

# The Observer

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THE OBERLIN COLLEGE FACULTY AND STAFF NEWS PAPER

## Focus Groups Set Ground Rules, and Wrestling with the Structural Deficit Begins

The College must eliminate \$3 million from its annual budget, and on the heels of focus groups held in December, changes that address Oberlin's structural deficit have begun.

The focus groups—which involved about 150 members of all employee groups—generated the principles that are guiding budget discussions among President Nancy Dye and her expanded senior staff. (See "Basic Principles for Change," below, or consult the entire focus-group report online at [http://ocaxp1.cc.oberlin.edu/~wwwcomm/focus\\_group/focusgroup\\_home.html](http://ocaxp1.cc.oberlin.edu/~wwwcomm/focus_group/focusgroup_home.html).—Ed.).

When the expanded senior staff—whose composition is named in the cover letter of the focus-group report, which was sent to all College employees—holds its weekly meetings, a flip chart listing the summarized principles is a constant physical backdrop and a consistent reminder to make decisions with the principles in mind.

### Changes in the Senior Staff

Formal address of the structural deficit began early in January when Dye announced that two senior staff positions would not be filled. The positions are vice president for admissions and financial aid (held formerly by Tom Hayden) and treasurer (held formerly by Charles Tharp). Three other positions in the treasurer's office have been affected by the change. Document specialist (a position never filled but budgeted) and confidential assistant (held formerly by Beverly Pearce) have been eliminated. The property-manager position (held by Rita Waltz, who continues her services in the Investment Office) has been reduced to five hours a week.

The Office of the Treasurer no longer exists, and the Investment Office, which used to be part of the treasurer's office, is now part of the Office of Finance.

"Consolidating all the financial functions within the Office of Finance will facilitate sharing information and work, and may enhance efficiency," says Andy Evans, who as vice president for finance heads the office.

Bernie Gordon—who under Charles Tharp had the titles assistant treasurer, trust officer, and senior endowment analyst, and was briefly acting treasurer—is now the director of the Investment Office and trust officer for the College. The Investment Office moved recently from Bosworth Hall to the Service Building, in part to work more efficiently with the controller's office.

### Reorganization, Reduction

The realignment of financial functions is an example of one of the kinds of changes to come, says Evans. Similar or identical functions being performed by more than one part of the College will be examined with an eye toward improving the services while consolidating them in one office, he says. Not all changes, however, will be of this nature.

"All divisions are being asked to contribute in some way to structural-deficit elimination," Evans says, adding, "Most of the changes—which must have permanent effects on the budget—will involve personnel-cost reductions, in both salary- and benefits-line items."

### The Timing

The College plans to eliminate the entire

structural deficit for the 1996-97 fiscal year, Evans says. This means that to be balanced, next year's nearly \$90 million budget, which now shows a deficit of \$3 million, needs to be reduced by \$3 million.

The current plan, says Evans, calls for College divisions to find some \$1.6 million in savings in the salaries and wages lines of the budget. The benefits costs related to that amount would bring the savings in personnel costs to \$2.2 million. The remaining \$800,000 will come from other line items in the budget.

By June 30 all plans will be completed, at least in broad strokes, says Evans, and most reductions in force will have been determined. Some divisions have already begun reducing staff, he says.

The College will issue "absolutely no overnight terminations," says Evans. The expanded senior staff is developing policies, he says, that define a severance-package model, aiming for uniformity in procedures whenever possible. "Of course," Evans notes, "union contracts must be adhered to when structural-deficit reductions have an impact on bargaining-unit members."

### How Many Positions Will Be Eliminated?

Referring to a number floating about campus, Evans says "60 is too high" as an estimate of the number of regular full-time positions that will be eliminated to balance the budget. (The number 60 probably originated in a General Faculty discussion, where the speaker's assumption was that the entire structural deficit would be eliminated by reduction in force; see "Faculty Meetings" in this issue.—Ed.) Evans will not go further in estimating the number of layoffs to come because, he says, all divisions haven't completed their decisions.

### How the Work Force Will Be Reduced

Involuntary separation will account for the largest portion of the staff reductions, Evans says, but attrition and retirement have roles to play.

All personnel changes give work units an opportunity to redefine the work they do, says Evans. As has been true for some time at Oberlin, each position left open by attrition will continue to be evaluated before it is budgeted, and not all open positions will be reallocated.

While Evans says that the College will not offer across-the-board early retirement packages, he urges employees thinking of retirement to consult division heads and Director of Human Resources Ruth Spencer.

### Staying Abreast of Changes

The *Observer* will publish more about Oberlin's structural deficit as information becomes available. See "How the *Observer* Will Cover the Structural Deficit." This

issue's "Faculty Meetings" section also covers the topic at length.

At an all-employee meeting in Finney Chapel noon Monday, February 12, President Nancy Dye will bring faculty and staff up to date on plans and changes resulting from the budget deficit. Dye and Dean of Student Life and Services Charlene Cole will hold residence-hall meetings early in the semester so that students can discuss budget planning, especially as it affects student-life issues.

## OhioLINK: Speedy Delivery and More

If you've ever borrowed books or periodicals through Interlibrary Loan—even assisted by the handy QuickMail form—you know that much of the process is waiting.

Enter OhioLINK, the next best thing to plucking the item right off the shelf in Mudd.

"The slowest link in the [OhioLINK] process," says Assistant Professor of Religion David Kamitsuka—a member of the General Faculty Library Committee who had early access to the service—is Mudd's notification by printout. But such a technicality doesn't slow down Kamitsuka—not when he knows how to work around that step.

You can check the status of your request on your own office computer, he says, and not even wait for Mudd's notification. When the OhioLINK patron record shows the book at the Oberlin College Library, you can pick it up at the Circulation Desk—usually two or three days after submitting your request.

Oberlin formally introduced OhioLINK January 15 with a demonstration attended by about 50 members of the faculty and staff. The executive director of OhioLINK, Tom Sanville, and Director of Libraries Ray English made comments at the occasion, and Dean of the Conservatory Karen Wolff read remarks from President Nancy Dye, who had been called out of town unexpectedly.

OhioLINK (Ohio Library Information Network) is more than a hopped-up version of Interlibrary Loan. One of Kamitsuka's favorite features is the display of tables of contents for many books.

Even if patrons cannot use OhioLINK to borrow specific material another library owns (some materials are for the owning library's use only), they can learn—from the OhioLINK screens on computers in their own offices or any other campus-networked computer—which academic libraries in the state own the materials.

The Oberlin College Library was the 43rd academic library in the state to join OhioLINK, and the first private college to do so. Oberlin makes 825,000 of its library holdings available to the other participating OhioLINK libraries.

One way to get to OhioLINK to choose "Connect to other DATABASES" from the main OBIS menu. OBIS is two clicks away from Oberlin Online's library homepage, [http://www.oberlin.edu/~library/OCL\\_homepage.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/~library/OCL_homepage.html). And if you're not ready to jump on the computer yourself, Oberlin's librarians are ready, says English, to invoke OhioLINK for you—or help you learn.

## Basic Principles for Change

The last two pages of the *Oberlin College Focus Group Report*—issued January 8 by consultant Elaine Kuttner, who conducted the focus groups—contain five basic principles for change. These principles summarize the responses of focus-group members to the question "For you to support this change process and feel that it has integrity, what must you see in the way the process is handled?"

- I. The primary focus of the change process must be improving Oberlin's ability to provide the highest quality educational experience to the highest-caliber student body.
- II. The change process must be perceived as credible.
- III. If any action must be taken that will significantly impact an employee's job, be sure it is handled with sensitivity, kindness, and as little stress as possible.
- IV. We must continue to preserve and enhance diversity.
- V. Communication must be a primary focus throughout the process of planning and implementation.

## How the *Observer* Will Cover the Structural Deficit

Communicating to faculty and staff what Oberlin is doing about its structural deficit is important. That's what last month's focus-group participants said over and over.

And that's why the *Observer* will have—in every remaining issue of this school year—front-page coverage about how the College is addressing the structural deficit. The paper will cover reorganizations, timetables for change, and other related topics.

### New Section in the *Observer*

Because Oberlin faculty and staff will want

*continued on page 2*

# Faculty Meetings

## General and Conservatory Faculties Discuss Elements of Structural Deficit

At a special meeting of the General Faculty, held December 5, President Nancy Dye and Vice president for Finance Andy Evans discussed with faculty members the meaning and implications of Oberlin's structural deficit.

Using the blackboard, Dye drew a graph that plotted expenditures and revenues by years. The graph showed that over time Oberlin's revenues are rising more slowly than its expenditures, leaving a wedge-shaped gap in the middle (the structural deficit) that, growing from year to year, would be at about \$3 million for fiscal year 1996-97.

Dye then considered Oberlin's three revenue sources: annual giving, the endowment, and tuition, and showed why none of the three can be expected to increase enough to erase the deficit. It is not realistic to think that we could double annual giving next year and keep increasing annual giving in the following years to get rid of the structural deficit, Dye said about the first revenue source. Hypothetically, we could eliminate the structural deficit if we took an additional \$3 million (above what we normally withdraw) out of the endowment, the second revenue source, for this year and more in following years, she said, but doing so would eventually use up all the endowment. The third revenue source, tuition, she said, could not contribute to eradicating the structural deficit because it cannot be raised enough to make a difference without acting as an utter deterrent to enrollment and retention.

The solution to the structural deficit must be primarily on the expenditure side, Dye said, adding that more than half the College budget is for salaries and benefits. One year the College froze salaries to address the deficit, she noted. There is "no way I can see my way clear" to freeze them again, she said, because to do so would be to move the College away from important strategic goals, particularly making Oberlin's faculty salaries more competitive. In fact, to get rid of the structural deficit by salary freezes, she said, the College would have to freeze salaries permanently, then begin to reduce them.

We cannot continue to do everything that we are doing, Dye said. The president said that

she would like to eliminate the structural deficit as much as possible with voluntary acts but that the College cannot eliminate the problem by voluntary actions only. She mentioned the focus groups scheduled for mid-December as one means by which members of the faculty and staff could help define the processes that will be used to address the structural deficit.

Referring to handouts they brought (reproduced on this page, with corrections), Dye and Evans then responded to questions from the faculty, who filled nearly every seat and lined the walls in King 306. These were some of the comments and exchanges:

Professor of Economics Robert Piron questioned the need to cut expenditures heavily; he called Dye's assessment of the College's ability to enhance revenue "pessimistic," and blamed past endowment performance for a good part of Oberlin's financial straits.

"I do not mean to suggest that we should not [work on the revenue side]," Dye responded, adding that she could not influence what was done in the past, and that it is important to focus on the future.

Professor of Art William Hood observed that to erase the entire deficit only by cutting staff would mean the loss of 60 employees receiving the average annual Oberlin compensation (salaries and benefits) of \$50,000.

Dye said that the process of eliminating the structural deficit could not be conceptualized that way.

Early retirement, said Frederick B. Artz Professor of History Marcia Colish, is something the College may want to consider for faculty (who are the least flexible, she said, given tenure). Early retirement might encourage older, more highly paid professors to leave, freeing their positions for newer, less highly paid faculty members.

"We've heard about [the need to cut expenses] for the past five years," said Professor of Classics James Helm, "and we cut again and again, and we still have a structural deficit. Is there any way to know whether we will resolve the problem this time?" What we're doing this year is different, replied Dye, "because we haven't cut *recurring* expenses in the past."

Associate Professor of History Leonard Smith asked whether the intent was to eliminate the entire structural deficit in one year. "We need to figure that out," said Dye, "—see what's possible."

### Con Faculty Discusses Deficit, Other Matters

Conservatory dean Karen Wolff addressed the conservatory faculty about the struc-

tural deficit and relevant focus groups at the December 12 Conservatory Faculty meeting.

Professor of Singing Daune Mahy, chair of the Admissions Committee, reported that each conservatory division will submit to the Admission Committee by March 1 a ranked list of Artist Diploma candidates they recommend for admission. The committee will review the rankings and make recommendations to Director of Conservatory Admissions Michael Manderen. The annual target number for entering Artist Diploma candidates is 12.

After extensive discussion the faculty moved that—with approval from the students' advisors and the assistant dean of the conservatory—students may enroll in a large ensemble for zero credit if they are scheduling 17 hours in other classes that semester. Associate Dean of Academic Affairs Kathryn Stuart, who chairs the Educational Planning Committee (EPC), brought the proposal—approved by the conducting and ensembles division—before the faculty from the EPC.

The faculty tabled a motion, brought by the TIMARA faculty, to reduce the number of ensemble credits TIMARA majors need for graduation.

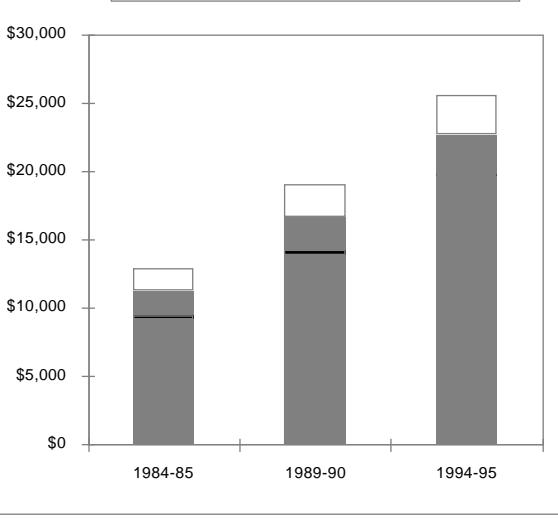
COMPARATIVE FINANCIAL DATA

	FY1984-85	1985-90	FY1989-90	1990-95	FY1994-95	1985-95
TOTAL SCHOLARSHIPS	7,085,831	59.39%	11,294,222	51.84%	17,149,017	142.02%
TOTAL EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION	23,776,489	57.73%	37,501,636	15.10%	43,165,045	81.55%
NUMBER OF FTE EMPLOYEES	785.44	12.35%	882.41	-1.31%	870.89	10.88%
PLANT MAINTENANCE COSTS	4,574,623	11.17%	5,085,828	14.88%	5,842,792	27.72%
OTHER EDUCATIONAL AND GENERAL EXPENDITURES	13,811,259	42.58%	19,691,536	8.74%	21,413,388	55.04%
MANDATORY AND DISCRETIONARY TRANSFERS	1,352,314	163.07%	3,557,542	86.40%	6,631,272	390.36%
TOTAL CURRENT FUNDS EXPENDITURES AND TRANSFERS	50,600,516	52.43%	77,130,764	22.13%	94,201,514	86.17%

HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF STUDENT CHARGES

	1984-85	1989-90	1994-95
TUITION	\$9,175	\$13,835	\$19,670
FEES	268	388	135
BOARD	1,870	2,485	2,900
ROOM	1,590	2,310	2,920
TOTAL	\$ 12,903	\$ 19,018	\$ 25,625

■ TUITION ■ FEES ■ BOARD □ ROOM



**Note correction:** The board charge for 1994-95 in the chart above left does not match the figure in the chart distributed at the faculty meeting. This chart is correct. The correction influences the figure for total 1994-95 student charges and the percentages of change in total student charges between 1990 and 1995 and between 1985 and 1995 in the chart above right, also corrected. Budget Director Bob Knight discovered a totalling error in the 1995 financial report, on which he based his original calculations, after working up the charts for the meeting.

These are  
corrected charts;  
see note below.

COMPARATIVE FINANCIAL AND OPERATING DATA

	FY1984-85	1985-90	FY1989-90	1990-95	FY1994-95	1985-95
STUDENT CHARGES	\$ 12,903	47.39%	\$ 19,018	34.74%	\$ 25,625	98.60%
TOTAL SCHOLARSHIPS	7,085,831	59.39%	11,294,222	51.84%	17,149,017	142.02%
AVERAGE SCHOLARSHIP AWARD	5,218	47.64%	7,704	39.91%	10,779	106.57%
NUMBER OF FTE STUDENTS	2,693	7.61%	2,898	-6.97%	2,696	0.11%
NUMBER OF STUDENTS ON SCHOLARSHIP	1,358	7.95%	1,466	8.53%	1,591	17.16%
% OF FTE STUDENTS ON SCHOLARSHIP	50.43%	0.32%	50.59%	16.66%	59.01%	17.03%
ENDOWMENT MARKET VALUE (GENERAL INVESTMENT POOL)	148,133,997	54.72%	229,193,992	25.71%	288,117,201	94.50%

### Observer Coverage . . .

*Continued from page 1*

to know who is being affected by the changes, the *Observer* will carry that information as well. The section of the paper formerly called "New Faces" is now "Transitions." Along with new employees joining the College, "Transitions" will report routinely on all faculty and staff transfers and departures, including those related to the elimination of the structural deficit.

### Have a Question?

The *Observer* editor will meet regularly with Andy Evans, vice president for finance, and

others to find out what changes are being planned and carried out. If you have a question about the structural deficit that you would like Evans to answer for *Observer* readers, you may send your question to the *Observer*, 153 West Lorain. You may also call the editor, Linda Grashoff, at x8463, or leave your question on the *Observer* answering machine.

### Intermediate Updates

Between issues of the *Observer* intermediate updates about the structural deficit and what the College is doing about it will appear, as needed, in *Oberlin Notes* and in campuswide mailings.

# News Notes



Professor of Flute **Michel Debost** has received a Distinguished Achievement Award for excellence in educational journalism from the Educational Press Association of America for his column, "Debost's Comments," which appears regularly in *Flute Talk* magazine. • **Jeffrey Hamburger**, Irvin E. Houck associate professor in the humanities, has been named one of three members of the advisory board for a project of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris: the catalog of German illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages. • **Albert Miller**, assistant professor of religion, was quoted in the October 30 *Washington Post* concerning language Louis Farrakhan used in his address at the Million Man March. Point-



sory board for a project of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris: the catalog of German illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages. • **Albert Miller**, assistant professor of religion, was quoted in the October 30 *Washington Post* concerning language Louis Farrakhan used in his address at the Million Man March. Point-



ing out Farrakhan's reference to the Washington monument as an "Egyptian obelisk," Miller said that Farrakhan's words were coded to convey the idea "that the Washington Monument is African, and that the symbols that the American government is based upon are in fact based on Africa." In his speech Farrakhan also identified George Washington as a Mason, and Miller told the *Post* that the Masonic tradition "is based on Egyptian symbols, which [Farrakhan] sees, and many

African Americans see, as being African and appropriated by Europeans." Miller is an expert on African-American religion; he attended the Million Man March. • Professor of Pianoforte **Peter Takács** performed November 11 at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. He recently accompanied violinist Lee Chin Siow '95 for an artist's recital-series performance in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. • **Jim Walsh**, assistant professor of mathematics, presented two papers at the recent joint meeting of the American Mathematical Society and the Mathematical Association of America (MAA), held January 9-13, 1996. He based his first talk, "Fractals and the Geometry of Linear Transformations," on an article he has forthcoming in the *College Mathematics Journal*. The paper described how Walsh has incorporated certain ideas about fractals into the second-year linear algebra course through student investigations using the computer. In his second talk, "Torus Maps and Closed Queuing Network Models," Walsh presented recent research into the problem of understanding the behavior of closed queuing networks by taking a dynamical systems approach. • Four publications produced in the Office of Communications have won Vision awards from the Cleveland chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC). *Around the Square*, the publication about students and campus news distributed to alumni, friends, and employees of the College, has won an Award of Excellence. The College of Arts and Sciences viewbook and the Conservatory of Music search poster, both aimed at potential Oberlin students, have received, respectively, an Award of Merit and honorable mention. The annual fund brochure, which is mailed to alumni, earned an Award of Merit.



## Transitions

The spring semester opens with the appearance of new faces on campus and the departure of familiar ones. Especially—but not only—because of personnel changes anticipated as the College eliminates its \$3 million structural deficit, the *Observer* begins, with this issue, to take note not only of the comings of Oberlin College colleagues but their transfers and departures as well. Anita Buckmaster, intern in the Office of Communications, writes the profiles of new employees. Information about departures comes from the Office of Human Resources.

### New Faculty and Staff

**Wendy Brisbane** (Kent State University B.A. 1994) is registrarial intern at the Allen Memorial Art Museum (AMAM). She has worked as a records research assistant at the AMAM and as a collections assistant at the Kent State University Museum. Brisbane is working on her master's degree in art history at Kent State and is married to Jeffrey M. Brisbane. **Russell Byers** (West Side Institute 1976) is heating plant stationary engineer. After leaving the army in 1959 he worked in heavy construction in Pennsylvania, where he later did carpenter bridge work and built houses. He was a blacksmith at Mondie Forge in Cleveland before entering West Side Institute. From 1976 to 1982 he was employed at U.S. Steel in Lorain, and from 1982 to 1994 he was self-employed in the floor-covering business. He is married to Joyce A. Byers and enjoys golf and racket ball. **Charles Mason** (Queen's College, Cambridge University B.A., University of California-Berkeley M.A. 1993) is curator of Asian Art at the Allen Memorial Art Museum. Mason has been a lecturer in art history at the University of California-Berkeley, a curatorial intern at the San Francisco Asian Art Museum, and a research associate at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. A recipient of a Mellon Foundation Scholarship and a Jacob V. Javitz Fellowship, he is completing his Ph.D. at U.C. Berkeley. Originally from Cleveland Heights, Mason enjoys antique collecting, fishing, and wine. He is married to Hannah Nendick Mason. **Maxim E. Mogilevsky** (Moscow Conservatory B.A., Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory Master's Diploma, Indiana University M.M., 1995) is visiting assistant professor of piano. A native of St. Petersburg, Mogilevsky has performed with many orchestras and festivals in Europe and Japan. From 1991 to 1995, he was adjunct professor of piano and assistant to Professor of Piano Alexander Toradze at the University of Indiana-South Bend. He has won prizes at the Tokyo International Piano Competition, the Unisa Piano Competition of South Africa, and the International Music Competition of Porto (Portugal). Mogilevsky enjoys literature, painting, and poetry. **Karel Paukert** (Prague Conservatory, the Royal Conservatory in Ghent, Washington University) is teacher of organ. Paukert has been the principal oboist with the Iceland Na-



Brisbane

is working on her master's degree in art history at Kent State and is married to Jeffrey M. Brisbane. **Russell Byers** (West Side Institute 1976) is heating plant stationary engineer. After leaving the army in 1959 he worked in heavy construction in Pennsylvania, where he later did carpenter bridge work and built houses. He was a blacksmith at Mondie Forge in Cleveland before entering West Side Institute. From 1976 to 1982 he was employed at U.S. Steel in Lorain, and from 1982 to 1994 he was self-employed in the floor-covering business. He is married to Joyce A. Byers and enjoys golf and racket ball. **Charles Mason** (Queen's College, Cambridge University B.A., University of California-Berkeley M.A. 1993) is curator of Asian Art at the Allen Memorial Art Museum. Mason has been a lecturer in art history at the University of California-Berkeley, a curatorial intern at the San Francisco Asian Art Museum, and a research associate at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. A recipient of a Mellon Foundation Scholarship and a Jacob V. Javitz Fellowship, he is completing his Ph.D. at U.C. Berkeley. Originally from Cleveland Heights, Mason enjoys antique collecting, fishing, and wine. He is married to Hannah Nendick Mason. **Maxim E. Mogilevsky** (Moscow Conservatory B.A., Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory Master's Diploma, Indiana University M.M., 1995) is visiting assistant professor of piano. A native of St. Petersburg, Mogilevsky has performed with many orchestras and festivals in Europe and Japan. From 1991 to 1995, he was adjunct professor of piano and assistant to Professor of Piano Alexander Toradze at the University of Indiana-South Bend. He has won prizes at the Tokyo International Piano Competition, the Unisa Piano Competition of South Africa, and the International Music Competition of Porto (Portugal). Mogilevsky enjoys literature, painting, and poetry. **Karel Paukert** (Prague Conservatory, the Royal Conservatory in Ghent, Washington University) is teacher of organ. Paukert has been the principal oboist with the Iceland Na-



Paukert

tional Symphony Orchestra and the deputy organist of St. Bavon Cathedral in Ghent. He has taught at Washington University (St. Louis), Northwestern University, and the Cleveland Institute of Music. He has lectured at the University of Michigan, Yale, and Harvard. Paukert has performed at Alice Tully Hall, Notre Dame, Zurich's Tonhalle, the Tokyo Cathedral, and the Royal Festival Hall in London. Winner of Cleveland's Art Prize for 1995, Paukert has also received a diploma in the Haarlem Improvisational Contest. He will teach at Oberlin on Mondays, and will continue his other positions as the chief curator of musical arts at the Cleveland Museum of Art and organist and choir-master of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Cleveland Heights. He and his wife, Noriko Fujii-Paukert, have three children, Kajo, Cathy, and Christopher. He enjoys tennis, hiking, and resistance training. **Sylvia Watanabe** (University of Hawaii B.A., University of New York M.A., University of Michigan) is visiting assistant professor of creative writing. She has conducted writing workshops at Western Michigan University and has taught at California State University, the universities of California-Berkeley, and Hawaii, and the State University of New York. Doubleday published a collection of her short works of fiction, *Talking to the Dead*, in 1992. Other examples of her work have appeared in 12 anthologies and periodicals. She co-edited *Home to Stay*, an anthology of Asian-American women's fiction. Honors for her work include the PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Award for 1992-1993, a 1991 O. Henry prize, and listing among the 1989-1990 distinguished fiction for the Pushcart Prize XIV. She has received an NEA creative-writing award

and the James Clavell National Literary Award for 1985. Watanabe is married to William Osborn and enjoys cooking and gardening.

### Changes in Appointment

**David Foos** is programmer/analyst in the Houck Computing Center again—back at Oberlin after working for Conley, Cantiano, & Associates a few years. He had worked for the College from 1985 to 1994. This semester **Inez James**, head women's volleyball coach and instructor in athletics and physical education, is also assistant women's lacrosse coach.

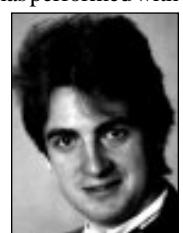
### Departures

**Michael Dieckmann**, acting associate director of computing, and **Diem Nguyen**, intern in the Office of Student Life and Services' Multicultural Resource Center, left Oberlin December 31, 1995. Dieckmann, hired in as a technical-support programmer, had been at Oberlin since 1983; Nguyen had been with the College a semester. **Lawrence Griggs**, stationary engineer in the central heating plant, retired December 29, 1995, after 20 years of service to the College. **Richard Schoonmaker**, emeritus professor of chemistry, and **Priscilla Smith**, emeritus professor of music education, have returned to retirement after teaching last semester. The following visiting assistant professors had one-semester appointments that ended December 31, 1995: **Marjorie Castle**, Department of Politics; **Myung Kim**, Creative Writing Program; **Susan Moses**, Division of Strings (violin/cello); **Jennifer Rinehart**, Division of Music Theory; **Kevin Rozario**, Department of History; and **Kevin Snape**, Environmental Studies Program. **Lynn Fisher**, visiting instructor in anthropology, left Oberlin January 31, 1995, her appointment having been for two semesters (last spring and this past fall) and a Winter Term.

## Letters

### Marian Baum Is Research Associate, Too

I am proud to be an Oberlin College research associate in psychology, first appointed in 1975. I am now invested in a project for citizen involvement in the Oberlin public schools called the Listening Post. About 10 years ago, with colleagues, I founded a program at Allen Memorial Hospital where children whose families are expecting babies attend a class in becoming older siblings [see the *Observer* of October 2, 1987, and May 7, 1987]. In 1993 Harry Dawe, associate dean and director of residential services at the College, and I began working together to found an institute for learning in retirement [see the *Observer* of September 30, 1993], a venture now called Living & Learning Institute and administered jointly by Oberlin and Lorain County Community colleges.



Marian Baum  
Research Associate in Psychology

*The editor regrets that, because of incomplete information supplied to the Observer, Marian Baum's information was not included*

in the article "Affiliates and Associates Enrich Oberlin's Cultural Mix" in the December 7, 1995, issue.

### OC Parent Lauds President for Words about Libraries

I entered a graduate program in 1994, when my daughter entered Oberlin as a freshman. Learning to research effectively in today's computerized libraries has been an essential part of my return to school. My experience supports President Nancy Dye's vision of the librarian as teacher and research assistant whose role is becoming ever more vital to students and scholars (*Observer*, December 7, 1995). Perhaps the most valuable piece of the president's message is the distinction she draws between abbreviated and sustained reading. Education must continue to include as priorities time and space for reflection and human interaction. At a time when alarmingly few key decision makers take this into account, I applaud Oberlin's president.

Wendy Roberts  
Baltimore, Maryland

**The Observer** (ISSN 0193-368X), the faculty and staff newspaper of Oberlin College, published 17 times a year, is delivered to employees and made available to students on campus. Copies are mailed to retired employees, certain alumni and friends of the college, and paid subscribers. Six issues a year, including this one, are mailed to parents of current students. The editor welcomes off-campus readers but does not always provide background information for them: news that has already been reported in the *Review* (the student newspaper) or announced elsewhere may not be reported fully or prominently in the *Observer*.

Editor: Linda K. Grashoff. Photo editor: Rick Sherlock. Editorial assistant: Anita Buckmaster.

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## *Observations*

# What's Conservative about Conservatism?

By David Orr

The philosophy of conservatism has swept the political field virtually everywhere, and virtually everywhere conservatives have been hostile to the cause of conservation. This is more than an ironic inconsistency. Because of the growing power of conservatives at all levels of government, the wisdom and foresight with which conservatives deal with long-term environmental issues is a matter of great consequence for the American people and their children.

Do conservatism and conservation share more than a common linguistic heritage? I believe they do. The present antipathy of conservatives to conservation suggests, at best, confusion about what it means to be conservative about soils, biota, wildlife, and natural resources. To make such a case, however, it is necessary first to define authentic conservatism.

Conservative philosopher Russell Kirk proposes six "first principles" of true conservatism:

- belief in a transcendent moral order
- preference for social continuity, i.e., the "devil they know to the devil they don't know"
- belief in "the wisdom of our ancestors"
- tendency to be guided by prudence
- "affection for the proliferating intricacy of long-established social institutions"
- belief that "human nature suffers irredeemably from certain faults"

For Kirk the essence of conservatism is the "love of order." Eighteenth-century British philosopher and statesman Edmund Burke, the founding father of modern conservatism and as much admired as unread, said the goal of order is to harmonize the distant past with the distant future. To this end Burke, like present-day Congressional Republicans, thought in terms of a contract, but not one about "things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perishable nature." Burke's societal contract was not about the distribution of spoils (such as tax breaks) but about a partnership promoting science, art, virtue, and perfection, none of which could be achieved by a single generation without veneration for the past and healthy regard for those to follow.

### Burke's Contract

Burke's contract was between "those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born." Those "possessing any portion of power," in Burke's words, "ought to be strongly and awfully impressed with an idea that they act in trust." For Burke, freedom in this contractual state is "not solitary, unconnected, individual, selfish Liberty. As if every man was to regulate the whole of his conduct by his own will." It is rather "that state of things in which liberty is secured by the equality of restraint."

As the ecological shadow of the present over future generations has lengthened, the wisdom of Burke's concern for the welfare of future generations has become more evident. If conservatism means anything at all, other than the preservation of the rules by which one class enriches itself at the expense of another, it means the conservation of what Burke called "an entailed inheritance derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity; as an estate belonging to the people."

Were Burke alive today, he would agree that this inheritance must include not only the laws, traditions, and customs of society, but also the ecological foundations on which law, tradition, custom, and public order in-

evitably depend. A society that will not conserve its topsoil cannot preserve social order for long. A society that squanders its natural heritage like a spendthrift heir can build only the most fleeting prosperity, leaving all who follow in perpetual misery. And societies that disrupt the earth's biogeochemical balances and destroy its biota are the most radical of all. If not restrained, they could force all thereafter to live in an ecological ruin and impoverishment that we can scarcely imagine.

### What is Conservative?

Taking as the standard Burke's view that "society is indeed a contract" between the living, the dead, and those to be born, what can be said about the conservatism of contemporary conservatives?

What, for example, is conservative about "getting government off the backs" of citizens while leaving corporations there? Burke, who had a healthy dislike for all abuses of power, would have wanted all tyranny curtailed, including that of corporations. How do price increases, for example, differ from tax increases? How do cancers caused by toxic emissions or deaths resulting from safety defects in automobiles differ from unjust executions? How does the ability of capital to abandon communities for others that it can exploit more thoroughly differ from government mismanagement? To those who suffer the consequences, such differences are largely academic. The point is lost, nonetheless, on most contemporary conservatives who often detect the sins of government in parts-per-billion while overlooking corporate malfeasance by the ton. Burke, in our time, would not have been so negligent about economic tyranny.

What is conservative about squandering for all time our biological heritage under the pretext of protecting temporary property rights? Conservatives have long scorned public efforts, meager as they are, to protect endangered species because, on occasion, doing so may infringe on the ability of property owners to enrich themselves. Any restrictions on private property use—even those that benefit the public and promote the interest of posterity—they regard as an unlawful "taking" of property. But this view of property rights finds little support in a careful reading of either John Locke, from whom we've derived much of our land-use law and philosophy, or Edmund Burke. For Locke, property rights were valid only as long as they did not infringe on the rights of others to have "enough and as good." It is reasonable to believe that this ought to include the rights of future generations to a biota as abundant and as good as that which sustained earlier generations. And for Locke, "nothing was made by God for Man to spoil or destroy," a line that has not yet been fully noted by many

conservatives. Locke did not regard property rights as absolute even in a world with a total population of less than a billion, and neither should we in a world of 5.7 billion.

### Energy Efficiency

What's conservative about conservatives' persistent opposition to national efforts to promote energy efficiency? Even on narrow economic grounds, energy efficiency has been shown to be advantageous. The United States' being half as efficient in its use of energy as Japan and Germany, for example, places it at a competitive disadvantage estimated to be between 5 and 8 percent for comparable goods and services.

What's conservative about conservatives' denial of the mounting scientific evidence of impending climatic change? Nothing could be more deleterious to the interests of future generations than for this generation to leave behind an unstable climate and the possibility that those changes might be rapid and self-reinforcing. Short of nuclear war no act by the present generation would constitute a greater dereliction of duty or breach of trust with its descendants. Regardless of whether climatic change occurs as many scientists believe it may, the willingness of many conservatives to run the risk of irreversible global changes that would undermine the well-being of future generations is a profoundly imprudent precedent. We have no right to run such risks especially when the consequences will fall most heavily on those who can have no part in making the choice.

Government Like Business?

What is conservative about the extension of market philosophy and narrow economic standards into all realms of public policy? Many conservatives want to make government work just the way business works. Government certainly ought to do its work efficiently, often much more efficiently than it now does. That much is common sense, but it is a far cry from believing that public affairs can be conducted as a business or that economic efficiency alone is an adequate substitute for farsighted public policy. Many things necessary for a decent society—such as compassion, justice, human dignity, environmental quality, the preservation of natural areas and wildlife, art, poetry, beautiful music, good libraries, stable communities, good education, and public spiritedness—can never meet a narrow test of profitability, nor should they be required to do so. This, too, is common sense. These things are good in and of themselves and should not be subject to the same standards used for selling beer and deodorants.

What is conservative about perpetual eco-

nomic growth? Economic expansion has become the most radicalizing force for change in the modern world. Given enough time, it will first cheapen and then destroy the legacy we pass on to the future. The ecological results of economic growth at its present scale and velocity are pollution, resource exhaustion, climatic instability, and biotic impoverishment. Economic growth destroys communities, traditions, and cultural diversity. And through the sophisticated cultivation of the seven deadly sins of pride, envy, anger, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust it destroys the character and virtues of the people whose wants it supposedly satisfies.

Conservatives (and liberals) have been unwilling to confront the difference between growth and real prosperity and to tally up the full costs of growth for our descendants. In the words of former Reagan administration Defense Department official Fred Ikle, "Growth utopianism is a gigantic global Ponzi scheme [leading to] collapse, engulfing everyone one in misery." Ikle continues to say: "The cause of this collapse would not be a shortage of material goods but the destruction of society's conservative conscience by our Jacobins of growth."

Conservatives' by-and-large deep hostility to evidence of ecological deterioration and to the cause of conservation is profoundly unconservative. A genuine and consistent conservatism would aim to conserve the biological and ecological foundations of social order and pass them on as part of "an entailed inheritance derived to us from our forefathers and to be transmitted to our posterity." If words mean anything at all, there can be no other standard for an authentic conservatism.

### Genuine Conservatism

Like that defined in Kirk's "first principles," a genuine conservatism is grounded in the belief in a transcendent moral order in which our proper role is that of trustees subject to higher authority. Genuine conservatism would honor and respect the need for both social and ecological continuity. It would respect the wisdom of the past and the biological wisdom accumulated over millions of years of evolution. A genuine conservatism would prudently avoid jeopardizing our legacy to future generations for any reason of temporary economic advantage. It would conserve diversity of all kinds. And a genuine conservatism, chastened by the recognition of human imperfectability, would not create technological, economic, and social conditions in which imperfect and ignorant humans might create ecological havoc.

An authentic conservatism has much to offer in the cause of conservation. Conservatives are right that markets, under some circumstances, can be more effective tools for conservation than government regulation can be. Conservatives' dislike of taxation might be the basis on which to shift taxes from things we want, such as income and employment, to things we do not want, such as pollution and inefficiency. An authentic conservatism would encourage a sense of discipline, frugality, and thrift in the recognition, as Burke put it, that: "Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites."

*David Orr is professor of environmental studies. His suggestions for further reading related to this essay are available as a hyperlink from this paragraph in the electronic version of the Observer (<http://www.oberlin.edu/~observer/main.html>).*

## Further Reading

A Reading List to Accompany David Orr's  
"Observations" piece in the *Observer* of  
February 1, 1996,  
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