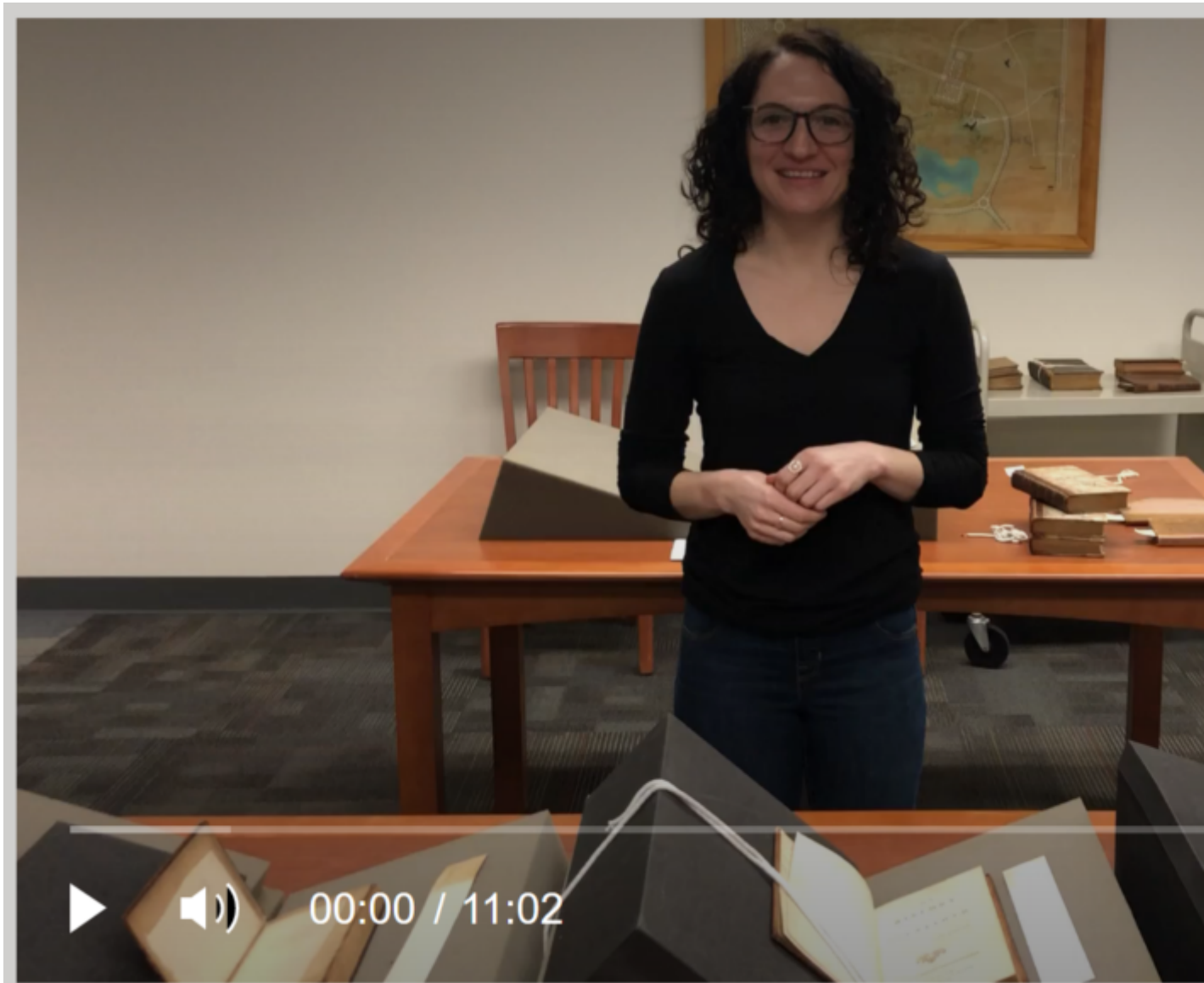


Pandemic Pedagogy: Marginalia in the Marguerite Hicks Collection

Editor's note: In the spring of 2020, Megan Peiser (Assistant Professor of English at Oakland University) was teaching a capstone course for the English major, "History of the Book in Theory and Practice," along with Emily Spunaugle (Assistant Professor and Rare Books Librarian). Before the emergency stoppage of in-person instruction in March 2020, this course met twice a week: on Tuesdays, students discussed the assigned readings in their regularly assigned classroom, and on Thursdays, students gathered in the Special Collections Reading Room of Oakland University's Kresge Library to investigate, touch, and experience examples corresponding to that week's readings. When the course had to shift to distance teaching, Peiser and Spunaugle created a series of videos talking about some of the books students would have been able to work with in person. In this conversation, the teachers explain some of their strategies and thoughts behind those videos. Peiser and Spunaugle's videos are available for anyone to watch and use at the Marguerite Hicks Project website: <https://margueritehickspro.wixsite.com/home/teaching-the-collection>



opening still showing Megan Peiser getting ready to start the first video

SW: Why did you decide to shoot videos of the books and not use still images with captions?

ES and MP: These videos are meant not only to demonstrate marginalia in our rare books, but more importantly to model our interactions with them: how are we opening the books? what kinds of questions do researchers ask of books? how does the materiality of a text in conversation with its marginalia tell us something about these books's use by former owners? In the videos, you can see Megan's fingers catching the deckled edges of an untrimmed book and running over the indentations made by type impressing the recto side of a leaf. There's much to be said for a book's materiality appearing in its digital surrogates, and much of this is predicated on the physical experience—even if this means witnessing someone else's experience.

How long did it take you to plan, script, record, edit, make transcriptions and captions, and upload your videos? What equipment and software did you use to make these?

On Wednesday, March 11, 2020, the University announced classes would be moved online

immediately. The next day, we ran to the library to film us interacting with the texts for that Thursday's book lab on marginalia. We had no script, no camera, no special lighting, and we're not actors. We filmed with what we had—an iPhone. We misspoke, we got flustered; Emily films upside down.

While these videos are a bit haphazard, they preserve Emily and Megan's experience of discovery, discussion, and collaboration when studying the material book. We whisper to each other, point out characteristics for the other to see, ask one another questions—this is how the real process of learning from a material book actually looks, which a scripted video wouldn't show. It was the closest asynchronous tool that we could create (especially last minute and so rushed) in lieu of having the students handle the books themselves.

We've recently received a new document camera from administration to host future remote special collections visits, which will make possible real time investigations of books in synchronous courses.

What did you ask students to do with these videos? (ie, were they assigned them as texts? did they write responses? discuss in class? just have as resources to draw on as needed?)

Students watched the videos and answered a series of questions based on materiality and use, much like they would have done in a face-to-face visit to special collections. For the purposes of this class, we treated each visit to Special Collections like a lab day for a science class—it was the day to put into practice what they read about theoretically for Tuesday. Students engaged in a forum discussion in the course management system about the materials in the videos, and tied what they learned about marginalia back to earlier lessons. The videos have since become teaching tools that other instructors worldwide are using to point to examples of both studying/finding/making sense of marginalia in hand-press books, and of the process of discovery.

You had to create these suddenly at the onset of the pandemic and the closure of your university. Have you continued to use them in your courses?

The course these videos were created for is only offered every couple of years, so we haven't had immediate need for these specific videos for the purpose of teaching in the English Department quite yet. We certainly hope to build a course focused on material texts that is more permanent in the near future, especially one that is interdisciplinary and open to students across our campus learning system. One way we see these videos as being useful that we did not expect is as ways to help the students become more comfortable with handling and exploring older book objects. Our students are often very reticent, and watching Emily and Megan together handle the books, turn the pages, lean close to look at pencil marks, shows students that in order to do this work, we must handle the books to some degree. It demonstrates to students that books are a functional technology—they are made to be used, not just stared at from behind glass. We hope that these videos highlight the accessibility of the discovery process when studying rare books.

Do you have any advice to other teachers who might want to make teaching videos of their collections or who might be exploring using videos of other collections in their courses?

In the *Before Times*, this would be the point in the conversation where we'd be obliged to talk about sustainability, or ensuring that the instructional video or module or whatever has some sort of futurity built in: will this resource be broadly usable? what's the educational return on the

creatorsâ€™ investment of labor? where will this resource live? can its size and file format weather server migrations and software obsolescence? etc. Sustainability entails the privilege of planning and selecting which resources to devote to which projects, a conversation we canâ€™t have in 2020 and 2021 in the same way. Sustainability, to smaller institutions that are understaffed and underfunded, has long signaled no. We need to remember that higher ed is still in emergency online teaching mode: questions of futurity, professionalism, and branding for online instructional content cannot be our primary concerns while we balance health and survival, caring for others and ourselves, and teaching our students. We embraced the messy, just-in-time nature of our videos as part of our pandemic pedagogy, and would encourage other teachers to evaluate their own time and energy, confront their own lingering expectations of their Before Times pedagogies, and scale appropriately. For some, this might mean creating their own instructional videos like we did. Others might find our videos or those already created by other teachers useful for their own courses. And others *still* might opt for using digital surrogates for modeling how to interrogate printed objectsâ€™ materiality. The lesson we learned through the creation of these instructional videos is the importance of foregrounding student learning, which doesnâ€™t have to be clean, polished, or professional to be effective.

Marginalia Lab 1 of 5; the full series is at

<https://margueritehickspro.wixsite.com/home/teaching-the-collection>

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