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B-50: Advanced Seminar in the History of Bookbinding  
5–10 July 2015

**Narrative Course Evaluations**

- 1) *Were the pre-course reading assignments useful? Did you do any additional preparation for your course? Are there any books or articles that you would like to see included in future years? Any that you might suggest removing?*
  1. The pre-course readings were a good introduction to the course, but several titles were unavailable to me. I just made a best effort of it, and still felt prepared for the class. I also feel like I will be able to go back to the resources after the class and continue to broaden my knowledge.
  2. The pre-course reading assignments were difficult to get a hold of, and were exhaustive. I did none of them, for which I feel a little guilty. I will use the list as a “further readings” guide, probably to great benefit.
  3. Pre-course reading assignments were useful, although some were hard to come by even with very good resources at my disposal.
  4. Very useful. I did not read them all, but Anthony Hobson is great, and the exhibit catalogs were useful for their annotated illustrations.
  5. The pre-course reading was very helpful, especially since certain chapters or sections were highlighted. It wasn’t possible for me to access all of them, but that was not a hindrance. Having taken JSvL’s intro course and his extensive bibliography were hugely helpful!
  6. Pre-course readings were helpful to refresh information, though I couldn’t find all of them. My additional preparation for the course included sorting through my institution’s collection and photographing some recent bindings. JSvL is wonderful at incorporating questions and comments you have about your own collections into what he covers in course work.
  7. Yes, the reading assignments helped me follow along with the lectures. Having a prior understanding of terminology and binding style made for a better learning experience.
  8. They were helpful, though I didn’t get to one of them.
  9. There were far too many listed to actually read. A smaller set of more directed readings would perhaps have been better. Also, the link for the Etherington binding terms is incorrect in the pre-readings and the booklet—perhaps should be updated.
  10. Very useful pre-course readings. I find the course much easier to follow and benefit from when I have read the texts in advance.
  11. A handful of the books were in French, which may not be readable to many. The reading list was enormous. Maybe a clearer idea of what we really should focus on from the list would be helpful. I’m not sure the entire list was realistic.
  12. {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. I always consult my previous workbooks, and assume this one will be just as useful. I appreciate that it comes both in paper, where I can make notes, and in e-format, where I can see the colors.
2. The course workbook was excellent. The addition of colored pictures improved it. I look forward to its official publication.
3. Workbook content is very helpful, and I expect to utilize it regularly, along with the one I received for the introductory course.
4. Good reference tool; I expect to use it at work.
5. The workbook is very comprehensive and understandable. It added valuable information to the course, and having the electronic version ahead of time made it possible to get a sense of the course in advance. The images are especially handy, given that the course covers so much material.
6. The workbook is thorough, and will be a regular go-to on my shelf! Having an electronic copy is especially helpful, so I'm grateful one was sent out before the course.
7. I was constantly referring to the course workbook during the description part of the course, and I know that I will be referring to it again.
8. Helpful—I plan to use the workbook as a reference and the examples and templates of bookbinding descriptions as exercises for myself, to improve my knowledge.
9. Yes—an amazing resource to refer back to. Also it was especially helpful to have the color version electronically.
10. Workbook is great—allows me to relax and listen, knowing I have that to refer to later, instead of having to take constant notes—although I did take a lot of notes too! Would really love to have the workbook in color—I would pay extra for that. JSvL emailed a color PDF, which is great, but a book would be even better.
11. It's a good general overview of things discussed in the intro course. I'm sure I will refer to it. I especially like the forms provided for book description.
12. JSvL's workbook was great, and receiving it via email in advance was helpful. Also added class notes to it. Thank you, JSvL!

3) *If you've taken previous RBS courses, how did this one compare?*

1. All my courses have been worthwhile—JSvL is an excellent instructor, and his stories about the bindings help place them in context, which I wouldn't otherwise get.
2. Equally superlative, which is to say, impossibly good.
3. Well, it is JSvL, so it was fantastic.
4. All were great, and so was this.
5. My previous course was also with JSvL, so I was accustomed to his teaching style. Because everyone in the course knows JSvL, and many of us know each other, there was a very easy dialogue. The conversations in class added so much to the course content, because we had such a variety of backgrounds and questions.
6. My only other course was also with JSvL, so they were both wonderful. Future instructors have a lot to live up to!
7. My previous course was also with JSvL, which is one of the reasons that I came back. He is so generous with his knowledge and passionate about bookbinding. I learned so much from his intro course that I wanted to come back.

8. They've all been wonderful, but I think JSvL is my favorite teacher—so smart, so kind and personable.
  9. Well, the last was also with JSvL, so very similar (similarly great). I liked especially the opportunities to work on descriptions of bindings, which we didn't do in the intro course.
  10. As good as always—fantastic.
  11. The other two were more rich in new information (new to me). This was more of a refresher, delving deeper into a couple of subjects I didn't know before.
  12. This was the best class! The material covered was thorough, and the class bonded well. Excellent experience.
- 4) *Which aspects of the course were most interesting and relevant for you as an individual? Did you walk away with any new insights, ideas, or project plans?*
1. I really hope that, time permitting, I will be able to identify bindings in my workplace library that can use more description, and I feel confident that I can provide it.
  2. The discussions of form following cultural influence were most interesting to me. I leave with several possible courses of research ahead of me.
  3. I believe JSvL does his best to prepare the groundwork for further research by giving you the tools for investigation—and gets you on the right road.
  4. Definitely have new insights and project plans for teaching, exhibits, and possibly articles.
  5. Being able to apply the huge amount of knowledge directly to bindings in the SC and RBS collections was invaluable. We immediately had the opportunity to think critically about what we'd learned, which really helped in our evaluations of materials.
  6. Binding descriptions are immediately relevant to my work, and I was happy to see a standardized form with terminology. Much of the binding themes by region will, I believe, also be very useful for my work.
  7. Going through the evolution of designs, and how political and artistic influence of the time influenced those evolutions. A classmate shared some of her miniature almanacs, and that has inspired a future artist book idea!
  8. I'm not sure yet—the describing was somehow harder and more intense than I anticipated. I do plan to go back through my library's collection and see if I can identify prize bindings, almanacs, and chocolate boxes, just from tools of class.
  9. The discussion of and making of descriptions. I already had in mind a project, and this class has been quite helpful in thinking more deeply about it.
  10. Stylistic information is most helpful to me—being able to identify date and geographic location. As a conservator, I am familiar with structure already, but am also very interested in structural anomalies and configuration.
  11. It was valuable to sit down and have the time to really inspect some bindings, with more detail than I generally have time for. It was interesting to learn about areas of binding history that need further research.
  12. Writing binding descriptions and seeing a wider variety of binding styles than in the intro class.
- 5) *Did the instructors help you to acquire all the skills and information promised in the course description? Was anything left out or undeveloped? Did you learn what you*

*had hoped to learn?*

1. Yes, no, and yes.
2. Yes, no, mostly. As to the last, I would have liked to spend more time on Italian bindings of the Middle Ages.
3. I am more than pleased with the skills I acquired this week; I learned more than I had hoped for.
4. Can't think of anything that was left out, or anything that fell short of what I had hoped to learn.
5. Absolutely! JSvL has such a huge amount to teach that I'm amazed he can synthesize it into two week-long courses, but he somehow manages to do it! It was even more apparent to me how much I'd learned this time around, because I got used to it.
6. JSvL did a wonderful job of covering all we were promised, in my opinion. There's so much to be covered, he may not dwell on every subject, but if he moves on before you're ready, and you ask a question, he will go back and expand until you're satisfied.
7. Yes, JSvL was very open and encouraged questions. I don't work in an institution with collections, but it was interesting to see how the lecture applied to those who do.
8. Yes—I believe I learned even more than I expected to.
9. The only thing left out was the ten-minute presentation, but I was happy it was not done. I perhaps would have liked to talk more about structure of bindings, but I did know going in that JSvL's specialty and knowledge is in design.
10. Yes—fantastic.
11. JSvL is a fantastic storyteller and instructor, and any info presented is guaranteed to be interesting. I didn't come with any particular expectations, but I felt my knowledge was refreshed since taking the intro course.
12. Absolutely.

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

1. I will use the knowledge gained to create even richer description for the books in the library. This will provide greater access to our library's patrons.
2. As a general addition to my professional knowledge. Little I have learned here will help me in my current job, but I now love books more.
3. To further inform my cataloging.
4. Teaching undergrads and grad students about books; public presentations.
5. I'm going to use what I've learned to place bindings geographically and on a timeline, in order to further my personal knowledge of binding, mostly, and also in advising my clients as to what they have and what may be the appropriate approach when conservation needs are present.
6. I will bring my skills and knowledge back to my institution, where I will share them with my classmates. I hope to develop new standards in our binding descriptions based on JSvL's format.
7. In my own classes. Even though I teach basic binding courses, my students are constantly curious about the evolution of materials and structures.
8. Help researchers and students by passing on what I've learned—when appropriate. This was more in depth than the sort of knowledge I often need to

- teach, but I'll find a way! I will also pass any knowledge on to our catalogers, if and when I see an opportunity.
9. I will try as much as I can to improve access, especially in the catalog, to bindings in our collection.
  10. Knowledge from this class will help me to more effectively identify materials and structures, talk more knowledgeably with my clients, and improve the quality of my work as a conservator.
  11. It will inform the way I look at the bindings I treat at my library. I will be able to more confidently pass along my knowledge to colleagues.
  12. Improve database descriptions of my bindings.
- 7) *Please briefly describe the intellectual level of the course. What sort of person might benefit the most from taking it?*
1. JSvL's style of teaching is built around stories—he provides a narrative in which bindings fit, so someone who likes the history of objects would fit well. We also got hands on, so you must be one who is willing to work.
  2. A person of great curiosity, with significant first-hand experience with books.
  3. The intellectual level is rigorous, and requires a person who has a genuine interest in bindings, either on a personal or professional level.
  4. Useful for rare book librarians, conservators, and binders, as well as book historians. Intellectual level is moderately high.
  5. The intellectual level of the course is high, in that one must have a fairly wide knowledge of binding history—either from courses or from experience. The intro class is absolutely crucial. The most important prerequisite, though, is probably enthusiasm, as there is so much to be gained from this if you want it!
  6. This course is good for someone surrounded by and often using special collections.
  7. I think this course can benefit people of all levels of interaction with books, whether hands on or academic or collector.
  8. Top-level intellectual—probably the college educated, but could be self educated, and of course interested in books, bookbindings, and book arts.
  9. It assumes some knowledge of binding design and history, though if one were to have seen many bindings and done preliminary readings, one could take the course and learn everything just fine.
  10. Very high intellectual level—great for those who work with books regularly, but are not book historians.
  11. Anyone who has taken the intro course.
  12. {no response}
- 8) *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. {no response}
  2. Learning more about the history around a single book is always very illuminating.
  3. Not at the moment.
  4. One of the readings gave me an idea that I hope to develop into some sort of article.
  5. Learning what there is to be gleaned from bindings in regards to history was

- huge—recognizing changes in style as a reflection of historical events was great!
6. The section on almanacs was an eye opener.
  7. Having another overview of leather grain and follicle structure. Also reviewing tooling technique and combining decorative techniques.
  8. How many smart people are into bookbindings. Wow! Mostly younger, too. I'm very glad to also have done a tracing—eye opening.
  9. {no response}
  10. {no response}
  11. Studying the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century bindings—especially JSvL's specialty, the “chocolate boxes.” I knew nothing before this course about these bindings.
  12. Selecting the books to describe and comparing my descriptions to JSvL's descriptions.

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

1. I always want more hands on; I would have been happy providing even more descriptions.
2. Time. More time.
3. I cannot think of any way.
4. Make it two weeks!
5. No recommendations whatsoever—JSvL is absolutely a joy to learn from, and my classmates were fantastic!
6. There was maybe a little too much focus on the Angling {?} bindings. We could have expanded to other subjects and shortened that one.
7. I think there was too much overview from the intro class. Could do a shorter overview with Gaskell.
8. Can't think of anything.
9. Perhaps fewer of the general slideshows of bindings, by date and country? Limit to just first day, then delve into some detail about specific bindings or techniques, &c.?
10. Standing for long stretches around book display table was tiring—maybe alternate that with sitting and PowerPoint presentations.
11. Perhaps a survey of subjects/bindings from each participant's home institution or collection would be fun to discuss. Each person could “present” a mystery or interest, and the course could learn and discuss using JSvL's experience.
12. {no response}

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

1. Yes, and yes.
2. Yes, and yes.
3. More than our money's worth; I would recommend the course, and wish there was a follow-up course to this one.
4. Yes, and yes.
5. Most definitely!
6. Yes, and yes!
7. Definitely. I have, and he is taking JSvL's intro course in two weeks!

8. Yes, of course. Well, my institution did pay for it all. (It's expensive for some.) Yes, I will recommend it.
9. Yes, if they were interested in binding history.
10. Yes! I recommend RBS and JSvL's class to everyone I speak to in the book world!
11. Yes.
12. Totally.

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

1. We went to SC to look at and describe some of their bindings, and it was a good part of the experience.
2. N/A
3. We went to SC, and it was time well spent.
4. Yes—materials in SC were useful.
5. Visiting SC was so valuable—it really added so much to the lecture information. An absolute must for the advanced seminar!
6. We visited SC, and it was a good supplement to our learning.
7. Yes, it was a pleasure to handle the material we'd been studying.
8. Yes, SC is great!
9. We made a few trips to SC, all to make descriptions of bindings, all time well spent.
10. SC visits were fantastic—to be able to hold those items was so enriching.
11. It was nice going to SC to look at bindings from that collection.
12. {no response}

12) *If you attended any of our optional evening events, do you feel that they were a good use of your time? Were there any that were particularly important to your RBS experience? Any that you could have done without?*

1. I like Movie Night, always—though I only saw one of the two films this year, it was worth staying late. I also find that the guest speakers are usually related to topics of the week, and therefore are of interest to hear.
2. I was surprised to enjoy Movie Night (Peter Waters, Moser Bible).
3. I could have done without the first—while informative, it was a bit jumbled. The second was insightful, and spoke to me on a professional level.
4. I only got to Movie Night, which was good.
5. Yes! The lectures were great (particularly the Abbey Press one) and Movie Night and Booksellers' Night were a lot of fun—so great to continue the conversation with new friends in those settings.
6. I attended all events. They were a great way to spend my evenings.
7. The Movie Night was particularly fascinating, and the lecture on Abbey Press was a riot.
8. I always enjoy the lectures; health and a project interfered with the Tuesday and Thursday events.
9. {no response}
10. Outside lectures were very interesting.
11. Yes, very fun. I enjoyed all the evening lectures and activities.
12. Loved the lectures. Would like to see an evening event on the lawn—all students

invited, BYOB plus food.

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

1. This is an awesome place to learn and to bounce ideas off people with similar interests. It is helpful to come to RBS.
2. Linen clothes for Virginia summers.
3. None.
4. You won't be able to read all of the list, but it helps tremendously to read what you can.
5. Do what you can of the reading, peruse the workbook ahead of time, and don't be shy about staying in touch with JSvL and your fellow students.
6. {no response}
7. {no response}
8. If it's been more than a year or two since the intro course, you should brush up on old notes, terms, reading materials. I found myself rusty on some basics at first.
9. {no response}
10. Do it!
11. Don't wait too long to take it!
12. {no response}

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

1. Always well worth the time spent among others of a similar interest level.
2. What sweet death is this?/Faded skins and shining gold/drowning in bindings.
3. May I return again next year?
4. Book fever.
5. So much to be learned/a nerd summer camp, of sorts/truly a delight.
6. I love RBS! I'll email you a haiku after I've given it some proper thought and composition.
7. {no response}
8. Intense, but so fun!
9. It's a wonderful experience to learn, while also spending quality time with like-minded people. The outside-class time is perhaps just as great as the in-class time!
10. Life changing.
11. Wish I could go every summer!
12. It's great to be with your peeps!

## **Student Data**

*Number of respondents:* 12 (of 13)

*How did you arrange for time off to attend this course?*

My institution/employer gave me professional leave time: 9 (75%)

My institution/employer did not give me professional leave; I used paid or vacation days:

1 (8.33%)

I am self-employed, and can arrange my own schedule: 1 (8.33%)

I am retired, and can arrange my own schedule: 1 (8.33%)

*Who paid your RBS tuition costs?*

I paid 100% myself: 3 (25%)

My institution/employer paid 100%: 6 (50%)

My institution/employer paid part; I paid the rest: 1 (8.33%)

I used a scholarship/fellowship to pay/waive 100%: 2 (16.67%)

*Who paid your RBS housing expenses?*

I paid 100% myself: 5 (41.67%)

My institution/employer paid 100%: 4 (33.33%)

I stayed with friends/family, or stayed in my own home and commuted: 2 (16.67%)

My situation does not fit any of the options above: 1 (8.33%)

*Who paid your RBS travel expenses?*

I paid 100% myself: 7 (58.33%)

My institution/employer paid 100%: 4 (33.33%)

I live locally, and had no travel expenses: 1 (8.33%)

*Which of the following best describes your current occupation?*

Library disciplines:

Cataloger/metadata librarian: 2 (16.67%)

Conservator/binder/preservation librarian: 5 (41.67%)

Library administrator: 1 (8.33%)

Public services librarian: 2 (16.67%)

Book trades:

Other: 1 (8.33%)

Other occupations/vocations:

Book collector: 1 (8.33%)