Description: This course, co-taught in the NYU Fales Library and Special Collections at Bobst Library by a librarian and an English professor, provides an introduction to the booming interdisciplinary field(s) of Book History. A scholarly discipline that engages researchers in many different fields of study (history, literature, librarianship, media and communications, and sociology, to name only a few), Book History addresses more than just books: it investigates the production, dissemination, and readership of all kinds of texts, from Egyptian papyrus to illuminated manuscripts, the Gutenberg Bible to penny dreadfuls, and triple-deckers novels to modern e-books. What unites book historians is a conviction that material artifacts are irreplaceably important: whether those texts be cuneiform tablets, handwritten personal letters, printed books, or e-readers. Our course will address a wide range of general topics, punctuated by case studies of particular artifacts and key historical events and intellectual and political debates. These case studies will pull together threads of inquiry from the course readings and allow students to work from specific material artifacts to larger questions of social, cultural, and historical importance. Sample topics to be addressed include orality and writing systems; the introduction and spread of printing technology; practices and ideas of authorship, readership, and publishing; censorship and intellectual property, and non-book formats (magazines, periodicals, ephemera, and so on). Basic principles of bibliographic description will also be introduced.

The course offers students the unique opportunity to study texts and tools of the trade in situ not only at NYU Special Collections but also at world-class institutions such as the New York Public Library (Rare Books and Manuscripts Division) and the New York Center for Book Arts.

Course Materials:
Michelle Levy and Tom Mole, eds. The Broadview Reader in Book History (available from Amazon in late October 2014)
A set of facsimiles of different bibliographical formats [available for a small fee in class]
Additional readings to be made available on reserve or in digital form via our course website.