

Michael F. Suarez, S.J.
G-70 (II): Advanced Seminar in Critical Bibliography
30 July–4 August

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 read prior course evaluations. My best suggestion is to make a graduated, navigable version of a short list available—by the time of application. Just put it on the website with a different structure. It's too overwhelming without the guide.
 2. They were interesting but we only ended up discussing one of them. To prepare, we had written summaries and planned to lead discussions of many of the readings, so it felt like a missed opportunity that we didn't get to hash them out together. Since the course is an advanced seminar, perhaps students could nominate particular readings they would like one group to discuss—then we could all get a sense of what items are most exciting across the represented disciplines.
 3. I thought the readings were very useful. It might have been helpful to include a paragraph preamble to each day's readings to describe the logic behind the choices. It also might have been nice to include/integrate the readings into discussion. One possibility, due to limited time, would be during book lab. Do 45 minutes just looking and 45 minutes looking and talking about the application of the readings.
 4. I must confess that other responsibilities in the weeks before the course meant I didn't read as widely or as deeply as I'd have liked. I look forward to making my way through more of the readings in the future.
 5. Substantially too much assigned reading of which little reference was made in class. A distinctly different pedagogical style than most of us are used to.
 6. The readings were useful, but I wish we had spent more class time discussing them.
 7. As previous years' evaluations have suggested, the pre-course reading is much too extensive to be useful as anything other than a reference source. We did not spend course time discussing 98% of the reading. {private response}
 8. Readings were great, but barely discussed or drawn upon. Either explain readings are meant as background (optional), or build them into the course more explicitly/compellingly.
 9. I picked and chose what readings to do. Some were more helpful than others, but the reading list is a good reference for the future.
 10. Yes, the reading assignments were useful, although the list was probably too long and we seldom engaged it in class.
 11. I really loved the readings, minus some of the very technical Susan Pierce works. I am teaching "History of the Book" this fall, so the reading has been a goldmine.

- 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 think it's great but didn't have as much time to look at it as I'd like. {private response}
2. Yes, thanks for all of the materials. It might have been useful to talk us through the materials on the jump drive.
3. Yes. For me, greedily, it would be great to have digital copies of everything AND (very greedily) some of the teaching tools, though I might ask for specific parts of the pedagogy lab directly (and a direct system might be most appropriate).
4. The materials will be very valuable. A wonderful assortment.
5. Lab handouts were helpful. I have not explored the large digital handout of exit readings, but expect them to be useful.
6. I have not looked at the digital workbook. It was very helpful that readings were made available in digital format. The lab discussion questions should have been used more during the lab sessions.
7. I think the PDF sources distributed will come in handy.
8. Workbook/lab sheets were useful, but level was pitched very low. I would use them as teaching materials in the future for undergraduate seminars.
9. Very useful. I will use them as references and in my teaching after this course. I appreciate the thought and detail that went into the teaching handouts.
10. The materials and workbook were amazing. I learned a ton in the work stations!
11. Definitely—I intend to modify some assignments for reuse in my own class.

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

1. An important capstone to the Mellon experience in some ways; I genuinely understand the architecture of how critical bibliography came to be and thus what it is. That may sound trivial, but it matters to me to know it. Practically speaking, labs and discussion are well-balanced.
2. Apples and oranges.
3. This one was fabulous. It felt balanced and with a clear pedagogy behind it, i.e., a clear organizing principle.
4. This course met the high bar set by other related courses I've taken.
5. It was completely different. Rather than imparting a specific set of skills, the class was an incubator for intelligently passionate scholars.
6. This is a much more theoretical, discussion-based class format than any other RBS course I've taken.
7. Very different—much heavier on discussion and theory, which I appreciated.
8. Solid. Amazing amount of materials and support staff went into making this course particularly object-rich.
9. It was more intensive/rigorous, but very enjoyable and engaging.
10. This was more theoretical than those focused on specific procedures. But it is useful, since it is arguing for a more capacious understanding of bibliography.
11. I really enjoyed aspects of this class, especially when we just played with and looked at manuscripts and printed books, which compared very positively to my experiences with Consuelo Dutschke's and Barbara Shailor's classes.

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. No major “ahas” or new project plans, but some nice connections made. I liked talking with the group about objects the most.
2. As usual with RBS, I came away with new ideas about how I can adapt this material for my teaching.
3. Reading lists, types of book comparisons, pedagogical methods, and fun book stories/anecdotes.
4. The series of materials labs were very informative. It was the discussions among the students in the class—each highly expert in her or his own way—that were the most valuable.
5. The student presentations and follow-up discussions both in class and in SC were outstanding.
6. The lab exercises were the most useful to me. It was informative to apply discussion topics to tangible objects, and demonstrated how our learning may best be applied practically.
7. Colleagues’ presentations were excellent and I received helpful feedback. Friday “pedagogy” demos were also great.
8. Hearing from course participants, both about their work and in five-minute flash presentations, was crucial. The best. It’s a really helpful mirror of how much I’ve come to know.
9. Loved the presentations by my colleagues—both about our current projects and those in SC. It was a chance to learn about and learn how to read certain materials from experts.
10. I think I have many new ideas that derived from the course, though no specific projects.
11. I learned a ton in terms of how to teach “History of the Book;” I was grounded anew in my knowledge that the Medieval-Renaissance divide is really not much of a divide, and I’m feeling less terrified of early printed books, which will hugely inform my future scholarship.

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. There’s a lot of room to grow the course, for all that it is jam-packed. That is not to say it was deficient when measured against the description.
2. I had hoped that this course would help to facilitate the formation of a community of scholars and researchers, and it has absolutely delivered on that!
3. Yes. Reading integration, as I mentioned in Q1, could have been improved.
4. I believe we addressed as much as could reasonably be expected in the available time.
5. The aim of the class is not skill development, but an inspiration to work outside the limits of traditional bibliography and in a more interdisciplinary way.
6. We did not address course readings nearly at all, and never brought up our article summaries. I think too much of the discussion was unfocused, and that there was no sense of goals to be met. I would have liked to have more explicit conversations about the disciplines the course is intended to explore (i.e., archaeology and anthropology).
7. It was not really clear going into this class what to expect, so it didn’t really shatter or satisfy any hopes or dreams. But, I was pleasantly surprised about how

- accessible the content was considering how daunting the pre-course prep was.
8. Readings and conceptual framework of critical bibliography was sadly underdeveloped. Good overview of application of bibliographical skills to a wide range of objects.
 9. We could have discussed a greater range of course readings. We mostly stuck to Gell—which was fascinating—but could have engaged with others.
 10. Yes, I think we covered all the themes mentioned in the description.
 11. I wish we'd had more theoretical discussions bridging our disciplines. With all due respect, MFS would sometimes get a bit beholden to a particular point and somewhat take the reins of our discussions, when more fluidity to give us time to create an actual class discussion would have been salutary.
- 6) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your time here?*
1. {private response}
 2. I plan to apply some of the ideas about teaching with original sources in my own classroom.
 3. In my scholarship and teaching.
 4. I hope to place my bibliographical work in a broader cultural and historical frame, provoked by many of the questions the course raised.
 5. Not clear. I expect my publications will now include a section on how my research challenges the traditional boundaries of bibliography, and how I resolve the challenges.
 6. I feel that my approach to talking about books and bibliography will be more nuanced and interdisciplinary.
 7. Teaching, researching, writing, applying for grants, and collaborating.
 8. Future teaching. Great models for how to teach book history, and seminars generally. I will continue to push material-focused work.
 9. In revising current projects, in developing future projects, and in my teaching practice.
 10. Hopefully in new book history projects!
 11. I plan to delve into early printed books a bit in the future, and to teach the crap out of "History of the Book" this fall.
- 7) *Please briefly describe the intellectual level of the course. What sort of person might benefit the most from taking it?*
1. Excellent for Mellon Fellows, but clearly also for anyone with deep engagement with objects, their analysis, and interpretation. I really appreciated the perspectives of all students in this course.
 2. I felt like the course was pitched just a little low for the level of the group, which came in with very high levels of experience in a number of areas.
 3. I think an academic or someone academically inclined. Intellectual level was high.
 4. I think the course makes the most sense for people who have already been at work on book historical questions for some time. One needs some sound expertise to really benefit from the cross-pollination of ideas the course promotes.
 5. Extremely high intellectual level. This was perhaps the first time the course was open to people other than Mellon Fellows. If the course is taught again, great care and thought must be given to class composition. Here, the prior relationship

- among many of the classmates allowed for immediate intellectual engagement; that may not happen with twelve strangers.
6. This course is best for graduate students and professors due to the very theoretical nature.
 7. Higher level than most RBS courses. It would be even higher with more time for theoretical discussion suited for academics invested in issues of materiality/objecthood, and non-academics who conduct serious research AND importantly are open to and excited by theoretical discussions.
 8. Academic and academically-minded collector or seller. Intellectual level felt average—the course stayed at levels of accepted truisms (objects matter, look at all the copies you can) too often.
 9. High intellectual level. It seemed most appropriate for academics.
 10. This course is apt for people with training in bibliography, and interested in reflecting and discussing the limits and potentials of bibliography as a field.
 11. Anyone working in bibliography from any discipline or aspect of book trade/collecting.
- 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. My favorite part of the course was hearing from my brilliant colleagues about their work, both in the presentations and in the SC visit.
 3. When I did the art and agency readings; each lab had one moment, like today, learning the process of lithography, yesterday Diderot’s *Encyclopedie* proofs, the day before the Aristophanes; when I finally realized what was “critical” in “critical bibliography,” i.e., that critical bibliography is about objects that resist traditional bibliography; this undoubtedly was my ignorance.
 4. Seeing the presentations from other students—people working at a high level in their respective fields—was a continual series of revelatory moments.
 5. {no response}
 6. It was very poignant to me to see how emotionally involved my classmates are with their objects of study, and I will use that information to calibrate my speech in the future.
 7. Recognizing thru-lines in multiple colleagues’ work, despite our differences in subfield and materials.
 8. Cross-disciplinary “aha” moments about divergent priorities in approaching an object. Most powerful moments came when hearing about others’ work and watching how people approach new objects.
 9. Feedback from class participants on my current project was awesome. I also had many great insights on teaching/syllabus planning.
 10. The peer-to-peer teaching exercise when all participants shared their views of a specific book with the group.
 11. Finding out that early printed books have complex Lachmann-esque stemmae, and learning so much about non-Western materials. Also just setting loose on an object with a blank slate and realizing, “I can say something about this even though this isn’t my field.”

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

1. I think the course would greatly benefit from expanding the range of material in some specific respects. {private response}
2. I think that because it's an advanced seminar, we could have had more opportunities to teach one another. The final SC visit was astonishingly generative and fun—we could have been doing this kind of peer-to-peer teaching all week!
3. Reading integration.
4. {private response}
5. A better match of reading to class discussion. The 90-minute labs should spend 40-60 minutes looking at objects, and the balance used for discussion.
6. More focused discussion and addressing practical applications.
7. Dramatically cut back on pre-course expectations. Writing summaries is not necessary. Be clear and explicit about which readings will be discussed, and then actually discuss them!
8. Better discussion of readings; more meta-reflection on the labs—making explicit what was meant as a takeaway; more close-looking in SC (it was really too superficial and takeaways were about things not gleaned from the object before us).
9. More focus on popular and ephemeral works during SC visits.
10. Perhaps following the readings a little more closely. But, the course was great.
11. More theoretical conversations based on the readings.

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

1. Yes!
2. Yes, I'd recommend it to others with a foundation in bibliography/book history who want to shore up their knowledge, and learn from their colleagues doing great work!
3. Yes.
4. Absolutely on both counts.
5. Mostly yes, but as noted above (Q7), the course will and must change when not coupled with the Mellon Fellowship.
6. Yes.
7. Yes, thank you Mr. Mellon. I would recommend to other Mellon Fellows or RBS instructors.
8. Yes.
9. Yes.
10. Yes. I'll recommend to people interested in bibliography as a field.
11. Definitely, precisely in this instantiation of it: the labs were extraordinary, as was hearing everyone's presentations.

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

1. Yes!
2. Loved the peer-to-peer SC session.
3. Yes. I loved both the book labs in class and SC.

4. SC visits are always helpful.
5. Yes, as to trips to SC.
6. Our time in SC was extremely fruitful.
7. I would have replaced one of the SC visits with an additional discussion section.
8. SC student-led lightning round = fantastic! Instructor-led sessions: too much time on the history of big highlights of collection rather than close material engagement with revealing of interesting material objects.
9. Visits to SC were interesting and valuable, though I often wished we could have gone even slower in our examination of certain texts.
10. Yes, the visits to SC were always a highlight.
11. The SC trips were excellent.

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. {no response}
2. N/A
3. I liked the lecture. I did "DesBib" so I saw paper museums, &c., but actually wish I had returned as I loved those (but had a conflict).
4. Always a good program of lectures. The museum sessions are well worth attending in the weeks they're offered.
5. I enjoyed the Monday talk. It was an unexpected delight to attend the paper and printing museum nights. I had seen the material in "DesBib," but was so much more able to understand and take advantage of it as I am further along in my education.
6. Monday's lecture was great.
7. I did not attend.
8. With assignments for the course, there was little time to attend.
9. Generally interesting, but the evening activities were not especially important.
10. I liked the paper lab a lot!
11. I didn't attend any purely for reasons of exhaustion and socializing with locally-based friends.

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

1. {no response}
2. {no response}
3. I think it is critical to understand the methodological question or purpose behind the course. Is it an intellectual question? Is it a practical skill (descriptive bibliography)? Is it a material knowledge skill (papermaking)? This might sound obvious but I think it would have helped me parse the course better.
4. If you have already been thinking about methodological and critical stakes, this is an excellent choice to sharpen your sense of disciplinary and interdisciplinary possibilities.
5. {no response}
6. Listen and learn from your classmates and use the opportunity to think about bibliography as a qualitative science.

7. Don't spend more than a day or two (max.) glancing at the reading. Think carefully about translating your own research across disciplines. {private response}
8. If the course is taught similarly, don't get hung up on the readings; skim as a vague backdrop for course.
9. Only do the readings that interest you. Share a project where feedback from the book community will be most helpful.
10. {no response}
11. Have generosity of spirit.

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

1. Not a single sentence, but genuinely grateful to this community for this week—from MFS to Barbara Heritage, Donna Sy, Claire Reeger, Amanda Nelsen, our followers (Amira Hegazy, Alex Youngman), and commissary staff! You are all so appreciated!
2. {no response}
3. Enlightening.
4. Strenuous, rigorous, and eminently congenial.
5. Inspiring to hang out for a week with young, talented, and passionate scholars.
6. I don't have to be a scholar to think, speak, and act like one.
7. Thanks, as always, to the amazing RBS/UVA staff for a generative and fun week. And please start doing typed evals!!! (My hand hurts from writing.)
8. Totally intellectually stimulating. Buzzing. Electric.
9. Exhausting, but enriching. Also: my colleagues are so brilliant.
10. An interesting, capacious discussion of bibliography as a field.
11. The more I learn, the less I realize I know...and that's the best thing in this world that one can realize.

Student Data

Number of respondents: 11 (of 12)

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

My institution/employer gave me professional leave time: 4 (36.36%)

I am a student or non-year-round employee, with a more flexible summer schedule: 5 (45.45%)

I am retired, and can arrange my own schedule: 1 (9.09%)

My situation does not fit any of the options above: 1 (9.09%)

Who paid your RBS tuition costs?

I paid 100% myself: 1 (9.09%)

My institution/employer paid 100%: 1 (9.09%)

I used a scholarship/fellowship to pay/waive 100%: 8 (72.73%)

My situation does not fit any of the options above: 1 (9.09%)

Who paid your RBS housing expenses?

I paid 100% myself: 3 (27.27%)

My institution/employer paid 100%: 1 (9.09%)

I used a scholarship/fellowship to cover 100%: 7 (63.64%)

Who paid your RBS travel expenses?

I paid 100% myself: 3 (27.27%)

My institution/employer paid 100%: 1 (9.09%)

I used a scholarship/fellowship to cover 100%: 7 (63.64%)

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

Student working toward a/n:

Ph.D./D.Phil: 3 (27.27%)

Professional educator:

Assistant professor: 4 (36.36%)

Full professor: 1 (9.09%)

Book trades:

Antiquarian bookseller: 1 (9.09%)

Other occupations/vocations:

Book collector: 1 (9.09%)

Other: 1 (9.09%)