

Project Year

Spring 2009

Project Title

The Scholar's Bookshelf: Recreating a Virtual Renaissance Library

Project Team

Walter Stephens, Professor, German and Romance Languages and Literatures, Krieger School of Arts & Sciences; Christopher Celenza, Professor, German and Romance Languages and Literatures, Krieger School of Arts & Sciences; Earle Havens, Curator, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Sheridan Libraries; Tania Zampini, Graduate Student, German and Romance Languages and Literatures, Krieger School of Arts & Sciences

Audience

The pilot undergraduate course, *Writing, Books & Wonder In The Renaissance*, (cross-listed: GRLL, History, Classics, Humanities Center) offered in spring 2010

Pedagogical Issue

Teaching courses around rare and valuable materials presents specific pedagogical and practical challenges: (1) the physical limitations that attend the active use, accessibility and physical conservation of these materials; (2) the general unfamiliarity of undergraduates with rare book materials; (3) the physical distribution of these materials across multiple locations (i.e., at the Eisenhower, Peabody and Garrett Libraries); and (4) the legibility and accessibility of these materials in multiple languages, scribal hands and printed letter forms.

Solution

Under the collaborative direction of Professors Walter Stephens and Christopher Celenza (GRLL), and Earle Havens (Sheridan Libraries), this project will create a digital foundation for exposing undergraduates in the humanities to the broad scope, intellectual interconnection and influence of specific classical and medieval texts during the Renaissance. Through a combined effort to identify, selectively digitize and customize student browsing of these interrelated rare books and manuscripts from the Libraries' collections, the team would generate an accessible "hands-online" tool that would chart the larger history of reading and writing practices, while also underscoring connections and traditions of thought made possible by the assembly of a scholarly library within the historical past.

English translations of texts in Latin and the vernacular languages will be provided by the faculty team and Fellow to guide students' navigation through these works using the CER's Map Tool, as well as interpretive notes about the specific material qualities of the physical texts in question: bindings, illustrations, historical reading practices, typography, etc. The latter, secondary focus will provide students with an added understanding of how the history, and general availability and accessibility, of texts were invariably linked to the conditions and means of their material production, circulation, and consumption over time. Student log-ins, pedagogical modules and instructions, and spaces for the

submission of written work embedded in the site, will initially orient students to the bookshelf. This would be followed by independent student navigation, original student research, and interpretive written work.

Technologies Used

Map Tool

Project Abstract

This project will constitute a collaboration between faculty members in the Romance Languages and the Sheridan Libraries. Specifically, we intend to identify, selectively digitize and provide on-line student access to a set of historical texts in Special Collections that were produced from classical antiquity up to the early modern period. The resulting product would be augmented with faculty, curatorial and Tech Fellow contributions of original interpretive texts, selected translations into English, as well as guided pedagogical exercises assigned to the students, inspiring their self-navigation of the bookshelf and drawing connections between the various texts it contains. Our students will move beyond the traditional history of texts, undertaking, instead, to actively replicate for themselves the activity of a Renaissance scholar in his library.

The interactive functionalities of the resulting presentation would provide undergraduates with the opportunity to learn about medieval and Renaissance books in a virtually “hands-online” way, exposing them to the physical and artifactual qualities of books in their evolving relationship to historical reading, writing and printing practices. This resource would also guide students intellectually through a selection of specific traditions of thought that connected the texts of the ancient and medieval past with the Renaissance present through the medium of books at a time when the very technology of the book was revolutionized by the technology of print.

This virtual gathering of books will illustrate first-hand the process by which manuscripts and printed books variously wove together, disrupted, and otherwise revolutionized the intellectual patrimony of the ancient and medieval worlds during the Renaissance.