

Hands-on Learning: Creation of a Module in Ephemera Studies in the Department of Typography

Context

Ephemera is the concept of studying history through everyday printed objects. The University of Reading has a unique set of ephemera collections, some of which are of worldwide importance including the Maurice Rickards Collection in the Centre for Ephemera Studies, and the John Lewis, De La Rue, Huntley and Palmers and Great Exhibition Collections in the library. The department has related collections of printing equipment and material that help with the understanding of the production of ephemera.

As an academic subject Ephemera Studies is very new and there are no opportunities to study it at undergraduate level.

Aim

The aim of this project was to create a new optional module, Ephemera Studies, for Part 3 students, which will allow undergraduates to study documents first-hand and undertake self-directed research. It will also develop students' skills in handling, storing and conserving ephemera.

Resources and Processes

The project was implemented by the Department's Curator of Archives and Collections and a member of staff specialising in ephemera. Development work started in Feb 07 when the proposed module description was submitted to the Board of Studies. Work was then undertaken in developing the module content, drawing on existing collections and resources, developing the reading list and the lecture programme. The module was delivered for the first time in March 08.

Results

In the first year the module was chosen by 8 out of the 17 undergraduates on the Design for Graphic Communication programme. Formal evaluation of the module is to take place in June 08. However the running of the module has gone smoothly, the lectures were delivered as planned, and the students seemed fully engaged and motivated throughout. The close supervision of students in an informal way was successful although they would have benefited from the inclusion of one or two timetabled progress reviews. It may also be better to run the module over a longer period to give the students more opportunity for self-directed learning.

In addition, in developing the module the staff team have found it very stimulating to consider ways of teaching in this relatively new subject area. It has brought staff in to increased contact with the collections and archives, and has helped staff reflect on their own approach to the subject of ephemera.

Sustainability

The evaluation of the module, plus any revision of the module content and structure, will take place in July 08 in line with university procedures and does not require any further additional resource. For AY08/9 the module will be opened up to students from other discipline areas across the university.

Further information

Martin Andrews

m.j.andrews@reading.ac.uk