**Oberlin students satisfy curiosity about art**

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*By Megan Harding*

Students often arrive at Oberlin College with an insatiable curiosity about art and museums. Since 1990, the Allen Memorial Art Museum, one of the top college museums in the country, has offered a class during the winter term that enables students to look behind the scenes at the Allen, explore museum careers, and experience teaching in the galleries.

“We expose students to what it’s really like working in a museum, and to the variety of jobs that are possible, from curating a collection to becoming an educator, registrar, art handler, or administrator,” explains Jill Greenwood, Eric and Jane Nord Family Curator of Education, who teaches Oberlin’s Practicum in Museum Education.

Students in this intensive course survey theories and practices of object-based learning, conduct research on artworks in the collection, prepare résumés for the art world, and meet with museum staff in a variety of professional roles. Practicum students also take field trips to the Cleveland Museum of Art and other museums in Akron and Toledo. Each January, the class attracts about 16 students from a diversity of majors, not just art history.

As a capstone to the practicum, each student leads a gallery talk for classmates and later presents a Sunday Object Talk to museum visitors. While polishing public speaking skills, students practice a technique called Visual Thinking Strategies. Using this approach, tour leaders encourage members of the audience to look closely at a work of art and relate their own thoughts, feelings, and observations—not simply absorb facts.

Students who complete the practicum often pursue paid positions at the museum, whether as student curatorial assistants or as full-time, post-baccalaureate fellows.

“For me, studying art is the best way to study history. It grounds things in a way other methods don’t,” said Walker Shadle ’19, who took the practicum and was hired as a fellow in the museum’s education department.

“I’ve always known about the Allen, and its role at Oberlin was one of the main reasons I chose to come here,” he said. “When I was a student, my coursework emphasized theory and methodology. It was the practicum that showed me how to turn my interests into a career.”