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New Courses in the Arts and Humanities Extend the Evolution of the Curriculum

Each school year the College offers courses that have never been taught before. Some are the result of a single professor's efforts to share knowledge of his or her specialty with students. Others are a result of a college-wide curricular revision that pulls together ideas from various departments. Still others are the result of a department's efforts to respond to changes in the intellectual and cultural landscape. Whatever their source, these new courses are important because they help students see the interconnectedness of various disciplines and to think creatively about the world around them.

New Courses in the Arts and Humanities

The Arts and Humanities division of the College of Arts and Sciences are teaching a total of 14 new courses this semester. These brief descriptions conclude the Observer’s two-part coverage—begun in the January 31 issue—of the 45 new courses being taught at Oberlin College this year.

Arts and Humanities

This semester in the English department, Assistant Professor Scott McMullin is teaching Nature Writing in America. While studying representative texts, McMullin’s students will also cultivate their ability to understand and write about nature. McMullin is the third new course in the English department this year that relates to some aspect of nature. Last semester Professor David Young taught Literature, Wilderness, and the Human Imagination, and Visiting Assistant Professor Augusta Rohrbach taught Place, Race, and Genre, which analyzed how writers of the Local Color Tradition projected a relationship between the land and the body as a way to work through ethnic and racial difference, and postulated a national narrative.

Monica Wachter and BRAVO are getting ready to transform campuswide computing.

Administrative Computing Services project manager. This week, ACAC work teams, building on what ACAC liaisons accomplished over the summer and fall, began analyzing business processes and workflow across the campus. The teams will look at how each department does business now and compare it with how the department staff would prefer to do it. They will define what in what order, says Wachter. “Later the teams will identify specific implementation issues and determine how business will be done in the new system.”

The work teams will vary in their composition and duration. Some will last weeks; some will go on for months or years. Many of the work teams will have the same names as the earlier teams (such as Purchasing and Fixed Assets, Human Resources, and Student Accounts). New teams will be named Reporting Tools, Data Access, and Data Standards.

Kickoff Coming

The new system—which includes not only Banner and SCT’s software but also a coordinated software package for facilities maintenance (FAMIS), a product of Prism Computer Corporation—is yet without a name. The unnamed system’s executive steering committee, newly formed, consists of Evans; Clayton Koppes, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; Karen Wolff, dean of the Conservatory of Music; and Bucher.

On February 24, ACAC will host a kickoff with public announcements of the new administrative-system name, the initial work-team compositions, a projected timeline for implementation, and a project mission statement.
Lisa Crawford, Paula Richman, and Robert Shannon Are Honored with Endowed Professorships

Three on the Oberlin faculty received confirmation of endowed professorships during the December trustee meeting.

NEA Conservatory Challenge Professorship
Lisa Crawford, professor of harpsichord and director of the Historical Performance Program, has been named the NEA Conservatory Challenge Professorship for 1996-97. The fund that supports the professorship was established in 1989 when the conservatory received a $1 million grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) that provides $1 for every $3 the conservatory raises for a variety of projects. Crawford is helping to hold the professorship.

Crawford received the honor, according to her appointment letter from Katherine E. Johnson, dean of the conservatory, for her “superb contributions to musical performance, to teaching, and to service to the school and the profession.” Crawford has been on the Oberlin faculty since 1973 and has served on many committees, including Conservatory Faculty and General Faculty councils.

Crawford’s work includes directing a group of students—two harpsichordists, three pianists, and three organists—with preparing for the Winter Term performance. The players performed, with baroque string players, a collection of concerts for multiple harpsichordists.

Last year Crawford began coordinating a large performance project during the regular school year. The first project, the Monteverdi Vespers, included professional soloists and students in several performances, and will this year include music by Bruckner. Crawford, scheduled for March, when a guest singer and an outside musicologist will participate.

Crawford received A.B. and A.M. degrees from Harvard University. Recipient of a Fulbright grant to study at the University of St. Paul. One of her largest works, it covers the halls and long corridors of an entire floor of the University of Minnesota, St. Paul. Her solo recitals include an appearance at the Library of Congress, a performance at the American Music Competition, and the winner’s circle of the Grand Teton Music Festival. He has also won National Arts Club of New York Auditions, Young Concert Artists, and Heugel in Paris. Her solo recitals in Europe include a number of performances at the Monteverdi Vespers, in Netherland and the University of St. Paul, New York. She has also been a fellow at the Erwin H. Houck Professorship in the Humanities.

Paula Richman, professor of religion, has been named to the Irvin E. Houck Professorship. Richman has been on Oberlin’s faculty since 1985 and currently chairs the department of religion. Richman’s work includes service on the Expository Publications Committee and the Ruth Gardner Chair in Pianoforte.

Karen Wolff, dean of the conservatory, described Richman’s accomplishments, including a research grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Fulbright grant to study in the United Kingdom, and her “superb contributions to musical performance, to teaching, and to service to the school and the profession.” Richman has been on the Oberlin faculty since 1985 and currently chairs the General Faculty Research and Development Committee. Her past committee work has included service on the E. O. W. W. Writing Program Committee. When working with her students on their writing skills, Richman says she is especially interested in teaching them “how to organize their ideas into coherent arguments and revise their points to make them more substantive and persuasive.”

Shannon is a faculty member of the Young Keyboard Artists Institute. Shannon has given solo recitals, ensemble concerts, and master classes throughout the United States, Europe, and Latin America. A past participant in the Grand Teton Music Festival, he has been a guest artist at the Festival of American Music in Sacramento, California. Shannon has appeared as a guest artist with the Young Keyboard Artists Institute. His performances have been heard on WQXR, National Public Radio, and Radio Bremen (Germany). He has three recordings on Bridge Records.

Eco-Rhythms
Eco-Rhythms—images and text inscribed on 280 black granite slabs arranged in rhythmic patterns—creates what the artist calls “a coherent narrative of global ecology.” Athena Tacha, professor of art at Oberlin, recently completed the public-art commission for the Department of Ecology at the University of Minnesota, St. Paul. One of her largest works, it covers the halls and long corridors of an entire floor of a building. Tacha conceived the installation in collaboration with the department’s science faculty. The work represents faculty members’ research.

“The endowed professorship,” says Richman, “will enable me to develop even further my analysis of diverse elements of the Ramayana, looking at a broader range of regional literature and tracing it over a longer historical period.”

Are Honored with Endowed Professorships

Ruth Gardner Chair in Pianoforte
Shannon has been appointed to the Ruth Gardner Chair in Pianoforte for three years beginning July 1, 1996. He is the first person to occupy the chair, established in 1983 with a gift from the estate of Ruth Strickland Gardner ’25.

According to this appointment letter from Katherine E. Johnson, dean of the conservatory, Shannon, like Crawford, was chosen for such honor because of his “superb contributions to musical performance, to teaching, and to service to the school and the profession.” Shannon received his B.M. degree in piano from Oberlin and his M.M. from the University of Illinois. He is a graduate of the Young Concert Artists Grant and an NEA consortium commission grant.

Shannon has performed with leading orchestras and ensembles around the world, and has appeared as a soloist with groups such as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the New York Philharmonic, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Shannon has also been a member of the early music group, the Hilliard Ensemble, and won the Erwin H. Houck Chair in Pianoforte.

Shannon has won numerous awards, including the Grand Teton Music Festival, he has been a guest artist at the Festival of American Music in Sacramento, California. Shannon has also been a guest artist with the Young Keyboard Artists Institute. His performances have been heard on WQXR, National Public Radio, and Radio Bremen (Germany). He has three recordings on Bridge Records.

Athena Tacha Collaborates with Minnesota Science Faculty to Create Eco-Rhythms

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Letter

Faculty Members Say Anonymous Mailing Offends Spirit of Community

Recently a number of faculty members received an anonymous mailing. We understand this finding is mailing offensive to the spirit of community.

Three of the mailed documents contain a request to make a donation to Oberlin’s College Faculty. The letter is signed by the donor(s), who wishes to remain anonymous.

We deplore the cowardice of such anonymous acts. Who sent this packet? We urge the community to consider the substance of their concern and to take responsibility for expressing it. This action represents a new low in local communications, as destructively under a message as the graffiti spray painted on the Memorial Arch several years ago to express the spirit of community.

Some of the questions the team is thinking about, Volk said, are What quality do we expect in our incoming faculty? And what challenges will we face in recruiting? The group is also exploring ways to attract good new faculty and to support current faculty at the middle and end of their career.

Suggestions and comments from the faculty included offering an new faculty orientation that offers, for example, one financial counseling, increased dramatically to develop students; an administrative and professional staff that is expected to help new faculty members at select secondaries; and for the purpose of promoting a liberal-arts-college education as advantageous over a university education not only in the sciences but also in all fields; synchronize Oberlin’s wish list for new faculty with the realities of the market; consider that attracting good faculty depends on the strong reputations of existing faculty; and to support current faculty at their various stages of their career and that current Oberlin faculty will mentor new faculty, introduce faculty candidates to Oberlin faculty whose interests they might share even if they are in different academic departments; consider the use of ad hoc courses in music; and to offer music education as advanced undergraduate courses.

The last day at Oberlin for the three faculty members is December 20.

New Employees

Diane Britt
(University of Massachusetts, Boston B.A., Leslie Rennick Pennsylvania State University Ph.D., 1996) is a psychology resident at the Counseling Center.

Pepper Dugan
(Assistant Professor of History, Pennsylvania State University, 1993-1994) says he is interested in issues of identity, race, and gender. He is interested in working at several colleges’ counseling centers, including those at Ball State University (1995-1996) and Kent State University (1996-1997). Before working at the College of St. Scholastica, he worked in private practice with Human Development and Counseling Associates (1994-1995). Pepper says he is looking forward to getting to know people on campus and taking advantage of all the musical opportunities available. He enjoys sports, spending time with family, and playing and listening to music.

Changes in Appointment

Last semester Linda Slocum, assistant director-desk supervisor in the main library to her previous responsibilities as library gifts coordinator. She started working for the College in 1994. On January 21 Kimberly Kosonovich transferred from Development Services to the Alumni Association, where she is an administrative technician who has been with the Office of Development and Alumni Affairs since February 1996.

Departure

The last day at Oberlin for William (Sayed) Salo, manager of grounds, will be March 31. Salo started at the College in 1985 as athletic supervisor and moved to his current position in 1990.

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The discipline necessary to detach themselves from their habitual present-mindedness, and to try to put themselves in the place of someone long dead, becomes genuine fun when students stand in the physical context in which a work of art came into being.

By William Hood

Students are required to attend hour-and-a-half lectures Monday through Friday for each subject; I provided the same readings I would have required had the coursework been taught here; and two of the four weekends we took day-long trips to important sites. After four weeks of classes the art history course concludes with a 10-day study trip. Last summer we stayed five days in Florence; the students discovered an extraordinary relationship with attractive young denizens of Oberlin College. Spoleto’s only disco, La Tartaruga (The Turtle) and its youths-only watering hole, The Bar Silver, will never be the same again.

This cheerful situation came about in the following way.

On a bitter February day in 1994 I received a handsomely produced brochure from something called Hesperia’s Institute for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in New York, announcing its first summer courses for U.S. undergraduates. The courses would be held in Spoleto, which I knew as the home of Giancarlo Menotti’s Festival of Two Worlds.

Although Italy sounded prettily tempting in an Ohio winter, I had never heard of the Hesperia Institute. But when I saw that its faculty included two distinguished Yale professors—Creighton Gilbert in art history and Paolo Valesio in Italian literature—I encouraged some of my students to write for more information. Thus began a relationship between Oberlin students and the residents of an Italian town, a relationship which is an incandescent joy to behold with one’s own eyes.

Hesperia is the brainchild of an austere, highly cultivated Roman philosopher, Edmondo Donato, who has lived in New York for the past 30 years and who has two daughters with his American wife. In thinking about his children’s dual nationality and the fact that they would grow up in the United States and continue to lead an American lifestyle, he began to imagine that the best possible way for them and other young people to learn about Italian culture would be to study it on the spot with teachers from first-rank U.S. colleges and universities. Hence he dreamed his dream into the waking world in 1994. The Hesperia Institute’s goal is to expose every summer about 33 U.S. undergraduates to the history and culture of the 14th through the 16th centuries, and to make that intensive, with none of the usual distractions caused by traveling from city to city, laden with backpacks.

That first summer it happened that the entire student body was from Oberlin. On their return in the fall, they were so wildly enthusiastic that I strongly urged others to follow in their steps. The next summer the Hesperia program enrolled even more Oberlin students, although their strength was somewhat diluted by a lone undergraduate from Columbia. In the third season, nine of the 16 participants were from Oberlin; the others were from Brown, the City University of New York, Georgetown, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, and the University of Toronto.

Proportionately, in 1995 Oberlin was even better represented on the faculty. Paolo Valesio of Yale taught Italian literature (in translation), as usual; but Davide Gavardini, assistant professor of comparative literature and Italian at Oberlin, taught the Italian language course and taught an art-history course, titled Artists and Their Patrons at Court, 1500-1600. I had so much fun, and so I think one of my students found, that I am going back in the summer of 1997, when my course will be called Italian Art and Society in the Middle Ages. Davide Gavardini is returning, too.

The courses themselves are quite rigorous, fully the equivalent of a three-credit course at Oberlin.

During almost 23 years of teaching art history at Oberlin I have longed for the opportunity to bring my students in front of the actual monuments in Italy, rather than lecturing from slides in a darkened dart-room in northeast Ohio. Having now had that chance, I can say with absolute certainty that there is almost no useful comparison to be drawn between the students’ secondhand experience in Oberlin and what they see on site. It isn’t only a question of how they learn. It is also a question of what they learn. One of my most difficult pedagogical tasks is setting works of art in context, but being in Italy makes that task work almost for itself.

Another epistemological difficulty in teaching art history is how to teach students how to accomplish the trick of wrapping their minds around something that is simultaneously a work of art and a document of the past that many people assume to be boring.

However, teaching on the spot makes it almost too easy for students to begin to contemplate works of art with eyes of the period. The discipline necessary to detach themselves from their habitual present-mindedness, and to try to put themselves in the place of someone long dead, becomes genuine fun when students stand in the physical context in which a work of art came into being.

Sharing that moment of authentic creative insight—and witnessing such emotional, even spiritual, energy shining from the face of a happy, young person—is for me one of the most exciting parts of my job. That’s why I’m going back. That’s why I sometimes wish I could teach all my classes in Italy.

People sometimes ask me what I want to return to Oberlin. There are several answers to that question, most of which don’t have a lot to do with teaching. What does have to do with teaching is the fact that I like our students; I like the kinds of minds they form for themselves here. I like the solid foundation that an Oberlin education provides for participants in the Hesperia program. For me, teaching in Spoleto is an aspect or outgrowth of my teaching at Oberlin. The former depends on the latter, not the other way around.

I look forward to it; however, I look forward to a new season with new students. And to the food. And the landscape. And the art. And—need I add it in mid-February?—the weather.

William Hood is professor of art and department chair; this is his 23rd year on the Oberlin faculty. Hood is the author of Fra Angelico at San Marco (Yale University Press, 1983), which won the Eric Mitchell Prize for a first book in art history, the George Wittenborn Prize and honorary mention in Italy’s Premio Salimbeni. He is working on “Naked Man: Essays on the Male Body in Renaissance Art,” which, he says, “I hope will be published in time for the End of the World at the Millennium.” If the world continues in its course, he says, he will then turn to a book tentatively titled “Artists and Jews. The Renaissance Invention of Cultural Diversity.”