Teaching Statement

A series of medieval manuscripts residing in the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library lie before me and my students. After instructing them on proper handling practices and historical facts regarding the materials and assembly of the manuscripts, I invite the students to engage with the books. Joining two students who had approached a manuscript small enough to fit in the palm of a hand, I encourage one of them to pick it up and as they flip through I illustrate how the book itself guides the reader with a personalized calendar of feast days, series of prayers for repeated daily devotions, and illuminations to invite further meditation. As a scholar of manuscripts, I experience these objects as opportunities for direct, physical encounter between the reader and the book lying in their hands. Manuscripts are both deeply personal objects and collectively revered objects. My teaching is inflected by this form of physical engagement that is simultaneously singular and collective. I aim to spark curiosity and incite conversation among my students by treating my classroom as a laboratory or workshop. My research, scholarly collaborations, and teaching strive to bring this sense of immediate and physical engagement with material culture from the past to new audiences. In doing so, I treat learning as a collective process in which I work alongside my students to provoke new stories and questions regarding the lesson at hand.

By focusing my pedagogical goals on collaboration and community, I aspire to provide space for students to practice skills that can be applied outside of the classroom and across disciplines. I frame unfamiliar material as occasions for my students to experiment together in the classroom, urging them to be inquisitive and use the opportunity to collectively problem solve and experiment. For example, to introduce my students to the procedure of coronation in the early medieval context, I designed an activity wherein they were divided into groups and all invited to read the same firsthand account. I prompted the students to imagine their place in the scene from the perspective of various “actors” in the “scene,” ranging from the ruler themselves to the archbishop crowning them and the nobles attending the event. Each group selected one actor to embody and discuss this perspective among themselves before presenting their impressions of the coronation to their peers. This activity spawned conversations about the gender, class, and power dynamics at play in the sample coronation, thereby connecting the diverse positionalities of students in the classroom with the spectrum of perspectives informing a historical rite. I design activities in the classroom to engage students from a variety of angles, such as the sensory approach of handling manuscripts or the embodied performance of designing a coronation as a theatrical scene. As such, my pedagogical approach is responsive to different modes of thinking and diverse types of learning among my students. I privilege process- and experience-based learning to empower my students of all disciplines to lean into their interests.

In my teaching, research, and academic outreach, I strive to create physical or virtual encounters to prompt diverse perspectives and retellings of familiar historical narratives. To do so, I have incorporated digital methodologies into my pedagogy and research. I see digital tools as another avenue for student connection with the material inside and outside of traditional classroom structures. For example, I designed a collaborative workshop for undergraduate students that paired storytelling with virtual reality technologies. This workshop opened a new space for thematic conversations that I simultaneously explore in my research, as well as afforded me a new set of temporary collaborators. My teaching, research, and outreach draw on such strategies in order to generate further experimentation and novel approaches to problems at hand in the academic and everyday world.