Jennifer Osborn (right) in the Rare Books and Special Collections division of the library at the University of Adelaide.

BRINGING THE BARD TO THE PEOPLE

I n an era when free access to educational resources is shrinking, JENNIFER OSBORN and her colleagues at the University of Adelaide and overseas have been pulling out all stops to create a MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) about Shakespeare, available at no cost to anyone who wants to learn more about the Bard and his work.

The disruptive educational technology of MOOCs struck the Barr Smith Library at the University of Adelaide in 2014. The University of Adelaide joined the EdX platform in the production of a series of MOOCs across our five faculties, from computer science's 'Think. Create. Code' to the Waite Research Institute's 'World of Wine: From Grape to Glass.' As the Research Librarian for English and Creative Writing, I am currently on the team responsible for developing and producing the AdelaideX Shakespeare MOOC in 2017.

Behind the creation of a six-week MOOC is two years of project work, undertaken by a team that includes the academic course coordinator, an elearning adviser, discipline-based tutors and students, technical and video staff, a project manager and a research librarian. I am responsible for advising on the many digital resources available for Shakespearean studies; I am also involved in regular team meetings, where we work on everything from reviewing the course learning aims and objectives to discussing close readings of scenes in the plays, devising interactive quizzes and selecting video footage.

We have taught Shakespeare's work in the English and Creative Writing discipline for many years, and the MOOC is largely based on the semester-long first-year undergraduate course, English 1107. I decided that my first and most important task was to create a resource guide that clearly distinguished between licensed resources available to University of Adelaide Shakespeare students (our subscription-based journals, databases and electronic reference sources such as the OED) and those that we could offer potential Shakespeare MOOC students. These are largely public domain, Creative Commons and Open Access resources – as well as the material that we produce in-house (where copyright is held by University of Adelaide staff).

Sharing resources and collaborating are second nature to most librarians and archivists, and a wealth of material was widely promoted during Shakespeare400, the worldwide celebrations in 2016 for the 400th anniversary of the playwright's death. Two major libraries, the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC, and the British Library in London, offered their digital collections as open source. I was lucky enough to meet some professional staff who were very generous with their experience and expertise; in September last year I visited the British Library and interviewed Zoë Wilcox, the lead curator of the beautiful Shakespeare in Ten Acts exhibition. (Zoë was also an adviser for FutureLearn's Shakespeare: Print and Performance MOOC, so it was a wonderful professional contact for me).

Many colleagues in my own library were also incredibly helpful. In April 2016, our Rare Books and Special Collections staff organised an exhibition, gathering together some of the physical resources held in the library's Theatre Collection: Shakespearean playbills, posters, theatre programs and prompt books. Our MOOC technical staff then filmed the exhibition's opening lecture and accompanying student performances. This footage will be edited and uploaded to the course from the university's new Video Recording Studio, located inside the library.

As research librarians, my colleagues and I have long been expected to use many of the skills and much of the expertise relevant to MOOCs. We participate in developing and promoting the library's resources and services, we acquire discipline-based subject expertise and knowledge, and we collaborate with academic staff in their teaching programs and research projects. The AdelaideX Shakespeare MOOC has given me unprecedented opportunities to do all of this. ✿

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