

The background of the top half of the page is a black and white photograph of an ornate, Art Deco-style interior. The walls are covered in intricate, repeating patterns of leaves and geometric shapes. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures and depth of the architecture.

OBERLIN

A Strategic Plan for Oberlin College

March 5, 2005





Oberlin as a liberal arts college and a conservatory of music exists to achieve—and to enable its students and faculty to achieve—academic, artistic, and musical excellence.

On the cover: The April 2004 performance by the Oberlin Orchestra, led by Steven Smith, in Severance Hall, home of The Cleveland Orchestra. As part of a continuing collaboration, the Oberlin Chamber Orchestra performed in Severance in April 2005 under the baton of Cleveland Orchestra Assistant Conductor James Gaffigan.

From the President

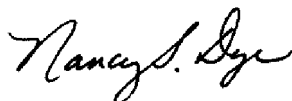
During the 2003-04 academic year, Oberlin initiated a strategic planning process focused on developing a plan that would ensure academic, artistic, and musical excellence as well as financial sustainability in the years ahead. On March 5, 2005, the Oberlin College Board of Trustees unanimously adopted the Strategic Plan, which had been approved by a General Faculty vote of 170-33, with two abstentions, the previous day.

This is a very significant accomplishment for Oberlin College. The twin actions by the faculty and the board bring to fruition some 18 months of work on the Strategic Plan. The plan charts a course that will strengthen Oberlin's future.

This book contains the text of the Strategic Plan as passed by the Oberlin College faculty and Board of Trustees, as well as the Financial Plan approved by General Faculty Planning Committee, the General Faculty Council, and the Board of Trustees. Brief explanatory text has been added at several places; this background material is marked by asterisks.

Oberlin's many stakeholders—faculty, trustees, alumni, students, and staff—have poured countless hours of thought, discussion, and negotiation into the planning process. The entire community is particularly indebted to the Strategic Planning Task Force (whose members are listed on the inside back cover) for its indefatigable efforts. The result is this Strategic Plan for Oberlin College. We can all take pride in this exceptional endeavor.

No strategic plan is self-executing. The hard work of implementation lies ahead. I am confident that if our community can muster the same good will and imagination that characterized the planning process, the plan will become a living document that will open the door to a bright future for Oberlin College.



Nancy S. Dye
President

A STRATEGIC PLAN

FOR OBERLIN COLLEGE



Background: Context and Process

Oberlin College enters this process of strategic planning with great strengths. Oberlin uniquely combines a premier liberal arts college with a world-renowned conservatory of music. Our proud history manifests ambitious dedication to academic and artistic excellence. Oberlin's excellence encompasses the highest standards for liberal and musical education and diversity, inclusiveness, and social engagement.

Those involved in this strategic planning process have worked to identify ways that Oberlin can build on its strengths to continue its distinguished and distinctive tradition combining commitment to academic and artistic excellence with the conviction that a liberal education is not only a private good but also a social good.

All academic institutions require periodic reassessment, and Oberlin is no exception. This self-analysis is particularly important at a time when the value of a liberal education and of liberal arts colleges is being questioned by an increasingly skeptical public. The key to Oberlin's future is to enhance the value of the education we offer. The strategic directions and strategies contained in this plan are all dedicated to this end.

While the College's academic core is rightly the major focus of planning, no plan will succeed without the attainment of institutional financial sustainability. Indeed, Oberlin's academic program and its financial viability are inextricably linked. Only an education of the highest quality will command resources commensurate with Oberlin's aspirations, and only a disciplined financial plan, focused on generating additional revenues, will prove capable of underwriting the programs that ensure the College's continued standing as one of the great institutions of American higher education.

Over the course of this strategic planning effort, Oberlin's faculty, trustees, students, alumni, and administrators have been invited to participate in discussion and consultation. The ultimate goal for the strategic planning process has been to produce a plan that will enjoy confidence among all sectors of the Oberlin community, in particular its faculty. The faculty, the staff, and student leaders, in turn, will be responsible for generating the energy and ideas for implementing much of the strategic plan. The plan will be in place when both the faculty and the board, by vote, have approved it.

The implementation of strategies will be flexible and pragmatic, and guided by several principles. Although all of Oberlin's constituencies will be involved in the work of developing ways to implement the many and various strategies of the plan, the faculty must, through their regular, elected representative governance mechanisms, consider and give approval to all recommendations and proposals concerning educational policy, academic legislation, curricular and academic program change, and the allocation and/or distribution of faculty positions consistent with bylaw provisions regarding duties and responsibilities.

The effectiveness of the strategies Oberlin implements will be assessed by a set of quantitative and qualitative indicators.

Principles

Oberlin has long been guided by a set of principles that give specific meaning and direction to an excellent education. These principles include a commitment to the life of the mind; a conviction that music and the arts are central to human existence; a commitment to social inclusion, diversity, the free exchange of ideas, and respect for many points of view as foundations of academic community; internationalism; responsibility for

stewarding the natural environment; and commitment to informed social and political engagement. Oberlin's genius has always been bound up with the conviction that men and women can change their societies—and the world at large—for the better. And Oberlin, throughout its history, has taken pride in the ways its alumni have dedicated their intellects and their art to understanding human needs of all kinds and finding constructive ways to meet them.

As a college and as a conservatory of music, we are committed to academic and artistic endeavor within the context of a rigorous and supportive educational environment. We challenge the individual and cultivate the creative spirit, we encourage the process of discovery, we expect the mastery of craft, and we promote the development of the intellect. At Oberlin, the pursuit of knowledge is undertaken in a culture of integrity and driven by the desire for achievement.

In addition to being an educational institution that serves its students, preparing them for successful lives and careers, Oberlin College is also a center of scholarly, artistic, and musical activity in its own right: an institution that provides an intellectual, intergenerational community of scholars, musicians, and artists—consisting of students and faculty—with the resources to interpret, understand, explain, express, and represent the world and themselves. The pursuit of excellence drives both these purposes.

As a conservatory of music, Oberlin is committed to professional education at the highest level. Specifically, we provide an experience that allows students to reach their greatest potential as

musicians, as individuals, and as aspiring artists in the field of professional music. We cultivate skills that are conducive to long-term success in both music and other disciplines, and we seek to graduate future leaders who prosper in the years following their Oberlin careers. The faculty and students of the Conservatory are committed to the pursuit and the achievement of excellence.

As a liberal arts college, Oberlin has always interpreted education as connected to and informed by the pressing social and cultural questions of the day. Our students have benefited from the belief that education will be enriched when it is not simply an abstract exercise but entails grappling with evolving social concerns. The College encourages a multiplicity of views. The hallmark of Oberlin has been teaching students *how* to think, not *what* to think. Through exceptional teaching and a dynamic curriculum, we prepare our students to achieve their personal and professional aspirations for the future. We foster an environment that attracts serious and gifted students and serves as a catalyst for their intellectual and artistic development. We seek to provide an education of enduring importance.

The College has long emphasized the significance of interconnectedness among the different modes of inquiry that enrich our curriculum, rather than the isolation of excessive specialization, and it has done so with an eye toward encouraging students to become informed social and cultural leaders. In the spirit of free inquiry and expression, Oberlin today, for example, is committed to providing an education that develops scientific knowledge, global perspectives, environmental consciousness, concern for social justice, and artistic understanding.



Foundations for Excellence

Oberlin's foundations for excellence are its faculty and students. The College and Conservatory have long been served by a superb faculty of scholars, musicians, and artists who are also exceptionally able and dedicated teachers of undergraduates.

The College of Arts and Sciences recruits, nurtures, and retains a distinguished faculty committed to providing students with an unusually broad and deep liberal education that involves rigorous study across the humanities, arts, social sciences, and natural sciences. Arts and Sciences faculty are also excellent and engaged scholars and artists who are committed to ongoing research and publication, artistic production and performance, and development as innovative teachers.

The Conservatory of Music recruits, nurtures, and retains a faculty of distinguished teachers, performers, and scholars who are committed to providing the highest level of conservatory education to young musicians and to ongoing performance, composition, and scholarship.

Faculty in both the College and the Conservatory are actively involved with campus, community, and professional service and participate in the ongoing governance of the College.



The qualities that our students bring to Oberlin are also central to this institution's excellence. Our students are independent, active learners who value ideas, diversity, creativity, independence, individuality, and social and political engagement and action. They are intellectually engaged, artistic, and idealistic.

Mission

Oberlin as a liberal arts college and a conservatory of music exists to achieve—and to enable its students and faculty to achieve—academic, artistic, and musical excellence.

Oberlin's mission is to:

- Graduate liberal arts and conservatory students who have learned to think with intellectual rigor, creativity, and independence;
- Provide the highest level of conservatory education to exceptionally talented young musicians;
- Offer superb liberal education across the arts and sciences, in the humanities, natural and social sciences, and the arts;
- Open the world to its students and develop in them the skills and knowledge they will need to engage with and navigate in highly diverse communities and in a global society;
- Nurture students' creativity by providing rich curricular and co-curricular opportunities for studying and making art and music;

- Help students clarify and integrate their intellectual strengths and interests, social commitments, and vocational aspirations;
- Enable students to integrate and apply their knowledge;
- Nurture students' social consciousness and environmental awareness;
- Provide outstanding preparation for success at the highest level of graduate and professional education and in careers;
- Graduate individuals who are humane, thoughtful, and influential actors in the world who will provide leadership in their communities and professions and in the arts, politics, education, international relations, public service, science, business, and communications.

Goals

Oberlin's current strategic planning integrates academic planning with financial planning in the conviction that programmatic excellence cannot be sustained without robust financial health.

Throughout this plan, two overarching and interactive goals are central:

1. Educational Goal: To enhance the value—and the perception of value—of an Oberlin education in ways that strengthen Oberlin's appeal to current and prospective students, serve its mission and values, and strengthen its leadership position and reputation in liberal arts and conservatory education. It is especially important at this time in Oberlin's history that the College focus on enhancing its reputation as an undergraduate institution that provides an excellent education of singular quality and rigor to every student.

2. Financial Goal: To enhance the quality and value of the education it provides its students, Oberlin must attain financial sustainability. To remain a great institution of American higher education, Oberlin must enhance each of its revenue streams. Currently its most critical financial priority must be to realize more net tuition revenue per student and to do so in ways that honor Oberlin's long traditions of racial and socioeconomic diversity.

Strategic Directions

Each of these strategic directions serves the goals of strengthening Oberlin's appeal to current and prospective students and enhancing the value of an Oberlin education. In addition to these substantive goals, the College will undertake an integrated and aggressive plan to capitalize on its strengths and heighten public awareness of the value of an Oberlin education.

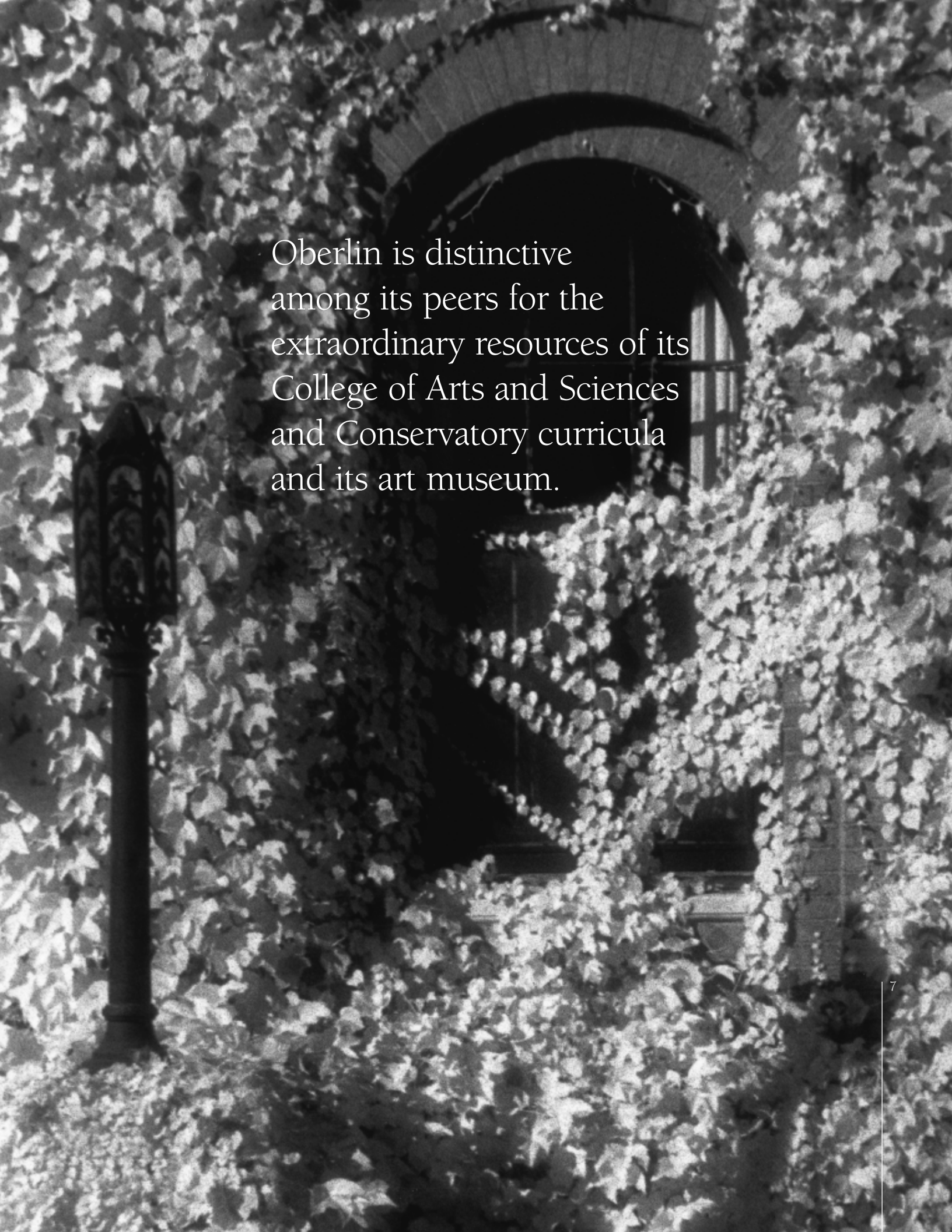
The implementation of strategies will be flexible and pragmatic, with all of Oberlin's constituencies being involved in the work of developing ways to implement the many and various strategies of the plan. A highly participatory form of faculty governance has long characterized Oberlin College and is an essential part of the vitality of the institution and the continued engagement of its faculty. For this reason, the faculty must, through their regular, elected representative governance mechanisms, consider and give approval to all recommendations and proposals concerning educational policy, academic legislation, curricular and academic program change, and the allocation and/or distribution of faculty positions consistent with bylaw provisions regarding duties and responsibilities.

1. Focus the Educational Experience

Rationale: A robust culture of academic and artistic achievement is integral to Oberlin's mission and values, and its appeal to the world's most promising students. We can serve our students better by being more intentional about how we advise and support them; how we help them focus their wide range of interests with their academic program and their thinking about vocation; and how we encourage their academic achievement.

Strategies

- Set and communicate high academic expectations and aspirations for students, thereby helping to strengthen Oberlin's culture of achievement.
- Fully integrate and enhance student advising in ways that help students to address the distinct educational challenges of each undergraduate year, and help improve student retention.
- Augment the professional training of Conservatory students by expanding opportunities to perform beyond the frame of the core curriculum, and by fostering strategic alliances with individuals and organizations beyond Oberlin, such as the current successful collaboration with the Cleveland Orchestra.
- Ensure appropriate verticality in every arts and sciences degree program.
- Adjust the credit system and/or the student course load in ways that help students move steadily and in timely fashion toward a degree.
- Identify and emphasize the many intellectual interconnections across Oberlin's curriculum to create coherent curricular pathways that help channel in a more intentional way the wide-ranging interests of our community.

A black and white photograph of a stone archway leading to a dark interior. The arch is made of large, rectangular stones. To the left of the arch, there is a decorative lamp post with a pointed top. A path leads through the archway into a dark interior space. The overall scene is dimly lit, with the light coming from the left, possibly from the lamp post or an opening further down the path.

Oberlin is distinctive
among its peers for the
extraordinary resources of its
College of Arts and Sciences
and Conservatory curricula
and its art museum.

2. Strengthen the Educational Experience

Rationale: Oberlin is distinctive among its peers for the extraordinary resources of its College of Arts and Sciences and Conservatory curricula and its art museum. Oberlin can enhance the value of its education and strengthen its appeal among students by creating new and innovative curricular collaboration among faculty and students, by paying more attention to creating meaningful opportunities for students to integrate and apply their learning, and by building new student opportunities for experiential learning.

Strategies

- Support curricular collaboration among the College, the Conservatory, and the Allen Memorial Art Museum to encourage innovative and exciting curricular offerings that only Oberlin can offer.
- Encourage curricular and co-curricular developments aimed at helping students explore, understand, and focus appropriately upon careers.
- Enhance student opportunities for community service, academically based service learning, and internships.
- Find effective ways inside and outside the classroom to help students view the world from perspectives other than their own, to deal with complexity and ambiguity, to make reasoned and effective arguments, and to deal thoughtfully with disagreement and difference.

3. Support and Build the Faculty

Rationale: At the heart of Oberlin's excellence is the creativity, vitality, and dedication of its faculty. Oberlin's faculty is going through a major demographic transition. The College must under-

stand the professional development needs of all of its faculty and enhance its competitiveness in the recruitment, retention, and professional support of its faculty. Oberlin must approach faculty development and satisfaction in ways that consider the quality of life in our local community.

Strategies

- Improve our competitive salary position for faculty among our benchmark institutions while maintaining an appropriate benefits package.
- In consultation with the faculty, reduce the standard teaching load or otherwise reorganize the curriculum to allow faculty more time for scholarship/artistic production, mentoring or advanced work with students, or greater attention to developing teaching excellence.
- Develop a plan to recruit and retain faculty and administrators of African American and other American racial minorities, especially in areas where there is significant under-representation.
- Improve individual faculty support for research, artistic production, and professional development.
- Increase the number of faculty grants and contracts.
- Expand and develop institutional collaborations such as the partnership between Oberlin and the University of Michigan.
- Establish an elected faculty task force charged to bring recommendations to the faculty on how to revitalize faculty governance and improve faculty-administration decision making, with an eye to enhancing participation, deliberation, transparency, and accountability.
- Develop means to foster faculty communication and collaboration across disciplinary, departmental, and divisional lines.
- Reshape department and program administration to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.

- Build the Oberlin Public Schools-Oberlin College partnership, fund and establish the new graduate teacher education program, and work collaboratively with the City of Oberlin to enhance the quality of life in Oberlin, Ohio.

4. Build Campus Community

Rationale: Members of the Oberlin community are deeply interested in exploring the educationally enriching possibilities of our diverse residential campus community. Increasing co-curricular programming that fosters the development of multicultural competencies and other life skills for communal and personal development will help build a stronger sense of campus community, enhance the value of the education we provide, improve retention, and strengthen our appeal to prospective students.

Strategies

- Develop an excellent and distinctive residential life program that supports the academic mission of the College, embraces diversity, and provides for imaginative and lively residential community that fosters students' personal, social, and educational development.
- Enhance institutional systems and resources to support the mental, emotional, and psychological well being of students.
- Enhance the educationally enriching possibilities of our diverse community by expanding and diversifying our applicant pool and by working to strengthen the pool of applicants of color to the College and the Conservatory.
- Significantly improve our admissions yield and retention of African American and other students of color, as well as first-generation and low-income students.*



- Complete the new student housing projects and develop a plan for renovating our central campus residence halls.
- Create more programs along the lines of Bonner Scholars, Mellon-McNair Scholars, the Multicultural Resource Center, and the Oberlin College Dialogue Center that build multicultural community and enable students to gain important and usable skills for community building and leadership.
- Build successful intercollegiate, intramural, and club sports programs that meet the needs of Oberlin student-athletes and that integrate our athletic program with the academic and social life of the College.
- Improve communication, consultation, and collaboration among the faculty, the students, the administration, the trustees, and the alumni.

5. Internationalize Oberlin

Rationale: Oberlin should play a leading role in American higher education by making itself a world college. Oberlin's capacity for international education is more important than ever. The major challenges that will face current and future genera-

**Resolution adopted by the Board of Trustees on March 5, 2005 (not incorporated into the Strategic Plan): It remains the intention of the Board of Trustees to focus on the admission and retention of African American students as our first priority at this time.*

tions of Oberlin students—such as climate change; the AIDS pandemic; racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural conflict; social inequality; and economic development—must be understood and addressed in a global context. Oberlin is well situated to address these challenges by building upon its international curricular offerings and its cosmopolitan campus.

Strategies

- Build on the strengths of our area studies programs and other international curricular offerings to make our curriculum richly global.
- Emphasize the study of foreign languages and cultures.
- Enhance the recruitment of international students.
- Create opportunities for meaningful international study and research for every student, regardless of academic major, who desires such experience.
- Establish relationships and collaborations with international institutions of higher education and with business, governmental, non-governmental, and other organizations in the interest of creating educational exchanges for students and faculty and creating additional opportunities for international study and internships.
- Consider using winter term and the summer months for international programs abroad and on campus.
- Collaborate more with Shansi.

6. Move toward Environmental Sustainability

Rationale: Oberlin is in a favorable position to be a national leader in promoting sustainability on and off campus. The College has already committed itself to pursuing the goal of sustainability, as expressed in the

“environmental policy statement of Oberlin College,” adopted by the Board of Trustees in March 2004. It should abide by this commitment by continuing to work toward developing an environmentally sustainable campus. Justifications include the unprecedented environmental challenges our students will face in the future; the great importance attached by current and prospective students to efforts to achieve sustainability; the learning experiences afforded to students as a result of these efforts; and the continuing example Oberlin can set for other institutions, academic and otherwise.



Strategies

- Seek to reduce the rate at which the College contributes to the depletion and degradation of natural resources, to increase the use of renewable resources, and to consider other measures that can enhance the physical environment in which we live.
- To the extent practicable, develop and implement state-of-the-art standards for building design, construction, and performance, and for land use, consistent with the above goals of energy efficiency and prudent resource use.
- Work toward environmentally sound as well as aesthetically pleasing means of maintaining the physical plant, the landscape, and their surroundings.

-
- Enhance and develop further opportunities for students and faculty to participate in the continuing “greening” of the campus and the wider community through promoting course work in various curricular areas, independent research projects, and community service.

7. Identify Key Academic Priorities in Each Division and Across Divisions

Rationale: It is imperative that Oberlin’s faculty identify specific critical academic priorities for the next generation in order to maintain and strengthen our academic reputation and leadership position as a liberal arts college and conservatory of music. The establishment of such priorities will be essential for effective curricular planning and for the success of our next capital campaign. This work will be taken up after the adoption of this strategic plan.

The Financial Plan

Oberlin’s current strategic planning has intentionally integrated academic planning with financial planning in the conviction that programmatic excellence cannot sustain itself without robust financial health. Any strategy designed to maintain and enhance Oberlin’s excellence will be dependent upon a successful strategy to build the College’s financial capacity.

The second strategic planning goal that the planning task force put forward focuses on attaining financial sustainability:

Oberlin will develop a financial profile that enables it to secure a revenue stream adequate to meet the ongoing operational and capital needs of an institution devoted to academic and artistic excellence, to balance revenues and objectives, to improve its relative financial standing among comparable institutions, and to ensure the perpetuation of an institution devoted to the highest standards of liberal education and professional music education for generations to come.

Much of the work of the Financial Task Force and, more recently, the Joint Strategic Planning Task Force has focused on Oberlin’s need for additional revenue. We have found that the slow growth of Oberlin’s revenues, most particularly net tuition revenue, relative to much more rapid growth of the College’s expenditures is the most serious and systemic of Oberlin’s financial issues. We have also examined Oberlin’s operating and capital expenditures, investment management and performance, and fund raising.

Many of the strategic directions hold considerable promise for improving Oberlin’s revenue streams by enhancing the value—actual and perceived—of an Oberlin education. Several other strategies for improving Oberlin’s financial situation in the short and the long run are discussed briefly in the following section.

Strategies

1. Reduce the undergraduate enrollment from a baseline enrollment of 2,883 in 2003-04 to a total undergraduate enrollment of 2,720 by the year 2010.

The reduction of a total of 163 undergraduate students will be accompanied by a reduction of 7 faculty positions in the College of Arts and Sciences. This reduction preserves the 12:1 student-faculty ratio in the College. The Conservatory of Music will reduce its faculty by 5 faculty positions. An additional 10 non-faculty staff positions will be reduced throughout the institution by the year 2010.*

A total enrollment of 2,720 undergraduates in the year 2010 will be a desirable size for Oberlin because it makes it possible to preserve the quality and diversity of the student body while also facilitating modest but essential increases in net tuition revenue per student.**

** All faculty reductions will be achieved through attrition.*

*** Oberlin, like many other American colleges, has gradually increased its size over the past 50 years. In recent years, Oberlin has been larger than ever before in its history.*

Undergraduate Enrollment Past 50 Years		Undergraduate Enrollment Past Decade	
1950	1,990	1994	2,741
1960	2,226	1995	2,830
1970	2,526	1996	2,861
1980	2,788	1997	2,907
1990	2,840	1998	2,905
2000	2,905	1999	2,916
		2000	2,905
		2001	2,840
		2002	2,848
		2003	2,883
		2004	2,807

2. Improve net tuition revenue.

- Retain the same number of full-pay students.
- Gradually lower the institutional discount rate.
- Improve admissions yield.
- Improve student retention rates.

3. Maximize contributed revenue.

- Begin comprehensive research and planning for a new capital campaign immediately.
- Significantly increase annual, unrestricted fund raising.
- Continue to identify, cultivate, solicit, and close major gifts for endowment and construction.

4. Continue to reduce operating expenditures by identifying and implementing additional efficiencies throughout Oberlin's operations. Continue to control the future growth of Oberlin's operating expenses, including benefits.

5. Gradually reduce Oberlin's endowment annual payout.

6. Address deferred maintenance and capital needs.

Strategic Planning Task Force – March 2005

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