Library Meets Museum
Creating Exhibitions of Rare Books and
Other Special Collections Materials
LIS 652 — Fall 2013

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 4 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. Over the weeks of the course, each student will create a portfolio consisting of documents supporting the creating of this theoretical exhibition of 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/](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](http://www.liu.edu/cwis/cwp/library/workshop/citmla.htm).

Textbook:


Additional reading

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 7

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

*Assignment for September 14: 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: no more than 2 pages of text (or outlined information). This information should be submitted to the instructor. Be prepared to present your information orally in class.

Textbook reading:

Lacher Feldman, Chapters 1, 3, 5, App. A

Supplemental readings:


SEPTMBER 14

Exhibition proposals

Scheduling exhibitions

Deadlines and timetables

Budgets

Development: fund-raising, sponsorship

Personnel and other logistics

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

*Assignment for September 21:* 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.

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Textbook reading:

Lacher Feldman, Chapters 2, 4, App. B, C

Supplemental readings:

Foundation Directory Online. http://fconline.fdncenter.org/ (Consult the example to see how one identifies a suitable foundation.)
SEPTEMBER 21

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

*Assignment for September 28: 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.

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Textbook reading:

Lacher Feldman, Chapters 6, 11, App. D

Supplemental readings:


SEPTEMBER 28

Case and item labels: parameters and design

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

Promotion: signage, press releases, etc.

GUEST SPEAKER: Curators of the current Grolier Club exhibition “Extraordinary Women in Science & Medicine: Four Centuries of Achievement” will be on hand to discuss the show, and how it was organized.

*Assignment for October 5: 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.)

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Textbook reading:

Lacher Feldman, Review chapter 6, read chapter 10, and App. E

Supplemental readings:

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).

**OCTOBER 5**

Related events: opening receptions, lectures, gallery tours

Evaluation and feedback

Installation and teardown

GUEST SPEAKER: Noted book designed and calligrapher Jerry Kelly will talk about the design and creation of exhibition catalogues, checklists, and other materials.

*Assignment for final class session, October 26:* 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.

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Textbook reading:

Lacher Feldman, Review chapter 10, read chapters 7, 12

**OCTOBER 12: NO CLASS. OPTIONAL STUDY DAY**

- Hours are 10 am-5 pm, with a one-hour lunch break noon-1 pm, during which the Library will be closed

- Meghan Constantinou will oversee student work that day. However, her duties are limited to supervising use of materials – any questions on your assignment should be emailed to me.

- In addition to the two public galleries, students have access to the third floor Library only

- Students must email Meghan Constantinou (mconstantinou@grolierclub.org) BY THURSDAY OCTOBER 10 if they plan to use the Library on the October 12 study day

**OCTOBER 19 NO CLASS**
Review and discussion of portfolios and mini-exhibits

The future of book exhibitions

Wrap-up discussion