



**LLILAS BENSON**  
LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES AND COLLECTIONS

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March 26, 2018

Barnard Library  
Barnard College  
3009 Broadway  
New York, NY 10027

Dear Members of the Search Committee,

I am writing to apply for the position of Digital Scholarship Librarian at Barnard College. I am a CLIR-Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Latin American Studies and Data Curation at the University of Texas at Austin, where I work in post-custodial archiving and digital humanities. Over seven years at the University of Texas, I have helped to shape the development of a collaborative, community-oriented digital initiatives team founded on a strong library-academic partnership. This has included community building, project management, collaborative curriculum design, workshop development, and digital project documentation. I am excited to bring this experience to the new Digital Humanities Center at Barnard College.

As a researcher and librarian, I have led digital humanities projects focused on the goal of improving access to and discovery of multilingual and culturally sensitive digital collections. In 2015, I collaborated with computational linguists and librarians to develop the Reading the First Books Project, an NEH Office of Digital Humanities-funded effort to develop tools for the automatic transcription of early modern printed books. As the manager of that project, I oversaw the development of new tools and platforms and the dissemination of the work across multiple disciplines, as well as project documentation and long-term preservation. I am excited to expand my experience working with large-scale digital projects at Barnard as a faculty-library liaison and as a collaborator in project design, management, technology, and grant writing.

My work in digital humanities is complemented by my archival work, which has prioritized using digital technologies to build community, strengthen cultural memory, and ensure long-term preservation and access to documentary heritage for communities across the Americas. As part of the digital initiatives team at LLILAS Benson, I have worked on accrual and preservation strategies, database management, and description and access for both the *Primeros Libros* collection of digital facsimiles of books printed prior to 1601 in the Americas, and the Guatemala National Police Archive, a growing collection that currently contains over twenty-one million digital documents from 1882-1996. I also lead a research group focused on the ethical and technical challenges underlying digital asset collection and management.

Additionally, I have been part of several cross-departmental teams working to strengthen library-faculty relationships in order to improve the use of digital collections for humanistic inquiry. I have found that a digital scholarship strategy that brings together faculty and student research with locally held collections helps build community and strengthen organizations, an approach that I will bring to the work of facilitating infrastructure and methods conversations at BLAIS.

Teaching is integral to the way I approach digital scholarship, from communicating with stakeholders about the importance of digital projects to training faculty and graduate students, supporting undergraduate courses, and preparing a new generation of practitioners. My tutorials, lesson plans, and curricula are designed for a diversity of audiences, from skeptical outsiders to experienced practitioners. They begin with the premise that all humanists are digital practitioners, whether we are reading poetry on an e-reader, using search algorithms to locate information, or applying statistical methods to large digital corpora. To conduct our work conscientiously in this environment, we must be attentive to the ways it shapes our methodologies and our ability to make meaning and communicate information. At the heart of this work is always the process of exploration and discovery that is essential to academic inquiry.

In the classroom, I center libraries and archives as sites of research that can unite traditional disciplinary research questions with new digital methodologies and information resources. Digital collections create new opportunities for access and discovery. They also introduce new questions about information management and research methods, and new problems related to the ethics of representing, describing, and sharing cultural heritage. In courses like “Central American History through Digital Archives,” a traditional history course that I redesigned as a digital scholarship seminar in collaboration with a faculty member, I draw on local digital collections to create opportunities for critical engagement related to these urgent theoretical and methodological questions. By the end of the semester, I expect students to be able to critically evaluate digital collections, understand how they impact research methods, and think creatively about how to engage with digital records. During both iterations of the course, students have overwhelmingly chosen the option of using digital platforms for their final projects. They have found that the digital scholarship gives them the tools to ask new research questions, collaborate with new partners, and reach new audiences for humanistic work.

In addition to my cover letter, I have attached both a resume and a curriculum vita. I am happy to provide additional materials upon request.

Sincerely,

Hannah Alpert-Abrams