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October 3, 2008

ACS Mellon Faculty Renewal Grant Report

Project: Development of a Book Arts Program at Washington and Lee University  
Period: June – August 2008  
Amount: \$3,500

I spent my summer 2008 sabbatical as planned. My goals and objectives for the project were: a) the development of a course and program in the book arts; b) the creation of a small teaching collection of artists' books; and c) the preparation of an exhibition on the book arts to be held at the university art gallery in spring 2010.

My goals and objectives did not change, and I am pleased with my achievements this summer. I attended two highly intensive week-long workshops at the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, New York. The VSW is one of the oldest book art and photography centers in the country. It is affiliated with the University of Buffalo at Brockport. I selected these workshops because of their pertinence to my teaching responsibilities, and because of the highly regarded instructors. The first workshop focused on the interplay between the two-dimensional book form and its three-dimensional content by creating and studying a variety of pop-up structures. The second workshop focused on the relationship between text, image, and narrative. This was invaluable because of the nature of my course, in which we produce books that combine letterpress printing, printmaking, and book structures.

In addition to the workshops, I visited the New York Center for Book Arts in New York City, one of the more active book art centers on the East Coast. I learned about exhibit techniques, ideas for exhibits, how classes are taught at the Center, and useful tools and equipment. I also met with several of the Center's teachers. While in the City, I sought out book stores with

collections of artists' books, and visited several book art supply houses. I purchased sixteen books, some instructional and some made by various book artists. These will be added to the teaching collection for the program.

When I wasn't on the road, I worked in studio at home making sample structures for the program. In addition, I spent much time online looking into existing book arts programs and connecting with the instructors in these programs. I also read several books on the historical context of artists' books. This research allowed me to select readings for the course.

Bringing the acquired knowledge back to campus, I ran into some unexpected complications. The W&L Art Department is undergoing major internal changes being the result of faculty leaving the school, as well as a change in their curriculum. The faculty member I was working closest with left the position in June. She and I taught the book arts course together and, moreover, she and I were going to collaborate on the book art exhibit in the gallery. Currently, the art department is understaffed, and my course may have to change dramatically. I am looking into integrating a book arts element into existing art courses, and into poetry courses and the university's literary magazine, *Shenandoah*. I am also planning to offer weekend workshops.

Several planned visits had to be postponed to later this fall: my trip to Wellesley College's book arts program and my visit to the Virginia Commonwealth University's book arts collection. Both were postponed for reasons beyond my control.

Once my research is completed, I will create a Washington and Lee Book Arts web site. This site will include research resources, photographs of student work, curricular information, and more. I will be happy to share this site with other ACS colleges, and serve as a contact point for schools that are interested in the book arts.

Respectfully submitted,

Yolanda Merrill