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Apparition or Icon? Integrating Critical Visual Literacy into Primary Source Instruction

Jillian M. Ewalt
University of Dayton, jewalt1@udayton.edu

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Apparition or Icon? Integrating Critical Visual Literacy into Primary Source Instruction | Jillian Ewalt, Librarian

University of Dayton
Libraries

The Course

This Is UD: Archival and Primary Source Research (UDI 204)
1 credit "mini course" (10 weeks, taught by librarians and archivists)
Mon. & Wed. 9:05-9:50
Students in this course will explore primary sources, utilize research techniques, and understand methods for preserving and finding materials related to the rich history of the University of Dayton and the surrounding area.

Institutional Context

The University of Dayton is a top tier, Catholic research university in Dayton, Ohio with 11,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

The Marian Library is a special library at the University of Dayton devoted to the study of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Collections document the history, spirituality and ecclesial foundations of Marian studies. Holdings include circulating books, periodicals, rare books and incunabula, artwork, visual resources, and archival materials.

Week 7: Visual and Material Culture

Goal: Engage undergraduate students from a variety of majors in analyzing, interpreting and thinking critically about visual resources from archives and special collections.

Session development: Select course learning outcomes (based on SAA Primary Source Literacy Guidelines) and ACRL Visual Literacy Standards were the basis for creating content. The lessons included lecture, a short reading, discussion, self-reflection, show and tell with historic artifacts, and two hands-on activities using archival photographs and postcards.

Pedagogy: Critical and feminist pedagogical approaches offered students opportunities for critical thinking, self-analysis, personal reflection, hands-on activities, intuition, and discussions. A focus on active learning rather than lecture helped de-center the librarian/instructor as the purveyor of knowledge.

Please take a lesson plan and syllabus for more information!

Assessment

Final Project: Student learning was assessed as part of the final project (a poster research presentation based on an item from special collections).

Exit Tickets: Every week, students answered the questions "What is one new thing you learned?" and "What is one thing we discussed that you would like to learn more about?"

Outcomes and Reflection

Students had the opportunity to think critically about special collections while practicing visual literacy skills (analysis and interpretation). Future sessions should allow more time for activities and discussion, deepen connections to content from previous sessions and contemporary issues (such as social media), and consider ways to critically and effectively assess student learning.