Conservatory Budget Reductions Near Completion

By moving two faculty members into endowed chairs, the Conservatory of Music will meet $70,000 of its reduction target of $100,000 to $125,000 in next year’s budget.

The remainder of the budget cuts, necessary to help eliminate Oberlin’s $3 million structural deficit, are all smaller, Dean Karen Wolff announced at the Conservatory Faculty meeting Tuesday.

The conservatory will save an additional $25,000 by reallocating adjunct personnel and accepting a retirement. Piano care will change to a less-costly plan.

Still being considered are faculty leave-replacement economies and Winter Term efficiencies.

Wolff does not anticipate any more personnel changes for the 1996-97 year, she said. Neither will the conservatory cut its capital-equipment line nor think about reducing the student body, she added in response to questions from the faculty.

Why the Observer Doesn’t Publish the Names of All the People Leaving

“Change is always difficult, especially when it’s not voluntary,” says Ruth Spencer, director of human resources, referring to the reduction in Oberlin’s work force that is resulting from the College’s reduction of its $3 million structural deficit. “Loss of a job is a major life change, on the same grieving level as death,” Spencer says.

Because some employees have asked that their names not appear in the Observer, and because she wants to protect the feelings of outgoing employees as much as possible, Spencer has asked the Observer in general not to publish names at least until separating employees and the College have signed a separation agreement. A separation agreement is a document that defines the terms of separation, including severance pay and other support during the transition from Oberlin to other employment [see “Dye Announces Severance Packages”]. Until a separation agreement is signed, says Spencer, other employees will have to live with the uncertainty of not knowing who will no longer work for the College.

“We want people who are leaving to feel as if they have invested their time and energy in the right place, and that this is a change that doesn’t negate what they’ve contributed,” Spencer says, explaining the fact of separation agreements and her request not to publicize separating employees’ names.

Why does the College care? “One of the things that Oberlin stands for,” says Spencer, an alumna, “is acknowledging the value of all people. People need to be treated as humanely as possible. [Not printing in the Observer the names of separating employees] is a manifestation of some care for their service. That is the tone [President] Nancy Dye has set for this College, this administration. We care as an institution to do what’s right.”

Dye Announces Severance Packages

Five months’ pay and a month of paid vacation: that’s what members of Oberlin’s Administrative and Professional Staff (A&PS) with between five and 15 years of College service will receive if their position is eliminated to help cure the College’s $3 million structural deficit. On Wednesday President Nancy Dye announced severance packages for Oberlin employees who are not members of the faculty or bargaining units.

A&PS employees with between one and five years of service will receive two months Continued on page 4
In November 1995 Rutgers University’s Twentieth Century Ensemble performed Professor of Music Composition Randolph Coleman’s “Format 1,” for three players. The ensemble’s coach and director, Paul Hoffman, uses Coleman’s Format works as the basis for his course at Rutgers on experimental music. Also in November Coleman lectured in a University of Chicago interdisciplinary graduate course, Public Art and Private Spaces, for sociology, art, and music studies. His lecture was titled “Repositioning Art Music: a Return to Embodiment.” Coleman was in residency at the Cincinnati Conservatory October 13-14, 1995. Besides giving composition lessons and a formal lecture, he coached an open rehearsal of his piece dig.it Ila, which the Cincinnati Conservatory’s Percussion Group premiered during his residency. • On February 2 Assistant Professor of Music Education Joanne Erwin gave a presentation, “Unlocking the Mysteries of the Bow Arm,” at the Ohio Music Education Association Conference. • Don Hilton, client-support analyst in the Houck Computing Center, is represented by several of the creatures on the cover of a new H.P. Lovecraft anthology, Dreams of Terror and Death: The Dream Cycle of H.P. Lovecraft, recently published by Del Rey. Hilton modeled for illustrator John Palencar. • John Knight, professor of music education, guest conducted the Berea Wind Ensemble for a public concert in Berea, Ohio, in December, and at the Ohio Music Education Association (OMEA) Conference in February. He is president of OMEA’s District IV. On October 28, 1995, Knight presented at the conservatory a clinic session, Preparing Ensembles for a Musical Performance, for Ohio music teachers. Two of Knight’s articles were published recently in the Instrumentalist, for which he is a contributing editor. “The Passion and Finesse of Serge Kouusevistsky” appeared in the November 1995 issue, and “Conducting Nelhybel’s ‘Festivo’” was in the January 1996 issue. The 50th-anniversary issue of the journal, dated August 1995, lauded Knight for his “adroit discussions” of contemporary conducting techniques. • Assistant Professor of History Wendy Kozol was a speaker at the November 4 annual Fall Conference of the Chester County (Pennsylvania) Historical Society. The conference focused on how popular culture since World War II has contributed to American values and been shaped by them. • Professor of Violin Marilyn McDonald has won the Teacher of the Year award from the Ohio String Teacher’s Association. Assistant Professor of Music Education Joanne Erwin presented the award to McDonald February 1 during the Ohio Music Educator’s Convention’s reception for Ohio string teachers. • The New Scientist mentioned Professor of Singing Richard Miller in “What’s in a Voice,” its September 23 cover story. “Singers monitor the resonances in their voices by vibrations sensed in their heads, especially around the hard palate and cheekbones,” wrote author Ingo Titze, a professor of speech science and voice at the University of Iowa. “Richard Miller . . . knows how to achieve these sensations consistently.” • Professor of Environmental Studies David Orr has contributed a chapter to Greening the College Curriculum: A Guide to Environmental Teaching in the Liberal Arts, edited by Jonathan Collett and Stephen Karakashian and published recently by Island Press. Orr’s is the first chapter, “Reinventing Higher Education.” • Heart of Whiteness: Afrikaners Face Black Rule in the New South Africa, written by Professor of Politics Ben Schiff and his wife, June Goodwin (see the Observer of October 26, 1995), has been receiving reviews in newspapers and journals in the United States and in the London Weekly Guardian. The American reviews are in Publishers’ Weekly, Kirkus, Library Journal, New York Times Book Review, Booklist, Condé Nast Traveller, the Plain Dealer, the Christian Science Monitor, Foreign Affairs, and Washington Post Weekly. Ray Suarez, host of National Public Radio’s Talk of the Nation, reviewed the book for Washington Post Bookworld. “The peculiar history and current predicament of the Afrikaners have begged for a truly nuanced telling,” wrote Suarez in the feature-length review. “Goodwin and Schiff’s work fills that need beautifully.” Schiff and Goodwin have appeared on radio programs originating in New York, Washington, D.C., Detroit, and Baltimore to talk about Heart of Whiteness and the related article they wrote for the November 13 issue of the Nation. • The January 29 Plain Dealer ran a profile of Associate Professor of Physics Dan Stinebringer. The article quotes Stinebringer describing pulsars and his attraction to them. Pulsars, Stinebringer’s specialty, are the ultradense cores of massive stars. • Almita and Roland Vamos have won Northern Ohio Live magazine’s 1995 Annual Achievement Award in education. The magazine reported the news in its October 1995 issue along with the news that Tom Van Nortwick won honorable mention in the outreach category for his work with “Dionysos Lives!,” a series of events surrounding the Great Lakes Theater Festival (GLTF) production of Euripides’s The Bakkhai. (See the Observer of September 14, 1995, for a story on their nominations.) Van Nortwick is engaged in a similar GLTF project involving The Dybbuk, a Yiddish play of the early 20th century that the GLTF will produce between February 29 and March 16. The February issue of Spotlight, GLTF’s newsletter, carries Van Nortwick’s essay about the play, “Urgent Questions for Our Own Time and Place.” GLTF is publishing two more of Van Nortwick’s essays, “Teaching Eternity,” in the teacher-preparation guide for The Dybbuk, and “Foolish Wisdom,” in the playbook for The World of Sholem Aleichem.” Van Nortwick will give a preperformance speech February 29 and deliver the keynote speech at a March 3 symposium on The Dybbuk.
A Few Hours in Cyberspace—Oberlin Style

By Anita Buckmaster '95

On February 8, while photographers around the world transmitted photographs to the 24 Hours in Cyberspace headquarters in San Francisco, I called faculty and staff around the Oberlin campus to see what we were doing on the Internet that day.

In San Francisco a team of editors representing Newsweek, National Geographic, the Associated Press, and other leading news sources assembled the digitally transmitted images into what they called a “digital time capsule,” chronicling life with online technology and noting how technology is changing the world. They broadcast the images and stories over the Internet in real time, making this the largest one-day online project ever.

At Oberlin my markedly low-tech and short-term version of the project found five of us painting on the walls of the digital cave, and here are our stories.

Professor of Psychology William Friedman used the Internet to keep in touch with his family—he corresponded with his son, who is away at Amherst College.

Art Librarian Jeffrey Weidman did what he does every day—some surfing through research collections, a little E-mail, a few newsgroups. He looked at a list for librarian—educators posted in Australia and checked out a discussion group sponsored by the College Art Association.

Associate Professor of Religion and East Asian studies James Dobbins has most of the bookmarks on his Netscape browser set to sites about Buddhism, his area of interest. On February 8 he looked at bibliographic and reference sites in Chinese and English. On that day, like many others, he downloaded and skimmed the headlines of Japan’s largest newspaper, Asahi.

Tammy Martin, administrative assistant in the Oberlin College Archives, installed the newest version of Netscape on her computer. Then she looked at the Windham Hill Records homepage, “just to check it out, to make sure Netscape was working,” she said. At the same time, a student worker was adding new information to the Archives’ homepage.

Community Services Coordinator Bridget Hardy used the Internet to advise a Bonner Scholar in Seattle who is trying to get scholarship money advanced before going to China for the semester. The student responded with a written description, to go on file at the Center for Service and Learning, of her plans for service in Asia.

Changes in Appointment

Mavis Clark has joined the Office of Communications as assistant editor of the Oberlin Alumni Magazine. She is responsible for reporting all alumni news and other stories as assigned by editor Cynthia Nickoloff. Clark’s magazine background includes editing several publications for Condé Nast in New York. She is a former director of publications for the National Association of College Stores, where her roles included editor and publisher of the association’s bimonthly magazine and weekly newsletter. She has held freelance and part-time positions at the College since 1981.

Departures

Professor and Director of Opera Theater Judith Layng has announced her retirement, to begin at the end of this semester. Judith Nichols will resign as administrative assistant in the admissions office March 7.

Corrections on URLs

Last week’s Observer (paper version) contained errors in two World Wide Web addresses (URLs). The URL for Oberlin’s Environmental Studies Center is http://www.oberlin.edu/zensys, and the URL for WKSU’s Akron Round Table page is http://www.wksu.kent.edu/rt/.

President’s Chapel Speech Aims to Unite Campus

In an address whose setting and content were designed, she said, to “break down barriers” between College employee groups, President Nancy Dye told a filled Finney Chapel on Monday that together Oberlin faculty and staff can build a “more trusting, more democratic, and more humane” institution.

Dye reported on matters related to the College’s $3 million structural deficit. Thirty positions, as of February 12, had been eliminated, she said, including 17 that were filled—necessitating the layoff of 17 people.

It is important, she said, amidst the difficulties associated with restructuring, to remember the goals of the changes, specifically those to:

- improve salaries
- improve financial-aid packages
- increase reserves for capital funding
- more understanding interaction.
Double Win for the Heating Plant Yields Wide-Ranging Benefits

We’ll all breath easier now that the College’s central heating plant has put on line a piece of equipment that will save money while it improves the plant’s atmospheric emissions.

In planning stages for the last few years, the project—the installation of a natural-gas burner—enjoys the financial and technical support of the Gas Research Institute (GRI), the research, development, and commercialization organization of the natural-gas industry, and Acurex Environmental, the company that installed the unit, say Gene Matthews, director of facilities maintenance, and Ron Pflaum, central heating plant manager.

Conservatory Faculty Discusses Applications, Budget, and Accreditation

At Tuesday’s Conservatory Faculty meeting Director of Conservatory Admissions Mike Manderen reported that the number of applications for next year are a little ahead of what they were at this time last year, when con applications broke previous records. Manderen expects 300 more applications before the cycle is over, he said. He said he is especially happy with applications before the cycle is over, he said. He said he is especially happy with applications for applied studies in piano, voice, and French horn, and senses the applications for next year are a little ahead of what they were at this time last year, when con applications broke previous records. Manderen expects 300 more applications before the cycle is over, he said. He said he is especially happy with applications for applied studies in piano, voice, and French horn, and senses

Conservatory dean Karen Wolff described the conservatory while Wolff is on sabbatical next year, she said. Today natural-gas co-firing burners are a hot topic in trade journals, he says, and Pflaum, central heating plant manager. Today natural-gas co-firing burners are a hot topic in trade journals, he says, and Pflaum, central heating plant manager.

“there will be raises” in spite of the budget reductions.

Wolff told the faculty that in spring 1998 the conservatory will be in line for an accreditation review by the National Association of Schools of Music. A self-study group will form soon under the leadership of Associate Dean for Conservatory Academic Affairs Kathryn Stuart, who will write the self-study report. The accreditation procedure is to establish that the conservatory is “doing what our catalogs say we are doing,” said Wolff. The group will also have an opportunity to examine and report on the conservatory’s finances and physical plant, she said.

Stuart will be acting dean of the conservatory while Wolff is on sabbatical next year, Wolff announced.

The College pays the EPA a $25,000 fee every year because it generates more than 100 tons of certain emissions, Matthews says. “With the gas burner—and maybe a second one for the other boiler—we hope we’ll get our emissions below 100 tons,” he says, and thereby be excused from paying the fee.

For about a year Acurex will leave its trailer parked on the lawn outside the heating plant. The trailer houses monitoring equipment the company will use to set base-line data for similar operations elsewhere. Using Oberlin College as a demonstration site, Acurex will bring stationary engineers from around the state to observe the burner’s operation. In exchange GRI and Acurex are helping to finance the $200,000 unit and its installation.

Because coal is one-third the cost of natural gas, the College wants to keep its option of burning coal, but, says Pflaum, “we want to clean up our act.” Still, the addition of the burner means that during a coal strike the College could burn natural gas to heat the boilers that produce the steam that generates the electricity and heats the campus.

Another advantage of the new burner is that it will act as a buffer between large steam demands and drops. Pflaum says, increasing the efficiency of coal burning in another way. Retired central heating plant manager Bob Mohler, Pflaum’s predecessor, had the idea to install such a burner many years ago, says Pflaum. Today natural-gas co-firing burners are a hot topic in trade journals, he says, and even now Oberlin is in on the ground floor with the technology.

Severance . . .

Continued from page 1

of compensation and a month of paid vacation. The College will make case-by-case arrangements with those who have worked at Oberlin more than 15 years.

All three severance packages will include continuation of benefits during the employees’ paid time off. The College will also extend outplacement services and letters of reference. Where appropriate, it will support networking at professional conferences. The separation model is based on two principles, said Dye.

The first principle, she said, is that “the College as an employer, if it is to eliminate jobs, has the obligation to provide some period of support to help the persons affected find other employment.” The second principle is that “the College ought to recognize length of service.”

Retirement

Concerning retirement, Dye said that Oberlin does not have an early retirement program because it recognizes no normal retirement age, mandatory retirement by age having been federally outlawed some years ago. All retirements must be voluntary, initiated by the employee, she said.

“If employees think they’d like to retire but don’t know how to go about it, they should see [Director of Human Resources] Ruth Spencer about their retirement opportunities.”

A few employees are putting together their retirement programs now, says Andy Evans, vice president for finance. Some of these retirements may help ease next year’s budget problem, he says.

Exit Speed

Some people will leave the institution faster than others, Human Resources’ Spencer notes. The speed depends on the needs of the work unit as defined by the manager as well as the needs of the employee. Because of the work unit’s needs and the need to reach a separation agreement (see “Why the Observer Doesn’t Publish the Names of All the People Leaving”), no one, she says, can be gone in a day.

“For some people [involuntary separation] may be a springboard, and some will question what is next. People start down that road at different speeds,” Spencer says.

The Observer is on line at http://www.oberlin.edu/~observer/main.html.
I appreciate your coming here today, and giving me the opportunity to address you. Standing up here in Finney Chapel before all of you makes me feel like a nineteenth-century college president: sermon-giving was a major part of their job description. I am not going to preach a sermon, but I do want to talk about some of the issues currently facing us as a college, to address some of the questions that I am hearing most frequently from you about our financial situation, and to update you on recent developments in dealing with the “structural deficit” that we must eliminate.

This meeting may well be the first of its kind at Oberlin. It seemed to me a good idea to bring all of us together, across the lines of our so-called “employee groups.” We, like faculty and staff at other colleges and universities—indeed like people in workplaces of all sorts—are accustomed to seeing ourselves as part of particular groups, rather than as members of a single community. At Oberlin, we usually talk about OCOPE members, Conservatory faculty, College faculty, UAW members, Administrative and Professional Staff members, and so on. I hope that this meeting can serve as a first step in finding ways to break down some of the barriers of department, division, and employee group, and to work together as a community united by our mission as educators, for all of us, whatever our job, our division, or our specific day-to-day responsibilities, are essential to the educational mission of the College.

In this sense, then, I don’t want to talk simply about our finances, or about our structural deficit, or about the measures we are taking to eliminate it, although I will talk specifically about these things. I also
want to take some time to talk about Oberlin as a community, and about some of our values and goals.

First, some specifics about the financial issues we face. I know that there is a lot of anxiety and confusion about our need to address our structural deficit in aggressive ways. There is nothing worse for a college community and the individuals who make it up than uncertainty about our jobs.

There have been a lot of rumors on campus about sixty or more jobs being lost. This is a greatly exaggerated figure and is simply not true. As of today, thirty positions at Oberlin College that existed at the beginning of the 1995-1996 fiscal year have been eliminated. This total includes the elimination of ten positions that were vacant, three retirements, and seventeen layoffs. In each instance involving layoffs, the individual in the position has been notified that his or her position is being eliminated, and the College will be working out a separation agreement.

I am happy to say that thanks to everyone’s hard work and contributions, we are well along the road to completing this process of budget cutting. By the end of this month, we will have a very clear idea about all of the specific ways we will be meeting the structural deficit, and I will share those specifics with you then. As has been the case so far, we will make every effort to avoid laying anyone off. We we must resort to more layoffs, we will make every effort to assist in the transition to a new job.

I have taked first about the elimination of positions because this is the issue I have heard you raise more often than any other. But I would also like to address some of the other questions, both general and specific, that I have heard being asked on campus.

Perhaps the most frequently asked question is this: Does this College, one of the most prestigious and successful in the United States, and one of the best endowed, really have a financial problem? How can this be? How can this be especially in light of the fact that you, Nancy Dye, have told us that the finances of the college are fundamentally healthy? The answer to each of these questions is:
Yes, Oberlin College does have a financial problem, despite the fact that our financial situation is basically healthy.

How can this be?

Oberlin is suffering from the effects of a growing structural deficit. Simply put, this means that our expenditures every year are growing at a faster rate than our income. We are spending more than we earn. This imbalance is not new. It has been well known to the College for five or six years. But what is new is this: we, like every other independent college in the United States can no longer deal with this problem by cutting around the edges of our operations or by raising tuition by large amounts each year.

At base, the problem we face is really about the price we charge. Sending a child to Oberlin now costs a family close to $30,000 a year: $21,000 for tuition; $5,000 for room and board; another small amount for fees for insurance and student activities; $600 to $700 for books and supplies, plus money for transportation and incidental expenses.

How did our price become so high? Year after year, we raised our tuition and fees to keep up with our growing expenditures. In this we have behaved exactly like other private colleges and universities, virtually all of which have steadily and often dramatically raised their tuition and fees. In large part, these price increases have been in response to the steady and sometimes steep increases in our costs, which are driven particularly by the fact that our enterprise is exceptionally labor-intensive. Over the past decade, for example, our costs for employee health insurance have risen sharply. Then, too, the College must buy all sorts of goods, many of which--like library books and journals and scientific equipment--have risen in price at rates much higher than the yearly CPI.

The unfortunate result of our pricing practices is this: as leading liberal arts colleges have raised tuition and fees, they have effectively priced themselves beyond the realm of financial possibility for an ever-greater number of American families. This development has been particularly important for Oberlin, for this College, unlike many of the colleges like us, has never attracted great numbers of wealthy students. Our reputation has always rested solidly upon
academic and artistic excellence rather than social prestige. But it is becoming increasingly difficult for us to compete for the students we want in the College and the Conservatory. And it is becoming harder for us to meet our students’ needs for financial aid and maintain our traditions of educational access.

What all of this means is that we must slow down, or even reverse, tuition increases. No longer can we increase our tuition charges each year by any percentage that fits our spending needs. We have entered a new era in the history of private higher education and we must work out ways to cope.

So, yes, we have a structural problem—one which we have recognized for a number of years. This problem is the result of building up more programs and services than we can afford at a time when we cannot raise tuition of significant amounts.

The second most common question I hear goes like this: We have been hearing about this structural deficit problem year after year, yet every year we balance the budget. And every year we have been asked to make cuts. We have been cutting and cutting. How can we be chasing down the same $3 million every year?

We have known about our structural deficit for a number of years, and have taken many steps—some small, some large—to address it. One year we froze salaries. In several other years we did not improve financial aid packages. Every year we have trimmed individual departmental budgets, some quite severely. We have cut back on the amount of money we put each year into our capital reserves.

These kinds of cuts are not very helpful in the long run. We could freeze salaries again, but this would be counterproductive in at least two ways. First, the need for raises is greater in the years after a salary freeze. Second, when we do something like freeze salaries, we actually move away from one of our major goals as a college. One of the things we know about ourselves is that we are not as competitive as we should be in either our salaries for faculty or the financial aid packages we offer students.
This year, we are trying hard not just to cut a budget, but also to do this in a way that moves us toward rather than away from long-term College goals. We will be improving salaries and financial aid packages and we will begin to make some progress toward ongoing capital funding. We will maintain our student-faculty ratio.

We need to put our financial house in order so that we can begin to address our major needs, particularly the needs of our students. Only in this way can we attract the very best and most talented students who can thrive at our College and Conservatory, regardless of their socioeconomic circumstances.

Another question I am frequently asked is this: how long will this process take? As I said earlier, by March 1 the budgetary work will essentially be completed. Much of this work is already done. For example, we have made some significant changes over the past few months in how we structure the work of our financial administration, and we have eliminated the treasurer’s division. We are relying more heavily upon outsourcing the work involved in managing our investments. But some of our work will take much longer. The student life administration, for example, is engaged in an important philosophical consideration of how we can best define and meet the needs of Oberlin students at this particular point in our history. We are asking fundamental questions about our identity as a residential college and about how best we can teach our students about living together in a diverse society. As we move on, we will have many educational and curricular questions to address as well.

And, finally, many of you are wondering about the college’s priorities and values. To what length is the College willing to go in order to balance its budget? Is it more important to balance the budget than to do anything else? The answer to this question is “No.” It is not more important to balance the budget than to adhere to the humane values of this College.

Let me give an example. I spoke a moment ago about the reorganization of our financial administration, and our greater reliance upon outsourcing for the management of our investments. It is entirely consistent with the values of the college to rely more on outside help to manage our endowment and other investments. It
would not be consistent with the values of Oberlin College to “outsource” our custodial services.

I said at the beginning of this talk that I was not going to talk only about our need to eliminate our structural deficit, but also about our needs and goals as a community of individuals working at and for Oberlin. I know that we are addressing our financial issues through the restructuring process in which we are engaged. I also hope that we will use this process of looking at the ways in which we work to make Oberlin a better place to work. In particular, I hope that each of us will take every opportunity to gain a better understanding and appreciation of the ways in which the work we do meshes with the work of others. It is very easy to see one’s own job as separate and distinct from everyone else’s job, and to see one’s own department as an island. In fact, we are all dependent upon one another, not only in doing our individual jobs well, but also in maintaining and enhancing the mission of the college.

Too often we at Oberlin suffer from the many different kinds of fragmentation that divide our community: the Con versus the college; the north campus versus the south campus; the faculty versus the A and PS. This fragmentation suggests that too often we define community as separate, competing interest groups. Such fragmentation also causes us to lose the knowledge and wisdom of many individuals within our community. Our custodians, for example, know firsthand how life is lived in our student residence halls. Our administrative assistants often know much about students’ experiences with the College, and what causes students to stay or to leave Oberlin. If we do not develop ways to get together across the lines of department and job categories to share expertise and experience with one another, these kinds of wisdom are lost to all of us.

Sharing, of course, involves communicating. It is only through talking with one another across the lines of responsibilities and departments that we can understand what each of us does and how our responsibilities fit into the life of the college. By reaching out to one another we can begin to break down the divisions among us. We need to work to create more common space, and I welcome your ideas about how we might do this as a college. Together I believe that
we can make Oberlin more trusting, more democratic, and more humane.