

# **The Cluster What? How Oberlin's Reunion System Works and Why Commencement/Reunion Weekend is Not Always on Memorial Day Weekend**

By Midge Wood Brittingham '60 (1997)  
Updated by Danielle Young (2016)

---

If you're a typical Obie, chances are you didn't run only with members of your own graduating class. More likely than not, you befriended people who were on campus at the same time you were—even if they graduated a year or two before or after you did. Enabling reunions of alumni to return to campus with friends from adjacent classes was a large part of the reason the Alumni Association adopted the cluster system for Commencement/Reunion Weekend.

The cluster system has been in effect since May 1974, and although the practice has proved popular, it can be confusing to the uninitiated. The cluster system allows three classes to gather together for reunions every five years. The middle class of each cluster celebrates its reunion on the actual five-year interval. For instance, in May 2017 the cluster 2011, 2012, 2013 will celebrate its 5th reunion and the cluster 1976, 1977, and 1978 will celebrate its 40th reunion. These clusters will return again in 2022 for their 10th and 45th reunions.

Clusters remain the same until the classes reach their 25th reunion, which each class celebrates alone. After the 25th reunions, the cluster configurations change, and remain in effect until the classes' 50th reunion, which is also celebrated alone. Fiftieth-reunion class members are inducted into the association's Half-Century Club, whose members are thereafter invited to return for every Commencement/Reunion Weekend. Nevertheless, the association does hold a 55th, 60th, and 65th at a class' regular five-year interval.

Like everything else in life, though, the cluster system is not perfect. Sometimes the break between clusters doesn't satisfy an individual's desire. If you're part of an Obie couple, your partner might be in a different cluster. So might your best friend.

Alumni are also asking why Commencement/Reunion Weekend is not always on Memorial Day Weekend anymore. In 2012, the Oberlin College faculty approved academic calendar changes. As a result of these changes, Commencement does not always fall on Memorial Day. Commencement is now held on the Fourth Monday each May. In some years, such as 2018, that fourth Monday is also Memorial Day. In

other years, such as 2017, Commencement/Reunion Weekend will be held the week prior to Memorial Day Weekend.

Rationale behind the academic calendar changes include lengthening reading period, closing the gap between end of new student orientation and the beginning of classes, reducing time between the end of Winter Term and the beginning of the second semester, and ending the second semester earlier, etc.

We are not separating reunions and commencement. Oberlin College will be celebrating our alumni and current graduates the same, festive weekend.

A chart displaying cluster reunions through the year 2064 is available on the Class Pages [website](#).