

Narrative Course Evaluations

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

1. All readings were useful. As always, I struggled to get through all of them but they helped provide context and background.
2. {private response}
3. Yes! The readings provided me a basic vocabulary and rudimentary understanding to engage in the course more fully, without feeling completely overwhelmed.
4. {private response}
5. {private response}
6. The pre-course reading assignments provided a great general grounding for the course.
{private response}
7. Yes. The pre-course readings were engaging and not too heavy. They provided a good introduction to both intellectual history and the techniques of production.
8. They were useful, although could have been more targeted. Although the Blunt has some flaws, it is still probably the best overview. The Twyman is a good introduction/review of printing techniques over history. I would move the Bridson to the “Browsing” category for its fine details but difficult to grasp the big picture. I think the Oak Spring catalogs could be considered as “almost required” – they have a lot of good stuff!
9. Yes, they were useful in allowing the course to go deeper into topics knowing we all had those texts in common. Perhaps a text that melds theory with materiality would help ground the many questions about empire and extraction ... though it is possible that text will have to come out of the scholars who attended this course. One of our colleagues focused on East Asian books had a few suggestions that they emailed, but I also realize those materials are covered in other RBS courses.
10. Yes, the readings provided a useful foundation for learning about the history of botanical illustration.
11. Yes, they are useful. Probably to add recent publications on non-Western materials in the bibliography.
12. Reading assignments were useful because it's important to have background in illustration practices and printing. Previous courses were helpful for background.
13. {no response}
14. Blunt was a bit much, but I loved the other two. But, I take Roger's point about how

canon-making Blunt was (is?), and so I see why he must be included. It does seem, however, that we made little reference to or use of the reading in class, so perhaps it could all be considered optional/suggested?

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. Love the workbook. Especially love the checklist of items we viewed over the course of the week.
2. {private response}
3. The course workbook is useful both as a quick reference to key concepts and terms but will also serve as an excellent resource with its thorough bibliography and most importantly, the list of books and materials that were viewed during each session. With precious time to view so many wonderful books, listing them in the workbook allowed for quick note taking at the time and will help in matching photos to the books after the course. Also, viewing and handling the examples of physical objects in printmaking was helpful in connecting and fully appreciating the process and people involved in producing these books.
4. The workbook is great – it's so nice to have the items listed out so you can easily take notes and look up items after the course. I also like the quotations from contemporary letters and works that highlight some of what we're learning.
5. Having the list of items we're seeing each day is really useful, and a great place to take notes. I also like the quotations from contemporary letters and texts that really highlight what some authors and printers are dealing with.
6. The workbook information provided key descriptions of book illustration processes and the explanations were enormously helpful in understanding their differences. It was fantastic to have full information for all the rare books we encountered compiled in one place, as well as room for notes! I also really appreciated the special touch of organizing the course bibliography by groups of interest in addition to the regular alphabetized order. It would have also been excellent if each of the course lectures could have come with a hand-out/page in the workbook to include what was covered in those lectures as it was sometimes hard to keep up with the amount of information coming our way.
7. The collection at the Oak Spring Garden Foundation's library is exemplary. All content was relevant to the lectures, and, in several cases, comprised objects that can't be found elsewhere.
8. These were very helpful, although I would have benefited from receiving the materials before class began to become familiar with the structure and content. I was a bit lost on the first morning. Based on past RBS classes I know that I will refer back to the workbook, especially having the .PDF version now with links.

9. Absolutely, the workbook and additional sources handed out were helpful both professionally in terms of what we were learning but also pedagogically, always smart to have primary source incorporation modeled in teaching. I will definitely use the materials after the course and have already begun to color code the bibliography for institutional library purchase requests and personal library additions. It made the library sessions and the massive volume of material covered much easier to follow, having the checklist of each book in that packet (with space for note taking).
 10. Yes, the content was useful, especially the bibliography. I plan to refer to the bibliography frequently in the future.
 11. Yes, the workbook is useful and will be useful for my future research.
 12. The course workbook was excellent and necessary, particularly the listing of all the books we would be examining during each session. That will be something I will refer to often after the course, especially my notes next to each entry. It also included our schedule of the location for each session, since we were located in different buildings on the Oak Spring property. I also appreciated the copies of an article about the history of botanical classification distributed by PC. It is the best summary I have ever seen on that topic.
 13. {no response}
 14. Yes, the book lists and other course materials are extremely valuable, and I will use them in the future.
- 3) *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 learned so much and all of it will contribute to my day-to-day work.
 2. {private response}
 3. In the immediate future, I will integrate some of the historic and cultural concepts and technical aspects from the course to my current courses, invited lectures, and sessions with students. I walk away with a cadre of targeted questions about the history of botanical illustration and the people involved. Luckily, the course and instructors provided resources to start exploring these questions. In the next year, I plan to develop a class for botanical art and illustration students providing them with a glimpse of the tradition they continue.
 4. {no response}
 5. {no response}
 6. I can't wait to process all that I learned about botanical illustration and botanical books from this week and to use this knowledge to reassess some of the key objects of my current research project. I went into the course wanting to have a firm grounding in the general practices of botanical illustration (important practitioners in the field, key moments of development and transition in the practice, an understanding of the challenges of botanical illustration, &c.), but I feel like I walked away with all this and

- more. Most of my "aha!" moments came from the comments of my fellow, brilliant classmates. Our course instructors were especially thoughtful in bringing together a class with a diverse set of interests and this really came out in every session as peoples' questions and comments completely reframed the way I was seeing the books we looked at together. What the botanist saw completely differed from what the art historian saw, for example, and the conversations these moments engendered were among some of the most instructive to me.
7. Knowledge about these materials is ripe for comparison across cultural contexts. In the future, I would like to do more with comparative histories of *materia medica* and other forms of botanical illustration in my own teaching.
 8. Definitely a few "aha!" moments. I teach about my library's collection of older botanical illustrations, and I have more tools to make this interesting to a general as well as student audience. Especially valuable is the biographical information; I find telling the stories of the people behind the books the most successful way of teaching. I was surprised by the value of the illustrating lesson on Tuesday afternoon. I had been dreading that part of the course, but Lara Call Gastinger made it instructive and fun.
 9. What I learned at RBS will directly inform one of the big projects I am currently working on - I'll be revising some sections of the whole book project based on this new knowledge and I will also be composing an entirely new chapter focused more specifically on the botanical illustration and *florilegia* genres. Plus, this course helped me see abundant connections between a previous stand-alone project on diagram and the ordering of a botanical empire in books, so I guess that was a series of "aha!" moments which will hopefully generate a fresh new project. When I posed my specific research questions to the instructors and had engaging conversations, that helped me see my own research program more clearly, so I think this course helped me focus my work in a way that has been impossible as a busy, early career scholar balancing teaching, service, and research. I also teach with rare books whenever I can, so I also picked up some pro-tips on how to do that effectively.
 10. Since I did not know very much about botanical illustration, the course provided a useful foundation of knowledge. I am particularly interested in the work of women illustrators and look forward to researching that more in the future.
 11. Yes, maybe not for now, but seeing new materials always inspire new ideas.
 12. As a collector, I will see many books in my collection in a new way. Some of the books in the Oak Spring Collection we examined are unique or the best of the best, which was a thrill to see. All will inform my collecting, and some will give me background for writing about American botanical books that I have been planning. I was particularly struck by a point made by RG about the books available in digital archives.
 13. {no response}
 14. I think I had nothing but "aha!" moments. I will use these skills in my writing and research, but also in my approach to nature and the natural world. The "perpetual journal" as presented by Lara Call Gastinger is a practice I hope to take up.

4) *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. Yes! And more!
2. Yes.
3. Broadly, yes! With such an ambitious course attempting to integrate art, science, print making and publishing for a collection of students with a wide range of knowledge bases, a few of the promised aspects were not as well highlighted as I had hoped for. Yes, (and more importantly) I feel confident and absolutely inspired to delve into those areas on my own.
4. {private response}
5. {no response}
6. The instructors were a dream team: one book expert, one botanical expert, and two art historians (while Megan McNamee was technically a guest lecturer, her presence and expertise throughout the course were fantastic and I hope she'll be included as a full-time instructor in future iterations of the course as her contributions were invaluable!) Much like architectural blueprints, botanical illustrations contain layers of meaning and take time to learn how to properly "see" and "decode" them. I feel like this class really taught me that—taught me how to see that what I was seeing in botanical illustrations was so much more than pictures of plants. They contain not only social and cultural histories, but histories about the conjoined evolutions of science, imperialism, and colonialism. Of course, I wish the course could have been twice as long as we only scratched the surface on so many things, but after taking the course I feel much more confident and better set up to look at botanical illustration on my own and to seek out continued knowledge in this field.
7. {no response}
8. They did and I did. This is a large topic and – of course – the instructors had to make choices, but they did a good job of providing information for the range of student interests. For subjects that were of special interest to me, I felt free to ask the questions for the deeper feedback I wanted.
9. Yes, the instructors were brilliant and very patient in answering questions and presented a ton of information over the week. What I learned exceeded my expectations and sparked even more ideas. The one botanist we had in our class was also extremely important in providing some of the info I hoped to learn (a science-based approach to the use of illustration) and our extended bibliography will help me fill in other blanks.
10. Yes, the instructors were great. Although the emphasis on printing techniques was useful, I had hoped to have more focus on the social and cultural impact of botanical illustration. I would have also liked more attention to the relationship between women and botanical illustration. What kind of lives did women botanical illustrators lead?

How did they construct a sense of identity in relation to the natural world? Can we view botanical illustrations as a kind of feminist art?

11. Yes. Although due to the time limit, we cannot cover anything we wanted to talk about, but I am glad I can reach them after class.
12. Absolutely.
13. {no response}
14. I have never had book illustration explained so clearly and so well. RG is a master, and Megan McNamee is also so helpful in explaining these processes. I could've used a little more on the botany bits – I loved PC's presentation, and it might have been great to hear more from him?

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

1. Avoid PowerPoint slide sessions in a darkened room after lunch! The class improved once the instructors figured out how to organize the library sessions so that students had time to view the books, and, when appropriate, handle them ourselves. Most of us are already trained in handling procedures and with the additional guidance and watchful eyes of the instructors I think we can all be trusted.
2. {private response}
3. Generally, no, or at least not once the logistics for viewing the books was settled on. Having two or three students rotate in groups created opportunity for contemplation, self-testing (woodcut or intaglio?), and a great exchange about the objects with other students. {private response}
4. {private response} This is more of an advanced RBS course, and I loved the variety of disciplines and specialties that made up our class. Because each student brought such expertise, it would be great to incorporate that into the course in some way. There is so much learning to be done not only from the instructors, but from each other, too.
5. {no response}
6. While our recommended readings provided a broad overview to the history of botanical illustration, I wished that at least the course's first session of the first day could have been devoted to re-articulating some of this history through the lens of our expert instructors. While it was great that we dove right into the "meat" of the course, it felt like a bit of a scattered entry into the subject at first and it was hard to get my bearings on how everything we were learning fit into the broader narrative. This really started to resolve itself once we got to day 2 and started following a more chronological progression of things, but day 1 was a bit overwhelming. That said, however, I thought it ended up working surprisingly GREAT having the botanical illustrator, Lara Call Gaster, visit with us on the first day. I think we all learned a lot about the more technical aspects and challenges of illustrating from our time with her and we mobilized our first-hand experience of drawing/observing plants in so many of our subsequent sessions.

7. {no response}
8. The faculty and the Oak Spring Garden Foundation staff had some trouble with the mechanics of displaying example books in the Library's Book Room. What worked best for me was having all the students sit down while the instructor talked to each book with the images projected on the screen above. This allowed for better note taking. After each book is presented in this way, have the class divide up in an appropriate number of small groups to visit each "station" for better viewing and further input from the faculty or the Oak Spring Garden Foundation staff. Having everyone gather around a book while the instructor explained was awkward and difficult for note taking. Another thing that would be helpful would be better chairs. Those in the Book Room looked nice but were not comfortable. While not elegant, padded folding chairs would be more comfortable and take less room.
9. More time to look closely at the books would have improved the course. I appreciate the many logistics and stewardship concerns, and yet all attendees are highly trained at handling rare books, so it was sometimes disappointing to be at a remove from the very objects we were there to see and learn with. The rapid timer system was clever and yet perhaps longer periods of looking at less might have its benefit at least some of the time. Alas, I will just have to apply to come back to see more of the collection!
10. A little more time in the mornings would have been nice. I would have liked to start the sessions a little later, perhaps at 9:00 or 9:30 a.m.
11. Maybe for this specific course, give a tour of the library, garden, and gallery at the beginning, so that the students can understand the context of the collection better.
12. It would have been helpful to receive the Vade Mecum and workbook at the gathering on the first night so we could get to know the other course participants and what would be covered in the course before classes began. Also, for this location, a little schematic map of the location of buildings we would be in would have been helpful.
13. {no response}
14. The deep dive into Bartram did not really work for me. I do not think that the focus on one person and just a few illustrations was worth the time it took. I appreciate AM very much, and I hope that in future years, she can participate with some broader content.

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

1. Any librarian, scholar, collector, or other person with any interest in botany, illustration, book history, &c.
2. Anyone with an interest in the topic and especially with an interest in (ahem) cross-pollination of prior knowledge across periods and cultures. {private response}
3. Anyone who's research or collections touch on botanical art and illustrations.
4. Our class was made up of art historians, librarians, a collector, and a botanist, and having this diversity made for excellent discussion. I can see historians, as well as

- museum professionals and archivists working in natural history or botanical collections benefiting as well.
5. {no response}
 6. While the instructors kept much of the information general and digestible, it did really feel like this was a course designed for students with a vested interest in the subject matter and with long-term engagement with the subject. The level of knowledge to do with botanical illustration across the students was high coming into the course. This produced wonderful cross-disciplinary conversations and also a space to ask both high-level and more basic-level questions. However, I think someone with no background in book history or the history of botanical books may feel slightly adrift in the course.
 7. Anyone with an interest in botanical illustration, especially in the European and North American traditions. Those with no prior knowledge in this area might find some content difficult to engage with.
 8. Librarians with significant historical botanical or horticultural collections for certain. Current day botanical artists and illustrators. Art historians. Botanists with an interest in illustration. Private collectors of botanical and horticultural books. Antiquarian booksellers.
 9. Any librarian, botanist, botanical illustrator, or scholar curious about the history of representing plants and what print process means for visualizing science and colonialism. Any collector interested in fine press techniques would also learn a lot via the lens of plants and the many genres that warranted their illustration over the centuries.
 10. The course is great for someone looking to obtain an overview of the field of botanical illustration. The teachers were engaging and very nice.
 11. Anyone interested in botanical illustrations.
 12. {no response}
 13. {no response}
 14. People who are interested in the history of botany and of book illustration.

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

1. Yes.
2. Yes! {private response}
3. Yes! The course was intensive, informative, and illuminating and delivered in a beautiful (and flower-filled) setting.
4. I felt that the board and housing cost was reasonable before I got there, and once I arrived, I was very impressed by how nice my room was. And everyone—including me—was raving about the food the entire time. When you factor in the quality of the room and board, the expense was more than reasonable.
5. {no response}

6. Absolutely. This course—a brilliant marriage of RBS and the Oak Spring Garden Foundation—felt like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. To study the exceptional materials of the Oak Spring Garden Foundation’s collections in the gorgeous setting of the Foundation completely added to the experience and the ability to immerse oneself in the subject. While the price for accommodations felt slightly high on top of the tuition, the accommodations were absolutely stunning, and the meals provided on site by the exceptionally talented chef were incredible and not soon to be forgotten.
 7. {no response}
 8. Yes. I received much benefit by just being at the Oak Spring Garden Foundation amongst the gardens, the farm, and the setting. Being exclusively with the course faculty and staff for the four days was especially valuable – little to no outside distractions! I was also inspired by the mission of the Oak Spring Garden Foundation, an unexpected benefit.
 9. Yes.
 10. Yes. The accommodations were wonderful, and the food was incredible. I’m glad we got to look at so many rare books featuring botanical illustrations. The gardens and grounds are also gorgeous and inspiring. The course gave me a lot to think about, and I look forward to doing future research in the field. The week felt like a fairy tale, and I was sad to return to the “real world” when it was over!
 11. Yes.
 12. Yes! In addition to the learning, it was a privilege to be immersed in the Oak Spring Garden Foundation and Library. It was a memorable experience.
 13. {no response}
 14. I do, thanks.
- 8) *If your course had any virtual field trips or guest speakers, do you feel that they were time well spent?*
1. N/A
 2. {private response}
 3. The guest lecturers were integral to the course. Megan McNamee’s lecture kicked off the course providing the contextual lens and background for the rest of the course. Lara Call Gastinger’s demonstration turned illustration as an object into a process emphasizing the observational and drawing skills required as well as the sheer time involved in producing a piece.
 4. {private response}
 5. {no response}
 6. AM’s contributions were the only virtual contributions to our course and her presence and comments were valuable. The lecture on Bartram was fantastic; however, within the much more conversational tone of the rest of the course, it would’ve been great if this presentation could have also been more casual/discussion based. I was incredibly

- impressed with the rare book session that followed her lecture, where she was able to walk us through a selection of books to do with her research project (the work, inspiration, and legacies of Bartram). This must've been an enormous effort on behalf of AM and the librarians at the Oak Spring Garden Foundation, but it was absolutely worth it. It was such a focused, enriching session even though AM couldn't be with us in person.
7. {no response}
 8. There was one virtual speaker, but that was not intentional, and I would not recommend it for future presentations of the course. It is vital to have all the faculty present for both the formal teaching session and the less formal social times.
 9. Yes, our botanical illustrator guest provided an incredible workshop to help us see plants more clearly and learn the tenets of their depiction. The intermingling of science and aesthetics plus the role of relationship between the plant-subject and observer, all opened my eyes and highlighted the pervasive historical problem between the general and the particular so often debated in botanical images. Plus, it was meditative and refreshing.
 10. Yes.
 11. Yes, but I do wish all the speakers could be there in person.
 12. The class by a botanical artist was a wonderful addition, helping me see flowers and plants in a new way. It was great to have the guided drawing which gave me insight into how botanical art is and was produced. Having Megan McNamee, who taught about medieval manuscripts and added comment to other topics, was great. Since all our meals as well as classes were with the instructors as well as the students, it was a continuous learning experience.
 13. {no response}
 14. The time with Lara Call Gastinger was amazing.
- 9) *Do you have any additional thoughts or advice for anyone considering taking this course in a future year?*
1. The site is beautiful. Be prepared to enjoy the outdoors and the kind and generous staff and the INCREDIBLE food. I'm still thinking about the meals. Bring sun and tick protection. The instructors were all fantastic. As always with RBS they are incredible experts, generous with their knowledge and passion for the subject.
 2. {no response}
 3. This evaluation is focused on the instructors and the formal aspects of the course. However, half of what I learned or will take away comes from the informal conversations with the students and instructors. If you are new to herbals, book making, and/or botany, read the required readings before the course, and if possible, glance over a few of the other suggested readings in your area(s) of interest. And watching a few videos on printmaking will not go a miss.

4. My advice is to make sure that you have a project or research idea in mind before attending this course, as you'll get much more out of it. And if you're unfamiliar with the general history of botanicals, herbals, and/or *florilegia*, then you really need to do your required reading to ensure that you'll be able to keep up during the course.
5. {no response}
6. {no response}
7. {no response}
8. I would recommend that students allow for a day or so after the class with few distractions to decompress and think through everything learned while adjusting back to the day-to-day world. Having a day ahead of time would be helpful, too. If you have a botanical illustration collection, make sure you have a good grasp of what you have in it. Don't rely on accessing materials by the internet – download as much as you need!
9. {no response}
10. {no response}
11. {no response}
12. For anyone interested in botanical books or gardens or book history, it is a dream come true.
13. {no response}
14. {no response}

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

1. Botany in the garden and in the library, beauty and learning inside and out, with amazing people, meals, and of course, books.
2. {no response}
3. Phenomenal!
4. {no response}
5. {no response}
6. This was a magical week.
7. {no response}
8. Garden library
Fresh food, old books, together
Ideas blossom.
9. Generous colleagues, enthusiastic instructors, and unmatched conversation in an absolutely gorgeous environment.
10. It's a unique and beautiful experience that you will never forget!
11. Always fun to look at rare books in person!
12. It was a privileged experience.
13. {no response}
14. Old books, new buddies, and timeless botany – who could ask for anything more?!?!