

Skill Module: Get to Know the Benson

The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection is arguably the largest Latin American collection in the world (Latin America defined here as including Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean island nations, South American, and areas of the United States during the period they were a part of the Spanish Empire or Mexico). A friend of mine just got back from a year in Chile. He said he met lots of Chilean, Mexican, and Colombian students and that their eyes would light up when he told them he's from the University of Texas at Austin. The collection is famous and lots of South and Central Americans dream about coming here to do graduate research. Like the HRC, the Benson has a rare books and manuscripts reading room, but it is also a regular circulating library.

Library hours: M-F 9-5, Sat 1-5pm, Sun 2-10pm

Rare books and manuscripts reading room: M-F 9-5, Sat 1-5pm, Sun closed

Skill Module requirements:

1. Attend a library tour. I will be leading two groups of students the week of September 13th to a tour given by a Benson librarian about the gems of the library. If you can't attend these group tours, organize a group yourself and contact the Benson librarians to book your own tour: blac@mail.utexas.edu
2. Jot down a couple of "gems" the librarian introduces that catch your attention. Do a write-up about the tour and include a bit about these gems and their significance to the collection.
3. Get acquainted with the Benson online search tools. All of the Benson's books and rare books (except for recently received items that haven't been archived yet) can be found through UT's regular library catalog: <http://catalog.lib.utexas.edu/>
4. The rare books and manuscripts are organized by collections. These collections are usually named after the person who collected the materials, which were eventually sold or donated to the university. You might find first editions of books published in the 1800s, or the original personal correspondence between two South American poets, for example. You can look at different collections here: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/benson/exhibits.html>
5. And search them here: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/>

Can you think of a writer or poet you'd like to research? Or maybe a city or name of a mountain ridge? Try searching the archives with different types of terms.

6. Once you've found an interesting rare book or manuscript through the online search tools, add it to your skill module write-up. Please write down all of the information provided (such as the call number, collection name etc) to show that you have found an individual item. Then write a paragraph explaining why this item is an important archival item. (Note, you won't actually be able to examine the item without physically going to the Reading Room, which for this task you WILL NOT be doing).
7. Attach your write-up to an email to your UGTA