

**Oberlin College
Long Range Planning
Report on Small Group Discussions
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**Submitted to:
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Background and Process

In September 1996, Oberlin College embarked on a long-range planning process to guide the College as it moves to the 21st century. Acknowledging that Oberlin is an institution where teaching and learning have been at their best for many generations, President Nancy Dye believes that successes of the past and present must not lead the College into complacency or an unrealistic sense of security. Success does not preclude the need for Oberlin to "engage in sustained conversation about its future, particularly in this time of uncertainty within American higher education."

The President laid the groundwork for long range planning in the spring of 1996 when she began discussing the process with the faculty, Board of Trustees, students, and senior staff. She asked planning consultant Elaine Kuttner to come to the campus several times throughout the spring to listen to all constituencies and to ensure that their thoughts about planning were folded into the design of the process. The President fine-tuned the process over the summer, in consultation with the board.

The College launched several campus-wide activities in the fall of 1996 to create a focus on Oberlin's future. Nancy Dye held an all-campus convocation and introduced this year as one of working together to create a vision for the College's future. Cornel West spoke to the Oberlin community about diversity and the challenges for a college such as Oberlin as it moves into the next century. The alumni created and implemented a panel discussion on Oberlin's mission past and the ways in which it has been realized over the years. Their theme was, "Think one person can change the world? So do we."

The small campus-wide planning discussions, or focus groups, began in October and were completed in mid-November. The next phase, in-depth planning team deliberations, will begin in December when the President, in consultation with her campus constituencies, the trustees, and the advisory committee identifies themes for further discussion. The President and her advisory team will establish in-depth planning teams for each area. These teams will include faculty, students, trustees, staff and alumni. Each in-depth planning team will be asked to consider one broad theme and make recommendations to the President and advisory committee regarding specific 'directions' and suggestions for moving forward.

The President will then present an integrated planning document which includes a statement of College-wide priorities, and proposals for specific action to realize those priorities, to the Oberlin community. She expects to make final recommendations for strategic action to the Board of Trustees and the faculty by the end of the 1996-1997 academic year.

Goals of the Long Range Planning Process

The goals of Oberlin's long range planning process are:

1. to establish campus-wide priorities that will provide the basis for ongoing planning and development for the next several years.
2. to develop common language regarding the future of the College, and agreement on several broad "directions" and actions Oberlin must take as it moves toward that future.
3. to create the internal capacity for ongoing planning and broad programmatic development at Oberlin.

Process for the Small Group Planning Discussions

This report represents the culmination of the first phase of ongoing planning for Oberlin. The work has been guided by the principle that planning must reflect the needs and priorities of the community. For this reason a "high involvement" process was used--a series of small group planning discussions held during October and November. Every member of the community--students, faculty, staff, alumni and trustees--was invited and encouraged to participate in this process. In all, about 443 members of the Oberlin community participated in the two-and-one-half hour group discussions -- about 139 faculty members, 123 staff, and 147 students as well as 20 trustees and 14 alumni. Diana Roose in the President's office, assisted by Judy Holm, handled the coordination and scheduling of the small group sessions. Elaine Kuttner and Ralph Fuccillo of Ampersand Associates, Cambridge, Massachusetts facilitated the discussions campus-wide.

The purpose of the discussion groups was not to develop a final plan, but to create a campus-wide dialogue and a common language regarding Oberlin's future. This report summarizes the results of those groups and is intended to be used by the President and the advisory committee as the basis for identifying the broad areas needing more in-depth discussion.

Each discussion group was asked to consider the following questions:

- **Question #1:** Brief discussion for establishing context: What do you expect to be the dominant characteristics of the social, political, economic and cultural environment in which Oberlin graduates will find themselves as the 2000s take shape?
- **Question #2:** Very broadly, what are some of the academic, technical, personal life and community related skills young people, Oberlin graduates, will need in order to thrive in the environment we have described?
- **Question #3:** Present capacity: What are some of the things Oberlin is already doing or is already "about" that should be continued or enhanced particularly because they will help the students thrive in the future environment we've discussed?

- **Question #4: Future capacity:** What are some of the things Oberlin will need to do differently in the future in order to help students thrive? OR What are some of the new elements we should consider building into the Oberlin liberal educational experience, academic and social, if we are to achieve our mission and our graduates are to thrive in the 21st Century?
- **Question #5:** In your opinion, what are some of the internal challenges or issues we may have to acknowledge and address as we work to develop the kind of “future capacity” we just described?

The President posed several additional questions that reflected some of her major concerns. These were given to participants, along with the five broad questions listed above, for reference during the discussions.

- A.) How might one best conceive of **Oberlin College as a residential community** and what are the implications, e.g. student groupings, faculty participation, etc.? Or, what are the characteristics of the residential community that Oberlin envisions itself in the future, and what are the implications for shifts in the way things are done presently?
- B.) As Oberlin moves into the future, we must have a clear sense of what it is we are trying to accomplish as an **inter-racial institution**. How can we create a campus climate, building on our core values, that is truly inter-racial?
- C.) How can Oberlin’s distinctive strengths in the arts find a **higher level of synergy in the collaboration of Conservatory and Arts and Sciences**? Or, what is the optimal relationship between the College and the Conservatory of Music?
- D.) How will we ensure that the curriculum responds to a rapidly changing world? And, how shall **curricular innovation and faculty development** be promoted effectively as a continuing process and not occasional episodes in the lives of individuals, departments/programs, and divisions of the College and Conservatory?
- E.) How can we create a strong, **diverse academic community, respectful of differences and united by a set of core values and goals**? A community that celebrates each individual’s “specialness” while also acknowledging a shared larger purpose.
- F.) How do you see the relationship between **research and teaching** evolving as we move into the future.
- G.) What has been and what can be the **Oberlin “niche” in the world of education in the future**? What are the implications in terms of student life, curriculum, programs, faculty, etc.?

The Report

The authors of this report are well aware of the fact that in one brief document, they cannot do justice to the thoughtful discussions that took place in the small group process - the eloquence, the diversity of perspective, the depth and insight into the issues. However, it is hoped that those who took part in the discussions will feel that their perspectives and concerns are well represented in both the report and the final outcomes of the process.

The results reported for Question #4 and #5 speak most directly to the areas that must be addressed as the planning progresses. It should be noted that no attempt was made to order the topics in those sections in terms of their importance. They have been grouped somewhat for ease of reading and flow of information, but beyond that, all information in those sections has been given equal weight. The authors of this document do not consider it their role to apply a system of weight or value to the areas brought forward in the groups.

The authors, upon reflection, made a conscious decision not to divide the comments into constituency groups or attribute comments to specific individuals. The discussions in each group were highly integrated, and one of the benefits is the ability to see and hear 'the whole.'

QUESTION 1

What do you expect to be the dominant characteristics of the social, political, economic and cultural environment in which Oberlin graduates will find themselves as the 2000s take shape?

The purpose of Question 1 was to create a common language regarding the groups' general expectations of the future. The results of this discussion then served as the basis for further discussion about skills young people would need to thrive in such an environment. (Question 2)

It was made clear to focus group participants and is repeated here for emphasis that there was no intention to map out, or understand the future in a definitive way. But as any planning process requires a meaningful scan of the anticipated future, the participants should be acknowledged for their informed and substantive discussions prompted by this first question.

As the conversations progressed and themes emerged, it became apparent that many people across the campus share closely aligned ideas about the environment in which Oberlin may be operating in the future. Readers who participated in the focus groups will recognize the commonly expressed issues in the following recollection of the broad themes.

One consistent theme that participants identified was technological change. Another theme is demographic change and diversity. The themes of globalization, community and the need for collaboration were frequently voiced.

The more specific themes, often referenced in concert with those listed above, dealt with changes in economics, politics, information processing and the environment. There was certainly a consensus among focus group participants that rapid change is underway and will continue to occur well into the next century.

Throughout there was consistent concern voiced about the growing disparity of wealth and resources in both this society and in the world as a whole.

General Themes and Sample Comments

Technological change

The impact of technological advances on human living patterns and relationships could be significant.

More and more focus on technical skills and less on being broadly or liberally educated. Decline of the ideal of the 'renaissance man.'

Technology will change the concept of literacy and could contribute to increasing disparity among peoples.

Technology is driving the skills need very high.

Diversity

People of color will be a much larger part of the population.

With all this technology, we are exposed to all kinds of people and cultures. There will either be some kind of cultural fusion or more violence.

The environment will be more diverse and less diverse, diversity but also homogeneity.

We'll be in a more stratified society.

Globalization

An increasingly international world.

If we can globalize in a positive way, we can look at interdependency.

Globalization of industry, where multi-national organizations are determining the world.

Community

We will probably still have class and race distinctions. Identifying lines will remain with less rooting in social communities, less regular employment; with increasing alienation.

Collaboration

It could be a world in which collaboration is more the norm for intellectual achievements.

Economics

National borders will not exist in the way we know them. We need to be more efficient about the economy.

Politics

The political picture is very bleak. Few great leaders will aspire to political life, however this could lead to more grassroots efforts.

Disenfranchisement from the political process.

More than two viable political parties.

Undercurrents of nationalism will be creating tension.

Information Processing / Communication

Economic entities will have more control of information. There'll be real issues around who controls information in the future.

Tremendous access to information.

Entering a more and more information-centered age.

We'll see a gradual shift from biological evolution to the development of information systems.

The information issue changes the way in which one has to approach the world. We can't know the smallest fraction of what is going on.

Environment

On the issues of resources, we'll be coming to terms with limits.

There'll be more challenges to our natural resources.

QUESTION 2

Broadly, what are some of the academic, technical, personal life and community related skills young people will need in order to thrive in the environment we have just described?

As with question 1, the second question for the focused discussions was intended to continue setting the context, create a common language, and place future Oberlin students in the center of the planning process. It was also intended as a constructive link to discussions about Oberlin's current and future capacity. (Questions 4 and 5) Again, there was no intention to flesh out the future needs of students at Oberlin in a definitive way in the short period of time allotted. As the write-up of this question indicates, we are looking simply for the broad themes that rose to the top as many groups discussed the topic.

Many different ideas were expressed about the kind of skills needed by young people in the future. Some ideas expressed by participants focused on underlying skills such as critical thinking, while others identified more specific skills. There was consistency among the groups that basic skills central to a liberal education are at the core of being prepared for the future.

There was clearly a recognition of a future world in which students need many types of skills that have not been emphasized up to now. One major theme had to do with being able to work with a great deal of information in the future. There was a focus on students' ability to apply moral standards and values to that information, to recognize well founded data and know how to learn from it, as well as apply what they learn from it.

Repeatedly, participants expressed thoughtful and caring concerns for success for Oberlin's future students. It should also be noted that several students verbalized a discomfort with the word "thrive" because they felt it implied a passive role for graduates in the future. It was clear that they intended to impact the future environment, doing what they could to move it in a more positive direction.

The themes and skill areas identified in discussions related to Question 2 are:

Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking: capacity to transcend one's own situation geographically and culturally, and want to do something about it.

Critical thinking skills and communication skills will become more important to prevent anti-social actions.

Students need to learn how to theorize and how to plan on the basis of theorizing, implement a plan and be able to evaluate the plan.

Information Processing Skills

There's so much information out there - how do you know what to make of it?

Young people will need computer literacy which could really become like literacy itself!

We need to re-evaluate how we help people structure their thoughts.

There needs to be a sense of self-relationship in the midst of all the information, considering both the sources of and relevance of the information.

Technological skills will be extremely important. Computer skills will be like learning to drive a car for transportation.

Community Organizing Skills

As a community, we build skills that help us know how to allocate scarce resources and how to clean up the environment.

Skills for strengthening grassroots and political movements.

Diversity Skills

Recognizing differences - seeing beyond yourself

People will need to have the language and multi-cultural sophistication to cross cultural boundaries -- work and live with many different perspectives.

Adaptability

Students will need skills for survival - for a world that is terribly complicated.

People will have to know how to live with and interface with change.

Personal Growth Themes

Young people will need patience and perseverance to get what you need and where you want to go.

Interpersonal skills-- I don't know how to measure these, but empathy is as important a value as we can possibly generate.

Empathy gives us the ability to figure out what could help another person.

We need to teach students how to be brave.

Communication Skills

Students will need to read, write and speak with confidence.

Students will need to develop skills of communication across boundaries to work on teams.

People will need to know how to advocate for their cause such as the arts and the environment.

The ability to communicate across disciplines: art, science and language.

Know how to interface with emerging skills: mass communication and art forms.

QUESTION 3

Considering four important elements of the mission--intellectual seriousness, artistic vibrancy, social commitment, and diversity and access--what are some of the things Oberlin is already doing that will help the students thrive in the future environment we've discussed?

The purpose of this question was to ensure that in the process of planning for the future, we do not lose sight of what Oberlin is about -- those characteristics that have made Oberlin work for students for many generations. Any plan must have a balance between what is kept, enhanced and built upon because it is critical to maintaining the essence of the institution, and what must change because the larger environment is evolving and student needs are shifting. **This question, #3, focuses on what the individuals in the focus groups believe Oberlin is already doing that will serve students well in the future. Question #4 focuses on those things the groups felt should be consciously changed as Oberlin transitions into the next millennium.**

It should be noted that all the groups expressed support for the essential elements of the Oberlin mission listed above, indicating that focusing on these areas would serve Oberlin well as it moves into the 21st century. The concern was not to change the mission but to make the mission a reality on a day to day basis.

Strong Academic Environment and Programs

Oberlin offers a very strong academic program to students, and discussion participants expressed a significant amount of pride in this fact. The excitement for learning that is engendered and the broad-based approach to learning were felt to be particular strengths.

Teaching critical thinking is something Oberlin does very well. Students have the opportunity to deal with information at high levels, to delve first-hand into learning and research and do original work, rather than passively absorb information.

The Conservatory is seen as very strong, providing a rigorous program of professional music education and offering students a liberal education as well. This makes the Conservatory unique. The excellence of the Conservatory enhances the College and vice versa.

Overall, there is a climate of academic excellence that permeates the entire institution. Faculty and students interact around intellectual topics and learn from each other. One outcome of this climate is Oberlin's history of producing large numbers of students who go on to earn the PhD.

Sample Comments

We offer a broad-based multi-faceted approach to education.

Student/faculty collaboration on research in the sciences provides the ultimate opportunity for students to deal with knowledge and critical thinking at the highest levels, to develop hypotheses and create something.

Educational innovation...we continue to enhance and deal with innovation and student centered approaches.

We have a commitment to intellectualism and creativity.

We have world class academic achievements in biochemistry, molecular biology, and chemistry.

Oberlin has a huge impact on higher education, with the number of PhDs that go on to teach in institutions of higher education.

One thing Oberlin does well is to empower its students to question and think critically about how to intervene and change.

We encourage students to think independently and not subscribe to a set point of view.

Oberlin does a good job academically letting students find their own way and giving them structure.

We have a kind of intellectual seriousness quality that other liberal arts colleges with SATs as high as ours don't have.

The Conservatory and the college enrich one another just by being there.

We could be a music department of a college but we pride ourselves on being more than that.

We have a wonderful climate of academic excellence and a strong commitment to teaching. We are a community with high ideals.

Oberlin provides an intellectually intense and stimulating experience that needs to be retained.

Strong, Committed Faculty and Administration Who Truly Care About Students

Much of the academic success comes from the rigor and seriousness of the Oberlin faculty and their commitment to developing the best in their students. Faculty bring both intellectual and pedagogical expertise to their students, as well as a passion for teaching and learning. Oberlin's small size allows faculty to do all the teaching, rather than relying on graduate students or interns, an approach which would distance students from faculty. This is a strength and a value that is important to everyone.

The one-to-one advising program, with faculty advisors, is generally seen as a strength, though it was pointed out that the quality of the advising can be inconsistent. Along with the strength of the faculty is the recognition that the staff at Oberlin is also committed and supportive.

Sample Comments

Professors actually teach the courses. Teaching is the number one priority for faculty.

Talk about teaching first; we've got to find teachers that embody the "Oberlin way."

We expose students to people who have a passion for what they do.

The intimacy when a professor stops and pays attention to an idea is an important part of the Oberlin experience.

Student access to faculty is key. Students feel faculty take them seriously.

Genuine, sincere interest of faculty to interact with students.

Oberlin has small classes and a demanding student body that gets a great deal of attention from faculty.

The system of advisors, with one to one advising, is a strength.

Human resources: best faculty, best students, best staff, and other resources including the physical plant.

I think of myself as engaging in both the production and the teaching of knowledge.

Nancy Dye has a wonderful light touch.

Since Nancy has been here there has been an increased service emphasis, a selfless idea of service since the day she arrived.

Providing a Whole Life Experience that is Broader than Academics

There is a strong recognition that Oberlin provides more than academic education. Many people commented on the integration of formal education with life education. It is an institution that challenges students to ask the larger questions and consciously engage in unique personal journeys. It encourages individuality and prepares students to “change the world.”

Sample Comments

We don't focus on just one thing, but put forth a larger continuum, context, and scope. This leads to understanding about the big picture.

We are good at asking the largest, most profound questions.

We focus on the whole person so they feel empowered to change the community.

We give students an anchor, a fierce dedication to individuality. Lots of schools will prepare you academically or musically, but Oberlin students are uniquely well prepared for leadership in their field and elsewhere.

We teach the students from the whole community and not just the classroom. Lots of learning takes place out of the classroom.

Oberlin is a safe place to experiment; there is acceptance of small failures, and you're not being judged.

We're good at emphasizing an ethical dimension to life.

Oberlin's programs abroad are a plus; students are willing to open up their minds to new and different things.

In class, out of class is a little more seamless here than in most schools.

Outstanding Music and Cultural Programs and Experiences

The Oberlin experience is greatly enriched by the Conservatory, which provides the College not only with a high quality program of music education, but also a great variety of musical and cultural programs which benefit all students, faculty, and staff. Creative and artistic talents are highly valued at Oberlin, and the opportunity to participate in cultural events of this nature is unique for a small liberal arts institution.

In addition to the Conservatory, there is also appreciation of the art museum, library, and other campus resources, although they are felt to be underutilized.

Sample Comments

Liberal arts and arts: if a student wants to study science and violin, s/he can do it.

The Conservatory has very high standards for the performance of music...one of the leading music schools in the world.

Through the Conservatory we provide instrumental mastery, performance in a variety of contexts, comprehensive knowledge of repertoire, and music technology.

At the Conservatory we prepare students to be articulate advocates for the arts.

Oberlin offers a unique opportunity to learn to listen through the arts.

We have great services in the library, art museum, the contemporary center, the international student center, Peter's Hall, and the international studies center.

Strong institutions like the art museum, with an excellent collection and access for students, and the Studio Arts program provides excellent opportunities.

Student Led Programs/Courses

Part of the way Oberlin provides a whole life experience to students is by allowing--indeed encouraging--students to take the lead in developing their own programs. This is seen most strongly both in courses that are student led and taught through EXCO as well as in Winter Term programs, which students design themselves, in partnership with a faculty advisor.

It should be noted that while the Winter Term program is praised by many as innovative and a strength of Oberlin's academic offerings, there is also considerable concern about the quality of the program today and whether it needs to be reshaped or changed. Several people expressed the view that Oberlin should improve the Winter Term program and keep it at the center of the curriculum, while others thought it might more usefully be replaced with other programs. Specific concerns are discussed in question #4.

Sample Comments

Students don't just learn how to write grants, but actually write them.

There's lots of freedom here...independent majors, students can create courses, one-on-one with faculty and the honors program.

Students can design and execute their own student programs and courses, with access to faculty as needed.

Winter Term encourages students to do something outside of their field of study. It's a great opportunity. The thrill is that it is unstructured.

Winter Term can involve student and faculty together...enthusiasm is important.

Winter Term provides an opportunity for students to make the world smaller; also, an opportunity to interact with alumni.

When Winter Term becomes what it should be, it's going to be a great foundation for that future we are looking at.

I love Winter Term; you learn so much integrating class and real life.

Commitment to Social Engagement

Clearly, one of the most important components of Oberlin's educational experience comes from the college's commitment to social justice and service programs. Social action is an important and integral part of a student's life at Oberlin.

The importance of these programs was stressed by virtually all groups. Their impact is far reaching, with both the immediate impact of the programs at the time they are undertaken and the longer-term sensitivity and commitment to social justice that Oberlin students have. Many discussion participants expressed a desire to see these social service activities become more intimately linked to the academic programs of the school in the future, not as something to be done on the side, but as an integral part of the Oberlin education process.

The Center for Service and Learning was often cited as a unique Oberlin institution that enables Oberlin to carry out its commitment in this area.

Sample Comments

Oberlin produces students with a sense of social justice and a desire to act.

We develop an idea of a liberal education: connecting intellectual activity with social action.

Increased emphasis on community outreach provides other kinds of opportunities and gives another dimension of need and ways to solve those needs.

The Oberlin Music Coalition, started and run by students, has been a valuable service to the community.

Academic rigor applied to a social commitment builds awareness and puts Oberlin in a unique niche.

Our strength is that we care about things.

The Center for Service and Learning has an impressive program of internships. It's "growing like hotcakes."

Commitment to Diversity

Commitment to diversity has been at the heart of Oberlin College since its beginning. It is an essential value of the institution, embodied in its students, faculty, staff, and programs. Diversity is interpreted quite broadly at Oberlin including, but not limited to, diversity of culture, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and point of view.

Oberlin's commitment to diversity is considered by many to be at the core of what makes Oberlin unique. It is an institution that encourages everyone to look deeply into themselves and embrace a full understanding of diversity. While groups discussed the importance of diversity and the fact that Oberlin has worked hard in this area over the years, they also acknowledged that there is much more work to do as the College moves into the next century. They felt that the Oberlin staff, students, faculty, alumni and trustees must continue to challenge themselves to create new ways of building a genuinely diverse academic community. This theme is evident throughout the discussion of question #4 of this report -- focusing on what Oberlin should do differently in the future.

Sample Comments

We have a commitment to Oberlin as a diverse community.

Oberlin has a strong tradition of educating women, African Americans and other minorities, and a spiritual component to our education.

We are expected to be tolerant, and if we don't act that way there is a forum for working that out. We're very strong that way.

We need to maintain and enhance the diversity we have.

A Strong Set of Shared Values

In many focus groups the conversation turned to values and shared values. Some of the discussion was specific, such as valuing diversity or social and community service. Much of it, however, was more general, reflecting the commitment that Oberlin has to helping people explore their values, and work towards understanding one another's choices. Many people expressed the belief that students leave Oberlin with a common bond forged on shared values, and that this is part of what makes Oberlin unique.

Sample Comments

Oberlin education leads to the ability to make decisions about one's values.

The environment promotes a "want" for values.

As an Oberlin graduate, I can say my fundamental values are from Oberlin.

I am struck by how our students are interested in values, even though they do not talk about them in those terms. Our students talk about this all the time. It's part of liberal arts, even part of a residential liberal arts education.

One of the most impressive things about Oberlin is when they learn what Oberlin is about...

Oberlin is a place where belief systems can be challenged.

QUESTION 4

What are some of the things Oberlin will need to do -- how must we shape Oberlin's academic and student life -- in order to help the students thrive? Or, what would an Oberlin (liberal) educational experience consist of if our graduates are to thrive in the 21st century?

Community at Oberlin

A call to build and enhance the sense of community of Oberlin came from all constituencies -- student, faculty, staff, alumni and trustee, College and Conservatory, young and old. It is as if there is one, shared, rarely disputed belief among Oberlin people that the key to true success as an institution is in 'the whole'. Probably the most eloquent statements made during the focus groups related to this theme. Many yearn for 'days gone by' when the whole campus assembled regularly to hear political opinions, music, scholarly talks, and other types of presentations. Others wanted to continue the small mixed group discussions that are the foundation of this planning process. Others were looking for the opportunity to be involved in all-campus discussions on an ongoing basis. Appreciation for Nancy Dye's work in the area of community building was acknowledged many times. The message was clearly one of support and commitment to this core value.

One critical area pointed out by participants was the fact that Oberlin lacks a central gathering place. It does not have a campus center or student union that is designed to create and support a sense of community. This contributes to the sense of fragmentation on campus. For now, this must be addressed through thoughtful programming and the creative use of other spaces. It is hoped that the future brings a more substantive solution to the issue.

Sample Comments

Oberlin should be more of a community. More of a sense of dialogue and mutual support. We should all support one another.

We had, at one time, a Thursday noon all campus assembly. It was great. Everyone on campus came together for these events, and they created a strong sense of community. Maybe we need to look at that kind of activity again.

There needs to be more crossover between management and faculty -- more of a shared culture.

There are few occasions for everyone to be involved in common dialogue. Most people loved Nancy Dye sending Cornel West books and having him come. We need more of that.

Maybe we should re-institute courses everyone takes and/or re-institute the large community coming together.

We need an 'empowered' faculty and staff with opportunities to share ideas and concerns, and share perspectives.

We need to all learn to be peace makers. We need to all contribute to a stronger, more positive sense of community and care for the morale of the whole campus.

More all campus events -- rituals. We should deal with the paradox of being separate individuals yet come together as a true community -- respecting one another's uniqueness.

We need to have the underpinnings that will help us base our decisions every day on the good of the whole.

We are losing a lot of positive energy and creativity.

Administrative assistants feel pushed out of the community loop at times. There is disparity in the way people on campus are treated. There should be a basic level of respect and a sense of everyone as part of the community.

We don't have a lot of community spaces and buildings are deteriorating.

We could use an architectural master plan.

Thomas Jefferson created the concept of the college or university as a village. We need to look at that.

Our student union is a very inappropriate space for our students to come together. We need a central student union that is designed with our philosophy in mind.

Wilder doesn't work as a gathering place for students. It's dark, groggy and heavy. A student union should be light and student friendly.

The lack of a good central gathering place for students contributes more to the fragmentation on campus than any other element we've discussed.

Students don't develop natural, comfortable relationships with one another because they don't often come in contact with one another except for classes and meetings. The dining hall certainly doesn't help matters.

We need a real campus center. Homey and inviting.

Faculty Interaction at Oberlin

A theme that resonated clearly was desire for a heightened level of "faculty collegiality and cross-campus intellectual discourse." Particularly those faculty who have been at Oberlin for 10 - 15 years or less find themselves yearning for a forum for exploring new pedagogical approaches. Several faculty also mentioned the fact that opportunities for College faculty to connect with Conservatory faculty were minimal and that many would like more opportunities to do so outside of the committee arena. There was also a sense that newer faculty need to be more effectively welcomed and integrated into the faculty community.

It should be noted that the issue of 'time' was mentioned quite often during this part of the discussion. No one wants to simply add to the time spent working. Rather, the sense was that a shift should take place -- one that would cut back on the time spent on

committees and emphasize the time spent on pedagogical and other academically focused discussions. Faculty members talked of ways to encourage the coming together of faculty for reasons other than committee work.

Sample Comments

I'd like to see the faculty having a support system for faculty pedagogy. It would be great to have a drop-in center for our faculty. We don't have open discussions among ourselves. The Danforth Center at Harvard is a good model.

There is a great deal of expertise spread throughout the college and no forum for tapping and bringing it together.

The way we organize our knowledge is changing. Also I think the social interactions among faculty don't naturally support that. Why? The answer is various and complex.

We need to provide the basis for moving forward in the area of faculty collegiality.

As a Conservatory faculty member, I feel isolated. The level of trust and interpersonal [relationships] is not good. As an institution, we are way too compartmentalized.

We need a stronger sense of unity and critical engagement.

The idea is a systematic way of the faculty coming together to discuss courses, share ideas, and new approaches to teaching.

We used to have a course where we all listened to one another's lectures. It was great.

We need to re institute ways to integrate new faculty into the academic community so they can feel part of the community early on.

As faculty, we have too much to do just trying to survive. This leads to lack of substantive interaction with people outside my department.

In the Conservatory, there is no place to come together.

If we had more understanding of what one another are doing we could help students make the connections.

It would help the students if the faculty who are advising them were connected with other areas and had in depth knowledge of the other courses. That way we would have somewhere to go in our attempts to create a road map that works for us.

We need a more flexible faculty. Coming together for interesting projects, talking among ourselves, more fluidity about curriculum, student needs, and all.

We need more faculty teamwork...do more work together, cross-functional or otherwise.

I only interface with people I work with. If we are going to do interdisciplinary work -- if we are to chart new territory in the development of knowledge -- then we need more communication, bridges, trust.

Minority, Women and New Faculty

Women and minority faculty, and many young and newer faculty, felt strongly that the faculty community must find ways to be more welcoming and supportive. "We have to create a more nurturing environment for individual faculty members." There was a

concern that very early on many of these individuals tended to feel isolated and disconnected from the core of the faculty. This leads to frustration and disappointment, especially in light of Oberlin's reputation as a welcoming and affirming place for women and minorities. Too many minority and women faculty leave for reasons having to do with their lack of acceptance into the community.

Sample Comments

We are heading towards a crisis in women faculty leadership. We need to recruit and support strong women faculty leaders.

We need to look at this issue (women and minority faculty) in the long term...in every department.

While we profess to be diverse, we segregate ourselves as faculty.

We lack the Asian American faculty to balance with the number of Asian American students. Other groups have the same issue.

We need to look at the isolation and segregation we impose upon ourselves.

We need to re institute a way to integrate new faculty both professionally and socially into the community.

Faculty Professional Development

Although a great deal of this discussion focused on faculty at Oberlin learning from one another, many groups discussed the desire for heightened exposure to ideas and pedagogical discussions outside of Oberlin. A large number of faculty felt that in order to be involved in bringing new curriculum, programs and approaches to Oberlin they would need more personal professional development themselves. They hope that some of this would come directly from the College in the form of enhanced support for attending pedagogy seminars, and other national forums for faculty dialogue. They also felt that the present culture does not readily provide the kinds of incentives needed to encourage new ways of thinking. PP

Sample Comments

We need to find ways to keep the faculty current. This should be happening across disciplines and in conjunction with other institutions. -- for study and research.

If students will need new skills, flexibility, innovation, and so on, faculty will also need new skills.

I would love to explore new pedagogical approaches, including multi-cultural and interdisciplinary.

We might institute ways of helping the faculty stay current -- with emphasis on the process of teaching and learning. We need an institutional incentive for faculty to be involved.

I'd like to see a system for supporting the faculty at different stages. Differing incentives at different phases of professional life. We should do that with the College staff too.

Enhanced Interdisciplinary Curriculum

Every group discussed, to some degree, the need for an enhanced 'interdisciplinary curriculum' in the future. Also, the vast majority of faculty and students, as well as staff, alumni and trustees, feel that breaking down the hard and fast boundaries between departments and across programs will be a key element in that process. Having said that, it should be acknowledged that there are several interpretations of what the term 'interdisciplinary' implies for Oberlin. To some it means developing "more fluid disciplinary boundaries" and faculty working closely together on joint programs. Others see it as a far more systemic process. Those individuals feel that "the way we presently organize knowledge is changing" and it is time to revisit the premise upon which the present departmental structures are based.

It should also be noted that some faculty members see 'interdisciplinary' as a way to give students courses that are broader in scope, while others see 'interdisciplinary' as a way to be far more specialized. Several faculty feel that interdisciplinary curriculum development must be approached with a certain amount of caution since it is perceived to be a very time consuming endeavor. Even at the most basic level, it will need a large amount of administrative support and should be led by faculty members with a great deal of personal interest and commitment to the process.

Sample Comments:

We need more fluid disciplinary boundaries.

People in the future will have to reassemble knowledge and we must know how knowledge bases inter-relate. We need more flexibility in order to begin thinking about these things.

I am not proposing eradicating disciplines, but need to discuss such things as interdisciplinary processes. Also, many students try to put two majors together to get something else -- try to achieve non-discipline-bound directions.

Integration between departments is becoming necessary, not just a 'nice thing.' Could there be a central support for interdisciplinary endeavors?

Change will be difficult. We are tied to the notion of compartmentalized knowledge.

Much of our departmentalization is essential. It gives us cohesiveness. We have created building blocks. We have to watch the relationship between that and an effusive network.

Students are double-majoring / double - minoring, some because they are trying to create their own interdisciplinary approach. That is, some students are doing double majors or minors not because they want to do both of those things, but because they are trying to integrate the areas themselves.

We do need to keep an eye on the 'core skills.'

There is a 'gaping hole' in the Oberlin curriculum -- the bringing together of science, technology and the humanities. It's been tried to some degree before -- (Sloan Foundation and other projects) but we haven't found the right approach.

Madison, Wisconsin has an integrated liberal studies program that works well. That and other programs might be interesting to look at.

Regarding interdisciplinary work: that could be a downhill slide if we are not careful. We would have to start with the faculty -- tapping their personal and intellectual interests. We have to give people a chance to dive into what they are good at.

We do need more interdisciplinary work -- but we should be careful, since this could be a trap -- not really working together, not right mix. It's also trendy. Need to be cautious.

The idea of the Environmental Studies Center is to integrate academic disciplines. The same model could be applied to other areas.

In the academic realm, each class is treated like a separate world. If you have a desire to integrate that knowledge with other work being done in other areas, there is little involvement on the part of the faculty.

Curriculum Change

A large portion of the faculty believe that it is time to look broadly at Oberlin's curriculum. Discussion groups acknowledged that when curriculum planning and development takes place, it is usually approached by faculty on a department by department basis, an approach that may not be the most effective one at this time since it does not allow for a 'big picture' perspective. There was a call to set clear priorities and to support work across disciplines. It is recognized that the system for rewarding faculty should be studied since it is not presently viewed as rewarding innovation in curriculum work. Also, the value of student input was acknowledged and discussed.

Sample Comments

I wonder, is the departmental structure the place for curriculum reform?

We need a broader look than departments can give. We have a need for larger oversight in order to support work across the disciplines.

We try too many things and don't do any of them well. We have a university mentality. It makes for a good marketing tool, but it doesn't necessarily serve our students well.

We can't keep adding. We need more focus. That's my personal hope for this process. Maybe we can begin to move towards doing fewer things--clear priorities and excellence--concentrating on fewer areas.

We need to enable faculty to be rewarded differently than they are today. We have to find a way to support course development in new areas. "If I do this now, how do I give up what I get rewarded for?"

We need to be more pro-active on course development and grants. We need funds and the time-off to develop new ideas.

As it stands right now, there is a serious lack of visionary, progressive views when it comes to curriculum development.

The current structure -- the EPPC -- doesn't allow much student input.

Now the rewards for faculty are not for change. "If I haven't written two articles and a book but developed a new course involving technology..."

Students don't feel on the cutting edge when we compare our curriculum with other 'similar' schools. Also, if a student has a curriculum idea, huge barriers emerge to communicating and implementing those ideas.

Winter Term

The concept of Winter Term is excellent. More restructuring is needed. People should use it as a tool, an internship or something.

There could be much more guidance for the planning of Winter Term projects. Planning should start earlier, especially if we use it as an internship.

I don't feel like Winter Term is a waste of time, even if we are fairly low key about it. We need the time to do things we wouldn't have time to do otherwise.

Winter Term is spotty -- only about 40% of our collective energy is being expended.

One of the most interesting aspects of our curriculum is Winter Term. But, as it presently stands, it should be abolished. It needs more structure, and a reflective piece as part of it.

Winter term is inconsistent across campus and in some cases not productive at all. If we don't address it, we are passing up a fabulous opportunity.

We could build more ways for the alumni to become involved in Oberlin. Residence for Winter Term?

Strengthen the support for Winter Term. It's a wonderful program with great potential.

Social Engagement

How could we work more social action activities directly into the curriculum?

It would help if there were ways to get credit for the long hours we work on social action. Maybe connect that work with specific academic work.

Oberlin was originally founded to create missionaries. Having community service be a requirement for credit would make it more central to the school's mission again.

There's such a strong focus on only intellectual knowledge. We talk about other kinds of learning -- experiential learning -- but in the end we only pay lip service to it. One example is our talk of a College run farm.

Basic Values as Part of the Curriculum

Oberlin is an institution that prides itself on the fact that, through its course work and student life experience, it helps students develop a firm set of personal values and an understanding of the relationship of those values to the choices and decisions they make. One individual said, "Yale Law School gave me the skills to make a whole lot of money. Oberlin gave me my values."

Those involved in the discussion groups feel that this aspect of Oberlin must be enhanced and built upon in new ways. There is a shared belief that since part of Oberlin's success seems to rest on its long standing ability to incorporate 'values' into the curriculum and lives of students, great care should be taken to keep this characteristic alive. Also, some feel that the more faculty and staff understand about the way 'values work' is done and the impact of that on students, the more they can help students clarify their own values and bring them to bear in this diverse, complex and quickly evolving environment.

Sample Comments

Our students are concerned about values, but are we equipped to do all these things? To what extent can one organize that and work with it as an institution? We can teach philosophy and history, but if we set out to teach values, what is the forum? Values 101?

We need more opportunities for students to work on gaining clarity on their values and evaluating their own personal lives.

I suppose we could rethink things on the academic side so more of what you are as a person is there, more of the whole is considered.

We need to have a clear focus on core values and beliefs.

Students should have help with taking stock of their own values and those of others. They should be able to recognize the values of the institution and find ways to act upon those they identify with.

Somehow, we have to support students as they develop a strong sense of self. The more you know and value yourself, the more you have to share.

When we talk about values, are we talking about freshman year projects, a service experience, or mentoring or a process over a long period of time.

Our students need the ability to understand situations and assess them. What is vital? What is not vital? They need to feel comfortable and confident, and have the ability to understand the principle behind the situation. Then they can apply knowledge and values to solving it.

Students need empathy - the ability to figure out what could help another person. Empathy is as important a value as we can possibly generate.

It is important that their Oberlin experience grounds them in a strong sense of self. Before I can enter into a relationship with another, I need to be secure with myself.

To what degree are our ideals about Oberlin a dream...but we must attempt to do it.

Imagination is critical. We cannot allow a shrinking of vision inside our community.

Oberlin does very well on the serious academic side. We don't do as well with education on emotions, tolerating different ways of thinking, healing past situations, and how to become whole.

Comments on Other Curriculum Areas for Consideration

I'd like to see more group problem solving models being taught and used.

We should teach research skills, debate skills, writing and communication skills.

We should teach more courses that prepare students for a global environment, economically, politically and socially.

We don't exercise enough guidance: moral, ethical, educational, academic. Learning how to think critically and creatively is important.

So many of our graduates go into education, and they have to work hard to find ways to become certified, etc. Education should be an academic major, or part of another program, or perhaps we could partner with other schools to make that available.

We don't give our students the opportunity to leave Oberlin certified to teach, yet so many go in that direction.

I was part of an institution that had honors day. Upperclassmen gave presentations of their work to their peers. That was one way we celebrated our academic achievement. I guess that is the equivalent of the senior recital for the Conservatory.

We could develop more opportunities all over campus for students to work with students. For example, student scientists explaining what they are doing, performance students performing and explaining their art and process, etc.

Take advantage of our geographic connection with the Great Lakes -- botanical studies, environmental studies, clean-ups, etc.

Student Residential Experience

The larger questions that emerged in this area include:

- A. What is the purpose of a residential college as we move towards the future?
- B. How can we strengthen and enhance the student / residential life experience so that we are living out Oberlin's mission and values, and providing future students with the greatest opportunity for success, academically, socially, professionally, etc., both during college and beyond.

Although many topics were introduced, a few key themes emerged.

1.) The first can be described as **"bridging student life and academic endeavors."** There is a strong belief that students would greatly benefit if these two areas were substantially more integrated. For example, faculty could do more to help students apply basic conceptual frameworks learned in the classroom to their daily life experiences. Also, the academic component would be enhanced by integrating the student's social engagement interests and other life experiences into the curriculum. As one faculty member explained, "We need to look at residential life and the curriculum together. We've been looking at things too narrowly."

2.) A second theme evolved around the **dorms and dorm life at Oberlin**. Placing the issue in the future context, the question becomes, "How can we create a community focused dormitory environment that helps students feel a strong sense of belonging and commitment to one another -- an environment that works for a highly diverse group of residents, with different needs and expectations?" It became clear throughout the discussions that the dormitory buildings themselves are not conducive to this vision for the future, so until the buildings themselves can be replaced, other approaches must be devised.

3.) The third theme had to do with **program houses**. This was by far one of the most common topics to be raised in the groups. They were discussed from many different perspectives. It was also a topic for which people have very strong feelings. Among the questions asked and discussed were the following: Why, historically, did we set up the program houses? What is their purpose? Are they accomplishing that purpose today? What is the impact of the program houses on the residents themselves and on the rest of the Oberlin community? Where do we go from here with program houses?

Some people feel quite strongly that program houses, as they were initially conceived, are good because they provide a "community within a community," an opportunity to live

with others who share common interests and issues. "I lived in a dorm for two years, then moved to a house. I was amazed at how close everyone felt. I felt so much more a part of something." There are others who feel very strongly that program houses have become a form of self-segregation, and the residents have little interaction with the rest of the Oberlin community. "These situations on campus are forcing students to make choices, then once there, the leaving creates hurt and anger."

There does appear to be a high level of agreement that it is time to look at the whole residential situation -- program houses, coops, and dorms -- as a single issue with the goal of creating a residential experience for every student that is more fulfilling and supportive in the future.

Sample Comments

For a number of reasons: social stratification, economy, technology -- the residential college concept may be in danger. Fewer residential colleges may exist. It will be very important for Oberlin to be a unique experience.

Does the residential college have a place in this permeable diverse technological society, especially when knowledge can now be accessed so easily from so many sources? What would be lost? For one thing, friendship and conversation would be lost. Mentorship would suffer.

You have to be very careful regarding 'curriculum' and student life. Students need to be students in the classroom and independent people in their living area. Don't make student life into too much curriculum or too organized. How much engagement can we give?

Residential life programmatic work should be related to issues we are working on academically or in our social outreach programs.

There should be a recognition that what happens in our classes really does carry into student life.

We need to look at ways we can better bridge the academic and residential and social life of the students. How one can really enrich the other.

We need to look at residential life and the curriculum together. We've been looking at things too narrowly. We need to look at what is good for the whole community.

Somehow we have to make everyone feel invested in their dorm environment, but the buildings themselves play against this.

How could we have more impact on the students who are not in one of our planned communities.

At least in program houses and coops people hang around together. There is no impetus for that in the dorms.

I lived in a dorm for two years, then moved to a house. I was amazed at how close everyone felt. I felt much more a part of something here at Oberlin. We need the dorms to have that same sense of community.

The boundaries of community on campus need to be thought about. What are we setting our students up to experience.

Take that same balkanization concept we talked about in the curriculum and apply it to residential life. There is no interest by students outside the program houses. Others won't go there. There is a lack of interaction.

We need to evaluate the way we implement the program house concept. Is our present approach helping or ultimately hurting our students?

The program houses on campus are representative of the diversity and representative of the fragmentation.

My vision for residential life is that of freshmen not living in program houses which isolate them from the bulk of their fellow freshmen.

We need to look at connecting as a community vs. building walls. The houses came about at a different stage of the college. Students needed more support as a minority. But that should be balanced with the positive impact of a whole, integrated community.

We need to end self-segregation and program segregation. We need to make changes that help us act on what we purport to do.

Now program houses have the same problem Winter Term has. They are not doing what they were set up to do.

I see a sense of community with the program houses, but not with the dorms. We need to define a shared larger purpose for our living together. We need to be dependent upon one another to make it work.

These situations on campus are forcing students to make choices, then once there, the leaving creates hurt and anger.

It's going to take some good thought and planning and a certain level of commitment to help the program houses achieve what they are set up to achieve. We need to combat the sense that people have that this is a form of self-segregation.

There's a real fuzzy line between safe space and self segregation.

Program houses do serve a purpose but are we making them work?

I feel like those houses are important. The third world house has been a place to be safe.

The staff in Student Life is trying to build bridges. Should program houses have outreach programs?

Diversity and Multi-culturalism

Many see the ability to create a strong vibrant multi-cultural community as one of the most important goals Oberlin could achieve. They feel they have worked hard in this area and have come a long way, but still wrestle with the issues. Clearly, a core value is one of respect for individual differences and appreciation for the uniqueness of every culture. But making that come alive at the College on a day to day basis is the challenge. Discussion group participants voiced a desire for an increased programmatic emphasis on diversity and multi-cultural issues in the future. Some of the areas mentioned for focus include: developing a more diverse faculty and staff, creating more focus on multi-culturalism in the classroom, increasing overall "sensitivity and responsiveness," enhancing students ability to move with more fluidity among cultures, and general work on racism and sexism.

Sample Comments:

We need to give students a genuine sense of cultural diversity, not just knowledge, but sensitivity, responsiveness and the ability to move among and within cultures.

It has always struck me that the Multi-Cultural Resource Center is not under the Dean of the College. Multi-culturalism isn't seen in the classroom education component.

Our philosophy seems liberal, but it is reactionary. I'm not sure we, as faculty, are always dealing with the racial and ethnic issues in the best way.

Often the fear of offending someone around inter-racial issues causes us not to have much dialogue. We often have trouble speaking with people with different agendas and cultural backgrounds.

How is the multi-cultural perspective going to manifest itself in the classroom?

We need to work, as a faculty, on issues of racism and sexism.

The personal lives of students are diverse, the thought systems we live in are diverse. We should put more focus on working with that.

Our staff should be diverse. We should set goals in that direction. This is not a racially balanced campus. We may have crossed one bridge, but we have to keep going.

I don't think many people are really dealing with it. The concept of a dominant culture -- of majority and minority - won't be relevant. We need to pick up our pace balancing the campus and working together on new levels of communication -- crossing the boundaries.

One way to think about the Oberlin experience is although the situation isn't perfect, at least we have created the opportunity for the students to have an understanding and respect for the diversity issue. That will impact them their whole life.

Crossing Boundaries

Many times, during the course of the small group dialogues, people focused on divisions within Oberlin. Many people used the term 'balkanized' as they discussed certain aspects of the residential situation and the curriculum. Some talked about barriers to working across traditional departmental boundaries and between College and Conservatory, while others cited divisions among faculty and between faculty and staff. Racial and ethnic separation, often accompanied by a sense of isolation, were acknowledged. And many other references were made to barriers between groups and institutional groupings.

One way of dealing with this situation is to create more opportunities for bringing together the entire campus as a community creating a greater sense of commitment to the whole. (Various ideas along these lines are discussed in the section titled Community at Oberlin.) However, many feel that the problem is one that should also be considered in a more strategic way, by creating some basic principles to guide the campus. They also talked of looking separately at each specific issue and addressing them with unique plans.

Sample Comments:

We are not going to get anywhere with diversity in the larger sense unless we break down the barriers that divide us on a day to day basis: faculty - staff, College - Conservatory, administration - student, etc.

Sometimes I feel that we compound the problem in only having people who represent their own interests teaching these classes. African American teaches African American, Latino teaches Latino. In many ways, this contributes to dividing us. Maybe some mixed background team teaching would be helpful here.

Balkanization of the curriculum: African American and Women's Studies are balkanized. African Americans take the African American course -- not many others. Women primarily take the Women's Studies courses. Not men.

We need to re-configure programs in ways that more innovatively link those courses with other departments -- so the topics are discussed in broader arenas.

If we don't have an understanding on campus regarding what we are each about and what we do, we will not get anywhere with the kinds of innovations we are talking about.

*We have trouble speaking with people with different agendas.
Departments are too compartmentalized.
Communication between committees is bad.
Conservatory and College have far too many boundaries.*

Resources competed for by departments have led to a siege mentality and other forms of protectionism.

Departments see themselves in and of themselves, not part of the whole institution. This sets up very thick walls.

The student body and faculty are fragmented. The faculty doesn't support one another. Some of that lack of connection may be how busy we are.

Student Centered Teaching and Advising

Although teaching is without a doubt considered a strength at Oberlin there is a sense that more could be done to adapt the teaching style to student's stages of academic and personal development. Discussions focused on providing opportunities for students to delve more deeply into subject matter, and enriching the whole educational experience by designing more approaches to fit the increasing maturity of the student.

A related topic, faculty advising, was also discussed in light of the students' needs. Basically, the students find the quality of advising at Oberlin to be very inconsistent. While some faculty go to great lengths to support and counsel the students for whom they are responsible, there are others who spend minimal effort, and do not view the job as a priority. Since this relationship is at the core of the students' experience at Oberlin, this should be addressed, particularly as the curriculum choices become more complex and multi-disciplinary. Students are going to need someone who understands the whole school's curriculum. It should be noted that many people are concerned about freshman advising in particular, and hope it will be improved and adapted in some way to better fit the unique needs of that age group.

Sample Comments

We need to acknowledge that there are big differences between freshmen and juniors, sophomores and seniors. Adjusting the kinds of courses we have at different levels to match their stage of development.

Students don't have time to go into the depths of any one area. They never get to the mysterious part -- the passionate part.

Could modifying the student load mean gaining a reflective window to encourage stages --- with us being alert to those stages -- and perhaps open other opportunities?

Many freshman come here and do not experience a small class in their first year.

We don't pay as much attention to student centered learning as we could. That includes apprenticeships and independent work. How challenging is the monochromatic sequence? Although the courses get more

We don't pay as much attention to student centered learning as we could. That includes apprenticeships and independent work. How challenging is the monochromatic sequence? Although the courses get more difficult and the number goes up...the format is still the same and students are not gradually becoming more independent

We need more first year in depth experiences. The colloquium programs are good models. An example of a colloquium: Here's what a college paper is all about. Here is an intimate experience that introduces you to the basic approach.

As faculty we do a good job of helping students in growing up 'like me' but spend less time helping students find opportunities toward the enhancement of their careers.

The advising system is better for juniors and seniors, but we need to improve lower class advisors.

Need to develop better student / faculty relationships as freshmen.

As students, we don't really have advocates. Our advisor system is very inconsistent. Some students get strong levels of support. Others get little to no support.

Somehow, the advisors need to be held accountable for their job.

We have to somehow change the culture and make advising a real priority, particularly for freshmen.

In the academic world each class is treated like a separate world. If you have an academic problem that goes beyond a particular course or department, there's nowhere to go. You are completely dependent on the extent to which your advisor has taken the time to familiarize himself or herself with the rest of the academic community. Few do it.

Maybe students could have a mid-level administrator and an academic advisor.

The advising issue also ties into minority retention.

Research / Teaching / Mentoring

Many groups discussed what appear to be the three major roles for faculty at Oberlin. The role of the teacher, the researcher and the mentor. When discussing the preferred future at Oberlin all three of these roles were seen as strong alternatives. The ideal situation would allow -- and even encourage-- all of these roles to exist side by side with equal emphasis. The issue seems to occur when one role is held in greater esteem than the others, and the rewards, monetary or otherwise, fall more consistently in one category than another. Many individuals in the groups feel that research is rewarded more than teaching or mentoring, a situation that could be a problem as the college engages in heightened levels of curriculum work. If the College chooses to focus on the development of new programs and the teaching of innovative new courses, then there must be some way to ensure that the best minds are put to that and the rewards are in balance.

Sample Comments

We need to discuss the place of research and the state of teaching. There's a kind of schizophrenia here at Oberlin. Personally, I find that I teach better when I'm doing research. and consider both a significant contribution.

I haven't seen opposition between teaching and research. I've seen many departments with superb research and superb teaching.

We may say we value a great teacher, but teaching is not rewarded as well.

The teaching / research distinction we make here is the wrong question. The real issue is how to better incorporate research into teaching and this with students.

One of the best things about Oberlin is that we have always understood that education takes place between the student and the source.

Tenure report focusing on research: an analogous report was never done for teaching.

We need a balance of strength. We don't need to argue the value of research, but we need some who will not be publishing but are excellent teachers.

We should put our resources on campus into the close mentoring of students and other things we do that will make Oberlin a very personal experience for students, and therefore worth the money to come here in the future.

Redefine what we mean by research. We need to acknowledge that one kind of research we can do is the researching pedagogical methods. This would not only be research but we could improve the educational environment.

We need to re-evaluate how Oberlin evaluates its faculty in the areas of research vs. teaching.

We should develop a close research relationship between faculty and students.

Can we figure out how to do high level, independent student / teacher research and have smaller classes in a way that is still financially sound for Oberlin?

Teaching must always be our primary role.

I feel, as an active researcher, that my courses are far superior because I bring the source closer to the students. I teach from conference papers, even from drafts.

The idea of greater involvement of students in research is good, but we have to recognize that we cannot involve students in all research.

We need to develop ways of mentoring - not just for honors students.

Alumni and mentoring: One idea would be to connect the present students with people that have moved on. We could establish a mentoring program with past Oberlinians.

Research and mentoring: We might need money for students to be research assistants.

Maybe we should do a study of how other schools have used the concept of mentoring.

The faculty should believe that mentoring to students is a big part of their purpose. I would like the faculty to see that as the most important thing.

One shouldn't lose track of the fact that we do produce scholars and joint student faculty or student watching faculty do good research is important.

There are so many ways to work with our students -- collaborative research, mentorship, service learning, field research, artistic and other creative endeavors. Yet, the greatest rewards are still for publishing a paper.

If you don't write papers and put them out there, you never put yourself on the line. We shouldn't be teaching without scholarship.

Student Leadership

The students of Oberlin play leadership roles in numerous ways on a day to day basis. They also use their leadership skills to develop courses for EXCO, and run OSCA. Many individual students work with others to create unique approaches for addressing issues. But many students who do these sorts of activities find that they are constantly reinventing ways to connect effectively with the larger student body to get input and involvement on important projects. Although they want to avoid a 'bureaucratic' approach to student governance, students could benefit from some mechanism, designed entirely for the Oberlin student culture and values, which would bring students together from many different perspectives in order to ensure a broad, representative discussion of issues and increased participation in activities campus-wide.

Sample Comments

Students at Oberlin naturally pull away from the concept of hierarchy, but they do need the language and skills to deal with leadership.

How can we draw from the Student Coop organization. It's entirely run through the leadership of students.

Without any kind of mechanism in place to bring the ideas of all students together, the student leadership ends up being made up of a few students, good caring students, but of limited diversity. It also puts the weight of the work on the shoulders of these few, and that's not fair.

Every situation that comes along, we have to redefine what student involvement looks like. It is a good, creative process, but it burns people out. It would be better to have some student leadership, a student government group or something.

Conservatory / College Collaboration

Few themes came forth so readily and so often as the Conservatory / College relationship. While there are certainly differences in opinion concerning the way this relationship would look at its best, there is a great level of agreement that the relationship should be strengthened. Most groups acknowledged that there are differences between the missions of the College and Conservatory in that the Conservatory provides direct professional preparation. They also acknowledged that part of the Conservatory's competitive strength comes from its independence. That is, it is not a music department of Oberlin College, but "something more than that." Still, the message from the focus groups was quite clear: Oberlin is not taking advantage of the potential synergy between the College and Conservatory.

Approximately 40 Conservatory faculty took part in the focused discussions. It was due to this level of involvement that the discussions on this topic were well informed and there were many opportunities to look at both sides of the issue. Many believe that the College music major and the double degree program would benefit from a closer look. But several ideas emerged regarding new ways to collaborate through cross-disciplinary courses and programs of study.

Focus groups made up primarily of Conservatory faculty and staff inevitably brought forth the concern that classical music, and as a result symphony orchestras, are losing support as the country turns increasingly to the 'popular' electronic sounds marketed

through mass media. With this as a backdrop, Conservatory faculty discussed the importance of developing advocates for the kinds of music studied in the conservatory: classical, jazz, electronic and computer music. They recognize that in order to do so, they would need to offer courses that were engaging and enjoyable to attend. Tom Kelly and Robert Levin at Harvard University were cited as drawing hundreds of students each year by offering combined performance and discussion courses that are lively and engaging. Of course, as with all discussions on new and interdisciplinary courses in the College and/or the Conservatory, the concern was one of time, energy and resources. An already over-committed faculty was hesitant to discuss these ideas in any great depth.

There is also a recognition that the Conservatory students could gain from many courses best offered at the College. Writing and speaking, cultural history and language, art and literature, and other areas of study will enable the students to become articulate professionals and strong advocates for the arts.

It should be acknowledged that one of the main concerns regarding the Conservatory / College relationship voiced throughout the focus group process was the fact that the 'systems' for admissions are significantly different. Students and their families find it frustrating that they cannot approach the two divisions as one institution. Some focus-group participants felt that this problem actually costs Oberlin a number of prospective students each year.

Sample Comments

Many of us get frustrated with the way we don't work together at times. Would like more cooperative curricular activity.

Consider working together to develop courses based on a common theme. Unify rather than diversify. Create strong interdisciplinary projects.

Build a bridge - a program to assist students in the College to learn a musical instrument.

The College music major could be strengthened.

Strengthen the double degree program. Build more cooperation.

We could work together on courses: art history, literature, history -- courses in the college could coordinate with an era of music.

Interdisciplinary projects require a very intense level of activity. It takes energy, effort, resources.

We rely on the College to help students develop certain skills.

Winter Term is a good time to try new ideas for collaboration.

Our students will need communication skills -- writing and speaking. They will also need an understanding of business and marketing in order to get work, and 'people skills'.

Our students will need to be prepared to be articulate advocates for the arts.

Our students will need to creatively address stress and anxiety.

We operate like two entirely separate institutions. There is not a single educational policy group we could use to communicate.

Presently we have too much committee work to engage in intense collaborative efforts.

We want to work with the College, but we do not want to become a music department. The goals of the Conservatory differ from the goals of the College. We are a pre-professional school. We could be a music department of a College, but we are more than that.

Conservatory: Considerations for the Future

Conservatory faculty and staff also discussed areas they would like to enhance or build upon as they move into the future. They discussed ways of enhancing publicity for their concerts and recitals. They also talked of perhaps doing faculty and/or student 'mini-talks' before certain performances. Ideas were explored for offering chamber music concerts in new and unexpected places throughout the campus -- library, dorms, cafeterias, and other locations. Such experiences could help Conservatory students learn to engage and educate audiences and help College students gain a musical education.

Conservatory faculty also talked about the specific preparation their students would need in order to better understand their audiences, be able to market their skills in various locations throughout the country, and effectively advocate for the arts. Of particular concern is the issue of audience building in the future, given the fact that the audience for serious music is shrinking.

Many 'life skills' were also mentioned: the necessity to be prepared for the unknown, the ability to cultivate the imagination, the ability to build well founded arguments and express views eloquently, and the knowledge of how to manage stress and anxiety in order to ensure physical and emotional well being.

Another point made during the focus groups was that the Conservatory is very much in need of additional space of a very specific nature. Additional practice rooms are very important. Also, there is a need for another performance space. The general size of the space should be such that about four hundred people could assemble for a concert. This is a good sized audience, but it loses its presence in a very large hall such as Finney.

Sample Comments

We do performances for different reasons -- public concerts and recitals, faculty and student recitals. But we don't do a good job of distinguishing between them.

Maybe when we do a concert we should help people make connections, and do more thorough explanations to draw people into the situation. Maybe do mini-talks before concerts. Students could do mini-lectures too.

If the old weekly campus-wide assemblies were to begin again in Finney, (political speakers, intellectuals and music,) we could take part in helping to bring the community together.

We could think about the virtue of studying one thing at a time. (Colorado College Model) Consider different ways to schedule courses.

Scholarships are needed. Is need-blind admissions impacting our getting the best talent?

Our students at the Conservatory are going to need a comprehensive knowledge of repertoire, music technology.

A realistic appraisal of what is available in music careers. For performers dealing with a different kind of market (non-urban) skills in presentation -- the ability to have a dialog with potential audiences, knowledge of how repertoire choices fit into what their audiences will know.

The Conservatory needs more practice rooms. Also, we could use additional performance space -- about a 400 person concert hall.

At the Conservatory, the scenery, lights and other things are falling apart. Conservatory facilities need to promote professionalism and the quality of art.

The Sciences

A greater emphasis on science was a theme in many groups. Science as a major appears to be quite strong. The emphasis in these discussions was actually on developing the sciences in a way that would be valuable to non-science majors. People feel that the basic knowledge and skills that science teaches will become increasingly important. The following comment summarizes the points that many people made during the discussions on this topic. "The kind of knowledge and analytical skills it takes to conduct and report on a serious scientific experiment are the same ones that will be needed to interface with, and make sense of, a complex and rapidly changing environment. Science is basic preparation for living in the world." It was also noted that the present science facilities are inadequate, but a preliminary program has been developed which will ultimately address that issue.

Sample Comments

Our students must be literate in the world of science. It is fundamental that we prepare students to handle knowledge that does not yet exist.

We might consider hiring fellows or interns from other countries to teach and do research in the sciences.

Science, like technology, is values neutral, so it's what values you bring to it that is the engine. We can help students bring that level of insight and values to the table.

We take it for granted that a scientist will be able to do general things well. But a generalist/humanist must be able to do scientific skills well -- understand statistics, be able to use basic scientific information to solve problems, the ability to observe and make appropriate assumptions, etc.

I see a gap in students' response to an emotional political issue in their everyday life and the way they are able to respond in a balanced way to a scientific issue in class -- considering all sides.

We need to revisit our core requirements and develop a core curriculum that 'punches up' quantitative proficiency.

The kinds of knowledge and analytic skills it takes to conduct and report on a serious scientific experiment are the same ones that will be needed to interface with and make sense of a complex, rapidly changing environment. Science is a basic preparation for living in the world.

Our science facilities are inadequate, but that's something we are in the process of addressing.

International Focus and Study Abroad

The desire to give students a better understanding of the world, of the global community, led many people in the discussion groups to suggest a future for Oberlin that would

include a heightened focus on international experiences. Study abroad was mentioned most often, but a number of other suggestions were given: an expanded repertoire of courses on different cultures, an international exchange program, a program of inviting interns from other countries to work in the area of science and technology, a cross-cultural peer mentorship program, etc.

Interest was voiced in Oberlin increasing its international student recruitment as well as increasing the scope of that recruitment to include areas of Asia and Africa not tapped now. The need for increased financial aid for international students was also discussed.

Almost every group indicated at some point that the more a student was able to feel comfortable living and working within other cultures, the more they would experience success in the future. The ability to be culturally fluent is considered critical.

Sample Comments

We lose students every year for study abroad or study at other institutions with strong international programs. The Oberlin of the future could be in collaboration with other schools all over the world.

The world is getting smaller. We should not be closing in on ourselves. Somehow, we have to give students a far more international awareness and experience.

Students will need more general knowledge of other cultures, races and religions. They will need to be open minded and work with, rather than against, differences.

We [Americans] won't be able to get away with either isolation or parochialism.

Oberlin needs to be more than American.

We need to create a more vibrant international campus.

Sometimes students don't want to leave their friends and social involvement behind in order to go abroad. But this is critical to preparing students for real life. We cannot over-estimate the learnings.

Oberlin's philosophy is well suited to offer students a larger, international experience. We should be far more aggressive in our work in that area.

The Arts at Oberlin

Discussion group participants conveyed that the performing arts are thriving on campus: musical performances of all types, both in the Conservatory and across campus, drama in all forms from professional level productions to spontaneous student projects, and dance is very popular. Still there are issues to be addressed such as lack of performance spaces and the need for more interdisciplinary collaboration. The visual arts were also discussed quite readily, particularly since there is strong concurrence that the future environment will be a highly visual one. People would like to see a stronger emphasis as we move toward the future.

Sample Comments

We need more performance spaces. We need space that is multipurpose, flexible, and well equipped.

We need an interdisciplinary arts major.

We need more faculty of color. My intro acting class taught by an African-American woman really opened my eyes.

TIMARA is a good example of collaborative work in the arts. We need more interdisciplinary approaches like that. For example, could the new opera staff work with the theater department and student arts organizations as well as produce operas? We need more openness to cross-fertilization.

In our profile we attract students interested in fine arts. They connect fine arts with the Conservatory. But we need to do arts in a more than token way in order to prepare people for the future.

We have such a great opportunity here at Oberlin to engage students in the arts. But we have yet to really take advantage of that.

With technology comes a much more visually oriented world. We want to help our students not only understand and decipher the information, but also to engage in the creative process with intelligence and skill.

I've heard Nancy Dye mention film as a possible area of creative study at Oberlin. I find that to be very interesting. It could be a way of combining many of our strengths: writing, critical analysis, music, and the study of cultures. Even our focus on values and diversity could find a place in film studies.

We need to pay more attention to the body -- to movement -- to dance and other art forms. We say that we feed the spirit, but mostly we come at it through the purely academic. We don't nurture the arts as we should.

We need to deal more with the visual arts here at Oberlin. Creating a more sophisticated viewer and a more eloquent critic would address some of the 'future' issues we discussed in the first two questions.

The visual arts are underplayed at Oberlin. Photography, film and computer animation are only a few areas we could offer in more depth.

Our museum is an unusual benefit in a school as small as Oberlin, yet we make very little use of it. We should think more about the role of that facility in our curriculum and lives.

Athletics / Health and Well Being

The fact that athletics is not one of Oberlin's current strengths was discussed a number of times in the groups. Once introduced, the topic took a similar turn in each session. People would like to see stronger support for athletics. They would particularly like to see the intra-mural program strengthened. But there is also a recognition that a wide variety of physical activities and organized physical recreation could contribute to the health and well being of the students as well as faculty who might choose to become involved.

In a couple of groups participants pointed out that the Oberlin mission seems to speak to the development of the intellect and the spirit but lacks acknowledgment of the importance of physical health and well being. People also expressed a belief that increased stress, as well as the increased periods of time spent stationary at computers, will make athletics and recreation "more critical to our well-being."

Sample Comments

I would like to see athletics be a life-long physical conditioning both for student and faculty.

Do we have the courage to recognize that the health of our faculty and staff -- their wellness -- is important and we could play a role?

With increased amounts of sitting at computers, athletics and recreation become more critical to our well-being.

I'd like to see the students value physical activity and recreation. It helps you spiritually -- your health and well being.

There is a certain amount of community disdain for the athletics department.

Students are actually ridiculed for taking part in the athletics program. We need to work on this area. Something is wrong.

We need a good sports program including a strong intra-mural component. Oberlin was a pioneer in the area of intra-mural sports.

Traditional college sports are probably not going to work as well at Oberlin as at some colleges, but certain elements will thrive.

Technology and Information

Every group agreed that technology is having a profound impact on our society. They also agreed that with technology has come a "blizzard of information." Students will need a heightened ability to process information and decide whether or not it is well founded or has value. They will also need a sophisticated understanding of problem solving and the role that information plays in that process. For these reasons, and many others, critical thinking and problem solving skills will be of great importance in the future. Along with critical thinking, critical viewing will be essential in an over processed, highly market driven, media environment. The ability to critique and create effective electronic written and visual communication will be a survival skill.

A great many people feel strongly that Oberlin must help students gain clarity on their personal values and beliefs since they will continually be exposed to, and be expected to work with, information based on values systems that are different and at times in conflict with their own.

What is unclear is the extent to which Oberlin must become involved in developing computer literate students. People struggled with this question. Some feel quite strongly that that kind of skill training was not the role of the liberal arts college. Others feel the opposite to be true, and believe that Oberlin must strengthen its capacity to provide high level support for advanced computer literacy.

Sample Comments

We all can testify to the blizzard of information. The density is amazing.

There should be some component of our process that guarantees students are literate -- computers, technology, internet, access to technology.

Computer literacy will become like literacy itself.

Critical thinking will need to be a strong focus within our curriculum, especially because the realms of information will be vast.

Students will need to emerge from Oberlin confident in their ability to interact with technology.

Critical viewing is something we have to do more with. So much of the world now comes through images.

There will be a call for sophistication in understanding and critiquing visual information -- visual learning.

We need to give students the ability to process and evaluate information. Critical thinking. There's so much information out there. Students need help in taking in complex information from multiple sources and make something of value come of it.

Students will need the ability to focus and solve problems in a hyper-text environment / multiple sources of information - speed of information.

Students will need to know how to interface with emerging skills: mass communication and art forms.

Niche

Many individuals expressed concern that the planning process not be limited to those areas which are internal to Oberlin, but that some energy be expended in considering the interface between the College and the 'outside world'. The fact that the world must see value in Oberlin as an institution was a strong theme, as well as the issue that many people outside Oberlin see it differently than it actually is.

Another issue, and definitely the more systemic one, is the fact that Oberlin must offer something unique and invaluable to the student of the future since financial resources will likely be dwindling and costs will continue to rise to some degree. The sort of 'niche' that many see for Oberlin can be summarized as follows: a highly personal, interactive and intimate place to study seriously, grow artistically, clarify values, and learn to live proactively in a world that will need leaders and people capable of crossing cultural boundaries with ease.

Sample Comments

It's going to cost quite a bit to attend Oberlin, but you are coming to a place that has certain standards and values. We are giving you something invaluable.

We will have to do a much better job of communicating what we are about in the future.

We are not doing well at marketing Oberlin as a place for a broad spectrum of groups. It's important that we are not excluding some parts of the spectrum. We need to embrace more of a balance so that we are truly diverse.

We can't rest on our laurels as administration. We have to take on the job of finding out how other schools do it better. We also have to be more open to new people coming in who have something to say. We need PR even if we are Oberlin.

We need to look at just what goes on within our walls. We have to be sure the outside world see value in Oberlin.

The question is one of what the outside world thinks of Oberlin. Many think of 'weirdness.'

The conception of Oberlin from the outside is different than the real thing. How do we rectify that.

We have to be sure the outside world sees value in Oberlin. No one has to come here. No one has to donate.

Question 5

In your opinion, what are some of the internal challenges or issues we may have to acknowledge and address as we work to develop the kind of 'future capacity' we just described?

Responding to Change

Change, as a general topic, came up quite often as the groups considered question #5. The basic message was that the idea of change -- of doing things differently in the future -- is an uncomfortable one for many. Others are excited and energized by the prospect. And in order to move forward with integrity both groups must come to terms with one another's viewpoint, and create an environment of respect for one another's issues. As many people noted below, it is essential that the good of the whole College is the driver of the process, not limited goals and individual interests.

Sample Comments

It will be difficult for some people to pull back and get beyond their vested interests.

Having to think about what is going to work for the whole College, not just for our area, and not just for us as individual faculty members.

We tend to talk things to death.

Our tendency to be critical allows us to deconstruct ideas and plans without responding to the moral obligation to put something of similar value in their place.

A lot of what we need is people taking the initiative.

We need to figure out how to guide the capacity for ongoing / effective planning

We must lose the fear of looking at the education process more flexibly. Students aren't wed to the past.

We need to embrace a willingness to change. We need to break down boundaries.

The phenomenon of interest group politics is pervasive. It affects everything we do. We need to look at the institution as a whole.

We will need to work together to answer the question: what do we need to do to support faculty and staff so they are able to be responsive to change?

There will be people who challenge the kinds of change we are talking about. We have to listen closely to them because in their challenge is a message that will help us balance our ideas. We need to keep everyone in the discussion.

We need to keep everyone at the table. Don't just take like-minded and go forward.

Decision Making

The message was clear: for any kind of College-wide change it will take strength and persistence on the part of the leadership, and an effective methodology for approaching all decisions with a big-picture perspective. The College must have a clear system for discussing and making decisions on issues that cross boundaries, recognizing the interrelationships and coming to terms with answers that work for the whole of Oberlin.

Sample Comments

We need more of an umbrella for decision making and we need to value the involvement of students in the process.

What will hold us back? Our inability to make decisions. Our inability to say no -- to make the hard decisions.

We have a reluctance to make choices and focus. The desire to do everything.

As faculty we are used to working on curriculum only at departmental levels with little experience in thinking about curriculum at a broader level, with a 'big picture' perspective. We need some kind of ongoing discussion of the larger picture both by faculty and staff and a process for decision-making that reflects that.

Faculty Governance / Committee Work

Faculty committees and other aspects of the faculty governance process were often brought up at this point in the dialogue. It was primarily a discussion among the faculty members present in each group. These individuals approached the topic with great care, and an effort was always made to acknowledge the inherent value of the faculty governance process and the good it accomplishes at Oberlin. There was also much appreciation expressed for those faculty members who contribute their time and intellect to making the governance process work.

Having said that, there was also a great amount of frustration expressed regarding certain characteristics of the process. Many feel that it is far too cumbersome. These same faculty expressed an appreciation for deliberation, but explained that the process used by committees is often more a barrier to decision-making than a help. Several faculty members are questioning the value of the work accomplished in certain committees. They feel that it is time to review the purpose and role of those committees and rethink the process for accomplishing their goals.

A related issue is that of 'time.' A significant number of faculty members feel that many of their colleagues are not involved in committee work, or are minimally involved, because it takes an inordinate amount of time. It is seen as a system designed in an era characterized by one person in the family working and the other staying home with the children. That is no longer the case, but adjustments have never been made to accommodate that change.

Another message inherent in the discussion of the committee process was that it does not take full advantage of the intelligence and creativity throughout the faculty since there are few venues for input to these discussions by those outside the limited boundaries of the

committees. Many expressed a belief that the process would benefit from emphasizing a more participatory approach.

There was also some concern that certain critical issues are not sufficiently discussed because they do not fit neatly into the specific mandate of any one committee. These issues tend to be either of a highly systemic nature, or contain elements that cross two or more committees.

The overall message seems to be one of faculty urging faculty to rethink the workings of faculty governance.

Sample Comments

One of our strengths is a truly committed faculty. We work on committees for long periods of time and care a great deal. But it sets up a situation where few are making the decisions, and this does close the thinking process. It limits the big picture and automatically sets up a number of 'turf' issues.

The organization and processes we use for our faculty system were put in place when one spouse was at home and one working. That is not the case now, and we need to revisit our present assumptions.

Many of us need to develop better skills for moving a committee forward in an effective way. Also group problem solving strategies. These are the same things we want our students to learn. We could all look at it together.

Could committee work be reduced to allow us to spend time on other academic issues? I think we spend too much time on administration and faculty governance. Too little on work. The time is not spent well.

The way faculty committees are designed, they diffuse accountability. Who is responsible for getting something accomplished? Many of us want to get past this barrier.

Its time to be honest with ourselves and commit to rethinking our governance process. It's laudable but inefficient.

Faculty governance sets us up to keep the issues narrowly defined.

We allow our governance structures to limit broad dialogue and create barriers to creative decision-making processes.

Time

Discussion group participants agreed that time will be a major issue as the College begins to grapple with change. Already students feel overworked, faculty are yearning for the time to delve deeper into their teaching, research and mentorship, and in many cases staff is feeling over-extended. The issue of time must be part of the dialogue if people throughout Oberlin are going to feel good about engaging in the effort. There are many ways to be creative regarding the time issue, and everyone will need to continually work together to find the best solutions.

Sample Comments

Time: too much work for both students and staff.

Are students and faculty working so much that we are all missing the best part of the educational experience...the discoveries, 'the mystery' as you said?

People are not able to give up work -- even if it is not essential anymore. There should be an organized way of helping people do that.

We have to be careful not to just develop a great deal more work for everyone to do. If we embark upon some new territory, we need to allow people to leave some other work behind.

Need ways that are understood and productive to decide what aspects of our work to take with us as we move forward, and what we can leave behind. We cannot simply keep adding on.

Ability to Attract and Retain the Best Students and Faculty

Few discussion groups finished without mentioning that the key to success lies in Oberlin's ability to attract the "best and brightest" students and the faculty to teach those students, as well as the highest quality administrative people. This involves not only creating the best possible academic community, but also being aware of the market and understanding how to influence worldwide perception of the College.

Sample Comments

One thing that could be a barrier to success is our inability to recognize that the market must play a role in our choices.

No one has to come to Oberlin. No one has to pay money to send their children here. We have to be somewhat realistic about our thinking. We cannot only think inwardly or we may find ourselves in trouble.

We need clarity regarding the kind of student we want to attract and what kind of community we need to develop to do that.

A big barrier would be the loss of faculty and an inability to attract a certain type of faculty. We need the "best and brightest" particularly if we are going to be about refocusing certain aspects of the curriculum and dealing with change.