

Welcome to Oberlin

Greetings and Instructions from the Dean

Welcome to the Oberlin family!

Congratulations on your acceptance to Oberlin. We are thrilled that you will be joining us this fall, and we very much look forward to meeting you and helping you begin your Oberlin career.

This Big Book of Forms is intended to make your preparations to come to Oberlin as easy as possible. The book includes most of the forms you need to complete and return to the College; please note, however, that the housing and dining applications must be submitted online.

The book also contains explanations of College policies, other important information, and essays by two professors, one from the College of Arts and Sciences and one from the Conservatory of Music, about an Oberlin education. Deadlines for submission are noted on each form, and a checklist at the front of the book will help keep you on track as you send in your paperwork. Please feel free to contact any of the offices requesting a form from you; office e-mail addresses and telephone numbers appear on each form.

You may also want to review the academic calendar for 2009-10, located on the inside front cover, as well as visit the many Oberlin web sites listed throughout the book.

Your years at Oberlin, besides being exciting, will be filled with intellectual and personal growth. You will find yourself in an incredibly rich community of scholars, artists, and musicians who will challenge and inspire you to learn deeply, create imaginatively, and become a truly engaged citizen of the world.

Best of luck, and welcome to Oberlin.



Kathryn Stuart, *Dean of Studies*

The Extreme Practicality of a Liberal Arts Education

It is now just over thirty years since the time I arrived at Oberlin as a freshman, the term used back then to indicate first-year students. I was both excited and terrified. The course catalog, which corresponded to a far more narrow curriculum than the one offered by Oberlin today, nevertheless presented endless possibilities. I wanted to learn everything. But as someone of decidedly working-class origins, I was haunted by the need to make it all somehow

“practical.” Like most anyone in my position, I had come to college partly in search of upward mobility. How could this smorgasbord of courses spread before me possibly help?

If I’ve learned anything in the intervening decades, it is that nothing is ultimately more practical than a liberal arts education. Properly pursued, the college experience is about learning life skills that are absolutely essential to success in most any career. Ours is a world in which very few people can be assured lifetime employment. The only real protection in such a world rests on intellectual flexibility and a kind of drive that comes from the experience of intense study. Consequently, Oberlin requires students to engage in several different forms of learning—in math and the natural sciences, the social sciences, and in the humanities. In addition, we expect students to acquire vital but nonquantifiable skills such as stress management, time management, and an ability to overcome adversity through sheer hard work. I vividly remember in my first semester of college confronting the possibility of academic failure, in a chemistry class. Prevailing in that course did not make me more than a mediocre chemist, but it taught me something about persistence that I have never forgotten.

The primary purpose of a liberal arts education is to prepare students to do something else, even if that something else is ultimately a career in academia. The proper set of choices will vary. Some of your choices are made for you, through distribution requirements, as well as requirements in quantitative proficiency and cultural diversity. Some majors have involved requirements of their own, while others do not. No student should leave Oberlin without a significant exposure to music. But basically, you have immense freedom in structuring your educational experience, along with the responsibility that comes with it. I always tell my advisees that the computer-generated number I give them that enables them to sign up for courses indicates that a conversation has taken place, not that I endorse their choices. Never in their lives will most students have so many dedicated professionals swirling around them tending to their welfare. But your success or failure at Oberlin is primarily up to you.

In my opinion, the properly structured education at Oberlin includes both challenge and self-indulgence. Academic rigor can generally be taken for granted—there are few undemanding courses at Oberlin. But you should seek out courses in which you have no prior expertise, and perhaps no self-evident talent. It is an invaluable experience to learn that you are no longer the smartest person in the room, and that you might never be more than barely adequate in a

given subject. But college is also a time for a bit of self-indulgence, in academic as well as cocurricular activities. To no small degree, success in college is about persistence. Persistence comes from loving what you are doing—whether studying biochemistry or Japanese poetry, playing lacrosse or the cello, or organizing a food co-op or a demonstration against global warming. It is not just desirable to indulge your passions in this sense, but essential. There is no more practical time than the first semester of college to study and otherwise engage yourself in something simply because you love doing so. The confidence that comes from succeeding at something you love is eminently transferable.

You will find innumerable things to balance as you work your way through Oberlin. You will never be able to take all of the courses that interest you. There will never be enough time for you to be truly “caught up” in your work. You will learn at least as much outside the classroom as in it, particularly from your fellow Oberlin students, some of the most interesting people you will ever meet. You will find that a major matters a great deal while you are in college. But for most people, the college major matters much less later on. A major is a means toward the end of an excellent liberal arts education rather than an end in itself. Above all, take advantage of as many of the magnificent things Oberlin has to offer as you can. Practically speaking, this is the best favor you can do yourself.



Leonard V. Smith, *Frederick B. Artz Professor of History*
Oberlin College, Class of 1980

Thoughts on Educating the Musician in the 21st Century

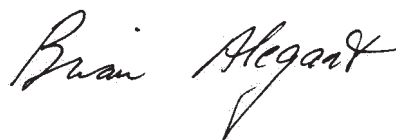
Oberlin is committed to educating and nurturing the next generation of musicians, scholars, and artists. We will help you become an excellent musician, one who performs compellingly, thinks critically, writes persuasively, and speaks articulately. We will encourage you to take creative and intellectual risks, and to be conversant (if not fluent) in a variety of musical styles and genres. And we will make it possible for you to have experiences that are usually reserved for professionals. For example, Oberlin ensembles have toured China, performed in Carnegie Hall under the direction of Maestro Robert Spano, a 1983 Oberlin gradu-

ate, and staged the United States premiere of Olga Neuwirth’s dramatic musical theater work *Lost Highway*. All three projects garnered critical acclaim.

I offer the following words of advice to conservatory and double-degree students on how to get the most out of your Oberlin education. First, expand your horizons, both in music and the liberal arts. Don’t be afraid to step outside your comfort zone. There is an astonishing array of courses to choose from in the Conservatory and the College of Arts and Sciences. The options can seem bewildering, and you will find that there simply is not enough time to take everything you want to. No matter. Just pursue your passions, and engage.

Secondly, do not expect opportunities to come to you. Figure out what you want to learn and what you want to accomplish, and work toward your goals. During my time at Oberlin I have observed students achieve extraordinary things: composing and staging operas; commissioning and premiering pieces by leading composers; building new instruments; creating cutting-edge installations around the globe; doing community service in such places as Oberlin, Cleveland, New Orleans, Ecuador, Ghana, Mongolia, Nigeria, and Panama; founding such new-music groups as eighth blackbird and the International Contemporary Ensemble; and publishing articles in journals such as *Perspectives of New Music* and *Music Analysis*. Oberlin offers countless opportunities through courses, internships, winter term, private readings, and collaborative work with faculty. Need help getting your project underway? Talk to your advisor and speak with other members of the faculty and administrative staff. Oberlin is a welcoming institution, and you will find that we are genuinely dedicated to nurturing and mentoring our students. However, you may need to take the first step.

My final piece of advice is this: Life is short; just do what you love. If you do your job, and we do ours, then you will realize your musical and intellectual potential. You will learn to think critically, to express yourself eloquently, to work independently and collaboratively, to take risks, to fail occasionally, and to succeed frequently.



Brian Alegant, *Professor of Music Theory*