

# OBERLIN

COLLEGE & CONSERVATORY

Oberlin College Board of Trustees

January 28, 2019

Dear Oberlin community,

Welcome to 2019!

Now that the holidays are over, we would like to report on a very productive Board meeting in December.

We spent a large part of our time on the Administrative and Academic Program Review. We want to commend everyone involved in the process. It's a lot of work, and we know it provokes concern and even discord within the community. Few of us enjoy discord. But it means that we are getting to the central challenges that Oberlin faces in the coming years. We need a vigorous debate about how to deal with these challenges; a debate without disagreement is no debate at all.

We came away from the Board meeting optimistic about the AAPR. The Board's Executive Committee had our third meeting with elected faculty leaders, where we had a fruitful discussion about how to foster innovation at Oberlin. David Kamitsuka and Bill Quillen gave trustees a progress report on the AAPR that also conveyed optimism, even though they readied us for hard, contentious work ahead. In our plenary discussion, we refined our criteria for financial success, which has been shared with the AAPR steering committee. On January 28, trustees will participate in a webinar on the revenue-center model, one of the tools that the steering committee is using to come up with its recommendations.

The AAPR recommendations will percolate over the next few months and we hope to devote much of our March meeting to the initial observations coming out of the process. These will be difficult conversations but we have to have them now, when Oberlin has the time and resources to chart a sensible path forward, rather than when we might be forced to make decisions under duress. (To see what that's like, look at Hampshire, Earlham, Sweet Briar, U Wisconsin-Stevens Point, and many other schools).

We also know that this only works if all of Oberlin's constituencies – faculty, staff, students, and alumni – can embrace the challenge of constructing the 21<sup>st</sup> century Oberlin, even if each of us has trouble letting go of our misgivings.

Thank you again to all of you who are supporting and participating in the AAPR.

Here are some other highlights from our meetings.

- As they have before, the Student Senate wowed us with their presentation to the board and their plans to strengthen student government and push important student initiatives. Special thanks to Kam Dunbar and Eddy Tumbokon for their presentation.
- Amy Chen and Leah Modigliani gave us a report on the endowment, and especially on the impressive performance last year. If the markets stay as volatile as they are these days, our investment office will need ample supplies of Dramamine. The next time we get an endowment report, we expect them to remind us of the virtues of diversification.
- We would also like to thank our fellow trustees for participating in the sexual misconduct training session. It is important for the Board to be clear about standards of behavior we expect from the community.

Our December meeting was an occasion to remember on what makes Oberlin magical. Trustees attended the showcase to dedicate the incredible Eric Baker Nord Performing Arts Annex. It is a beautiful space, one that stood on its own Thursday night, but also melted into the background once our incredible students and faculty took to the stage. We also had a chance to honor Clyde McGregor for his leadership and generosity over the years. The choral piece composed by Professor Stephen Hartke and dedicated to Clyde was absolutely beautiful and the choir's performance was magnificent. Former president Marvin Krislov returned for a visit and for the unveiling of his portrait.

Finally, trustees took part in Barefoot Dialogues. The experience left many of us persuaded that this exercise in sustained dialogue is good education, good for the mind and the spirit, and a good way to build community – all qualities of a great residential liberal arts education.

Oberlin students, like many of their generation, are often criticized for their fragility – for being coddled kids easily triggered by micro-aggressions. We didn't see fragility sitting around those circles. We saw vulnerability. The two may look the same, which makes it easy for the critics to criticize. But they couldn't be more different, at least in one important sense. A fragile person perhaps must be shielded from the harsh "real" world. A vulnerable person, on the other hand, is capable of empathy, and empathy is the beginning of understanding, wisdom, and strength. The harsh "real" world needs a lot more of that.

See you next time.

Chris Canavan  
Chesley Maddox-Dorsey  
Carmen Twillie Ambar