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Dear Catherine Ricciardi,

I am happy to submit my application to the Student Internship Program in Primary Sources. This internship would enable me to pursue my interest in archival practices by learning how to describe and catalogue primary sources. As a student of medieval literature, I'm interested in making digital medieval manuscripts more searchable, accessible, and interactive. Cataloguing and arranging a more modern collection, such as the Jerry Robinson and Al Jaffe collection, would teach me critical archival practices that I could then transfer to creating digital tools for medieval manuscripts. I will be available to process a collection from June 1st until May 2018, as I finish my fourth year in the English department.

I believe that my coursework and extracurricular training have prepared me for this internship. I have taken two graduate classes in the RBML: Brent Edward's "Black Radicalism and the Archive" and Christopher Baswell's "Vernacular Paleography."

Professor Edward's class examined various primary sources such as Alexander Gumbly's scrapbooks, the C.L.R. James Papers, and the Amiri Baraka Papers. The class frequently discussed different archival practices and piqued my interest in the various methods and implications of arranging and describing primary sources. For my final project, I worked with the Constance Webb Papers, and since only a few scholars have written about Webb, I developed my essay almost entirely around the RBML's primary sources (photographs, personal letters, art, etc.). This project taught me about both the great thrill and responsibility we face in the archive, as we can find many different, sometimes contradicting, narratives within a collection, and how we choose to communicate these nuances can have a critical impact on future scholarship. I also took Chris Baswell's "Vernacular Paleography," which was co-taught by Consuelo Dutschke in the RBML. This course provided access to the RBML sources that are more directly related to my field (medieval manuscripts). We covered about a thousand years of manuscripts, learning how to date, identify, and transcribe them, in addition to learning medieval book history. We often worked with a manuscript in front of us as we viewed it simultaneously on Digital Scriptorium. This allowed us to consider what kind of information a librarian might include in an online catalogue or image database and the tricky balance between managing the librarian's time, providing user accessibility and readability, and describing critical information.

The questions that arise when digitizing manuscripts are often the same fundamental questions of any archival work (how much do we describe this particular object? do we bring any external research into our description? how do our description or object arrangements propose their own interpretation?). I encountered these questions again this March at a two-day workshop on digitizing manuscripts. The goal of the workshop was to create a digital edition of the RBML's Plimpton Add. MS 04, one of the Middle English versions of the "Fifteen Oes of St. Bridget." As we learned TEI, we also learned that encoding a text forces you to make many editorial decisions according to the text's intended audience and purpose. As I was finally helping to create a digital tool myself, I further understood the weight of the decisions behind any project that seeks to describe and catalog primary sources. I hope to continue working on digital manuscript projects, and I especially hope to create a digital tool that will accompany my dissertation.

The opportunity to work with an entire collection and further grapple with the questions surrounding archival practices would therefore be immensely helpful as I work with medieval manuscripts and digital tools going forward. This internship would help me to

navigate the archive, uncover significant primary sources, ask critical questions about these sources, and determine how to best describe and arrange these sources for the scholarly community. These are all skills that I can directly transfer to my own research and digitization projects.

I am particularly interested in two collections that intersect with my research interests, those of Jerry Robinson and Al Jaffe. Comic books and cartoons are like medieval illuminated manuscripts in their reliance and emphasis on both image and text.

Manuscript illuminations provide a medieval, visual interpretation of text while also serving as independent interpretable objects, and I've found that they add nuance and insight to my own literary criticism. Since I'm interested in the relationship between text and image, working with the collections of a cartoonist or comic book writer might help me further consider an artist's perspective on this image-text relationship. In addition, if there are any drawings or images in these collections, thinking through how to best describe and catalogue them would be very useful for describing illuminations in medieval manuscripts. I'm especially excited about Jerry Robinson's work on Batman; I've thought a lot about how classical characters evolve into medieval characters through different adaptations and translations, and I've always thought about these characters in terms of comic book characters like Batman. But I would be happy to work with either of these collections, and any of the collections in the RBML for that matter, as I predominantly want to learn archival practices.

I believe my academic and professional experience prepares me for this internship, and the opportunity would greatly help my own research going forward. Thank you for your consideration, and I'm excited about the possibility of working in the archive this year.

Sincerely,  
Jenna Schoen