

Library Meets Museum

Creating Exhibitions of Rare Books and Other Special Collections Materials

LIS 652 001 — Fall 2011

Palmer School of Library and Information Science, Long Island University

Instructor: Eric Holzenberg; 212-838-6690; email (preferred mode of communication) is ejh@grolierclub.org.

Time and place: Classes held at the Grolier Club, 47 East 60th Street, 10 am to 6 pm; office hours are by appointment.

Academic integrity: Consult the University's policy on plagiarism.

<http://www.liu.edu/CWPost/StudentLife/Services/Counseling/AcadPolicies/Conduct/Standards.aspx>

Description: While this course considers theoretical issues of conceptualization and criticism, it essentially provides practical, hands-on, experience with the steps necessary to create a successful exhibition of rare book/special collections material. Major topics are planning, implementation, evaluation, and documentation. The course is appropriate for students who are preparing for curatorial careers in rare book/ special collections units.

Objective: The general objective of the course is to enable students to plan and mount rare book/special collections exhibitions, employing the current best practices in the rare book/special collections and museum fields. As evidence of his/her mastery of the material, each student will create a portfolio, step-by-step, that demonstrates his/her ability to create a rare book/special collections exhibition. (See the schedule below for an indication of the range of specific skills required by exhibition planning and implementation.)

Method: This course will use the case method. Using actual material from the Grolier Club Library, each student will plan a theoretical exhibition designed for a Grolier Club exhibition space. Over the weeks of the course, each student will create a portfolio consisting of documents supporting the creating of this theoretical exhibition of Grolier Club rare book/special collections materials. Guest speakers and field trips will provide reality-based insight into this curatorial function.

Grading: Final portfolio 50%; class participation and step-by-step assignments 50%.

The final portfolio will be, in effect, the accumulation of the assignments submitted in class. Students should adopt a consistent graphic design for all work submitted so that, when accumulated, the resulting portfolio will have graphic coherence and appeal. The portfolio in its final form may

require additional titles, subtitles, etc. The portfolio should have sufficiently professional content and form so that it could be submitted to a potential employer as evidence of the ability to mount exhibitions in rare book/special collections settings.

Work must be prepared on time and reading must be completed in a timely manner since these elements form the basis for group discussion and activities in class. Students will participate in supportive critiques of each other's portfolio elements as the class progresses.

It is expected that students will attend all class sessions. Exceptions must be discussed with the instructor well ahead of the class session. Obviously no credit for class participation can be given if the student is absent from class.

Class sessions will consist of these parts:

- Introduction to the new material on the topics listed below
- Review and discussion of assigned work
- Occasional talks by guest speakers and/or field trips.

The course will be operated as a seminar with considerable student participation.

Citation style: Use the MLA (Modern Language Association) author/page method. See examples of the author/page approach at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/02/>. Further examples of MLA bibliographical citation formats can be found also at <http://www.liu.edu/cwis/cwp/library/workshop/citmla.htm>.

Textbook:

- Mary E. Brown and Rebecca Power, Exhibits in Libraries; A Practical Guide (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Co. Inc, 2006).

Additional reading (available at Bobst Library reserve and LIU online reserve as indicated):

- David Dernie, Exhibition Design (New York: WW Norton, 2006).
- Arnold Rattenbury, Exhibition design: theory and practice (New York: Van Nostrand, 1971).

Schedule and Assignments

Please note that the following topics represent the steps, roughly in order, that the organizer of an exhibition must take to plan and implement a successful rare book/ special collections exhibition.

SEPTEMBER 10

Introduction and overview

History of book exhibitions

Rationale for modern exhibitions of special collections materials

Soliciting and developing exhibition ideas

Tour of Grolier Club exhibitions

Exhibition topics for final project

Brown and Power, Chapters 1-4.

Reed, M. "Blurring the Boundaries: Collaborative Library and Museum Exhibitions in Los Angeles." *RBM* v. 8 no. 1 (Spring 2007) p. 45-50. Available through LIU online databases via Wilson Web, Library Literature and Information database.

J.Y. Cole, et. al. "Treasures on Display: More Than a Century of Library Exhibitions." *Library of Congress Information Bulletin* 67 no. 10 (October 2008) p. 167-173, 177. Available through LIU online databases via Wilson Web, Library Literature and Information database.

Marcia Reed, "Blurring the Boundaries: Collaborative Library and Museum Exhibitions in Los Angeles." *RBM* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2007). <http://rbm.acrl.org/content/8/1/45.full.pdf>

SEPTEMBER 17

Exhibition proposals

Scheduling exhibitions

Deadlines and timetables

Budgets

Development: fund-raising, sponsorship

Personnel and other logistics

Exhibition facilities: Room layout, cases, lighting, HVAC, security

Brown and Power, Chapter 5, and pp. 86--155. For timelines, see specifically pp. 64, 104, 131.

Foundation Directory Online. <http://fconline.fdncenter.org/> (Consult the example to see how one identifies a suitable foundation.)

*Assignment due: Visit a museum or library exhibition. In a brief write-up, indicate place (specific library or museum), time and date of your visit, title of the exhibition, explicit overall concept of the exhibition as expressed in exhibition materials, and a critical analysis of the degree to which the exhibition carried out its avowed overall concept. Length: ca. 2/3 of a page of text (or outlined information). This information should be submitted to the instructor. Be prepared to present your information orally in class.

SEPTEMBER 24

Intellectual organization: Who is the audience? What story will the exhibition tell? With what goal?

Selecting items to display: research methods, intellectual and aesthetic criteria, limitations imposed by condition/value

Borrowing items for exhibition

Design and layout: number and arrangement of items,

Exhibition architecture; cradles and other means of display; strapping; backing of prints/drawings/MSS

Makala, J., et. al., "Making exhibits out of nothing at all: Special collections, information literacy, and a curious incident in the library." *College & Research Libraries News* v. 67 no. 11 (December 2006) p. 681-3. Available through LIU online databases via Wilson Web, Library Literature and Information database.

Smithsonian Institution, Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design. Available online at <http://www.si.edu/opa/accessibility/exdesign/contents.htm>.

Visser, M. "Considerations in the Preparation of Library Exhibits Featuring Rare Books and Manuscripts." *College & Undergraduate Libraries* v. 11 no. 2 (2004) p. 51-62. Available through LIU's online reserves.

AAM Registrars Committee, American Association of Museums. *General Facility Report*. 2nd ed. Rev. Washington DC: AAM, 2008). (ISBN 978-1-933253). Ordered 1-09; will be available at Bobst Library reserve.

ACRL , Association of College & Research Libraries, A Division of the American Library Association. "Guidelines for Borrowing and Lending Special Collections Materials for Exhibition (January 2005)." 6 Jan. 2009
<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/borrowguide.cfm>

Environmental Conditions for Exhibiting Library and Archival Materials. ANSI/NISO Z39.79-2001. Bethesda: NISO Press, 2001. ISBN: 10880124-44-0; ISSN 1041-5653. Available online at: <http://www.niso.org/standards/resources/Z39-79-2001.pdf>.

*Assignment due: In a format suitable for your portfolio, create a formal proposal for your exhibition, based on the application template used by the Grolier Club Committee on Exhibitions. Your proposal should address all the issues raised by the application, including 1) a description and rationale for the exhibition, and 2) a budget, along with 3) a plan for raising money to cover expenses. With the fund-raising plan you should also provide at least one possible source of private or company support, along with a sample letter (one or two pages) to one foundation explaining the project and soliciting funds. (A profile and address of a suitable foundation will be provided to you by the instructor.)

OCTOBER 1

Case and item labels: parameters and design

Exhibition publications: repurposing exhibition text (labels, etc.)

Promotion: signage, press releases, etc.

Brown and Power, review pp. 105-123.

Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels; An Interpretive Approach* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 1992). "Part I: Overview" (pp. 1-36); also Chapter 7, "Writing Visitor-Friendly Labels," (pp. 83-94). Both segments will be available through LIU's online reserves.

Greer Allen, "The Design and Printing of Library Exhibition Catalogues." *RBML* 5, no. 2 (1990), p. 77-84.

*Assignment due: Submit 1) a list of seven (or a few more) objects for display, including an assessment of condition for each item, and a brief description of the type of architecture — cradle, backing, strapping, etc. — necessary to safely display it; 2) a preliminary plan showing the placement of each object within a single case; 3) a bibliography of four items relevant to the entire exhibition, and 4) one paragraph for each of the four bibliographical items indicating what information or artifactual value will be directly applicable/useful to your exhibition concept.

OCTOBER 8: NO CLASS

OCTOBER 15

Related events: opening receptions, lectures, gallery tours

Evaluation and feedback

Installation and teardown

Brown and Power, pp. 53, 181; review pp. 130-134.

Deirdre C. Stam. [Paper on evaluation.] Will be available through LIU's online reserve system.

*Assignment due: 1) submit an introductory label for your exhibition, attractively formatted, and no longer than 1 page double-spaced; 2) submit full label information, attractively formatted, for two items in your exhibition; 3) bring examples of exhibition-related printed publications to class. You can pick these up at museum and library exhibitions. They should be in original format (on original paper), not photocopies or printouts. (You will want to include imitations of some of these publications, tailored to your subject, in your final portfolio.)

OCTOBER 22

Review and discussion of portfolios and mini-exhibits

The future of book exhibitions

Wrap-up discussion

*Assignment: submit portfolios and demonstrate mini-exhibitions. Each mini-exhibition will consist of the introductory label, plus the selection of items previously chosen from Grolier Club collections, each individual item to be accompanied by a descriptive label, appropriately formatted.