

Marianna Shreve Simpson & Kelly Tuttle
M-85: Introduction to Islamic Manuscripts
24 – 29 July in Philadelphia, PA

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. Yes, extremely useful though very long. Start early!
2. Yes, apart from the Rosenthal chapter. One of the uploaded readings was lacking its illustrations.
3. I did find the readings helpful to set the scene and provide me a basic foundation and context through which to approach the course. Some were a bit repetitive but there were not too many and ultimately the repetition helped me learn.
4. Very useful. I'm sure I'll be returning to them in future.
5. Yes
6. {no response}
7. {no response}
8. Yes they were extremely helpful for grounding our use of materials. Potentially add more on future directions of the field or debates/disagreements of the field or about acquisitions/provenance.
9. The reading assignments were incredibly useful to give a background for the material we looked at.
10. The readings were very helpful and I will continue to reference them.

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 was thorough and I appreciated the generous space left for us to add our own notes.
2. Course workbook will remain a useful reference source. Including more alphabets or a table of numerals would be useful (for those without Arabic).
3. I love when RBS classes have workbooks! I will definitely continue to use this one as a reference tool. A useful addition would be a checklist of the materials we saw, organized by day. It is so helpful to be able to take notes next to the item information.
4. Workbook [was] extremely helpful. Some of the pages were charts I had copied for myself before the course—so it was nice to have them assembled in a handy form.
5. Everything in the workbook was useful—from the diagrams to the bibliography—there were some parts that did not print correctly so I am grateful for the digital copy which I can continue to use!

6. {no response}
7. {no response}
8. Extremely useful, I will continue to consult it.
9. The course workbook is gold! I wish I had this type of material when out on dissertation research. Needless to say, the workbook will be a guide for all my upcoming research, as well as a central tool as I develop a course on the Art of the Book.
10. Very useful and I will continue to use it.

3) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your RBS course? Did you walk away with any “aha!” moments, new ideas, or project plans?*

1. I'll apply my new knowledge to re-examine our holdings, make sure they are described accurately and thoroughly, and share what I have learned with our students.
2. I hope to incorporate this new knowledge into as many library sessions as possible—and can now teach with Islamic manuscripts in a meaningful way instead of speaking only in broad/general terms as a point of comparison with European manuscripts.
3. I knew basically nothing so everything was an “aha!” moment. I will use what I learned to improve description, provide more meaningful instruction, better integrate materials into the classroom and exhibits and programming, and to make more informed collection development decisions.
4. The skills and knowledge will be immediately useful in my daily work.
5. This course really helped me develop a far more holistic sense of the Islamic book as an object - I hope to be able to transfer some of the things I learned to what I teach, even without access to physical manuscripts.
6. {no response}
7. {no response}
8. Yes, it has taught me how to evaluate, approach, formally analyze, and even catalog these works. I will use it to acquire, teach, and catalog. I love the mix of material and intellectual history.
9. This has been one of the most productive learning experiences I have ever had! The skill set coming out of this course is something I can use and build on for the rest of my academic career. I now have several ideas, not only to use things learnt in the course, but also to create a course on the art of the book in the Muslim world. The course has given me vital guidelines and a clear path on how to look at a particular manuscript that is part of my ongoing research.
10. Yes! Currently I'm working on a manuscript project and am having issues understanding how to question and describe the text I work on. What I learned in this class will greatly help me with that project and has led me to go back and re-edit a paper under review in which I describe a codex.

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. Absolutely, and so much more. The structure of the week helped us build skills progressively.

The schedule was packed but I never felt completely overwhelmed.

2. Yes!
3. Yes! I learned so much and have confidence to go back and look at the relevant items in the collection for which I am responsible. I never imagined I would be able to do something like identify a script for a language I don't know at all!
4. Yes they did. They were a great team. I was surprised and pleased by how much I learned.
5. Yes, very much so. I only wish there was more time.
6. {no response}
7. {no response}
8. Yes, they truly went above and beyond! The mix of skills the instructors brought to the table was also wonderful. The combination of approaches was amazing.
9. Thanks to the instructors I learned more than I could have hoped for. There are skills that, as a student of art history, I was never taught!
10. Yes, very much so. I will need to continue to review names of different parts of the book, but that is where the extra material is helpful. I didn't realize I would be able to get so much from this course.

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

1. {private response}
2. I would have liked more brief presentations with slides to introduce us to new concepts (before looking at manuscripts—sometimes it was difficult for all of us to see the books/leaves at once).
3. None that I can really think of. It is great to have the balance and mix of the expertise that KT and SS together bring to the table.
4. {no response}
5. I would have enjoyed some scheduled discussion of the market for Islamic manuscripts, but we talked about it in unscheduled moments—And there was so much to discuss!
6. {no response}
7. {no response}
8. More diversity of texts/languages. There is a heavy Persian emphasis.
9. {no response}
10. Maybe ending at 5 and not 5:30. It's a very long day.

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

1. Anyone who will encounter Islamicate manuscripts in the course of the work or study.
2. Anyone who wants to be able to interpret/understand the materiality of Islamicate manuscripts.
3. Any librarian, scholar, student, collector, or other person with any interest in the subject. You really do not need prior knowledge, though it helps and you will learn more than you will believe.
4. Anyone responsible for assisting researchers to access Islamic manuscripts and anyone

responsible for preserving or treating Islamic manuscripts.

5. Grad students, faculty who don't have much access to primary materials, or who have unknown materials in their collections.
6. {no response}
7. {no response}
8. Subject specialists, art historians, students of Islamic history, and all types of librarians.
9. I think we had a perfect balance of people representing different career paths: rare books librarians; curators; textualists; art historians; conservators
10. Anyone interested in book culture and manuscript production.

7) *Do you feel that you got your money's worth? Would you recommend the course to others?*

1. YES. YES.
2. {no response}
3. RBS is expensive and I wish it was [not] so that more people could attend. I am so privileged that my institution pays. I certainly feel they are getting their money's worth for all that I will bring back.
4. Yes, the course was good value. I would recommend it highly to others.
5. Absolutely.
6. {no response}
7. {no response}
8. The course was expensive but paid for by the WRBG. I additionally needed to pay my university another 200% of the RBS price for it to count as a credited course. I will not personally pay out of pocket, but would recommend the course to anyone with funding.
9. I would recommend this course to anyone connected to manuscript studies, especially scholars and professionals that focus on European and Western manuscripts.
10. I had a fellowship and would not have been able to come without it but I am thrilled I took this course and will recommend it to others.

8) *If your course made any trips outside of the classroom, do you feel that they were time well spent?*

1. Both the Kislak Center and the Penn Museum were great. We are lucky to have such diverse collections in one city.
2. Yes—but operating the whole day at the Kislak Center might have been more useful overall than visiting the Penn Museum in the afternoon.
3. Yes. Going to Penn and seeing other collections really broadened the experience and I think was important to the course as a whole.
4. Yes, the outside trips were opportunities for more comprehensive exposure to Islamic manuscripts in Philadelphia collections.
5. Yes—every place we visited outside the Free Library gave us access to things we did not see in our regular classroom.
6. {no response}
7. {no response}

8. Yes to other collections at Penn. The comparison/contrast was extremely useful.
9. It was time very very well spent! Having the opportunity to look at some elite manuscripts at the Penn Museum was extremely important.
10. Yes. I enjoyed visiting the Penn Library but was a bit less enthused about the Penn Museum.

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

1. Do the pre-reading if you possibly can. Your experience will be better if you know what you are looking for.
2. Familiarity of Arabic script and ludo-Arabic numerals will be helpful!
3. Do it! We all benefit so much from learning about the book and its history, beyond the western dominant narrative.
4. {no response}
5. Do it
6. {no response}
7. {no response}
8. Have a sense of the general contours of the history of the book in the region and some sense of the different language/symbols involved.
9. {no response}
10. Bring a sweater.

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

1. Exceptionally good, even by RBS's high standards!
2. {no response}
3. Islamic Manuscripts, much more than an introduction.
4. Very worthwhile.
5. Digital copies, images, and facsimiles are incredibly useful tools for my teaching, but spending extensive time with the books themselves has given me far more insight into what we are looking at and new vocabulary and practical knowledge with which to discuss them.
6. {no response}
7. {no response}
8. What a lovely week / These Islamic manuscripts / Are so rich and great
9. One of the most rewarding learning experiences.