

Roundtable/Workshop:
Creative Approaches to Teaching the History of the Early American Book

In the conclusion to her pedagogical guide, *Studying Early Printed Books, 1450-1880*, Sarah Werner observes, “No book exists outside of its making, even the books you read today and scroll through on your phone” and, further, each book participates in the “treasure trove of information, from the most self-important to the most humble.” Working from the premise that all books (self-important and humble) in any form (scroll to screen) can be studied for the traces of their making, this panel invites teachers of book history to share the tools, techniques, theories and practices that undergird their pedagogy.

This roundtable and workshop will feature maker-oriented pedagogies that ask students to experiment with the material features of book and book-like objects. In his 2011 gloss of *critical making* as a pedagogical concept, Matt Ratto argues for the importance of “theoretically and pragmatically [connecting] two modes of engagement with the world that are often held separate – critical thinking, typically understood as conceptually and linguistically based, and physical ‘making,’ goal-based material work.” In this model, the learning outcome is not the product but the process of making itself, which becomes a method for reflecting on and interacting with key principles of book and material culture.

We invite panelists to present specific assignments or exercises and, where feasible, to create an interactive or application-oriented experience for attendees. We are particularly interested in those assignments, exercises, and experiments that extend the critical making paradigm to the history of the book and material criticism in early American literary studies. The goal of this roundtable will be to equip participants with creative approaches to teaching early American book history that range in scale from one-off exercises to semester-long projects. We encourage panelists to consider the disparity that marks teachers’ access to resources; creative approaches that take scarcity—of time, funds, support, materials—into account are particularly valuable.

Proposals might include creative approaches to teaching the following topics:

- Making books or book materials
- Books as objects; book-like objects
- Material and textual assemblages
- Banned, censored, hidden or disguised books
- Uses of books beyond reading
- Teaching with special collections and archives
- Book networks and circulation across time/space

- Technologies of the book
- Telling book stories

If you would like to participate, please submit a brief bio and an abstract (150-250 words) describing the assignment you will demonstrate or explore in the workshop.

Please submit materials to the panel organizers Lindsay DiCuirci (dicuirci@umbc.edu) and Jillian Sayre (jillian.sayre@rutgers.edu) by October 20, 2022.