

Dear UVA Students,

I know many of you are busy with spring semester courses and that completing a research project may not be high on your priority list—I've been there. But I'd love to tell you about an opportunity that could be an incredibly transformative experience for you (and one that comes with some great financial perks): Rare Book School's RBS-UVA Fellowship Program.

My name is Emma Whittington (CLAS '12), and I was a 2011–2012 RBS-UVA Fellow. My project, “Borges and *Ficciones*: The Transmutation of a Text,” allowed me to research the Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges's early printed texts, attend an RBS course, and travel to Buenos Aires. I went on to receive the 2011–2012 Fellowship Project award: a \$500 cash prize (on top of a stipend and RBS course tuition).

Because the Fellowship is so new and because I only heard about it through word of mouth, I really want to return the favor and explain why it is such a unique and wonderful opportunity for undergraduates of all disciplines.

As a third year Comparative Literature major, I figured that I would want to participate in the CPLT Distinguished Majors Program during my final year—admittedly just to see if I could do it—but I was feeling stuck on ideas for a topic. I studied Spanish literature, and as such was already familiar with Borges's short stories, so I thought I might write something about his massive literary influence. Still, the direction of my project was going nowhere. Then I heard that Rare Book School was offering a fellowship for undergraduates to “submit a proposal to attend an RBS course that will substantially inform a year-long project (*viz.*, a Distinguished Major's thesis).” The fellowship seemed like a great way to find guidance and support for my project, as well as to provide substantial resources for my research. Plus, I had already been interested in Rare Book School course offerings—but their price tag meant that there was no way I'd be able to attend without outside help.

I submitted an application for the fellowship program as well as for Michael Winship's course, “The American Book in the Industrial Era, 1820–1940,” and proposed to examine Borges's massive influence on writers and genres from all over the world. True, Borges was not an American author, but I thought that the course would give me a better understanding of the era during which Borges began publishing. The course gave me that understanding, but it also did much more. It tapped into the amazing energy of Rare Book School, exposed me to resources and guides for finding additional information, and made me realize just how many aspects of print history there are to study. In fact, after taking my RBS class, the focus of my project shifted entirely. I went from thinking about Borges as a literary figure (a project I could have conducted anywhere in the world), to examining the

unique holdings of UVA's Borges collection in person. This meant I got to participate in research that couldn't happen anywhere else but Charlottesville and that I got to do it with the founding curator of UVA's Borges collection: C. Jared Loewenstein.

I even found a way to make it to Argentina by applying for a CLAS Small Research and Travel Grant. In Argentina, I spent a week interviewing antiquarian booksellers and also Borges's widow, and I learned about Borges's writing process in order to determine how changes in different editions of his books would have ended up occurring.

What started out as a run-of-the-mill research project evolved into my biggest accomplishment of fourth year: a project that can be submitted for publication. I have RBS to thank for that, and I could not endorse their fellowship program more. It exposed me to a kind of scholarship which I didn't know existed, offered me the chance to engage—as a peer—with some of the most accomplished scholars in the world, and allowed me to unite many seemingly-disparate interests into one unified project.

It's exciting to think of all the possible projects that RBS can enrich. I hope one of them can be yours.

Sincerely,

Emma Whittington
CLAS '12