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Transcribing Recipe Manuscripts Online: V.b. 380 and the “What’s in a Recipe?” Undergraduate Research Project at Penn State Abington

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In this paper we will discuss some of the practical concerns and successes related to teaching students about paleography, editing, and digital practice as part of the Early Modern Recipes Online Collective (EMROC) project.<sup>[1]</sup> Ultimately, we argue that large-scale digital projects, such as EMROC, afford students an opportunity for legitimate peripheral participation, to use Jean Lave and Etienne Wegner’s framework, in scholarly communities of practice.<sup>[2]</sup> This experience, in turn, fosters students’ identities as researchers. In this essay, we will show several ways students encountered and engaged with these practices during a phase of the project that ran from January 2019 until April 2021. We begin this paper by introducing the concept of a community of practice and then describe how our students come to learn about both manuscripts and paleography. Then, we shift to a discussion of Folger Shakespeare Library V.b.380 and how this particular seventeenth-century manuscript provided students

with research opportunities in the fields of women's labor, social history, and food studies.<sup>[3]</sup> Finally, we describe how the students worked with the manuscript through various hands-on and digitally mediated activities, and we conclude with a discussion of student reflections and takeaways from these experiences.

We begin by offering a quick contextualization for this project, before returning to our pedagogical practices. Undergraduate students engage in the work of transcription and participation in undergraduate scholarly communities through Penn State Abington's Undergraduate Research Activities (ACURA) initiative wherein the three of us have coordinated an ongoing independent study project called "What's in a Recipe?"<sup>[4]</sup> The ACURA program pairs students and faculty in multi-semester research experiences. Students receive 1-2 credits each semester, commit to participating in a project for two to three semesters, attend project meetings every other week, gain research experience, and present their work at an annual campus poster fair. The project described in this essay first ran with five students for a three-semester project that began in spring 2019 and culminated in spring 2020. In 2020-2021 we ran the project on a two-semester schedule with three students and, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we used an online, synchronous format.

Our research project happens at Penn State's Abington College, a small four-year, local-serving, public branch campus near Philadelphia. At this campus of approximately 3500 undergraduates, students tend to have significant financial need, and more than a third are first generation college students. We are one of the most diverse campuses within the Penn State system. We operate as one university, in a geographically dispersed system; Christina Riehman-Murphy and Marissa Nicosia are based at Abington and Heather Froehlich was based at the University Park campus for the duration of this project. Nicosia, a professor of Renaissance literature with long-standing research interests in recipe manuscripts, started running this research project with a single student in 2016. In 2018, she approached Riehman-Murphy (then Reference & Instruction Librarian and liaison to undergraduate research at the Abington campus) and Froehlich (then Literary Informatics Librarian, supporting digital scholarship) to collaborate and provide additional scaffolding. Riehman-Murphy offered additional information literacy instruction, including a popular session on the "They Say/I Say" model of scholarly conversation.<sup>[5]</sup> Froehlich ran an activity looking at the manuscript from a variety of angles with Voyant Tools.<sup>[6]</sup> Riehman-Murphy and Froehlich both offered individual research consultations throughout the project, and run a workshop with students focused on identifying and communicating transferrable skills they have developed to leverage in their resume or for graduate school applications. In this project, the three of us have worked closely with self-selecting students who learn the art of paleography and transcription through sustained focus on a single digitized early modern manuscript recipe book each year. In doing so, the students also develop independent research interests and become part of the EMROC scholarly community as researchers, becoming practitioners in their own right.

Undergraduate research projects, which bring students into close collaboration with faculty on research projects, can provide the opportunity for students to learn about scholarly communication practices which they otherwise may not be privy to or have access to until

graduate work.<sup>[7]</sup> Through this project our pedagogy creates an authentic situated learning experience, where the students practice what Lave and Wenger describe as a form of “mastery of knowledge and skill [which] requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of community.<sup>[8]</sup>” Lave and Wenger describe how participants join a community of practice and become enmeshed in its norms, vocabulary, and operations. Describing how this process unfolds in time, they write “‘Legitimate peripheral participation’ provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice.”<sup>[9]</sup> We have structured our project so that students move from peripheral transcription activities towards fuller participation across multiple research avenues through the process of situated learning experiences which in turn builds their agency in the project. Students are aware from the onset that their transcription work is a legitimate contribution to the overall manuscript transcription project of EMROC, though there are other paleographers and professional vetters who are also responsible for the outcome. Throughout the semester, our students move from the periphery within the small local class itself into a shared community of practice as part of the wider world of literary-historical recipe scholars.

### **A Community of Paleographical Practice**

We construct a community of scholarly practice, following an experiential pedagogical model. We begin by inviting students into the labor of transcription, and framing their participation in this activity as part of the larger EMROC project, one which has set a precedent of welcoming student and newcomer participants into the community.<sup>[10]</sup> Our first project meeting with students begins by introducing the practice of semi-diplomatic transcription. We use a choice page of the manuscript and a handout with some common secretary hand, italic, and roundhand letterforms. Nicosia was taught paleography this way as a graduate student by Peter Stallybrass in a seminar class, Heather Wolfe in a week-long Rare Book School course, and through a peer-group run by Jessica Rosenberg and Simran Thadani.<sup>[11]</sup> In a section of an article on “Manuscripts and Paleography for Undergraduates” that Wolfe titles “Quick and Dirty Paleography,” she writes, “I have found that the best way to engage students in the joys of paleography is to distribute and discuss two cheat sheets—the alphabet and common abbreviations—in the first session and then to proceed to the reading of a manuscript as soon as possible.”<sup>[12]</sup> We concur with Wolfe’s assessment of the efficacy of this method. After even an hour of transcribing together, students become familiar enough with the process to continue transcribing on their own. From this experiential introduction, students engage with the manuscript material in a variety of additional multimodal ways including writing with goose quills, cooking recipes, working with rare books, using web-based textual analysis tools, and presenting their research.

While our project is enabled by ongoing digital projects at libraries like the Folger that introduce primary source research to students, it simultaneously also contributes to the development and perpetuation of these projects with students taking on increasingly larger roles in the interpretation of materials and the creation of new knowledge. Peter Stallybrass claims that online archives, collections, and projects are “beginning to make scholarly work (previously the mystified privilege of an elite) available to anyone who’s interested in doing it.”<sup>[13]</sup> This is a powerful shift in the politics of both access and the self-identity of novice

and seasoned researchers alike. For Stallybrass, this is a roundly positive development with perhaps even utopian potential. He concludes, “Better still, think of knowledge as what we share for future creations rather than as the private property of past and present authors.”<sup>[14]</sup> In our project, we encourage this sense of collective endeavor through a wholly participatory model, as described by Lave and Wenger, who argue that “learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of community.”<sup>[15]</sup> Students move from the periphery to expertise through the process of participation. As we see it, semi-diplomatic transcription is a practice of interpretation and not simply a rote task. By completing this work, students are doing the same work as far more seasoned researchers. Over the course of our project, they begin at the periphery as they learn to transcribe and then become further enmeshed in the scholarly community through reading, conducting independent research, meeting researchers, and sharing what they have learned with various communities – our campus, interested members of the local community, and writing for a public audience.

We provide structure for students by inviting them to discover their own tactics and skills to help them ‘decode’ the script over the course of a semester after our first encounter with the text as a group. By actually doing the transcription, they grow in confidence: many of them discuss finding the hand “easier” to read as we go along, or that their transcription processes speed up as they keep working. As one student put it, “Initially, I was skeptical if I would be able to do it at all. But, eventually, when I transcribed the first two pages I gained a lot of confidence.”<sup>[16]</sup> As they move further from the periphery, they begin to see, as Lave and Wenger put it, their “participation as a way of learning – of both absorbing and being absorbed in – the ‘culture of practice.’ An extended period of legitimate peripherality provides learners with opportunities to make the culture of practice theirs.”<sup>[1]</sup> They develop a sense of ownership over their transcriptions, building their knowledge around recognizing distinct letterforms. In doing so, they find themselves building a stake in their own development and begin to see themselves as experts.<sup>[18]</sup>

This pathway is ultimately supported by also sharing the “Student Collaborator’s Bill of Rights” as we welcome students to the project to introduce the idea of thinking about themselves as developing expertise and contributing to a larger world of scholarship and information as well as the ethics surrounding their contributions to published transcriptions.<sup>[19]</sup> Even if they do not see themselves as authentic participants yet, they are given space to imagine themselves in that role. In addition, we explain how their transcriptions contribute to the mission of EMROC - to make transcriptions of historical recipe manuscripts available to researchers and the general public.<sup>[20]</sup> Introducing this “Bill of Rights” and the EMROC project alongside paleography as a research practice also allows our students to feel a sense of ownership of the data they create; they know where it will go and how it will be used. In the remainder of this essay, we will describe several ways we scaffold this move from peripheral participation to full membership in a scholarly community of practice, by continuing our discussion of transcribing V.b.380. Then, we discuss ways we encourage students to explore their own research interests based on what ideas and questions emerged from the transcription process.

## The V.b.380 Project

In preparation for each iteration of “What’s in a Recipe?” we coordinate with EMROC concerning manuscripts in the transcription queue. The majority of these manuscripts to date have been from the collections of the Folger Shakespeare Library as the library has significant holdings in this area, has undertaken large-scale projects to digitize these items, and served as the home of the Early Modern Manuscript Online (EMMO) project, which houses transcribed EMROC text files.[\[21\]](#) Each year, we seek to center our project on a manuscript that is in a reasonably readable hand, contains both culinary and medicinal information, and will be available to work on for the duration and is not earmarked for the annual EMROC Transcribathon, Folger paleography courses, or other purposes.[\[22\]](#)

In 2019 we began working with a manuscript described as an “English cookery and medicine book,” with the Folger shelfmark of V.b.380. This manuscript is a large folio of approximately 360 pages and it is almost completely filled with recipes from cover to cover.[\[23\]](#) It is associated with a person named Anne Western, whose name appears throughout the manuscript, though her name is not provided in a way that conventionally denotes possession of the manuscript. Bookseller Ben Kinmont and the Folger catalog propose that Anne Western was a later user of the manuscript who might have been preparing either a new manuscript for personal use or a fair copy to use as the basis for a printed cookbook.[\[24\]](#) The manuscript has been dated to 1677 on the basis of paper analysis. When our project began, page images from V.b.380 were already digitized and included in LUNA, the Folger Shakespeare Library’s digital collections platform.[\[25\]](#)

Once a document or book has been digitized, these high-quality images can be made available for semi-diplomatic transcription and encoding of certain features, including editorial interventions and common abbreviations using platforms which emphasize community engagement with primary-source documents.[\[26\]](#) There are several platforms which support this capacity, including FromThePage and Zooniverse: We used the Dromio interface supported by Michael Poston and Heather Wolfe at the Folger in large part because V.b.380 was already ingested from LUNA.[\[27\]](#) Transcribers use Dromio and other such platforms to carefully read and record their view of the manuscript.

Transcription platforms regularly include options to record a variety of relevant features for manuscripts, including gaps, marks, superscript text, deletions, and insertions. These features can become silently encoded in XML with these platforms, allowing for more robust (i.e. not flat) experience of what is visually available on the page. Inexperienced and expert paleographers will very often come up with different readings of the same line based on the letter forms, punctuation, and other features that they see on the page, so it is considered best practice to collect three separate transcriptions for comparison and vetting to produce a fourth vetted version of the transcript which represents the best readings of each line largely agreed-upon by the majority of transcribers for each page.[\[28\]](#) To maintain our own project records, and for distance reading activities later in the research cycle, we have students copy their transcriptions into Microsoft Word documents as they complete their assigned pages.

Between January and September 2019, students enrolled in our project completed a full single transcription of V.b.380. By early 2021, students had also made substantial contributions to the second and third transcriptions of the entire manuscript. These transcriptions were saved in the Dromio interface to support the larger world of early modern food and recipe scholarship and returned to the project leaders. The work of transcription and the completed transcriptions provided the students a specific entryway to the world of V.b.380 – what did the writer eat, what ingredients were available to them, and how did they prepare them? As transcribers, our students encountered new-to-them ingredients (ambergris, mace), larger-than-usual quantities (a pound of butter, a gallon of wine), and less specific instructions than they might be used to as readers and cooks of twenty-first-century recipes.

The experience of encountering a seventeenth-century manuscript through a digital interface is one of layered time and intersecting communities. Each year, our students grapple with the writing on the page that was created and used by households between the seventeenth century and the present. Students' access to this manuscript material is mediated through digital tools and situated within a larger present transcription project and community that seeks to produce collective knowledge – and is thus future oriented in its aims. Through engaging in the process of transcription, students are connected to the initial compiler – or compilers – of the manuscript who created the first layer of text on the page. Later commenters or users read and prepared dishes from this manuscript and added their own comments, notes, cross-outs, and emendations. In addition, students follow the path of readers who encountered the manuscript at various points in its lifespan from the seventeenth century up to today who read without leaving a trace behind. In the process of transcribing the traces of these individuals and households, student transcribers are confronted by cross-outs, corrections, and other kinds of marginalia alongside the text itself. They must leverage the resources provided by the transcription interface to decide how to present this material, impacting how the text will be understood by current project participants as well as future researchers. Thus, student transcribers are always making specific and meaningful editorial choices when they produce their readings of the text. All transcribers, of course, make decisions as they copy out a text, but since our 2019-2021 students who worked on V.b.380 saw themselves as legitimate participants in a larger academic endeavor, they dwelled on these moments of difficulty as contributors to the creation of new knowledge.

Our students found this type of decision making – where there was not a simple right or wrong answer – simultaneously difficult and empowering. Some of our students described their first encounter with the manuscript as “challenging;” they had to get used to some unique features such as “handwriting, handwriting shifts, sloppy penmanship, variable spellings, different inks, smudges, cross outs or write-over edits, and unfamiliar words.” It was in these moments, early in the project, where they first understood that they were undertaking authentic research. One student kept a pad of paper next to them while transcribing and wrote out words that were initially unfamiliar. In addition to using Google searches to identify variant spellings, another made a diagram (or legend) of letterforms from each section of the manuscript. A third kept a log of the most common words that came up while they were transcribing to help them recognize frequently repeated words. Another found the zoom function on Dromio indispensable as they examined specific letterforms. One

student organized their transcription sessions by getting “into a flow with a section of, say medicinal recipes or recipes for apricots that had similar words and ingredients.” Another “found envisioning an early modern hearth and imagining scenarios – such as ‘what would it be like to cook this recipe in the evening for someone who was sick?’ – kept [them] engaged and interested.” As time went on, they found themselves growing more and more confident and even “found transcription to be much more interesting and even fun.”

During our project meetings, students asked the most questions of recipes when they encountered cross-outs, comments, and other kinds of emendations. For example, a recipe for “Marmalade of Aprecotts” (Figure 1) has been crossed out and the annotator added comments accompanying the cross-outs reading “not this” in the margin and a “no” at the end.[\[29\]](#)

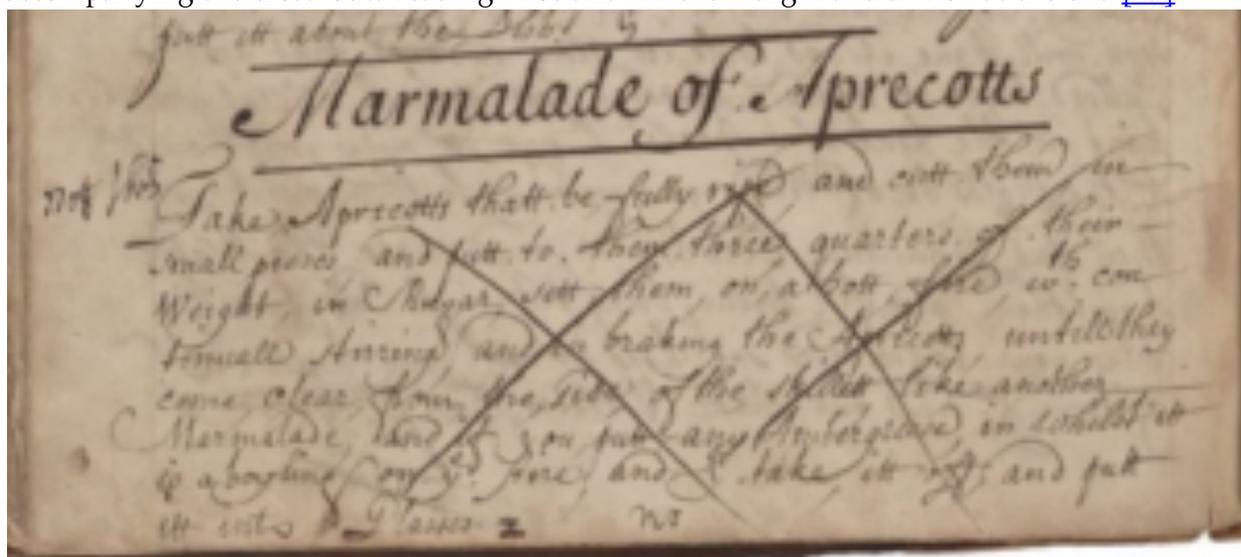


Figure 1. Inter-textual annotation in V.b.380, p. 28, “Marmalade of Aprecotts”.

Despite these annotations, we can still read this recipe; according to the principles of semi-diplomatic transcription, the crossed-out recipe should be retained in the record of the manuscript. Thus, the student must decide where to place the marginal comment alongside the line-by-line transcription of the recipe. Multiple layers of intervention become apparent here: first, the original scribe and compiler of the manuscript, then the user who determined that this recipe was not valuable in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, the student paleographer interpreting these letterforms to generate their own transcription, the buttons and XML tags involved to record these features in the text, and of course the remediation of this bit of information across multiple software platforms and file formats.

Decisions about format, notes, emendations, and proper names frequently arose during transcription. Although these questions pertain to portions of the text that are not crossed out, our students found them to be especially difficult to work through when the accompanying recipes were also partially obliterated. For example, the recipe for “Mrs. King’s Cakes” in Figure 2 shows a different kind of editorial engagement by an early user that our student paleographers needed to decipher.[\[30\]](#)

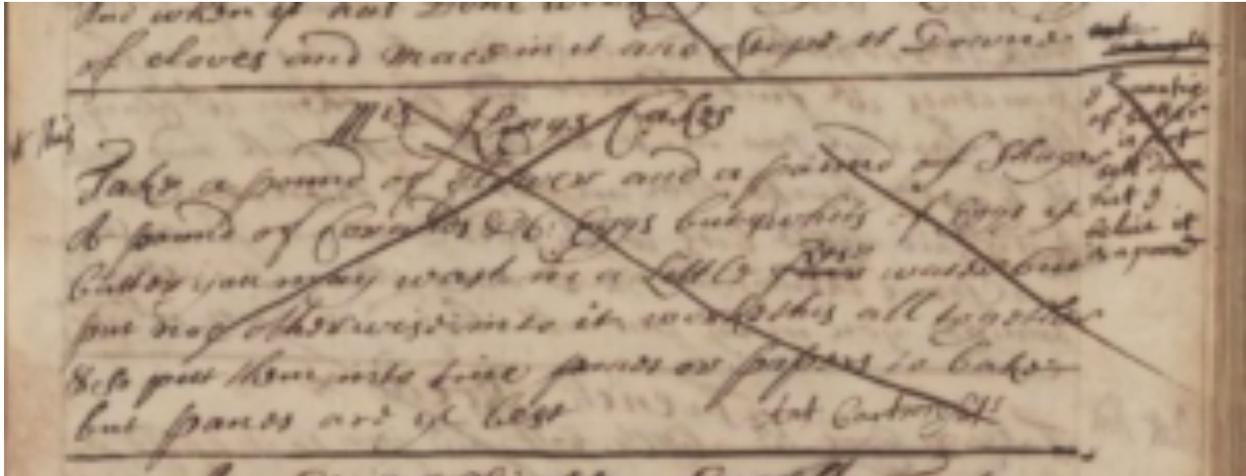


Figure 2. Inter-textual annotation in V.b.380, p. 37, "Mrs Kings Cakes".

As Figure 2 shows, there is an attribution below the main text, noting that "Aunt Cartwright" very likely provided this recipe to the original compiler. "The quantity of butter is not set down but I believe it is a pound," states the righthand marginal comment. However, on the lefthand margin we see the comment "not this" and the recipe is crossed out. Again, where to locate these comments in the transcription and how to indicate the proper names and commentary challenges the student transcribers to make decisions about how the words on the digitized manuscript page will ultimately become part of the finalized, vetted transcription. To share a final case study, the recipe "To Sweeten the Blood" (Figure 3) was not crossed out, but it was highly annotated. It includes notes on preparation for human or animal use. The original recipe is attributed to "Dr. Coatsworth" and the clarifying notes on how to use this recipe to prepare pigs for slaughter are attributed to "Mrs. Hockleys" [31]:

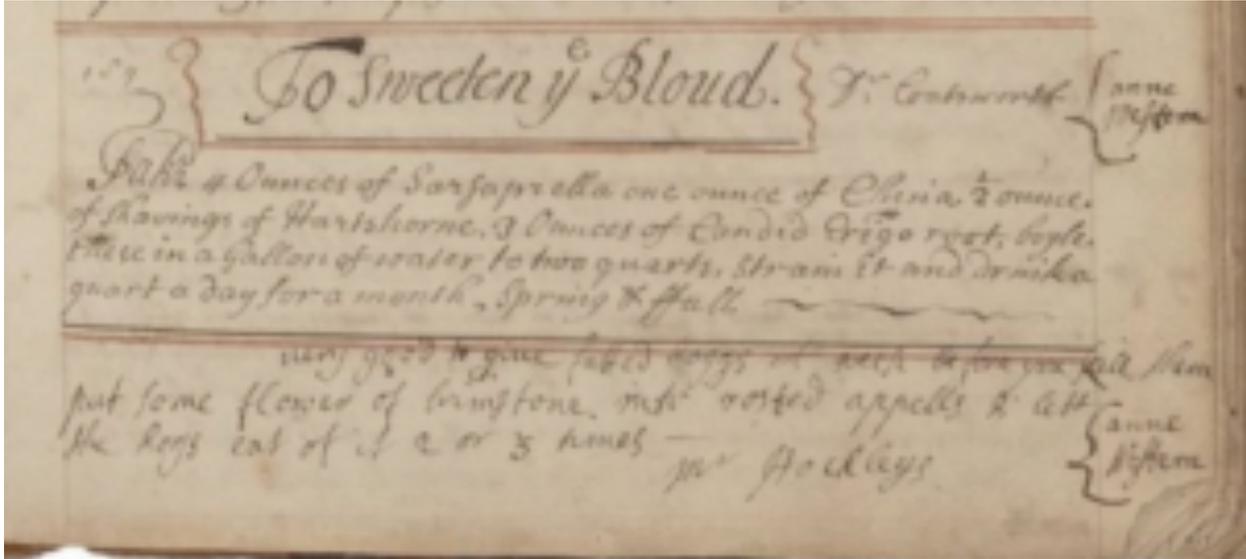


Figure 3. Inter-textual annotation in V.b.380, p. 175, "To Sweeten the Blood".

Anne Western's signature marks both the recipe and Mrs. Hockleys' note in Figure 3. In total, three or four different individuals were involved in the making of this recipe: Dr.

Coatsworth, Anne Western, Mrs. Hockleys, and perhaps an initial compiler who was a different person altogether. How does one locate these notes in a transcription? Page layout in particular is a highly notable feature we cannot replicate with our digital platforms, so this kind of remediation becomes more important in transcription. In each example, the transcription choices we describe here affect the ways our students conceptualize and understand our manuscript as they become active editors and scholars in their own right.

Students develop their paleographic skills through exposure and practice, growing in confidence over each week of transcription. This allows them to move from the periphery (new to the manuscript and the idea of paleography) into a more expert position (with substantial knowledge of the manuscript hand and information conveyed in the manuscript itself). Lave and Wegner emphasize that “learners, as peripheral participants, can develop a view of what the whole enterprise is about, and what there is to be learned. Learning itself is an improvised practice: A learning curriculum unfolds in opportunities for engagement in practice. It is not specified as a set of dictates for proper practice.”[\[32\]](#) As we describe above, we introduce our students to the practice of paleography through experiential learning. We prioritize the journey of research and learning, allowing the students to experience research in real time and under real conditions: nothing is straightforward, but exploration is just as (if not more) important for authentic research experiences. Not only are our students encountering manuscripts that bear witness to the work of former communities – compilers, members of the household, active users who wrote notes, and silent readers – but they are also participating in a current community with an eye to producing a usable future resource. After establishing this foundational knowledge and set of shared practices with students, we can introduce different modalities and forms of engagement shaping our students’ work, which we describe in the next section.

### **Multimodal Engagement**

To encourage the students to develop their own individual research interests and projects, we introduce multiple modes of engagement in the second semester of each iteration of this project. Some ways we have executed this in the past have included practicing historical letterforms with goose quills, cooking and modernizing recipes, using web-based text analysis tools (such as Voyant Tools, described below) to work with digital collections or physical rare books, presenting at a research fair (historically in-person; during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this was virtual), creating materials for a public event, and writing for a public audience. These approaches follow an Open Pedagogy model, with strong emphasis on the mode being led by student inquiry and interest and the invitation to become creators of information, rather than simply consumers.[\[33\]](#)

Two activities in particular have become regular modes of engagement in our project: distant-reading and hands-on practice. Froehlich leads a distant-reading activity with the completed, transcribed manuscript, allowing students to step away from individual recipe transcriptions and take a birds-eye view of the manuscript at large with Voyant Tools.[\[34\]](#) For example, when one student mentioned the use of the verb “mingle” in their recipe, we investigated it across the manuscript to explore the context of the word and what it might mean, which helped us have a better sense of how users of V.b.380 might have understood it. We were also

able to identify terms we had found rather pedestrian as transcribers but very interesting in practice – such as “sugar,” which was a desirable and often expensive in the seventeenth century. An additional experience we have built in is the process of writing out recipes as our manuscript author would have done in the seventeenth century. Nicosia leads the class in a lesson in copying a recipe from V.b.380 by hand using goose quills, mulberry paper, and iron gall ink.[\[35\]](#) Introducing students to the art of secretary, italic, and roundhand scripts by writing with these materials has proven to be a valuable experience on multiple levels. It gave students a break from solely engaging with the manuscript through a screen and most importantly helps them better understand what physically goes into the formation of the letter forms they work so hard to transcribe.

Visiting libraries to meet with academics and librarians and handle recipe manuscripts has also been a crucial element of this project from its earliest iterations. Our project visit to the Folger Shakespeare Library in early 2019 gave students a unique opportunity to see themselves as researchers embedded within a larger community of practice. All five students and all three project leaders traveled to Washington DC together. Jennifer Hunter (Head of Firestone General Service Operations, Princeton University Libraries) also traveled with us because she was interested in undertaking similar work with students and her research examines communities of practice. Although students were not able to handle V.b.380 because it was on display in the exhibit *First Chefs: Fame and Foodways from Britain to the Americas*, they were able to see the manuscript’s size and binding in the display case.[\[36\]](#) They also had the opportunity to handle similar manuscript materials and recipe books from the same time period in a session run by Beth Debold (Assistant Curator of Collections). The curators of the *First Chefs* exhibit, Amanda Herbert (then Associate Director at the Folger Institute) and Heather Wolfe (Curator of Manuscripts) gave us a tour and answered students’ questions about recipe manuscripts, kitchen labor, and medical practices in the early modern home. Sara Pennell (Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Greenwich, UK) whose work the students had read earlier in the semester, was in residence at the Folger as a fellow. She joined our tour and also fielded questions from our students. Through their sustained engagement with one manuscript, they were already equipped to think through the wider historical and cultural contexts presented in the exhibit and in the manuscripts that they were able to touch and read. Even though they may not have had as much experience with the manuscripts we consulted or the items on display in the exhibition beforehand, our students already had a sense of scale and scope. More importantly, asking these questions immersed them in a real community of scholars.

In addition, working so closely with V.b.380 prior to this visit to the Folger allowed our students to participate in conversations about the remediation of the manuscript in a digital format, too. We encouraged the students to become attuned to specific details of the transcription interface that interested them as they went along. During our Folger visit, they also met with Mike Posten (Database Applications Associate) and Meaghan Brown (then Digital Production Editor) who were working on developing the transcription interface. At this meeting, our students provided user feedback to Posten and Brown describing how they used the interface and which aspects of the interface were difficult or unhelpful. Initially, students were surprised: They anticipated a meeting where they would be listening, rather

than talking. However, when the students realized that their experience and expertise was valued in the conversation, they shared their experiences with transcribing and made thoughtful suggestions for future add-ons or instruction. One student suggested a “go to next page” link at the top of the page to allow for easier progression through the material. Posten and Brown added this feature to the transcription interface shortly after and that student was thrilled both to see their suggested feature added to the program and to use it as they continued transcribing. Just as it was meaningful for our students to meet the scholars whose work they had read and to handle materials, it was equally valuable for them to meet the people who developed the transcription tool they used to interact with V.b.380. They provided meaningful feedback to improve user experiences with the platform; in doing so they also encountered a less-visible aspect of working with digital infrastructure. Our visit to the Folger made the many audiences of scholarship visible and accessible to our students. This was an important community-building experience, introducing them to several stakeholders in the research process, including but not limited to librarians, developers, faculty, and other students.

With support from Penn State Outreach, our 2019-2020 students also had the unique opportunity to connect to communities in Philadelphia in the fall 2019 semester. In collaboration with Shivaani Selvaraj (Director of Urban Engagement at the Penn State Center in Philadelphia), Joseph Eytan Shemtov (Special Collections Coordinator at the Free Library of Philadelphia), and Suzanna Urminska (Coordinator of the Culinary Literacy Center at the Free Library of Philadelphia), we planned a day-long immersion in Philadelphia food history and culture. We began by visiting the Free Library, and then ate lunch at Reading Terminal Market before going to the Penn State Center where we used their nutrition education kitchen to test three recipes that the students had selected from V.b.380. In November, we held a pop-up event at the Penn State Center in Philadelphia which built on this immersion experience and was designed to introduce members of the public to V.b.380, seventeenth-century manuscript cultures, and historical culinary and medicinal practices. Each student devised an individual station connected to various aspects of the work that they had done on V.b.380; attendees could explore and smell medicinal recipe ingredients, practice writing with goose quills, try their hand at transcription, and eat almond pudding and knots that we had prepared using updated recipes that we had developed.[\[37\]](#) These additional modes of inquiry and this specific event were fostered by a one-time grant. Ultimately, this shaped the experience and research questions that emerged from the project overall for this specific group of students.

After participating in transcription and multiple activities as a group, each student developed their own independent research project. The outcomes of these practices reflect student interests first and foremost, and it is through these activities that students can develop robust, individual research questions to address. One student created a zine about ecofeminism, describing and illustrating the ways women’s labor was embodied in our manuscript after reading scholarship by Rebecca Laroche, Jennifer Munroe, and Elaine Leong.[\[38\]](#) Another performed specific ingredient and instructional verb searches in Voyant Tools to investigate how different words function in our manuscript. A third student explored distant reading tools to analyze the scientific vocabulary in medicinal recipes in more depth.[\[39\]](#) This same

student decided to write about one recipe for the EMROC blog as a means to share the results of one of her research questions with a wider scholarly audience.[\[40\]](#)

Shepherding our project through the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic led us to consider entirely new lines of research for V.b.380. With access to libraries, archives, and the physical teaching and learning materials in our classroom now prohibited, we looked for ways to engage students with aspects of the manuscript that would work in an entirely digital model. For the first entirely virtual cohort, we were able to maintain our planned first semester focused on transcription, but it became clear in our conversations during the semester that the students were collectively developing an interest in specific ingredients. Thus, we decided to follow their lead and during the second semester we narrowed the scope for research for their individual research projects, requiring them to focus on one ingredient of their choosing and explore it in whatever manner they were interested in. We added readings to the syllabus that would give students both academic and public-facing examples of how scholars engaged with ingredients. In addition to reading undergraduate students' blog posts about an ingredient, we mailed each student a copy of Sarah Lohman's Eight Flavors and we also required students to listen to the watermelon episode from the Gastropod podcast series.[\[41\]](#) Both of these sources offer potential models of how sustained forms of scholarly-informed writing for a public audience can look and feel. Finally, we mailed students goose quills, iron gall ink, and a parchment bound journal so that Nicosia could lead her handwriting session over Zoom.

### **Materiality, Users, Access**

Because of exhibition schedules and COVID-19, physical engagement with V.b.380 is one mode that we have not yet been able to make possible for the students in either of the 2019-2021 cohorts. Online-only access to V.b.380, however, has not prohibited students from engaging with larger communities or considering the materiality of seventeenth-century manuscripts. While our study of V.b.380 did not explicitly focus on the materiality of the text, our students had a rich sense of its various material uses from sustained, explicit engagement with the text. Medicinal recipes, appearing alongside more recognizable foods like pies and desserts, emphasized the diverse purposes a book like this would serve. Our students were particularly struck by the sheer volume of ingredients in some of the recipes. Finding a recipe calling for pounds of butter, they were reminded that recipes were prepared for larger households or perhaps for medium-term preservation or future use. Similarly, knowledge about herbals cited in the medicinal sections required specialized, formalized knowledge about what ingredients were safe to use and how best to use them. Such thinking required them to consider different kinds of outdoor cultivation spaces and interior storage spaces in a 1677 home, what would be required for life before refrigerators, and concerns about stewardship and care cycles. Within the boundaries of the home, the physical structures and experiences of women's lives become clearer. As one student wrote, "Women and their work, although more often confined to the home, give insight even more so than men into the day to day lives and norms of society—history is made in the home as much as it is made in the public eye. I want to be a part of that story and I want to help people see not only how valuable humanities research is but the significance of V.b.380's content." For this student, a focus on the material realities of medicine and food in the seventeenth-century home

reframed the historical questions that they wanted to ask and their sense of the significance of their research.

This is just one example of how, when students interact in a variety of ways with a manuscript, they are able to identify specific, shared features across the text that represent their own interests. The ability to excavate individual research projects out of one shared text is particularly powerful; as one student said, “We all have been working with the same text and yet we all have adopted something different from the text to call our own and spend our semesters focusing on. We each have different takeaways and points of interest and meanwhile, this text has become so much more than an assignment or lifeless document to transcribe.” Students were surprised and excited to see the different paths that their peers had chosen for their individual work. This mirrored, for them, how other scholars might use the transcriptions of V.b.380 to continue to produce scholarship.[\[42\]](#)

Perhaps most crucially, our students already understood that V.b.380 has multiple readers or users over time. Traces of these past users remain in various annotations (such as through cross-outs described above and emphasizing which recipes are not worth repeating). Our students saw themselves as the latest engagers with the V.b.380 manuscript, creating a new digital layer which serves to augment the extant material. In this case, our students are not just readers but also participants in the world of V.b.380. Moreover, providing experiences working specifically with the material facets of historical culinary culture helped our students develop their identities as researchers: they were not operating in a vacuum but as part of a larger scholarly community. They saw themselves as part of a long line of users of our manuscript – and as key players in helping make the manuscript more future-proof by adding a computer-readable layer. In digitization, V.b.380 became images; their role was to remediate it into a machine-readable form of text. Our visit to the Folger therefore brought them into two discrete communities. While our students got to meet people who are part of our modern world of manuscript study, they also got to engage more thoroughly with physical and material histories of the manuscript itself. Thus, students – students who have been involved in this project in the past and who are currently involved in iterations of this work – see themselves as both part of the manuscript’s audience and creators who must think about future audiences for their work on the manuscript. Thinking broadly about the many communities who have engaged and will engage with the manuscript, they consider both their own needs as current transcribers and the needs of future scholars who will engage with the many layers of intervention in the manuscript that now also includes their own interventions.

### **Conclusion – Broader Scholarly Communities of Practice**

Accessing V.b.380 online was an especially practical solution for running a project at a campus with few rare book resources. Yet working with it digitally has had the major added benefit of connecting students to a larger community. The digital environment has opened additional possibilities for these undergraduate students to legitimately participate in scholarly communities of practice, from their position as newcomers on the periphery. Researching V.b.380 through the practice of transcribing and in dialogue with the EMROC community helped them understand that digitization provides more than access. However, it also

produced a sense of meaningful research practices specific to the needs of this project. As a part of the Folger's workflow each page of V.b.380 (and other manuscripts) would be vetted by an experienced paleographer before release. Further vetting allows for comparisons across three transcriptions, checking for consistency and accuracy. This showed our students how their own contributions fit into a larger process, but also, as one student noted, how much "effort and personal interest goes into independent research and scholarly collaboration." Moreover, by teaching students how to do textual analysis and distant reading with their transcriptions early in the project, students were able to imagine how their individual decisions as transcribers would impact the final, vetted transcription. The process of transcription increases the ability to search a text in a variety of ways, creating new research possibilities for the public and scholars alike. As one student reflected, [they] want to show "why such findings mattered and why understanding and acknowledging the significance of words and textual indicators is important to understanding the bigger picture of history." This activity put particular emphasis on how else the digitized manuscript(s) might be used in future research by the scholarly community.

Authentic legitimate peripheral participation in scholarly practices is a transformational experience for undergraduate students regardless of whether it is happening in person, through a digital interface, or via Zoom. In addition to paleography and transcription training, we provide layers of multimodal engagement, often following the students' emerging interests in the manuscript and research. This engagement has included writing with goose quills, cooking and modernizing manuscript recipes, exploring digital collections, handling other rare books, distant reading of the manuscript, and engaging with the public at research fairs and events. Drawing on these experiential learning processes, students have been able to design their own further research steps such as recreating recipes from V.b.380 or identifying "commonalities between recipes." Moreover, the solely digital medium through which they have explored the manuscript has not prevented them from beginning to see themselves as experts through a sustained encounter in the process. As one student writes, "I never imagined that in such a short time I would become somewhat of an expert on transcription and an early modern text let alone that I would get to spend three semesters working with it and rare texts like it." When we asked the students to reflect on their experiences, they spoke about how they understood the process of research in new ways and remarked on their own development as scholars. Students consistently note in their reflections that they were connected to a community of transcribers, that they had developed new skills in transcription, and that their work had meaning for their own individual research and to a larger scholarly community.

They had a rich sense of how their transcriptions and research would contribute to future study, suggesting future routes for additional research. For example, one student writes, "the more I pursue it and continue to make sense of the text and draw connections, the more information I unlock for scholars and myself." Moreover, they found themselves participating in a community of practice engaged in understanding how recipes create, preserve, and circulate various kinds of information in and outside the early modern home. Another student writes, "For the past year, this project has enriched my understanding of language, science and history—every time I transcribe, I learn something new and hone my

skills as a research[er].” Students’ reflections demonstrated that the individual growth and learning that they experienced by participating in the project is intertwined with their participation in a larger community of scholars researching recipes, manuscripts, science, food, and medicine through EMROC and beyond. Instead of presenting research as a prescribed path with a defined beginning and end, we encourage our students to engage in an iterative process with the manuscript as a means to understanding the larger scholarly spheres of culinary and medical history, manuscript studies, and women’s history. By progressing from novices to experts in a short time, students gained authentic research skills and by the end of the process saw themselves as contributing members in the EMROC community.

## Notes

[1] For more information on the Early Modern Recipes Online Collective, see <https://emroc.hypotheses.org/>. For more information on the Early Modern Manuscripts Online project, see, [https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Early\\_Modern\\_Manuscripts\\_Online\\_\(EMMO\)](https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Early_Modern_Manuscripts_Online_(EMMO)).

[2] Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 29.

[3] “English cookery and medicine book, [manuscript]., ca. 1677-1711.” Folger Shakespeare Library Call Number V.b.380. Available online: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/FOLGERCM1~6~6>

[4] Following Abington College Undergraduate Research Activities (ACURA) policy, Nicosia is the faculty member who serves as instructor of record and enters grades for the students at the end of each semester. Students receive an A grade if they have completed all individual and collective work listed in the syllabus for the semester. For more information about the ACURA program, see “Undergraduate Research – ACURA.” *Penn State Abington*, January 31, 2022. <https://www.abington.psu.edu/academics/undergraduate-research>; We have previously written about this project here: “Constructing Authentic Student Textual Authority: Teach a Text you Don’t Know,” Christina Riehman-Murphy, Marissa Nicosia, and Heather Froehlich, September 2019. <https://recipes.hypotheses.org/15404> and in Christina Riehman-Murphy, “Situated Learning and Open Pedagogy: Pathways for Undergraduate Students’ Emerging Information Literacies,” in *Intersections of OER and Information Literacy*, ed. Elizabeth Dill and Mary Ann Cullen (Chicago: Association of College & Research Libraries, 2022).

[5] Gerald Groff and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (New York: Norton, 2017).

[6] Stéfán Sinclair and Geoffrey Rockwell Rockwell, *Voyant Tools*, Web applet. McGill University: Montreal, Canada. Available online: <https://voyant-tools.org/>. For more information on how we used this resource in the course, please see Heather Froehlich,

“Exploring Recipe Transcriptions with Voyant in the Classroom,” *Early Modern Recipes Online Collective*, July 5, 2019. <https://emroc.hypotheses.org/2596>.

[7] Catherine F. Riehle and Merinda K. Hensley, “What Do Undergraduate Students Know about Scholarly Communication? A Mixed Methods Study,” *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 17, no. 1 (2017): 145-178.

[8] Lave and Wegner, 29.

[9] Lave and Wegner, 29.

[10] We take inspiration from the pedagogy series run by *The Recipes Project* (<https://recipes.hypotheses.org/thematic-series/teaching-recipes-a-september-series>) as well as the pedagogical work of the *Making and Knowing* project (<https://www.makingandknowing.org/>). This series of articles from *The Recipes Project* about transcribing recipe manuscripts with students describes experiences and practices that align with our own in many ways. Rebecca Laroche, “Teaching Recipes Online: Building Community and Purpose,” *The Recipes Project* September 11, 2014 <https://recipes.hypotheses.org/4360>; Jennifer Munroe, “Transcribing in Baby Steps,” *The Recipes Project* September 16, 2014 <https://recipes.hypotheses.org/4423>; Amy L. Tigner, “Teaching Recipes as Literary Practice and the Practice of Transcription,” *The Recipes Project* September 18, 2014 <https://recipes.hypotheses.org/4439>.

[11] Nicosia’s experience in paleography and semi-diplomatic transcription comes largely from Wolfe’s course; Froehlich and Christina have no formal training in paleography. The Rare Book School maintains a list of paleography resources related to Wolfe’s course, many of which we use when we work with students:  
<https://rarebookschool.org/courses/manuscripts/m70/reading-list/>

[12] Heather Wolfe, “Manuscripts and Paleography for Undergraduates” in *Teaching Early Modern English Literature from the Archives*, ed. by Heidi Brayman Hackel, Ian Frederick Moulton (New York: Modern Language Association, 2015), 23. The “cheat sheets” that Wolfe refers to, and that we also use, are pages 7-12 in *The Alphabet Book: A Guide to Early Modern English Secretary Hand* (version updated 2021): [https://folgerlibrary-my.sharepoint.com/personal/hwolfe\\_folger\\_edu/\\_layouts/15/onedrive.aspx?id=%2Fpersonal%2Fhwolfe%5Ffolger%5Fedu%2FDocuments%2F2021%20Rare%20Book%20School%2FAlphabetBook2021%2Epdf&parent=%2Fpersonal%2Fhwolfe%5Ffolger%5Fedu%2FDocuments%2F2021%20Rare%20Book%20School&ga=1](https://folgerlibrary-my.sharepoint.com/personal/hwolfe_folger_edu/_layouts/15/onedrive.aspx?id=%2Fpersonal%2Fhwolfe%5Ffolger%5Fedu%2FDocuments%2F2021%20Rare%20Book%20School%2FAlphabetBook2021%2Epdf&parent=%2Fpersonal%2Fhwolfe%5Ffolger%5Fedu%2FDocuments%2F2021%20Rare%20Book%20School&ga=1)

[13] Peter Stallybrass, “Against Thinking,” *PMLA* 122, no. 5 (2007): 1585.

[14] Stallybrass, 1585.

[15] Lave and Wenger, 29.

[16] Student quotations are from submitted written assignments. Only students who consented to having their submitted work used anonymously for research purposes as part of a Penn State IRB-approved study have been included in this paper.

[17] Lave and Wegner, 95.

[18] Lave and Wegner, 115.

[19] Hailley Di Pressi, Stephanie Gorman, Miriam Posner, Raphael Sasayama, and Tori Schmitt, with contributions from Roderic Crooks, Megan Driscoll, Amy Earhart, Spencer Keralis, Tiffany Naiman, and Todd Presner, "A Student Collaborators' Bill of Rights." *The HumTech Blog*, June 8, 2015, <https://humtech.ucla.edu/news/a-student-collaborators-bill-of-rights/>

[20] Early Modern Recipes Online Collective, "About," *EMROC*, <https://emroc.hypotheses.org/about>.

[21] "Recipe books at the Folger Shakespeare Library." *Folgerpedia*, November 4, 2021 [https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Recipe\\_books\\_at\\_the\\_Folger\\_Shakespeare\\_Library](https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Recipe_books_at_the_Folger_Shakespeare_Library).

[22] During the course of the V.b.380 project in fall 2019, our students participated in the fifth annual EMROC Transcribathon which was focused on Folger manuscript V.b.400. For the details of that specific event see Lisa Smith, "Remember, remember the fifth of November." *The Early Modern Recipes Online Collective*, October 26, 2019 <https://emroc.hypotheses.org/2756>. For general information about EMROC's Transcribathons, see "Transcribathon – Instructions, Glossaries, and more." The Early Modern Recipes Online Collective, accessed January 17, 2022 <https://emroc.hypotheses.org/transcribathons/transcribathon-instructions-glossaries-and-more>.

[23] The Folger catalog lists the physical description of the manuscript as follows: 1 volume : [6], 86, 91-128, 131-179, 179-366 p. ; 31 x ; 19 cm. <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/6k7k3s>

[24] The Folger purchased V.b.380 from Ben Kinmont in 2015. The library catalog quotes from bookseller Kinmont's dealer catalog where he writes, "The name which appears most often is that of Anne Western, though it is clear that she is a later cook as her name is in the margins only and is in a different hand than that of the main body of the recipes." <http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/x9g9fq>

[25] For more information on LUNA and the Folger Digital Image Collection, please see [https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Digital\\_image\\_collection](https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Digital_image_collection).

[26] Victoria Van Hying, "Harnessing Crowdsourcing for Scholarly and GLAM Purposes," *Literature Compass* 16, no. 3–4 (2019).

[27] For additional information on these platforms please see: Ben Brumfield and Sara Brumfield. *FromthePage*. Brumfield Labs, LLC: Austin, Texas. Web. <https://fromthepage.com/>; <https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Dromio: Folger Transcription Platform> and related frequently asked questions (<https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Dromio Frequently Asked Questions>) for a description and discussion of Dromio's specific utility for early modern materials. Finally, the Zooniverse.org platform (<http://zooniverse.org>) is a collaboration between the Adler Planetarium (Chicago, USA) and Oxford University (UK). It is funded by generous support including a Global Impact Award from Google, and by a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

[28] Rebecca Laroche et al., "Becoming Visible: Recipes in the Making," *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 13, no. 1 (September 2018): 133–43, describe "the requisite for optimal vetting" is to have three readers transcribe (136). In general, avoiding an even number of transcribers allows for majority rule. Three readers per page means one view is likely to be dominant while also minimizing labor in the comparison stages, allowing for confidence in the collective transcriptions.

[29] Folger, V.b.380, 28.

[30] Folger, V.b.380, 37.

[31] Folger, V.b.380, 175.

[32] Lave and Wegner, 93.

[33] Robin DeRosa and Scott Robison, "From OER to Open Pedagogy: Harnessing the Power of Open," in *Open*, ed. Rajiv Jhangiani and Robert Biswas-Diener (London: Ubiquity Press, 2017), 115. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/bbc.i>

[34] Sinclair and Rockwell, *Voyant Tools*, <https://voyant-tools.org/>.

[35] This activity is also suggested by Heather Wolfe and was a part of Nicosia's training with her. Nicosia has led this activity in a classroom setting and in a synchronous Zoom meeting after mailing students the required materials. Wolfe writes, "The physical labor of writing—the messiness of it, the noise of it, the difficulty of it – becomes readily apparent when they try it themselves." Wolfe, "Manuscripts and Paleography for Undergraduates," 24.

[36] *First Chefs: Fame and Foodways from Britain to the Americas* <https://www.folger.edu/exhibitions/first-chefs-fame-foodways-britain-americas>

[37] Nicosia shared the modernized recipes on her *Cooking in the Archives* project. See Marissa Nicosia, "How to Make Knotts," *Cooking in the Archives*, December 11, 2019. <https://rarecooking.com/2019/12/11/how-to-make-knotts/>; Marissa Nicosia, "Almond

Pudding." *Cooking in the Archives*, January 27, 2020, <https://rarecooking.com/2020/01/27/almond-pudding/>.

[38] Rebecca Laroche and Jennifer Munroe, *Shakespeare and Ecofeminist Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Elaine Leong, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge: Medicine, Science, and the Household in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

[39] The students shared their projects during a virtual research fair. Their slide deck is in Scholarsphere, Penn State's Institutional Repository. <https://scholarsphere.psu.edu/resources/c28b578c-7c66-46ef-82ca-a12939186e07>

[40] Pickett, Amanda, "30 Grains of a Dead Man's Skull: Transcribing Folger MS V.b.380." *Early Modern Recipes Online Collective*, October 14, 2019. <https://emroc.hypotheses.org/tag/amanda-pickett>

[41] Sarah Lohman, *Eight Flavors: The Untold Story of American Cuisine* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017); Cynthia Graber and Nicola Twilley, "The Most Dangerous Fruit in America." *Gastropod Podcast*. August 3, 2020. <https://gastropod.com/the-most-dangerous-fruit-in-america/>

[42] Nicosia also modeled this for them by testing and writing about recipes from V.b.380 during the project. <https://rarecooking.com/tag/ms-v-b-380/>