

## Oberlin College

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101 North Professor Street, Carnegie Building, Oberlin, OH 44074-1075

**Web Site** [www.oberlin.edu](http://www.oberlin.edu)

**Location** Small town

**Total Enrollment** 2,947

**Undergraduates** 2,932

**Male/Female** 41/59

**SAT Ranges** V 590–690

M 620–720

**ACT Range** 26–31

**Financial Aid** 55%

**Expense Pr** \$ \$ \$ \$

**Phi Beta Kappa** Yes

**Applicants** 4,504

**Accepted** 54%

**Enrolled** 30%

**Grad in 6 Years** 80%

**Returning Freshmen** 90%

At Oberlin College, founded in 1833, they put the “liberal” in liberal arts. The small, iconoclastic Ohio school has long been a bastion of independent thinking and uncommon ideas; it was the first American college to accept women and minorities. Though the political slant of the student body is anything but, Oberlin’s curriculum reflects its long-standing appreciation of diversity. Bright spots range from an outstanding conservatory of music to strong offerings in the natural sciences. And despite their reputation as long-haired slackers, students are focused, bright, and determined. What differentiates an Oberlin education? “The community feeling, the intellectual atmosphere, and the quality of the students—not just as students, but as people,” says a senior.

Oberlin’s attractive campus features a mix of Italian Renaissance buildings (four designed by Cass Gilbert), late 19th- and early 20th-century organic stone structures, and some less interesting 1950s barracks-type dorms. The buildings rise over flatlands typical of the Midwest, which do little to stop brutal winter winds. The art museum, sometimes mentioned in the same breath as Harvard’s and Yale’s, is one of the loveliest buildings on campus, with a brick-paved, flower-laden courtyard and a fountain. Currently, a new environmental studies building is under construction.

The architectural mishmash couldn't be more different from Oberlin's academic menu, where offerings are uniformly excellent. In fact, Oberlin has been a leader among liberal arts colleges seeking to strengthen their science offerings; biology and chemistry are two of the college's strongest departments, and undergraduates may major in interdisciplinary programs like neuroscience and biopsychology. Oberlin's conservatory of music holds a well-deserved spot among the nation's most prominent performance schools; the voice, violin, and TIMARA (Technology in Music and Related Arts) programs are especially praised. English is also lauded, and—not surprisingly at such a liberal school—interdisciplinary and self-created majors, such as black, Latin American, environmental, Russian, Third World, and women's studies, are popular. East Asian studies have long been outstanding at Oberlin as well; a study abroad program at China's Yunnan University is available, and the two-year Shansi fellowship in an Asian country is a popular and sought-after post-graduate goal. Studio art and creative writing “are really impressive in reputation, but nobody ever gets into the classes. so it isn't really important,” a sociology major says.

Oberlin's students are as serious about their schoolwork as they are about politics, justice, and other social causes. Courses are rigorous; heavy workloads and the occasional Saturday morning class are the norm. Still, a sociology major says, “The academics are competitive, but taken more as a recreational event. This is a place where most people are really excited about academics, which is great.” Students share class notes and study for tests together in hopes that everyone can do well; they measure progress on an individual basis, not in comparison to how their friends are doing. The intense pressure is somewhat minimized by the credit/no-entry policy, which allows students to take an unlimited number of grade-free courses (if they can get in). Plus, anything below a C-minus is scratched from a student's transcript. Generally, however, students at Oberlin are gifted and want to challenge themselves. Recognizing that, most departments offer group and individual independent-study opportunities and invite selected students to pursue demanding honors programs, especially during their senior year. Professors are “as excited about teaching as students are about learning,” says a biology and dance major.

There are no requirements for freshmen at Oberlin, but general education requirements include proficiency in writing and math and nine credit hours in each of the three divisions—arts and humanities, math/natural sciences, and social sciences—plus another nine credit hours in cultural diversity courses. Students are also required to take one-quarter of the semester hours needed to graduate outside their major's division, and to participate in three January terms, during which they pursue monthlong projects, traditional or unique, on or off campus. About 25 different freshman/sophomore colloquia are available, with enrollment limited to 15 students each, and though the majority of other classes are limited to 25 students, the computerized registration system makes it easy to get in.

One of Oberlin's most unusual offerings is EXCO, an experimental college that offers students and interested townsfolk the chance to teach one another. “EXCO classes range from beer-making to sexual information, to martial arts, to the Beatles discography,” notes one student. “Oberlin is a place that values almost any form of knowledge.” Many learning opportunities are available beyond the town of Oberlin as well, including a semester at the Oberlin Center of European Studies in Strasbourg, France, or programs in China, London, France, Germany, and Dublin through the Great Lakes Colleges Association.\* Sea lovers can travel to Mystic Seaport.\* In fact, so many students leave Oberlin for a semester or two, seeking a break from the Ohio monotony, that a break is practically part of the curriculum. Back on campus, the

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Academics ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Social 📱 📱 📱 📱

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Admissions (440) 775-8411 or  
(800) 622-6243

E-mail Address

college.admissions@oberlin.  
edu

Strongest Programs

Neuroscience  
Creative Writing  
Environmental Studies  
Art History  
Music

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Mudd Library has more than a million volumes and is a superb facility for research and studying or socializing; the famous A-level is the place to be on weeknights. Even more special is the music conservatory, with its 153 practice rooms, substantial music library, and more Steinway pianos under one roof (168 grands, 18 uprights) than anywhere else in the world. Qualified students can earn both a BM and a BA in a five-year dual degree program.

Aside from their similar political leanings, "Obie-Dobies" are a fairly homogeneous lot: two-thirds come from public school and 78 percent are white. Still, more than 90 percent of students are from out of state. African-Americans account for 8 percent of the student body, Asian-Americans 9 percent, and Hispanics 4 percent. Initiatives to increase diversity at Oberlin include advisors from various ethnic and racial backgrounds and a multicultural resource center with a full-time director. The campus is politically active, with issues of sexuality, race, and gender coming to the fore; a women's studies and music education major says, "If it's out there, it's an issue here. Everyone's correct, incorrect, and debating." A popular annual event is the Drag Ball, sponsored by the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Union, in which half the student body shows up in full drag. The event includes a runway competition and a disco string orchestra, and brought MTV's cameras to campus a few years ago. "Safer Sex Night is also quite an event," says a sophomore.

Three-quarters of Oberlin's students live on campus. They choose from among 25 dorms, ranging in size from 15 to 235 people, several of which center on foreign languages. Dorms vary dramatically in shape, size, mood, and feel. "Dorms vary in desirability, but none are that bad," a junior says. "Students are guaranteed housing, just maybe not their first choice." Only two dorms are single-sex; all dorms are four-class except Barrows, which is reserved for freshmen. The best dorms are said to be the program houses, including French House, African Heritage House, Russian House, and Third World House. Seniors and lucky juniors can land the preferred singles (thanks to their upperclass standing or good lottery numbers), but many move into cheaper off-campus apartments, although only a fraction are allowed off the college's meal plan. Oberlin's dining hall system includes six dining rooms in four buildings, chosen through another lottery. An appetizing alternative to institutional fare can be found at one of the six co-ops that make up the Oberlin Student Cooperative Association (OSCA), a \$1-million-a-year corporation run entirely by students. Co-ops plan and prepare their own meals, and though only 12 percent of the student body actually live in these houses, almost 25 percent take their meals there, enjoying everything from homemade bread to whatever's left in the pantry before the next food shipment arrives.

Social life, like so much of the Oberlin experience, is what you make of it, students report. One student describes it as "tremendous," saying "We're in the middle of farmland, yet I'm rarely bored." Another agrees, "It becomes a question of what can be fit into one's schedule." House parties, plays, movies, and conservatory performances are planned every other night. And since there's no Greek system, nothing is exclusive. As for drinking, "I don't know what the policy is, but it certainly doesn't have any bearing on real life," says a sociology major. The "tiny but complete" town of Oberlin offers the essentials, students say: "a small-town movie theater, two bookstores, pizza places, banks, grocery stores, and a bakery with great doughnuts." Towngown relations are good, and volunteer options include hospitals and a mentoring program for college-bound kids. If all else fails, Cleveland—including the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and major league baseball—is 30 miles away. "Trips to Cleveland for a nice dinner or a performance or protest are common," says a senior. Other good road trips are Chicago (6 hours) and Washington, D.C. (six-and-a-half hours).

Oberlin competes in the Division III athletics, but the varsity sports have lukewarm followings. That may be because Oberlin is a charter member of the North Coast Athletic Conference, which emphasizes scholarship and considers women's sports on par with men's. Women's lacrosse and tennis have both captured the NCAC championship in recent years; other decent teams include men's swimming, men's and women's soccer and track and field, and women's basketball. Participation in club sports, particularly rugby and Ultimate Frisbee, is on the rise.

An Oberlin education is a study in contrasts. A junior says other students are both her biggest complaint about the school and its "biggest bonus." Classmates lament their rural Ohio location, but note that there's often so much going on that they can't fit everything in. All students appreciate the opportunity to push themselves in a supportive atmosphere. Oberlin is special because of the emphasis on "student participation and scrutiny about every facet of life here," says a women's studies and music education major.

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**IF YOU  
APPLY  
TO** 

**OBERLIN . . .** Early decision: Nov. 15, Jan. 2. Regular admissions: Jan. 15. Financial aid: Feb. 1. Guarantees to meet demonstrated need. Campus and alumni interviews: recommended, evaluative. SATs or ACTs: required. SAT IIs: recommended. Accepts the Common Application. Essay question: personal trait, interest, or goal; significant experience; person you admire; future effect of a life change you have experienced; or important personal value; also why Oberlin. Accepts the Common Application and electronic applications. Overlaps (except for the conservatory): Brown, Wesleyan, Carleton, Swarthmore, Vassar.