

“Can I Really Touch It?” Antiquities in the Hands of History Undergraduates

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Abstract: The recent donation of a 1000-piece collection of Near Eastern and Mediterranean antiquities to Mercer University Library inspired an experiential learning assignment developed by an archivist, an instruction librarian, and a member of the history faculty. Undergraduate history students were prompted to safely examine assigned artifacts in a controlled environment and produce 'thick descriptions' which were used for later additional assignments. A formal secure/safe handling policy was created for this collection since it was the first of its kind in the library. For the history class, the librarian and archivist hosted an ACRL Framework-based information literacy session that included instruction in appropriate object handling. The undergraduates needed to have tactile sensory input in order to accurately and appropriately describe many of the objects' physical characteristics for their thick descriptions. This problem-based project mimicked 'real-world' experience such as a historian might have. Student engagement was measured by a comment form for review of instruction, and students also completed a pre-test and post-test. Photos, handouts, policy, and sample materials are available. There are currently plans to expand this exercise to a local high school history class.

About the Authors:

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