

THE SENATE INFORMER



The Student Senate is the central governance organization for the student body. It is the principal advocate for the interests of the student body as a whole to the Oberlin administration and faculty, and ensures effective student participation in the faculty governance system. The Senate is a central forum for common dialogue within the student community, and for the development of legislation to actualize common goals.

WHO WE ARE

*By Justin Brogden
Outreach Coordinator*

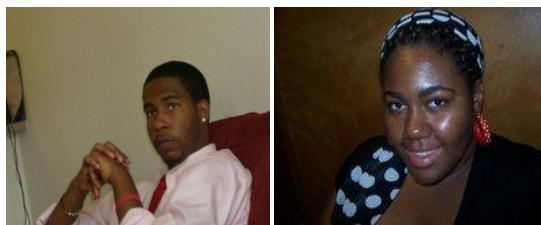
For the most part Student Senate operates under the radar. When I ran in the fall, I asked two questions: 1) could you tell me who your Senators were? And 2) could you tell me what they did? My guess was that most of us would answer “no” to both. Despite the many hours of work the Senators have all logged in the months since, I would suspect the response would be pretty much the same today.

While we may be content to work behind the scenes it’s time the Student Body knew exactly who we are and what we’ve been doing. That’s why with great enthusiasm we have revived the long defunct Student

Senate Newsletter, aptly titled “*The Informer*”. By strengthening the link between Senate and the Student Body we can ensure the transparency and visibility we so desperately need in order to be an effective governing body.

Besides reading *The Informer* students may wish to attend our open plenary sessions from 7 to 9 pm on Sunday evenings in Wilder 215. You can also email us at Student.Senate@oberlin.edu or stop by an individual Senators office hours to learn more.

SENATORS GRUBE AND GREEN RESIGN; REPLACED BY KWAME WEBSTER AND VANESSA COLEMAN



Oberlin's newest Senators: 2nd years Kwame Webster and Vanessa Coleman

After serving more than 1 ½ years on Student Senate, Louis Grube, who most recently served as Associate Liaison stepped down as of March 17th due to time constraints. In a resignation letter he explained: “The most important thing any one senator can do is to make sure they are doing the right thing for the functioning of senate. I don't think I can do this enough to be happy with my abilities as a senator.”

Second year Kwame Webster, who came just twenty votes short of snagging a seat during the highly competitive elections in February will serve out the rest of his term. Senator Luke Squire was chosen as the Senate's new Associate Liaison.

Fourth year Senator Sara Green, who was elected to her first term in the fall, also announced her resignation citing time constraints as well. In a letter she stated: “This was not an easy decision, and I've been thinking it over throughout all of spring break. This semester, I've been struggling to honor the commitments I've made... There are students who would make better use of the position, and such a person should have it.” Of the rest of Senate she said: “[They are] all incredibly inspiring leaders and people,

Spring 2008 Student Senate Office Hours

| <u>Senator</u> | <u>Day</u> | <u>Time</u> | <u>Place</u> |
|----------------|------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Pine | M | 9:00-10:00 am | Writing Center |
| Webster | M | 10:00-11:00am | Saunders Lounge |
| Watiker | M | 1:00-3:00pm | Senate Office |
| Webster | M | 2:00-3:00pm | 1 st floor King |
| Riley | M | 4:30-6:00pm | Azariah's |
| Coleman | Tue | 12:00-1:00pm | Lord Lounge |
| Nguyen | Tue | 2:30-4:30pm | Senate Office |
| Pine | W | 9:00-10:00 am | Writing Center |
| Ferrara | W | 11:00-12:00pm | King 135 |
| Carlson | W | 12:00-1:00pm | Senate Office |
| Shinn-Krantz | W | 3:15-4:15pm | Senate Office |
| Coleman | TH | 12:00-1:00pm | Lord Lounge |
| Hilburger | TH | 4:30-6:00pm | ‘Sco |
| Chilen | TH | 5:00-6:00pm | ‘Sco |
| Klebanoff | F | 12:00-1:00pm | Science Center Atrium |
| Jones | F | 1:00-2:00pm | SFC office |
| Squire | Sat | 2:00-4:00pm | Senate Office |
| Brogden | Sat | 7:00-9:00pm | Senate Office |

*The Senate Office is located at Wilder 222

and it has been a privilege to work with and get to know [them all].”

Sara’s last meeting was March 30th. Second year Vanessa Coleman will serve out the rest of her term.

A NEW ERA

By Colin Jones

Student Finance Committee Chair

The Student Finance Committee has struggled in recent year to keep pace with the rising demands of student organizations. Thanks to the support that SFC has received in the last referendum and from Student Senate, the committee has been able to instigate and sustain real progress instead of merely talking about it.

To that end, Senators and members of SFC developed a proposal to increase the student activity fee by \$200 over the next four years, from its current \$218 to \$418 by the end of the 2011-2012 year. After working through Winter Term and into February, this taskforce prepared the proposal for the General Faculty, which approved the measure unanimously.

In practical terms, this will mean SFC will have \$400,000 more dollars to allocate after the full increase is in place in the fall 2011. This begins with the 2008-2009 year and an increase of \$100,000. It is our hope that students can start to put this change into action. SFC and Senate are prepared to work diligently and request the resources necessary to maximize the efficient and transparent use of these funds.

Foremost in this effort we are attempting to streamline the SFC office and move towards digitizing pertinent information that can be easily accessible to students through the web. This is not by any means a completed task, but

instead a process, which SFC will enact in the coming years.

For the future, we hope to develop processes for the development of larger capital investments, such as the creation of the South Basement Space. Student can begin to think ambitiously, but it is also important to understand fully developed strategies that involve administrative and alumni support will be the most likely to make an impact. The time is now for students to back up our creativity with the funds and the will necessary to make positive change at Oberlin.

HONORS AT GRADUATION



By Marc Shinn-Krantz

Process Coordinator

Last semester, the Honors at Graduation Committee—chaired by chemistry professor Robert Thompson—brought a motion to the College Faculty to change the way that honors at graduation works. While, the Honors at Graduation Committee presented some information on their work to the Student Senate last spring, many Senators felt that the committee did not adequately follow up on a commitment to further involve the Senate or the student body. The Senate has spent a great deal of effort this year in working to inform the student body and gather student opinion on the proposed changes to the honors at graduation system.

Committees

Are you interested in helping shape policies that affect your experience here at Oberlin? Do you want to provide your input to administrators, faculty and staff who will seriously take your considerations into the decision making process? Do you want to help allocate money to host different concerts, bands, and other events?

Apply for a committee! Sitting on committees is one experience that really allows students to learn the many ways Oberlin College operates and functions, and as a result, gives students a way to express their own concerns and voice their needs. Committees consist of faculty, staff and student members, and range in various categories and topics including admissions, student finance, educational planning and policy, athletics, housing and dining, student honor, library, LGBT concerns, environmental sustainability and more!

Most committees differ in meeting schedules with most meeting only a couple times a semester to some meeting every other week. Student run committees may be more or less demanding. For more specific qualifications, time commitments and overall information on committees, visit the Student Senate website and check out the page on committees! To apply for a committee, please e-mail the student senate committee coordinators at oc.committees@gmail.com.

Honors at Graduation continued)

This proposal would have instituted a General Honors (commonly referred to as Latin Honors) system beginning next spring. Students would be awarded honors on their diplomas based purely on their GPA, with approximately the top 25% of students being awarded *Cum Laude*, *Magna Cum Laude*, or *Summa Cum Laude* in any given year. The proposal would also have removed college set GPA restrictions on the current departmental honors system. Currently, students receive departmental honors at graduation if they satisfactorily complete a capstone project and if they meet minimum GPA requirements set by the College. Many colleges and universities, including a number of our peer institutions have similar honors at graduation systems. Oberlin itself had a Latin Honors system that was discontinued in 1971 when the credit/no entry system was instituted. Now that the credit/no-entry system has been removed for all incoming students, the committee chose to propose a similar system to what Oberlin had in 1971.

Based on concerns among various Senators and concerns that had been voiced to the Senate, we decided to put a question on the student referendum gauging student opinion on this issue. Senate also decided to host an open forum to discuss the proposed changes. I would like to thank Professor Thompson for agreeing to attend this forum and fielding numerous questions and comments. A number of concerns were raised at this forum and during Senate plenary meetings. Some were concerned that instituting an honors system based on GPA could make Oberlin students more competitive and more

grade driven. Others thought that it was unfair to institute a system that would take effect immediately—applying to students who had already completed more than half of their college careers, and intending to graduate in 2009. Some people worried that instituting a General Honors system would discourage students from taking classes outside of their “comfort zone,” a major aspect of a liberal arts education. Finally, some students simply did not see why an honors system was necessary and saw no reason for change.

The first time the College Faculty considered this proposal, the referendum was still in progress. Upon urging from Senate, the faculty voted to table the issue until the results had been finalized. Over half of the student body voted on this issue, with 427 votes (30%) in favor of adopting the honors proposal, 994 votes (70%) against adopting the proposal, and 58 abstentions.

When the College Faculty reconsidered the issue this semester, the faculty present voted 25-10 against adopting the proposal. Many professors cited student opinion in their reason for opposing General Honors. The Honors at Graduation Committee brought forth another motion that the committee should be disbanded following the 2008-2009 academic year and that its duties should be transferred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. It seems unlikely that the committee will bring forth further proposals for change in its final year, but if it does, Senate will be sure to work with the committee to create a proposal that the student body can rally behind.

STATE OF THE CONSTITUTION

By Ben Klebanoff

Organizational Liaison

The Student Senate has worked hard over the past few years to increase our legitimacy. This has involved trying to become a more transparent institution, and ensuring that our practices are in line with the desires of the student body. This year, the Senate has worked hard to ensure that the Constitution of the Association of Students—the constitution of our student government—creates a well functioning student government, and reflects the will of the student body. Last semester, Senate discovered that there had been significant changes made to our constitution without the approval of the student body. In the referendum last fall, the most obvious examples of inconsistency were corrected by a majority vote of the student body. Yet Senate wanted to be certain that our constitution was thoroughly investigated to ensure that any additional changes that had been made could be put up to the student body for consideration.

The Senate found two areas of our constitution where changes were made without the consideration of the student body. These sections involve how Senate runs its elections, and how Senate creates groups to investigate issues on campus and develop policy proposals. Instead of putting these constitutional changes up to a vote by the student body, a past Senate had these changes approved by the Dean of Students, and the Office of the President. This Senate will attempt to rectify these mistakes in the upcoming referendum.

Additionally, over the past year questions have been raised regarding who should be eligible to serve on Student Senate.

(State of the Constitution continued)

Specifically, it poses a structural dilemma of sorts to have seniors elected to the Senate in the spring, as these seats must be refilled in the fall. In time, this system leads to the problem Senate now has where there will be thirteen seats up for election in the fall, and only two next spring, under our current election structure. Many feel that this is unfair for incoming first years who after getting acclimated to Oberlin over the fall semester may be interested to run in the spring, yet face an unduly stiff competition.

The Senate intends to pose several questions in the upcoming referendum dealing with these issues. These questions will ask what time line Senate elections should operate under, how Senate should delegate tasks within Senate and to interested individuals in the student body, and who is eligible to run for Senate. We look forward to hearing your thoughts on these matters.

PROPOSED GREEN FUND STRUCTURE

*By Luke Squire
Associate Liaison*

The Student Senate recognized the student body's overwhelming desire to expand Oberlin College's participation in the environmental movement. The Green Fund was designed to be a source for student driven green projects, stimulating greater campus discussion and awareness of green solutions and ideas to common problems.

In the Fall Semester of 2007, the student body approved the creation "of a waivable student fee to create a Green Fund" through a student referendum. 85% of the 1,527

students who voted in the Referendum supported the funds creation. In January of 2008, the Senate conducted a student poll inquiring what students would be willing to contribute to the Green Fund. 53% of the students who responded supported a fee of \$20 or more. Therefore, the Senate felt that the Green Fund would be a waivable fee of \$20 per student. A student's decision to not contribute to the Green Fund will not affect that person's ability to make proposals as to how or to whom the fund should be allocated.

Though this not final, the proposed structure of the Green Fund is as follows: The Green Fund will be administered in three parts over the course of every semester. Therefore, proposals for allocating the Green Fund will be accepted by Student Senate twice each academic year. The total allocation process will take 13 weeks, allowing time at the end of the semester for recipients to be notified of their allocation and for questions to be answered regarding why the Senate chose to support particular projects.

The first six weeks of the semester will be the request period of the allocation process. Student Senate will use this time to publicize the existence of the Green Fund and educate the student body on the process of filing allocation requests. All proposals for Green Fund allocation will be due at the end of this period.

The next four weeks of the semester will be the review period of the allocation process. The review period is designed to be a transparent and inclusive process. All proposals will be posted online by the Senate for public viewing and sent to the

(Green Fund Structure Continued)

Green Edge Fund and the Center for Environmental Sustainability. The Green Edge Fund and the Center for Environmental Sustainability will review and critique the proposals, detail the expected effectiveness and impact of each proposal, and outline the proposals' relevance to the Green Fund's goals for green projects. The two groups will neither endorse nor reject proposals, but evaluate them for Senate and the student body. Simultaneously, the student body will be able to voice support or criticism of proposals to Senate. The review process will culminate in a public forum hosted by the Senate where any student will be welcome to voice their opinion regarding the allocation of the fund or a proposed project.

The final period of the process, the actual allocation period, will last three weeks. During this time the Senate will make final allocation decisions on all of the submitted proposals. The Senate allocation process will be closed to outside student voice and its decisions will be final and without an appeals process, although Senate will

actively publicize its ultimate allocation decision and publicly display its vote on each proposal to the student body.

The remainder of the semester will allow for proposals to be financed so that Green Fund projects may begin at the start of the following semester (or sooner if so outlined in the proposal).

Additionally, projects must show they will directly enhance Oberlin's environmental sustainability and/or decrease Oberlin's environmental impact by supporting Oberlin College in attaining its goal of becoming a climate neutral campus.

The Green Fund will be a unique and innovative tool of expression and participation for students at Oberlin College. The student inspired and driven projects that the Green Fund will sponsor will reflect Oberlin's commitment to a green future and underline the student body's invested interests in that goal. Oberlin has a rich tradition of independent and progressive thinking, and this student driven fund displays our continued determination to take action to improve the world around us.

STUDENT SENATE FACTOID

Class Breakdown:

1st year: One (Luke Squire)

2nd Year: Four (Vanessa Coleman, Kate Riley, Andrew Watiker, Kwame Webster)

3rd year: Three (Justin Brogden, Ben Klebanoff, Leah Pine)

4th year: Six (David Carlson, Nick Ferrara, Ian Hilburger, Colin Jones, Nancy Nguyen, Marc Shinn-Krantz)

5th Year: One (Lillie Chilen)