

## Overview of the Docent Program at the Hood Museum of Art

The Hood Museum of Art is an academic museum that enriches the lives of Dartmouth College students, faculty and staff, and serves as an important cultural and educational resource for the Upper Valley region of New Hampshire and Vermont, and beyond. Public audiences served by the museum include adults, teens, families, teachers, and school children. Docents play a pivotal role in helping many of these community audiences engage with and learn about art.

The docent program has been in existence since 1985, when the Hood Museum of Art opened. The purpose of the docent program at the Hood is to have well-informed, well-prepared volunteers available to lead tours of our museum's collections and exhibitions for our community audiences as well as to help staff Family Days and other museum-wide events. Docents provide tours of the museum's collections and special exhibitions to visiting groups of all ages, ranging from first-graders to adults. All docents are trained to work with the permanent collection (which includes nearly 65,000 objects and is strong in Native American, European, Euro-American, African, Asian, global contemporary, Indigenous Australian, photography, and Oceanic art), the Orozco mural (located in Baker-Berry Library), and special exhibitions. Tours last sixty to ninety minutes and vary in focus according to the needs and interests of each group. The majority of tours for school groups are based on lessons and activities developed by the Education Department. When the museum is open docents annually give tours to approximately four thousand museum visitors. The majority of these tours are for school groups from the surrounding region and the remainder are for adult groups.

Participation in the docent program requires a substantial commitment of time and energy on the part of volunteers but is tremendously rewarding. The following are general guidelines and a description of the commitment involved in being a docent:

- Attending training sessions (required) on Monday mornings from 9:00 AM to noon.
- Being available to lead tours on an assigned day of the week, Tuesday through Friday, between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM.
- Docents are expected to be absent two weeks or less during the term.
- A modest amount of leading tours or helping staff museum programs at other times during the week, as needed.
- Reading information provided during training.
- Tour preparation.
- Docents are required to commit to active participation for at least two out of the three terms during the academic year (fall, winter, spring). While docents are welcome to take one of these terms off, they do not have to.
- Docents use teaching strategies created by the education staff that correspond to the information publicized to teachers, modeled at teacher workshops, and provided online. This is to ensure that visitor's expectations are matched by their experiences at the museum.

Our current docents are enthusiastic supporters of the arts and share a love for art and a desire to help others learn about art. Training sessions provide an opportunity for docents to meet curators and other museum staff, learn a great deal about art and teaching strategies, and become familiar with the workings of the museum. Docents are constantly learning and exploring new material through these sessions as well as through occasional field trips organized by the museum and the option to audit art history and other courses at the college. Social events—such as a fall potluck luncheon and winter holiday party—are also a regular part of the docent program.

## **Other Programs**

In addition to leading tours on their assigned weekday, docents are required to help staff a modest number of tours and other museum programs that take place on weekends or evenings such as those described below:

**Family Days** take place a few times a year. These weekend events are designed for children ages six to twelve and their adult companions. Each Family Day involves a self-guided exploration in the museum, at least one studio project, and sometimes a related demonstration or performance. Docents greet visitors, explain the gallery and studio activities, hand out materials, and generally assist participating families.

**Introductory tours** are offered on selected Saturday afternoons. These tours, usually attended by adults, introduce our audiences to special exhibitions or specific areas of the collection. Typically there are 2 or 3 introductory tours offered each term.

**Museum-wide events** include a range of programs where the museum reaches out to the entire community. Docents are expected to help in a range of ways, from staffing information booths to overseeing art activities and giving tours.

## **Ongoing Training**

Docent training is overseen by the Hood Foundation Associate Curator of Education. Sessions feature Hood staff members and outside speakers from the college and beyond. Most training sessions take place on Monday mornings between 9:00 AM and noon, with an occasional session taking place at a different day of the week or time. Roughly twenty-two training sessions take place during the academic year. Monday training sessions are considered mandatory. The goals of these sessions are to provide information about teaching techniques and content information related to the artwork on view. Training sessions provide the extremely important opportunity to discuss, develop, and practice our teaching skills. The training year runs roughly from September 1 to June 15. During the summer, participation in training sessions and tour giving is optional.