

The role of special collections departments in humanities undergraduate and graduate teaching: A case study.

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## **The Role of Special Collections Departments in Humanities Undergraduate and Graduate Teaching: A Case Study**

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the pedagogical rationale and learning outcomes for incorporating a special collections department in teaching humanities undergraduate and graduate courses. This case study highlights an innovative collaboration between a University of Colorado German professor and the special collections librarian and staff.



## The Role of Special Collections Departments in Humanities Undergraduate and Graduate Teaching: A Case Study

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**abstract:** This article analyzes the pedagogical rationale and learning outcomes for incorporating a special collections department in teaching humanities undergraduate and graduate courses. This case study highlights an innovative collaboration between a University of Colorado German professor and the special collections librarian and staff.

There is little research in either pedagogical or library science journals on the role that special collections departments can play in enhancing the teaching of the humanities. Existing scholarship concerning special collections departments has tended to address administrative issues involving acquisitions, bibliographic control, conservation, restoration, and security. Special collections are portrayed almost exclusively as a resource for researchers rather than as a means of student access to rare materials that can enrich learning on the undergraduate and graduate levels.<sup>1</sup> Some works examine the use of archival materials in teaching composition or research writing but do not address the pedagogical strategies for, and benefits of, scheduled class visits to special collections departments.<sup>2</sup> With reference to her 1995 survey of sixty-six directors of liberal arts college libraries, Susan M. Allen, head of the Department of Special Collections at UCLA Libraries, observed, "even in liberal arts colleges, the special collections department is not always perceived or used as a humanities laboratory."<sup>3</sup>

That a rare books or special collections department is rarely viewed as a pedagogical resource stems in part from the widespread assumption that texts exist wholly independently of the physical books or manuscripts in which they appear and thus that the

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