

DESCRIPTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

GLIS-644

The codex has been the principal written tool for the transmission of information and ideas for almost two millennia and it has its proper history. The exploration of this history and of the physical construction of the codex is the subject of this course.

OBJECTIVES:

Students will discover the physical book, its characteristics, history and importance in cultural history and for research.

Students gain an introduction to the history of the book and to the physical properties of books — both manuscript and printed.

Students will learn how to identify and describe books, primarily from the hand-press period, using the principles of descriptive bibliography.

Students will have an introduction to the development of appropriate collection policies and how to acquire, handle and house antiquarian material in an institutional setting.

CONTENT:

Lectures on:

1. The codex: its origins, construction and description.
2. Descriptive bibliography: the principles and practice of describing books using the theory developed by Gaskell, Bowers and others; format, signature collation, formula, illustrative techniques and an introduction to textual editing.
- 3 The printed book as an artefact: printing presses and type, paper making, bookbinding. The history and technical aspects of these processes will be studied, as well as their use as historical evidence in studying rare books.
4. The place of the book in the history of culture, and the history of collecting antiquarian books and manuscripts both privately and in institutions.
5. As well, some attention will be given to rare book librarianship: the role of antiquarian materials in research libraries and the development of policies for a rare book or special collections library.

In-class Workshops:

Time will be devoted to working with books in a workshop setting. These workshops will give students an opportunity to work with antiquarian books from the McGill collection in a practical way and practice bibliographic description.

BASIC READINGS:

Mark Bland. *A guide to early printed books and manuscripts*. Chichester, U.K. ; Malden, MA : Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Philip Gaskell. *A New Introduction to Bibliography*. Oxford: 1972. (Reprinted 1995).

Fredson Bowers. *Principles of Bibliographic Description*. Winchester, U.K.: 1994. (Earlier editions also available.)

John Carter. *An ABC for Book Collectors*. 8th ed. London: 2004. There are various editions available and they are all suitable.

METHODS:

Weekly lectures and workshops.

EVALUATION:

There will be one short paper on a subject relating to the history of the book and an assignment requiring each student to do two bibliographical descriptions. A short test will complete the final grade. **LATE WORK WILL BE PENALIZED AT THE RATE OF ONE PERCENT (1%) OF THE MARK PER DAY.**

Paper	25%
Test	25%
Bibliographic descriptions	50%

- *McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity/> for more information).*
- *In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.*

LOCATION & CONTACT INFORMATION:

The class will be held in the Colgate Room in Rare Books and Special Collections on the 4th floor of the McLennan Library Building. My telephone number is 514-398-4708 and my e-mail address is richard.virr@mcgill.ca. Office hours are by appointment.

“DISCLAIMER: This syllabus is provided for informational use only. Content and assignments may change before the start of the course and may differ between course sections. Students of this course should not use this document but instead retrieve the official version from the McGill course management site”.

Dr. Richard Virr
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