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RBS-UVA Fellowship Short Essay

I am enthused to submit my application for the 2024-2025 RBS-UVA fellowship. I am a fifth-year doctoral candidate in U.S. History and I have applied for Brian Cassidy's summer course "Identifying and Understanding Twentieth-Century Duplicating Technologies." The subjects of my dissertation, "Trashland Adventures: Building Bohemia in Detroit's Cass Corridor, 1963-2013," used a variety of duplication technologies to create art, share poetry, foment dissent, promote rock concerts, advocate for marijuana legalization, and spark cultural and political revolution. Some of the primary source material I am using in this project includes underground and anarchist newspapers, hardcore punk zines, rock show flyers, and poetry printed on broadsides, postcards, bumper stickers, and bookmarks spanning from the 1960s-1990s. "Twentieth-Century Duplicating Technologies" would substantially inform my entire dissertation, and would be crucial for shaping the first chapter, which I then intend to edit into either a journal article or a piece of public writing.

My dissertation project tells the story of Detroit's Cass Corridor, which was home to generations of artists and activists during the late twentieth century until gentrification, re-branding, and a sports arena erased the neighborhood in the wake of Detroit's 2013 bankruptcy. My project seeks to demonstrate that inner-city Detroit was home to thriving arts and culture during the height of deindustrialization and to explore how bohemian communities are fostered and destroyed. My dissertation joins a conversation with other scholars of urban and cultural history exploring how the work of white radicals interacted with the Black liberation struggles they emulated and sought to support. The artists, writers, and activists of the Cass Corridor used duplication technologies to advocate for marijuana legalization, autonomous music venues, supporting local art scenes, and the abolition of technology. Letterpress, offset, mimeography, and xerography were used by the subjects of my dissertation and feature in the primary source material I am using. This course would help me gain skills to identify these technologies in sources and to better understand the daily work of these artists and writers.

During the proposed fellowship year, I would forward a chapter about the influential community spaces the Detroit Artists Workshop, the Alternative Press, and the Detroit Printing Co-op. While "Identifying and Understanding Twentieth-Century Duplicating Technologies" will influence my entire dissertation, which includes subjects who practiced duplication in every chapter, this chapter in particular will be informed by attending RBS programming. In this chapter, I engage with the history of three art collectives which centered printmaking in their work and were crucial for building artistic community in inner-city Detroit during a tumultuous period of cultural dynamism, political rebellion, and urban unrest from the 1960s-1970s. The artists, printers, poets, and activists John Sinclair, Ken and Ann Mikolowski, and Fredy Perlman led these projects, were part of establishing the bohemian community in the Cass Corridor neighborhood, and were pivotal influences on the arts and politics of Detroit decades after they left the city. RBS programming will help me to center their practice as printers, which was important to them as individuals and to the community organizations they led.

I have completed extensive primary source research for this project, and this course will allow me to better interpret these documents. Due to the political and unconventional nature of these sources, much of the primary source material I am working with comes from the private collections of people I have interviewed, is often undated, and stored with varying levels of organization. The ability to better understand these documents as material objects will be an indispensable skill as I

continue to work with materials that have not been processed by “official” archives. Additionally, I do not have a background in visual arts and have not yet had a hands-on opportunity to learn about duplication technology. While the figures in my dissertation wrote extensively about duplication, and many felt that duplication was a central aspect of their artistic and political practice, I have only gained exposure to this work through reading about it. This course and the Rare Book School’s resources offer an indispensable opportunity for me to gain intimacy with the historical subjects of my dissertation and greater understanding of their artistic practice and day-to-day work.

I am well-prepared to participate in RBS programming through my diverse academic and professional experiences. I gained a love for books through six years of library work at public and university systems, four of which were spent lost in the stacks at the University of Michigan’s Harlan Hatcher graduate library. My interest in underground publications came through my own artistic practices as a musician, a poet, and fiction writer, and especially my involvement in the subculture of punk rock. I performed as a member of a punk band while I pursued an undergraduate degree in creative writing at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. There, I was mentored by the poet Keith Taylor, who himself participated in the poetry printing project of the Alternative Press. Underground publications are the connective tissue of so many of the artistic movements that I have participated in and that have sustained me, but it is only through researching my dissertation that I have begun to learn about the importance of printing.

Given the time period and subject matter of my dissertation, Mr. Cassidy’s knowledge of counterculture and avant-garde movements will be a critical resource for my project. Learning from an instructor like Mr. Cassidy and having the opportunity to engage with the duplication technologies used by the subjects of my dissertation will provide me with context and language that will deepen my entire project and especially allow me to take my first chapter in directions I could not imagine otherwise. During the proposed fellowship year, I would complete a revised final draft of my first chapter on the Detroit Artists Workshop, the Alternative Press, and the Detroit Printing Co-op. The course will significantly advance my dissertation and allow me to frame the chapter for submission to either a leading journal in my field such as the *Journal of Urban History* or a public piece of writing such as the *Washington Post*’s “Made By History” series. Knowing how central duplication is to the lives and work of the subjects of my dissertation, I am convinced that engaging with the Rare Book School is necessary for me to successfully describe the world of Cass Corridor bohemia in the twentieth century.