

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. Yes. They were helpful. Cannot think of additional readings.
2. The pre-course suggested reading was vast and offered a wonderful overview of the course scope. It is also an amazing resource for further study. It would, however, have been helpful to have a few required readings clearly identified.
3. Yes, they were useful; in fact, I would go so far as to say essential for someone new to the subject. Given the level of expertise and discussion in class, anyone entering with no prior knowledge would be left out.
4. The pre-course reading assignments were very useful. Read at your own discretion—if you already know the material represented in the readings, decide whether it's worth it for you to read again.
5. They were useful, though probably too much to be completed in a reasonable time. Perhaps some video previews could be incorporated, especially for courses dealing with objects.
6. The readings were useful, although I will certainly go over some again, now that I have more experience with the material.
7. I had access to only a few of the suggested readings. I supplemented with some more publications specific to my interests. I would have been interested in recommendations for recent, interpretive essays to complement the excellent codicological readings. Also, suggestions of primary source readings are something I would have appreciated!
8. Since I am a specialist in Islamic art, I did not consult any of the general background readings. I did appreciate the more manuscript-specific readings.
9. Yes, the course readings were useful, and I'm glad they were separated into sections because honestly I read the visual and material cultures articles that pertained to my interest and work objectives. The condensed books on Koran and Islamic culture were helpful, too, for a beginner.
10. {private 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. The book was excellent. Not only as a repository of notes, diagrams, and glossary, but also as a guide to the collection in use.
2. The workbook is a wonderful resource that I will be using for a long time! Content was spot on, and supplemented class time.
3. Parts will be useful, other parts less so. I think it's a great idea and could be expanded in anticipation of later reference use.

4. The workbook is nice to have. If you were able to do the readings, though, it's a bit redundant. It will be useful for me after the course because of the bibliography.
5. It looks like it will serve me well in the future.
6. The workbook, complete with the catalog of Lewis O manuscripts, was a godsend.
7. Excellent! A digital copy would also have been useful.
8. The workbook and especially the library catalog are of great value.
9. Yes, I will definitely use and refer back to the list and good bibliography the instructor provided. I appreciated that MSS included diagrams, charts, maps, and a timeline in her workbook, and a list of terms and definitions.
10. The workbook is very appropriate and useful. The contents will be helpful far past the duration of the course.

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

1. One of the best. I felt that I learned a lot and changed my knowledge from theoretical to practical and object-based.
2. N/A
3. A little more ad hoc and graduate seminar-like, but I expect this was partly the result of our having a very gifted and curious mix of people.
4. N/A
5. N/A
6. This was shorter and more focused. Also, the group was smaller (10 instead of 15), and it meant we could all easily see the material.
7. N/A
8. N/A
9. N/A
10. N/A

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. It made all the years of previous study come to life. I feel now that I have a more confident understanding and can bring more "to the game" in future study.
2. This course offered a broad overview of the key aspects of Islamic manuscripts from paper and bindings, to calligraphy, illumination, and illustration. I learned an enormous amount, since I had no prior background in the material—and I'm inspired to keep learning more.
3. The range of literature, and the regional differences to book structure and design aesthetics.
4. I was most interested in the script descriptions and binding techniques, and the instructor covered those a great deal. I have walked away each day with new insights and ideas for projects.
5. The varied sources, periods, and styles analyzed helped to show the types of broad connections that have me thinking about numerous research ideas for the future.
6. This course came at a critical juncture in a new research project, and it has provided me with a clear foundation on which to build.
7. {no response}
8. The most valuable aspect for me was the ability to interact with so many Islamic manuscripts. It was an excellent supplement to my classroom studies, and I think

- I am coming away with a more finely trained eye.
9. Being able to have a hands-on experience with the collection items was invaluable. Not only MSS showing us things and pointing out things, we had the amazing help of Joe Shemtov who facilitated while keeping an eye on everyone's and the objects' safety. I learned a lot from seeing the book construction, current state of wage, and being able to see the same books several times throughout the week. A person cannot ingest a book in one sitting, so being able to revisit an item later in the week was a very effective, helpful method.
 10. {private response}
- 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. I cannot think of anything left out or overlooked.
 2. MSS is a generous, sharp, incredibly learned, and kind instructor. Her erudition is evident in every comment, but even more important, she was able to harness the expertise of the students in the room. The best part was looking at the manuscripts with her, and learning to see and analyze through her eyes.
 3. It was not particularly "introductory," but I was fine with the way it proceeded. I can be responsible for some extra reading and filling in. Most importantly, we used our time to look at manuscripts and that was precious.
 4. The instructor's teaching very much agreed with the promises of the course in the description. I would have liked to learn more about paints, pigments, colors, and inks, but now I know where to look for that information.
 5. Yes, very much so.
 6. **THIS CLASS WAS AWESOME.** Whatever you are paying MSS, double it. She taught non-stop for 8+ hours/day, including answering questions during breaks. She did a brilliant job of sharing her own peerless expertise, and also inviting others to share theirs.
 7. Yes. The course description said no experience was necessary and MSS did an amazing job of creating a comprehensive introduction to the topic. I feared that having no Arabic I would be unable to appreciate the finer points of Arabic calligraphy, but now I can tell naskh from thuluth!
 8. I had hoped this course would delve a bit more into the technical aspects of manuscript production, and less into the visual, but overall I am very satisfied. The course also seemed to focus almost exclusively on the Eastern Islamic world (almost no Ottoman examples), which surprised me, but probably results from the strengths of this collection.
 9. Yes, MSS was very inclusive to our class which was VERY diverse in our educational background, professions, and objectives. Very flexible and adept approach!
 10. Yes, the instructor did help me to acquire the skills promised in the course description—very much so. I suppose I expected more of an art history course...how to tell Persian painting from Timurid, &c., but I perhaps falsely assumed that would be a part of the course.
- 6) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your time here?*

1. Purely personal/pleasurable research and self-education.
2. I will be embarking on a new research project involving Islamic manuscripts, and this course was fundamental to my upcoming sabbatical. I also hope to be able to teach this material in the future.
3. Description, potential acquisition, and assisting faculty and patrons with our holdings.
4. I will use the skills and knowledge acquired here as I do research for my dissertation and in my work with manuscripts and rare books.
5. I hope to incorporate much of what was covered in my own classes and syllabi.
6. I plan to do extensive examination of other Islamicate manuscripts in my area, and write several articles and a book, and to incorporate this new knowledge into my courses.
7. Expand my teaching to more vigorously include Islamic book arts.
8. The skills I've gained here will help me to enhance my study of manuscripts and manuscript material in my curatorial practice as an Islamic art historian.
9. I definitely have more familiarity with material so when I come across items in my institutional collection I feel better prepared to know where to start and what questions to ask. I have also acquired new colleagues who are an email away.
10. I will use the skills I acquired—namely understanding and ascertaining information about a manuscript from close, first-hand examination—in teaching and object-based research.

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

1. Mentally agile, able to handle lots of new information.
2. This is an introductory course, but it would be helpful to have some background with manuscript studies broadly. Having some historical/cultural background would also help, but is definitely not required.
3. The intellectual level is high. I would recommend it for graduate students and above, especially those with the relevant background.
4. The intellectual level of the course could be described as college-level in its requirements, and the discussions we had—an introductory, college-level course. Students, librarians, curators, professors, and teachers could all benefit from this course.
5. Gaining the most from the course would require a fair background in Islamic history.
6. Librarians, curators, students, book dealers, and researchers. People who take this seriously.
7. Anyone with any sustained interest in Islamic book arts. Students brought a wide range of expertise and experience to the classroom that vastly enhanced discussions.
8. I think this course catered toward someone with a background in manuscript studies, but not necessarily in the study of Islamic manuscripts, or the Islamic world.
9. This course was uniquely comprised of its participants so for me, the intellectual quality of MSS, Joe, and my classmates was high, very stimulating, and deeply respectful. I felt as a newcomer to RBS, and this topic, very welcome and comfortable contributing my questions and comments.

10. {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. Handling and viewing manuscripts. The teacher sharing her insights from years of study. Seeing how the manuscripts work in terms of fabrication and paratext.
2. The best moments were discussing individual manuscripts with MSS in a hands-on manner, which is most of what we did. It was thrilling to feel my own eyes learning to discern details that I had not known to think about before.
3. My own ability to recognize manuscript styles and relate them to a region has grown.
4. Our tangents were actually the most notable and fruitful moments—our discussions on bindings, order of script and manuscript production, and painting styles were fascinating and very much “aha” moments.
5. Too many to list, thanks to the varied expertise of the students and teacher.
6. Honestly, getting a week of time with MSS and her enormous expertise—in tandem with the books—was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity (which I would love to repeat).
7. Working with the excellent but under-studied collection at FLP was exciting. We discovered at least three dissertations waiting to be written.
8. Seeing the enthusiasm and passion of the instructor for the manuscripts was really inspiring.
9. That the instructor, although an expert in her field, and accomplished in her own right, was so open and receptive to learning from us, and deftly fielded discussions, arguments, and critiques in lively, timely, respectful, and engaging ways. She never projected a dull moment because she was so engaged with the material and drew us in!
10. Learning from such a terrific scholar and expert on the field was such a gift. She is also a terrific and tireless teacher. The whole week was full of such moments—too numerous to mention.

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

1. Cannot think of anything now.
2. Identifying some required basic readings would perhaps have freed up a period. Also, if we had had some “project” work to follow throughout the week (i.e., work with a single manuscript), that may have cemented things.
3. Some advice added to the reading list that is based on the level of prior knowledge. The list was quite long, and not every student could have benefitted from all of it.
4. This course could have had more codicological teaching when it came to inks, but other than that, it was great. {private response}
5. Please offer a “level II” or advanced course!
6. Perhaps we might each have been able to work closely with a particular manuscript for an afternoon.
7. {no response}
8. I think if it’s going to be an “Introduction to Islamic Manuscripts,” there should be more Ottoman material included.

9. None that I can think of.
 10. Basic fact sheets on the manuscripts we looked at would have been useful. It would have streamlined a lot of time spent looking for shelf marks, asking the instructor to repeat herself, and digging through the workbook.
- 10) *Do you feel that you got your money's worth? Would you recommend the course to others?*
1. Yes. Yes.
 2. Absolutely! I hope MSS teaches a follow-up to this course!! {private response}
 3. I would recommend the class for an advanced student. RBS is a very good value given the quality of instructors and collections.
 4. I was here on a scholarship, so I certainly got more than my money's worth. I would recommend the course to others with the additional advice that they should find someone to pay for it.
 5. Without question.
 6. Yes, but I didn't pay for it. If I had to finance this out of my own pocket, it would be steep (but worth it).
 7. Definitely.
 8. Yes, although I wish there had been a more affordable convenient housing option.
 9. Yes, and yes.
 10. {private response}
- 11) *If your course made any trips outside of the classroom, do you feel that they were time well spent?*
1. Yes, we saw an amazing number of items at Princeton.
 2. Yes, we had a field trip to Princeton that was useful—though disappointing that we could not handle any materials or take pictures.
 3. We visited Princeton, which was wonderful, and this did allow us to discuss the origins of other great collections and use them in different settings.
 4. My course went to my home institution, and I learned things about our collections I didn't know, so I do feel that the trip was time well-spent.
 5. The Princeton trip, while tiring, was very much worth it.
 6. Yes—the Princeton collections were amazing. I do think that we could also have looked at some of the Islamicate manuscripts at Penn, too.
 7. Somewhat. The album leaves at Princeton added a bit. It might also have been interesting to look at Islamic art and put books in the context of the larger visual culture.
 8. The trip to Princeton greatly added to the course overall.
 9. Yes, and Princeton was very organized on both ends, RBS and them.
 10. The course took a trip to Princeton. It was time very well-spent, as we were given access to materials that supplemented the on-site collection.
- 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. Enjoyed the small talks from other departments and learning about the library

- outside of manuscripts.
2. I attended the lecture which was not great. {private response} The distance from the FLP to Penn made evening events difficult. RBS should consider an evening event at FLP. Also, days are long and very intense—it's also nice to have a free evening.
 3. No surprises here. I attended what I needed to.
 4. I attended the Tuesday evening lecture. It was a good use of my time because I learned new things about digitization. I didn't go to the cheese event, but I don't think that means we should get rid of it.
 5. The lecture was a little too narrow in scope.
 6. N/A
 7. {no response}
 8. I went to one of the evening lectures, which I felt was targeted at people highly specialized in manuscript studies (not me).
 9. I appreciated the total commitment and presence of FLP staff interacting and introducing themselves to us, and telling us about what they do here, and not just how we can share ideas and build library bridges.
 10. {private response}

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

1. Should definitely come prepared with the readings.
2. Do some background reading from the amazing bibliography so you can ask questions and take advantage of MSS's incredible knowledge!
3. Same as always; prepare. You get out what you put in.
4. This course is amazingly informative as an intro to Islamic manuscripts. Take it if you've ever wanted to know more about this manuscript tradition.
5. If one does not have much experience with the civilization in question, take full advantage of the advance reading.
6. I think that ten people is better than fifteen. The cohort matters, too: MSS did a great job of assembling a group of interested students who all took the material seriously, but came at it from different perspectives. I learned almost as much from my classmates as from MSS. Working directly with the manuscripts is so critically important, and a reason why RBS is special. It's an intense, tiring week, but I would not trade it.
7. Integrate FLP more into the evening events! All RBS students should get a compelling reason to visit.
8. Bring a sweater! Rare book libraries are cold.
9. Do not be intimidated to take a class outside your expertise of focus, although we had, I felt, much depth in this class, it was as MSS said, instead of "introduction" a "crash course" to Islamic manuscripts. Her ability as an instructor was superb in being able to invite in each student at their level and experience.
10. {private response}

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

1. It was incredible and a singular experience.

2. More please!
3. Books don't need electricity to be electric.
4. Time well-spent with books
Islamic manuscripts are
Fascinating things
5. I was sad to see it end.
6. {no response}
7. M.S.S. + MSS = BOSS
8. A worthwhile experience that you could only have here!
9. ALL BOOKS ALL THE TIME KEEP IT UP KEEP IT GOING
10. Fantastic, worthwhile experience!

Student Data

Number of respondents: 10 (of 10)

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

My institution/employer gave me professional leave time: 3 (30%)

My institution/employer did not give me professional leave; I used paid or vacation days:
1 (10%)

I am self-employed, and can arrange my own schedule: 1 (10%)

I am a student or non-year-round employee, with a more flexible summer schedule:
4 (40%)

My situation does not fit any of the options above: 1 (10%)

Who paid your RBS tuition costs?

I paid 100% myself: 3 (30%)

My institution/employer paid 100%: 2 (20%)

My institution/employer paid part; I paid the rest: 1 (10%)

I used a scholarship/fellowship to pay/waive 100%: 4 (40%)

Who paid your RBS housing expenses?

I paid 100% myself: 4 (40%)

My institution/employer paid 100%: 2 (20%)

My institution/employer paid part; I paid the rest: 1 (10%)

I used a scholarship/fellowship to cover 100%: 1 (10%)

I stayed with friends/family, or stayed in my own home and commuted: 2 (20%)

Who paid your RBS travel expenses?

I paid 100% myself: 4 (40%)

My institution/employer paid 100%: 2 (20%)

My institution/employer paid part; I paid the rest: 2 (20%)

I used a scholarship/fellowship to cover 100%: 1 (10%)

I live locally, and had no travel expenses: 1 (10%)

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

Library disciplines:

Conservator/binder/preservation librarian: 1 (10%)

Curator: 1 (10%)

Special collections librarian: 1 (10%)

Student working toward a/n:

Ph.D./D.Phil: 2 (20%)

Professional educator:

Lecturer/adjunct: 1 (10%)

Assistant professor: 2 (20%)

Associate professor: 1 (10%)

Other occupations/vocations:

Other: 1 (10%)