

The Art of the Codex

Arguably the most influential construct in history is the book, and the most important developmental marker in any society is the creation of a written word. The ability to write, to contain that writing in a portable and lasting form, and to preserve that form and its contents allow for the continuation of history and the transmission of ideas through time. We as a society are on the brink of a 'New Technological Age.' Books themselves which are "simultaneously a written text, a material object, and a cultural transaction"¹ according to Leslie Howsam, could very well be on the brink of extinction. The sweeping monopoly of the internet on the transmission of ideas and information is gaining momentum and ground has been lost for publishers, magazines, and newspapers that may soon become obsolete. Technology is not just changing the methods of communication, but the way in which we communicate as well. The language of convenience and programming is infecting our words and how we choose to portray our ideas; in this way texting has done us a great disservice.

The idea of literacy since its rise in the Middle Ages has become a method of standardization and a mark of what and who can be considered civilized, educated, and therefore an acceptable member of society. Yet as M.T. Clanchy reminds us, "literacy in itself is primarily a technology. It has different effects according to circumstances and is not a civilizing force in itself."² The development of the written word, books, and subsequently the printing press had effects on society just as the development of the internet, the kindle, and cell phones have now. The parallels between the two ages, in the development of books and the development of the internet are significant, yet just as a growing reliance on the written word helped to extinguish the traditions of oral histories and trust in spoken language, the advance of electronic technology threatens our appreciation and reliance on books. As such there is a growing need to protect and care for these objects that symbolize, articulate and physically embody the past.

This need is what motivates me to create an interdisciplinary major focusing on the restoration and conservation of books and documents, specializing in the medieval and Renaissance periods. My love of books manifested in an accompanying love of history and the progress of ideas. There is no direct path to the future I have chosen. This area of study is not well plotted in the United States and there are many overlapping fields involved. While studies in book culture are on the rise, programs dealing with restoration or conservation are dwindling and the skills needed are seldom approached before a master's level, and usually only taught through internships. This has left me in an awkward position and spurred my decision to attend Hendrix. My solution has been to consult several experts in the field, and based on their recommendations build a degree suited to carry me into the Master's level of study. Therefore this degree plan hinges on several key elements; my decision to focus on the medieval and Renaissance time periods, the acquisition of hand-skills that are invaluable to dealing with fragile objects, and an ability to think critically. The structure and core of my classes are built upon the historical period

¹ Leslie Howsam, *Old Books & New Histories; An Orientation to Studies in Book and Print Culture*, (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2006), vii.

² M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record; England 1066-1307*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1993) 7.

I have chosen to specialize in with the intent of gaining knowledge about that specific period of time. Latin is an invaluable tool to allow for translation of a wide variety of texts, as well as a gateway into other languages. I have taken every opportunity, and will continue to develop and utilize every advantage in the pursuit of the hand-skills necessary for the field. Finally I have chosen classes that require an ability to analyze text, and the implementation of ideas, such as Historiography and Literary Theory. The degree plan I have outlined is a carefully created tool allowing me to gain the skills necessary to obtain a craft master's in restoration, yet also providing me with a historical understanding and ability to analyze that allows me to distinguish myself not only in my chosen field, but also in reference to a chosen time period.

Beyond the classes I have outlined I have already made great strides in advancing my interests. I have completed an odyssey which allowed me to create contacts, gain information, and become more knowledgeable in the care of ancient documents. I have diligently pursued several study abroad opportunities in order to experience other cultures and ways of life, helping me to develop the ability to recognize my own cultural lens. I have also applied for Hendrix in Italy in the hopes of learning a new language. I have pursued this path beyond the classes I have listed in my degree plan. I have structured my experiences and my life toward the completion of this goal.

The capstone of my degree plan will be in two parts. The first will be Hist 480 senior capstone experience, in which I will develop and present a paper focusing on a specific historical text allowing me to demonstrate my grasp of history, the analysis of ideas within a text, as well as my utilization of Latin. Secondly I will supplement this with a creation of a bookbinding portfolio that will demonstrate the hand-skills I have gained proficiency in. The capstone grade will be determined through an average of the grade for the portfolio created during an independent study with Professor Melissa Gill and the grade for Hist 480. I believe that the combination of these areas of study in compliment with history will provide me with the best possible approach to graduate programs and my future career in the conservation of the past, and the objects it is contained within.

Latin 210 01 Readings in Latin

Hist 317 01 Crusades and Contact

Hist 318 01 Magic and Witchcraft in Europe

Hist 300 01 Historiography

Hist 480 Senior Capstone Seminar

Engl 243 01 Gothic Literature

Engl 280 01 Literary Analysis

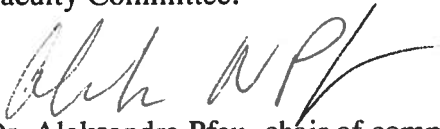
Engl 300 or 400-level course on medieval or early modern literature

Anth 200 01 Buried Cities and Lost Tribes

Independent Study with Professor Gill

Maymester with Craig Jensen

Faculty Committee:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aleksandra Pfau'.

Dr. Aleksandra Pfau, chair of committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melissa Gill'.

Professor Melissa Gill, committee member

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Resinski'.

Dr. Rebecca Resinski, committee member