

A Roadmap for an Education in the College of Arts and Sciences at Oberlin

An Oberlin education is designed to help you become an independent, self-directed, life-long learner. It is designed to sharpen and strengthen your intellectual, social, and spiritual capacities, as well as your political and communal responsibilities. This lofty purpose will take different forms for each of you, so we invite you to be actively involved in shaping your education. Like any road map, *this* road map is not exhaustive. It provides you with guidelines, and should help you think concretely about how you can make the most of your experience at the College. It provides you with a big-picture view of how you can develop personally and intellectually, from your first year through your last year, along with some concrete tried-and-true suggestions with links to useful information.

With an actual road map, it's most useful if you have considered your destination, as well as the sights you would like to see along the way. With this road map, though, the destinations are many, and it will be most useful if you revisit it during your time at the College. The sights of interest and the realm of possibilities will vary from year to year. If you sense you have made a wrong turn, please stop to ask for directions. Take this document with you to appointments with academic advisors, faculty, and staff. Your mentors will be able to highlight points of interest that you have yet to consider, and direct you to resources that are essential for your work at Oberlin.

Keep in mind that an Oberlin education takes place inside and outside the classroom. With a holistic sense of your liberal arts education in mind, you can think of your year-by-year progress through Oberlin in the following stages:

- Year 1: **Explore** new horizons by way of the academic curriculum and other opportunities for growth.
- Year 2: **Connect** your ideas, values, and interests to your coursework and your co-curricular activities.
- Year 3: **Deepen** your connection to your fields of study and to the communities in which you live.
- Final Year: **Develop independence** in your lifelong pursuit of intellectual, artistic, and personal growth.

These stages will coincide with one another, but largely as a matter of successive progression. While no two students will experience the same journey, there are many common experiences for students in their first, second, third, and final years. The road map is designed to support your development by giving shape to “the spirit of these years”—the different concerns that students face in the beginning, middle, and end of their time at Oberlin.

This road map repeatedly affirms the importance of establishing a close connection with your advisor. In many cases, the most successful students are those who develop a close relationship with academic advisors, research supervisors, other faculty, or staff members. All around you at Oberlin are resources to help you negotiate the College's policies, think about the choices available to you, or assess what you have done so far and what you want to do next.

Year 1 – Exploration

You are new to Oberlin and Oberlin's new to you, so the first year is about exploration—intellectual, social, and personal. You can let Oberlin happen to you, or you can begin to define your intentions here. Seize the reins of your liberal arts education.

Explore new intellectual horizons

- Take courses that were not offered at your high school. Explore how your interests fit with the diversity of Oberlin courses. The institutional requirements—for example, 9-9-9, cultural diversity, and quantitative proficiency—can steer you in a variety of directions, but it's up to you to select which courses will work for you.
- Acquire proficiency in a variety of academic practices. Understand the values that sustain a community of learning, and enroll in courses that will allow you to sharpen a variety of skills, including critical reading, writing, listening, analysis, and information literacy.
- Write about what the opportunity to study at a small liberal arts college means to you. What are the values of our community of learning? How does your conduct in and outside the classroom sustain or weaken this community?
- Begin a new foreign language or advance your fluency in a language you've already studied. The earlier you attend to this task the better.
- Use Winter Term to explore the college, community, or the world. A variety of options are available, from an on-campus group project, to a service-learning project, to language study in a foreign country. Start thinking about your project during fall break. Review your ideas with a Student Academic Ambassador, and then schedule an appointment with your advisor to explore the project in more detail.

Explore new experiences

- Join a student organization, or a varsity sport, a club sport, or an intramural activity in athletics and physical education.
- Select a community service project through the Bonner Center for Service and Learning. The town of Oberlin isn't just where you go to school, it's where you live. Make it a better place for everyone.
- Foster your understanding of cultures by attending events sponsored by the Multicultural Resource Center, the Oberlin College Dialogue Center, and program houses.
- Get involved in the arts on campus by attending a Conservatory concert or viewing an exhibit at the Allen Memorial Art Museum. Consider auditioning for a student theater production or one of the a cappella singing groups.

Explore the resources available at Oberlin College

- Get to know your advisor and at least one professor.
- Outline your educational goals and consider how you might pursue the connections between your values and your Oberlin education. Discuss these

with your advisor, class dean, or another member of the faculty or staff. Explore how your interests fit with the opportunities available at the College.

- Throughout the semester, find time to distance yourself from short-term deadlines to take stock of the big picture. Life as an Obie may entail a number of metamorphoses. Keep a record.
- Learn about academic and student life policies, including College and community codes of conduct. Understand why the Honor Code, for example, is the lifeblood of our intellectual community.
- Refine your time management and organizational skills. Shape the ways in which your studies, your extra-curricular activities, and your social life interact on a daily and weekly basis. Make a plan to stay healthy: sleep, eat, and exercise well.
- Get to know an upper-class student who can help you expand your horizons. Schedule a time for coffee or lunch with your Student Academic Ambassador, or with an ambassador whose interests coincide closely with your own.
- If you are already confident about your major, find out who the student major representatives are for that department. Talk to them about their winter term projects, summer internships, and course selection.

Year 2 – Connection

This year poses particular challenges and opportunities. While the novelty of the first year begins to fade, many students find excitement in connecting to Oberlin in creative ways. Use this year to select a major, broaden your general education, and understand more deeply the communities of Oberlin and beyond. Continue to give shape to the connections between your passions and your education. Ask for help when you need it. Remain confident that things will come into focus for you.

Connect your ideas, values, and interests to possible majors and other areas of study

- Take courses in the departments and programs that you find most compelling. Talk about your interests with students and faculty, including department chairs. Find out, for example, how compatible a particular major is with different study-abroad programs.
- Finish your distribution requirements, including 9-9-9, quantitative proficiency, writing proficiency, and cultural diversity. Take the necessary steps to declare a major by the time you accumulate 56 credits (for most students, that will occur during the spring of your second year). Use your distribution requirements to explore disciplines and departments that complement your prospective major.
- Develop a résumé and begin to compile a portfolio of your achievements, assessments, and plans. Each of these tools can serve as a personal archive, to allow you to reflect upon what you have done, so that you can choose wisely what to do next.

Connect with local, regional, and global communities

- Pursue activities in student organizations.

- Commit to some form of civic engagement that relates to your academic interests.
- Talk to your advisor about nominating you for the Academic Ambassador Program.
- Consider studying abroad in a location where you can speak the native language and learn more about the nation and the world. Review your academic progress, including winter terms, as you develop your proposal for an academic leave to study away.

Connect your education to your vocations and avocations

- Look back on your initial set of educational goals. Assess the ways in which they have changed, and update accordingly. Recognize the flexibility necessary to this endeavor, and imagine how different your values and identity may appear again in the next couple of years.
- Plan a summer internship and consider a Winter Term internship related to your social values and fields of interest. Use summer and January to explore real-life experiences, which can deeply affect your education at Oberlin and opportunities after Oberlin.
- Begin investigating what you might do after Oberlin. Learn about fellowships for recent graduates and explore graduate and professional school programs. Broadly speaking, explore the careers you may pursue once you graduate.

Year 3 – Deepening

You are now nearer your departure from Oberlin than your arrival. You have declared a major and are becoming more “disciplined.” By this point, you should have a range of faculty and staff to consult with. It’s time to deepen your experience by pursuing advanced coursework in your major, and learning more about its specific theories and methods. Solidify your commitment to community participation, and continue to plan for life after Oberlin.

Deepen your knowledge

- Review plans for your major with your advisor: determine whether you will choose a formal or informal concentration and how that choice will influence your choice of capstone project.
- With your advisor, develop a plan for a senior-year capstone—honors, research, senior seminar, practicum. Decide whether it will happen within your major or if it will be a multidisciplinary project.
- Choose electives that support your academic and personal goals. Use the idea of breadth to guide you as you continue to make the most of the liberal arts education.
- Organize and participate in campus events that are relevant to your educational goals.
- Use your study-away experience to extend and deepen your knowledge of the world and the college.

Deepen your community relationships and networks

- Find out about professional societies associated with your major. Get involved with your department. Serve as a student major representative or arrange visits by outside speakers. Volunteer for leadership positions in student and community organizations.
- Plan a winter term project or summer internship related to your career interests. Junior-year internships or related mentored experiences are great ways for you to test the waters of employment and can help your transition from Oberlin to graduate or professional school, the working world, or both.
- Consider again the ways in which student organizations or community involvement could deepen your sense of the world around you.
- Review opportunities for fellowships after college and consult with appropriate faculty.

Deepen your consideration of life after Oberlin

- Arrange meetings with your advisors and mentors about how your work at Oberlin can support your long-term career and personal goals. Junior year is key for planning ahead.
- Meet with an advisor in the Office of Career Services to find out about tests required for graduate or professional school.
- Update your résumé.

Final Year – Development

For three years or more, you have laid the groundwork for your last two semesters. The final year is not just about finishing at Oberlin; it can also be a time to develop independent modes of learning and living that will serve you after you leave Oberlin. Select advanced coursework to focus and deepen your knowledge. Use your last electives to expand your horizons and to embrace the intrinsic joy of learning. Turn to advisors and other resources to think about life after Oberlin. Celebrate your Oberlin career and your achievements.

Develop independent, life-long learning and creativity

- Aspire to create knowledge through your senior capstone. Use this opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of your field of study, and to draw connections between your major and your other interests.
- Pursue opportunities to present your work on campus and in the community. Part of advanced work involves taking your knowledge to public forums and practicing the skills of effective speaking, writing, and presentation. Talk to your mentors and Career Services about how to give a talk, rather than read a paper.
- Choose courses you have always wanted to take, particularly those that will enrich your life after Oberlin.

Develop your leadership capacities

- Accept leadership positions in student or community organizations. These opportunities will teach you important skills of organization, and allow you to bolster the qualities of Oberlin you care about the most. Contribute to the vibrancy of the College and the community.

- Mentor Oberlin students. Tutoring and advising can allow you to master what you already know and reciprocate the generosity shown to you when you arrived at the College.

Develop a concrete plan for post-Oberlin steps

- Revisit Career Services: attend senior orientation session; practice interviewing skills, finalize your résumé, learn about writing graduate school essays. Seek out advisors to read drafts of your application essays.
- At the beginning of the fall semester, think about which academic assignments might be included in your portfolio. Select a substantial assignment that you would be willing to send out with your graduate school applications (even if you are not planning to go straight to graduate school). Build a calendar for its first draft, revision, and completion. Set up appointments with the professor and your advisor for feedback. Submit a dazzling final project.
- Review, edit, and polish your portfolio.
- Complete applications for fellowships, graduate school, post-college internships, or jobs.
- Take advantage of the networking opportunities available to you through Oberlin alumni and the Oberlin Alumni Association.