

## Lessons from the Penn Librarian Teaching Institute

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In the summer of 2019, Penn Libraries hosted the Penn Librarian Teaching Institute, which was open to all professional library staff and aimed to “...to improve the teaching practices of librarians through active dialogue, practice among peers, and the review of current literature in the learning sciences.”<sup>1</sup> This course met once a week for six weeks, and was taught by fellow librarians and education specialists Katie Rawson and Sam Kirk. Other students included colleagues from departments throughout the library.

The six class topics were pedagogical theory and practice for librarians, instructional design, active learning, learning science, problem-based learning, and critical information literacy. The slides, course notes, and suggested resources from the Teaching Institute are freely available on the internet at <https://guides.library.upenn.edu/TeachingInstitute>.

The Teaching Institute was a great introduction to how professional educators think about teaching, how to describe and analyze different teaching styles, how to design class sessions, and how to create lesson plans. Participating in this course also provided the opportunity to advocate for what conservators contribute in addition to caring for the collections, and I was fortunate to have the opportunity to apply what I learned right away.

Reader Services Librarian April James, who oversees our Special Collections Reading Room, also attended the teaching institute, and we used this course as a starting point to reimagine our Careful Handling Training for student workers. This training is taught by Conservation to the team of more than 20 students who work in the reading room. As April was new to Penn when this training was first developed, she now has a better sense of what conservation can offer compared to training the students receive elsewhere. In collaboration with April, we were able to reprioritize our goals for the training, and I was able to apply what I learned by creating a new lesson plan.

Careful Handling Training is now more engaging. Previously, we used a PowerPoint, and we include images and concepts from that presentation in a handout that students are responsible for reading before class. This freed us to spend more time engaged in active and problem-based learning. Most of our student workers are enrolled in graduate or post-graduate humanities programs, so they already have a deep interest in caring for the collections. The two, 45-minute sessions include Hands-On Practice using study collection books & models and a Fictional Reading Room Scenarios discussion, where we ask questions such as, “A patron places a book on the floor to take a better picture of it. How would you approach this situation?” The new training was co-taught by myself and senior conservation technicians Elizabeth McDermott and Sibylla Benatova, and was a success. April reported an immediate and noticeable difference in students’ confidence with carefully handling special collections materials and assisting patrons.

Thanks to our colleagues who taught the Teaching Institute, I gained an even greater appreciation of what professional educators can teach us about facilitating learning. I encourage you to not only check out this course guide but also to look for similar opportunities, or to advocate for them if they do not yet exist.

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<sup>1</sup> Rawson, Katie and Sam Kirk. 2019. “Penn Librarian Teaching Institute.” University of Pennsylvania Libraries. Accessed October 16, 2020. <https://guides.library.upenn.edu/c.php?g=948455&p=6839121>