

Spring 2011

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Ex Libris

Newsletter of the West Virginia University Libraries

Spring 2011

www.libraries.wvu.edu

Rare Book Room Enhances Academic Experience

If you want to read *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* this weekend, multiple options lay before you. You could go to the public library and check out a copy for free. You could go to Barnes & Noble or a used book store. You could have Amazon rush you a copy, or you could download it to your e-reader. Whichever the choice, it will probably run less than the cost of two venti mochas at Starbucks.

It was a different story for folks back in 1876. Months before the novel's publication, a salesman made the rounds soliciting potential buyers for Mark Twain's new work. He brought a sample chapter that contained illustrations, examples of the decorative binding options, and a sheet to take orders. Sign on the dotted line, and your book would arrive within a few months. Depending on the binding and other details, it cost the reader \$2.75 to \$4.75. That could equal a full day's wages in 1876.

That realization becomes even more powerful when a student visits the WVU Libraries' Rare Book Room, holds a first-edition of the book, and examines the intricately designed cover.

"There's something magical about visiting the Rare Book Room," said Marilyn Francus, associate professor of English in the Eberly College of Arts & Sciences. "Students get excited about the texts, because these books are not like the books they know – they have different designs, bindings, fonts, spellings, and different illustrations from what they are used to. Students discover that texts, as objects, reveal history and culture. And suddenly, books are really cool."

Francus began bringing her students to the Rare Book Room on the sixth floor of the Charles C. Wise Jr. Library in 2006. She believes the visits enhance what students learn in the classroom by providing a deeper understanding of how different today's paperback – or e-reader – is from a tome crafted in the 1700s.

The trips are more than just a quick tour. Francus collaborated with Harold M. Forbes, Rare Books Collection Curator, and Stewart Plein, a visiting librarian at the College of Law Library, to create a plan to incorporate treasures from the Rare Book Room into course curriculum.

For a class period last fall, Francus's students gathered in the Stealey Manuscripts Reading Room in the West Virginia and Regional History Collection. Spread out on the tables were more than two dozen rare books selected by Forbes and Plein.

Forbes and Plein welcomed the students and talked briefly about the history of publishing and what constitutes a

rare book. They explained how expensive books once were and that only a privileged few owned collections. In wealthy homes, book-lined shelves served as a status symbol.

"Having a book itself was a big deal," Plein said. "Only the wealthy could afford a book, and the wealthier ones wanted more decoration."

Plein focused on how books were constructed, and directed students to pay attention to the bindings, the types of materials used, the gold-trimmed edges, and other details.

She then distributed white gloves and invited the students to examine the books.

Along with the books were other unique items from the collection: clay tablets from Mesopotamia, a copy of the Book of Esther on a leather scroll, and a Thai book written on palm fronds connected by string and designed to be worn around the neck.



Chelsea Richmond, a political science senior, and Matthew Burns, a senior majoring in English and national security, examine a selection of books housed in the Rare Book Room.

"There's a genuine cool factor. There are not a lot of places in the world you can go to and handle books that are older than the country."

Matthew Burns, WVU Senior

Heather Hixson, a psychology junior, perused everything, but she was awed most by Boydell's *Illustrated Shakespeare* (1804), a collection of illustrations based on William Shakespeare's plays. She gingerly turned the pages as she appreciated the artist's interpretation of the Bard's work.

"This was the coolest lecture ever," Hixson said. "I'm proud that we have such unique resources here."

It was the same story for Matthew Burns, a senior majoring in English and national security. As a writer, he's interested in books, and as a history buff, he's fascinated by all the old volumes that fill the room.

"There's a genuine cool factor," Burns said. "There are not a lot of places in the world you can go to and handle books that are older than the country."

Rare Book Module

This story actually begins a while back. While working on her doctorate, Francus traveled to several rare book archives around the globe. At Trinity College in Dublin, she held Jonathan Swift's hand-written autobiography.

"It was a thrill, that moment of contact where suddenly the past is present, and real—and that's the thrill I want my students to have," Francus said.

"There are things that are ineffable, that you suddenly understand about literacy, about literature, and about history when you hold a rare book in your hands. It's vivid and tangible. And I thought, 'let's do it.'"

Her idea was not just to bring her class into the Rare Book Room, but to create a teaching module that would encourage other instructors to bring their classes as well.

Plein thought it was an incredible idea. She said most faculty members either didn't know that the Rare Book Room was available for class use or how to incorporate rare books into their curriculum. She welcomed a way to spread the word.

"It was quite literally the best project I've worked on in all my time here," Plein said. "It was very exciting to work on something that would bring rare books to students and students to rare books."

To create the Rare Book Module, Francus applied for a development grant in rare book pedagogy in 2006. She and Plein then collaborated to develop a list of exercises and resources for faculty. Meanwhile, Plein and Forbes surveyed the Rare Books Collection to determine which texts could hold up to student use.

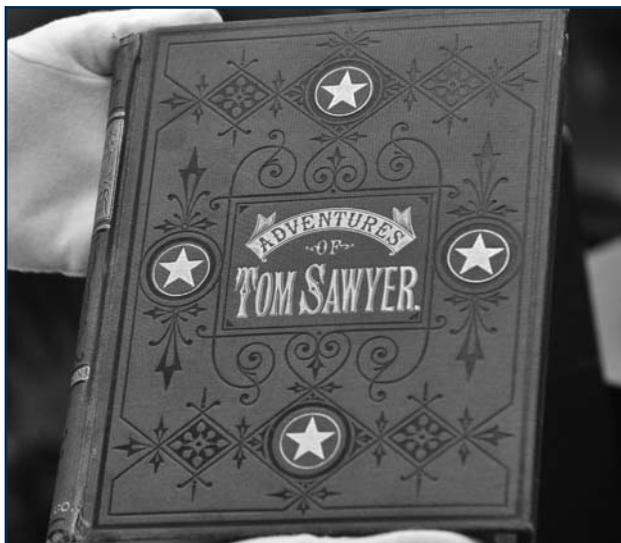
The module, which is available online at <http://www.as.wvu.edu/english/rarebooks/index.html>, consists of assignments that can easily be modified to fit into a course's curriculum.

For Francus's classes, students get an assignment that requires them to return to the Rare Book Room and work on their own with a few volumes.

The assignment could involve transcribing a text and creating a modern edition, which teaches students the perils of transcription and the challenges with which a modern editor grapples.

Eighteenth-century works are very different from contemporary books. Editors face questions about capitalization, punctuation, semicolons, and the "long S,"

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The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, first edition, 1876.

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Ex Libris

WVU Celebrates Asimov Collection

The tale of Isaac Asimov is one of a toddler who immigrated to the U.S. from Russia and went on to become one of the foremost writers in the Golden Age of Science Fiction. His life was most of all an “American success story,” says fellow writer James Gunn.

Gunn breathed life into the 20th Century author for an evening at West Virginia University as part of the 2010 David C. Hardesty Jr. Festival of Ideas last fall, telling the audience that his friend Isaac appreciated their support.

Gunn, director of the Center for the Study of Science Fiction, assembled a portrait of Asimov, whom he had known personally, that presented quirks embedded in a broad canvas of writing.

Writing was a constant in Asimov’s life, delving into topics from the Bible to limericks. Asimov (1920-1992) penned and edited 470 books – at his most prolific, he wrote 13 books a year.

He studied chemistry and worked as a professor at Boston University until he resigned when his department required him to research instead of write.



James Gunn, director of the Center for the Study of Science Fiction, recounts his memories of Isaac Asimov during his Festival of Ideas presentation.

Asimov wanted to be known as a science fiction writer, but he also wrote many non-fiction science books.

“His science books represented a significant contribution to a general awakening of the American public to the need for greater understanding of science if the U.S. were to maintain its leadership in the world,” Gunn said.

In Asimov’s heyday, the world was discovering spaceships, atomic energy, computers and the moon landings - things he and other writers had described years before.

Gunn said Asimov described his role this way: “Science fiction writers and readers didn’t put a man on the moon all by themselves, but they created a climate of opinion in which the goal of putting a man on the moon became acceptable.”

Asimov is still doing that in some way through the extensive Isaac Asimov collection at the WVU

Libraries. Before the Festival of Ideas lecture, visitors pored over about 150 items of the more than 600 books and related Asimov memorabilia as part of a special display in the West Virginia and Regional History Collection on the sixth floor of the Charles C. Wise Library.

The Asimov Collection

The foundation for the Libraries’ Asimov Collection was established by WVU alumnus Larry Shaver and Carlos Patterson of Sacramento, Calif. Shaver discovered Asimov while he was a student in Morgantown more than 30 years ago. The Fairmont native picked up one of the author’s paperbacks in a bookstore, devoured it, and began looking for more titles.

His collection grew to near 600, with 75 percent being first editions including 20 autographed books. In 2002, he realized what he had assembled over decades was too big a resource to leave on the shelves of his home library, so he donated his collection to the Libraries.

“I knew the collection had an intrinsic value that others could share if I could just find it a proper home, and the people at WVU were so gracious at accepting them,” said Shaver, who returned to campus for the event. “I’m



Robert Barricelli, a recruiter for the Davis College of Agriculture, Natural Resources & Design, browses the Asimov display in the WVRHC’s main reading room.

extremely happy that they’re doing more than I could have expected.”

Patterson had no previous ties to the University. He found the Libraries’ digital Asimov exhibit while searching online and decided that WVU would be good home for his personal collection. He was on hand to watch the collection tour.

“It’s tremendous to see the books displayed,” Patterson said. “One of the things, as a collector, is that you do it for yourself. But it’s a pleasure to be able to know that other people enjoy it as much as we do.”

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WVU Libraries Develop Open-Source Software

West Virginia University’s innovative spirit isn’t limited to research and teaching but includes every behind-the-scenes employee who helps the University work more efficiently.

One of those examples is a professional technologist in the Libraries’ Systems Department who has developed an innovative piece of software, the second to be released through WVU’s open-source licensing agreement.

The software, called EngineAPI, lets users rapidly develop web interfaces. An API, or application programming interface, is software used to help unrelated pieces of software interact.

“It takes a lot of the tedious work and puts it behind the scenes, so it’s easier and quicker for a programmer to develop redundant applications,” said Mike Bond, the software’s creator. “It allows me to program a whole application in 15 minutes as opposed to a few days.”

EngineAPI helped Bond to revamp the Libraries’ new e-Reserve system in two months instead of about a year.

Although Bond designed it with libraries in mind, the software has multiple uses, such as validating data, creating forms and templates, managing content in one place and displaying it in another, and producing RSS feeds from any page.

Visitors to the Libraries’ website unknowingly reap

the benefits. For the Libraries’ digital collections, the module combines an image database and a text database making them appear as one system on one website. The software also detects smartphone users and directs them to the Libraries’ mobile web page.

“The software that Mike Bond created will lead to many efficiencies in the Libraries’ work in the future, making both our lives and our users’ lives easier,” said Bill Rafter, Head of the Libraries’ Systems Department.

Bond began working on the software two years ago when faced with the need to enable a new employee to quickly develop software while maintaining security standards. The software sanitizes certain data automatically and helps prevent someone from creating security problems by accident. After using and studying the 1.0 version for a year, Bond took what he learned and updated it.

He demonstrated his creation at a digital libraries conference in Ann Arbor, Mich., and received good feedback. Representatives from several research universities expressed interest in returning home with the software and putting it to use on their campuses. In turn, they will work to develop the software for more uses.

“I’ve been using open source for years, so it’s nice to be able to contribute back to the community,” Bond said.

The University has developed other open-sourced projects, though not under this license, and created a

content management system as the first piece of software under the license.

Dave Olsen, a professional technologist with University Relations – Web, considers offering software to the greater community through open source as fulfilling the University’s land grant mission.

“By open sourcing, we take a larger and more active role in higher education in terms of being a leader in whatever the endeavor is,” Olsen said. “The Libraries are taking a leading role in their field.”

To access the URL for the software, visit <http://systems.lib.wvu.edu/engineapi>.

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Libraries Connect Farmers with Research

What do a delicious roasted ear of corn and a well-researched term paper have in common? Both are the result of applying knowledge to create a superb product.

Assisting in the process, the West Virginia University Libraries are providing the public with access to decades of research conducted by the West Virginia Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station.

"Since the 1880s, WVU has fulfilled its land-grant mission by conducting applied agricultural research and publishing the results in printed Experiment Bulletins. Now, we are continuing with that mission by making this valuable research available to a larger audience," said Noel Kopriva, Agriculture, Forestry and Design Librarian.

Five years ago, the WVU Libraries joined the Agriculture Network Information Center (agNIC), a network of about 60 institutions and organizations dedicated to offering free access to quality agricultural information and resources.

The Libraries then began collaborating with the National Agricultural Library to digitize the *West Virginia Agricultural*

and Forestry Experiment Station Bulletins, which date back to 1888, and create a searchable database of full-text bulletins.

So far, issues from 1970 to 2005 are available at the agNIC website, www.agnic.org. The remaining issues are in the process of being digitized. Last year, the site received more than 40,000 hits.

"People are finding the website and using it, which is very gratifying," Kopriva said.

The audience for the website and the bulletins are typically researchers, government agencies, people in the Extension field, and farmers, both large and small scale.

"The articles are written in pretty accessible language,"

Kopriva said. "It's science, but it's not jargon. Anyone can use them."

The Experiment Station is the oldest research unit at WVU and in the state. In 1887, Congress passed the Hatch Act and provided funds for several land-grant colleges to establish experiment stations. The West Virginia Board of Regents received \$15,000, and the State Legislature then directed WVU to create a station.

WVU, in turn, shared its research by publishing the *West Virginia Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station Bulletins*, hosting lectures and workshops on campus, and traveling the state.

"You had to take the knowledge you gained in your experiment station and extend it to farmers and their families," said Cameron Hackney, Dean of the Davis College



A crowd gathers to view a calf aboard WVU's Agriculture Train, circa 1913.

of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Design. "Part of getting the money was extending what you learned to the citizens to improve their lives and to improve profitability of agriculture in the state."

While the Davis College remains actively engaged in research, Hackney believes volumes can be learned from the old bulletins because many things done 20, 30 or even 100 years ago remain relevant today.

For example, WVU was on the forefront of fungi research in the 1960s. The state's flagship university also led in studies on a new food processing method that applied high pressure to kill micro-organisms. The first experiments in this procedure were done on campus back in 1908.

"It's in one of our Experiment Station bulletins," Hackney said. "That was the beginning of it; now it is being used commercially."



Farmers attend an event sponsored by the WVU Agriculture Experiment Station, circa 1913.

Libraries Participate in National Assessment Project

The long line outside of a restaurant hints that the food is delicious. A thumbs up from Roger Ebert carries the promise of a good movie. A string of impressive touchdowns signifies a great quarterback.

Identifying quality research sources online, though, is more difficult.

"It's not hard to find information; it's hard to find good information. You have to know the difference and then how to use the good information ethically," said Megan Oakleaf, an assistant professor at Syracuse University School of Information Studies.

Oakleaf was on campus recently to lead a training session in establishing information literacy assessment tools. Information literacy is the ability to find, evaluate, and effectively use information. The visit was part of Oakleaf's Rubric Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (RAILS) project, <http://railsontack.info/>.

Funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, RAILS is a three-year project that seeks to measure information literacy skills of college students. It is designed to help librarians and academic faculty develop and test rubrics that evaluate student learning and information literacy.

The WVU Libraries are among five academic libraries from across the nation selected to participate in the initiative. The results will contribute to research in this field.

"The Association of American Colleges and Universities is really excited," Oakleaf said. "They're eager to use what we learn."

Last fall, Carroll Wilkinson, the Libraries' Director of Instruction and Information Literacy,

attended an intense introductory training session for RAILS while participating in the Association of College and Research Libraries Assessment Immersion program.

"Though frontiers are never easy, it is exciting to be the first site in this research project. Substituting tests with a values rubric for assessment of information literacy learning is rich with possibilities for us here at WVU," Wilkinson said.

One of the dilemmas facing academia today is the vast sea of information available. Students think they are at an advantage because the Internet makes so much accessible, but they're actually at a disadvantage if they're ill-equipped to navigate through it all.

"Students, generally speaking, don't see the differences between good, bad, and mediocre information," Oakleaf said. "That's the most dangerous problem to have."

Librarians teach about aspects of the research process to equip students with the skills necessary to find the best information. At WVU, the Libraries currently offer courses in basic library research, Film and Media Literacy, and Gender and the Research Process. Plans call for a course in information use and student success in the future.

During her visit to campus, Oakleaf spent a day working with nine librarians (Susan Arnold, Virginia Bender, Linda Blake, Kevin Fredette, Grace Gmeindl, Noel Kopriva, Barbara LaGodna, Beth Royall, and Jessica Tapia) and Dr. Bernadette Jungblut, Director of Assessment and Retention at WVU. The group examined rubrics to measure what students are learning when librarians teach.

Oakleaf explained that while tests work with

facts, they are not a good fit for information literacy because everything is about context.

"With a paper, there are certain skills you can easily measure or judge," Oakleaf said.

For example, an instructor can see how well a student used information in the paper and how well he used it to build an argument.

Other things to consider are whether quotes and summarization were used appropriately and if credit was given to the proper sources in the correct way. Instructors also evaluate whether the student found and used good sources.

"Rubrics articulate what you expect students to know. They also say, 'this is what excellence looks like'," Oakleaf said.

After a paper is returned, students can see where they fall on the rubric. The rubrics show if the paper meets the standards or if improvements are necessary.

"When you can articulate the skills you're seeking to teach to students, you can measure it in their work, and then you can better help your students to improve their research skills," Oakleaf said. "Possessing good research skills enhances a student's academic experience."



Professor and Librarian Publish Article on Collaborative Success

A WVU professor and a librarian have written an article about how their partnership in the classroom enhanced the academic environment for students.

During the 2010 academic year, Dr. Tim Warner, a geology/geography professor, and Linda Blake, science librarian, were one of five teams to participate in the WVU Libraries' Information Literacy Course Enhancement Program, a joint effort between the Libraries and the Provost's Office. The program's goal is to incorporate information literacy concepts into the curriculum.

Their results appeared in the winter 2010 edition of *Issues in Science & Technology Librarianship*, an online journal published by the Association of College & Research Libraries, Science and Technology Section.

"People associate information literacy more with the humanities, where there is often a strong emphasis on term papers and writing," Warner said. "I thought they'd be interested in how we're doing it in a science class."

Warner, who uses the Libraries heavily in his teaching, understands that students can often be overwhelmed by the flood of available information available online when they undertake a research project. He considers the ability to find quality materials a priority for students.

"It's not like you can go to one or two places to find information and then you're done," Warner said. "There are so many different sources. They vary so much in reliability and quality, and they can be in obscure places. That's how a professional librarian helps me."

The pair collaborated to provide students in his Introduction to Remote Sensing class with an understanding of how to evaluate scholarly literature, how to develop a more sophisticated approach when researching a topic, and how to avoid plagiarism. Warner

dedicated two class sessions and two labs to the project.

In his teaching, Warner focused on assessing the reliability of materials. He explained the peer-review process and the role of publishing in a scholar's career. He also touched on non-peer-reviewed material such as general Internet sources, the popular press, and gray literature.

Blake focused on the process of searching for information and explained that the Libraries maintain subscriptions to thousands of electronic journals indexed in hundreds of databases. Rather than using Google to scour the entire web, she directed them to the Libraries' digital holdings. She also explained how to craft searches to net the best results.

"There is just so much information out there, and it's not going to get less; it's going to get more," Blake said. "It's largely uncontrolled on the Internet. That's why it's real important in the sciences to use library-funded sources to weed through it."

The final piece was a lecture on plagiarism. Prior to the lesson, most students thought they were aware of what constitutes plagiarism and were confident they were working within the rules. Afterwards, students said they will be more cautious when writing papers.

"Plagiarism is more complex than students realize," Warner said. "Even professionals can get blasé. It's easy to not think through something."

Blake and Warner evaluated their efforts by surveying the class before and after sharing the information literacy curriculum.

Across the board, comments were extremely positive, and almost all students expressed that they felt their information literacy skills had improved.

Warner and Blake saw a significant change in how students approach library resources. Students said they



Dr. Tim Warner, a geology/geography professor, and Linda Blake, science librarian, participated in the initial Information Literacy Course Enhancement program. The two wrote an article about their experience.

would previously go first to Google or Google Scholar. Now, the first place they go is the Libraries' website. They will still use Google Scholar, but it will be a supplemental source.

Students' enthusiasm about what they learned pleased Warner. He noted a student who said one of the research tools she discovered changed her life.

"She was obviously indulging in a little bit of hyperbole, but I think it shows that if you've been struggling and then see something that handles the concern so well, it really is life-changing," Warner said.

Brazilian Professor Visits WVU to Gain ETD Expertise

An electrical engineering professor at Pontifical Catholic University, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, visited the WVU Libraries this fall to glean insight into how best to advance her institution's Electronic Thesis and Dissertation (ETD) program.

"It's important for us to decide our next steps based on the experience that is successful. West Virginia's experience is well-known and respected," Pavani said.

Ana Pavani serves on the Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD) Board of Directors and has been instrumental in implementing the national Brazilian ETD program as well as the development of the Latin American ETD Consortium. At PUC, Pavani designed and managed the establishment of an institutional repository, which contains ETDs, senior projects, journals, books, articles, and courseware.

Pavani is interested in evolving the Brazilian national ETD program. During her visit, she sought advice from WVU Libraries faculty and staff regarding incorporating multimedia applications in ETDs as well as preservation methodologies.

"Adding multimedia to ETDs is very important in many areas," Pavani said. "If you can add simulations or dimensional visualization, you give a lot of value to ETDs. It's much easier for people to understand."

WVU has been a pioneer in multimedia ETDs. Since 2004, the NDLTD has presented the Innovative ETD Award to nine WVU graduates for integrating their scholarly work with the latest technology applications.

Some have included video clips to allow others to experience the essence of their dramatic art presentations; others included animated simulation models, software code, and data sets so other scholars may follow in their footsteps using the same software

and methodologies.

PUC's role in Brazil is quite similar to WVU's role here as a land grant university. Brazilians look to PUC for research to improve the health and daily lives of citizens, to help business and industry grow, and to protect the environment.

For example, since 2005, the public has electronically accessed more than 120,000 times a dissertation about mountaintop removal by West Virginia native Shirley Stewart Burns. Her research, later published with WVU Press, became fodder in the ongoing MTR debate and eventually led to changes in U.S. Environmental Protection Agency policy. In Brazil, engineers and technicians rely on ETDs to learn the latest research concerning oil and offshore drilling.

"We have no doubt that the ETD program is worth it. I believe you have the same passion," Pavani told the audience during one of her presentations.

While at WVU, in addition to meeting with Libraries faculty and staff, Pavani also talked with WVU ETD/IR Task Force representatives, faculty from the Department of Computer Science & Electrical Engineering, and representatives from the Center for Excellence in Disabilities. She also gave a presentation about her work on technology accessibility research projects for the blind and visually impaired at PUC.

Developments have included computer accessibility applications for the ETD repository, the library catalog, and online curriculum, as well as development of a wireless brain-machine interface to assist individuals with disabilities.

Her visit also included tours of the Downtown Campus Library and the West Virginia and Regional History Collection. She was most struck by the number of students in the library.

"Every place I went, there were students. They were either reading, or using the computers, or discussing in groups," Pavani said. "I got the idea that the library is a

laboratory of ideas and interaction of young people."

Pavani is the fifth international visitor to come to campus to study the University's ETD program. She was preceded by Yaqub Ali, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan, in 2008; Susan Copeland, Robert Gordon University, Scotland, in 2006; Drs. Sumant and Beena Goel, Digital Dissertation Foundation of India, 2005; and Simon Bevan, Cranfield University, England, 2004.

WVU became a pioneer in the field when it established its ETD program in 1998, having become the second institution in the world to require all master's theses and doctoral dissertations to be submitted electronically and then posted on the Web according to the student's directions. As of spring 2011, WVU's ETD collection contains almost 5,000 research documents, including 3,000 theses and 2,000 dissertations.



Myra Lowe, Associate Dean of Libraries; John Hagen, manager of the ETD program; and Ana Pavani, professor at Pontifical Catholic University, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.



Rare Book Room Enhances Academic Experience—Continued from page 1

the symbol in old documents that looks like an “f.”

Students must decide what changes to make and then justify their changes and talk about their audience. Who would be reading this new edition? Would it be someone who knows about 18th-century literature?

Some assignments require students to examine the binding, decorations on the cover, the size of the book, the frequency and type of illustrations used, and develop a theory about the intended audiences when the text was originally published.

“I want my students to think about books as material objects in history,” Francus said. “We are living in an age of e-readers and changing reading technologies, and I want them to think about what it means to be a reader, and how texts are produced and circulate in society.”

Chelsea Richmond, a political science senior, lugs around fewer books since receiving an e-reader for her birthday. Much of her assigned reading is available in PDF form so she can leave the bound versions at home.

However, she’s thinking more about physical books after her visits to the Rare Book Room. Thoughts about the book’s place in the future swirl in her head.

She wondered if students, as electronic books gain in popularity, would forget how to go to a library, look up a call number, and find a book. And then there’s the practicality of paper over microchip.

“Books don’t break, and the screen always works,” Richmond said.

Claire Fowler, a freshman studying English, had similar thoughts.

“On one hand, an electronic book is environmentally friendly. But on the other hand, books can have historical meaning,” Fowler said. “You can look at the pages and see the typeface. You can feel it.”

Fowler credits the classroom discussion for creating a foundation upon which to build a greater appreciation for books. She said they talked about books as objects, as opposed to just concentrating on the metaphors and symbolism in the text.

“We focused on the books themselves. It was really interesting and very different,” Fowler said.

This new perception enabled students to see a connection between themselves and those who read the pages in the past.

“You know somebody has touched this book, experienced this book,” Fowler said. “When I hold a book in my hands and read it, it’s weird to think someone did the same thing a really long time ago.”

The Next Chapter

Francus is excited for her students. Not only have they developed an appreciation for books, she believes their work in the Rare Book Room will translate to the rest of their academic careers.

She said hands-on learning opens venues for students to engage in critical thinking and research skills. For some, it motivates them to do research on a larger scale.

Reading old texts and jotting notes with pencil was new for Burns, who is used to searching through electronic journals and online databases.

“It was a very different experience for me,” Burns said. “It was probably something similar to what my parents would have done when they were in college, before they had access to online information.”

Richmond also thought that she had a handle on what research entailed but realized she was missing out on a big part.

“It felt like real research. It felt so much more in-depth than sitting behind a computer and looking up things on the Internet,” Richmond said.

Both plan to head to law school in the fall, and both believe they’re better prepared to tackle a heavy work load that will involve reading through stacks of thick law books.

“I feel I’ll be more confident going in, finding a book, and doing actual research,” Richmond said.



A collection of clay tablets from Mesopotamia are among several unique items preserved in the Rare Book Room.



Stewart Plein, a visiting librarian at the College of Law Library, and Marilyn Francus, associate professor of English in the Eberly College of Arts & Sciences continue to develop the Rare Book Module they created in 2007.



LEAVE A LEGACY®

*Make a Difference
in the Lives
That Follow*

Anyone who walks into a library knows that it’s a special place. In this electronic age, libraries worldwide have become far more than physical buildings containing books, newspapers and magazines. That’s definitely true of the WVU Libraries.

Those who value the many roles libraries play in our society can provide a legacy for the WVU Libraries through a gift in their will or revocable trust. It’s simple – have your attorney include the wording of “to the West Virginia University Foundation, Inc. for the benefit of the WVU Libraries.” Through additional wording in the provision, you can specify that your gift will be for academic journals or technological resources, preservation services, the genealogy archives, the West Virginia & Regional History Collection, facility improvements, or unrestricted use.

Other special options for future support of the Libraries include creating a gift arrangement that pays you income for life, changing the after-death beneficiary of retirement account assets, donating life insurance, or gifting real estate while retaining full lifetime use. To learn more, contact Monte Maxwell at 304-293-0306 or Monte.Maxwell@mail.wvu.edu. An online source of information is the WVU Foundation’s website: www.wvuf.org. Click on “Ways to Give” and then “Planned Giving.”

Your support is definitely needed. Choosing such a worthwhile legacy for the WVU Libraries will impact the lives of many in the way that you feel is best.

*WVU Celebrates Asimov
Collection—Continued from page 2*

The Great Explainer

Dean of Libraries Frances O’Brien said the Libraries are proud to host one of the largest Asimov collections in the world.

“Isaac Asimov has written books in every Dewey Decimal Classification, which is a neat and unusual feat for a writer,” O’Brien said.

The collection is a reminder of the interest that Asimov kindled in the sciences.

“So many people tell us they discovered Isaac Asimov through his fiction when they were teenagers, and it opened up an interest in science that they’ve kept to the present day,” O’Brien said.

“He’s a very accessible, a very readable author, and he’s one of those authors that people feel they have a real connection with, so it’s always fun to talk to people who love to read his books and are so happy to see what we have and that we’re taking care of the collection.”

Mike Bagby, a professor in WVU’s School of Dentistry, was one of those teenagers whose interest and career in science was sparked by Asimov’s writing. He now teaches a materials dentistry course that involves chemistry,

physics, engineering, and dentistry.

“He can present science in a language that the average person can understand,” Bagby said. “I guess you could say he could create a world that you could visualize in your own mind.”

Abra Sitler, an English junior at WVU, pulled on a pair of white gloves and examined the rows of books. As an English major pursuing a minor in biology, she lauded Asimov’s ability to understand both writing and science.

“I definitely appreciate what he’s done for science and science fiction and the way I think he’s increased science’s popularity and accessibility,” she said. “It’s kind of rare to have popular writers who write a lot about science.”

She believes more writers like Asimov are needed today.

“Science is the future for us,” Sitler said. “Our society is becoming more and more technological, and I think it’s important to understand how that works and how these changes are going to affect society.”

At the end of Gunn’s speech, he took a question from someone in the audience who asked if the science writers of today were creating a culture in which science could thrive.

“There are some remarkable new writers these days...but most of their writing tends to blur the boundaries between science fiction and fantasy,” Gunn said. “I don’t think there’s anybody who is right now writing the kinds of things that Isaac was, and I just wish there were.”



Members of WVU's agriculture faculty teach a class on grafting and budding at the Agricultural Experiment Station, circa 1913. More than a century's work at the Experiment Station is preserved through the Agriculture Network Information Center (agNIC). Learn more inside on page 3.

Mark Your Calendar for West Virginia Day Celebration

The WVU Libraries and the West Virginia and Regional History Collection will celebrate the state's founding with an event on June 20.

This year will mark the 148th anniversary of West Virginia's statehood. This year's theme will be the 150th anniversary of the commencement of the Civil War.

Exhibits will focus on the formation of the Restored Government of Virginia, which was located in Wheeling and led to the creation of West Virginia.

The preliminary schedule includes exhibits in the WVRHC's Davis Family Galleries, guest speakers, and a reception.

The event is open to the public. All who attend will receive a commemorative West Virginia Day poster.

Ex Libris the Newsletter of the WVU Libraries
Spring 2011 * West Virginia University

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