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H-190: An Environmental History of the Book
4–9 August, 2024, Chicago, Illinois

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. I thought the two readings were useful, but could probably have been selected from, say, a few chapters. Maybe the Michael Wamer review should be assigned pre-reading.
2. {private response}
3. Very useful! Great background for the course and I loved that we got to speak to both authors about their books.
4. Yes. I would have been happy to have more varied but shorter readings, e.g., bits of books.
5. Yes, these were very relevant and helpful readings. I'm glad I got the opportunity to learn from these authors.
6. Yes! I especially appreciated that we Zoomed with the authors for an even richer discussion.
7. The authors for the suggested texts actually Zoomed into the class to answer questions, so I wish that I had been better prepared for that opportunity.
8. Yes, but hard to get, and I wasn't able to complete them in advance. It was great to have both authors join via Zoom and talk about their work!
9. They were—although some scans circulated before the course would have been helpful. I think, personally, it was the right amount—best not to overload before the course.
10. Yes, they were helpful and extremely applicable to the course content. Adding Joshua Calhoun's "Nature of the Page" could be a good addition.
11. Both texts were very useful.
12. Thought-provoking materials, but I was unsure when reading them how they would be used/important for the class.

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. Materials were distributed too late to be looked at before arriving on Sunday of the RBS class week. Otherwise, the course materials were very well thought out and will be a resource to continue to look at later.
2. {no response}
3. Yes, love the updated readings list that Angela Wachowich has been compiling. It will be very useful.
4. The resources provided on Canvas were great, and I will be downloading everything for future reading.
5. I thought that all the materials used in the class were very useful and interesting. It was such a great opportunity that we got to meet with some of the authors of the texts we read. I will continue to think about these topics well after the course.
6. {no response}

7. The many guest lectures and field trips were outstanding and gave us a broad, rich experience.
8. Great collections prepared for use! Very fun and engaging. Great talks and tours. These were the "course materials" to me.
9. The material on Canvas looks good and I will certainly consult it after the course. To repeat a part from earlier, it would have been great to have access to the materials a little earlier.
10. N/A
11. The teaching materials were exceptional, memorable, highly appropriate, and very useful. I'm certain I will use these same materials in the future.
12. I'll refer to the syllabus and reading in the future. There was no workbook or distributed teaching materials.

3) *Which aspects of the course were most intriguing and relevant for you as an individual? Did you walk away with any new insights, ideas, or project plans?*

1. RBS recreates the experience and energy of being in graduate school—having a community of academics reading the same works, though often taking them in disparate and creative directions.
2. The conversation/lecture from Dipesh Chakrabarty. It was helpful for unpacking how we have framed human history separately from natural/planetary history, and I will use that framing to think about sustainability, preservation, and more.
3. Materials and how they relate to our use of the book, how it can be thought of and treated as a historic object and product of society. It gives me a lot to think about in my own job and research. Other students drew connections that were interesting and new to me.
4. I enjoyed both the time with the collections and the great talks. It's helped direct my thinking for research writing and a grant application. The curatorial staff were also extremely generous with their expertise.
5. I liked the focus on animal, vegetable, and mineral, and the incorporation of hands-on activities in the preservation lab. This course was a lot of fun and I'm so grateful I got to take it. Yes, it helped me to conceptualize a course I'm teaching on animals, and it also helped me to think about the physical nature and production of the books I analyze in my book project.
6. I really enjoyed all of the guest speakers and field trips, like to the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, where we heard from experts on materials like clay tablets, papyrus, as well as photography and conservation (ink making was a hit!). I plan to incorporate what I learned into my teaching.
7. Yes! Every day I felt inspired to take up new research projects. I have many new secondary texts to read as well.
8. Working in academic libraries, some of the book history content was already familiar to me. I loved hearing how others engaged the topics, and the best parts for me were the times we connected to environment and nature most directly.
9. The broad categories we were thinking through helped the course inform my own thinking on a whole range of things. I'm still processing everything I've learned, but I know I'll be having "Eureka!" moments for months to come thanks to this course.
10. Most intriguing was class discussion, the invited Zoom talks with scholars, and the exposure to diverse materials in the classroom. Yes, I walked away with lots of new

ideas and a fresh invigoration to continue my current projects with the new knowledge I've gained.

11. The essentially organic nature of books was explored so thoroughly that it has fundamentally changed how I see and think about books. This, after a lifetime of immersion in them. Amazing!

12. The struggle with the amorphous concept of "Environmental History" was frustrating but it did serve to open up areas of inquiry and/or different foci for my current digital humanities work and research. Dipesh Chakrabarty's session was intellectually provocative (in a good way!).

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. The instructor ES was quite well informed and well-read on the subject of ways of knowing the book through the natural world.

2. Yes, and no! I think I came in with hope of some more theoretical/philosophical conversations about a different approach to book history that we did not get to, but discussing the materials through a more natural history/environmental lens was wonderful.

3. Yes, I wasn't sure what to expect, fully, but I learned a lot—and learned that NONE of us knew exactly what to expect, as this is an emerging field of study—and very broad!

4. The course was pitched as exploratory, and I think it was that—so I enjoyed the open-endedness. I could have maybe liked more time for higher level, state-of-the-field discussion. And more about measuring the environmental footprint of books.

5. Yes, this was a wonderful course.

6. They did. Environmental history is such a broad field, but the course was well organized and focused. I appreciated the use of Canvas for more reading materials (but would prefer Google Drive). The course was excellent.

7. Yes.

8. I did not have specific goals, just an open mind. But I leave with many ideas for further inquiry that will support my research and my institution, I feel. So, thanks!

9. The instructors and staff members were phenomenal—I learned far more than I ever would have expected to learn.

10. Yes. The instructor was brilliant, and I felt that the course helped me to learn a new way to approach and consider the objects of study.

11. Yes, and yes.

12. This is difficult to say. The course followed the description to a degree, but I felt that ES, being a first-time teacher for a first-time-offered course, allowed the course to go wherever the discussions took it. This course wasn't so much a "skill building" week as it was an immersion into wrestling with the concept of "Environmental History."

5) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your time here?*

1. Developing course material; writing an article.

2. I'm going to think more about sustainability/environment in my daily library work again. Hopefully some scholarship I do will return to these principles/concepts, but I'm not sure what yet.

3. Tell colleagues and friends, use to deepen my own work with (physical) books and possibly follow research angles about materials.
4. I'm starting a new book project that directly builds on this work. And a research collaboration with a botanic garden.
5. This experience has directly affected how I will interact with the books I analyze in my own book project. It also affects how I view and handle rare books in the future in terms of all the different animal, vegetable, and mineral productions that went into them.
6. Primarily for undergraduate teaching and to make the rare book collection more accessible to students.
7. {no response}
8. I definitely want to connect some of the ideas with my future teaching with special collections.
9. To help inform my research skills and thinking about my dissertation—and I have a notebook full of nuggets to chase down and explore.
10. I plan to use the skills and knowledge I've gained in my research and teaching.
11. It will help shape my own (new) job as curator of environmental studies and how I provide instruction and research assistance to users. As an author, it's giving me new insights and tools for inquiry.
12. I will incorporate the knowledge into my instruction and engagement with students, as well as my research and practice.

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

1. Anyone with an interest in material culture studies, including curators, professors, and students in graduate programs.
2. Environmental historians. Preservation/conservation professionals. Library/archives professionals. People interested in environmental studies. People who are new to book history/need a new perspective on book history.
3. Other book conservators would benefit.
4. I felt that we had a diverse group in terms of background and all of us took something away from it. So, graduate students, English and history faculty, information professionals.
5. Anyone who is interested in book history.
6. We had a range of professionals in the class with a different take on environmental book history, so it seems this would reach a broad range.
7. {no response}
8. Library Administrators? I joke, but also not joking. I want more people to center the environment in our professional practices and values. Outside of that, it's clear this topic can be of interest to different academic roles and disciplines—which is a strength!
9. Anyone with a broad interest in books and the environment—probably not suited for someone who wants to focus their energies in a very narrow direction.
10. All those with interest in material book studies.
11. Any librarian and/or archivist.
12. Researchers into rare book and those who engage with the history of the book.

7) *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. Sharing ideas with professor and fellow students. Thus, the section involving sharing what we had looked at the Regenstein was useful.
2. Dipesh Chakarabarty's lecture and both visits to ISAC. Michael Stramm saying print history is agricultural history. ES talking about the women working in the print shop on Walden and horse powered presses.
3. It's hard to pick one moment!
4. Collection items were the source of lots of "aha" moments. Having them in the room was invaluable.
5. I really didn't know much about how parchment was made so all of the material on "pigs and parchment" was very fascinating to learn about.
6. The whole week was one long "aha!" moment. I really enjoyed exploratory time in the mornings and when we worked on our own. Individual exploration was an important part of making this a great experience.
7. {no response}
8. I just really appreciate the emphasis on connection, and authentic engagement with materials and different "experts" and participants. It creates constant "aha!" moments.
9. The cuneiform tablets, the papyrus, the medieval treatise on plants... spending some time with the 1570 Euclid was an incredible treat.
10. There were many! The whole course felt like an aha moment! It was a genuine pleasure to learn from the incredible instructor and my fellow students, as well as all of the other scholars and librarians at UChicago.
11. The talk by Dipesh was extremely powerful to me.
12. Dipesh Chakrabarty was a refreshing challenge.

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

1. 1. More time could have been given to "fleshing" out areas of study "ripe" for investigation by book historians interested in environmental questions or materials. 2. {private response}
2. I can't believe I'm saying this—more pre-reading! I wish we had 30% more shared vocabulary with one another. I think the ability to request our own materials was interesting but let folks veer away from the course topic; I wish we could have all stayed a little more on course theme for final presentations. Just a bit more structure to wrap up would be beneficial.
3. More time! Kidding, because I know we only had one week. It was structured well within the time constraints, but I wish it would have somehow fit in more content.
4. We do need to make sure there is time for breaks and perhaps a bit more structure and direction. My only criticism is that it was a bit diffuse and that tours/talks ate into free time.
5. No, this was an excellent course!
6. No.
7. There was a formidable amount of walking and standing in this course that became physically exhausting, even though it was mentally stimulating. I needed more athletic shoes and more opportunities to sit down briefly. A list of restaurants within walking distance would have also been extremely appreciated, as we scrambled to find

lunch and coffee before class. There was not much available in the area and most coffee places were closed for the summer. RBS-sponsored coffee in the morning would have been much appreciated.

8. I have no advice. This is the first time (in Chicago) and I know there is a learning curve. I am happy to have been a part of that process and think it will get better every time it's offered!

9. Nothing other than the small organization points already mentioned.

10. More time for group discussion might have been beneficial to me, but I don't know if that would be universally applicable to all students. I certainly wouldn't want to remove any course content to make room.

11. A bit more introduction of the texts that were brought out (but this improved through the week).

12. More communication prior to the week.

9) *Do you feel that you got your money's worth? How likely are you to recommend this course to others? On a 1-10 scale, 1 would indicate that you disagree that you got your money's worth, 5 would indicate a neutral response, and 10 would indicate that you agree that you got your money's worth.*

1. 9
2. 7
3. 10
4. 9
5. 10
6. 10
7. 10
8. 10
9. 10
10. 10
11. 10
12. 7

10) *If your course made any (virtual) field trips outside of the classroom or had guest speakers, do you feel that they enhanced the course experience?*

1. The field trips and guest speakers were the best part of the course. I felt that we had the added bonus of learning Assyriology, papyrology, and photographic processes, a real sampler approach. The tours of Mansueto & Regenstein were excellent.

2. Yes! All of the field trips and speakers were wonderful. Even if I knew something about the trip/lecture it was still worthwhile.

3. Yes. Loved speaking to ISAC faculty and Brit & Joel at the Smart Museum. Also really enjoyed helping host the conservation lab components. Guest speakers were all interesting and engaging.

4. Yes, they were excellent. I was very grateful for how many people gave up their time. However, I do think we needed a bit more time for group discussion on core issues with the main instructor—so perhaps one or two fewer of these next time.

5. Yes, the guest speakers were excellent!

6. Absolutely. Field trips really made the experience more meaningful.

7. 100%

8. Absolutely. A real treat.
9. YES!
10. Yes. Extremely so. We had many outings that exposed me to materials, periods, and areas of focus.
11. Yes, absolutely.
12. All were good. Difficult to hear the soft talkers though.

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

1. Thanks so much, ES!
2. Review the institution's collections before you come, if research/request time stays on the schedule.
3. Think about the topic broadly and freely—consider connections to the natural/environmental/ecological world and history. The topic is not narrow or an already well-defined area and is full of potential for interdisciplinary research and communication.
4. Come prepared to think expansively and to help steer the course.
5. I would definitely recommend this course!
6. No.
7. Some of the organization and communication fell between the cracks this first year {in Chicago}, but I'm sure each year's experience will only improve.
8. I wish I had spent more advance time considering the UChicago collections I might explore. Dress warmly.
9. Try and be interested in everything—enjoy the opportunity to be a generalist and learn outside of your field—and the more specific stuff will come without you realizing. Also—make friends! This was a terrific group.
10. I have never been in a classroom where I learned so much, met so many wonderful people, or had so much fun. Go into the course with openness and curiosity and you will have an unforgettable experience.
11. Very well worth your time.
12. Come with a plan for using special collections materials during research time. I "winged it" and came out okay, but feel I got lucky with that. Mea culpa.

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

1. Food for thought.
2. Engaging, intriguing, compelling. A lot learned and a lot more to think on.
3. I want to take a lot more RBS classes.
4. I come away brimming with ideas. ES's course didn't teach me what the environmental history of the book is, but it taught me about the ways to ask that question and the stakes of the discussion.
5. A very memorable experience. Thank you for allowing me to join the class!
6. Request many books/Through Special Collections, and/You will find treasures.
7. {no response}
8. Mostly, an obvious thought—the book is for me a metaphor for the creation and dissemination of knowledge. It became less literal for me as the week progressed. But I still love books.

9. Brain is too fried for a haiku—suffice to say this was a week filled with surprise, delight, excitement, knowledge, and a LOT of fun. Thank you!
10. Perfect.
11. In time, and to dust,/Cicadas, books and all things/Some return, some don't.
12. Professional engagement, but in a deeply human and beautiful way.