

# Using Object-Based and Open-Enabled Pedagogy for Authentic Learning

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# 1. Object-Based Learning:

An Opportunity for Students to Conduct Original Research

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Adams Library: New Book Area Z675.U5 E97 2017

Adams Library E-book

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ric-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4676114>

# Object-Based Learning

Object-based learning (OBL) is an experiential pedagogy concerned with the close and tactile study of material *things*, such as artworks, specimens, texts, and artifacts. It is an approach for “learning about, with, and through objects” (Paris, 2002, p. xiv).



Image: Anchor Plaza via [@newanchors](#)

# OBL presents opportunities to:

- bolster the use of campus collections in teaching and scholarship
- teach research fluency concepts through experiential/authentic projects
- diversify forms of knowledge production on campus
- collaborate with librarians and staff

Image: [AH-TAH-THI-KI Museum Blog](#)



# Object-Based Learning: A Brief History

- **1543:** Andreas Vesalius' *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*
- **18th and 19th centuries:** University departments amassed incredible collections pertaining to the study of art, archeology, and geology.
- **20th century:** Object teaching and use of collections fell from popularity.
- **21st century:** Public museums overhauled their engagement strategies, resulting in OBL research and education programs that championed visitor interaction with objects. Faculty began to look at their university collections with renewed interest (Hannan et al., 2013).

# Object-Based Learning Theory

- OBL shares a branch with other **experiential learning modalities**, such as active and problem-based learning.
- OBL is a specialized type of experiential learning distinguished by its **focus on physical materials and sensory experience**. Pioneered by art and museum educators, OBL makes a case for the educational value of visual, tactile, olfactory, and auditory engagement with objects. Research in the Museum Studies field demonstrates that hands-on interaction with objects triggers emotion, aids memory retention, and facilitates understanding (Chatterjee, 2008).

# Real Objects + Their Digital Surrogates

**Real objects** activate visual, spatial, linguistic, kinesthetic, and interpersonal intelligences (Simpson and Hammond, 2012).. They invoke the mindbody connection.

**Digital surrogates** are helpful for the purposes of object selection, review outside of class, and digital knowledge production.



Image: *Durga as Slayer of the Buffalo Demon Mahisha* [@Met Museum](#)



# OBL: An Emerging Pedagogy in Higher Education


- A body of scholarship explores the potential for OBL practice in higher education. These studies demonstrate how **educators are deploying OBL to teach subject-specific knowledge and instill transferable skills across disciplines and academic levels** (see references).
- After a lifetime of looking at websites and paging through textbooks, **students are generally enthusiastic** about access to real artworks, manuscripts, scientific equipment, artifacts, and even ordinary household objects.

# Research Fluency + Object-Based Learning

- The specificity of **an object imposes important limits on inquiry**, making the task of research more manageable for students.
- Students conduct **original research, which teaches them resourcefulness, helps them to avoid plagiarism, and gives them experience working in a professional manner.**
- At some stage, students may be delighted to realize that they are making discoveries, and that they are **foremost experts on their objects.**

# OBL + Digital Knowledge Production

- Objects are excellent candidates for digital presentation formats, such as interactive online exhibits, images, and videos.
- Media presentations may be intellectually and logistically accessible in ways that student research papers are not.



WHEATON COLLEGE  
PERMANENT  
COLLECTION:  
ENGAGING WITH  
OBJECTS

Browse Items Browse Collections Map **Browse Exhibits** Contact Us About

**BROWSE EXHIBITS (3 TOTAL)**


**Browse All** Browse by Tag

**ARTH 230:  
Provenance Research  
Spring 2014**

In the Spring 2014 semester, students enrolled in [ARTH 230: Introduction to Museum Studies](#) were required to conduct provenance research on objects from [Wheaton's Permanent Collection](#). Using primary source documents from the collection and the college's [Gabbie Archives](#) as well as a variety of secondary sources, they attempted to identify previous owners and/or locations for 18 objects ranging from antiquities to portraits and from books to textiles. This exhibit showcases their findings.

[provenance](#), [student research](#)

[class project](#), [donor](#)



**ARTH 230:  
Provenance Research  
Summer 2014**

During the 2014 summer session, students enrolled in [ARTH 230: Introduction to Museum Studies](#) were required to conduct provenance research on objects from [Wheaton's Permanent Collection](#). Using primary source documents from the collection and the college's [Gabbie Archives](#) as well as a variety of secondary sources, they attempted to identify previous owners and/or locations for 3 objects held in the collection. This exhibit showcases their findings.

[class project](#), [donor](#), [provenance](#), [student research](#)

# Barriers

- New pedagogy
- Changes to curriculum
  
- Reduced time for lecturing
- Increased collaboration with curators and librarians
  
- Practical concerns: What about the challenges presented by stationary classroom design, large class size, student-to-object ratio, security, note-taking, absences, and access to objects outside of class?

# Making OBL happen

Professor Joe Cain, a practitioner of OBL at University College London, recommends several helpful strategies for resolving some of these issues:

- Approach knowledgeable library and archives staff who can make specific suggestions based on the curriculum.
- OBL will find a home on campuses that support faculty through dialogues and training workshops, and led by staff who are versed in the theory and practice of teaching with collections.

# OBL in Higher Ed: Case Study 1

Researching provenance of items  
belonging to Wheaton College's  
Permanent Collection (Niederstadt,  
2014)

At Wheaton College in Norton, MA, Leah Niederstadt has enhanced several of her art history courses through research centered on OBL. As Assistant Professor of Museum Studies and Curator of the Permanent Collection, Niederstadt is in the unique position of having oversight and access to a sizable collection of art objects. Niederstadt integrates materials from the Permanent Collection into all of her courses, usually in the form of experiential learning exercises that require students to research a single object. While developing her *Introduction to Museums Studies* course for 2014, Niederstadt devised an assignment that required students to trace the provenance of selected objects (see Fig. 3.4). They would share their findings through the creation of a collaborative digital exhibit. To ensure support for her course, Niederstadt organized a collaborative team consisting of an instruction librarian, digital initiatives librarian, and archivist.

The planning resulted in a series of research and technology workshops facilitated by librarians. Wheaton's Digital Initiatives Librarian, Amy Bocko, and I facilitated two of these workshops. The first was a 90-minute session that introduced students to research methods, search tools, and issues surrounding image copyright and fair use. I started class by modeling a method for researching provenance. Using the example of a painting in Wheaton's Permanent Collection, I took students through an inquiry process that began with mining pertinent documents held by



# OBL in Higher Ed: Case Study 2

Describing the physical characteristics  
of 18th Century Enlightenment texts at  
the University of Colorado Boulder  
(Schmiesing and Hollis, 2002)



## The Role of Special Collections Departments in Humanities Undergraduate and Graduate Teaching: A Case Study

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Ann Schmiesing and Deborah R. Hollis

**abstract:** This article analyzes the pedagogical rationale and learning outcomes for incorporating a special collections department in teaching humanities undergraduate and graduate courses. This case study highlights an innovative collaboration between a University of Colorado German professor and the special collections librarian and staff.

**T**here is little research in either pedagogical or library science journals on the role that special collections departments can play in enhancing the teaching of the humanities. Existing scholarship concerning special collections departments has tended to address administrative issues involving acquisitions, bibliographic control, conservation, restoration, and security. Special collections are portrayed almost exclusively as a resource for researchers rather than as a means of student access to rare materials that can enrich learning on the undergraduate and graduate levels.<sup>1</sup> Some works examine the use of archival materials in teaching composition or research writing but do not address the pedagogical strategies for, and benefits of, scheduled class visits to special collections departments.<sup>2</sup> With reference to her 1995 survey of sixty-six directors of liberal arts college libraries, Susan M. Allen, head of the Department of Special Collections at UCLA Libraries, observed, “even in liberal arts colleges, the special

# OBL in Higher Ed: Case Study 3

Developing an FYS course with  
integrated OBL for Rhode Island  
College (Fall 2018)

## ***Raid the collections!: Making discoveries in Rhode Island College collections***

FYS 100

Amy Barlow

**Course description:** *Raid the Collections!* invites students to examine an array of fascinating objects—artifacts, artworks, and digital archives—drawn from various collections at Rhode Island College. The course is divided into four projects, each designed to probe college history and introduce different research methods. Students will learn how to handle, evaluate, and contextualize one-of-a-kind objects. They will be asked to consider issues surrounding cultural property. And finally, they will explore what it means to “collect” and “curate,” and will imagine rearrangements of specific collections on campus.

### **Project 1:**

#### **Artifact of Rhode Island College: The Anchor**

The entire class will participate in an object study of the large anchor located on the quad. Students will:

- Complete a formal analysis and compositional sketch of the anchor;
- Locate basic information pertaining to anchor type, terminology, materials, date range, production, and function/use;
- Research the provenance of RIC’s anchor using archival documents contained in Special Collections;
- Explore the anchor’s symbolic meanings;
- Report on their findings in writing and in-class presentations.

### **Project 2:**

#### **Object biographies: Examining the lifecycle of objects held by RIC Special Collections**

Working from a list of 5-8 preselected objects (e.g. Cape Verdean mortar and pestle, cuneiform tablet, Rhode Island State Normal School scrapbook of 1893, etc), students will:

- Learn about the history, purpose, and organization of college collections;
- Practice handling objects (guest: Professor Marlene Lopes, Head of Special Collections);
- Write and present short biographies of their objects. Biographies will include formal analysis, historical background, provenance, comparative analysis, and the development of a hypothesis that the student would want to explore through further research (not to be undertaken in this class);
- Generate a bibliography for their object.



# Research Fluency + Object-Based Learning

- The **archival community** has a strong tradition of encouraging faculty to integrate original source material into the curriculum.
- After a lifetime of looking at websites and paging through textbooks, **students are generally enthusiastic** about access to real artworks, manuscripts, scientific equipment, artifacts, and even ordinary household objects.
- The specificity of **an object imposes important limits on inquiry**, making the task of research more manageable for students.

“Students get terribly excited when you put them in touch with real stuff. . .the object itself becomes the hub of a wheel of exploration, with spokes of inquiry radiating out in many directions.”

-Professor Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “Talking About Teaching, Part III,” 2011

# Research Fluency + Object-Based Learning

- Having to consult with peers, professors, librarians, and other stakeholders teaches students that **research is responsive and social**.
- Each new ability helps students to **close the gap between their skills and those cited by employers as being areas of weakness** among new college graduates, including: (1) engaging others in the research process; (2) retrieving information using a variety of formats; and (3) exploring a topic with dogged persistence (Head and Wihby, 2014).
- At some stage, students may be delighted to realize that they are making discoveries, and that they are **foremost experts on their objects**.

# What about Digital Objects?

- Thinking about digital objects/digital surrogates as more than “the next best thing” or good for review outside of class.
- Digital objects have unique properties that can be described, measured, evaluated, analyzed, and contextualized. Ex: audio files
- Curation and arrangement: Unlike physical objects, digital objects can be organized into many different collections and/or exhibits simultaneously.

# OBL + Student Feedback

Perhaps one of the most compelling cases for OBL comes from students. They report that they like learning from objects, even preferring them to traditional lectures and research papers.

- Examples



Image: Jillian Carkin, Wheaton College Class of 2014, presents her research on the provenance of Wheaton College's *Greek Black-Figure Attic Amphora*, purchased in 1981 with the Newell Bequest Fund.

## 2. Digital Proxies: Leveraging Open Licensing for OBL

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# Open-Enabled Pedagogy

## Open Educational Practices, Open Pedagogy

“Teaching and learning practices only practical in the context of the 5R permissions characteristic of open educational resources.”

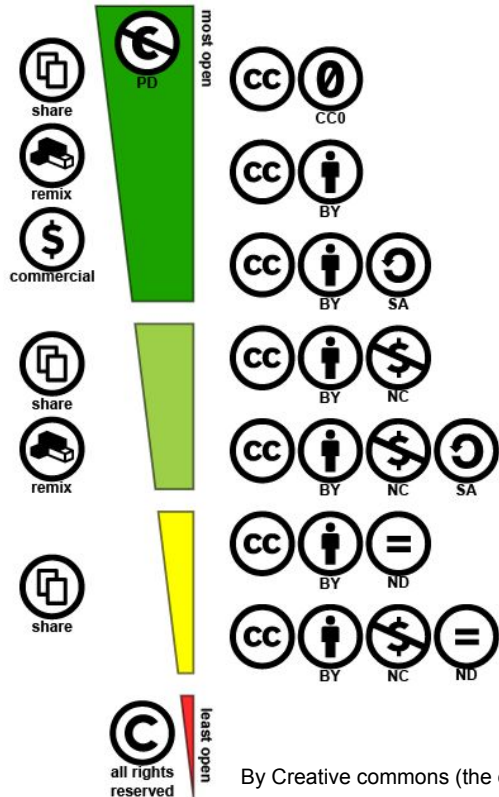
- David Wiley, Chief Academic Officer of Lumen Learning, Education Fellow at Creative Commons Faculty of Instructional Psychology & Technology, Brigham Young University

# The 5Rs of Open Licensing

- **Retain:** Users have the right to make, archive and own copies of the content
- **Reuse:** Content can be reused in its unaltered form
- **Revise:** Content can be adapted, adjusted, modified or altered
- **Remix:** The original or revised content can be combed with other content to create something new
- **Redistribute:** Copies of the content can be shared with others in its original, revised or remixed form



# Digital Public Domain Collections + Repositories



Digital Public Domain content often...

- Is digitized objects from museums, libraries and cultural institutions,
- With a physical description of the object,
- And use is **encouraged**

Resources: [library.ric.edu/open-collections](https://library.ric.edu/open-collections)

# Citizen Science for Humanities: Citizen Archivists

## Example: Transcription as OBL

### [Healey journals and notebooks](#)

"To satisfy my curiosity I look up places that Albert mentioned in his diary," he [Tai Lam] said. "I explore areas in Dorchester that I wouldn't have done otherwise."

Herwick, Edwin. "[Digging Through The Diary Of A Dorchester Teen.](#)" *WGBH Nnews* (Jun. 2017).

## Citizen Archivists: Transcribing + Curating

### Sample Transcribing Projects

- [Europeana Transcribe](#)
- [Smithsonian Digital Volunteers](#)
- [NYPL Labs: Transcribing and geocoding menus for curation](#)  
[Building Inspector](#)

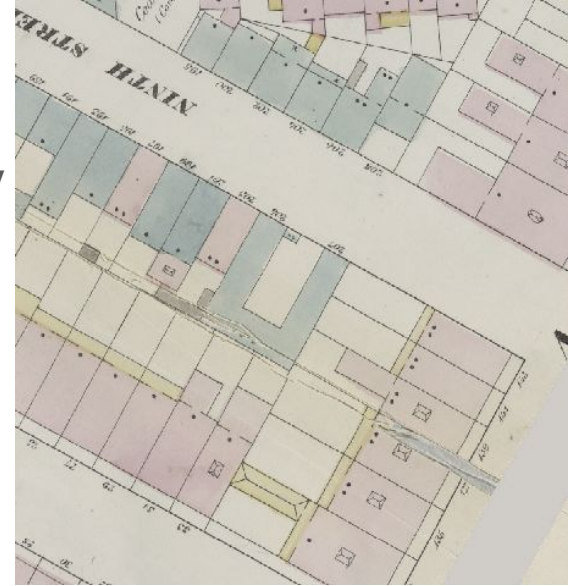
### Sample Collection + Curation Projects

- [Book Traces](#)
- [Our Marathon](#)

Zastrow, Jan. "[Crowdsourcing Cultural Heritage: 'Citizen Archivists' for the Future.](#)" *Computers in Libraries* 34.8 (Oct. 2014).

# Open Licensing + Digital Knowledge Production

- [5Rs of Open Licensing](#) allow for:
  - **Reusing + Revising**: Sharing [digitally](#) without requesting permission from object holder.
  - **Remixing**: Creatively using beyond initial study and original presentation of the objects.
  - **Retaining + Redistributing**: Students can add copies of their work to portfolios, which can be used for further academic or professional work.
- Contribute to bigger [research and curation](#) projects.
- Discuss Intellectual Property, Copyright and Creative Commons Licensing.



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