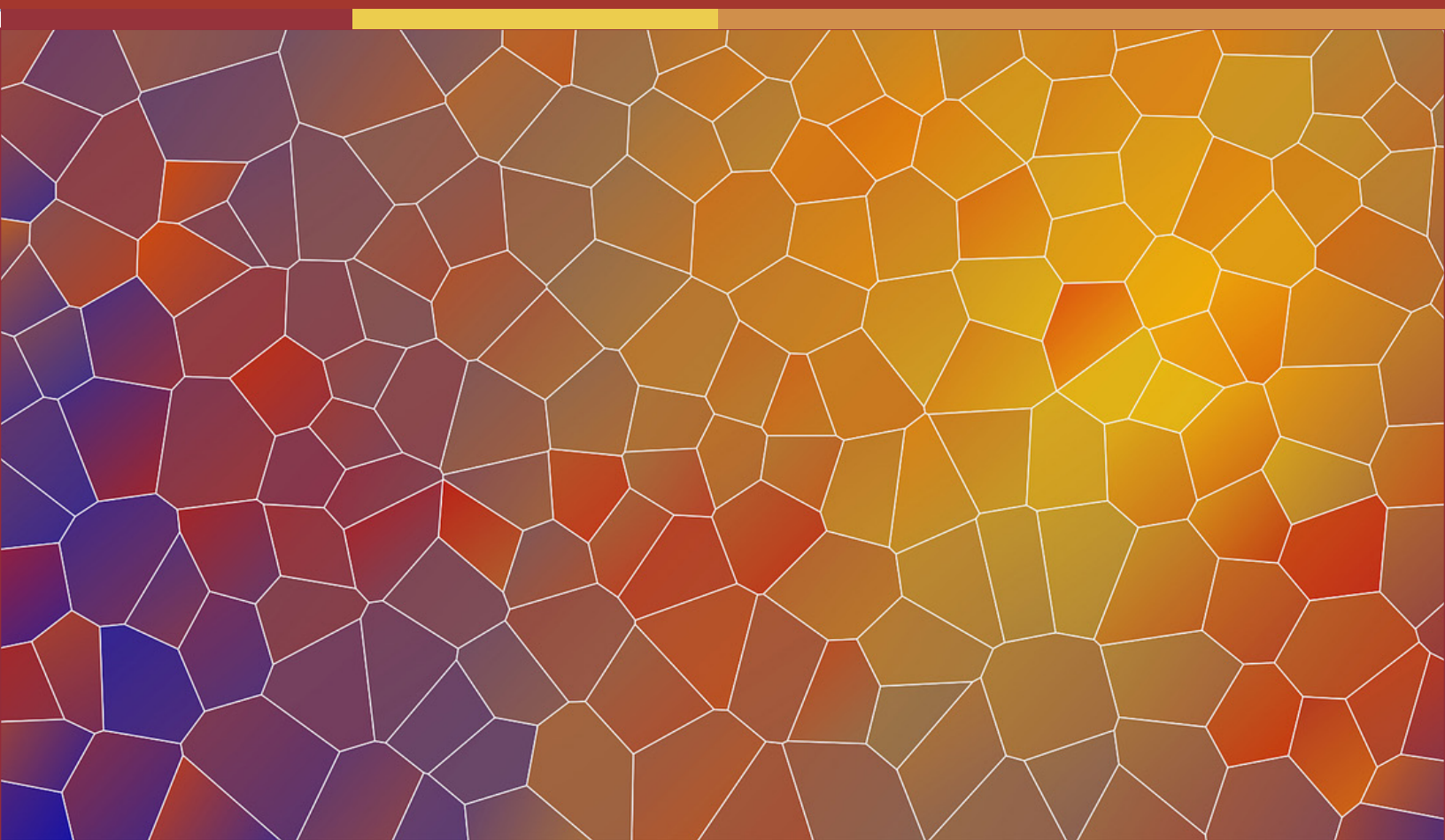


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# TEACHING REPORT

## Hands On Workshops for Real World Experience: Scaffolded Assignments and Archival Objects in the Historian's Craft

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### Abstract

Abigail P. Dowling redesigned an Ancient Mediterranean History course to feature active, scaffolded assignments that gave students the experience of working as a historian. These assignments featured lectures from other faculty, hands-on workshops, creative expression, and physical recreations. Dowling, and collaborating researchers Bailey, Griggs, and Wright, used three IRB-approved surveys to test students' self-assessed comprehension of the class subject, how their self-assessed comprehension changed through the course, tested, and assessed their understanding of key definitions from the course's learning objectives, and surveyed which activities the students found most valuable for their learning. For results regarding student learning, the researchers found an improvement in students' understanding in the value of objects to historical research and their comprehension of the breadth of historians' job duties. Students' responses on which activities increased learning emphasized the usefulness of hands-on object workshops for undergraduate students.

### Keywords

experiential learning, history education, material history, general education requirements, archival objects, collaborative teaching, active learning, hands-on workshops

Material history, a subset of historical analysis, borrows many principles from archaeology and historical archaeology to study places or objects contextualized with historical narratives from texts or oral sources (Knapp, 1992). Overwhelmingly, surviving pre-modern historical records favor the urban elite, such as high-ranking political or church members. Scholars acknowledge that ancient texts also favored men (Richlin, 2014). While oral history can bridge some of those gaps for more recent case studies, object analysis helps scholars study those who leave little to no textual record, such as the working classes, the enslaved, and even women and children (Van Oyen & Pitts, 2017). Scholars regularly acknowledge the usefulness of manipulating objects and “reading” them as primary sources in historical pedagogy (Balachandran, 2017). Object-based learning studies have also described successful student experiences with hands-on learning using historical objects from the faculty and librarian perspective (Makarowski & Boehme, 2019). Yet, it is rarely studied from the student perspective. We want to know, “what do students think they get out of object-based learning?”

Our study assessed student engagement and self-assessed learning of course objectives of a hands-on series of workshops and object-based learning assignments associated with a collection of ancient historical

## Real World Experience *continued*

objects recently donated to our institution as a learning collection (all before 500 CE). In fall terms 2017 and 2019, History faculty Abigail P. Dowling taught a lower-division general education course, the Ancient Mediterranean, ca. 5000-400 BCE, that introduced students to material history and asked them to work with ancient objects from a unique collection, the Holmes Holy Land Ancient Artifact Collection, housed at Mercer University's Macon campus Tarver Library. In this publication, we assessed student engagement and perceptions of the artifact workshops and assignments from the Fall 2019 course. We published our initial, positive faculty findings from the Fall 2017 course in a descriptive article of our collaboration in Summer 2018 (Dowling et al., 2018). Here we present a systematic study of student perceptions of the hands-on workshops and assignments.

### The Collection

Serendipitously, Mercer alumnus Y. Lynn Holmes donated his objects as a teaching collection in summer 2017 as Dowling revised a course inherited from her predecessor. The Holmes Collection boasts 1,000 artifacts and is the only collection of its kind available to the public in Macon, GA. The collection consists of coins, figurines, knives, beads, mirrors, fertility idols, and other daily items made from ceramic, metal, glass, and stone from roughly 4,000 BCE to the late Roman Empire (ca. 400 CE). The less fragile pieces--typically those consisting of stone, metal, or ceramic--may be handled safely by undergraduate students in a supervised classroom setting. The authors recognized the value of the collection as an engaging tool to introduce general education and lower-level History and Classics students to the principles of object analysis and library information literacy.

### Literature Review

Especially at the lower levels, general history surveys rely overwhelmingly on textual or perhaps epigraphic analysis (in the case of Greece and Rome), even for eras where much of what we know about the society has been derived from archaeological study (Davis & Brice, 2020). That means that what students learn, and thus envision, about ancient societies and cultures is the result of millennia-old biases against the average laborer and other subaltern groups instilled in textual sources, a

point that Amy Richlin, among ancient scholars studying women, has made repeatedly. Roman women are almost exclusively depicted negatively in Roman texts, especially satire (Richlin, 2014). The only favorable depictions of women are those who act as perfect exempla of Roman pietas to state, father, husband, and children, for example Livy's Lucretia and Virginia. Histories of the enslaved and poor laborers grapple with this same problem (Harper, 2011; Moss, 2021). While these topics can be researched without objects, historical archaeology, which is the archaeological study of literate societies in combination with historical textual analysis, is common (Joshel & Petersen, 2014). We wanted to expose our students to both types of evidence.

Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, historical scholars (historians, art historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, etc.) and archivists, especially those who study colonialism, have discussed the bias inherent in the wider archive for years (Allen, 1986; Trouillot, 1995; Carter, 2006; Thomas, et al., 2017), which is another reason to introduce students to archaeological analysis (Smith, 2010). While faculty have successfully integrated the close analysis of images and images of objects alongside primary sources into classes for decades with great success, that focus was aimed at diversifying sources and increasing student engagement. More recent efforts have been directed at naming and subverting the silences of the archive although they are not as common as the first mode of teaching with historical images and objects (Carter, 2006; Anderson & Fleming, 2019).

For the most part, faculty introduce undergraduate students to what Giorgio Riello calls "History from Things." With "History from Things," "historians relate to material culture [...] by concentrating on its material form and treating it the same way in which they treat a manuscript, diary, an inventory, or an image: objects as primary sources" (Riello, 2009, p. 24). Like the other members of her department, Dowling commonly uses this form of analysis in her foundational history survey, where logistics and curricular expectations make it impossible to spend time with objects in the archives. It is the most common form of primary source analysis taught at our university.

## Real World Experience *continued*

Riello also names two other types of material history analysis: “History of Things” and “History and Things.” History of Things is “the historical analysis of the relationship between objects, people, and their representations” (Riello, 2009, p.24). In this case, the object is, itself, as an object, the subject of the study; this form of study allows us to think about the way categories of objects, such as ancient oil lamps, are used both individually and societally, and what they say about larger narratives, such as trade or increasing differentiation of labor. The third category Riello discusses is “History and Things.” Methodologically, this approach decontextualizes the object from its past and thinks about how they are displayed and interpreted, now, such as display in a digital database or catalog. This is an important way to interact with objects for public-facing historical study.

Recently, more historians have attempted to grapple with how to introduce “History of Things” and “History and Things” into undergraduate courses and help students work with non-textual sources.<sup>1</sup> Riello’s article is one example. Other scholars have documented introducing physical and image-based numismatic analysis into their courses to help students overcome the inherent elite bias of documents as well as the ways in which ancient rulers used coins as part of what we consider a media image campaign (McIntyre, Dunn, & Richardson, 2020; Melville-Jones, 2020; Brice & Kopestonsky, 2020).<sup>2</sup> To date, most studies on object analysis pedagogy in history focus on coins.<sup>3</sup> Only a few feature library instruction (Aurand, 2011).

As access to digital archives has increased, a small, but growing number of archivists have sought to understand how faculty and students use archives, the training they receive, and what instruction to offer. Initial research suggests that object-based learning, which revolves around student interactions with objects, yields positive results (Rockenbach, 2011). As Barbara Rockenbach noted in her article about undergraduate use of the Yale Archives and collaboration between instructors and archives in the manuscript department,

studies around object-based learning are primarily found within museum studies. Within museum studies, the benefits of object-based learning are well-attested, especially for comprehension and idea recall, and have been for some time (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). As with other studies, Rockenach’s focused on the two faculty members’ assessment of student learning. Wendy M. Duff and Joan M. Cherry’s study on the impact of archival sessions on undergraduate learning, also at Yale, asked for student feedback on the archive orientation sessions. In Duff and Cherry’s article, they assessed student confidence levels in using the archives and use of archival sources to assess effectiveness (Duff & Cherry, 2008). The study authors found that while confidence increased four-fold the use of sources remained relatively unchanged. As Duff and Cherry noted, it is difficult to isolate and study the impact of learning practices. As an exploratory study, they called for other universities to perform similar studies. We see our study as occupying a similar space and asking similar questions as the Duff and Cherry study; however, instead of focusing on the impact of the library and archival instruction, we wanted to assess the impact of the workshops and object-based projects on student confidence around general historical skills and wider course content in an introductory-level history course. Although our library and archive have substantial collections of historic texts, many dating to the nineteenth century and some even earlier, and which our History majors use to write their capstone research papers, the age and breadth of the Holmes Collection is unique. We wanted to first focus on the student perception of hands-on assignments with objects, not texts or texts-as-objects, but also on the student impact of working with ancient objects.

### A Brief Introduction to the Workshops and Assignments

Mercer’s collection does have coins, but because it contains other ubiquitous objects, such as oil lamps, beads, blades, etc. from all over the Middle East and spanning several thousand years, it allows students a unique experience to study the lives and cultures of everyday people who lived millennia ago. The first

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the edited volume, *History and Material Culture: A Student’s Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey. 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> The entirety of volume 30 of the *Journal of the Numismatic Association of Australia* contains important descriptive studies on numismatic pedagogy.

<sup>3</sup> A notable exception is Robin Fleming’s 2013 course at Boston College, *Making History Public: History Down the Toilet*, which paired with the City of Boston’s Archaeology Lab and used trash for analysis. <https://bcm.bc.edu/index.html%3Fp=6223.html>



## Real World Experience *continued*

iteration of this course was taught in Fall 2017 with the help of instructional librarian Bailey and collection archivist Wright. For the Fall 2019 course, Dowling made minor course changes and the authors decided to develop a schema to investigate student responses and self-assessed learning using the Holmes Collection on student engagement and learning. Dowling, Wright, Bailey, and additional Mercer librarian, Griggs, with experience in survey design, met several times in summer of 2019 to develop the study. We developed three surveys (pre-, mid-, and post-test) to be given throughout the semester. While our Fall 2017 course seemed successful from the faculty perspective—that is, students appeared engaged and successfully met assignment and course objectives—we lacked the students' perspective on the utility of hands-on activities for skill building and historical comprehension.

Dowling assigned two connected assignments that required the students to use the Collection, and we hosted two interactive workshops focused on supporting these assignments. Student interactions with the Holmes Collection can be divided into two types: first, physically interacting with the collection by handling the objects themselves; second, by using the objects' entries in Mercer's institutional digital repository, University Research, Scholarship, and Archives (URSA). Both workshops encouraged hands-on interaction and manipulation of the objects, and the second assignment required the use of the repository. The first assignment asked the students to generate reports based on their physical study of each object. Then students were challenged to use an anonymized, student-generated report and the basic information in the repository's database to complete their second assignment: historical research on the society that created the object, as well as the object's importance to that society. The goal of the workshops and assignments was to push students to engage with these objects in the manner of the "History of Things," that is thinking about the objects as a category rather than as an individual object with an individual history to be "read."

As a general education course, an important goal is to introduce students to historical professions and their processes. Our accrediting institution, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) requires at least one class in

the Humanities/Fine Arts. Our institution requires six credits, one in Humanities and one in Creative Expression, which can only be fulfilled by a select number of Art History courses. It is very likely for students who took this for Humanities general education credit, that this will be the only historically-oriented course they take in college. Therefore, it is crucial to introduce the students to the norms of our discipline, not just to meet the curricular and assessment student learning objectives, but to cultivate archival and library research skills and engagement in historical study as a whole (Weiner, et al., 2015). Others have shown that student interaction with archives increases student interest, although these studies mostly concern textual items in archives (Matyn, 2000; Johnson, 2006).

The workshops and project are designed to make student interaction with the objects mimic the experience of historians. While some historians accompany field archaeologists, most do not. As a result, historians work from notes, images, and published reports of objects. Even for field archaeologists, careful notes, photographs, and small samples are frequently the only objects that can be taken home from the field site. Objects of the type stored in the collection are usually accessible only as part of a formal private, archive, or museum collection and cannot be consulted freely or regularly, whereas repositories and textual reports are more freely available. Research shows that even historical graduate students and faculty have little to no formal training in archival techniques and research (Weiner, et al., 2015). We wanted students to experience both modes of object interaction.

### Workshops

The first workshop aimed to train students in object handling and study. Dowling and Wright selected four objects of varying materials and types from the Collection. Wright developed handling protocols for the students, in consultation with archivists from Emory University. Objects were placed in closed cell foam-lined baskets. Students wore nitrile gloves and were regularly reminded to use two hands to handle the objects. The first workshop emphasized object-handling protocols as well as library instruction on the URSA website. To model appropriate archival convention, students' bags were locked in a separate location before they entered the classroom. Objects allowed in the archival room were

## Real World Experience *continued*

limited to pencil, paper, student ID card, and phone or camera. We invited the students, broken into groups, to carefully examine a series of objects chosen for group discussion, including a fake object, with nitrile gloves, scales, and rulers. The workshop ran roughly 75 minutes (the class period) as students rotated to each chosen object to discuss with each other, us, and take notes.

The second workshop occurred two weeks later. Before class, we selected enough objects for each student in the class. We choose a mix of object types, periods, geographical locations, and conditions. Our goal was to select engaging objects with secure identification in the repository records for ease of student use in the second assignment. We invited students to choose an object and sit in front of it. Students used their own cameras (usually on cell phones) to take photographs. Other students sketched their objects. Students took an average of 40 minutes with the objects, but several students chose to use the full class time (75 minutes). Many students asked questions and casually chatted with each other about their objects throughout the assignment, often remarking on and comparing elements of their objects.

### Written Assignments

A week before the first workshop, students were given the first assignment. The assignment read,

On 9/3/2019 and 9/17/2019, we will visit the library. One of the librarians, Kristen Bailey, and an archivist, Kathryn Wright, will introduce you to our ancient Mediterranean objects collection. In the process, you will learn how to touch and interact safely with ancient objects (many of them are over 2,000 years old). In the first meeting, we will practice describing objects. The goal is to describe in immense detail with no analysis or interpretation the object so that another scholar may use it to make interpretations. The second library day, you will select an object from those set out on the tables and study it. You are encouraged to bring your cameras and take photos for later consultation as you work. You will have two weeks to revise and edit a thick description before submitting it. Keep in mind, your description will be used anonymously by another student to complete the second, historical analysis portion of the assignment.

Students were required to submit a 250–350-word description. These descriptions model artifact catalog entries, with the notable exception that students cannot confirm origin or material because they lack technical expertise and equipment. Students executed one round of peer review before final submission. After instructor feedback based on a pre-distributed assignment rubric, the students revised and resubmitted final versions of their reports. Griggs anonymized the reports. Because the public-facing digital catalog of the repository is still in development and the search function not very user-friendly,<sup>4</sup> we added repository numbers to ease student search and distributed the reports to different students for additional research.

For the second assignment, students were asked to use their peer's report along with the basic information provided in the repository entry (approximate date, origin, material, as well as provenance and purchase date, if available) to 'analyze the object in historical context.' The prompt read,

Using the description, any photos provided in the description, and the URSA record, your task is to analyze the object in historical context. Your analysis should address the following: What was the object for? What does the object mean? What does it tell us about the society that created it? Why is it important? How does it help you understand the culture we've been learning about better? You may use any texts or lectures from class, but you are also required to research and find **at least one credible academic source (book or article)** to help you analyze your object. You should use the databases compiled by Ms. Bailey to locate an academic source.

Bailey offered additional in-class library instruction after the second assignment prompt was distributed on how to use library resources to find secondary research and was available for research consultations.

### Survey Methodology

Foremost, we want to move beyond descriptive faculty observations to assess student perceptions of assignment effectiveness, a growing trend in history pedagogy, library instruction, and archival studies (Horowitz, 201). To

<sup>4</sup> Dowling is working separately with history and computer science students in independent study courses to optimize the repository database for student and public use.

## Real World Experience *continued*

assess student learning on project-based assignments, and specifically the impact of hands-on use of archival objects in the classroom setting, we administered a series of three surveys, a pre-, mid-, and post-test, using the Qualtrics platform (Appendix A). The surveys and evaluation methods were designed in collaboration between the classroom instructor, archivist, instructional librarian, and assessment librarian. We designed the surveys to measure changes in student responses to material history, ancient history, the historical profession, and the workshop experiences and assignments from beginning of the semester to the end. We were most interested in tracking the students' perceptions and experiences with special emphasis on their training and use of archival objects. The proposal for this project and the surveys were submitted to the Mercer's Institutional Review Board and were approved in 2019.

Participation in the surveys was voluntary and anonymous. Special care was taken to limit the course instructor's influence on the students and the instructional faculty had no contact with the results until after the course was completed. Each survey involved a mix of question types: 7-point Likert scales, short answer, percentage, and ranking questions. Additionally, multiple questions were repeated throughout the surveys to measure changes that occurred over the course of the semester. All repeated questions were coded beforehand to track how the students' responses evolved throughout the semester. Bailey administered all surveys.

All the questions from the pre-test were repeated in the post-test, which was administered in the final class of the semester. The third survey also contained additional questions relevant to student perceptions about the assignments and learning from the entire semester. The second survey, the "mid-test," was administered after the students had completed the first object analysis assignment. This survey collected data on the students' response to library and archival instruction and how well it prepared them to complete their assignment.<sup>5</sup>

### Student Demographics, Stated Interested, and Prior Knowledge

We asked the students a few demographic questions: why they were taking the course, how many college-level history courses they had taken, and how interested in ancient history they were (see Appendix A for the pre-test survey questions). Over half of the students<sup>6</sup> were History majors (30.4%) or minors (26%) and an additional student was a Classics major (4.3%). The remaining students took the course either as a general education requirement (13%) or for 'other' reasons (26%). In the free-response field provided for 'other,' the students expressed interest in the topic and/or the instructor. The students in the course were predisposed to interest in ancient history. Entering interest in the topic translates to better engagement from the beginning and means this group of students was favorably predisposed to the material, which likely increased their confidence and scores in other areas. We would like to do this survey again in Fall 2023 to compare the results of different student groups.

Many of the students were familiar with college-level history courses. Everyone had taken at least one course previously, although 40% of the students had taken only one. Four students each (18%) had taken two and three courses. Some had taken four or more courses (5 students; 22.7%). These demographics also suggest that the course would have higher student engagement levels, regardless of the activity's effectiveness at engaging students. Over half the students had taken more than one college-level history course. Although we cannot be certain this means they were exposed to rigors of historical and textual analysis, as well as some of the expectations of the profession, before taking this course. In future surveys, we plan to ask students about their prior experience with libraries, archives, and library instruction to parse out the impact of library instruction on the success of this series of student experiences.

### Results & Discussion

The first set of historical questions asked students to assess the utility of objects in historical study. The students assessed these specific statements: 'Objects

<sup>5</sup> We also asked several qualitative questions to assess student learning of major concepts, such as empire and imperialism, but found that our data collection failed; students did not write more than one to two sentences. All responses were insufficient to assess the responses. In the future, we will change our data collection protocol.

<sup>6</sup>  $n=23$  on the first survey; one student added after the first day so the second and third surveys  $n=24$

## Real World Experience *continued*

are useful historical sources.’ ‘Objects are as important as texts in historical study,’ ‘Texts are useful historical sources,’ ‘Texts are important as objects in historical study,’ and ‘Texts are historical objects’ using the 7-point Likert scale discussed in the methodology section.

Across the board, students came into the class with some understanding that objects were historical sources. No one disagreed with the statement that ‘Objects are useful historical sources’ on the first day; however, the post-test demonstrates that after the course, more students strongly agree that ‘Objects are useful historical sources’ and ‘Objects are as important as texts in historical study.’ When we favored texts in the same structure of statement (‘Texts are as important as objects in historical study’), students were more likely to agree, emphasizing the students’ familiarity with texts as historical sources (Fig. 1).

It is unsurprising that students agreed with the statement that texts are useful historical sources and as useful as objects coming into the class. The historical

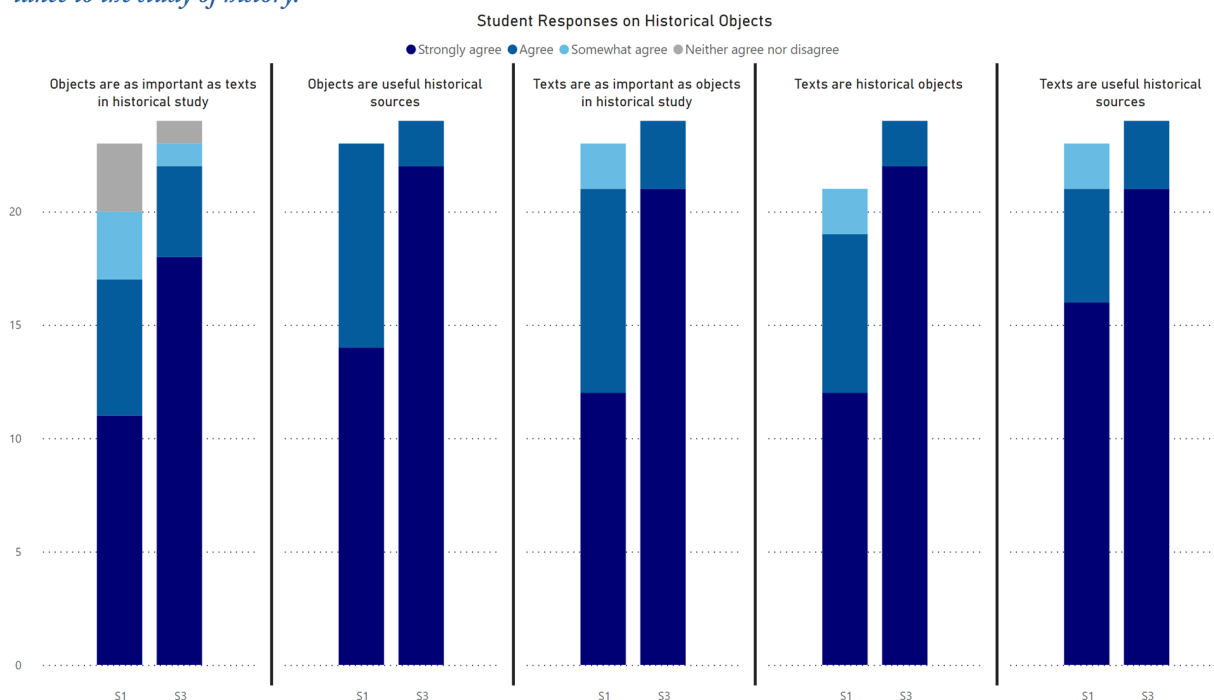
discipline, as well as the focus of the History and related departments (e.g., Religion and Classics) at Mercer, emphasizes the value and use of texts as the main form of historical evidence. Remember, every student had taken at least one college-level History course. Mercer is a traditional undergraduate institution, and many students had taken classes from Mercer History faculty, and our main mode of primary source instruction and analysis is textual. Notably, students over the period of the course increasingly acknowledged the value of objects to historical study, which is an important shift for thinking about how historical narratives, then and now, have been constructed. It is possible that increased student awareness of objects could be achieved through more traditional primary source methods that were employed in other class lectures throughout the semester (Press & Meiman, 2021) Thus to target the impact of the workshops and assignments on student learning, we asked more specific questions.

It is well-established that students’ engagement, which is measurable, affects their motivation and is associated

Note. S1 means their response to Survey 1, S3 is for their follow-up response on Survey 3.

**Figure 1**

*Student responses to a series of 7-point agree-disagree Likert scale questions on historical objects importance to the study of history.*





## Real World Experience *continued*

with grade increases and academic resilience (Kuh et al., 2007). Thus, the next set of questions, which was administered at the mid-test and at the post-test, addressed the students' perceived value of working with the collection to their learning and course experience. We asked the students, again on a 7-point Likert scale, to agree or disagree with the following statements: 'The Ancient Object Analysis Assignments (workshops included): '...increased my ability to analyze the motive, agenda, and cultural impact of ancient societies using objects,' '...increased my understanding of the motive(s), agenda(s), and/or cultural impact(s) of the ancient societies we have studied in class, '...increased my understanding of the discipline of history and the historical profession' (Fig. 2). The results were more varied than the last data set.

On the mid-test, most students felt that the workshops "increased my ability to analyze..." By the post-test, when they had finished the second assignment analyzing the object in context, they all did. Half strongly agreed and 46% agreed. The number of students who strongly agreed with the statement that their ability to analyze the

'motive, agenda, and cultural impact of ancient societies using objects' doubled (Fig. 2). These students believed the hands-on workshops combined with the assignments helped them learn how to analyze objects historically; they believed that the hands-on experiential learning improved learning overall.

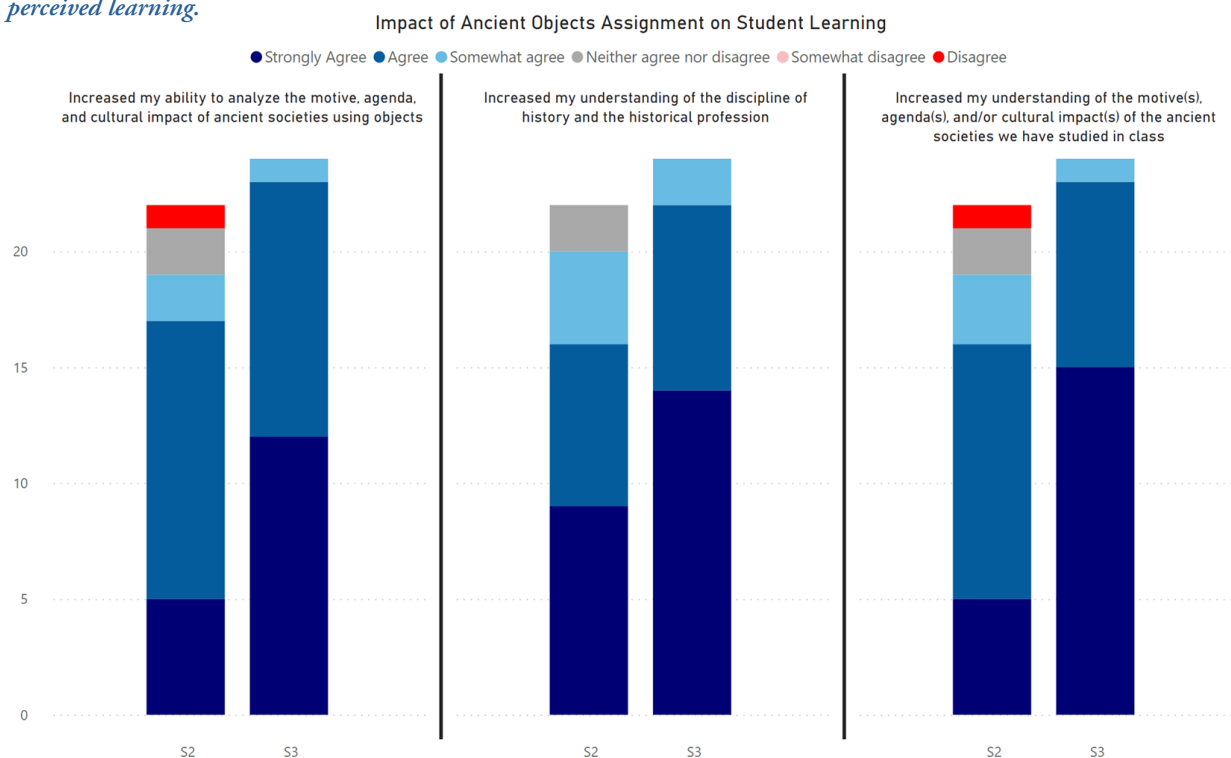
On the mid-test for the question 'understanding motives, agendas, and cultural impacts of ancient societies,' only 23% strongly agreed and half agreed. On the third survey, no students disagreed or were neutral. The number who strongly agreed nearly tripled (63%) and only one somewhat agreed (4.2%). The remainder agreed (23%) (Fig. 2).

For these 24 students, working hands-on with ancient objects for no more than three hours and for some time with the digital catalog to complete short assignments enabled them to understand the complexity of not only material history analysis but also to understand the societies we studied in class better. This is especially relevant for us. Our university, like many universities,

Note. S2 means their response to Survey 2, S3 is for their follow-up response on Survey 3.

**Figure 2**

*Student responses (in a 7-point agree-disagree Likert scale) on the impact of the Ancient Objects assignment on their perceived learning.*



## Real World Experience *continued*

has pushed various forms of experiential learning and other high-impact learning practices, especially service learning. The literature has repeatedly demonstrated that high-impact practices increase student engagement, but they also require a substantial time investment and are labor intensive for the instructor(s) (Kong, 2021). An important take away from our study is that even when students only engage in one experiential practice, they perceive benefits beyond the desired learning outcomes of the assignment.

We asked students to self-assess their comfort and confidence level in analyzing an image of an object to assess if the course material and working with objects positively improved their self-confidence in historical object analysis. The students were asked to respond on a 7-point Likert scale with two sets of statements. They were first asked how they defined material history and its importance to history study, and then their confidence in the correctness of both responses. The second set of confidence questions asked about historical analysis more explicitly. Students were asked to rate their agreement with the statement, 'I know how to analyze an object to understand the motive(s), agenda(s), and/or cultural impact(s) of the society that created the object,' and 'If you were given an image from an ancient society, for example, the 20th century BC Egyptian statue below, how comfortable would you feel using it to offer an interpretation of Egyptian motive(s), agenda(s), and cultural impact(s)?' All questions were administered on the pre- and post-tests (Fig. 3).

Student responses to both sets of questions were similar. Students were moderately certain or unsure if they had the definition correct at the pre-test; no student strongly agreed that they defined it correctly and several disagreed. By the post-test, students self-assessed as more confident, with no students answering below agree. Combined with the data on the student-assessed value of the workshops, which used the same statement, we see a clear pattern: students believed that they were more capable of historical object analysis after taking the course and being exposed to the object workshops. We know that self-confidence, along with engagement, are important predictors of student success (Tavani & Losh, 2003).

Student comfort level with historical object analysis

also increased over the duration of the course. On the first day, five students (22%) stated that they were uncomfortable analyzing a 20th-century BC Egyptian statue. Five students were neutral, that is 'neither comfortable nor uncomfortable' (22%). Six students were either 'moderately' or 'extremely comfortable' (26%). By the end of the course, 21 out of 24 students (87.5%) were 'moderately' or 'extremely' comfortable with using an image of an Egyptian object "to interpret Egyptian motive(s), agenda(s), and cultural impact(s)." That is a nearly four-fold increase (Fig. 3).

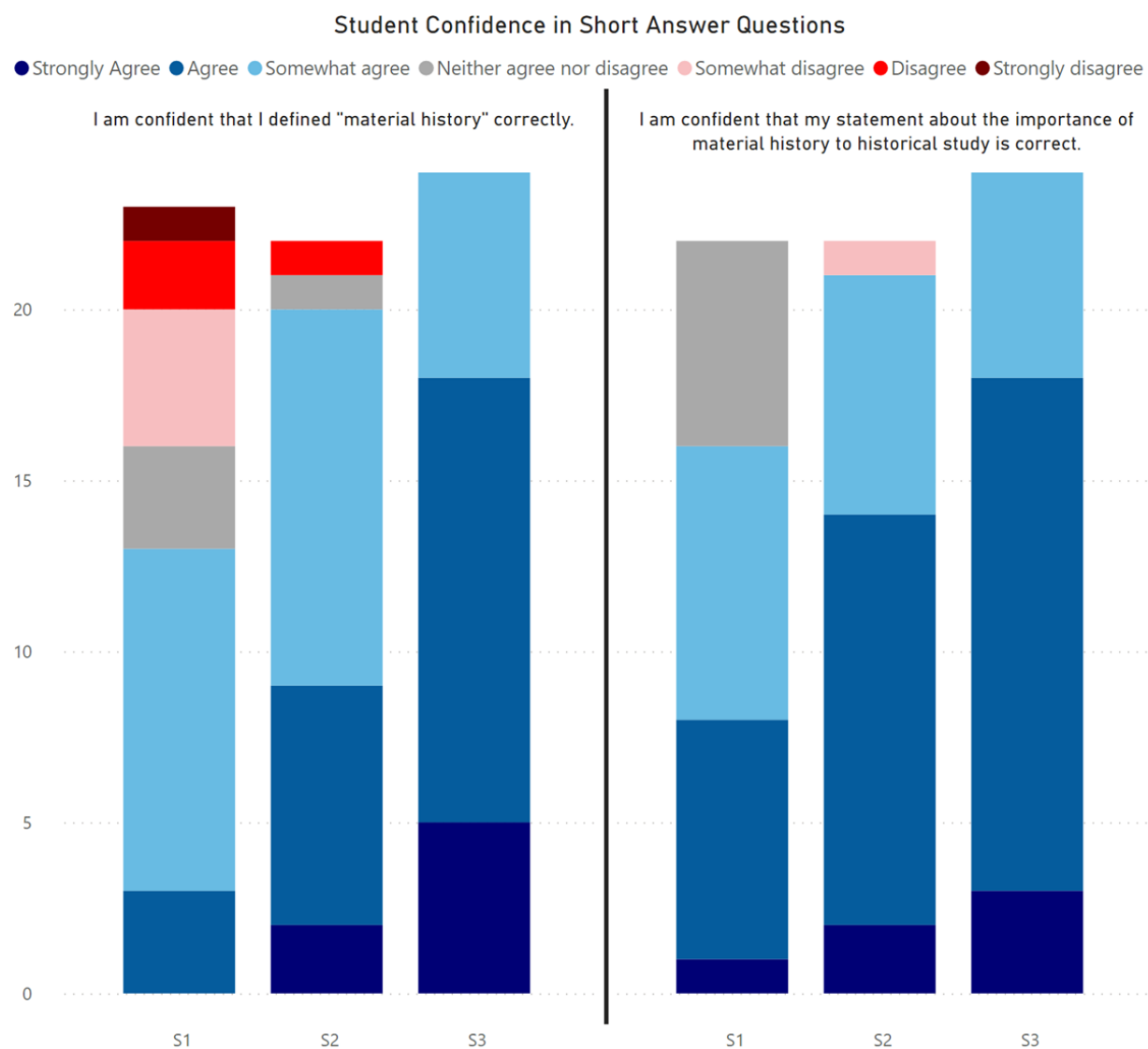
Students overwhelmingly assessed themselves as more confident about material history and more comfortable with historical object analysis after taking the course. It is not possible to isolate the impact of only the workshops and assignments on student confidence in defining material history or analyzing historical objects as the course employed object analysis as primary sources throughout. It is likely that other elements of the course, such as in-class group analysis of images of art and objects also contributed to their understanding and confidence as student learning communities have a demonstrably positive impact on student learning (Vescio, et al., 2008); nevertheless, the results of the student surveys emphasize that the short time with the objects in the collection improved student understanding of historical object analysis and self-assessed confidence in their historical interpretive skills. While integrating hands-on activities into history and other humanities and social sciences courses is not a new practice, and faculty descriptions of similar workshops and assignments elsewhere have reported success (Rockenbach, 2011), the results of our study show that the perceived benefits for students go beyond meeting assignment and course learning objectives. In particular, students noted a substantial increase in their confidence and comfort, both crucial to improved learning outcomes.

Although two of the investigators have since moved into different positions, Dowling intends to reframe the study instructions for the knowledge demonstration survey questions and run this study in Fall 2023 when the course is offered again. This would allow us to assess student performance on learning objectives alongside more targeted student perceptions of the library instruction, workshops, and object assignments as well as ask students additional, pointed questions about

## Real World Experience *continued*

**Figure 3**

*Student responses through the three surveys to measure their confidence in their answers to the two survey questions on the definition and importance of material history.*



*Note. S1 means their response to Survey 1, S2 and S3 is for their follow-up responses on later surveys.*

engagement and about their future goals and enrollment plans in historical courses. We also intend to ask more directed questions about other student interaction with objects, such as in-class group-analysis of images of objects to assess the impact of the workshops and related assignments separately more clearly from other forms of

object interaction and analysis instruction.

### Conclusions

While we compiled responses from only a small number of students (n=24) and cannot draw sweeping

## Real World Experience *continued*

conclusions, the data emphasizes that students believed the object activities increased their learning, engagement, and confidence in the course material. Further, the results strongly suggest that the hands-on workshops and assignments increased student understanding of and self-confidence in historical object analysis and historical interpretation. Students overwhelmingly assessed the workshops as positive experiences and rated their confidence in historical analysis skills higher after the workshops, interacting with the objects, and completing the assignments. Further, the additional answers we collected and analyzed emphasized that from the student perspective working with the objects directly increased their engagement, which is associated with student success, and interest in the course and historical field (Lester, 2013). The results of this small study are encouraging for humanities faculty who want to increase engagement and perhaps course enrollment. Anecdotally, we heard that students enrolled in the Fall 2019 course *because students from the Fall 2016 course spoke so positively of the object workshops*.

Collaborative, iterative, and hands-on projects are recognized as a high-impact practice (HIP), as is undergraduate research (AAC&U). We all know that high impact practices are very effective for making sure all students learn, but they also come with “high-impact fatigue,” as Jane S. Halonen and Dana S. Dunn termed it (2018). Intensive course and assignment preparation for HIPs, as well as labor intensive monitoring of student research, is a barrier in a general education course open to non-majors and specialists simultaneously. Further, increasing university expectations for student learning experiences across curricula makes employing the HIPs that we know work difficult in general education courses. What our study suggests is that even very brief workshops working with inexpensive, everyday items (e.g., single beads, knife blades, oil lamps) produced noticeable and promising results from the students in terms of measurable engagement, which we know leads to improved outcomes (Kong, 2021).

At the time it was created, our course met the 2012 version of the “Western Heritage” general education curriculum block for our unit, the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. That curricular block was revised (but never assessed) in 2019 and implemented in 2020, and overhauled again in 2022, to be implemented in 2023. Although only 13% of students enrolled in the course did so to meet the general education requirement, the course

was required to meet the series of general education student learning objectives required by both the unit and the university. The college-level objectives emphasized awareness of major developments in the “Western tradition” as well as reflecting on how those traditions have shaped the perspectives, purposes, character, or motives of the historical actors. In addition, it meets the university-level competency for Critical Thinking, which requires that the students demonstrate the ability to draft and support an argument using diverse sources. With these university- and college-level requirements, the course was already overburdened even before Dowling added course-specific outcomes. As instructors, we were thrilled that with limited time and labor investment into the hands-on workshops and collaborative project, we saw demonstrably positive impacts on students’ self-assessed confidence and learning. We believe that this kind of iterative object-based workshop series could be employed with similar success in other lower-level and general education courses in the Humanities, employing different topic foci.

We are also cognizant of faculty workload problems. The students surveyed in this study submitted two very short assignments that required only minimal marking from the instructor. The number of students in the course was 24. Especially paired with other course assessments, substantial preparation and grading from workshops and associated assignments could lead to faculty overwork; however, the assignments required no additional marking than other short written assessments. To combat faculty burnout from HIPs, Halonen and Dunn (2018) recommended both limiting scope of HIPs and associated assignments and the intensity of marking to keep faculty workload reasonable. We believe the workshop plus assignments series achieves those recommendations and is suitable for mid-size classes. The combo workshop and assignment series required only minimal advance set up and employs student-led review and revision of the assignments before faculty marking, which minimizes the need for extensive marking, but also involves the students in the process. We hope the results of this study encourage Humanities and library faculty to consider ways in which they could collaborate to combine material analysis and increase student informational literacy outside the purview of traditional library instruction.

We recognize that many institutions, especially smaller ones, may not have access to substantial, or indeed any,



## Real World Experience *continued*

object collections. Our institution had only a small manuscript archive before the Collection's donation, and there would have been extremely limited on-campus options for this kind of activity before 2017. Even when an institution does not have a collection, due to the small time investment in the workshops, it may be possible to host one or two sessions with modest collections off-campus, which are more commonly held by smaller institutions or in local, state, regional, and federal repositories. For example, our city has several historical museums and sites of interest with collections that could

be consulted by classes. This opens up the possibility for faculty to collaborate with local museums, libraries, and archives for the object manipulation portion of the project. While we focused on classical objects, because that was the bulk of the collection's holdings and the emphasis of the course; there is no reason that analogous collections of everyday objects, or even 19th or early 20th century books, could not be used to introduce students to material analysis in any Humanities courses.

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## Real World Experience *continued*

### Appendix A Historical Artifact Analysis Surveys

Survey appearance notation 1: S1 means that the question appeared on survey 1, S2 for survey 2, & S3 for survey 3.

Survey appearance notation 2: A large number of the questions rely on a 7-point Likert scale (agree-disagree, interested-not interested, comfortable-uncomfortable). For those questions, You will find a note that says '7-point Likert scale (term)'

#### IC2 - ELECTRONIC CONSENT [S1, S2, S3]

By clicking on the "I agree to participate" button, you are indicating that:

- You have read the above information;
- You are at least 18 years of age;
- You are agreeing to participate voluntarily;
- You understand that responses are anonymous and confidential and will not affect your grade.
  - "I agree to participate"
  - "I do not want to participate"

#### E1 - Why did you enroll in this course? [S1, S3]

- History Major
- History Minor
- Classics Major
- General Education requirement
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### E2 - How many college-level history courses (at Mercer or another institution of higher education) have you taken? [S1, S3]

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

#### E3 - What do you hope to gain from this course? (select the option that best meet your goals) [S1, S3]

- Better historical understanding of Ancient Mediterranean societies
- Training for historical and/or classical study
- A good grade
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### E4 - How interested are you in Ancient History? [S1, S3]

- 7-point Likert scale (interested)

#### HP0 - Answer the following questions about historical study to the best of your ability. [S1]

#### HP1 - What is the primary purpose of studying history? [S1, S3]

Creating a narrative

Interpreting past events

Understanding historical people

Avoiding past mistakes

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### HP2 - Select any activities that you think professional historians participate in as part of their historical work. [S1, S3]

- Teaching
- Researching
- Traveling
- Presenting
- Translating
- Transcribing



Real World Experience *continued*

- Engaging in archaeological fieldwork
- Engaging in archival research
- Experimenting
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**P1 - What percentage of their professional time do professor-historians spend doing each of the following activities in their work time? [S1, S3]**

(Total must add up to 100)

Teaching (preparing lectures, grading, office hours, etc.) : \_\_\_\_\_

Library research/working with printed secondary source materials : \_\_\_\_\_

Archival research/working with original materials : \_\_\_\_\_

Archaeological research/working with original materials and sites : \_\_\_\_\_

Presenting conclusions at professional organizations/conferences : \_\_\_\_\_

Writing articles/books to publish in academic venues (journals/books) : \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Total : \_\_\_\_\_

**OH0 - Respond to the following questions about historical sources to the best of your ability [S1, S3]**

**OH1 - Objects are useful historical sources. [S1, S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**OH2 - Objects are as important as texts in historical study. [S1, S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**OH2 - Objects are as important as texts in historical study. [S1, S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**OH4 - Texts are as important as objects in historical study. [S1, S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**OH5 - Texts are historical objects. [S1, S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**OA1 - I know how to analyze an object to understand the motive(s), agenda(s), and/or cultural impact(s) of the society that created the object. [S1, S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**OA2 - If I were given an image from an ancient society, for example, the 20th century BC Egyptian statue below, how comfortable would you feel using it to offer an interpretation of Egyptian motive(s), agenda(s), and cultural impact(s)? [S1, S3]**

7-point Likert scale (comfortable)

Real World Experience *continued*

*(Image from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, used under the Creative Commons 0 license)*

**M1 - In your own words, define "material history." [S1, S2, S3]**

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**M2 - I am confident that I defined "material history" correctly. [S1, S2, S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**M3 - Why do you think "material history" is important to historical study? [S1, S2, S3]**

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**M4 - I am confident that my statement about the importance of material history to historical study is correct. [S1, S2, S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**M5 - I feel more confident about my knowledge of ancient material history than I did before I participated in the Ancient Object Analysis Assignments. [S2, S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**Emp1 - To the best of your ability, define the concept "empire." [S1, S3]**

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**Emp2 - I am confident that my definition of "empire" is correct. [S1, S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**Emp3 - According to your own definition, which of the following historical civilizations would you consider an empire? [S1, S3]**

- Egyptian New Kingdom, ca. 1200 BC
- Athens, ca. 450 BC
- Han Dynasty China, ca. 200 BC
- Mongols, ca. 1300 AD
- Inca, ca. 1400 AD
- Spain, ca. 1492 AD
- British Empire, ca. 1700 AD

**Emp4 - Of the possible choices for empires offered in the previous question, which have you studied previously in a history class (high school or college)? [S1, S3]**

- Egyptian New Kingdom, ca. 1200 BC
- Athens, ca. 450 BC
- Han Dynasty China, ca. 200 BC
- Mongols, ca. 1300 AD
- Inca, ca. 1400 AD
- Spain, ca. 1492 AD
- British Empire, ca. 1700 AD

## Real World Experience *continued*

**A1 - Did you attend and participate in the introductory workshop on how to handle and interpret ancient objects historically? [S2]**

Yes

No

**A2 - Did you attend and participate in the hands-on workshop in which you were assigned an individual object to work with for the entire class period? [S2]**

Yes

No

**HO1 - I enjoyed my hands-on experiences with the ancient objects. [S2]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**HO2 - Hands-on interaction with ancient objects positively enriched my classroom experience. [S2]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**HO3 - Hands-on interaction with ancient objects increased my engagement in the class as a whole. [S2]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**HO4 - The first hands-on instructional workshop prepared me to work with ancient objects. [S2]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**HO5 - The hands-on interaction with the ancient objects benefited my understanding of the discipline of history and the historical profession. [S2]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**L1 - I was comfortable touching and working with the ancient objects during the second workshop (when you worked individually with a single object). [S2]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**L2 - The research component of the Ancient Object Analysis Assignments familiarized me with Mercer's library resources. [S2]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**L3 - The library instruction prepared me to research the society that created my object. [S2]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**AOA1 - The Ancient Object Analysis Assignments helped me improve my historical writing. [S2, S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**AOA2 - The Ancient Object Analysis Assignments (workshops included) increased my ability to analyze the the motive, agenda, and cultural impact of ancient societies using objects. [S2, S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**AOA3 - The Ancient Object Analysis Assignments (workshops included) increased my understanding of the motive(s), agenda(s), and/or cultural impact(s) of the ancient societies we have studied in class. [S2, S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**AOA4 - The Ancient Object Analysis Assignments (workshops included) increased my understanding of the discipline of history and the historical profession. [S2, S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**AOA5 - The Ancient Object Analysis Assignments positively enriched my overall classroom experience. [S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**AOA6 - The Ancient Object Analysis Assignments increased my engagement in the class as a whole. [S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**SR1 - I enjoyed my hands-on experience with the phalanx shield and roleplay. [S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**SR2 - The shield and role-play activities enriched my classroom experience. [S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

## Real World Experience *continued*

**SR3 - The shield and role-play activities increased my engagement in the class as a whole. [S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**SR4 - The lecture by the sculpture professor helped prepare me to craft a shield. [S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**SR5 - The shield and role-play activities benefited my understanding of the discipline of history and the historical profession. [S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**SR6 - The shield and role-play activities increased my ability to analyze the the motive, agenda, and cultural impact of ancient societies using objects. [S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**SR7 - The shield and role-play activities increased my understanding of the motive(s), agenda(s), and/or cultural impact(s) of the ancient societies we have studied in class. [S3]**

7-point Likert scale (agree)

**R1 - Please order the following activities according to which you believe contributed the most (1) to the least (8) in your overall learning in the course: [S3]**

\_\_\_\_\_ Ancient Object Analysis Assignments

\_\_\_\_\_ Hands-On Workshops

\_\_\_\_\_ Dr. Dowling's Lectures

\_\_\_\_\_ Assigned Readings

\_\_\_\_\_ Class Discussion

\_\_\_\_\_ Phalanx Assignment

\_\_\_\_\_ Quizzes

\_\_\_\_\_ Guest Lectures (Ms. Wright and Professor Blackburn)



Real World Experience *continued*

## Appendix B

## Rubric for Thick Description of Holmes Collection Object

Content	Excellent	Admirable	Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Unacceptable
Accuracy (20 points)	Factually describes all elements of the object with no inference.	Factually describes near all of the object's elements with very little inference.	Describes the majority of the object's elements with some inferences. May make some minor description errors.	Describes some of the object's elements with a lot of personal inference and interpretation. May make major description errors.	Does not adequately describe the object or relies too heavily on personal interpretation to be useful.
Organization (20 points)	Description accounts for the needs of the reader first. Organizes information organically and logically.	Description accounts aims to satisfy the needs of the reader but may fall a little short. Organizes information organically but may have minor logical breaks.	Description accounts aims to satisfy the needs of the reader but may fall short. Organizes information but may not strictly follow internal organization.	Description privileges the author not the reader. Information is somewhat organized but has no clear internal structure.	Description privileges the author not the reader. No organization apparent.
Usability (20 points)	Description easily used by reader to draw conclusions about the object and its historical context.	Description can be used draw conclusions about the object and its historical context but may miss minor information or be a little difficult to use.	Description can be used draw conclusions with some difficulty. May be lacking major information or be difficult to use.	Description cannot effectively be used by a researcher to draw conclusions due to a number of issues (information, factuality, organization, clarity, etc.)	Description cannot be used by a researcher to draw conclusions due to a number of issues (information, factuality, organization, clarity, etc.)
Style					
Clarity (20 points)	Words are chosen for their precise meaning. Correctly uses the shared vocabulary of historians and archaeologists learned in class. Concepts are fully explained.	Most words are chosen for their precise meaning. Primarily uses the shared vocabulary of historians and archaeologists. Most concepts are clearly explained.	Some words are ill-chosen. The shared vocabulary is not used or not used correctly. Some concepts are ill-defined or poorly explained.	Many words seem ill-chosen. Shared vocabulary not present. Key concepts left unexplained.	Difficult to understand with no representation of shared vocabulary. No concepts introduced or explained.
Expression (10 points)	Vivid and effortless. Intentionally uses stylistic elements to shape the reader's experience. Even though it's an object report, some phrases and surprises have aesthetic value.	Clear and engaging. Competent. Some intentional stylistic elements may not work.	Competent. Pedestrian phrases. No effort to control style for the audience's benefit.	Attempts to express ideas and concepts but has very little control over stylistic elements.	Uncontrolled or inarticulate.
Mechanics (10 points)	All sentences are complete and grammatical. Paragraphs are coherent and have topic sentences. Concepts flow. No slang or colloquial language. Virtually error free (no more than a typo/page).	Most sentences are complete and grammatical. Paragraphs have topic sentences and represent distinct units but transitions may be rocky. Concepts flow. Some slang or colloquial language. Virtually error free but may be more than typos (2-3/pg).	Sentences are generally grammatical. Paragraphs may lack cohesion and topic sentences. Flow between paragraphs intended but not achieved. Disruptive errors.	Disruptive errors in grammar, sentence structure, or paragraphing that interfere with the reader's engagement and/or comprehension. Slang is pervasive.	Constant or severe errors that make reading nearly impossible. Spelling errors and typos are rampant.

\_\_\_ Paper requirements followed (length, typed, etc.)

\_\_\_ Proper citation of text(s) used

\_\_\_ Pages acknowledged

Real World Experience *continued*

## Appendix C

## Rubric for Historical Analysis of Holmes Collection Object

Content	Excellent	Admirable	Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Unacceptable
Thesis/Argument (20 points)	Perceptive, interesting, relevant, clear & controversial or surprising. Uses independent historical research.	Significant, interesting, relevant and clear but not ground-breaking. Still controversial enough for argument. Demonstrates historical research.	Tangential, prosaic, or uncontroversial. May be borderline descriptive. Some historical research.	Irrelevant or descriptive. Insufficient historical context.	No discernible position taken. No clear research or historical background.
Reasoning/Logical Development of Argument (20 points)	Each reason/premise supporting the thesis is made in a separate statement. Utilizes sub-arguments to support the main thesis. All arguments support initial thesis.	The premises are generally clear but sometimes conflated/confused. May have overlap between which premises are assumed and which are proved. Usually supported by sub-arguments.	Some confusion between proved premises and presumed premises. Support for premises is often lacking. May not contain sub-arguments.	Frequent confusion between premises taken and given. Little to no sub-arguments or logical support for thesis or arguments don't address/support thesis.	No premises/reasons or restates thesis repeatedly. There is no support for claims just statements.
Evidence (including counter-argument) (20 points)	The premises clearly support the thesis. The original argument and sub-arguments are valid and demonstrated with textual or visual evidence from credible, scholarly sources. The paper considers obvious and unobvious counter-examples and connects them to the evidence.	The premises appear to support the thesis. The arguments appear valid and are developed and supported by credible, scholarly evidence. Visual and textual evidence are used with original reasoning to support claims. Uses obvious counter-examples.	The premises appear to support the thesis but the arguments aren't developed. The textual evidence and independent reasoning is undeveloped or lacking. May not use sufficient evidence. Uses minimal counter-examples.	The premises do not clearly support the thesis and the arguments aren't developed. Little to no textual evidence is used and independent reasoning is lacking. May use questionable evidence. No clear counter-examples.	The premises do not support the thesis, and there is no discernible argument. No evidence is used, or it is non-scholarly or non-credible. No counter-examples.
<b>Style</b>					
Clarity (20 points)	Words are chosen for their precise meaning. Correctly uses the shared vocabulary of historians and archaeologists learned in class. Concepts are fully explained.	Most words are chosen for their precise meaning. Primarily uses the shared vocabulary of historians and archaeologists. Most concepts are clearly explained.	Some words are ill-chosen. The shared vocabulary is not used or not used correctly. Some concepts are ill-defined or poorly explained.	Many words seem ill-chosen. Shared vocabulary not present. Key concepts left unexplained.	Difficult to understand with no representation of shared vocabulary. No concepts introduced or explained.
Expression (10 points)	Vivid and effortless. Intentionally uses stylistic elements to shape the reader's experience. Even though it's an object report, some phrases and surprises have aesthetic value.	Clear and engaging. Competent. Some intentional stylistic elements may not work.	Competent. Pedestrian phrases. No effort to control style for the audience's benefit.	Attempts to express ideas and concepts but has very little control over stylistic elements.	Uncontrolled or inarticulate.
Mechanics (10 points)	All sentences are complete and grammatical. Paragraphs are coherent and have topic sentences. Concepts flow. No slang or colloquial language. Virtually error free (no more than a typo/page).	Most sentences are complete and grammatical. Paragraphs have topic sentences and represent distinct units but transitions may be rocky. Concepts flow. Some slang or colloquial language. Virtually error free but may be more than typos (2-3/pg).	Sentences are generally grammatical. Paragraphs may lack cohesion and topic sentences. Flow between paragraphs intended but not achieved. Disruptive errors.	Disruptive errors in grammar, sentence structure, or paragraphing that interfere with the reader's engagement and/or comprehension. Slang pervasive.	Constant or severe errors that make reading nearly impossible. Spelling errors and typos rampant.

\_\_\_Paper requirements followed (length, formatting, etc) \_\_\_proper citation of text(s) \_\_\_pages acknowledged