibliophiles and researchers have very different needs or desires for the information that is presented. I think this strengthens ideas about the value of books as objects, which is sometimes difficult to convey to colleagues in other areas who think only about the content of resources.
6. Powerful—you don't have to be a library professional to do this work, you just need to understand the tools and be curious! Powerful advances in bibliography have come from the work of collectors and dealers!!!
7. The best lesson for me was to look at references whose titles appear irrelevant to see if that is really the case.
8. {no response}
9. I think a simple "aha!" moment I had was just realizing that research and somewhat overwhelming amounts of information and resources didn't have to be scary, but could actually be fun. The lightbulb realization that hunting down information didn't have to be tedious or intimidating, but could actually be a fun book-themed scavenger hunt was enlightening, especially when I was able to witness some of my classmates' own enthusiasm when it came to realizations regarding their own work and pursuits.
10. {no response}
11. I mostly covered them in my comments above, but I'll reiterate that I came to appreciate just how these bibliographies came to be compiled and published. They contain a level of scholarship and discipline that rarely exists anymore. It was fun to hear about their personality quirks and JS's anecdotes were highly amusing (not that any surprised me, having worked in the book world for so long!!).
12. There were several moments. JS shared so much of his expertise and his insight into different bibliographers and book collectors and made connections between various key people in the field. I have pages and pages of notes. This material was new to me so everything was eye opening. I did find it helpful to have sample reference questions where we had to think about which resources we would consult to find the answers.
13. {no response}
14. Not quite an "aha!" moment but it was fascinating to learn the historical context behind names and phrases I hear fairly often. W.W. Greg, P.M.M., Tanselle, &c. were all names I interact with often at work but did not know the significance of. I'm excited to take this knowledge back into my work.
15. Learning the difference between bibliographies, catalogs, and checklists was a true "aha!" moment for me. It seems basic, but this can make all the difference when one is utilizing a reference source.
16. Some practical tips and tricks on how to search for and select a proper reference source

in an efficient way. Sort of a “Sherlock Holmes” thinking method.

17. The two big moments were realizing that reference books in themselves are interesting and some are worth reading in their own right. There's a lot to know and the well is deeper than I thought.
18. {no response}
19. {no response}

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

1. {no response}
2. The instructor could write a book, he's at least half way there in workbook info!
3. {private response}
4. Can't think of anything.
5. {no response}
6. Would have loved to have a non-virtual cup of tea with JS and classmates! Such interesting people!
7. Put the knowledge in JS's head in an AI we can talk to every day. <grin>
8. I liked the lecture format. I could just focus on the information being presented.
9. {no response}
10. I think a PowerPoint presentation would be helpful—not to replace the workbook but to lay out some of the main takeaways and history he covers.
11. I agree with those who suggested in the past that screen sharing would be helpful in some instances, if at the very least to break the monotony of the lecture format and the two-screen zig-zagging, especially for sources that are discussed in passing.
12. I would have liked a section on Canadiana.
13. {no response}
14. Only if we got a stipend to buy some of the books! More seriously, no, it was amazing.
15. I would just begin the course a bit earlier on Friday (maybe 9:00 a.m.).
16. {no response}
17. Nothing—JS is fantastic!!!!!! What an asset to the RBS.

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. {no response}
2. 10
3. 3
4. 10

5. 8
6. 10
7. 10
8. 10
9. 10
10. 10
11. 8
12. 10
13. 10
14. 10
15. 10
16. 10
17. 10
18. {no response}
19. {no response}

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

1. {no response}
2. N/A
3. N/A
4. N/A
5. {no response}
6. N/A
7. N/A
8. {no response}
9. N/A
10. {no response}
11. N/A
12. {no response}
13. {no response}
14. {no response}
15. N/A
16. Probably not.
17. {no response}
18. {no response}
19. {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. Don't plan to do anything else during lunch except eat lunch.
3. The course materials are enough.
4. Take notes in the Word document! You'll get mixed up about which resource is which pretty quickly if you don't. Similarly, it might seem like you could pick this stuff up on your own, just by reading, but you can't; even if JS published it all as a book, you'd never come close to having the experience of being guided through the resources in person.
5. {no response}
6. Take it!!
7. Be sure to clear your mental space for the week as much as possible. The course covers so much information that it is easy to miss something here or there if you aren't focused. Having said that, JS does a great job of regularly asking if anyone has questions or suggestions for additional references.
8. {no response}
9. Be prepared to take a lot of notes! I sometimes found it helpful to write things down very quickly as we moved through the course and then to read back through things during breaks and organize my thoughts a little bit more while the discussion was still fresh in my mind.
10. {no response}
11. Being familiar with basic book and bibliographical terminology will serve you well. I was, but kept thinking that some things might have to be defined for newbies.
12. I would recommend printing out the workbooks. If people have access to two monitors this was also helpful.
13. Take. This. Course. You will not regret it—JS is incredibly knowledgeable and you will learn so much.
14. {no response}
15. The course format may not be for everyone; it requires a high level of concentration and an ability to sit behind a computer and listen to very long lectures.
16. No.
17. {no response}
18. {no response}
19. {no response}

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

1. {no response}
2. Changed my mind. Changed my thinking. Changed my point of view on collecting, bibliography, and bookselling.

3. Difficult to remain engaged.
4. I'd apologize for being unable to sum it up verbally. I'd just open my eyes wide, wave my hands around, and nod enthusiastically.
5. {no response}
6. RBS is as much about the people as about the scholarship.
7. RBS is the most effective way to learn about all things books while simultaneously charging your enthusiasm batteries and meeting like-minded people.
8. Great learning experience!
9. This was an excellent experience, and thank you to JS for sharing his wisdom and experience with us!
10. {no response}
11. References are grand, / Use them wisely and often, / Collating still stinks.
12. Ignited a bibliographic fire I never knew I possessed.
13. What a wonderful, informative experience!
14. Books about books and / Books about books about books. / Joel, a walking bib.
15. The L-25v course unlocked the universe of rare book reference sources and their power, and I believe this course will revolutionize the way I identify, research, and interpret rare books.
16. JS's knowledge base is awesome, his way of delivering it is wonderful and entertaining, and I'm glad I took this class with him at the exact point in my career when I truly needed it and can make the most use of it. Thank you, JS and RBS.
17. {no response}
18. {no response}
19. {no response}