

Literary Manuscripts in the Classroom: Using Manuscript Collections to Engage Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

Special collections librarians need to find new ways to engage undergraduate students. One way to engage students is to approach faculty members with innovative ways to integrate special collections materials into their curriculum. At Bowling Green State University, the rare books librarian developed an outreach opportunity for undergraduate students to examine the literary process from manuscript to publication. Using the collection, she created packets for students that gave them the opportunity to track editorial changes. This article discusses the development and implementation of this project and ends with tips for others interested in using literary manuscripts in the classroom.

Keywords: rare books, literary manuscripts, undergraduates, higher education, special collections

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Special collections librarians in academic libraries often struggle with developing meaningful outreach to students, especially undergraduates. Students frequently view closed-stacks materials as intimidating or of little use in their studies. Given this attitude on the part of students, librarians are developing instruction and outreach sessions to engage students and create new and relevant educational experiences utilizing special collections materials.

One way to increase impactful instruction sessions is for a librarian to approach classroom faculty members with new ideas for teaching using primary resources. By approaching the faculty member first, librarians can help create connections between courses and special collections outside of the typical one-shot instruction session. Librarians can highlight under-used collections to faculty members and students. Students can gain practical experience in using primary resources for research purposes and learn how to incorporate primary resources into their future courses. Finally, by offering the use of primary resources in a new light, librarians and faculty members can create long lasting relationships that benefit both parties and lead to new collaborations.

At Bowling Green State University (BGSU), the rare books collection saw sporadic use in undergraduate and graduate curricula. Many faculty members were not aware that the collection existed or that it had curricular ties to the courses they taught. To promote and increase use

of the collection, the rare books librarian created an aggressive outreach campaign that used the university course catalog as a guide. If ties existed between the curriculum and the collection, the rare books librarian contacted the faculty member to offer the use of the rare books collection in their upcoming course. For each faculty member contacted, she offered specific items from special collections that would be useful in their curriculum.

Using this outreach technique, the rare books librarian developed a unique experience that created the opportunity for students in an English course to review the editorial process from manuscript to published form. This activity was especially relevant for the students because the goal of the English course was to create a literary piece of their own from manuscript to publication. By comparing one of the collection's literary manuscripts to its published form, students were able to use primary resources as a real life case study of how to approach their own class project.

This article will discuss the experience the librarian created for the students using the rare books collection and the literary manuscripts contained within. This includes preparation of materials, issues of access, and organization of the instruction session, as well as final results with tips for future sessions. From this experience valuable lessons were learned that will make replicating an instruction session like this possible at other institutions that hold literary manuscripts.

Literature Review

The use of primary resources in instruction sessions is well documented in the literature. Before the early 2000s, few articles provided librarians and archivists with practical examples of primary resource use in the classroom (Bahde, et al, 2014). But by 2012 the literature on this topic grew substantially and continues to grow to this day. For general practitioners, *Using Primary Sources: Hands-On Instruction Exercises*, has become a standard text. The compendium offers multiple lesson plans, including introductions, learning objectives, audience, and preparation guidelines. Of particular interest to this article is Taormina's exercise, which sets students the task of tracing the editions of famous works through their many iterations (Taormina, 2014). Chase (2012) also outlines how literary manuscripts can be used in undergraduate education. Her experience is similar in that it involves the examination of short stories, poems, and essays to teach students. She differs, however, by extending the sessions to a semester long course.

Adding to the literature are the specific case studies of primary resource usage in the undergraduate classroom. The philosophy of the use of

rare materials in the undergraduate classroom has evolved with time. In the past, undergraduate students were discouraged from using rare books in their research. If an undergraduate did happen to gain access to these materials, it was only for specific courses, often related to the book arts (Alvarez, 2006). In their article, Schmiesing and Hollis (2002) address this outdated notion and call for the increased integration of rare materials into undergraduate research. By describing their experience of integrating rare materials in a humanities course for undergraduates, they demonstrate that undergraduates do receive a valuable experience because of the “student-centered learning experience” it creates (Schmiesing and Hollis, 2002, p. 478). Alvarez (2006) continues to challenge the historic norms of the exclusion of general undergraduate use of rare books. Of note in his article is the importance of expanding the use of primary resources into courses not traditionally associated with the history of the book, including art history courses, media studies, and the history of science, to name a few. Sutton and Knight (2006) also assert that special collections libraries must expand their undergraduate outreach and instruction. In their case study, they chose to focus on general library instruction and how collaboration between special collections librarians and instruction librarians can encourage undergraduate research that uses primary resource materials.

By 2008, case studies on undergraduate education and rare books become more elaborate and challenge previous conceptions about which materials are appropriate for use in undergraduate education. Bahde (2011) addresses two issues related to undergraduates and special collections in her article. First, she continues to promote the use of special collections for undergraduates by integrating newspapers into a journalism course. Second, she tackles the problem of bringing large groups of students to special collections libraries by bringing the materials to large lecture halls. Gardner and Pavelich (2008) expand the idea of using primary resources to teach undergraduates by challenging the types of materials used. They note that print materials are often used in the classroom but they find that ephemera in the undergraduate curriculum offers a new approach to teaching critical thinking.

Most of the literature on rare materials in the classroom is written from the perspective of the librarian/archivist. Torre (2008) offers a different perspective. In her article, she describes the first time she visited a rare books library as a junior in college. She uses her own experience as further justification of undergraduate access to rare books materials.

Case studies are not the only type of research related to this topic. More recent articles address how to assess special collections library instruction for undergraduates. Victor, Otto and Mutschler (2013) detail

their experience in using pre- and post-library assessment to determine what benefits students gain by using primary resource materials. Krause (2010) created a case study to test an assessment rubric she developed for an undergraduate history class. Her findings state that students do receive meaningful educational outcomes from these sessions and that archivists can demonstrate this by using the rubric she created.

Most recently, librarians and archivists have started the process of defining information literacy outcomes for archives and special collections (Carini, 2016). The standards proposed include measurements to evaluate outcomes the authors list as: know, interpret, evaluate, use, access, and follow ethical principles (Carini, 2016 p. 197-200).

The Rare Books Collection at BGSU

Bowling Green State University is home to several units that contain special collections materials. The library houses the Browne Popular Culture Library, the Music Library and Sound Recordings Archive, the Curriculum Resource Center, and the Center for Archival Collections. Each special collections unit has individual staff, reference points, and offers instruction sessions. Many topical, geographic, and chronological connections exist between the collections and librarians often conduct collaborative instruction sessions to capitalize on these links. However, the majority of instruction sessions are provided independently by each unit.

The Center for Archival Collections (CAC) is different than the other special collections units at BGSU in that it consists of a diverse collection of sub-units, one of which is the rare books collection. Historical strengths of the rare books collection have evolved with the changing curricular needs of the institution. The collection contains unique items including a first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, three plays from a Shakespeare Third Folio, a work by Galileo, and some incunabula. In recent years, collection emphasis has been on poetry, especially the Beat poets, Midwestern American literature from the 20th century, and artists' books. In addition to rare books, the CAC also owns a series of literary manuscripts by Ray Bradbury, Jan Wahl, Robert Peters, and Carol Bergé, among others.

Historically, incorporating rare books into instruction sessions has been challenging. One issue the rare books librarian at BGSU faced was coordinating selection of materials housed in the rare books collection with materials housed in the Browne Popular Culture Library (BPCL). The rare books collection is independent of the rare, unique, and limited edition monographs housed in the BPCL, which often leads to confusion for patrons. However, the two collections contain many related materials. The major differences between the collections are philosophical in nature.

The rare books collection consists of a variety of materials that support the study of literature and the history of the book. The BPCL's collection houses materials that support the study of popular literature, especially the history of genre fiction.

Some of the challenges to increase rare books usage in instruction sessions have been overcome using the increased outreach, promotion, and education techniques described in this article. Most classes and individual students who visit the collection now are interested in examining the history of the book and printing. Students have visited the collection to see artists' books, which has led to engaging discussions about what a "book" is. Students also have examined the history of printing through binding and typographical specimens. Another example of innovative use of the rare books collection has been its use in an undergraduate digital humanities courses on ethnic studies and identity in U.S. culture from the 1940s-1970s.

Development of the Project

The BGSU English Department was the primary focus of the library's initial outreach to promote innovative use of special collections materials in the curriculum. The rare books librarian contacted a faculty member who taught a course on 20th century poetry because the CAC is home to a large poetry collection and includes the manuscripts of poets Carol Bergé and Robert Peters, which seemed a natural fit for her course. During a tour of the collections with her, a discussion began about the literary manuscripts housed in the collection. The faculty member had another course on literary editing and publishing and was interested in developing an instruction session using literary manuscripts. Based on this discussion, the rare books librarian developed an instruction session to compare a literary manuscript from its initial to published form. This would give students the ability to see first-hand what changes were made throughout the editorial process and what was subsequently published, helping them understand their own editorial process in creating a literary work. During the session, each student would compare 2-3 pages of a literary manuscript against the published work. Each student would be expected to note any changes they found between the two versions. They were also expected to discuss why changes might have been made and the impact they may have had on the piece.

Logistics

In order to use a literary manuscript from the collection, the rare books librarian had to be cognizant of the relationship between the donor agreement and access with regard to classroom logistics. The donor agreement for the manuscript selected for the course allowed use of the item for the purposes of the session. However, it stipulated that users may not duplicate any of the material and that photocopies made for access purposes must be collected and destroyed.

Access and preservation of the materials required additional accommodations. For preservation purposes, the rare books librarian created color-photocopies of the manuscript for the students to use during their “mark-up” portion of the session. The photocopies proved beneficial because students were able to mark changes on the surrogate copy, as they would on their own material. The rare books librarian also made photocopies of the published text to provide simultaneous access for students, to allow comparison of the texts.

To facilitate the session, the rare books librarian prepared packets for the students. Each packet contained 2-3 pages of the manuscript and published text. It was important to create the packets because the literary manuscript and published text did not line up in the same way. The packets were also necessary because of time constraints, in this case a one hour class. While creating these packets, the rare books librarian had to read the two texts side by side and try to determine where the pages aligned. This was especially difficult with major editorial changes. The creation of the packets was one of the most difficult aspects in preparing the items for undergraduate student use.

The final stage of preparation involved a practice performance of the activity. This was done in order to determine where the significant editorial changes occurred and the types of editorial changes that had been made. The rare books librarian did this so that she was prepared to facilitate discussions during the instruction session. She wanted to ensure that the literary manuscript she chose were different enough from the published text to make the practice engaging and informative. It was also helpful to know where in each packet changes were made so that she could help students identify them during the session.

Implementing the Instruction Session

The program was divided into two instruction sessions. The first hour-long session was a guided tour of the CAC. The rare books librarian highlighted the types of collections, formats, and materials housed in the

collection. She then exhibited materials from the rare books collection that focused on literary editing to prepare them for the second session. By dividing the project into two sessions, the students were able to familiarize themselves with the collection and receive instruction on proper handling practices for rare and special collections items.

The following week students came back to compare the manuscript to the printed work. The rare books librarian used the CAC conference room to host the students. The conference room was chosen, as opposed to the reading room, because of class size, access, and courtesy to other CAC patrons. The original manuscript was placed in the center of the conference table. At each student's seat there was a packet that contained the photocopied surrogates for review. Students were given 45 minutes to review the materials.

Students found a variety of editorial changes in their packets. Some students had very small changes that included punctuation or single word changes. One student had a packet in which the changes were so extensive it was hard to compare the two texts. During the preparation process, the rare books librarian tried to ensure that she included pages that had substantial changes, which proved beneficial in keeping the students interested, on-task, and engaged. Even with the preparatory work anticipating these challenges, some students still had pages that did not correspond directly, or had only minor changes, which led to some confusion or frustration.

Throughout the class time the students continued to share their findings and their thoughts on the editorial process. Once the students were finished with the final review and discussion, they had the opportunity to physically examine the original manuscript pages they were using in surrogate form. Finally, following the course session, all surrogates were collected and destroyed.

Findings and Conclusion

The use of literary manuscripts in the undergraduate classroom is a successful way to create meaningful instruction sessions for students using special collections. Students have an opportunity to use rare materials in a new way that is relevant to their coursework. Librarians and teaching faculty can build new relationships and strengthen existing ones. And perhaps the most important outcome is that underused special collections can become more relevant to an institution's goal of enhancing the undergraduate educational experience. The rare books librarian was able to use her experience to make this project amenable to replication at other institutions.

Outreach to faculty is key to developing instruction sessions. Teaching faculty are often unaware of the special collections at their institutions and frequently have very little contact with special collections librarians. In order to create bridges between the teaching faculty and librarians, it is important to give faculty members tailored, behind the scenes access and experiences. The rare books librarian learned that it was effective to show faculty members the most unique items—those not often put on display or used in instruction sessions—to encourage faculty members to see the value of the collection and their potential use, even if there were not obvious connections between the materials and the courses.

Before faculty members visited, the rare books librarian also studied their scholarly interests. If there were materials in the collection that corresponded to their interests, she made a special effort to highlight that material during tours. From this tailored outreach, requests for instruction sessions increased. Using the course catalog is also an effective means to identify faculty and courses for individualized outreach. If faculty members see the value of the special collections, librarians can develop more impactful instruction sessions.

Knowledge of donor agreements is important for librarians using literary manuscripts in the classroom. Unless access is restricted—and even in some cases if it is—a collection may be a good candidate for an instruction session; however, physical use may be limited depending on the agreement. Because of the donor agreement in this project, the rare books librarian was required to destroy the students' editorial mark-up work on the photocopies, which unfortunately eliminated potentially useful information. Students also did not have a record of their work. In the future, the rare books librarian will be more intentional in identifying a collection that would allow the students to retain their copies. Others interested in replicating this project should also consider the trade-off between donor agreements and the value in using a particular collection. Although a manuscript may be of great interest, its usefulness can be lessened by a restrictive donor agreement. A manuscript with fewer restrictions on access may prove a better selection for classroom purposes.

Staging a practice presentation before students arrive is critical. Before students and faculty arrive, librarians need to understand how long the project will take from start to finish. Often librarians are given a limited period of time with students. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that the project can be completed within a set timeframe. Splitting the visit into two one-hour instruction sessions helped with student focus and attention. Others wishing to implement this program should consider having students visit their collection multiple times to complete the

project. This additional time would allow for a more in-depth experience with the collection and materials.

By giving the project a trial run, librarians can identify potential challenges students may experience. In this case, one of the biggest problems was collating the manuscript with its published form. The rare books librarian realized that she needed to be very explicit about where the literary pages corresponded for the students. One should be prepared to spend time to collate the two texts. Marking where the texts begin and end on each document is also recommended.

Selecting meaningful sections with major literary changes ensures student focus. The rare books librarian noticed during the instruction session that students who had packets with more significant changes were more engaged in the project than students who could identify only minor differences between the texts.

Preparing additional packets for students was crucial. Many students are able to finish their packets quickly, and by having extras, librarians can extend the experience for those who are particularly adept with the assignment. For this reason, it is essential to know how many students will attend. In this case, it was helpful to have prepared at least a quarter more packets than the number of students in the class.

Projects like these can lead to other opportunities, including those in the digital humanities. With their literary analysis, students were performing tasks common to many metadata librarians. They were “marking-up” literary documents in a way that is analogous to Text Encoding Initiative (TEI), a metadata schema that can be used with literary texts to mark important changes such as deletions, additions, cross-outs, etc. Incorporating TEI instruction is a way for a librarian teaching a similar session to add another dimension to the course.

Students and teaching faculty are often unfamiliar with the curricular ties special collections libraries may have to their courses. To increase student use of underused materials, librarians must use multi-prong outreach strategies to engage faculty in partnership. By developing a stand-alone project, involving 2-3 page packets of literary text, students in an undergraduate English course were able to apply the skills they were developing in the classroom to the analysis of special collections materials. Planning ahead, being aware of donor agreements, and exploring new ways to engage with students creates successful outcomes for all those involved. This project was a very positive experience and paves the way for future collaborations between BGSU teaching faculty and the library’s rare books and special collections units.

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