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OLA News is a newsletter serving the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and LGBT-affirmative alumni of Oberlin College. OLA News is published twice annually in the spring and fall by the Oberlin Lambda Alumni. Contributions to the OLA News are a collective effort of the Steering Committee members listed above. Design and layout by **HERBERT D. ZEMAN '65**. OLA logo by **PETER NICHOLSON '91**.

OLA NEWS

*Serving lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and
LGBT-affirmative alumni of Oberlin College*

SPRING/SUMMER 2000

THE
NEWSLETTER
OF OBERLIN
LAMBDA
ALUMNI

VOL. 9, No. 2

OLA STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING RECAP

April 7-9, 2000

On Friday, April 7, the OLA Steering Committee got together for the first of its meetings of the new century. For those of you who have had the opportunity to sit in on the OLA Steering Committee, it will come of no surprise that the weekend's meetings were highly organized, packed with informative sessions with staff and students from both the College and the Conservatory, and focused on activities undertaken by OLA during the past year and planned for the future.

The Steering Committee was fortunate to have Peter Nicholson as a guest for dinner. Peter was in Oberlin for a brief visit on his way between trips to Seattle, Chicago, New York, China, and Europe. Following dinner with Peter, the Steering Committee hosted a reception and discussion with students who identify as being part of the LGBT community on campus. This event proved to be a huge success both in terms of attendance and level of discussion. Students and alumni participated in dialog which focused upon our various experiences as part of the queer community at Oberlin. A few students voiced a desire for greater emphasis on and a more wide spread implementation of queer studies or queer foci within traditional studies. OLA acknowledges that the success of this event was largely due to the coordination efforts of Tori McReynolds, the Multicultural Resource Center (MRC) staff liaison for the LGBT community. Tori, a 1999 alumna, just finished her first year in this important position at Oberlin and will continue her post during the 2000-2001 academic year. She has made tremendous strides in her work on campus and has gained respect and admiration from students, faculty, and staff at Oberlin as well as from the OLA Steering Committee. Following the meeting, several of the Steering Committee joined members of Zami, Oberlin's queer student group of people of color, at the Campus Restaurant for a poetry reading/coffee house. The readings were very moving and very creative. John Young had arranged for the Steering Committee to attend the coffee house.

On Saturday we had another student oriented event during which we were shown a film entitled, "Though We Are All Queer, Queer Is Not All We Are." This powerful student-written and directed video focused on issues of race and class within the queer community. Several of the students involved in making the film were there for a discussion following its viewing.

The annual Oberlin Drag Ball was on Saturday evening, and Tori McReynolds, in her typical host style, treated the steering committee members as V.I.P.'s at the ball. It was an amazing event, and the first experience of an Oberlin Drag Ball for all of us. Wilder was decorated lavishly, and the costumes were as original and creative as everything else at Oberlin. S.C. members attended a delightful presentation by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, who had been flown in from San Francisco to judge the runway drag show. The Sisters were at their best and provided much camp and wit for the large audience. Wilder was packed to capacity. The old S.C. members retired relatively early so that they could meet in the morning with campus administrators. The younger S.C. members, see photo, had a Ball late into the night. If any of you have the opportunity to attend the Drag Ball, please do so!

OLA S.C. members had opportunities to meet with campus administrative leaders during the weekend. We met with Clayton Koppes, Dean of the College, and discussed some concerns expressed by students about the lack of queer studies on campus. We had the opportunity to have our first meeting with Robert Dobson, the new Dean of the Conservatory. He raised a number of concerns and issues related to addressing the needs of LGBT students as well as the larger Con community. We offered to serve as a sounding board about queer issues and suggested that it could be of help to have us, as alumni, who are viewed as allies of the students, assist him as advisors when problems arise which

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OLA SC Meeting

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involve queer issues. He said that he would keep that in mind. On Sunday morning, following our previous evening at the Annual Drag Ball, we met with Peter Goldsmith, Dean of Student Affairs. This was our first meeting with Peter. We discussed our connections with the LGBT student leaders, with whom we had met on Friday, as well as some issues which had occurred following the Drag Ball. We also let him know how much we appreciate the work Tori McReynolds is doing on behalf of the LGBT community at Oberlin. Our final meeting was with Nancy Dye. We mentioned to Nancy our desire to have an openly gay person appointed to the Board of Trustees at Oberlin. We noted that this issue had been discussed before with past members of the Steering Committee and that such an appointment has not yet been made. Many LGBT alumni believe that having an openly queer trustee would be more reflective of the diversity of the greater Oberlin community.

Nancy stated that the board would not have any difficulty with having an openly queer trustee. She and the board look for new members based on three characteristics: wisdom, work, and wealth. The board governs the operation of the institution by providing knowledge with regards to finance, investment, and asset allocations. The board also has a lot of legal talent. Previously there were many academics on the board but few individuals who had the knowledge of managing an institution. Nancy and the board also look for members who show a significant commitment to Oberlin. She stated that, "We need trustees who can come to Oberlin 4 times per year and who are willing to work on committees... We ask trustees to open doors to places – foundations, organizations... We need more non-alumni members on the board." She also commented that Oberlin is not well connected with the business community in Cleveland and needs to rectify that. The board also needs members from a broad geographic base, and it should include more representation from the Northwest and from Silicon Valley. SO, if you or one of your best friends or acquaintances (alumna/us OR NOT) are

- an openly LGBT person,
- wise, hard working, committed to Oberlin, and/or just a tad rich, and



SC members (ZS, HZ, & EF) pose in the VIP room at the Drag Ball



Sisters bless SC figure skater (HZ) in VIP room.

- interested in serving on the Board of Trustees of Oberlin College,

get in touch with OLA, and let's chat!

LAVENDER GRADUATION '00

On May 27th OLA sponsored the second Lavender Graduation, the only explicitly queer event held during Commencement and Alumni Weekend. The ceremony brought together a gathering of approximately seventy-five, which included graduates, parents, alumni (27 signed the guestbook), faculty, administrators, and supporters, to celebrate the accomplishments of LGBT graduating seniors. This year's OLA representative, Zoe Sherinian, served as M.C. for the event with the help of LGBT Coordinator Tori McReynolds ('99) and Professor Eve Sandberg. The importance of the Lavender Graduation as an event which brings people

together from all sectors of the Oberlin College community was made clear by the applause that followed the acknowledgment of parents who were present to support their graduating LGBT children. Without the support of their parents, many of the students would not have been present that day. This event created a powerful sense of community, which continued throughout the weekend.

Lavender Graduation began with colloquium presentations of their work by two recipients of the Andy Cemelli Grant, the alumni sponsored queer studies grant honoring the former co-chair of the student LGBU and an OLA founder, who died of AIDS in 1996. This grant, together with the Robertson Prize, provides an important opportunity and an impetus for students to pursue vital projects in queer studies and LGBT activism.

Oberlin College fifth year double degree student Matthew Hayden spoke about his efforts to improve the resources available to queer people through the Lorain County Rape Crisis Service (LCRCS) and Oberlin's student-run Sexual Assault Support Team (SAST). Hayden has been working with these organizations to develop a stronger awareness of LGBT issues. His project also focused on locating and developing written materials for LGBT clients as well as workers at these two organizations to assist them in providing appropriate services. The second Cemelli Grant recipient, graduating senior Khary Polk, gave a presentation about his research on homosexualities within slavery in the Americas. He conducted his research utilizing the archives at Tulane University. Polk has uncovered significant sources describing sexual games which southern white and black men played together. The graphic original descriptions which he shared with the audience offered compelling evidence of an inter-racial same-sex culture which, until now, had not been explored by academics. Polk has also begun to investigate the position of African slaves as cabin boys on Transatlantic merchant ships and the possible interpretation of them as sex slaves for their captain masters. Polk had also received a Mellon Grant for his work. Both Hayden and Polk are involved in significant independent research and activism. Hayden will work next year at Oberlin as an Assistant Area Coordinator of Residential Life and Services. Polk plans to further his research

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LAVENDER GRADUATION '00

Lavender Graduation '00

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through graduate studies. The third Cemelli Grant recipient, senior Joey Plaster, will continue his research on the oral histories of gay male Oberlin alumni and will present his findings via the web and at next year's Lavender Graduation Colloquium.

The colloquium was followed by the presentation of Lavender Graduation certificates, rainbow tassels, and OLA T-shirts, to twelve graduating LGBT students. Tori McReynolds read the graduates' names as they came forward to receive these tokens of recognition while the room full of supporters applauded proudly. A reception of intergenerational schmoozing and chocolate-covered strawberries capped off the event.

Zoe Sherinian reports that, in addition to having been the OLA representative at the Lavender Graduation Colloquium, this was her fifteenth year cluster reunion (for the classes of 1984, 1985, and 1986). She was thrilled to visit with close to twenty queer alumni, most of whom had been out as students (with a few wonderful surprises, too). Friday night was full of reminiscing over past unrequited crushes, angst-ridden relationships, and lots of gossip. Queer alumni were well represented (especially the wimmin) at the OSCA picnic at Tank, while Saturday night at the 'Sco was hotter than ever. Classics from the early '80's, such as "It's Raining Men!" (and how it rained all weekend!) brought back great memories, while an assortment of microbrewed beers and a dancing cage added new pleasures to this old familiar space. Zoe was convinced by an old (straight) female acquaintance (who said, "ooh I remember dancing with you") that her thirty-eight year old body can still groove. But she just couldn't keep it shaking until 2 a.m. like she used to. Many retired at midnight to Barrows lounge to nurture old memories, network, and strategize getting together again before their twentieth reunion. On Sunday night, a formal dinner with faculty members provided an additional opportunity to remember Andy Cemelli and other Oberlin friends who have passed away, including Jeff Mittleman, '84. Sunday night the concert band and Oberlin Can Consortium, accompanied by pie and popcorn, were as fabulous as ever.

For those of you who could not make the reunion or who are considering going to your

next cluster reunion, don't miss it. Oberlin is as wonderful as ever!



Zoe presents Lavender Graduation Certificate to student while Tori looks on.

JOHN YOUNG AND ZAMI

John Young arrived early for the OLA Steering Committee weekend, as he had been asked several months prior to the meeting to speak to Zami concerning his experiences as an African American gay man at Oberlin College during the early '80's. John reports that his evening with Zami was one of the most exciting and memorable moments he had experienced in a long time. He spoke with six students, though he had hoped more would have attended. Those in attendance were transfixed on how difficult, or nearly impossible, it was for him to negotiate being an active member of Abusua and being openly gay on campus. He related to the students that since that time persons such as Audre Lord, Essex Hemphill, Marlon Riggs, and Keith Boykin have produced many of the works which would start a small but consistent change in the community's perception of gay people of color. The students were eager to learn about his being able to maneuver his identities within the Oberlin community. After a lively question and answer period, he promised the students that he would attend the Zami Coffee House at the Campus Restaurant and that he would continue to meet with them during the weekend.

As had been reported in another article, the coffee house was a great treat. The event was like an open mike evening, and numerous students went to the stage and read or sang. John was surprised to see the Oberlin student he's been counseling serving as MC for the evening. All of the OLA Steering Committee members who were present were impressed with the level of talent and the passion for performance, which the students displayed. But

of course, this is Oberlin!

Overall, John had not seen such significant visibility of gay students of color doing things since his arrival on the steering committee. He is proud of the students who are asserting themselves on their own terms and who don't need to explain their orientation to anyone. He is most grateful to Miriam Jackson for her astounding leadership as chair of Zami. This sister is great! And, once again, Tori McReynolds did a splendid job of coordinating these events.

Finally, John mentions that he has been begging OLA members of color for a long time to send him articles for the newsletter. He has also called many to ask them to submit letters of self-nomination to the steering committee for consideration. He will be leaving the committee next year, and there are no other persons of color on the S.C. It is important for the young students in Zami to have role models from previous Oberlin generations; it shows a sense of caring from the alumni. John and the other steering committee members ask for letters of self-nomination to the steering committee to be sent to OLA or any current steering committee member.

ALUMNI EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

Jim Harrington, S.C. co-chair, attended the Alumni Executive Board meeting this past June in Boothbay Harbor, Maine. The June meetings are held in Boothbay Harbor where Midge Brittingham, Oberlin Alumni Director, has a lovely summer home on the water. It was a great weekend of meetings held in the Fisherman's Warf Inn, indulging in fresh lobster, and enjoying great camaraderie with Executive Board members who came to Maine from all over the country. In addition to Midge's presence (she hosted a fun cocktail party on a sunny evening at her home on the bay), the board was joined by two other alumni staff members: Margaret Erikson and Dale Preston. Committee reports were given by the chairs of the Admissions Advisory Committee, the Awards Committee, the Communications Committee, the Conservatory Committee, the Nominations Committee, and the Trustee Search Committee. The two affiliate group representatives (Oberlin African American Alumni and Oberlin Lambda Alumni) also gave

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ALUMNI NOTES AND NEWS

Alumni Executive Board Meeting

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progress reports. Numerous other discussions concerning general alumni association business took place during the weekend, and the meetings were chaired by alumni association president Diane Kenty. OLA will hold its next weekend meeting during the Alumni Council Weekend in mid-September. This will provide OLA with the opportunity to connect with the rest of the council.

VISIT OLA ONLINE NEW OLA EMAIL ADDRESS

OLA has a new online look! Use our updated site to learn how you can become a volunteer or participate in OLA regional activities. Find out more about current Steering Committee members or how to become one yourself. Contact us via our new email address (ola_oberlin@yahoo.com) to give us your feedback or to refer a friend who might want to become an OLA member. To visit OLA online, go to the Oberlin College website at <http://www.oberlin.edu>, click on Alumni, and then Affiliate Groups, and then scroll down to Oberlin Lambda Alumni, and click again.

ANGELS INCREASE CONTRIBUTIONS

Because of all of you who made

contributions to OLA between January and March 2000, we were able to take Herb Zeman, '65, up on the full amount of his matching challenge grant. Herb offered to contribute an additional fifty percent on top of all contributions of \$100 or more made during the first three months of this year, up to a total in matching funds of \$3000. Many of you came through with gifts of \$100 or more, allowing us (just barely!) to take Herb up on the full amount of his challenge. All contributions go to important OLA projects such as the funding of the Cemelli Grant and the Robertson Prize awarded annually to Oberlin students pursuing intellectual, artistic, or political activities which contribute toward the richness of the LGBT community; HIV/AIDS awareness projects involving students, alumni, and administration; sponsorship of Lavender Graduation; the production of the OLA Newsletter; and many other short-term and long-term projects. Thanks to all of you who made contributions of any amount during the period of Herb's matching grant challenge. And if you didn't get your check in earlier this year, you may still do so. OLA is a completely self-supported affiliate of the Alumni Association. OLA depends on the continuing support of members like you to fulfill its mission of supporting the entire LGBT community. We depend on everyone to contribute what they can (suggested annual membership contribution is \$40) in order to continue OLA's important work!

REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

There are several regional activities planned for the upcoming social season. Clyde Owan, Alumni Council President-Elect, has been working with OLA Co-Chair Jim Harrington in


coordinating some events in conjunction with general alumni regional chapters. There will also be OLA-specific events during the year. Announcements will be sent to OLA members through regional mailings. Philadelphia, Boston, and New York City events are in the works. For those wishing to assist in the planning of those events or who wish to organize and plan an event elsewhere, please contact Jim Harrington at: Harrington@World.Oberlin.Edu.

QUEER TRUSTEE NEEDED

Dear OLA Members:

The Steering Committee would once again ask for all OLA members to express your concerns to the board of trustees regarding having an openly queer member appointed to the board. There have been discussions with administrators and trustees for several years, and no progress has been made. The board of trustees membership does not reflect the diversity of the Oberlin community. There has been much effort to recruit a diverse community of students, faculty, and staff at Oberlin, but that's where the recruiting has ended. We ask for you to voice your concerns to OLA, Oberlin College President Nancy Dye, Acting President Clayton Koppes, and Chair of the Board of Trustees Thomas J. Klutznick. Mr. Klutznick also chairs the nominating committee for the board. This is the time for change. Oberlin students and alumni have historically expressed their opinions, so we ask for you to stand up and speak out once again!

Thanks from the OLA SC

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