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can raise fruitful discussion about the choice and organization of stories and the execution of images with ample material for analysis of artistic, cultural, economic, and religious issues. Themed courses, for example, classes which use environmental studies approaches to understand the middle ages, might use several different manuscript facsimiles. The Hunting Book of Gaston Phébus: Manuscript Français 616, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale both describes and illustrates hunting techniques for prized game animals or herds for feeding large groups of people.13 Medicina Antiqua: Codex Vindobonensis 93, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek is a recipe book for medicines with abundant illustrations of plants and descriptions of appropriate seasons and techniques for harvesting ingredients.15 Book of Beasts: A Facsimile of Ms. Bodley 764 is a compendium of information about animals, a bestiary, compiled from various ancient and late antique authorities with many illustrations and Aesop’s fable-like moral conclusions.16

The editions listed above are all affordable, but these less expensive facsimiles have drawbacks and can additionally be difficult to locate. They are often radically altered from the original in size, material, method of construction, and binding, which limits the level of analysis an instructor can teach or require. Instructors will most likely have strong feelings about which manuscripts they would like to teach, but budget concerns may limit the library’s ability to purchase the most “authentic” manuscript facsimiles. These facsimiles can prepare students to work with the real thing, if faculty want to arrange a capstone experience like visiting a manuscript repository. As a special collections librarian, I often work with groups from regional institutions who come to work with manuscripts in Western Michigan University’s collections because their own schools neither have nor are likely to acquire any due to lack of funds, lack of expertise, or low priority for this type of acquisition. Knowing a class has some practice with facsimiles can be reassuring to a special collections staff, who may be concerned about unleashing a group of unknown undergraduates on the university’s treasured possessions, particularly for a faculty member they do not know personally. The “home” librarian can often help reassure the host librarian of the preparation and reliability of the students involved until the faculty member establishes a relationship with the curators at the host institution.

Librarians increasingly strive to become partners in instruction, but that requires them to be aware of pedagogical innovations in the disciplines they serve and to develop creative ways to support them, particularly in interdisciplinary fields. The richness of the manuscript tradition is an integral feature of medieval studies, and these materials can intrigue students and stimulate classroom discussion, but few undergraduates have the basic skills to fully realize the benefits of working with handwritten materials in other languages, a tension which Johnston characterizes as “student resistance and attraction to using rare books and manuscripts.”17 Instructors want to challenge their students through this kind of study because manuscript description and analysis involve the attention to detail, interdisciplinary thinking, and analytical skills that are among the primary goals of a liberal arts education. This approach can also lead to discussions on issues such as authorial intent, cultural change, the transmission of information, and the ways in which history and its artifacts are reinterpreted by modern scholars, which lead students to challenge their assumptions. For librarians, these new trends in teaching illustrate the vitality of library collections at a time when much of the focus of the profession has been on the growth and promise of digital resources, and this work can provide stimulating challenges. Specialized collection development is an important tool to help instructors realize their goals for student achievement and to help academic librarians stay involved with the intellectual life of the departments they serve.