

David Harris Flaherty Undergraduate Student Library Scholarship 2020
Recipient: Caitlin J. Wareing-Oksanen, Faculty of Fine Arts
Award-winning Essay

In my time as an Art History and Visual Studies student at UVic, the library has been an invaluable resource. It is my favourite place to study, write, rest, attend classes, and is, without fail, my first stop when beginning a research project. This semester I completed a project titled “Medicinal Mandragora.” Playing with the concept of health food marketing on social media, my goal was to pair illustrations of mandrakes from late antique and early medieval manuscripts with ancient mandrake recipes, instructions, and stories, on the platform Instagram. In doing so, I was attempting to flesh out the intersection of magic, herbology, medicine, and the visual power of the manuscripts. This project, which was ultimately assigned a final grade of 98%, would not have been possible without access to library resources.

My research first took root in the library’s Special Collections classroom. It was in a lecture hosted there that I first perused exquisite facsimiles of medical herbals and magical manuscripts. In doing so, I was able to evaluate of the cultural and financial value of the texts first hand. With many of the manuscript images commonly available online separated from their textual sources, these copies helped me get a sense of how they may have been originally understood. I then translated this into my project and fleshed out a significant part of my thesis; as with pseudo-medical marketing today, sensational imaging and writings went hand in hand. The image of the mandrake could be both instructive, powerful, and reflected the evolving and multicultural mythology of the plant. Given the importance of images in this project, the

facsimiles in the library's collection were a crucial source of high resolution images which contributed to my visual analysis, and the final presentation of my research.

Outside of the Special Collections room, the library's books provided information ranging from medical history to literary translations to art analysis. When I had difficulty tracking down a book (or several) the librarians helped me find them and expand my research to sources I may not have otherwise found. Access to primary sources was vital to this, and many other, research projects. These are often hard to come by in print, but the UVic Library's access to online databases such as JSTOR, and various ebook and manuscript archives, made them easy to find and available at any time. This was particularly vital during the last few weeks of the Spring 2020 semester when visiting libraries in person was no longer viable.

Throughout my academic career, the library has been an indispensable resource. This project is just one of the many that relied on archival, print, and digital material from the library. Moreover, be it lending me laptop charger so that I can keep studying, setting up my computer to print from the library at the last minute, or giving me place to rest, study, and peacefully read through textbooks and facsimiles, the library has seen me through the toughest challenges of my academic career.