Sylvia Hill Williams, Oberlin College Trustee

Sylvia Hill Williams ’57, ’90hon, died Wednesday morning in Washington, D.C., at age 60 from complications of a brain aneurysm. She had been elected to the Oberlin College Board of Trustees in 1990.

“Her death is a great personal loss,” says board chair William Perlik. “She was a marvelous colleague and an extraordinary human being. She was a great friend, not just to the institution but to me personally. She believed strongly in the College—its excellence and its future. The College will sorely miss her support and dedication.”

Williams, director of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African Art since 1983, also chaired the trustee Collections Committee and was a member of the Allen Memorial Art Museum (AMAM) Visiting Committee.

“Her death is a great loss for the profession and for Oberlin as an institution, especially the museum,” says Anne Moore, director of the AMAM.

Williams was a member of the board of trustees of the Association of Art Museum Directors, a member of the American Association of Museums—of which she was vice president from 1986 to 1989—and a member of the Arts Council of the African Studies Association and the Exhibition Advisory Committee of the American Federation of Arts.

Before moving to the Smithsonian, Williams was a curator in the department of African, Oceanic, and New World Culture at the Brooklyn Museum. She had taught at the New School for Social Research, New York University’s Graduate School of Arts and Science, and American University.

She was an art-history major at Oberlin and received an M.A. degree from New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts. She held a Certificat de Français Parlé from the Ecole Pratique de l’Alliance Française in Paris.

“When some sentiment was growing to sell off part of Oberlin’s art collection,” says Perlik, Williams “was eloquent and far sighted in pointing out how foolish that would be. We will remember her for her overall good sense and good judgment as well as her interest in Oberlin’s art collection.”

She leaves her husband, Charlton; mother; and sister.

Oberlin in New York

Assistant Professor of Politics Eve Sandberg was one of several Oberlin faculty and staff members who, along with students, spoke Saturday at the Yale Club in New York City. The event was the Oberlin Commitment: Expertise and Outreach, an Educational Symposium for Alumni and Friends of Oberlin College. “It was a wonderful opportunity for students, faculty, and alumni to discuss important contemporary issues,” says Sandberg. “Additionally, it gave students and faculty a chance to communicate some of the important and enriching initiatives that are being supported under the Dye administration.” Other faculty and staff presenting included keynote speaker President Nancy Dye, Center for Service and Learning director Daniel Gardner, Professor of Music Education Kitty Jarjisian, the conservatory’s Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Kathryn Stuart, Professor of Biology Dennis Luck, Assistant Professor of History Len Smith, and Assistant Professor of Wind Conducting Timothy Weiss.
**News Notes**

**Jeffrey Hamburger** gave a lecture at the annual meeting of the College Art Association in Boston February 23 titled “To make women weep’: Ugly Art as Feminine and the Origins of Modern Aesthetics.” • Associate Professor of Voice **Marlene Ralis Rosen** gave a master class and sang a recital at the University of Illinois January 22. The program included music by Hugo Wolf, Claude Debussy, and Sergei Rachmaninoff. • Correlating 2.6 Billion Year-Old Marker Beds from Western Australia to South Africa is the name of a project that has won Professor of Geology **Bruce Simonson** a $26,445 grant from the National Geographic Society. The money will fund up to six weeks of field work by four people. Going to South Africa with Simonson this summer will be Brooke Wilkerson, a sophomore geology major; Scott Hassler ‘82, an expert on ancient volcanic deposits; and Jimm Myers, a specialist on the chemistry of volcanic rocks who is on the University of Wyoming geology faculty. The group will also collaborate with Nic Beukes, a geology professor at Rand Afrikaans University. “It will definitely be the sexiest science I’ve done yet if we succeed in linking a 2.6-billion-year-old impact ejecta layer between two separate continents,” says Simonson. “The impact ejecta layer is an inch-thick layer of glassy spherules thought to be melt droplets dispersed by a major meteorite or comet impact that took place 2.6 billion years ago.” The team will also try to correlate distinctive layers of volcanic ash of comparable age between the two continents. Success means confirming how two regions currently located in Western Australia and South Africa originally fit together as a single continent. “Given the age of these strata, we’re probably talking about the oldest and first continent on earth,” Simonson says. Simonson and his students (including senior Darian Davies) have made five earlier field trips to Western Australia and one to South Africa to study these ancient strata; the **Observer** last reported on the work in the May 11, 1995, issue. • Professor of History **Robert Soucy**’s latest book, _French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933-39_ (Yale University Press, 1995), has been reviewed in newspapers in Paris, London, and Rome, including _Le Monde, Libération, the Times Literary Supplement, Sunday Telegraph, Daily Telegraph, and Financial Times_, and _Il Giornale_. Soucy was recently commissioned to write the entry on fascism—treating fascist movements in 10 countries—for the next edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

**Transitions**

**New Faculty**

**Moshe Fischer** (University of Bucuresti M.A., Tel Aviv University Ph.D. 1980) is part-time visiting associate professor of religion. For nearly 30 years his work has centered on archaeological excavations. His most recent appointments include directing the Archeological Project Yavneh Yam in 1992; directing the excavation at Kh. Zikrin from 1982 to 1989; and codirecting the excavations of the Roman Temple at Quedesh from 1981 to 1983. He has won fellowships at the University of Konstanz and the German Institute of Archeology, as well as a DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) fellowship. Fischer has contributed to several archaeological journals, and his book, _Marble Studies: Roman Palestine and the Marble Trade_, has been accepted for publication. He and his wife, Greta, have two children, Yair and Shay. Fischer looks forward to teaching and learning while at Oberlin. **Thomas L. Klaber** (Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music) is teacher of trombone. Klaber has held chairs in bass trombone in the Cleveland Orchestra and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and has made many recordings with both groups. He and his wife, Gayle Morgan Klaber, have a 4-year-old daughter and a son who is nearly 2.

**Departures**

HVAC technician **Donald Arcuri** will leave the College March 7. He began working for Oberlin as a boiler operator in 1978. • **Wayne Streator**, Service and Transportation Manager, will leave the College officially May 7. Streator worked for the College 20 years, beginning as a grounds foreman.

**Letter**

Survey Administration Might Affect Results

Some people have expressed their concern to me about how the Senior Survey (see “Learning and Satisfaction” in last week’s *Observer*) was administered.

They question the survey’s being part of a packet of forms that students had to complete into order to receive their rain tickets to commencement exercises. Lisa Kastor, assistant director of career services, for example, has said, “Many students were unhappy and felt manipulated into completing the survey. Results might have been different under different data-collection procedures.”

How a survey is administered should always be considered when interpreting the results, and we will not package this year’s Senior Survey with the commencement tickets.

It’s noteworthy, though, that many of the other COHFE schools took similar measures to ensure data collection.
Six Faculty Members Take Research Status Next Year

Six members of the faculty will be on College-sponsored research leave all next year. On research status will be Geoffrey Blodgett, Robert S. Danforth Professor of History; Michael Loose, assistant professor of neuroscience; William Rothstein, associate professor of music theory; Yakubu Saaka, professor of African-American studies; Stephen Sheppard, associate professor of economics and environmental studies; and Janice Thornton, assistant professor of biology and neuroscience.

Cass Gilbert’s Biography

Jeff Blodgett will write a biography of Cass Gilbert (1859-1934), the preeminent American architect of the Beaux Arts tradition who designed Finney Chapel, the Allen Art Building, the Quadrangle (which includes Bosworth Hall and the Asia House complex), and the Cox Administration Building. Collaborating with art critic and architectural historian Franz Schulze, whose previous publications include biographies of Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson, Blodgett will explore the intertwined themes of political and aesthetic conservatism in Gilbert’s work. Supplanting research completed in the collections of the Library of Congress and the New York Historical Society, Blodgett will digest the substantial materials in the Minnesota Historical Society and Gilbert’s 10 letterbooks, placed on personal deposit in the Oberlin College Archives at the request of the architect’s grandson the Reverend Cass Gilbert III. The biography will interpret the aesthetic and technical dimensions of Gilbert’s architecture and the cultural climate of emerging Modernism in which Gilbert’s career concluded. Working in Oberlin and Chicago, Blodgett and Schulze expect to complete their manuscript in September 1997.

Mammalian Brain Research

Michael Loose plans to make measurements on individual living neurons (nerve cells) from the mammalian brain, investigating the mechanism by which the neurons periodically release LHRH (luteinizing hormone-releasing hormone). (LHRH stimulates the pituitary gland to release hormones that act on the gonads, regulating the cyclic pattern of reproduction.) Loose wants to learn whether LHRH-producing neurons have unique cellular characteristics that account for the release, in pulses, of LHRH from millions of such cells acting in synchrony. His hypothesis is that LHRH may act in a feedback loop on the cells that produce it, thereby synchronizing its own output. Loose plans to disperse cells from rodent brain, identify LHRH-producing neurons by morphological and cytochemical characteristics, and obtain direct electrophysiological recordings from single cells using patch-clamp techniques. If successful, the delicate, elegant patch-clamp techniques will allow Loose to determine whether the neurons show patterns of electrophysiological behavior that are correlated with the presence of LHRH in their microenvironment.

The Language of 18th-Century Music

Bill Rothstein will finish the research for a book tentatively titled “The Language of Eighteenth-Century Music.” Two articles and an unpublished conference paper Rothstein has written are the foundation for the book, which will demonstrate the fundamental stability of musical syntax throughout the 18th century despite radical changes in musical style, form, and rhetoric. Rothstein will use the Sibley Library at the Eastman School of Music and the music library at Yale University to consult outstanding collections of 18th-century music, but he will spend most of the summer in Oberlin, working on his manuscript. Continued on page 4

Continued on page 3

Three Named Junior Faculty Fellows

Early sabbatical leaves are going next year to David Kamitsuka, assistant professor of religion; Nanette Macias, assistant professor of art; and Timothy Scholl, assistant professor of Russian. The fellowships of Kamitsuka and Macias are contingent on their being reappointed for next year. Macias’s leave is for fall semester and Winter Term; the leaves of Kamitsuka and Scholl are for Winter Term and spring semester.

Christian Communal Beliefs and Realism

The James W. and Anne F. Ford Fellowship in the Humanities will support Kamitsuka’s work on a book-length study tentatively titled “Realism and Plain Sense.” The project, in philosophical theology, will explore how Christian communal beliefs and practices intersect with current philosophical debates about realism. Kamitsuka will create a topological analysis of representative attempts in philosophical theology to account for religious understandings of reality. To do so, he will study the works of several key scholars who address contemporary philosophical debates on realism, placing their theoretical approaches within a spectrum of views of reality characterized at one extreme by stark objectivism, and on the other by a constructivist position. He will evaluate the relationship of these positions to theological beliefs and practices. Although he will travel to several university research libraries over the school year, Kamitsuka will primarily be in Oberlin, working on his manuscript.

The James and Anne Ford Fellowships support early sabbaticals for untenured faculty members in the humanities.

Multimedia Altars

On the Donald R. Longman Fellowship Macias will work on altars for two collaborative multimedia installations that will include sculptural and video elements. The works, to be informed by Mexican folk altars, will develop themes of history, identity, and religious iconography. Macias will travel to Mexico and Southern Italy to study and document folk altars in the Catholic tradition. She will also identify an appropriate site for the installations. In Oberlin she will work with other members of the studio-art faculty to learn the video techniques she intends to use in her installations. She plans to collaborate with her colleagues to conceptualize and execute the installations.

The Donald R. Longman Fellowship supports a program of early sabbatical leaves for untenured members of the College Faculty.

George Balanchine, Russian Romanticism, and Russian Modernism

The B. Wade and Jane B. White Fellowship in the Humanities will support Timothy Scholl’s leave. Scholl will complete archival research and begin writing a book that examines the work of George Balanchine (1904-1983), exploring the relationship between Russian Romanticism and Russian Modernism. Balanchine’s well-documented corpus of work illuminates a prodigious career that, because of the choreographer’s emigration, largely escaped the devastations of revolution, war, and purges that blighted the careers of other Russian modernists, Scholl says. He will argue that scholars concerned with the dynamism and change of Modernism have failed to acknowledge the essentially conservative orientation of much of early 20th-century art. The book represents a continuation of Scholl’s previous work that culminated in his publication From Petipa to Balanchine: Classical Revival and the Modernization of Ballet (Routledge 1994).

The B. Wade and Jane B. White Fellowship for untenured faculty members in the humanities is endowed by a gift from the Whites and supported with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the SURDNA Foundation.
The Observer is on line at http://www.oberlin.edu/~observer/main.html.
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• Advise ACS on project priorities in accordance with broad institutional priorities established by the Information Technology Policy Committee (ITPC)
• Help plan for administrative information technology
• Identify training and staff-development needs of administrative users and assist the Computing Center in meeting identified needs

March 1, 1996