

Narrative Evaluations

1) Do you have any practical suggestions for improvements to RBS's online logistics?

1. Having now taken two courses in the virtual format, I have to say I don't know if online teaching lends itself well to the goals of RBS - interactivity has been lacking, and I feel like one really misses the hands-on elements of studying book history. The course facilitators have been great surmounting the obstacles associated with online formats but it still doesn't feel entirely worth the course price.
2. {no response}
3. Zoom and Gather.town work well on the whole. My classes have left the Zoom open during the break (everyone turns cameras off) and this works extremely well; I've just learned that this is not the official RBS policy but I suggest a change. It's disconcerting to have the chat suddenly disappear and to have to sign back in, sometimes elaborately. Gather.town is hit and miss for me--frequently socially and/or technologically overwhelming; frequently a lovely place to chat. I think it depends more on outside factors. However, my best experiences there have been when the teacher offered a specific time to chat in Gather.town, or there were other specific activities planned (including but not limited to the evening lecture). This is more work for the teacher but it was the only class that seemed to successfully have a community conversation outside of Zoom.
4. I did have some connection difficulties but Neal Curtis was right on it and helped tremendously.
5. {no response}
6. I had smooth sailing with the online logistics...
7. Gather.town.town is not an effective use of time- whatsoever. We need to get serious here. Especially given the subject matter ...

2) How would you describe your encounters with RBS staff?

1. Staff have been extremely friendly and helpful. Quick to answer emails and help out with enquiries or fix problems.
2. Excellent. Camille Davis did a wonderful job keeping us up to date and informed.
3. Minimal but always great! Camille is one of the best course assistants I've seen--so engaged and excellent at managing the chat and actively contributing.
4. My encounters with RBS staff were limited. I had a great conversation with Neal and he was very helpful and generous!
5. {no response}
6. Lovely!
7. positive

3) *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?*

1. I'm glad there is a lecture during every week a course takes place. I did not participate in any of the social events.
2. {no response}
3. Evening lectures are great. Would recommend more structured activities on Gather.town (by class) at times that work for the teacher--otherwise it's hard to get into.
4. Having been at RBS in person and not being the best consumer of online opportunities, I found the variety of options to "meet" people did not seem much like an in person visit.
5. {no response}
6. Attended Marina Rustow's brilliant lecture -- definitely a good use of my time! Couldn't get my head around Gather.town Town; I knew I'd hate being a cartoon that I didn't draw myself... next year in real life!
7. no Gather.town please

4) *Were the pre-course reading assignments useful? Are there any readings that you would like to see added or removed in future years?*

1. I personally love course readings but many of the PDFs mentioned for this course were not made available. Reading the essay by Schomburg from *The New Negro* was beneficial, but I already owned a copy.
2. The pre-course reading assignments were very useful, particularly Arthur Schomburg's *The Negro Digs up his Past*
3. The readings were all very useful and very humane--a suitable amount for the course and very manageable. They gave concrete information on the material covered and suggested wider implications.
4. My schedule did not allow me to read everything suggested but I will continue to acquire readings on Black history, literature and art.
5. {no response}
6. I found *Unsung: Unheralded Narratives of American Slavery and Abolition* terrific (though one of the least legible covers I've *ever* seen), and totally enjoyed Arthur Schomburg's essay *The Negro Digs Up His Past*. I think the white paper from the 2014 conference on Black collections could have been useful if it had received any discussion, but the truth is that aside from Gaskell in Des Bib, I've never encountered *any* discussion of the readings in any RBS class -- it's really a shame as I inevitably arrive ready to talk, and then there's no opportunity.
7. {no response}

5) *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 video shown in the last session was fantastic. I feel like this course was super slideshow heavy though. I learned a lot about the Schomburg Center but not much about the practicalities of archiving African American collections more broadly as I had hoped.
2. The Schomburg Center and the Lapidus Center have excellent online resources. The presentations from the director and curators exemplified their passion and I want to visit soon.
3. The course workbook was very helpful in navigating the week.
4. {no response}
5. {no response}
6. There was no course workbook for this class, and given its abbreviated introductory nature I don't think one was called for. I am very glad to have a copy of *Unsung*.
7. This was much more of a 'workshop' than a 'course'

6) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your RBS course? Did you walk away with any “aha!” moments, new ideas, or project plans?*

1. I would like to visit the Center.
2. Working with our special collections, and limited items pertaining to African Americans, I found the dynamic ways in which staff presented material and encouraged research and interaction very helpful.
3. Approaching an unfamiliar institution as a teacher or researcher can be so daunting, even with a plethora of public information available, without a human guide to curate, explain, wave, smile, laugh, etc., as well as to dig deep into their expertise and experience and that of their colleagues to share information and answer questions beyond the public facing website. This course was invaluable for providing all of that and more (including some fabulous objects!).
4. Until Covid my husband and I came to NYC every year to see theater. I hope the next time we come I will be able to make appointments with some staff at the Schomburg to talk about specific topics.
5. {no response}
6. I hope to use what I learned, which was largely about the holdings of the individual Schomburg collections and their huge and rich array of outreach activities, to help readers at my collection, and for future exhibition plans.
7. I was interested in finding out about the fellowships BUT then was rather disappointed when I looked over the highly privileged parameters for eligibility...

7) *Did the instructors help you to acquire all the skills and information promised in the course description? Did you learn what you had hoped to learn?*

1. I honestly feel like the course was advertised as a more practical use of the Schomburg Center as a case study for archival practice but what we got was a roster of meeting the staff who often repeated material about the Center's offerings.
2. Yes, absolutely
3. Yes--a thorough introduction to the vast research and teaching opportunities available at this collection and institution.

4. The course was "advertised" as an introduction to the Schomburg and it definitely did that. If we had been on site I think there would have been more opportunity to "chat" about some specifics. I found the online environment didn't really provide that. I went to one presentation and there were 10 or more participants at the beginning. At the end there were 2 and I was 1. Much of my experience at RBS was in talking informally with other students, my own faculty members and those who were teaching other classes. That informal communication has been very useful over the 10 courses I've taken. I would love to see this course offered in a slightly different format onsite so question and answer could flow more seamlessly.
5. {no response}
6. Yes. My sense of what the Schomburg holds and how to get access to it is much better informed now.
7. {no response}

8) *Are there other ways in which the course could have been improved?*

1. Way more interactivity and activities!
2. The only way for improvement is being able to be on site but all of the curators presented holdings in such a way to give us an overview yet entice us to come and visit.
3. {deleted response}
4. I would have liked more information on how the Schomburg acquires materials, their search strategies, their experience with "the trade" on these topics and how they prioritize who they collect.
5. {no response}
6. 1) I had the sense that there wasn't much discussion amongst the curators beforehand, as person after person told us that there were five divisions (Photographs and Prints, MIRS, MARB, Art and Artifacts, and JBH) of Schomburg plus the Lapidus Center... and I would have been really happy if, in addition to the general introduction, each curator had chosen some specific aim or question to address, just to give direction to conversation afterward. Actually, Michelle Commander's framing of her talk with poems of Lucille Clifton did just that (and I'm always happy to see Clifton's work getting the love it deserves). Also, all of the stuff we saw -- the photographs, the paintings, textiles, artifacts, and other stuff from A and A, the screening of *From these Roots* -- was wonderful, even in the mediated way we saw it. And I got a lot of ideas for books to read from Michelle Commander especially. 2) A general note for any class taught on Zoom: I was appalled at how most people kept their cameras off. Is this normal? It seemed unbelievably rude to me and I kept wanting to say something, but didn't want to sound bossy or prissy. But it was really a problem. A cloak of invisibility ensures that there won't be much discussion, and while there was some, it was always the same people talking... Also, in general, it would have been great to have gone around with introductions. We were encouraged to put these in the chat, but no one did. Setting aside fifteen minutes or even ten would have been worth it, I think. Again, this is a problem that surely wouldn't have come up if the class had taken place in the flesh.
7. {no response}

9) *Who might benefit the most from taking this RBS course?*

1. People with less knowledge of African American archives.
2. Curators, and special collections staff who are interested in community outreach
3. Curators, librarians, researchers, teachers, and anyone interested in the topic!
4. I think anyone working with 18th, 19th and 20th Century collections which cover history, literature and social justice areas. Particularly anyone who works at or teaches at a college or university level.
5. {no response}
6. Librarians and curators who have no idea that the Schomburg Center exists, but who live close enough to visit.
7. {no response}

10) *Do you feel that you got your money's worth?*

1. Sorry, no. A lot of the lectures felt like the way the Schomburg would advertise themselves to anyone at free virtual events. Nothing felt specifically RBS related, nor exclusive.
2. Yes
3. Yes! This was such an enjoyable, informative, and restorative week to spend time with such lovely people (curators, students) and to learn so much from their expertise.
4. Yes but I would have paid more for a longer class and a chance to get into details like antiquarian dealers the Schomburg uses. I have a major endowment that can support acquisitions related to 19th Century Black Literature and there is some wiggle room for Black History. Finding materials well described, reasonably priced and little known writers is a constant challenge. Any help I can get from the people whose heritage I am trying to document in the most empathetic way is the most valuable I can get.
5. {no response}
6. Yes.
7. Absolutely not! I was happy to hear a little more about the centre but frankly, it was not really a positive or insightful learning experience. Would not recommend.

11) *On a scale of 1–10 with 10 being most likely, how likely are you to recommend this course to others?*

1. 6
2. 10
3. 8
4. 5
5. 10
6. 9
7. 0

12) *If your course had any virtual field trips or guest speakers, do you feel that they were time well spent?*

1. {no response}
2. {no response}
3. n/a
4. Not part of the course I was taking but I need to say that Marina Rustow's lecture was excellent and I hope that this might be recorded and available in the future. Is that possible?
5. {no response}
6. I WISH!!! that we'd had field trips! And I'm making one this weekend to see the exhibitions again.
7. {no response}

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. Come prepared with questions about a collection, question, artist/author, or object that interests you!
4. {no response}
5. {no response}
6. Wait till you can take it IRL.
7. {no response}

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

1. Trying hard to adapt to the circumstances of an online format.
2. {no response}
3. {no response}
4. Festina Lente
5. {no response}
6. Mural/I wish I could see you/Suriname cloth/I wish I could touch you/Book/At least I can read you!
7. money wasted. sorry.

Student Data

Number of Respondents: 7 (of 12)

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

1. My institution/employer gave me professional leave time.
2. My institution/employer gave me professional leave time.

3. I am a student or non-year-round employee, with a more flexible schedule.
4. My institution/employer gave me professional leave time.
5. My situation does not fit any of the options above.
6. My institution/employer gave me professional leave time.
7. I am a student or non-year-round employee, with a more flexible schedule.

Who paid your RBS tuition costs?

1. I used a scholarship/fellowship to pay/waive all of my tuition expenses.
2. My institution/employer paid 100% of my tuition costs.
3. My institution/employer paid 100% of my tuition costs.
4. I paid 100% of my tuition costs myself.
5. My institution/employer paid 100% of my tuition costs.
6. My institution/employer paid 100% of my tuition costs.
7. My situation does not fit any of the options above.

Not including this year, how many RBS courses have you attended?

1. This is my first course.
2. This is my first course.
3. 9
4. 9
5. This is my first course.
6. 8
7. This is my first course.

Which of the following best describes your current occupation?

1. Other Occupations/Vocations: Post-doctoral fellow/researcher/scholar
2. Library discipline: Special collections librarian
3. Professional educator: Other
4. Library discipline: Curator
5. Professional educator: Assistant professor
6. Library discipline: Curator
7. Student working towards a/an: Ph.D./D.Phil.