

David Whitesell  
G-20: Printed Books to 1800: Description & Analysis  
14–19 June 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. I did find the pre-course readings to be useful, but even more so when read a second time after discussion/practice in class. Very nice bibliography provided for further readings. Works mentioned in class might be helpful to review beforehand, but especially so afterwards, after having had initial introduction.
  2. The pre-course videos were essential. The Gaskell readings were difficult to digest in isolation from archival material books, but it was good to have his book as a base.
  3. Yes, the readings were useful. I did not do any additional prep. It might be nice to have one or two articles demonstrating the use of bibliographical analysis in historical or other disciplinary contexts.
  4. I read Gaskell and Bowers, and took notes. The two are essential. I also looked at Pearson.
  5. Pre-course reading was appropriate, and not too long—it was good also to go through and review the reading as nightly assignments.
  6. Yes—all reading was very useful. The only suggestion is that the Pearson provenance book is exceptionally expensive, so a supplementary article would be good. (I couldn't get it in time through ILL.)
  7. The pre-course reading was very helpful in preparing us for the course, and rereading while at RBS was also very important.
  8. Pre-course reading was essential. Gaskell more so than others. I would perhaps remove the optional readings and replace with major historiographic pieces: McKenzie, Sayce, Greg, for example.
  9. The pre-course reading assignments were very helpful.
  10. A lot of reading, but I was so glad to have do it all—I did a lot of the supplementary reading, as well. It helped me to take in DW's lectures.
  11. I read most of Gaskell (as assigned), and found it excellent and very useful. The two recommended videos were helpful, too. This turned out to be sufficient preparation for the course, but I plan to do more readings after completion of the course.
  12. Yes, first off, DW was highly organized and helpful in helping us prepare. We did not see the very thorough and helpful class workbook in advance, but that did not matter, since he sent us enough helpful advance reading and notes and assigned selection from the course textbooks. Good video!
  
- 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. Loads of useful materials listed in the workbook will ensure its continued value. A few too many handouts given out. All content was appropriate. Wish there was a test to take and pass.
2. The course workbook will become a treasured resource for me as I go out into archives and apply the skills I've gained. Please make it available as a PDF {private response}.
3. Useful and very helpful for later research/study.
4. Very useful. I am certain that the featured exit reading list will help me enormously in my future reading.
5. The workbook as a whole will be a useful tool. However, it was a little hard to follow along with the lectures, because it was out of order sometimes, and so I wasn't always sure if the current topic was covered within the workbook or not.
6. Fabulous, perfect. Would love a digital copy, because it's hard to lug to the archives.
7. I will guard my workbook with my life! A wealth of information and reference at my fingertips.
8. Very useful, and will continue to be. A PDF version, in addition, would be appreciated for use in "the field."
9. The workbook and teaching materials were awesome. For every new thing we learned, we had fabulous material that helped us understand and apply it.
10. Yes, well done. The only thing I would suggest is a map to the signature statement, with another one to all of the different numbers identifying them.
11. The course workbook is excellent and very useful. I will keep using it in the future, especially the "supplementary material" and "exit reading list." The teaching materials displayed (or distributed) during class were wonderful—amazing collection!
12. See above! DW is both a master bibliographer and a master teacher about handpress books and the art and science of descriptive bibliography as both a body of knowledge and practice. Bravo! The materials and texts were good, but DW's teaching was the best aspect of the course. He made the most arcane aspects of book history and bibliography come alive, clearly, concisely, and at perfect pitch and pace. DW's workbook will be my biblio-bible. Thanks.

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

1. {no response}
2. {no response}
3. {no response}
4. The best, if ever I thought that could be possible. In this one, nothing was left undeveloped; everything was conveniently illustrated and presented in a most attractive way. Extremely well planned.
5. Other course was L-25 ("Reference Sources"); the two are very different, so it's hard to compare quality. The classmates were different though, in terms of occupation, and so the discussions were also different due to that.
6. N/A
7. First RBS course.
8. N/A
9. {no response}
10. They're all first rate. I wish I could come more often!

11. N/A
12. {no response}

- 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 now have a much greater appreciation for the work of a bibliographer, whereas previously I was more interested in the content of the book rather than its structure.
  2. I'm walking away with a set of skills that I'm ready to put into practice on my next archive visit.
  3. Learning the basic elements of the book (paper, binding, and type), as well as bibliographical standards, will be very helpful, even though I don't anticipate having to do much collation myself.
  4. The introductions to illustration and bookbinding were something I was very much looking forward to, but I found provenance discussion at the end of the course most interesting for my interests.
  5. I really enjoyed being able to handle and see the books from the RBS collections, and loved seeing SC. Hands on is the best way for me to learn—applied collating practice was also helpful. I had never collated before!
  6. I will finally say the right things about material texts, and not feel so insecure.
  7. I was very excited to learn more about construction processes, including a much better idea of how to distinguish binding materials.
  8. I walked away with a new way of looking and seeing. I am excited to keep using these tools to see objects more fully, and am really hopeful a new project will emerge out of this practice.
  9. Yes, it taught me to look at books differently, and I will walk away with a great curiosity to learn more about each process of book production, circulation, and reception.
  10. What is important to a given audience can be different in different disciplines. Very, very, very important concept for me personally to quantify this.
  11. I was looking for a general overview, and found most aspects very interesting and stimulating.
  12. I learned exactly the kinds of things I needed to learn in theory and practice for studying a private, European rare books collection. I benefited most from in-class practice of skills, hands-on experience in printing, and hands-on work with rare books. Thank you.
  
- 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. The course description was a bit general, so yes, many skills were promised and delivered. Much of the course was left out—how could you hope to cover it all in one week? I learned a lot, but I didn't arrive with any expectations other than an interest to learn, and this class certainly filled that need.
  2. Absolutely. DW has managed to condense a great deal of information into one short week of class. It's astonishing. He's an incredibly effective teacher.
  3. DW was very knowledgeable and informative and patient! The only piece that

might be more developed are the applications of this outside the field of bibliography.

4. A big yes. I learned much more than I hoped I would. The amount of work that DW has put into preparing this course made it so well conceived and entertaining from beginning to end that nothing seems to be wanting. He would patiently allow much time for student discussion as well.
  5. I hoped to learn more in terms of the history of the book/printed book, but I realize this was not explicitly part of the scope of the course.
  6. Yes! It was a superb class with a brilliant instructor. My only suggestion for improvement would be to see if we could collate a work more closely linked to one's research.
  7. Yes. I got more than I anticipated—learning so much that I am now much more aware of what I don't know. I'll have to come back!
  8. Acquired all the promised skills. Definitely. The historiographical trajectory of bibliographical studies was frustratingly underdeveloped. Felt like a Gaskell-Bowers fest, without understanding their place in history—past/present/future. Got the great overview of the skills and methods of this field, as hoped.
  9. DW is amazing. He is extremely knowledgeable, clear, and helpful. He has a great sense of humor, as well.
  10. Yes.
  11. The course fulfilled its promise, and was faithful to the descriptions.
  12. I have these questions in Q4, above. My only suggestion relates to learning to fold paper to make differently sized books. Please give each student sheets for practicing folding.
- 6) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your time here?*
1. Practice writing formulas and bibliographical descriptions for our own rare book collections. These skills enhanced my knowledge and desire to learn more. Excellent background not found in library school curricula. Working in a small library you need to wear many hats.
  2. I plan to apply them directly to my dissertation research and writing.
  3. It will help me assess purchases and existing holdings, read dealer catalogs, and interact with dealers better.
  4. Start reading on illustration and bookbinding and provenance and go on looking at books.... I'm sure I'll find multiple uses in my research and teaching.
  5. We learned many ways to analyze the physical aspects of a book, and learned how to interpret what we saw, and also how to interpret the way others have recorded the same information, all obviously very applicable to conservation.
  6. For both research and curriculum planning.
  7. I am a cataloger, and will be using this information to enhance my records. In addition, it has given me ideas for possible future projects.
  8. In my own research, and as part of my own teaching—expanded, hands-on history of the book.
  9. {no response}
  10. I shall become a better cataloger, and be ready to publish a particular bibliography should the opportunity arise.
  11. I plan to use the knowledge and inspiration in a variety of future activities, from personal bibliographical research to rare book presentations for students.

12. I plan to use the knowledge I have gained about eighteenth- and nineteenth-century book production and book description (the two go hand in hand) to study and describe an eighteenth-century private rare book collection.

7) *Please briefly describe the intellectual level of the course. What sort of person might benefit the most from taking it?*

1. The students were a mixed lot. Some looked bored, some knew much already, others seemed out of place in the wrong course. This course would most benefit those seeking to read bibliographical descriptions in printed reference works, as well as librarians working in the field wanting to begin research projects.
2. This is the course for you if you want to acquire a set of very practical skills. It was dense, but DW made it accessible.
3. This would certainly help catalogers and other library professionals, as well as scholars studying book history.
4. Probably those with some acquaintance with books.
5. All can benefit, but it may be more of a review for those who have studied physical aspects of books as objects before. It was introductory in that sense and introductory in bibliographical description, too.
6. A perfect first RBS course. Also good for grad students starting archival/dissertation work.
7. Anyone wanting a better understanding of bibliographical principles, from librarians to academic scholars.
8. Library professionals who want a good overview to understand the different pieces; researchers, catalogers, curators, &c. could find it interesting. Course more about acquiring skills than thinking through their applications and implications—could frustrate certain academics.
9. I think this course is perfect for people interested in being introduced to every relevant aspect of the early history of printed books.
10. I think rather, that some experience with books would give the best context for success.
11. Anyone interested in rare books will benefit from this course.
12. I enjoyed the mix of students and projects, and I learned from everyone in the class. The students in this course ranged from professional curators and librarians to graduate students and professors studying various aspects of book history. High intellectual level—DW made the material accessible to all.

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. The best parts were hands-on typesetting and printing that made you appreciate the work that goes into creating a book.
2. The examples from the collection were essential in my learning process. Highly technical or obscure points were illuminated by RBS teaching kits.
3. The collation practice was very helpful. It makes me look more closely than I customarily do. I’ll take that with me, even if I don’t collate every day going forward. The hands-on experience of evaluating examples in class as he taught was also extraordinarily helpful.

4. So many “aha” moments, from beginning to end, that I can’t choose one. Collating, identifying illustrations, identifying issues...any.
5. Learning to collate is useful, and now I understand the difference between editions, issues, states, &c.
6. Brilliantly chosen textual examples.
7. Bindings, collation, understanding of hidden clues to the book, and a great understanding of what descriptive bibliography is, and why we need it.
8. The teaching collection of RBS is mind boggling. And DW’s ability to bring those material examples alive was profound. Inspiration to slow down and see better.
9. For me, the best part was the presentation that DW did on his chosen items at SC.
10. The differences between standard book cataloging and descriptive bibliography was beautifully articulated by DW.
11. The favorite moments were related to the display of unique items from the teaching collection to illustrate specific points or practices.
12. Just learning about how eighteenth-century books were produced (physically), seeing rare books close up, and learning to describe them precisely—all “aha” moments.

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

1. {no response}
2. {private response}
3. {no response}
4. Couldn’t say.
5. More time in SC!
6. DW is great at controlling a room and managing time. No suggestions.
7. More time?
8. More sense of how traditional bibliography could link up to other ideas/agendas/commitments of other fields. Which tools does bibliography offer, rather than simply use?
9. {no response}
10. The map in Q2 was the only thing that occurred to me.
11. This course has clearly been honed and “tested” over a number of years, and DW keeps tweaking it in response to new material or developments. No major changes needed.
12. I think DW has carefully thought through the difficult course material, and does a masterly job of dispensing it—can’t think of improving on this.

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

1. Most certainly. I would recommend this class to others as per Q7, above.
2. Everyone who studies print culture, book history, or “material texts” should take this course.
3. Yes! It was a wonderful overview. Exactly what I needed.
4. Indeed.
5. Yes.
6. Yes, but my institution paid. Yes.
7. Yes!

8. Yes! And more. DW even scheduled and oversaw extra sessions in the evening.
9. Yes, very strongly recommended!
10. Yes, yes, and yes.
11. {private response}
12. Yes, to both questions.

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

1. A look at SC was very interesting, and really added to the variety of materials encountered overall. I wish we had more time in that visit!
2. The press demo with Josef Beery and the type demo with Amanda Nelsen were wonderful trips. I came away from both with a much more material and intuitive understanding of processes that before I had only read about.
3. The visit to SC was well worth the time, as was the session on printing and typography.
4. Very well. DW.
5. Time in SC was especially valuable, and evening collation workshops were also very helpful.
6. SC was excellent.
7. Only one visit to SC, but it was fascinating.
8. Trip to SC was a treat. Like getting taken to the Chocolate Factory with Mr. Wonka.
9. Yes, the SC visits and printing workshops were awesome and very helpful.
10. {no response}
11. The visit to SC was not necessary, but a nice addition, as it allowed us to see wonderful books that DW had chosen very well to provide an overview of printing and binding across several centuries.
12. Yes—printing, composing, ornament workshop, viewing rare books at SC—all worthwhile, well timed, informative, and integral to the learning experience.

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. The film night was very informative and worthwhile, as was the evening practice session. I think the Thursday night visit to booksellers could have been a bit more structured. The lecture on paper was fun, but the film was much better. The type lecture was incredibly boring and a useless waste of time.
2. {no response}
3. The lectures were interesting and informative. They reinforced material learned in class.
4. I attended Video Night, and enjoyed it thoroughly.
5. The lectures were really interesting. I would have attended the movie night if it had started earlier, but I was staying somewhere not too close, so I wasn't able.
6. I wish I could have, but was unable to.
7. The talk on type (Russell Maret) and the Linotype film were both eye-opening and exciting events.
8. Evening lectures were incredible, and provided really rich material to discuss with

- colleagues here. Ornament Night and Video Night were a little...flat. I would have preferred either a more guided, hands-on activity—maybe a roundtable—or space to hear about the courses in progress.
9. Video Night and Ornament Night were great!
  10. I was sorry to miss all but the ornament demonstration. Wanted to do everything!
  11. I chose to spend most of my free time on personal research in SC (fortunately open until 7 p.m.!), and missed the two lectures, as well as the book-hunting night. I enjoyed the type-ornament workshop. These optional events are a nice supplement.
  12. I attended the outstanding and illuminating lectures by book arts practitioners. A pleasure, and deeply educational.

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

1. Why have you waited to take a course at RBS? Where else can you find the training needed? Invaluable confluence of collections and staff knowledge.
2. {no response}
3. {no response}
4. {no response}
5. Read! Engage! Participate!
6. Come prepared with the reading.
7. {no response}
8. If you are deep into bibliography, this may be review. It's very much an overview, but a masterful one. I would maybe suggest scheduling evening time at SC with objects for your research to think through course implications with your own materials.
9. I recommend this course if you are interested in a very complete analysis of printed books, their production and materiality, up to 1800.
10. I took the course after several others, and now wish I had taken it earlier. It is such a big-picture, big-concept course!
11. Take the preparation somewhat seriously by doing at least the assigned reading. Be prepared to invest yourself fully in the material, and to "think like a bibliographer."
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. Hope to see you again next year!
2. {private response}
3. Invaluable!
4. So sad it's over.
5. I learned so much in so little time, but also learned just how much I have yet to learn. Everyone is very inspiring!
6. Incredible. RBS made me acutely aware of how lucky I was to receive funding to attend. I was one of only two people from public universities in my class, which was a shame.
7. Thank you, oh wise one, DW!

8. Really intense week/Lots to take home, mull over/will be back, no doubt.
9. Sensational!
10. Books are becoming historical objects faster every year. I'm so glad RBS is here to bring that history alive.
11. Exhausting, but rewarding; unique, invaluable opportunity.
12. "...rare and valuable encounters with rare books and book culture."

## **Student Data**

*Number of respondents:* 12 (of 12)

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

My institution/employer gave me professional leave time: 5 (41.67%)

I am a student or non-year-round employee, with a more flexible summer schedule: 7 (58.33%)

*Who paid your RBS tuition costs?*

I paid 100% myself: 4 (33.33%)

My institution/employer paid 100%: 5 (41.67%)

I used a scholarship/fellowship to pay/waive 100%: 3 (25%)

*Who paid your RBS housing expenses?*

I paid 100% myself: 4 (33.33%)

My institution/employer paid 100%: 3 (25%)

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

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

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

*Who paid your RBS travel expenses?*

I paid 100% myself: 6 (50%)

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

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

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

Library disciplines:

Cataloger/metadata librarian: 2 (16.67%)

Curator: 1 (8.33%)

Public services librarian: 1 (8.33%)

Student working toward a/n:

M.A./M.S.: 1 (8.33%)

Ph.D./D.Phil: 3 (25%)

Professional educator:

Assistant professor: 1 (8.33%)

Associate professor: 2 (16.67%)

Full professor: 1 (8.33%)