

**Lingnan University**  
**Department of Visual Studies**

<b>Course Title</b>	: Understanding Museums
<b>Course Code</b>	: CLB9016
<b>No. of Credits</b>	: 3
<b>Mode of Tuition</b>	: Lecture, tutorial, museum visits
<b>Class Contact Hours</b>	: 2 hours lecture and 1 hour tutorial per week, except when visiting museums
<b>Category in Major Programme</b>	: Cluster course (Humanities and the Arts)
<b>Prerequisite</b>	: None
<b>Co-requisite(s)</b>	: None
<b>Restriction(s)</b>	: None
<b>Exemption Requirement(s)</b>	: None

Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations.

**Brief Course Description**

This course introduces students to the history, functions and practices of museums. The focus of this course will be museums in the Western tradition, although examples in other cultural contexts will also be considered. It will examine the different ways of defining museums, followed by topics broadly divided into the following categories: histories, collections, display, audience and the museum profession. The course takes a critical approach to the study of museums. It will highlight past and current issues and the often contested roles that museums are expected to play in society.

**Aims**

This course aims to introduce students to the study of museums and museum work as a profession. Through this course, students will have a better understanding of the historical development and functions of museums as well as the challenges involved in museum work. It will also enable students to respond more critically to exhibition design, museum practices and their implications. This course will include museum visits that allow students to observe, analyse and engage with curatorial and educational work in situ.

## **Learning Outcomes**

On completion of the course, students will be:

1. able to describe and explain the historical development of museums
2. able to demonstrate knowledge of notable museums around the world
3. able to articulate and discuss the different definitions and functions of museums
4. able to critically analyse and respond to the design of museum displays, spaces and their implications
5. aware of the challenges involved in the formation and care of museum collections
6. able to discuss the use of digital technology in museums and their effect
7. aware of the different components of museum work and management

## **Indicative Content**

1. What is a Museum?

### History

2. Origins of the Public Museum
3. Museums from the 20th Century Onwards

### Collection

4. Collecting
5. Ethics
6. Conservation – Visit Conservation Laboratories

### Display

7. Museum Architecture
8. Exhibition Design
9. Exhibition Evaluation – Museum Visit

### Museum Audience

10. Museums in a Digital Age
11. Education

### Museum Profession

12. Governance and Marketing

13. Perspective of a Museum Profession – Invited Speaker

14. Museum Visit

### **Teaching Methods**

This course is structured around one lecture and one tutorial per week. The lecture maps out the weekly topic and raises key issues. As much as possible, museum websites will be used to provide students with a better sense of the spaces and collections of museums in discussion. Tutorials will involve small group discussions on the lectures, weekly readings and further images shown in class. The course will include several museum visits which will take place during class hours or weekends, depending on the scheduling and the availability of education services. In such cases, discussions will take place during the visit. Through museum visits, students will be encouraged to critically reflect upon actual museum displays, designs and the professional practice of collections care. Furthermore, at least one museum professional will be invited to give a talk on a topic of relevance to the course.

### **Measurement of Learning Outcomes**

Students' knowledge and ability to analyse the histories, functions and relevant issues of museums will be measured by their continuous participation in class discussions and a final written exam. Their ability to critically reflect upon museum design and display will be measured by two written exhibition reports as well as an oral presentation on a museum of their choice.

### **Assessment**

Class Participation 20% (including museum visits; some reimbursement for transport is available)

Presentation 15%

Exhibition Reports 35%

Final Exam 30%

#### Class Participation 20%

Regular attendance (10%) in lectures, tutorials and fieldtrips is expected. Students are expected to do the required readings each week and participate in group discussions and class exercises (10%).

#### Presentation 15%

Each week, one or more students will present for 15-20 minutes on a museum of their choice, discussing on one major aspect of museum work covered in the course. Students are encouraged to present on museums that are less well known.

### Exhibition Reports 35%

Interpretive text for exhibit(s) (300-500 words) (10%), providing a concise panel description and caption label for one key object or one sub-section of objects in an exhibition.

Exhibition review (1,500-1,800 words, including footnotes) (25%), offering a critical analysis of different components of a museum exhibition such as display practice, learning services and marketing strategies.

### Final Exam 30%

Two-hour end-of-term exam, focusing on the histories, functions and issues related to museums.

### **Required Readings**

Ambrose, Timothy and Crispin Paine. *Museum Basics*. London: Routledge, 2007.  
[available online]

Burcaw, G. Ellis. *Introduction to Museum Work*. Walnut Creek: Altamira, 1997.

Edson, Gary and David Dean. *The Handbook for Museums*. London: Routledge, 1994.

### **Supplementary Readings**

Alexander, Mary and Edward Alexander. *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums*. Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2007.

Anderson, Gale. *Reinventing the Museum, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*. Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2004.

Bennett, Tony. *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. London; New York : Routledge, 1995.

Carbonell, Bettina Messias, ed. *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004.

Cuno, James, ed. *Whose Culture?: The Promise of Museums and the Debate Over Antiquities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Dernie, David. *Exhibition Design*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006.

Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean. *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. London; New York: Routledge, 1992.

Marstine, Janet, ed. *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006.

Macdonald, Sharon, ed. *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.  
[available online]

McClellan, Andrew, ed. *Art and Its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2003.

- Parry, Ross, ed. *Museums in a Digital Age*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Sandell, Richard and Robert R. Janes, eds. *Museum Management and Marketing*. London; New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Sandell, Richard. *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference*. London: Routledge, 2007. [available online]
- Wang Hongjun 王宏鈞, ed. *Zhongguo bowuguan xue jichu* 中國博物館學基礎 (Basis of Chinese Museology). Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001.
- Wang Yongchuan 黃永川 et al. *Bowuguan yingyun de xin siwei* 博物館營運的新思維 (New Thoughts in Museum Administration). Taipei: Guoli lishi bowuguan, 2005.
- Weil, Stephen E. *Making Museums Matter*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003.
- Wu Guochun 吳國淳. *Lijie yu quanshi: Guanzhong yu bowuguan xuexi yanjiu* 理解與詮釋：觀眾與博物館學習研究 (Understanding and Interpretation: A Study of Audience and Museum Learning). Taipei: Guoli lishi bowuguan, 2005.

Important Notes:

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3\* hours of class contact and 6\* hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>.

\* Numbers of hours are subject to adjustment for individual courses.