

Rare Books FAQ

What do I need to know about visiting Rare Books in person and online?

Rare Books is a unit of the Special Collections Department in Pius Library. Our service point is Pius 307, and we are open 9am-1pm, Monday through Friday, or by appointment. You will find comprehensive information about our collections and how to access them on our website at <http://lib.slu.edu/special-collections/collections/rare-books>. Link to our blog, Twitter, and Instagram activity on the Special Collections homepage, at http://pius7.slu.edu/special_collections/.



Who can answer my questions about the collection?

Jennifer Lowe is the public services librarian for the rare book collection. You can contact her at 314-977-5070 or jennifer.lowe@slu.edu. She is happy to help you with any level of question, so don't worry about "doing your homework" beforehand. Her office is in room 307 of Pius Library.

Can you give me an overview of the collection?

The Rare Books unit of Special Collections contains more than 30,000 volumes spanning from the mid-fifteenth to the twenty-first century, with the majority dating from the hand press period of book production. The collection was formed around a core of books belonging to the founders and early faculty of Saint Louis University and has absorbed many subsequent additions.

The strengths of the collections are in theology, philosophy, Church history, English recusant history, emblem books, and works written by or about members of the Society of Jesus. Items of note include incunabula (books printed before 1501), including a leaf from the Gutenberg Bible, many works by the seventeenth-century Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher, works by Peter Ramus, and the 1662 *Atlas maior* of Joan Blaeu in eleven hand-colored volumes.

How do I use the reading room?

When you visit, we will direct you to fill out a registration form and put your backpack in a locker. Tell us what you want to look at by submitting a call slip. If you don't know what you want, or what the call number is, we can help. Books must stay in the reading room and be used with a foam support. Taking photos with your phone or camera for private study is permitted. For publication needs, we are able to supply high-quality reproductions at no cost to SLU affiliates.

What kinds of services do you offer?

Navigational Help – Are you interested in finding out whether we have material of interest, but don't know how to start? We can give you a general sense of how strong our holdings are in your area and show you the most effective ways to search the library catalog.

Reference Resources – Our reference collection in Room 307 supports research in all aspects of book history. We can also help you identify special collections at other libraries that are important for your research topic.

Bibliographical Expertise – Do you need to gain a grasp of bibliographical techniques for your research? We can provide hands-on individual or group instruction using materials from the collection, relevant to your time period.



Instructional Sessions in the Reading Room – We are ready to provide classes and tours, or help you fashion an assignment, class, or course based on original materials from our collections. By integrating rare books into a class assignment or course, you will help your students learn through direct experience the historical contexts in which information, ideas, and literature were created, read, preserved, disseminated, and transmitted through time. Please contact Jennifer Lowe to discuss your instructional needs.



Exhibits – Our front room contains rotating exhibits from the collection. Many of our past exhibitions have been co-curated by students or faculty members who have demonstrated a special interest or deep engagement in some aspect of our material.

Events – We offer semi-regular public programs, such as exhibition openings, curators’ talks, and visiting speakers. You can follow our activities via the library website, social media, and Newslink.

What are some tips on searching the catalog?

Use the Library Catalog (under “Books” on the homepage) rather than SLUth. The “Advanced Keyword Search” is the most helpful interface. You can narrow your search by location (to Pius Special Collections), by material type, by language, and by date. Searches limited to Special Collection include results from the Vatican Film Library as well as Rare Books. To exclude VFL microfilm holdings, select “and not” and type the truncated term “microf*.” If you want to search a date range, but do not have a title or keyword in mind, simply type an asterisk instead.



*We look
forward
to your
visit.*