

Imagining the Library
First Year Research Seminar
Instructor: Professor Gregory Erickson

Spring 2017

Gallatin School of Individualized Study

Silver: Room 403

Tuesday, Thursday: 11-12:15

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Office hour: Tuesday, Thursday: 2-3; (Wednesday by apt.)

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Syllabus

Course Description

Archibald MacLeish, head librarian of the Library of Congress during World War II, asserted that librarians “must become active agents of the democratic process” and that libraries could be a kind of “warfare.” From the Library of Congress to the legendary ancient library in Alexandria to the medieval monastic library at Melk to the new fully digital library at Florida Polytechnic University, how we imagine, remember, and construct our libraries is indicative of how we narrate our cultural identity. In modern fiction, texts such as Jorge Borges’ “The Library of Babel,” Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*, and the Harry Potter books use libraries to speculate about our world using the organization of great fictional libraries from the past and the future as metaphors for human thought. To imagine a library is to ask: What is worth preserving? Who has access to certain information? How do we organize this information? How do changes in our ideas of books and libraries reflect changes in the ways we organize other forms of knowledge and in how we read and think? In addition to actual and imaginary libraries, class topics will include the history of the book and of reading, the concept of scripture, theories of the archive, and the significance of new media and digital technology. Student research projects and papers might explore the history, theory, or architecture of actual libraries new and old; they may look at the role of libraries in education, research, and in speculative fiction about the future of humankind. The course will include guest speakers and visits to the New York Public Library, the Morgan Library, and collections within NYU Bobst Library.

Much of the work in this course will focus on the practice of developing and writing a research paper. I will encourage you to explore topics of their own interest, and assignments will include informal writing, reaction papers, various essay forms, and multiple research strategies. While developing your own writing process, we will work on building an argument, referring to other texts, using secondary material effectively, mastering the mechanics of quoting, citing, and documenting sources, and understanding the practice of incorporating your voice into existing intellectual discussions. The course will conclude with individual research projects developed in small working groups.

Learning Goals

- To continue to develop college level research and writing skills
- To develop your own writing voice in conversation with other thinkers/writers
- To work together collaboratively in writing and learning communities
- To develop your own expertise on a chosen research topic
- To study the ways that books and knowledge have been controlled, disseminated, and depicted.

Evaluation and Course Requirements

Essays and assignments: In the first half of the semester you will write two essays as part of our initial exploration of the different aspects of these topics. The following shorter assignments are intended to facilitate the process of writing the final research papers. You are required to complete all writing assignments on time. For each project you will be expected to work out your own topic, to write multiple drafts, and to work with other students on their papers. We will work on the drafts in class so it is just as important to be on time with your drafts as with your final projects. Please proofread your papers carefully for spelling errors, grammar, etc.

Essay #1: 4-5 page essay on some material aspect of libraries or books

Essay #2: 4-5 page essay on a library in fiction

Informal writing will be short writings done both in and outside of class and on the course web site. These are intended to allow you to work out some of your thoughts to class readings and discussion, and to allow your classmates and I to see what you are thinking about. Although I will assign a grade to your informal writings, they should be free and unpolished. I am only looking for effort and thought and not for organization, mechanics, or “correctness.”

The final research paper will be on a topic of your choice, approved by me, that focuses on a primary text or example, that develops a specific research question, and that also addresses the critical literature on that text. The last five or six weeks of the semester will be devoted primarily to working on this paper. I will divide the class up into groups that will work together on each stage of the process.

The course will be graded on the following basis:

Two essays (4-5 pages each):	30% (15% each)
Final research essay (8-10 pages):	30%
Informal writing:	30%
Participation/Attendance:	10%

Academic Integrity:

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who

value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (<http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html>).

Course Schedule

Libraries: An Introduction

Week one: January 24; 26

Week two: January 31; February 2

Reading: Battles: “Reading in the Library,” and “Lost in the Stacks”
Augst: “Introduction”

Imagining the Ancient Library

Week three: February 7; February 9

Reading: Casson: “The Library of Alexandria”
Battles: “Burning Alexandria”
Greenblatt: from *Swerve*

The Library in America

Week four: February 14; February 16

Reading: Sherman: from *Patience and Fortitude*
Augst: “Faith in Reading”

History of the Book: From scroll to codex to Kindle

Week five: February 21; February 23

Reading: Casson: “From Scroll to Codex”
Essay #1 draft due 2/23 [workshop day]

Private Libraries and Collections:

Week six: February 28; March 2 [March 2 at Morgan Library]

Reading: Benjamin: “Unpacking my Library”
Bhabha: “Unpacking my Library”
Manguel “Library as Imagination”
Essay #1 due 3/2

Libraries in Fiction:

Week seven: March 7; March 9

Reading: Manguel: "Library as Myth"
Borges: "The Library of Babel"
Doctor Who: "The Silence in the Library"

[Spring Break]

Week eight: March 21; March 23

Reading: from *Don Quixote*
Young adult Fiction: TBA
Essay #2 draft due 3/23 [workshop day]

Creating the Library of the Future

Week nine: March 28; March 30

Reading: Palfrey: "Hacking Libraries"
Drabinski: "Queering the Library"
Guest: Emily Drabinski
Essay #2 due 3/30

Part III: Steps to the Research Paper

Week ten: April 4; April 6 [April 4 at NYPL]

[Choosing a research paper topic and organizing working groups]
Research techniques
Research questions

Week eleven: April 11; April 13

Due: description of your selected text (4/11)
Group work: discuss the outline or sketch of your final project (4/13)

Week twelve: April 18; April 20

Due: literature review and annotated bibliography of your topic (4/18)
Group work: discussion of literature review and sources
Due: position paper (4/20)

Week thirteen: April 25; April 27

Group work: presentations and discussion
Due: rough draft of final research paper (4/27)

Week fourteen: May 2; May 4

Presentations

Final research paper due (May 5)

Required Texts:

The readings will be taken from the following texts. I will make the assigned sections available on our NYU classes site. Many of our readings are single chapter from a book or a collection. As you move into your research project you may want or need to read other chapters in some of these books.

Augst, Thomas. *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States*.

Battles, Matthew. *Library: An Unquiet History*

Benjamin, Walter. "Unpacking my Library: A Talk about Book Collecting."

Borges, Jorge Luis. "The Library of Babel."

Canfora, Luciano. *The Vanished Library" A Wonder of the Ancient World*

Casson, Lionel. *Libraries in the Ancient World*.

Cervantes, Miguel. *Don Quixote*

Eco, Umberto. *The Name of the Rose*.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *The Swerve*.

King, Stephan. "Library Policeman"

Manguel, Alberto. *The Library at Night*.

Monroe, Suzanne. "Check it Out: Diverse Images of the Library Experience in Children's Literature."

Murakami, Haruki. *The Strange Library*.

Palfrey, John. *BiblioTech: Why Libraries Matter More than Ever in the Age of Google*.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*.

Sherman, Scott. *Patience and Fortitude: Power, Real Estate, and the Fight to Save a Public Library*

"Silence in the Library." *Doctor Who* (4.8)