

Oberlin College Strategic Plan 2016-2021

**Institutional transformation through
an inclusive approach to
academic and musical excellence**



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Institutional transformation through an inclusive approach to academic and musical excellence

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The “Oberlin College Strategic Plan 2016-2021: Institutional transformation through an inclusive approach to academic and musical excellence” presents concepts and initiatives that will guide Oberlin College and Conservatory forward over the next five years.

We seek a distinctive and sustainable path to a new level of inclusive academic, artistic, and musical excellence. Rooted in the shared values expressed in our mission statement, the plan reflects the ideas and aspirations of the diverse cross section of Oberlin community members who contributed to the planning process begun in September 2014. The Steering Committee conducted an open process which included creating a Strategic Planning website where a preliminary report and a draft strategic plan were published with opportunities for written responses. Committee members also offered numerous sessions for in-person feedback. The committee carefully considered all responses.

We thank everyone who contributed to the crafting of this plan. Special thanks are due to the Strategic Planning Steering Committee. Composed of Oberlin trustees, faculty, staff, alumni, and students, it has met regularly over the past 16 months.

Oberlin’s need for a new strategic plan stems from a combination of internal and external factors. Foremost among these are the rapid and dramatic demographic, financial, cultural, and technological changes affecting the world and higher education since our previous plan was approved in 2005.

The Steering Committee worked to identify and analyze the challenges facing Oberlin and to find opportunities for Oberlin to excel. The single greatest challenge to Oberlin’s future is its financial model, which is not sustainable in the near future because assumptions underpinning it are unlikely to be fulfilled in the current demographic and financial climate. For that reason, financial sustainability is a central element of this plan.

We believe this plan provides the strategic framework for Oberlin to make meaningful progress in the coming five years. Implementation of the plan will focus on three main areas: engaging students in innovative ways and offering them pathways to success in a diverse, inclusive residential community; providing students with a connected learning experience with more effective advising, mentoring, and post-graduation support; and building a sustainable financial model. We are confident these steps will elevate Oberlin’s academic, artistic, and musical excellence and help us be the most inspiring, educationally rewarding, and academically rigorous college and conservatory in the world.

Once the Strategic Plan is approved by the General Faculty and the Board of Trustees, it will be implemented by the

administration, led by the president in collaboration with the General Faculty Council (acting in its planning capacity), the Board, and Oberlin’s faculty, staff, students, and alumni. Task force structure, mandates, and calendars will be determined by the administration working with those stakeholders and will be finalized with the Board’s approval by the end of the spring 2016 semester. Implementation groups will be established through existing governance structures. In particular, the Board, advised by the administration, will set broad financial parameters for the president and senior staff’s consideration. The Board will also determine a set of indicators or means of measuring the overall health of the College and Conservatory and request an annual assessment of progress in achieving the Strategic Plan’s objectives.

Again, we sincerely thank everyone who contributed to the contents and shaping of this plan, and we welcome your continuing participation.

Marvin Krislov

President, Steering Committee co-chair

Diane C. Yu

Member, Board of Trustees, Steering Committee co-chair

Oberlin's Board of Trustees began an ambitious strategic planning process in the fall of 2014. That process had three main goals:

- 1. To assess the progress made by Oberlin over the last decade**
- 2. To better understand both the rapidly changing landscape of higher education and Oberlin's place in that landscape, and**
- 3. To help Oberlin chart a course that reinforces our existing strengths, offsets vulnerabilities, and invents new capabilities and capacities for the future.**

The process was conducted by a Steering Committee that was co-chaired by President Marvin Krislov and board member Diane C. Yu. Its members included faculty, staff members, students, Oberlin trustees, and alumni. As that group began its work, it revisited Oberlin's mission statement and core values and reviewed Oberlin's last strategic plan, approved in 2005.

The new plan took shape over the spring, summer, and fall of 2015. Its core conclusions are presented in the form of three powerful "Directions for the Future":

- 1. Foster academic and musical excellence in an equitable and inclusive educational environment**
- 2. Develop the residential experience to ensure that it serves as an intellectual and artistic incubator for educational excellence**
- 3. Define and set in motion the necessary steps to achieve sustainability—educational, financial, and environmental**

Each of these directions has specific recommendations associated with it. A list of all of the recommendations is included in the Appendix. Collectively, these recommendations map out a strategy that is far-ranging and comprehensive—a path that carries forward the best of Oberlin's past and present, and points us toward the Oberlin of the future.



Mission, Values, and the 2005 Strategic Plan

The strategic planning process that began in the fall of 2014 had three points of departure. The first was Oberlin's mission. The mission statement was revisited and revised in the planning process:

Oberlin College and Conservatory educates students for lives of intellectual, musical and artistic rigor and breadth, sustained inquiry, creativity and innovation, and leadership. Oberlin aims to prepare graduates with the knowledge, skills, and perspectives essential to confront complex issues and to create change and value in the world.

Oberlin is committed to educational access and opportunity. It seeks to offer a diverse and inclusive residential learning environment encouraging a free and respectful exchange of ideas and shares an enduring commitment to a sustainable and just society.

The second point of departure was the core values that derive from our mission. Those values include:

EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

The College of Arts and Sciences and Conservatory of Music are committed to educating students to achieve academic and musical excellence. An Oberlin education prepares students for successful lives, careers, and leadership by enabling them to see and develop meaningful connections and integration with all aspects of their Oberlin experience and with the wider world.

The Oberlin Conservatory provides professional education at the highest level, enabling students to reach their greatest potential both as musicians and individuals and to attain skills and perspectives—not only in music, but in other disciplines—that will prepare them to become leaders.

DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY

A diverse and inclusive residential community is critical to fostering the spectrum of perspectives, interactions, and approaches upon which the most effective teaching and learning depend.

STEWARDSHIP

Oberlin seeks lifelong engagement with and wise stewardship of the institution by students, parents, faculty, staff, trustees, and alumni.

SUSTAINABILITY

Oberlin remains committed to leadership in environmental sustainability and education.

The third point of departure was Oberlin's 2005 Strategic Plan. The 2005 Strategic Plan offered a range of initiatives designed to improve the quality and value of an Oberlin education. Implementing that plan over the past decade has strengthened Oberlin in many ways, and examples of some of the results follow.

- To increase the diversity of the student body, Oberlin partnered with two high-profile organizations—and has collaborated with other community-based

“Oberlin’s commitment to educating African Americans and women was not endorsed by every person on campus or in town. Racism and sexism did not suddenly vanish from the earth. We’re still fighting them today. But Oberlin’s actions changed the world by changing the lives of countless women and men of every race for the better. That history is important because it is the foundation of what Oberlin has become. No other college has Oberlin’s long history of academic excellence combined with its commitment to access, inclusion, and social justice. Oberlin has always attracted women and men who have the audacity to take on formidable challenges in the interest of peace and justice.”

—Johnnetta B. Cole '57, in a speech at First Church, Sept. 3, 2008

“I don’t know of another college that opens its doors for students in such ways as Oberlin. If you are willing, and actually put yourself out there and take chances, amazing opportunities will arise. At Oberlin, there is something—a club, a research lab, a play—for everyone to take part in, succeed in, and, best of all, enjoy.”

—Lauren Choban '16



and educational organizations, domestic and global—that identify and recruit talented, motivated, high-potential students from multicultural backgrounds and low-income families.

- We also devoted major resources to improving the student experience. Residential life, student support—especially peer-to-peer programs—health and wellness programs, mental health and emotional well-being initiatives, disability services, and athletics have been expanded and revitalized. New internship and entrepreneurship programs have begun to open exciting doors for our students and graduates.
- We are furthering our efforts to internationalize the campus and curriculum through a curricular review with two overriding goals: gaining a better understanding of the global components in our courses of study and giving students easier access to these components. We opened the Center for Languages and Culture in 2012, which helps internationalize Oberlin by providing support for relevant curriculum development and programming. Oberlin has increased its number of faculty and students from around the world and continues to expand student experiences abroad through short-term and semester-length study-away programs. These efforts have resulted in Oberlin maintaining its place in the top 25 baccalaureate institutions in the total number of international students and total number of students studying abroad.
- Oberlin has also made great strides toward achieving the goals of environmental sustainability articulated in the 2005 Strategic Plan. Efficiency improvements to our existing facilities, LEED-certified new construction, a largely renewable electricity portfolio—including 10 acres of on-site solar power generation—and the closing of our coal-fired central heating plant all reflect this progress. In the classroom, an increasing number of faculty from across the disciplines have addressed sustainability-related issues in their teaching and research. Taken together, these initiatives have contributed to Oberlin’s internationally recognized leadership in environmental sustainability.

Record numbers of high school students are now applying for admission to Oberlin, making us more selective than ever before. Philanthropy and engagement have increased across all segments of the broader Oberlin community. We are now in the final year of a successful fundraising campaign, and we are very pleased with the support received so far for financial aid, faculty initiatives, and key facilities improvements. We continue to seek additional gifts, especially for scholarships.

In sum, initiatives undertaken after the 2005 Strategic Plan—made possible by the combined and concerted efforts of Oberlin’s faculty, students, staff, Board of Trustees, alumni, parents, and supporters—have enhanced the value of an Oberlin education, reinforced our finances, and strengthened our reputation as one of the world’s outstanding colleges and conservatories.

A Record of Accomplishment

In the past decade, the growing influence of Oberlin—its teaching, thinking, creativity, artistry, and innovation—has been underscored by the achievements of our faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

Faculty members distinguish themselves as scholars, performers, artists, and teachers. They make important contributions to their disciplines—while at the same time remaining committed to the successful teaching and mentoring of Oberlin students. Looking back on their Oberlin experience, many alumni credit their achievements to a demanding, empathetic, and inspirational faculty member.

Staff members excel in their professional fields and provide the support to enable teaching and learning to flourish.

Students in both the College of Arts and Sciences and the Conservatory have earned dozens of prestigious honors, including Beinecke, Fulbright, Gates, Goldwater, Luce, Marshall, NSF, Rhodes, Truman, Udall, and Watson scholarships and fellowships. Conservatory students have won national and international music competitions, including the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition and the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.

Numerous recognitions of Oberlin and its graduates demonstrate that the College and Conservatory provide pathways to excellence and leadership. Examples include:

- In 2009, the Conservatory was awarded the National Medal of Arts—the highest award given by the president of the United States in recognition of achievements in the arts.
- In 2011 and 2015, an Oberlin faculty member was named US Professor of the Year by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, including the first music professor to hold this honor.
- At last count, 22 Oberlin graduates were members of the National Academy of Sciences, which represents an astonishing 1 percent of the academy’s total.
- Eleven Oberlin alumni, graduates of both the College of Arts and Sciences and the Conservatory, have received MacArthur “genius awards,” including five since 2008.
- And as has been the case for decades, more Oberlin graduates go on to earn PhDs than graduates of any other baccalaureate college.

“One purpose of education is to open minds and explore what you may not have considered on every side of many, many stories. In my own experience, Oberlin has played an important role in creating change among people who may never have considered inclusion or diversity—sometimes years later!”

—Patricia Stevenson '85

“Residential liberal arts colleges will remain unique experiences only if we cultivate, glorify, and reward close mentoring relationships between faculty and students.”

—Drew Wilburn, Associate Professor and Chair, Classics; Chair, Archeological Studies Program; Irvin E. Houck Associate Professor in the Humanities



The Case for Oberlin

Oberlin is singularly well placed to provide its students with an exceptionally deep, broad, and meaningful education by combining a distinguished liberal arts college offering bachelor of arts degrees, a world-class conservatory providing preprofessional training in music leading to the bachelor of music degree, and an internationally acclaimed academic art museum. The rare presence on one campus of such powerful educational assets offers students a wealth of opportunities to immerse themselves in a life of the mind in a place infused with intellectual and creative energy. Students pursuing degrees in the two divisions learn from and inspire each other by frequently taking classes together and by getting to know each other through co-curricular, extracurricular, and social activities. While there are significant pedagogical differences between the two degree programs, both are driven by the renowned teaching, scholarship, research, artistry, and creativity of Oberlin’s outstanding faculty.

Students in the highly respected double-degree program, invented at Oberlin, pursue degrees in both the Conservatory and the College of Arts and Sciences. This program, which prepares students for an enormous array of professional possibilities after Oberlin, can be completed within five years and is attractive to both students and their families.

An Oberlin education enables our graduates to stand out as innovative, interdisciplinary thinkers, engaged citizens of their communities and countries, and leaders in their chosen fields of endeavor. Moreover, since its founding, Oberlin has endured as a symbol of the quest for social justice, and that history of providing quality education to all students on an equal basis continues to draw talented and thoughtful people to our campus. Graduates of the College and Conservatory pursue a wide range of careers, including education, health industries, law, business and management, fine and performing arts, writing, and government and public service—and many continue their efforts to further social justice objectives throughout their lives.

The Challenges Before Us

Despite the successes described above, we are operating in a moment of significant change. The higher education environment has grown more complex and competitive in the past decade. The combination of rising college costs and growing income inequality is straining the financial model of higher education, especially for residential liberal arts institutions. The number of middle-class families in the U.S. has declined, and many more families today require assistance from multiple sources to be able to send their children to college. Similarly, the economic challenges for students from lower-income families and from historically underrepresented groups continue to increase.

The major demographic shifts now underway will only intensify this situation. By 2022, for example, nearly 50 percent of public high school graduates will be from historically underrepresented groups, and many are expected to be first-generation college students. Oberlin has long been committed to equity, inclusion, and social justice. Nevertheless, we still lag behind many of our competitor schools in terms of compositional diversity—enrolling students who are Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Latino/Latina, and Native American.

These changes demand the development of a new approach to the costs of an Oberlin education. We do not have the financial resources to continue to increase our discount rate—that is, the portion of tuition provided as financial aid from institutional resources. The 2005 Strategic Plan called for the College to reduce this rate in order to achieve greater financial stability. We have gradually done so, putting our finances on a more sustainable foundation, while simultaneously maintaining our strong commitment to meeting 100 percent of the demonstrated need of all admitted students, an important strategy to ensure the diversity of the student body. These two important goals are pulling in opposite directions.

Another financial challenge involves the endowment payout rate. Endowment payout is the portion of the endowment that is withdrawn for use each year. We have intentionally reduced our endowment payout for support of operations to 5 percent and our total endowment payout from a peak of 7.2 percent in 2008 down to 6.1 percent in 2015. This reduction in spending is intended to preserve the purchasing power of our endowment and ensure our successors more resources to keep Oberlin vital for generations to come. It also reduces the flow of funds available to support current operations.

Other issues for residential liberal arts colleges include the need for increased globalization, rapidly evolving technologies and related opportunities, and the proliferation of educational options for students, including some that cost significantly less than Oberlin and its peers. Rankings that assess the “return-on-investment” of a college education challenge the value of a liberal arts approach and proclaim pre-professional training as the soundest educational investment. We pay due attention to these rankings and reports. At the same time, we believe strongly that our true value derives from our distinctive blend of humanities, social science, natural science, music, and the arts—which together shape and enrich our students’ learning outcomes and their lives.

What are the implications of these challenges for Oberlin? The evidence points to at least four overriding conclusions:

- **We must enhance the diversity of Oberlin College and Conservatory.** This is not a new commitment for Oberlin, but it is one that has gained increased urgency in recent years. Simply stated, Oberlin cannot deliver the high-quality education it promises unless our community is equitable, diverse, and inclusive.

Diversity is 1, a wide variety of identities, ideologies, characteristics, languages, backgrounds, histories, practices, perceptions, communities, and other aspects of human experience and 2, the interactive processes by which people share their experiences of the world with others, both alike and unlike. Both elements are important—the “who” of diversity enables the “how” of interaction with diverse perspectives.

“If we want to be part of Oberlin’s legacy, while respecting what that legacy really looks like, maybe we need to acknowledge that this is another big moment in America’s racial history, and we can be part of launching that. It’s 2015—who knows what’s going to come in the next 20 years—but it could be something big, and we have the potential to be at the forefront of this huge, powerful message. If any of my peers and I are sitting in this room 25 or 30 years from now, I’d be proud to have been a part of those meetings that made Oberlin hopefully what it will be in 30 years.”

—Jasmine Anderson ’17

“No matter our individual passions, Oberlin provides us the opportunity to do what we love while connecting us with peers and professors that broaden our perspectives and help us make connections.”

—Reid Palmer '14

Equity means fair and appropriate strategies to enable each person—student, faculty, staff—to succeed to their fullest potential.

In an **inclusive environment**, all members have a sense of being valued and recognized members of the community.

- **We must position Oberlin strategically for continued prominence in a rapidly changing world.** This plan proposes a number of initiatives that will significantly advantage Oberlin as it redoubles its commitment to the highest level of academic and musical excellence. That excellence, in turn, will assure our relevance and impact.
- **We must recognize and respond to the reality that our high-tuition, high-financial aid model is vulnerable.** Oberlin is not yet on a sustainable financial trajectory. Our per-student endowment value and capacity to raise transformative gifts still lag behind those of many peer institutions. We enroll considerably fewer full-pay students, and we remain far more dependent on tuition revenue than many other colleges.
- **We must make the case for Oberlin more effectively.** This is less a challenge of invention and more a challenge of articulation. To attract the people and secure the support we need—and to thrive in a world where “success” is often defined by other people’s metrics—we must demonstrate why Oberlin deserves to be cherished and strengthened.

Three Directions for the Future

In light of this analysis, we present three interrelated strategic directions:

- 1. Foster academic and musical excellence in an equitable and inclusive educational environment.**
- 2. Develop the residential experience to ensure that it serves as an intellectual and artistic incubator for educational excellence.**
- 3. Define and set in motion the necessary steps to achieve sustainability—educational, financial, and environmental.**

Our sequencing is purposeful. We begin with a distinctive thread of excellence in every aspect of our students’ educational experience. We then move on to a consideration of the kind of residential experience that we have to create to support connected learning. This, in turn, leads naturally to an exploration of the resources needed to sustain that community.



Foster academic and musical excellence in an equitable and inclusive educational environment.

Oberlin is a powerful academic enterprise. Our faculty love to teach and pursue knowledge, and our students are the beneficiaries of that passion. The College can more effectively cultivate educational excellence by creating structures and opportunities to encourage, enhance, and systematize achievement. This imperative includes facilitating intentional connections among and across the many educational opportunities (curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular) and ensuring that the college experience fits the needs and aspirations of our diverse student body.

Connected Learning and Integration

This goal can be achieved by adopting the framework of connected learning—an educational model that supports every student in the intentional integration of coursework, advising, mentoring, internships, experiential and applied learning, and personal support throughout their undergraduate careers. Connected learning leverages the relationship among the College of Arts and Sciences, the Conservatory of Music, the Allen Memorial Art Museum, the libraries, and the residential experience.

The success of connected learning depends on the faculty and staff. Oberlin's are exceptional. Our faculty members consistently demonstrate their deep commitment to teaching and advising, scholarship, and musical/artistic accomplishment. Staff members are similarly committed to supporting the educational, personal, and social development of students, mentoring students in work-study and other opportunities that offer preprofessional career preparation and ensuring that Oberlin operates efficiently, safely, responsibly, and inclusively.

A student's path through Oberlin should be purposeful, set by the individual with guidance from a principal academic advisor as well as support from other resources. Connected learning should help students:

- Build coherent pathways through a curriculum that provide structured opportunities for deep examination within the primary areas of study as well as exploration of the rich traditions of a liberal education, from a first-year seminar to a culminating experience.
- Build connections across the curriculum through interdisciplinary study and ties among the College of Arts and Sciences, Conservatory of Music, Allen Memorial Art Museum, and libraries.
- Engage within and beyond the classroom, acknowledging the powerful impact of meaningful interaction among people of a wide variety of identities, ideologies, characteristics, languages, backgrounds, histories, practices, perceptions, communities, and other aspects of human experience.

“Music challenges and inspires me and fills me with awe. I can’t imagine a world without it, and I can’t imagine doing anything more rewarding. I’m doubly blessed to teach at Oberlin College, which is truly a unique, even magical place. I consider myself lucky to be able to work with and learn from extraordinarily talented and motivated students.”

—Brian Alegant, Director and Barker Professor of Music Theory and 2015 U.S. Professor of the Year

Oberlin is a powerful academic enterprise. Our faculty love to teach and pursue knowledge, and our students are the beneficiaries of that passion.

The “4+4” designation refers to the students’ four years on campus and a commitment to them for four more years after graduation. Oberlin 4+4 will benefit and engage two key constituencies: students during and just after their Oberlin years, and alumni, who will be providing mentorship and career advising.



- Build a deeper understanding of the relationships and interdependencies between aesthetic, behavioral, humanistic, and scientific ways in which we create knowledge and understand our world.
- Establish habits of mind and body that will support life-long learning and healthy and sustainable living.
- Connect the academic experience at Oberlin with what comes after Oberlin.

Toward this end, faculty are currently exploring ways to intensify connected learning through project-based learning, culminating and transitional experiences, and course-based research. One recent initiative in this spirit is the proposed development of “theme-based course clusters.” A cluster will comprise several courses offered simultaneously by faculty from different disciplines who are interested in this kind of collaboration. Courses will focus on a single theme chosen to engage students and faculty with the world’s great challenges and opportunities, such as Music and the Brain, Food Justice, Global Refugee Crisis, or Mass Incarceration.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1.1

Adopt a framework of connected learning that integrates all aspects of an Oberlin education.

1.1A Deepen educational collaboration among the Arts and Sciences, Conservatory, Allen Memorial Art Museum, and the libraries.

1.1B Develop theme-based course clusters, with several courses offered simultaneously by faculty in different fields that encourage integration of learning across disciplines.

Advising and Oberlin 4+4

Effective connected learning requires expansion and reinforcement of initiatives in mentoring, advising, and coaching. We already have a wealth of riches in this area, including faculty and staff advisors and resources such as the **Career Center, Creativity and Leadership, LaunchU, Alumni Relations, the Bonner Center for Service and Learning, and Oberlin Shansi.**

More intentional connection of these resources is central to helping our students develop their individual trajectories and shaping their integrated learning experiences. Richer

exposure to career options and the acquisition of skills for effective professional interaction—including appropriate technological expertise essential for 21st century effectiveness—are also important, especially as students progress through their undergraduate years.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1.2

Create individually tailored, equitable systems of guidance and support that help students build personally meaningful pathways through the curriculum—from first-year seminars to culminating experiences—along with mentoring, advising, and coaching that help students connect their academic, artistic, personal, social, and professional development at Oberlin and beyond.

This intensification of mentoring, advising, and coaching will be complemented by a bold new initiative: Oberlin 4+4. The “4+4” designation refers to the students’ four years on campus and a commitment to them for four more years after graduation. Oberlin 4+4 will benefit and engage two key constituencies: students during and just after their Oberlin years, and alumni, who will be providing mentorship and career advising.

Students and young alumni will also be guided by faculty and staff members to connect their Arts and Sciences and Conservatory experiences more intentionally to set the stage for their professional journeys. Again, our on-campus resources, including the Career Center, are key components of this effort, helping all students and recent alumni identify and achieve meaningful career objectives that build upon their Oberlin experience.

1.2A Connect students and young alumni to professional pathways by developing and investing in Oberlin 4+4: a new model for integrating academic and applied learning experiences with multiple on-campus resources and Oberlin’s alumni network.

1.2B Further develop Oberlin’s programs in entrepreneurship (Creativity and Leadership/LaunchU) by cultivating relationships with faculty, staff, alumni, and outside experts to help students create and develop their entrepreneurial ideas.

1.2C Create opportunities for students to master the latest technological advances as part of their education and their transition to a post-Oberlin life.

The Learning Environment

Connected learning’s effectiveness requires attention to strategies for ensuring an inclusive and equitable learning environment. To achieve this, Oberlin must redouble its efforts to cultivate a diverse faculty and staff, with particular attention to the forms of diversity that have been hardest for the College to achieve. The diversity of Oberlin’s faculty is critical to ensuring that students have a diverse range of teachers and mentors. In the Arts and Sciences, there are 7 percent Black faculty and 3 percent Latino/Latina, and tenure-track hires in the last five years have been 35 percent faculty of color. In recent years, the Conservatory has similarly increased faculty and staff diversity. We need to continue this progress.

“The presence of the Center for Learning, Education, and Research in the Sciences on campus has enabled greater interdisciplinary and interprogrammatic conversations and collaborations to take form, even beyond the sciences. These ties have materialized both within and outside the curriculum, across the divisions of the college, and include coordinated efforts to create a more equitable learning environment for everyone.”

—Marcelo Vines, Director,
Center for Learning, Education,
and Research in the Sciences

We must also explore ways to ensure all members of the educational community have the capacity to support and mentor students of all backgrounds.



Toward that end, the Arts and Sciences is reviewing the allocation of faculty positions with consideration of how they will contribute to interactional diversity in the curriculum.

Oberlin students arrive on campus from virtually every state in the U.S. and about 45 foreign countries. In some cases they are increasingly diverse—in 2005, Oberlin’s enrollment of African American students was 5.3 percent and Latino/Latina was 4.7 percent. In Fall 2015, the percentages were 8.4 African American and 6.7 Latino/Latina. More hard work remains to be done to increase the number of historically underrepresented students we enroll and to support and retain them.

The past decade has seen significant changes in the number and profile of international students at Oberlin. The overall number of international students has increased by 43 percent, and the divisional distribution has shifted from 59 percent of international students pursuing a degree in the Conservatory, to 61 percent pursuing a degree in the College of Arts and Sciences. Currently, 7.1 percent of Oberlin students are international.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1.3

Ensure an inclusive and equitable learning environment, including development of an Equity and Inclusion Implementation Plan that addresses the systemic barriers that keep us from reaching our compositional and interactional diversity aspirations and articulates clearly these aspirations. The plan will also identify appropriate strategies to measure and mechanisms to communicate progress, including concrete benchmarks that will be reported to the General Faculty by the beginning of the spring 2017 semester.

1.3A Implement new strategies to help Oberlin succeed in hiring and retaining an outstanding faculty and staff from a broad range of racial, ethnic, gender identity/identities, sexuality/orientation, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

1.3B Enroll and retain students from a broad range of racial, ethnic, gender identity/identities, sexuality/orientation, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Increase the number of students from historically underrepresented communities in the United States and the number of students from lower-income families.

1.3C Enroll and retain international students from a broad range of countries and cultures and focus on addressing their distinctive needs.

Teaching and Support for All Students

As Oberlin continues to build the compositional diversity necessary to achieve educational excellence, we must also explore ways to ensure all members of the educational community have the capacity to support and mentor students of all backgrounds in order for connected learning to be successful. Recent activism focused on barriers to education—for example, Title IX, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Black Lives Matter—that reflect both major changes to the compositional diversity of student populations over the past 50 years and the demands of faculty, students, and staff that institutions transform in ways that meet the needs of all students. Inclusive approaches to education are necessary in order to achieve academic and musical excellence, a responsibility that Oberlin takes very seriously. For example:

- In the College of Arts and Sciences, faculty have revised curricular goals that emphasize social justice as a foundation of Oberlin’s mission.
- Over the last four years, the percent of historically underrepresented students graduating with STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) majors has risen from 7.7 percent in 2012 to 13.7 percent in 2015 (historically underrepresented students in STEM include Black, Latino/Latina, and Native American).
- Independent efforts in several departments have increased percentages of historically underrepresented and female majors by creating socially relevant introductory courses, fostering inclusive environments, and diversifying the faculty.
- In the Conservatory, the creation of an additional position in musicology has resulted in new and more diverse offerings in music history available to conservatory and arts and science students. These courses include Popular Music and U.S. Urban Identities, Anthropology of Entrepreneurship, and Ethnomusicology as Activism.

Collectively, these initiatives represent progress—but we can do more. Our students come to us from a societal playing field that is radically unequal: socially, politically, and economically. It is not enough, therefore, for Oberlin to point our students toward high educational achievement, the acquisition of life skills, and a successful transition to a rewarding professional life. We have to meet them where they are—celebrating and complementing their strengths.

This means, among other things, facilitating engagement in the classroom. Among the important connections we seek to cultivate are those that are forged among members of our community as we continue to grapple with issues of equity, inclusion, and social justice. Central to developing these connections is a commitment to teaching and learning that embraces inclusive pedagogies. We understand that administrators and faculty must work together to relieve demands on faculty time and make these newer responsibilities possible.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1.4

Facilitate teaching and support for all students

1.4A Support faculty development of inclusive pedagogies, so all students can succeed, by offering regular pedagogy workshops for faculty across the disciplines.

“Through research, undergraduates become stronger students, build community with each other, and form deep connections with the institution. Undergraduate research projects allow staff members to work directly with students on their academic development and allow faculty members to mentor students. Community-engaged research provides faculty, staff, and students the chance to participate intimately and intentionally in the local communities of which the institution is a part. Thus undergraduate research, as a form of experiential learning for students on and off campus, can be central to achieving the academic mission of Oberlin College.”

—Afia Ofori-Mensa
Director of Undergraduate Research

“Science education at Oberlin is embedded — appropriately— in a rich matrix of other academic disciplines. This juxtaposition gives both students and teachers the right context for science as a lifelong intellectual engagement.”

—Yolanda P. Cruz,
Robert S. Danforth
Professor of Biology

1.4B Offer regular workshops for administrative and professional staff members to develop their capacity to advise and mentor students from all backgrounds.

1.4C Address structural barriers that inhibit student success and further develop and create institutional structures that enable each person to succeed to their fullest potential.

Support for Faculty and Staff

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1.5

Support faculty and staff

1.5A Seek new ways to encourage and support faculty to develop as scholars, musicians, and artists throughout their Oberlin careers.

1.5B Support professional development of faculty and staff members to deepen their abilities as effective, engaging, and innovative teachers, advisors, and mentors.

1.5C Provide faculty and staff with innovative technology and training commensurate with their pedagogical and/or professional goals and explore ways that technology can help overcome geographic hurdles.

Engagement with the World

And finally, educational excellence and connectedness mean engagement with the world. This comprises the coursework—theoretical and experiential—described above, opportunities to study abroad, and the kinds of civic engagement upon which our students thrive. Our international students in both Arts and Sciences and the Conservatory—along with our international language teaching assistants and our international faculty, staff, and alumni—contribute in a variety of ways to our understanding of and meaningful engagement with the world.

Through all these resources, Oberlin seeks to provide its students with the language skills, cultural understanding, environmental sensitivity, and technological training needed to thrive in new contexts and cultures. This effort, too, must be intensified.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1.6

Prepare students to connect effectively to their global environment by enhancing opportunities to study and engage with languages and cultures through coursework, study abroad, international co-curricular opportunities, and interacting with Oberlin’s international students, faculty, staff, and alumni.



Develop the residential experience to ensure that it serves as an intellectual and artistic incubator for educational excellence.

The College and Conservatory create connected learning by developing a learning environment that prioritizes face-to-face interpersonal engagement and seamlessly connects a range of opportunities and supports through the residential experience. Campus life serves as a workshop to cultivate the skills and dispositions that enable students to become lifelong learners and transformative leaders in whatever fields they pursue and communities in which they participate. Both the residential campus and Oberlin's location offer unique resources for creating this space for learning that remains a lifelong touchstone for Oberlin alumni.

On campus, our Allen Memorial Art Museum; Science Center; Adam Joseph Lewis Center for Environmental Studies; Conservatory buildings and performance spaces, including Finney Chapel and Hall Auditorium; along with other classroom buildings, libraries, and student residences, provide spaces for teaching and learning. But, equally important, these are spaces where students, faculty, and staff meet, study, work together on research projects and other collaborative pursuits, listen to concerts and lectures, develop entrepreneurial ideas, and socialize. All of these activities are central to Oberlin's philosophy of active engagement and pursuing excellence in an inclusive educational environment.

The personal connections that develop in a residential college community, and only in such a community, are also vitally important at Oberlin. The residential college experience—connecting the curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular—becomes a critical laboratory for developing the skills in communication and interaction, reflection and engagement, tolerance and openness, and advocacy and dissent that sustain a dynamic intellectual environment. Looking forward, we need to integrate the learning opportunities of our residential experience more fully with those of our core academic programs. One way to approach such integration is to develop a culture of active engagement on our campus.

Active Engagement

A culture of active engagement is realized through interpersonal interactions as a mode of learning. In particular, active engagement supports and reflects the importance of freedom of thought, inquiry, speech, and assembly. Through this culture of engagement, Oberlin honors its deep commitments to academic freedom and social change.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 2.1

Enrich Oberlin as a residential community of learning by expanding support for students, faculty, and staff that helps everyone develop the understanding and skills essential for interacting effectively across lines of difference.

Campus life serves as a workshop to cultivate the skills and dispositions that enable students to become lifelong learners and transformative leaders in whatever fields they pursue and communities in which they participate.

“For more than 20 years, Oberlin College’s Bonner Scholars Program has supported students underrepresented in higher education with the motto ‘access to education, opportunity to serve.’ Through their community engagement, Bonner Scholars learn from local nonprofit leaders, draw on their skills and talents to help address community-identified needs, and explore their academic and professional interests.”

—Trecia Pottinger, Director, Bonner Scholars Program, and Assistant Director, Bonner Center for Service and Learning



By bringing together people in a common space, a residential liberal arts college can also foster a culture of well-being and self-care in order to promote individual and community achievement. Oberlin has built a strong support system for its students. In collaboration with students, we have made impressive progress in increasing and enhancing services and initiatives in student mental, emotional, and physical health and wellness. We have established or improved peer-to-peer mentoring and support programs, disability services, residential experiences, and resources dedicated to supporting historically underrepresented students. As we further build this support system, we will explore new and innovative models for creating networks of support through creative approaches to collaboration and staffing.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 2.2

Address the needs of students from historically underrepresented communities, those who are the first in their families to attend college, and those who are lower income.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 2.3

Develop new and enhance existing programs and services to support mental, emotional, and physical health and wellness, including athletics and physical education and support for students with disabilities.

Oberlin’s Location, Shared Resources, and Civic Engagement

Unlike many rural liberal arts colleges at a considerable distance from major metropolitan areas, there is both a major metropolitan center with world-renowned arts organizations, hospitals, and educational institutions and a population that is ethnically, racially, and socioeconomically diverse within a 30-mile radius of Oberlin. Civic engagement has provided an important strategy to enable students to experience unique and valuable learning experiences that are only possible because of the College’s location in northeast Ohio.

In many cases, that engagement begins in the Bonner Center for Service and Learning, whose mission is to make connections—among students, faculty, staff, community partners, and alumni—to help address the most pressing challenges of our time. We see these student efforts as a critical way that Oberlin College gives back to our community.

Community-Based Learning courses bridge the gap between college and community and offer high-impact experiences that increase interdisciplinary thinking and enhance critical thinking skills. Civic engagement also extends from Oberlin and

Lorain County to locations around the country and abroad. Students take advantage of winter terms and summers to engage with the world, and—ideally—to improve it.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 2.4

Further develop opportunities for students to be involved in civic engagement in Oberlin, Lorain County, and greater northeast Ohio.

As part of our relationship to the larger community, we will continue to share the resources of the College of Arts and Sciences, Conservatory of Music, Allen Memorial Art Museum, and libraries in innumerable ways with the City of Oberlin and the region.

We must also continue to build robust public and private sector partnerships and make thoughtful investments in local and regional economies, knowing that these relationships are both mutually beneficial and the right thing to do. Oberlin College will maintain its support of the Oberlin public schools as well as the Oberlin Project, which aims to revitalize the local economy, eliminate carbon emissions, restore local agriculture, food supply and forestry, and create a new, sustainable base for economic and community development.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 2.5

Continue and deepen our connections with the larger community.

Additionally, Oberlin College will seek to promote and provide for community employment and businesses as it moves forward in its initiatives. This comprises both our support of the Oberlin public schools and our embrace of the Oberlin Project as a vehicle for community education, artistic access, environmental sustainability, and economic development. This includes the development of a community and economic development implementation plan that articulates goals for our support of the Oberlin public schools, the Oberlin Project, and our hiring and contracting from the local community. The plan will also identify appropriate strategies to measure and mechanisms to communicate progress, including concrete benchmarks that will be reported to the General Faculty by the beginning of the spring 2017 semester.

Oberlin students are doers and makers, thinkers and teachers. They ask hard questions—of others and of themselves. They constantly challenge the status quo—including the status quo at Oberlin. It's been said before: We don't create students who create change; we attract students who are already committed to being a part of that change. An Oberlin education provides students with a place to experiment as well as anchor their learning.

Civic engagement also extends from Oberlin and Lorain County to locations around the country and abroad. Students take advantage of winter terms and summers to engage with the world, and—ideally—improve it.



Define and set in motion the necessary steps to achieve sustainability—educational, financial, and environmental.

To achieve educational excellence, we have to bring our resources—financial, human, physical, and reputational—to bear on that mission. Thanks to the generosity of Oberlinians past and present, and thanks also to the College’s tradition of strong financial stewardship, those resources are substantial.

However, they are not unlimited. In recognition of that fact, we have undertaken this planning process in order to set priorities, guided by our mission and informed by our community. Our plan reflects some choices about what to do and not to do, and we will continue to have to make choices in how we allocate resources. Sometimes those choices will be difficult. But because we are determined to maintain our traditions of financial responsibility and effective governance, we will make them.

In that spirit, we will develop and implement a financial plan that will allow us to flourish as an outstanding College of Arts and Sciences and Conservatory of Music. The plan will be concrete—clearly defining a path toward financial sustainability—and flexible, enabling Oberlin to respond nimbly to the challenges certain to emerge in an uncertain future.

As we consider the most effective use of our resources—which involves striking the balance between meeting today’s needs and serving those of generations in the future—five areas require particular attention:

- Our enrollment
- Our endowment
- Our people
- Our governance
- Our campus

Our Enrollment

In terms of enrollment, we are in an increasingly competitive market. We know, without question, that our residential, liberal arts education model delivers extraordinary value in preparing students to create their own futures. We also know that this model is capital- and labor-intensive—in a word, expensive. Further, we know that many of our students and their families live on fixed and tight budgets, and that this trend is likely to increase in the future.

So we must consider our size and the breadth of our program offerings. We must seek out the balance that will give us the financial resources we need, while allowing us to serve our students effectively and achieve our goals of access, equity, diversity, and inclusion. We remain committed to meeting 100 percent of the

We know, without question, that our residential, liberal arts education model delivers extraordinary value in preparing students to create their own futures. We also know that this model is capital- and labor-intensive—in a word, expensive.

“As the Sustainability Committee tried to highlight in the preamble to our draft climate action plan, our position of leadership comes not only from what we have successfully done but also our refusal to walk away from the difficult or seemingly impossible.”

—Dennis Hubbard,
Chair and Professor of Geology



demonstrated financial need of every student we admit. But we realize that meeting these goals will require significant resources and—inevitably—some tough decisions and tradeoffs.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3.1

Slow the rate of annual increases in student charges—tuition, fees, room, and board. Continue and intensify efforts to increase our resources for financial aid and other forms of student financial support.

Our Endowment

Our endowment is the financial bedrock on which our entire plan is built. Growth of the endowment over time—through a combination of gifts, investment returns, and disciplined spending—is essential to our long-term success.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3.2

Continue efforts to build the endowment through philanthropic gifts, sustainable levels of spending, and top-quartile long-term returns. Slow the rate of annual endowment draw, including withdrawals for all purposes—operations (unrestricted and restricted), capital spending (including debt service), and other expenditures—to ensure long-term financial sustainability and growth.

Our People

With their remarkable energy, diversity, commitment, and expertise, our people are our greatest asset. It is indisputable that for Oberlin to thrive, we must attract and retain outstanding faculty and staff. We must invest in them, by providing competitive compensation and opportunities for personal and professional development. In 2013, the Board of Trustees set a faculty compensation goal of reaching at least the median among a competitor group of peer institutions in each continuing rank: a goal that we must strive to achieve.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3.3

Maintain commitments to achieve competitive faculty compensation.

The entire Oberlin community bears shared responsibility for stewarding and advancing the institution in ways that help fulfill its mission. Students, alumni, faculty, staff, parents, and friends can support the College and Conservatory in many ways. It comes from consistently and continuously expressing passion

for Oberlin through engagement and participation, advocacy, gifts of time or talent, and financial support. Such stewardship helps lead Oberlin College and Conservatory toward a sustainable future and showcases Oberlin throughout the U.S. and abroad.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3.4

Create new and diverse pathways for judicious stewardship of the institution by alumni and also by faculty, staff, students, and parents. Engage all members of the wider Oberlin community in stewardship of the College of Arts and Sciences and the Conservatory of Music.

Our Governance

Governance is a key element of institutional stewardship and encompasses roles played by the Board, administration, faculty, staff, students, and alumni. Our governing bodies must become more responsive and agile, making decisions in a timely manner enabling us to seize opportunities and confront challenges as they arise. These twin goals of broad, transparent participation and nimble decision-making are not mutually exclusive. By working together to clarify the roles of our governance bodies and to streamline repetitive or time-consuming processes, we can increase the pace, responsiveness, and efficacy of Oberlin's governance systems.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3.5

Streamline all of our systems of governance so that they can act more quickly and effectively in addressing the rapidly changing environment of higher education, while still delivering thoughtful and transparent decisions backed by broad consensus among all stakeholders.

Our Campus

As noted, our campus shapes almost every aspect of the experience of living and learning at Oberlin. We must have the right educational, residential, recreational, and other spaces to support our mission. We must provide a safe, secure, and efficient physical infrastructure equipped to support the education of today and tomorrow—and at the same time, we must strive to derive the greatest possible return on our physical assets.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3.6

Review campus educational, residential, and other spaces and assets necessary to support our entire educational enterprise, especially all aspects of connected learning.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3.7

Fund institutional priorities by generating new revenue streams and by analyzing current operational and capital expenditures, determining appropriate tradeoffs, and reallocating resources accordingly. Redesign policies, practices, and processes to achieve greater efficiencies and synergies in operations.

Not only will our physical campus strive toward carbon neutrality, but also our students, faculty, staff, and visitors will seek to align their actions with our goals of sustainability, resiliency, and equity. In this pursuit, Oberlin will partner with the local and regional community and be a leader and model to others.

By working together to clarify the roles of our governance bodies and to streamline repetitive or time-consuming processes, we can increase the pace, responsiveness, and efficacy of Oberlin's governance systems.



STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3.8

Use the campus year-round, offering programs and facilities that will enhance both the reputation and revenue of the Arts and Sciences and Conservatory. Direct resources to this effort and leverage our investments in improved and new facilities and physical assets.

Our environmental commitments extend still further. Not only will our physical campus strive toward carbon neutrality, but also our students, faculty, staff, and visitors will seek to align their actions with our goals of sustainability, resiliency, and equity. In this pursuit, Oberlin will partner with the local and regional community and be a leader and model to others.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3.9

Reaffirm and take tangible action toward meeting Oberlin's commitment to environmental sustainability. This includes creating an actionable and financially feasible plan for achieving Oberlin's commitment to carbon neutrality by 2025.

Of special note here is technology. We live in an era when human interactions are increasingly mediated by technology—in ways that both create new forms of community and challenge older ones. Oberlin is committed to thinking creatively about the role of technology in building and enhancing a more meaningful residential, artistic, and intellectual community; and in supporting our physical infrastructure so that it is efficient, effective, and environmentally sound.

We must study and prioritize campus-wide educational and administrative technology needs so we can adopt and adapt technologies appropriate for Oberlin. All of this will require major upfront and ongoing investments, and so our capital expenditures must be undertaken with a clear view of their long-term impact on institutional finances.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3.10

As part of analyzing expenditures and operations, pay particular attention to technology and opportunities it may provide to improve our educational programs and administrative processes.



The Oberlin College Strategic Planning Steering Committee has evaluated the decade of progress Oberlin has made since the previous Strategic Plan. We have studied the many complex, emerging challenges affecting the higher education sector in general, and liberal arts colleges in particular. We have embraced an updated mission statement, a set of core values, and three strategic directions with associated recommendations.

The “Oberlin College Strategic Plan 2016-2021: Institutional transformation through an inclusive approach to academic and musical excellence” is conceived to be a three-to-five-year plan.

The principal goals are to:

- 1. Foster academic and musical excellence in an equitable and inclusive educational environment**
- 2. Develop the residential experience to ensure that it serves as an intellectual and artistic incubator for educational excellence**
- 3. Define and set in motion the necessary steps to achieve sustainability—educational, financial, and environmental**

Within those directions and accompanying recommendations, we will focus on the following areas:

- 1. Connected learning, with special emphasis on advising and Oberlin 4+4**
- 2. A diverse and inclusive community of students, faculty, and staff that ensures equitable paths to success**
- 3. Financial and environmental sustainability**

Once the Strategic Plan is approved by the General Faculty and the Board of Trustees, it will be implemented by the administration, led by the president, in collaboration with the General Faculty Council (acting in its planning capacity), the Board, and Oberlin’s faculty, staff, students, and alumni. Task force structure, mandates, and calendars will be determined by the administration working with those stakeholders and will be finalized with the Board’s approval by the end of the spring 2016 semester. Implementation groups will be established through existing governance structures. In particular, the Board, advised by the administration, will set broad financial parameters for the president and senior staff’s consideration. The Board will also determine a set of indicators or means of measuring the overall health of the College and Conservatory, and request an annual assessment of progress in achieving the Strategic Plan’s objectives.

We strongly encourage the Oberlin community to engage with those efforts. The broader the base of participation, the greater the chance that we will reach our ultimate goal: to be the most inspiring, educationally rewarding, and academically rigorous college and conservatory in the world.

OBERLIN COLLEGE STRATEGIC PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE AND WORKING GROUP ROSTERS

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