



On-line and Distance Learning Case Study: The 'Understanding and Managing Rare Books' Module at the University of Dundee

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Background

- Developed by **Rare Books in Scotland forum (RBiS)**

‘Rare Books in Scotland (RBiS) is a forum facilitated by the National Library of Scotland for members of staff in Scottish libraries and other organisations who have responsibility for collections of 'rare books' in the broadest sense’

<http://www.nls.uk/about-us/working-with-others/rare-books-in-scotland>

- Delivered as a module offered by **Centre for Archive and Information Studies (CAIS)**

‘The Centre for Archive and Information Studies (CAIS) provides archival education and research opportunities, offering Masters degrees, courses for Continuing Professional Development and PhD study in Archives, Records Management, Information Rights and Digital Preservation. CAIS is part of the School of Humanities at the University of Dundee and the courses are accredited by the Archives and Records Association UK and Ireland and the Records and Information Management Professionals Australia.’

<http://www.dundee.ac.uk/cais/>

Background: timeline

- 2003-4 Rare Books in Scotland founded. Begins to offer free one-day training workshops to members: bibliographical format, bindings, cataloguing, 'Latin for Rare Book librarians', etc
- 2006 Report '**The provision of training within Scotland for rare book librarians**' http://www.nls.uk/media/22374/rbis_for_scurl.pdf
- 2007-8 RBiS and CAIS begin to discuss module development
- 2009 Report '**Framework of rare books training needs**' <http://www.nls.uk/media/22379/teaching-model-report.pdf> including summary of 'wish list' of requirements from managers, rare book librarians and volunteers
- 2010-11 development of module
- 2011 Module first taught in Autumn Semester

'The provision of training within Scotland for rare book librarians'

Why a postgraduate-level course?

Practical

- meet demands of increased role of rare book material in university teaching
- growth of the study of the history of the book
- growth of projects and digitisation within libraries based on their rare book material

National (as of 2006)

- government cultural policy: 'high national priority' given to 'the maintenance and improvement of standards in both non-national museums and in libraries' (quoting *Scotland's Culture*, 2006, p.38)
- support not available to students wanting to study for a postgraduate diploma in librarianship outside Scotland.

Benefits of postgraduate-level module would include

- useful foundation for new professionals
- could attract people into a career in rare book librarianship
- the potential to help retain promising young professionals in Scotland
- training within the context of the Scottish printed heritage

'Framework of rare books training needs'

Top items by mention on 'wish list' compiled by interviewing staff at NLS, university libraries, other libraries with historic collections

- Provenance (7)
- Handwriting/palaeography (6)
- Latin for rare book librarians (5)
- Bindings (6)
- Cataloguing (6)
- Finding aids and resources (5)
- Preservation and conservation (5)
- Exhibitions (5)
- Bibliography (5)
- Handling (4)
- Types of printing (4)
- History of printing (4)
- What is a rare book? (4)

Main difference of opinion: historical bibliography and cataloguing -essential or not?

Module structure

Unit 1: What is a rare book?

1. What is a rare book?
2. The history of books
3. The history of the book trade
4. The history of the book

Unit 2: Cataloguing and Provenance

1. Analytical bibliography
2. Cataloguing rare books
3. Describing illustrations
4. Provenance and other copy-specific information
5. Describing bookbindings

Unit 3 Collection Management

1. Ethics
2. Collection development
3. Customer Services (including reading rooms)
4. Knowledge Management
5. Preservation and Conservation
6. Security

Unit 4: Access and Promotion

1. Access issues
2. Catalogues, surrogates and digitisation
3. Awareness and exploitation of collections
4. Exhibitions and displays
5. The web

The distance learning experience

- Do you need access to rare books? To a library?
- Kinds of learning – not just reading but practice; how to enable kinaesthetic learning e.g. handling materials?
- How to test for and correct understanding?
- Access to resources not online e.g. DCRM(B)
- Problems common to distance learning: communication, discussion boards and emails

From a review of the module blogged by one of the students

‘Ultimately, I recommend the course to rare books and special collections librarians and potential librarians. I learned a lot, found out about some very valuable resources, and will continue to work through the module content to properly get all out of it that I can. My only reservations focus on the unrealistic timescales given to students, given the wealth of material to study and understand, and the assignments to be submitted. Bear in mind that this course is aimed at professional librarians, and as far as I was aware, we all had full-time jobs at the same time as studying.’

<http://victorianlibrarian.wordpress.com/2014/06/07/understanding-and-managing-rare-books-at-dundee-university/#more-2659>

Bibliography at a distance:

Learning through kinaesthetic self-study tasks

Part 1

If possible, find a book printed before 1750, preferably one for which you can find information about the format, and hold it up to the light to find the wire lines and chain lines. Also see if you can find any watermarks – this is easiest with larger format books.

Part 3

If you are unable to find a suitable book, then you should look at the images in the online article by Mary Wootton et al, 'Observations Concerning the Characteristics of Handmade Paper: The Library of Congress Endpaper Project 1996'....

Part 5

You might also like to find a book printed in Britain the first half of the nineteenth century and see if you can tell if it uses wove or laid paper...

Part 2

Return to this book once you have worked through the section on format and see if you can use your knowledge of whether the wire lines are vertical and chain lines horizontal, or vice versa, to identify the format of the book, and check your result against the format information you have found.

Part 4

Compare the early book with one printed on wove paper: think about how both look under close examination – can you see the fibres or any flaws in the paper? – and how both feel to the touch.

Bibliography at a distance:

Using formal assessment to check comprehension

Assessed Task 3, following completion of Analytical Bibliography unit

Compile as full a bibliographical description as possible of the book *Dissertatio de arbore draconis seu Dracaena* by Domenico Vandelli published in Olispone in 1768, working from the digitized copy available from the Biblioteca Digital de Botânica of the Universidade de Coimbra in Portugal.

Without examining a physical copy of a book, it is very difficult to make a definitive judgement about format: for the purpose of this task, include a statement at the appropriate part of the description giving your opinion about what might be the format of this book.

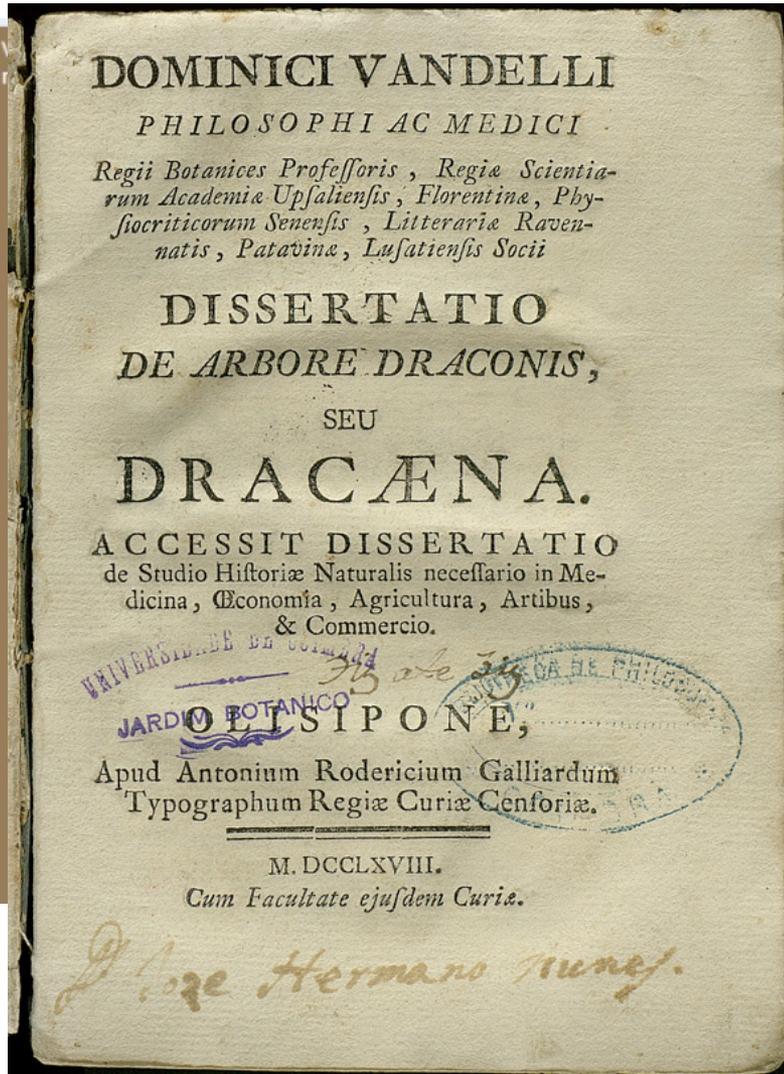
Here is a link to the digitized book:

<http://bibdigital.bot.uc.pt/obras/UCFCTB-t-B-78-1-42/globalItems.html>

Required elements:

- Title page transcription
- Format statement and collational formula
- Technical details
- Contents ('intellectual contents')
- Wider context (e.g. bibliographical citations)

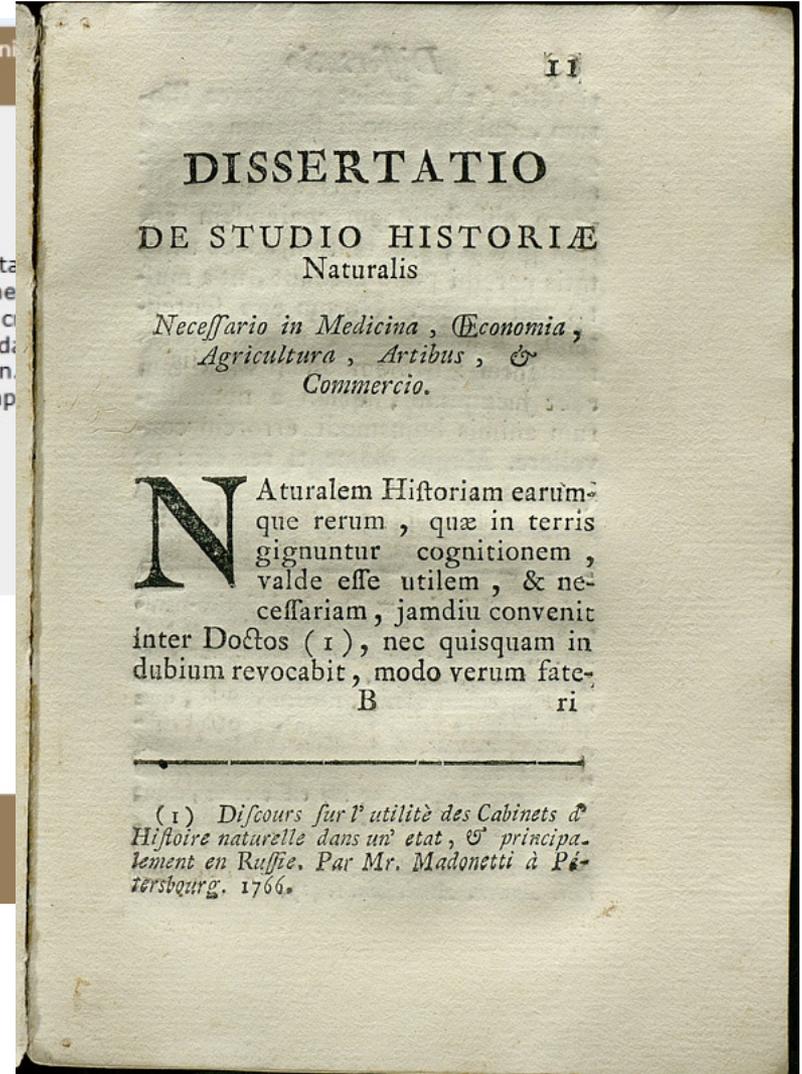
Bibliography at a distance: Using formal assessment to check comprehension



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Can rare book librarianship be taught by distance learning? – **YES!**

- We tried to balance old/new and practical/academic
 - traditional versus modern bodies of knowledge (scholar-printers versus digitization)
 - expert knowledge versus professional skills (collational formulae versus reading room management)
- Problem of overloading – if you add new skills and information, what do you drop?
 - not just modern professional skills (social media presence) but new types of rare books (19th-century decorative bindings; artists' books)
 - Rare book librarianship teaching traditionally concentrates on hand-press book era: this knowledge is what both students and employers ask for but do we have a responsibility to provide more?



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