

Oberlin Alums on Oberlin-in-London

The semester I spent in London on the Danenberg Program was, by far, the best semester of my Oberlin career. Like many study-abroad programs, the London semester gave me the opportunity to learn about myself and my world, to cultivate life skills and cultural sophistication, in ways I could not have here at Oberlin. *Unlike* many similar programs, however, the London semester also helped me grow, rather explosively, as a student: I am not exaggerating when I say that the London Program was the most academically rigorous and intellectually stimulating semester I have had at Oberlin.

The London Program is the archetype, the exemplar, of Oberlin's educational ideals: it is committed to international studies, cultural diversity, historical and geographical contextualization, and interdisciplinarity. In addition, its small seminar classes and the closeness it fosters between students and professors allow for the very teaching and learning that drew me to Oberlin. It is no wonder to me that many of Oberlin's finest graduates in the last twenty-five-odd years have gone on the London Program. A world-famous novelist, a score of successful academics, even a handful of Oberlin College Trustees – the success of this program's alumni attest to its being part of the core of this college's greatness.

– '05 grad

My experience through Oberlin-in-London opened new vistas of work and exploration. Upon graduation, I moved to Russia, and then to Turkey, as an ESL instructor. I spent two years abroad before returning to the United States. I was the first of my family to live abroad; before traveling to London, I was unsure if I would ever gain such an opportunity. Having been raised in a working-class family in small-town Nevada, I had no model for foreign travel and foreign scholarship. Though economic barriers were steep, these cultural barriers were just as difficult to overcome. Without the economic and academic flexibility of Oberlin-in-London, I would not have had the bravery or the cultural resource to make the jump I did upon graduation.

– '99 grad

The London program is Oberlin distilled: learning and labor on an intimate scale. I was on the program in 1987, and it affected me in ways that reverberate to this day. I can honestly say that I learned more in London – more about theater, literature, art, and most importantly *myself* – than in any other semester.

– '89 grad

I spent the spring semester of my sophomore year, in early 2001, studying politics in London, and I can honestly and unhesitatingly say that those were the happiest three months of my life. That was also a period in my life where my horizons were exponentially broadened; and when I look back to the experiences I have had that have made me who and what I am today, my experience with the London Program is absolutely first on the list.

– '03 grad

My semester in London was my best semester of college and the happiest, most fulfilling time of my life. It was in London that I began my love affair with city living. Now I'm working on a doctorate in urban geography. And I have London to thank for starting me down this road.

– '94 grad

The London Program was not only a high point of my Oberlin education, it was truly a high point of my life. It cracked open the world for me, taught me how to live in and absorb a new culture. It gave me the confidence to later travel alone through Europe and Asia. It is part of what inspired and encouraged me to become a writer. I still think about what I learned, saw, ate, and experienced that year. I still draw on it. I can even still can navigate the winding streets of London like a pro (more confidently, my husband says, than I can drive the streets of Berkeley where I now live) because of all the miles I walked during those months, all the museums I saw, all the theaters I called home. It was one of those rare moments when I knew as it happened that I was having a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

London made literature, history, theater, symphony, opera and film living, vital things to me in a way the classroom never fully could. It was a huge gift and an essential part of a liberal arts education.

– '83 grad

Intellectually, it was like nothing I'd ever experienced before; London's theaters – and, indeed, our every experience of the city – were fodder for the deepest, most engaging discussions of my academic career. I could feel my brain growing smarter as we took the basic skills of textual analysis that we'd learned in our English classes at Oberlin and used them to engage with living, breathing texts and performances in the world's most exciting city for theater. I grew up that semester: intellectually, socially, personally. I found my semester in London to be necessarily individualistic and communal at the same time, in a way that distilled the essence of the college experience – the Oberlin experience – for me. It's where I truly learned to think...and to think like an Obie, in particular, with the training wheels off. There's no other experience, at home or abroad, that could have come close to doing that for me.

– '96 grad

My experience in the Oberlin-in-London program was the distillation of Oberlin's educational philosophy, that learning is not an ivory tower activity, but takes place in the world, and is to be found everywhere as we move through life. Whether I was doing my course assignments, such as walking through Mayfair and Belgravia in order to date the rowhouses using detailed differences in the architecture, or just living my life in London, riding the tube or shopping at the market, I was learning every moment. I came to Oberlin because I wanted to be challenged and pushed to grow at every turn, not just academically, but psychologically and spiritually. My time on campus certainly fulfilled my hopes, but the Oberlin-in-London program exceeded anything I could have thought possible from a learning environment.

Oberlin-in-London is different because it is just that: the values and spirit of Oberlin transplanted to London, with all of its great resources, particularly for those interested in British and world literature, European history, art history, architecture, and contemporary global politics. Rather than focus on language acquisition or heritage-seeking, Oberlin-in-London tackles the big cultural, historical, and political questions, as only an Oberlin program would seek to do.

– '91 grad

The London Program was the single most formative event in my college career. The education that I received during my semester abroad was critical to my future academic work, and my memories of those fantastic months remain a part of me today. It was the first time that I committed fully to my studies and learned to love my work.

– '95 grad

My semester on the London Program was the most intellectually and emotionally exhilarating and empowering experience of my Oberlin career. The program exemplifies what Oberlin can be at its best. For me it fulfilled a deep desire to immerse myself fully in an intimate, passionate, and intensely intellectual community of Oberlin students, and I found myself embracing everything that London was capable of giving me with a thirst for knowledge and experience that had previously been present but timid within me. Since returning from the program I have found that intellectual, academic life and emotional life can no longer operate as separate entities for me. The program led me to approach the remainder of my time at Oberlin with a new enthusiasm and confidence in every aspect of my life.

The practical implications of the London Program are tremendous. I found my first experience living in the heart of a big city to be invigorating rather than overwhelming and alienating, as I had feared. I learned to trust myself entirely in terms of navigating the city and using many of its resources. The friendships I formed on the London Program have changed my life and opened my eyes. They have helped me grow up in exactly the ways I had hoped I would during college.

– '05 grad

The London Program changed my life. Before I went on the program, I was a country girl from the backwoods of Michigan who'd never seen Shakespeare staged. I had never gotten the opportunity to live in a culturally rich environment, and I had only left the country one other time in my life. Participating in the London Program was probably the greatest privilege I have ever known. It taught me the beauty of theater, the importance of collective dialogue, and opened me up to countless enriching non-academic experiences. Because of the London Program, I left the backwoods of Michigan after graduation and moved to New York, where I am continuing my academic career and my cultural fulfillment. I was able to make this move because living in London not only made me confident I could live in a huge, thriving city, but made me aware that it was the only way I could happily live my life.

– '99 grad