The Traveling Scriptorium: A Teaching Kit for the Material Cultures of the Book

SUMMARY
This grant would allow the planning and creation of a teaching kit for the study of the material culture of the medieval and early modern book. This modular kit would allow students—in sessions for library staff or for Yale undergraduates—to use authentic materials in studying paleography, book-making and rare book deterioration. The kit would contain both materials and guides (created by the grant participants), and would be able to travel to classrooms around the Yale University Library and University for demonstrations led either by conservation and curatorial staff or for self-directed sessions using the accompanying literature and guides.

PURPOSE & EXPECTED OUTCOMES
The material culture of the book is increasingly a focus of scholarship and teaching, both in the Yale University Library and more broadly in the University. This knowledge plays an important professional role across the Yale University Library collections: curators, conservators, cataloguers and archivists who work with these collections need to understand how early books were made, written, and read in order to address the questions which arise for scholarship, collection management, and preservation. A direct, hands-on experience with the materials and processes underpinning the medieval and early modern book is an important component in understanding the broader social, historical, and technological contexts in which these works were produced.

This kit would provide a set of materials and guides which could be used to teach several inter-related modular sessions: 1) how to read and write early and early modern English handwriting; 2) how early and early modern books are constructed; 3) specific conservation issues arising from the material construction and use of early and early modern books. Some materials would include: goose quills and pens, to be used for writing; parchment samples, both whole and rubricated for writing; limp vellum or wooden board binding; pigments for illustration; components of ink (oak gall, iron sulfate) and prepared ink. The kit would include both some reference texts and a bibliography of key literature. Working together, the grant participants would create teaching guides for the kit’s three modules, so that the kit could be used independently by classes in the Library or broader University. There would also be an important teaching role for the participants, in presenting sessions based on the kit in their own teaching sessions with library staff, faculty and students, and visitors.

The kit would be accompanied by a web-site (hosted on wordpress), with photographs and text introducing the kit’s purpose and contents. This site would be updated periodically with photographs of the kit being used in library and other sessions, and would provide useful publicity for the study of the material cultures of the book at Yale.

The direct outcomes of this grant would include: 1) the creation of the kit itself; 2) the creation of the guides accompanying the kit, in an important cross-departmental project
to combine perspectives on the material cultures of the book; 3) the use of the kit in Yale University Library sessions for the teaching of paleography, the construction of the early book, and the identification of deterioration in early collections; 4) the publication of the kit’s creation, mission, contents, and use on an accompanying web-site.

METHODOLOGY
All participants have had experience teaching groups and working with faculty to support and promote material culture studies. Examples include:

- A special hands-on session by curators and conservation librarians at the BRBL as part of *Objecting: New Questions and Directions in Materials Culture Historical Work, a conference at Yale in September 2010*
- Conservation lab tour and sessions on the production methods of medieval manuscripts for the faculty and students of ENGL 449, *Medieval Manuscripts to New Media*, spring semester 2010
- Conservation lab tours and materials sessions for ENG 168a, *Reading Medieval Manuscripts, and a new graduate level version of ENG 168a offered in the spring of 2011*
- Regular class presentations on paleography and material culture for undergraduate and graduate courses from the English, History, Sociology, Architecture, and Graphic Art departments, among others

The participants have taught hands-on workshops, and have learned that a step-by-step lesson plan and pre-made list of components are necessary to move the teaching forward seamlessly, leaving time to concentrate on explaining concepts and assisting students.

There are three stages to the creation of the kit. Working from the participants’ knowledge of the types of session and materials we have taught in the past, we would plan a list of materials and accompanying guides for the three modules. We would then order the materials and a box to house the kit. In order to draw on the strengths of our professional perspectives, we would draft the three guides in sections, exchanging sections for additions and revisions. At the end, we would photograph the materials, compile an inventory, and mount this on the wordpress site for the kit, with instructions for the kit’s use and booking.

TIMELINE
1. Initial planning of the kit’s contents and guides: January – March (including consultation with Jessica Brantley, medievalist and Associate Professor in English)
2. Ordering the materials: April – May
3. Writing and editing drafts of three guides: April – June
4. Finalizing guides: July – August
5. Creating final web-site: July – August
6. Pilot teaching sessions: September – November
7. Evaluation: December
EXPENSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tr>
<td>Purchase of permanent materials for the kits</td>
<td>$1200.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purchase of consumable materials for the hands-on components of the kits*</td>
<td>$1000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Costs for guides, handouts, and other associated written materials for the kits</td>
<td>$300.00</td>
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*This expense is related to the initial start-up and kit creation. Once the kits are tested and evaluated, continuing costs to maintain and replenish the hands-on kits will be determined and alternative funding sources identified. At this stage, yearly expenses are anticipated to be significantly less than initial set-up costs, approximately $500.00 per year.

BENEFIT

This project would have several benefits. The grant would benefit the participants, by allowing them the opportunity to create a new model for teaching the material cultures of the book within rare book and manuscript library collections. This is an exciting adaptation of the “teaching kit” idea used by natural history and other museums for educational outreach within the K-12 community. For the grant participants, this would be a useful opportunity to create a teaching model for book history, and one which we envision as the possible subject for an article in the professional literature. More immediately and pragmatically, it would also support the grant participants in the sessions and presentations we already lead in these fields, and would give a very useful pedagogical tool for teaching the material cultures of the book.

Second, the kit would be of immediate benefit to the Yale University Library staff. Given the budget cuts, funding is seldom available for professional development of this kind, traditionally taught by organizations like the Rare Book School in intensive week-long materials handling seminars. By creating a teaching kit at Yale, we would be drawing on the tremendous expertise of conservators and curators to teach paleography, book-making, and materials deterioration to the Yale University Library staff. These three areas are of great importance to departments across the Library, including archivists, rare book cataloguers, accessions staff, access services staff, and curators.

Third, the kit would be of benefit to the Yale University Library and University more generally. As an important pilot project in teaching the material cultures of the book, the grant would also foster a collaborative approach to the topic across departments of the Library. By consulting with faculty such as Jessica Brantley, a medievalist and Associate Professor of English who teaches regularly from the Beinecke collections, we would also be able to develop important connections between the Library and undergraduate teaching at Yale, while creating a useful resource for teaching both library staff and broader audiences within the Yale community.
Fourth, the kit would be of long-term benefit to ongoing conservation and preservation outreach aimed at K-12 audiences in greater New Haven community. The Preservation Department receives several requests each year for tours, demonstrations, and hands-on instruction from K-12 educators from local school systems. Most recently the Special Collections Conservation Laboratory hosted a half day session for 7th and 8th graders from the Housatonic Waldorf School. The work of this project would allow the Preservation Department to sustain these well-received community outreach efforts more efficiently as the kit would offer ready examples and reduce preparation time.

Fifth and lastly, the kits would serve as a model for the development of additional kits based on other formats and areas of material culture study. Examples for further expansion include photographic materials and methods, Asian scrolls and bindings, historical sound recordings, and cartographic materials such as maps and globes.