CHAPTER 15

OkstateShakespeare:
BRINGING SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND DIGITAL HUMANITIES INTO THE UNDERGRADUATE CLASSROOM

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Introduction
This case study outlines a collaborative, semester-long instructional project for an upper-level undergraduate Shakespeare course at Oklahoma State University (OSU) utilizing the library’s rare book resources and digital humanities techniques to teach students the history of print culture in Renaissance England. In the fall of 2014, English professor Andrew Wadoski collaborated with OSU Library Special Collections and University Archives (SCUA) librarian Sarah Coates and English liaison librarian David Oberhelman to design the “OkstateShakespeare” assignment. His students created an online exhibit and critical companion to the three-volume, 1587 edition, of Raphael Holinshed’s Chronicles of the History of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales\(^1\)—the source of Shakespeare’s history plays and other works such as King Lear, Macbeth, and Cymbeline, and one of the oldest titles in the institution’s rare book holdings.
Students learned about the history of print and the basics of Renaissance English historiography through Shakespeare's drama, and, in groups, developed a website devoted to Holinshed exploring the text in terms of Tudor politics and the role it played as source material for Shakespeare. This project leveraged rare, fragile print sources; digital surrogates from subscription collections, such as ProQuest's Early English Books Online (EEBO); primary and secondary sources from research databases; and web development platforms, such as WordPress, to enable students to create a supplement and educational guide to Holinshed. This guide provides access and enables members of the OSU and wider scholarly community to learn about the importance of this work for Shakespeare studies and early modern publishing. This case study will give an overview of OSU and its library's SCUA division, and then discuss the OklahomaShakespeare digital project and its impact on student learning. It will also address the project's impact upon the faculty-librarian partnership and how it served as a springboard for future instructional collaborations.

Institutional Background

OSU is a public, land-grant university located in Stillwater, Oklahoma in the north central region of the state. As of the 2014–2015 academic year, it had a total undergraduate enrollment of twenty thousand eight hundred and twenty-one and graduate enrollment of five thousand thirty-three. The OSU English Department offers bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in British and American literature as well as other areas. Until the arrival of Wadoski, there had been turnover in the department in the Renaissance/Shakespearean specialist position.

The OSU Library has 3,468,428 volumes in its holdings, and also offers a full array of primary text and secondary research databases. It uses a subject liaison model to work with academic departments for collection development, research support, and library instruction. Oberhelman, who serves as liaison to English and other humanities and performing arts departments, had worked with English since 1997, but before this project had not incorporated special collections materials into his library instruction efforts except for a few courses on Oklahoma or Western U.S. literature.

The SCUA division at the OSU Libraries consists of two separate departments: Special Collections and the University Archives. SCUA contains "material focusing on the history of Oklahoma State University, its employees, and graduates. Rare books, manuscripts, photographs and research material related to Oklahoma women, history, politics, business and natural resources have also been acquired." The department began as a rare books section in the 1930s when the university acquired several incunabula and other volumes
published in Europe up to the 1700s, including the 1587 edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles*.

These volumes received little use in subsequent years, and lack of a true special collections unit caused them to be somewhat orphaned in the university library’s holdings. The section grew with the acquisition of the first archival collection—the Otto M. Forkert Collection of early print fragments and facsimiles, such as a reprint of Gutenberg’s Bible—purchased in 1951.

In the late 1960s-early 1970s, a special collections librarian was hired and the rare books section turned into the department now known as SCUA, and the new department focused more on collecting in other areas.

**Impetus for Collaboration**

The acquisition of collections early in the school’s history and the research interests of faculty and librarians on staff in the 2010s laid the groundwork for this collaboration. The collaboration between the OSU English liaison librarian and SCUA librarian working with the Shakespeare class grew out of single-session presentations on the library’s rare book holdings and print samples from the Otto M. Forkert Collection for Wadoski’s classes. These sessions laid the groundwork for a partnership that promoted student engagement with rare primary sources. In 2011, Oberhelman, first met with Wadoski, then a new professor of early modern literature. In the meeting, Wadoski asked if the library held any early books he could show in his courses to teach the history print culture to his students. While Oberhelman knew about a few of the library’s rare books, he was unfamiliar with the full extent of the collection’s holdings and approached Coates to inquire about rare books that had not been extensively used. Coates prepared a preliminary bibliography and Wadoski was impressed with the titles OSU owned, something he had not expected at a medium-sized state university. This question thus sparked a multi-year initiative with Wadoski, Oberhelman, and Coates focused on integrating the library’s database and special collections/archival resources with daily classroom instruction and assignments.

**Instruction for Classes Before Fall 2014**

Early library instruction for Wadoski’s Shakespeare classes, prior to the fall of 2014, focused on exploring the ways databases such as EEBO, the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Online*, and the *Dictionary of National Biography* could enrich the undergraduates’ understanding of print culture. The initial emphasis was introducing students to various historical contexts within which Shakespeare’s plays and language were situated. In addition to traditional papers and examinations, these classes had short database searching and writing assign-
ments in which students developed their skills in information gathering, synthesis, and summary. They used database resources to create a bibliography of all the printed editions of a given Shakespeare play consisting of all the quarto editions, up to and including the 1623 First Folio. Students then wrote a brief biography of one of the printers responsible for one of the early quarto editions to understand the context of publishing and the book trade in that era. (See Appendix 15A for sample assignment involving editions and printers of Romeo and Juliet quartos). Some courses had a variant on that assignment: students would take keywords from the literary texts and search EEBO for other texts using those words, as well as search the OED Online for historical usage of the words. Oberhelman offered instruction on using these tools for researching early printers and their role in the Tudor book trade, and assisted students as they explored the tools. A writing task focused on description and summary, rather than argument and analysis, creates a writing venue that allows less experienced writers to focus on the basics of their prose; over time, this has flattened the skill gap between the top and the bottom of classes. Furthermore, these assignments inculcate basic research skills and introduce students to a crucial historical context through which to understand Renaissance literature.

While these short assignments themselves focused on engaging with digital resources, students handled and examined the early books from SCUA, as well as the early print fragments in the Otto M. Forkert Collection. The courses featured one or two show-and-tell sessions, where Coates shared primary source materials and gave a brief Prezi presentation on the history of the book in the West. These sessions enabled students to inspect items firsthand and develop a tangible sense of the world of early modern books the writers they were studying inhabited. They engaged with the details of printing, paper, and binding in a way neither modern critical editions nor digital images could ever provide. This, in turn, allowed them to learn about the material aspects of the early modern book trade and to understand the complex transactions and transformation between old books and modern critical editions used in classrooms. Seeing the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century books immediately captured students’ attentions. In the case of Holinshed, the simple presence of something materially connected with Shakespeare’s London, combined with the fact that they were allowed to handle it, developed an immediate connection.

**Project Scope**

The culmination of these instructional efforts involving rare books was the OkstateShakespeare research project involving Holinshed’s Chronicles, the primary source in SCUA most closely tied to Shakespeare, undertaken by un-
dergraduate students in Wadoski’s ENGL 4723: Shakespeare and History class during the fall 2014 semester. (See Appendix 15B). In this project, students conducted original research leading to the creation of an online exhibition and educational resource focused on the book in relation to Shakespeare’s histories and tragedies. Through the construction of an online supplement, this project created a venue for members of the OSU and wider communities to access and learn about this document and how Holinshed informed the creation of some of Shakespeare’s best known plays.

In April 2014, Wadoski talked with Oberhelman and Coates about having his students in next fall’s Shakespeare class create an exhibit of rare books held in SCUA and highlighting the Holinshed volumes. This exhibit, as originally planned, would have remained on display for an extended period of time. However, due to concerns about the fragility of the items, security, and the lack of display cases, this initial plan quickly evolved into the idea of having students create an online exhibit or website instead. This new idea led to several meetings wherein various platforms, such as Omeka, CONTENTdm, and Tumblr were discussed as a way to display these student exhibits. However, it was quickly decided that using Omeka or CONTENTdm would be too complicated for this project; students would have to learn about Dublin Core metadata standards and scan in the materials in addition to curating the exhibit. Likewise, Tumblr was also taken out of consideration because of the informal fashion in which the exhibit would be displayed. The online exhibit idea then transformed into having students create an online supplement to Holinshed, thus using Shakespeare’s histories and tragedies as a way to interact with Holinshed, early modern historiography, and the history of the book. Coates began investigating digital blogging platforms, evaluating them on ease of use and flexibility. The librarians chose WordPress as the content platform for several reasons: (1) it was free to use, (2) it was easy to use and had an excellent WYSIWYG editor with minimal/no HTML experience needed, and (3) it had many themes that could be used to change the website’s appearance.

**Instruction Sessions for the Project**

For the OkstateShakespeare project, groups of three or four students conducted original research with the guidance and assistance of Wadoski, Oberhelman, and Coates. This research, which was both grounded in and informed daily discussion in ENGL 4723, was undertaken in the special collections holdings, in specialized databases such as EEBO and Iter Gateway to the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and within the wide array of primary and secondary sources available in the library and through its journal subscriptions. Student groups created both analytic and descriptive information modules offering focused accounts of a range of topics pertinent to Holinshed and his book’s place in Tudor England.
Topics addressed included the book’s creation and production; Holinshed’s religious and political affiliations; the practices of history writing in the Renaissance; and the specific uses of Holinshed’s *Chronicles* by English Renaissance writers, including William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, and Samuel Daniel.

The library component of the course consisted of a total of five sessions held at the OSU Library computer training lab. Wadoksi and the librarians designed the first session to accompany the first assignment, which had the students trace the usage of certain political keywords from *Troilus and Cressida* and *Richard II* (the first of the plays they had read derived from Holinshed’s historical account) in the *OED Online* and in contemporaneous texts from *EEBO*. (See Appendix C). In this session Oberhelman also showed the students the *EEBO* online copies of Holinshed’s *Chronicles* to introduce them to that text. At the second session, a few weeks later, the students viewed the library’s rare books and learned about the Holinshed group project they were to undertake. Coates gave her presentation on the history of the book and exhibited some of the library’s incunabula and other rarities as she had done before. This session, though, highlighted the Holinshed volumes so the students could see the original after having viewed the digital surrogate in *EEBO*. Then Wadoski, Oberhelman, and Coates discussed the group assignment, the creation of an online companion to Holinshed and Shakespeare, and the librarians got into the mechanics of the WordPress site they would be making.

At the beginning of the semester, Oberhelman and Coates had created a course LibGuide that contained links to various library resources for their assignments and contained information and instructions on their digital project. Coates set up the course’s WordPress.com site,8 created the main subpages for the topics in which the groups would enter their content, and wrote a manual for the students to help them get their work into WordPress. After showing the rare books in the second library session, Coates presented on using WordPress, and gave the students instructions on creating subpages (child pages in WordPress) into which they would deposit their text and media. At the end of the semester, three class sessions were held in the library’s computer lab; these class sessions were “open lab days” where groups of students worked on their project webpages with Wadoski and the librarians available to answer questions about the project, finding sources, using WordPress, and related topics such as Creative Commons licensing for images. Students found these sessions immensely helpful. Many of the questions asked fell into two categories: specific questions about aspects of the assignment itself and using WordPress. Students said that they found these sessions useful because they were able to meet with their group members in person, something they found difficult to do with conflicting schedules. They also said they appreciated being able to ask for help with WordPress and having their questions answered immediately.
Digital Project Showcase

The project culminated in a digital showcase in the library’s Peggy V. Helmerich Browsing Room during their class time in late November 2014. Flyers and email notifications advertising the event were sent out to faculty in the English Department, the library, and other related departments and colleges across campus. There were approximately thirty-five attendees consisting of teaching faculty from English and other departments, OSU librarians, and other students not in the Shakespeare course. The showcase allowed students to present their work and discuss their process to the OSU community. For this one showcase session, Coates brought the library’s copy of Holinshed’s *Chronicles* out of storage and carefully displayed it on book cradles so attendees could see the physical book, then learn more about it and its influence on Shakespeare from the groups. Each group of students was provided a laptop to show their pages on the WordPress site. Attendees wandered through the exhibit, and the groups would give a brief (generally one minute) summary of their topics and answer questions. Finally,
students would talk about what they had learned in the course of developing this site, and how presenting their research in an online document with several co-authors differed from the individual papers most students in an upper-level English class were used to writing. This showcase helped the students learn how to present their work to an audience, and several students indicated it helped them gain confidence and poise they could use in other settings.

Figure 16.2. Andrew Wadoski and student inspecting the four volumes of Holinshed’s Chronicles at the digital showcase event.

Figure 16.3. Students discussing their project webpages with faculty at the digital showcase.
Conclusion

Impact

The results of the OkstateShakespeare project were most positive for all involved. They demonstrated that creating an online guide to a work like Holinshed’s Chronicles could enhance the students’ engagement with the history of print culture and the historiographic issues in Shakespeare’s plays.

STUDENT IMPACT

A formal assessment of the class was conducted via the university’s official course evaluations and by an informal verbal survey of the students Coates conducted at the final showcase. Students noted in their course evaluations that they were particularly enthusiastic about learning the basics of web design. Coates found, in her informal verbal survey of the students, many felt more comfortable using WordPress and that they could apply what they had learned about displaying information on the web to other classes and potential career. Furthermore, several students found these projects to be formative for their professional development, as they consider either applying or have been accepted to, IT-intensive library science graduate programs.

In addition, many students told Coates they had been scared of using an online platform to display their work, but after having “open lab days” they felt much more confident. They also learned about copyright (some of the students chose to embed images or YouTube clips into their pages) and Creative Commons licenses. Many said they had not been aware of copyright/licensing issues in designing web content and that they now understood copyright protections better.

Group projects are rarely used in English classes at OSU, most infrequently in upper-level courses. The students said they were concerned at first about working in groups, but nearly all of them appreciated that they had done so, as it made sharing the workload easier. Also, they said they could divide and conquer tasks: if one person was better at doing research, they did more of the research; if one person was better with WordPress, they would help their group members use the site. The students learned about delegating tasks and working together through this project.

LIBRARIAN AND FACULTY IMPACT

Pedagogically, the librarians would make changes before beginning a new collaboration with a similar project outcome to ensure a smoother experience. Since this was a new project and other online guides were written at a more
advanced level, the librarians found it difficult to describe the expected project outcomes to the undergraduate students. They characterized it as an online supplement at the beginning of the semester, a paper in the middle of the semester, and “think like a Wikipedia page” towards the end of the semester. With a clearer description of the project, the librarians could have alleviated student anxiety as they were working on the WordPress site.

Concrete deadlines and additional instruction on developing a WordPress site would have alleviated student anxiety and made the process more organized and consistent for all. Breaking the project into smaller chunks with due dates would have made the end of the semester scramble less stressful. In fact, many of the students had not uploaded their work to the WordPress site until the night before the digital showcase, despite repeated reminders not to wait until the last minute in case something went wrong. In addition, while students were encouraged to visit with Oberhelman and Coates for assistance outside of class (meetings with Wadoski were a requirement), very few students did so. Mandatory meetings with the librarians would have made it easier to address issues and concerns about research and WordPress earlier in the semester and would have made “open lab days” more productive. The manual created for WordPress was sufficient for the basic editing the students were required to do, but from the lab sessions, it became apparent the sections on uploading images and determining copyright should not have been left as links to WordPress’ own manuals. Those sections should have been expanded with screenshots from WordPress inserted directly into the manual created for the students, as was done for the basic editing.

**Next Steps**

The OkstateShakespeare project has borne fruit in the form of subsequent classroom digital collaborations involving the English subject librarian and special collections. Notably, a follow-up version of this project was undertaken in Wadoski’s metaphysical poetry class in the fall of 2015. Students in this class examined a seventeenth-century manuscript collection of devotional verse supposedly written by an otherwise anonymous English woman, Elizabeth Newell, is housed in Yale University’s Beinecke Library and available on their early modern paleography website. In the course of their investigations, one of the students made a discovery leading to the uncovering of the printed sources from which this verse miscellany was culled. This project started with the working premise—based on the work of earlier scholars and the attribution by the Beinecke itself—that this document was composed, and not simply transcribed, by Newell herself around 1668. As Wadoski and the students began digging into the poems as well as archival databases like EEBO, they revealed that these were, in fact, transcriptions of works by other authors and were able to reconstruct all
the attributions as well as adjust the dating of the manuscript by over a decade. This, of course, led to a major mid-stream reconfiguration of the assignment. However, it was an object lesson in the process of scholarly discovery; the project began with a working hypothesis that was completely altered once students began delving into uncharted territory. The students then got to go through the processes of re-orienting their individual projects and of reframing the questions they were asking as they shaped their projects around this new discovery. In this project, the professor and librarians took some of the lessons learned about incremental deadlines, additional open lab sessions, and clearer prompts to describe the format of the website project to students. The results were even better in terms of student engagement with the source material. Wadoski and the librarians are further planning to use Holinshed, and other rare books in SCUA such as the 1493 Liber Chronicarum (Nuremberg Chronicles), in a graduate early modern literature course to be taught in the fall of 2016.

As this collaborative endeavor has developed, it has become a forum for promoting undergraduate research, and it has also underscored the contributions special collections can make to library instruction and undergraduate teaching. The OkstateShakespeare project allowed students to create viable public digital humanities projects through which the public can engage with and learn about otherwise hard to access historical texts, a key component of the university’s land-grant mission. Through this work, students also developed basic research skills, experience working with primary and secondary sources, a deeper knowledge of Renaissance literary culture, and a range of widely applicable skills in archival and database navigation, basic web development, and web design. What began with a new faculty member’s simple query about old books at the library transformed into a full-semester digital humanities initiative centered around OSU’s underutilized rare book holdings. There were many benefits from this collaborative relationship, for each of the partners brought their own expertise to the table. Indeed, it is the fusion of the English professor’s knowledge of the history of print culture and Renaissance historiography, the English liaison librarian’s experience with research resources and digital humanities methods, and the special collections librarian’s knowledge of the library’s rare book holdings and the curation of online exhibits and digital platforms that made this project so unique.
Appendix 15A. Printer’s Biography Assignment

This assignment is intended to give you a sense of the print history of Shakespeare’s plays; a better understanding of the Renaissance English book trade and period print culture; and the chance to hone your research skills as you navigate and synthesize a variety of online resources. It will also give the chance to see (at least in online scans) what printed texts looked like in Shakespeare’s time.

1. Using EEBO, compile a bibliography of the printed editions of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet up to and including the 1623 Folio.

2. Using the Dictionary of National Biography and the Dictionary of Literary Biography, find out information about the Printer of one of these editions and write a short (-1 page) synthesis and summary of the DNB/DLB articles that focuses on the most relevant, pertinent, and interesting information. If your first choice of printer does not yield results in these two works, find another printer to write about. Be careful—there may be a number of people in these dictionaries with the same name. Just because you are writing about John Q Smith, do not assume that the first John Q Smith you come across in the DNB is the one you are looking for. Pay attention to dates and details (i.e. doe the bio mention that this individual was, in fact, a printer? Was this person alive at the time these works were being printed? Etc.) Be especially careful about fathers and sons, who often shared both names and professions.
Appendix 15B. ENGL 4723: Shakespeare Assignment 1: EEBO/OED

Political Keywords

This assignment is an exercise in the closest kind of interpretation. I want you to attend to Shakespeare’s texts at the level of individual words and their variable meanings. Pick any passage of roughly 4–8 lines from one of the works we have read (Troilus and Cressida or Richard II). What this passage needs is at least one of the political key words listed below. Then go to the Oxford English Dictionary (online) and find out all you can about the word, most importantly its etymology and origins, and the range of meanings that would have been available to Shakespeare when he wrote the work. Your next step will be to go to the Shakespeare Concordance (in the library) and find the various times Shakespeare used the word and its variants (and perhaps its cognates) to get a sense of the specific shades of meaning that informed Shakespeare’s uses of this word. Then, using the advanced search option on EEBO, I would like you to find 4–5 works printed in the same year as the play you are studying that also contain that word.

Using this information, you will then develop an approximately 3–4 page essay that presents a close reading of that passage that considers the multiple interpretations made possible by the various meanings associated with this word, the various shades of meaning rooted in its origins and cognates, and Shakespeare’s (and, perhaps, his contemporaries’) other uses of the word. As you analyze the passage, it would be useful to see if there are certain words that tend to cluster around the word you are focusing on.

Please attach to the essay a bibliography listing the 4–5 contemporary works that use the word you are studying.

Some words to use:
- Valour
- Bond
- Discretion
- Treason
- Commonwealth
- Slander
- Degree
- Honor
- Oath
- Mercy
- Sovereign
- Duty
- Reverence
- Liberty
Appendix 15C. ENGL 4723: Shakespeare Term Project: Digital Holinshed

In this project, we will create an online companion to Raphael Holinshed’s four volume edition of the *Chronicles* (1587) housed in the Library Special Collections archive. This companion will consist of a general overview and outline of Holinshed’s text along with more detailed presentations examining specific aspects of the text such as its background and production, its reception and influence, and the intellectual and political contexts within which it was produced and received. We will seek to create a supplement and online exhibit about this unique text and its relation to Shakespeare. We will use this project as a platform to situate both writers within the context and practices of the early modern study of history (i.e., before the modern disciplinary/professional model that we might find in a modern day university classroom develops in the 18th to 20th centuries).

In order to complete this task, we will break up into groups of approximately 3 students (we have 10 possible topics and 25 students). Each of these groups will research one of the presentation/display topics listed below and create a webpage based on that research.

As a basis for the research, we will use the *Oxford Handbook of Holinshed’s Chronicles*, which will be on reserve at the library, as well as databases such as EEBO, DNB, DLB, and ITER, and sources available in the library stacks and special collections.

Overview: general description of work / who was Holinshed (perhaps generated more generally by the class wiki style based on the knowledge developed in their particular group projects)

1. Production:
   a. Printers/publishers/networks of writers, polemicians, etc. within which it was produced
   b. Illustrations/physical form

2. Work’s politics:
   a. Political themes (providence / monarchy / visions of social order)
   b. British / Archipelagic cultural identity

3. Historiography
   a. Historiography vs. chronicling
   b. Holinshed’s sources
   c. How book relates to / adapts contemporary historiographical practices

4. Literary Holinshed
   a. Style and rhetoric in Holinshed
   b. Uses by other poets such as Spenser and Daniel
Notes


6. Ibid., 162–63.


9. The URL is https://earlymodernpaleography.library.yale.edu/.

10. As of the writing of this chapter, an article by Andrew Wadoski on the literary attribution discoveries made in this course will appear in a forthcoming issue of *The Library: The Journal of the British Bibliographical Society*.

11. For an overview of OSU’s mission as a land-grant institution, see Institutional Accreditation, Oklahoma State University, “University Mission,” 2015, https://accreditation.okstate.edu/Mission.

Bibliography


