

Cally Brandt
URCAD Talk
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Hello everyone and congratulations new URA scholars! My name is Cally Brandt and I would like to tell you about my experience as an undergraduate researcher here at UMBC. My story begins in Hagerstown, Maryland, which is where I grew up and went to high school. In my senior year at North High, I took a Latin course in which my teacher showed me that languages are not only about grammar, but are connected to history, archaeology, and art. At this time I began looking for a college with a strong program in Ancient Studies. I noticed UMBC because its Ancient Studies Department had a good reputation. But another thing caught my eye that I did not realize would shape my experience here to such a degree: the possibility to conduct undergraduate research. Not only did UMBC stress that undergrads could conduct research, but also have it funded by the Undergraduate Research Award program. In case I ever decided to go on to grad school, I wanted to take advantage of this opportunity that I knew would put me in a good position when I applied.

I came to UMBC in the fall of 2005 as a member of the Honors College and the Humanities Scholars Program. My introduction to research came in my sophomore year when I took a course with Dr. Richard Mason in the Ancient Studies Department. In this class, eight students became eight curators, and we put together an exhibition called *The Glory of Ruins*, which featured photographs of Greek sculpture and architecture taken from Special Collections. Once I helped create a show, I noticed that each curatorial decision produces an effect on the viewer. A classmate and I presented a poster at URCAD that revealed how our class put together this exhibit.

As it is a requirement for Humanities Scholars to study abroad, I began thinking in the spring about what I could research while living in Italy in the fall. I wanted to use that time to study art that I otherwise would not be able to access over here in the U.S. At the time I was translating stories for a Latin class from the *Metamorphoses*, a poem by the ancient Roman author Ovid. I recalled from an art history course I took as a freshman an artist named Gian Lorenzo Bernini, who had created an awesome sculpture, the *Apollo & Daphne*. Further investigation led me to two other sculptures by this genius of the Roman Baroque period, *Pluto and Persephone*, and *Aeneas' Flight from Troy*. Not only do all three sculptures portray stories from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but, conveniently, they are all located in one museum in Rome, the Galleria Borghese.

I won an Undergraduate Research Award to study how an artist uses sculpture to represent the idea of change and to compare it with how a poet conveys the same concept. To do this, when I visited the Galleria Borghese I analyzed the sculptures, searching for the source of my reactions. During my visit I would write down all that I could remember: the composition, and how it changed by walking around it, and the mood of the piece. Then, to gain the best sense of what Ovid was saying, I looked at the original Latin text and I referred to an English translation. By examining the Latin, I saw how specific word choices, with their different shades of meaning, shape the message to the reader. I found that the more representations I have of a concept, the more comprehensive my understanding of it. This is especially true in education, where both images and literature can illustrate abstract ideas such as love, justice, truth, and change.

Rome is where I became comfortable saying, "my major is Art History." Before studying abroad, I wasn't sure what path I wanted to pursue. But suddenly I was in

Rome, and I was there to learn about art where it was made and to conduct art historical research. Three of my five courses were on-site where we spent hours trekking up and down the hills of Rome not to see art, but to experience it. After this, I could consider art like an art historian, not as a student of art history. When I returned to the States, I gave an illustrated talk at URCAD on my research, which became my honors senior thesis, entitled, “Two Media, Same Metamorphoses?: The Works of Ovid and Bernini.” If you would like to read it, it has been published by the UMBC Review and you can pick up a copy of the research journal here at URCAD today.

After presenting my thesis, I wanted to try a more hands-on approach to research. So, last summer, I spent three weeks doing archaeology on the west coast of the Peloponnesus. Each day at the dig site, called Iklaina, I learned how an object evolves from being an artifact in the ground to something that explains Bronze Age Greeks to archaeologists and perhaps to visitors to a museum. One day as I was digging in the dirt, the director of the dig pointed to an area and told me to dig there. As I swept over the dirt with a coarse brush, white stones emerged. I was excited but I had to remember not to dig around the object. Instead, an archaeologist patiently uncovers the surrounding area layer by layer, so that the object reveals itself. By the end of the excavation, that stone that I saw became a stone wall, which became part of a complex network of architecture at a Bronze Age site.

I returned from this dig and began volunteering at the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts in Hagerstown. The curator allowed me to work with her and the small team that runs the Museum. I conducted an inventory of the collection in storage. Here I was, an aspiring art historian, unsupervised in a basement full of art! I picked up

hundred-year-old portraits of people hidden away in storage, and wondered how to balance unknown works with famous works by Picasso. This started me thinking about issues in museums, such as why we assign importance to some pieces versus others, and how to address them using art history.

This past January I had the opportunity once again to observe a museum from inside. I was an intern at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore with the curator of Renaissance and Baroque Art. I organized files and compiled bibliographies on all the paintings from a room called the Collector's Study. Though my job may have been unglamorous, I used that time at the Walters to observe what a curator actually does and listened to the people behind the scenes: people who clean, handle, store, and accept new pieces into the collection. These are the people who know the art intimately and when you put the experts together you have a successfully functioning museum.

I did not come into UMBC knowing what I wanted to research, but I developed my questions along the way, and continue to ask questions. This is why I am here at URCAD today, to present with my classmate Sarah Ryan about an exhibition of photography. We are poster number 20 if you would like to stop by and ask about our latest project. Because of this constant curiosity, I discovered what I want to pursue. I am going to study Art History in a sequential MA/PhD program at the Institute of Fine Arts at NYU. I see art history as one way of understanding the world, and my travels and research have trained me to analyze and to articulate these issues, in order to bring awareness and, perhaps, change.

Thank you for your attention and I hope you enjoy URCAD today!