

John G. W. Cowles Director, AMAM, Oberlin College

Oberlin, Ohio, United States

Application deadline: Dec 2, 2024

Andria Derstine, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College

Oberlin College invites applications for the position of John G. W. Cowles Director of the Allen Memorial Art Museum (AMAM). This is a continuing, full-time, 12-month Administrative and Professional Staff position reporting to the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences.

One of the most distinguished college or university art museums in the United States, the AMAM inspires curiosity, inquiry, learning, and connection through experiences with original works of art for the broadest audience possible, both on campus and beyond. The museum boasts an outstanding comprehensive and growing collection of more than 17,000 works spanning many of the world's cultures, multiple media, and 6,000 years, and plays a significant role in Oberlin College's teaching mission. AMAM staff are committed to enhancing students' learning, engagement, and critical thinking skills through broad examination of the museum's collection and its integration into the curriculum through innovative academic programs. Over the past decades the museum has become ever-more connected to teaching across almost all disciplines at the College – in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences – and within Oberlin's Conservatory of Music. Its talented staff also engage with students in ways both co- and extra-curricular, by facilitating experiential learning, supporting career-readiness, promoting student-community engagement and alumni connections, and encouraging dialogue on urgent contemporary issues. The museum is also an important and long-standing resource for the local and regional community, and has been free and open to the public since it opened in 1917, with a national and international reputation for excellence through its collection, exhibitions, and programs.

In a new Director, the College seeks a visionary, experienced leader committed to the importance of a nationally leading academic museum in a liberal arts college and conservatory of music. The Director will thrive in a collaborative educational context, build on the museum's strengths, continue to diversify and enhance its collections and programs, strengthen ties with the College's academic program, and expand the museum's presence in the Oberlin community and beyond. With a proven track record of exhibitions, publications, and programs, the director will demonstrate enthusiasm, curiosity, and knowledge of art, as well as the ability to inspire a broad constituency with art's unique value in our contemporary world.

The Director supervises the AMAM's staff of 20, and will have the opportunity to fill the newly-created position of Deputy Director. The Director works closely with the Office of Advancement and many other stakeholders on campus, including faculty and students, and is responsible for developing and working with the museum's Visiting Committee, an advisory group. The Director plans and designs strategies for all aspects of museum programs and fundraising and will play a key

role in planning for the museum's expansion. The Director will have a courtesy appointment in the Department of Art History with the opportunity to teach courses in the department.

Broad responsibilities include:

- ☒ Supervision of staff of 20, along with general oversight for the museum's Visiting Committee (advisory board of 20), a Volunteer Guild (circa 20 local residents), and numerous student employees
- ☒ Managing the museum's budget and overseeing financial matters, working with the College's Chief Business Officer
- ☒ Executing and/or amending the museum's 2023 Strategic Plan
- ☒ Engaging with campus partners to position the museum as an integral part of planning and programming at Oberlin
- ☒ Partnering with Advancement, fundraising for the museum expansion and specific projects
- ☒ Planning for the museum's expansion, which is currently undergoing a funded feasibility study, with numerous stakeholders and colleagues in the College's Facilities Planning and Construction Office
- ☒ Overseeing the museum's physical plant, including significant interactions with colleagues in Facilities Operations
- ☒ Overseeing curatorial work, including exhibition and installation planning, art acquisitions, and research on provenance and cultural property matters
- ☒ Active membership and leadership in the national and international museum community
- ☒ Interacting with local and national donors to the museum and to Oberlin College, while seeking, through outreach, to raise greater awareness of the museum's many programs

Requirements:

- ☒ Ph.D. degree in an object-focused field of study (such art history, studio art, anthropology, or archaeology)
- ☒ Extensive professional museum experience in curatorial and leadership positions
- ☒ Success in administration, including hiring, staff relations, budgeting, and planning
- ☒ Broad knowledge of art and material cultural as represented in the AMAM's collection, and experience with issues currently affecting museums today (including cultural property)
- ☒ Highly developed communication skills, collegiality, and a demonstrated ability to work effectively individually and as part of a team
- ☒ Desire to collaborate with colleagues regionally, nationally, and internationally, as well as with a broad range of constituencies including students, faculty, staff, alumni, artists, visitors, volunteers, collectors, and donors
- ☒ Excellent organizational skills and ability to manage multiple projects simultaneously
- ☒ High degree of professionalism
- ☒ Substantial supervisory experience
- ☒ Demonstrated commitment to fostering a welcoming, inclusive environment for all

Desired qualifications:

- ☒ Art handling experience
- ☒ Experience using TMS (The Museum System)
- ☒ Foreign language skills
- ☒ Significant teaching in museums or in higher education

Compensation: Salary will be commensurate with qualifications and experience and is expected

to range from \$165,000 to \$195,000. The position includes an excellent benefits package.

To Apply: Candidates should submit: 1) a cover letter, 2) a curriculum vitae, and 3) contact information for three references through Oberlin College's job portal at <https://jobs.oberlin.edu>. All applications must be received through jobs.oberlin.edu. Review of applications will begin December 2, 2024. Application materials received after that date may be considered until the position is filled.

About the Allen Memorial Art Museum (AMAM): Opened in 1917, the AMAM has always been free for everyone. The collection is housed in an impressive Italian Renaissance-style building designed by Cass Gilbert. In 1977, a gallery for contemporary art was added to the Gilbert building by the architectural firm of Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown. From 2009-11 the museum undertook a comprehensive mechanical systems renovation including significant architectural improvements by Samuel Anderson Architects, earning LEED Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. In 2014-15 conservation and cleaning of the museum's historic King Sculpture Court ceiling and clerestory were completed by ICA-Art Conservation, with new LED lighting installed in several galleries. In 2024 as part of Oberlin College's Sustainable Infrastructure Program the museum's mechanical systems were connected into a campus district system, and other building upgrades were performed. Significant work towards planning for a feasibility study for a facility expansion was also undertaken in 2023 and 2024.

The AMAM has an outstanding collection of more than 17,000 works that provides a comprehensive overview of the history of art from a variety of cultures, as well as numerous endowments for acquisitions, staffing, programs, and publications. The museum houses the Eva Hesse Archive, which includes the artist's notebooks, diaries, photographs, and letters, and oversees Frank Lloyd Wright's Weltzheimer/Johnson House in collaboration with the Studio Art and Art History Departments. A database of the museum collection is available at <https://amam.oberlin.edu/art>; numerous catalogues have been published from both the collection and exhibitions.

The museum has an exceptional program of interdisciplinary collaboration with the academic departments of Oberlin's College of Arts & Sciences and Conservatory of Music. During academic year 2023-24, the museum had 5,755 visits by students as part of classes, engaging with 176 distinct courses and 108 faculty members. The museum also engages in significant outreach to the broader community, presenting and facilitating scores of talks, tours, and events year-round. The departments of art history and studio art, as well as a major art library, are housed in quarters adjoining the museum, and use the museum extensively. The museum was re-accredited by the American Alliance of Museums in 2023. Further information about the AMAM is available at <https://amam.oberlin.edu>. The museum's most recent strategic plan can be found at <https://amam.oberlin.edu/about/strategic-plan>.

About Oberlin College: Founded in 1833, Oberlin College is a private, four-year, highly selective national liberal arts college in a bucolic small town with an excellent quality of life near Cleveland, Ohio (just 30 minutes from Cleveland Hopkins International Airport) and is also home to an outstanding Conservatory of Music. Together, the two divisions enroll approximately 2,900 students. Oberlin College was the first college in the U.S. to make interracial education and co-education central to its mission. The College continues to view a diverse, equitable, and inclusive educational environment as essential to the excellence of its academic program. Among liberal arts col-

leges, Oberlin is a national leader in successfully placing graduates into Ph.D. programs.

Reference:

JOB: John G. W. Cowles Director, AMAM, Oberlin College. In: ArtHist.net, Oct 25, 2024 (accessed Jul 6, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/43023>>.