Focus Groups Set Ground Rules, and Wrestling with the Structural Deficit Begins

The College plans to eliminate the entire structural deficit for the 1996-97 fiscal year, Evans says. This means that to be balanced, next year’s nearly $90 million budget, which now shows a deficit of $3 million, needs to be reduced by $3 million.

The current plan, says Evans, calls for College divisions to find some $1.6 million in savings in the salaries and wages lines of the budget. The benefits costs related to that amount would bring the savings in personnel costs to $2.2 million. The remaining $800,000 will come from other line items in the budget.

By June 30 all plans will be completed, at least in broad strokes, says Evans, and most reductions in force will have been determined. Some divisions have already begun reducing staff, he says.

The College will issue “absolutely no formal announcements,” says Evans. The expanded senior staff is developing policies, he says, that define a severance-package model, aiming for uniformity in procedures whenever possible. “Of course,” Evans notes, “union contracts must be adhered to when structural-deficit reductions have an impact on bargaining-unit members.”

How Many Positions Will Be Reduced?

Referring to a number floating about campus, Evans says “60 is too high” as an estimate of the number of regular full-time positions that will be eliminated to balance the budget. (The number 60 probably originated in a General Faculty discussion, where the speaker’s assumption was that the entire structural deficit would be eliminated by reduction in force; see “Faculty Meetings” in this issue.—Ed.) Evans will not go further in estimating the number of layoffs to come because, he says, all divisions haven’t completed their decisions.

How the Work Force Will Be Reduced

Involuntary separation will account for the largest portion of the staff reductions, Evans says, reiterating that retirement and layoffs have roles to play. All personnel changes give work units an opportunity to redefine the work they do, says Evans. As has been true for some time at Oberlin, each position left open by attrition will provide the opportunity to redefine the work they do, and not all open positions will be reallocated.

Reorganization, Reduction

The realignment of financial functions is an example of one of the kinds of changes to come, says Evans. Similar or identical functions being performed by more than one part of the College will be examined with an eye toward improving the services while consolidating them in one office, he says. Not all changes, however, will be of this nature.

“All divisions are being asked to contribute in some way to structural-deficit elimination,” Evans says, adding, “Most of the changes—which must have personnel effects on the budget—will involve personnel cost reductions, in both salary- and benefits-line items.”

The Timing

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OhioLINK: Speedy Delivery and More

If you’ve ever borrowed books or periodicals through Interlibrary Loan—even assisted by the handy QuickMail form—you know that much of the process is waiting. Enter OhioLINK, the next best thing to plucking the item right off the shelf in Mudd. “The slowest link in the [OhioLINK] process,” says Assistant Professor of Religion David Kamitsuka—a member of the General Faculty Library Committee who had early access to the service—is Mudd’s notification by printout. But such a technicality doesn’t slow down Kamitsuka—not when he knows how to work around that step.

You can check the status of your request on your own office computer, he says, and not even wait for Mudd’s notification. When the OhioLINK patron receives the book, he can pick it up at the Circulation Desk—usually two or three days after submitting your request.

Even if patrons cannot use OhioLINK to borrow specific material another library owns (some materials are for the owning library’s use only), they can learn—from the OhioLINK screens on computers in their own offices or any other campus-networked computer—which academic libraries in the state own the materials.

OhioLINK (Ohio Library Information Network) is more than a hopped-up version of Interlibrary Loan. One of Kamitsuka’s favorite features is the display of tables of contents for many books.

While Evans says that the College will not offer across-the-board early retirement packages, he urges employees thinking of retirement to consult division heads and Director of Human Resources Ruth Spencer.

Staying Abrace of Changes

The Observer will publish more about Oberlin’s structural deficit as information becomes available. See “How the Observer Will Cover the Structural Deficit.” This issue’s “Faculty Meetings” section also covers the topic at length.

At an all-employee meeting in Finney Chapel noon Monday, February 12, President Nancy Dye will bring faculty and staff up to date on plans and changes resulting from the budget deficit. Dye and Dean of Student Life and Services Charlene Cole will hold residence-hall meetings early in the semester so that students can discuss budget planning, especially as it affects student-life issues.

OhioLINK’s executive director, Tom Sanville, spoke to the Mudd audience. Oberlin formally introduced OhioLINK January 15 with a demonstration attended by about 50 members of the faculty and staff. The executive director of OhioLINK, Tom Sanville, and Director of Libraries Ray English made comments at the occasion, and Dean of the Conservatory Karen Wolff read remarks from President Nancy Dye, who had been called out of town unexpectedly.

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The Oberlin College Library was the 43rd academic library in the state to join OhioLINK, and the first private college to do so. Oberlin makes $85,000 of its library holdings available to the other participating OhioLINK libraries.

One way to get to OhioLINK to choose “Connect to other DATABASES” from the main OBIS menu. OBIS is two clicks away from Oberlin Online’s library homepage, http://www.oberlin.edu/library/OhioLINK_homepage.html. And if you’re not ready to jump on the computer yourself, Oberlin’s librarians are ready, says English, to invoke OhioLINK for you—or help you learn.

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General and Conservatory Faculty Discuss Elements of Structural Deficit

At a special meeting of the General Faculty, held December 5, President Nancy Dye and Vice president for Finance Andy Evans discussed with faculty members the meaning and implications of Oberlin’s structural deficit.

Using the blackboard, Dye drew a graph that plotted expenditures and revenues by years. The graph showed that over time Oberlin’s revenues are rising more slowly than its expenditures, leaving a wedge-shaped gap in the middle of the structural deficit that, growing from year to year, would be about $3 million for fiscal year 1996-97.

Dye then considered Oberlin’s three revenue sources: annual giving, the endowment, and tuition, and showed why none of the three can be expected to increase enough to erase the deficit. It is not realistic to think that we could double annual giving next year and keep increasing annual giving in the following years to get rid of the structural deficit, Dye said about the revenue source. Hypothetically, we could eliminate the structural deficit if we took an additional $3 million (above what we normally withdraw out of the endowment) and added revenue source, for this year and more in following years, she said, but doing so would eventually use up all the endowment. The third source revenue, tuition, she said, could not contribute to eradicating the structural deficit because it cannot be raised enough to make a difference without acting as an utter deterrent to enrollment and retention.

The solution to the structural deficit must be primarily on the expenditure side, Dye said, adding that more than half of the College budget is for salaries and benefits. One year the College froze salaries to address the deficit, she noted. "There is ‘no way I can see my way clear’ to freeze them again, she said, because to do so would be to move the College away from important strategic goals, particularly making Oberlin’s faculty salaries more competitive. In fact, to get rid of the structural deficit by salary freezes, she said, the College would have to freeze salaries permanently, then begin to reduce them. We cannot continue to do everything that we are doing," Dye said. The president said that she would like to eliminate the structural deficit as much as possible with voluntary acts but that the College cannot eliminate the problem by voluntary actions only. She mentioned the focus on contributions for mid-March as one means by which members of the faculty and staff could help define the processes that will be used to address the structural deficit.

Referring to handouts they brought (reproduced on this page), with corrections, Dye and Evans then responded to questions from the faculty, who filled nearly every seat and lined the walls in King 306. These were some of the comments and exchanges:

Professor of Economics Robert Porton questioned the need to cut expenditures heavily, he called Dye’s assessment of the College’s ability to enhance revenue “pessimistic,” and blamed past endowment performance for a good part of Oberlin’s financial strains. “I do not mean to suggest that we should not [work on the revenue side],” Dye responded, adding that she could not influence what was done in the past, and that it is important to focus on the future.

Professor of William Hood observed that to erase the entire deficit only by cutting staff would mean the loss of 60 employees receiving the average annual Oberlin compensation (salaries and benefits) of $50,000.

Dye said that the process of eliminating the structural deficit could not be conceptualized that way. Early retirement, said Frederick B. Artz, Professor of History Marcia Colish, is something the College may want to consider for faculty (who are the least flexible, she said, given tenure). Early retirement might encourage older, more highly paid professors to leave, freeing their positions for newer, less highly paid faculty members.

“We’ve heard about [the need to cut expenditures] for the past five years,” said Professor of Classics James Helm, “and we cut again and again, and we still have a structural deficit. Is there any way to know whether we will resolve the problem this time?” What we’re doing this year is different, replied Dye, “because we haven’t cut recurring expenses in the past.”

Associate Professor of History Leonard Smith asked whether the intent was to eliminate the entire structural deficit in one year. “We need to figure that out,” said Dye, “—see what’s possible.”

Con Faculty Discusses Deficit, Other Matters

Conservatory dean Karen Wolff addressed the conservatory faculty about the structural deficit and relevant focus groups at the December 12 Conservatory Faculty meeting.

Professor of Singing Daune Mabry, chair of the Admissions Committee, reported that each conservatory division will submit to the Admissions Committee by March 1 a ranked list of Artist Diploma candidates they recommend for admission. The committee will review the rankings and make recommendations to the Director of Conservatory Admissions Michael Manderson. The annual target number for entering Artist Diploma candidates is 12.

After extensive discussion the faculty moved that—with approval from the students’ advisors and the assistant dean of the conservatory—the students may enroll in a large ensemble for zero credit if they are scheduling 17 hours in other classes that semester. Associate Dean of Academic Affairs Kathryn Stuart, who chairs the Educational Planning Committee (EPC), brought the proposal—approved by the conducting and ensembles division—before the faculty from the EPC.

The faculty tabled a motion, brought by the TMARA faculty, to reduce the number of ensemble credits TMARA majors need for graduation.

COMPARATIVE FINANCIAL DATA

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HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF STUDENT CHARGES

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<td>$21,003</td>
<td>$2,245</td>
<td>$2,900</td>
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TOTAL $12,903 $19,018 $25,625

These are corrected charts; see note below.
Transitions of Oberlin College colleagues but their transitions this issue, to take note not only of the comings only—because of personnel changes anticipation of new faces on campus and the departure of many orchestras and festivals From 1991 to 1995, he was associate at the Victoria and Albert Museum, California–Berkeley, a curatorial intern at the San Contests. He will teach at Oberlin on the Royal Conservatory in Ghent, Washington, the Royal Festival Hall, Notre Dame, Zurich’s Tonhalle, the Tokyo Cathedrals and director of residential services at the Brahms, and Harvard. Paukert has performed at Alice Tully Hall, Notre Dame, Zurich’s Tonalities for a project of the Jazzing up Farrakhan’s reference to the Washington Monument is African, and that the symbols that the American government is based upon are in fact based on Africa. In his speech Farrakhan also identified George Washington, a land chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC). Around the Square, the publication about students, is distributed to alumni, friends, and employees of the College, has won an Award of Merit. The College of Arts and Sciences viewbook and the Conservatory of Music search poster, both aimed at potential Oberlin students, have received, respectively, an Award of Merit and honorable mention. The annual fund brochure, which is mailed to alumni, earned an Award of Merit.

New Faculty and Staff
Wendy Brisbane (Kent State University B.A. 1994) is registral intern at the Allen Memorial Art Museum (AMAM). She is a graduate of the museum’s research assistant at the AMAM and as an accolyte assistant at the Kent State University Museum. Mrs. Brisbane is working on her master’s degree in art history. In Kent State she is employed with the new graduate program in 1994, when she entered a graduate program in mathematics and computer science. Her first year was spent at Mondie Forge in Cleveland before entering computing, and built houses. He was a blacksmith at Priscilla Smith, a senior faculty of Oberlin College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. Paukert received a diploma in the Haarlem Improvisation Master Class and the Royal Festival Hall, Notre Dame, Zurich’s Tonhalle, the Tokyo Cathedrals and director of residential services at the Brahms, and Harvard. Paukert has performed at Alice Tully Hall, Notre Dame, Zurich’s Tonalities for a project of the Jazzing up Farrakhan’s reference to the Washington Monument is African, and that the symbols that the American government is based upon are in fact based on Africa. In his speech Farrakhan also identified George Washington, a land chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC). Around the Square, the publication about students, is distributed to alumni, friends, and employees of the College, has won an Award of Merit. The College of Arts and Sciences viewbook and the Conservatory of Music search poster, both aimed at potential Oberlin students, have received, respectively, an Award of Merit and honorable mention. The annual fund brochure, which is mailed to alumni, earned an Award of Merit.

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The philosophy of conservatism has swept the political field virtually everywhere, and virtually everyone has been hostile to the cause of conservation. This is more than an ironic inconsistency. Because of the nature of the conservatives at all levels of government, the wisdom and fore- sight with which conservatives deal with long-term environmental issues is a matter of great consequence for the American people and their children.

Do conservatism and conservation share more than a common linguistic heritage? I believe they do. The present antipathy of conservatives to conservation suggests, at best, confusion about what it means to be conservative about soils, biota, wildlife, and natural resources. To make such a case, however, it is necessary first to define authentic conservatism.

Conservative philosopher Russell Kirk proposes six “first principles” of true conservatism:

- belief in a transcendent moral order
- preference for social continuity, i.e., the “devil they know to the devil they don’t know”
- belief in “the wisdom of our ancestors”
- tendency to be guided by prudence
- “affecting for the proliferation of integrity of long-established social institutions”
- belief that “human nature suffers irredeemably from certain faults”

For Kirk the essence of conservatism is the “love of order.” Eighteenth-century Brit- ish philosopher and statesman Edmund Burke, the founding father of modern conservatism and as much a conservative as one can be, said the goal of order is to harmonize the distant past with the distant future. To this end Burke, like present-day Congressional Republicans, thought otherwise, but not one about “things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perish- able nature.” Burke’s societal contract was not about the distribution of spoils (such as tax breaks) but about a partnership promoting science, art, virtue, and perfection, none of which could be achieved by a single genera- tion without veneration for the past and healthy regard for those to follow.

Burke’s Contract

Burke’s contract was between “those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.” Those “possessing any portion of power,” in Burke’s words, “ought to be strongly and awfully impressed with an idea that they act in trust.” For Burke, freedom in this contractual state is “not solitary, uncon- nected, individual, selfish Liberty. As if ev- ery man was to regulate the whole of his conduct by his own will.” It is rather “that state of things in which liberty is secured by the equality of restraint.”

As the ecological shadow of the present over future generations has lengthened, the wisdom of Burke’s concern for the welfare of future generations has become more evident. If conservatism means anything at all, other than the preservation of the rules by which one class enriches itself at the expense of another, then the consideration of what Burke called “an economic inheritance” owed to us from our forefathers, and to be transmit- ted to our posterity; as an estate belonging to the present, is of whether cli- mate change occurs or characters we do not want, such as income and employ- ment work just the way business works. Government certainly ought to do it, but it is a far cry from believing that public work can be conducted as a business.

Genuine Conservatism

Like that defined in Kirk’s “first principles,” a genuine conservatism is grounded in the belief in a transcendent moral order in which our proper role as trustees subject to higher authority. Genuine conservatism would honor and respect the need for both social and ecological continuity. It would respect the wisdom of the past and the biological wisdom accumulated over millions of years of evolution. A genuine conserva- tion would prudently avoid jeopardizing our legacy to future generations for any reason of temporary economic advantage. It would conserve diversity of all kinds. And a genu- ine conservatism, characterized as it can be, the wisdom of their forefathers and to be transmitted to our posterity; as an estate belonging to the present, is of whether cli- mate change occurs or characters we do not want, such as income and employ- ment work just the way business works. Government certainly ought to do it, but it is a far cry from believing that public work can be conducted as a business.

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What’s Conservative about Conservatism?

By David Orr

David Orr is professor of environmental stud- ies. His suggestions for further reading re- lated to this essay are available as a hyperlink from this paragraph in the electronic version of the Observer (http://www.obelin.edu/~observer/main.html).
Further Reading

A Reading List to Accompany David Orr’s “Observations” piece in the Observer of February 1, 1996, “What’s Conservative about Conservativism”?


