About the Program

Oberlin’s London Program is a life-changing experience: a chance to study with a small group of motivated students and stimulating faculty in an exciting city, in the presence of great museums, music, theater, history, and a thriving and diverse culture. Unlike most study-away programs, the Oberlin-in-London Program offers students the opportunity to study abroad with professors from our own campus—and in one of the world’s most exciting, diverse locations! It thus combines the thrill of living in a vibrant international metropolis with the rigors of first-rate education. The curriculum makes intensive use of all that London has to offer. Classes are designed to plunge into the city—much learning takes place outside the classroom. Courses are both disciplinary and interdisciplinary.

Students on the program are registered at Oberlin College, and your courses are Oberlin College courses, so there is no need to transfer credits, and your financial aid travels with you. Moreover, the Financial Aid Office adjusts aid packages to take account of those living costs—mainly housing—which are higher in London.

Oberlin’s London Program has profoundly changed many students’ and faculty members’ lives forever. Those of you who come along are in for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.
Oberlin-in-London, Spring 2014

For more information, visit www.oberlin.edu/london. E-mail london@oberlin.edu to receive updates and information about meetings and deadlines.

Students will earn full semester credit (equivalent to 4 courses) under the new course system. All students will take the following course:

Nature and Culture: Romanticism, Evolution and Ecology in the British Imperial Age. Nick Jones & Roger Laushman. (Counts as 1.5 full courses.)

This course will explore, through readings, museum visits and field trips, the foundational struggle of nature and culture in the "long 19th century" in Britain (roughly, from the American Revolution through the first World War). The period saw enormous changes in the relationship of nature and culture, including industrialization at home, the global trade in raw materials (including exotic species), the exploration of the geological past, the formulation of and controversies about the theory of evolution, the development of Romanticism with its accompanying pastorality, the exponential growth of London as a megalopolis and the development of tourism. In this century, scientists, artists and imaginative writers reshaped how Britons thought about the natural environment. Scientific theories (Darwin’s natural selection being one of the most important) placed the present in the light of the past and the local in the light of the global. Artists began to explore place and time with new sensitivity to light, change and contingency. Poets and novelists wrote powerfully about the ambiguous and often tragic relationship between the powers of nature and the powers nurtured by or unleashed by human culture.

Conducted through an interdisciplinary vision based in, but not limited to the study of ecology and literature, the work of the course will comprise analysis of scientific writing and theory, visual arts, literature and music, as well as the cityscape of London and the landscape of Great Britain.

The course will count for the ENGL major as either a 200- or a 300-level course, depending on the student’s previous experience, and towards the 1700-1900 and British lit. requirements. No previous English courses are required. Alternatively, it will count as a BIOL 400-level seminar, with BIOL 100, 102, or 103 (or 605) required.

Students will choose one of the following two courses:

The Poem in the Museum. Nick Jones. (Counts as 1.5 full courses.)

This seminar will explore the synergy between reading poems and looking at objects in the museums of London. Poems in English from the Renaissance to the present day will be paired with paintings, sculptures, and other works of art in order to tease out what each ‘says’ to the other. Responding to the work of art will be used as a basis for a critical and interpretative reading of the poem, and vice versa. Many class meetings will be in art museums (including the National Gallery, the Courtauld Institute and the Tate), as well as in museums of other kinds (the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert, and the Imperial War Museum) and at sites that do not necessarily see themselves as museums, yet constitute objects of artistic study in themselves (Westminster Abbey, St. Paul’s Cathedral, the Tower of London). Prerequisite: two English courses or consent of the instructor. Previous experience in art history would be welcome but is not required.

Nature Perspectives: From the Linnaean Revolution to DNA. Roger Laushman. (Counts as 1.5 full courses with Biology lab credit.)

We will explore how the Linnaean system of naming species revolutionized biological organization, which facilitated global exploration in the effort to describe and understand biological diversity. The 18th and 19th centuries were a period of empire-building that combined discovery and exploitation. Much of the diversity that was described during it is represented in the museums, botanical gardens, and libraries of Great Britain. We will examine material first-hand from perspectives of systematics, ecology, and evolution to understand the patterns of distribution and abundance, comparing the perspectives of the original collectors and curators to our current understandings based on molecular biology, climate, and geography. Students will carry out research on selected topics, conducting literature reviews and examining specimens, with results conveyed both in written and oral presentations. Field trips will make use of museums and botanical gardens, with guest speakers.

Students will choose one of the following two courses taught by resident faculty in London:

The London Stage. Donna Vinter. This course aims to expose students to contemporary British theatre in all its variety. At its heart will be discussion of productions in the current London repertory, with plays ranging from classical to contemporary, and venues including subsidized, commercial, and fringe theatres. Counts toward the English major.

The History of London. Katy Layton-Jones. This course explores the history of London from its Roman origins to the present day and examines how royalty, trade, religion, and transport have shaped the city’s pattern of growth over 2000 years. Counts toward the History major.