

## Responses to the Draft Strategic Plan of October 26, 2015

In order received as of 12.10.15

### Community Responses to the Draft Strategic Plan Response Form

3:35:49 PM 10.27.15

**Robert Bonfiglio**

*Student*

“Respectful.” Bad word. So many connotations. Sometimes respect is the thing least needed in discussions.

#### **Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

A coherent Curriculum. This could be the best way to distinguish Oberlin to improve its standing as a unique and different form of learning.

Engagement with outside communities. Too much to learn by doing this that cannot be overlooked.

Diversity. Not in terms of race, the go to answer, but in terms of political backgrounds.

4:12:37 PM 10.27.15

**Elena Robakiewicz**

*Student*

While I agree with most of the core values, I do not believe that Oberlin is working its hardest to make sure we have a diverse campus. This is particularly evident in the lack of diversity of voices on-campus. I also believe that students at Oberlin are not taught how to respect others' opinions. I believe most Oberlin students do not respect conservative opinions that do not match with their own and are likely to shoot down those within the classroom who express these viewpoints. I believe this aspect of Oberlin education is not addressed enough and there should be a push to make sure students are working harder to appreciate all global views instead of just claiming to.

#### **Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Slow the rate of annual increases.

While it is necessary and understandable that tuition and other expenses are increasing in order to combat increases in costs, there are certain aspects of Oberlin's cost that are a burden on students and are generally unfair. One aspect where I believe this is very evident is in ResEd. Prices for rooms on campus are outrageously exaggerated. In addition, the requirement for students to live on campus for four years takes advantage of

students who must pay far more for on campus housing than for off. Although there are wonderful, more affordable alternatives such as coops, in general the rising cost of housing and dining is taking advantage of students and their families who have no choice but to follow the rules and regulations Oberlin's ResEd employs.

Committing to hiring and accepting diverse faculty and students. Oberlin boasts impressive diversity to match its unique history, but this is an area that can always continue to improve, especially along lines of socioeconomic backgrounds.

Helping students with support after graduation. Oberlin's community of alums and students is important and unique. I believe the continuation to develop relationships throughout Oberlin's network is important and should be emphasized for students before and after graduation. Making sure students understand the diversity of Oberlin professions is important, especially in an era of scathing reviews of Oberlin's average salary after graduation.

9:37:19 PM 10.27.15

**Hannah Rosenberg**

*Student*

Sure, yes of course. Every institution and organization ought to champion these incredibly vague goals. They are brochure buzz phrases. That doesn't mean they are enough. That doesn't mean that all will be given equal priority or that all will have achievable and appropriate action steps assigned to them. Oberlin's number one goal as an institution ought to be the prioritization of marginalized voices, the dismantling of systemic oppression, and the exploration of alternative pedagogies. I would have much more confidence in listed goals were they expressly linked to these priorities.

Yes. They align with elements of the core values. I do not believe they are prioritizing they are prioritizing what really needs to be prioritized, but I cannot say they don't align with goal initially listed.

### **Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

#6 and #7 (Direction 2, strategic recommendations): “Recruit and retain students from a broad range of racial, ethnic, gender identity/identities, sexuality/orientation, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Develop additional future resources targeted to increasing the opportunity for enrollment of students from historically underrepresented communities in the United States.” And “Hire and retain an outstanding faculty and staff from a broad range of racial, ethnic, gender identity/identities, sexuality/orientation, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Develop new ideas and priorities for success in faculty and staff recruitment and retention.” (Page 18). Without increased representation, there can be no justice.

#13 (Direction 3, strategic recommendations): “Slow the rate of annual increases in student charges—tuition, fees, room and board—while developing resources to ensure

that we can offer an opportunity for enrollment to a student body from the United States and abroad that represents a broad range of racial, ethnic, gender identity/identities, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.” (Page 21). Revolutionizing higher education by making it affordable should be Oberlin's main priority.

#10 (Direction 2, strategic recommendations): “Develop new and enhance existing programs and services to support mental, emotional, and physical health and wellness.” (Page 18). People on campus are suffering and failing out and dropping out because OC does not recognize the affect structural oppression has on student's lives.

11:27:40 PM 10.27.15

**Gavin Epstein**  
*Student*

I feel that the Mission Statement would give more real direction were it less vaguely worded.

I agree with all three Directions, but think they are prioritized in the wrong order. With a record number of applicants, Oberlin does not need to be worrying about its academic reputation as a top priority. More important to prioritize is the commitment to diversity and financial accessibility, a goal where Oberlin fell short in our last Strategic Plan.

Because there is no location to discuss areas which I do not believe should be included in the Strategic plan, I will discuss them here. I do not believe course clusters will do anything to increase coherency. I see them becoming collections of courses loosely tied together in a way that students will rarely consider when choosing classes. Further, if taking every class in a cluster simultaneously is required, I do not foresee many students having time to fit that many courses in between major and distribution requirements. I also think the 4+4 idea will create real achievement in enough cases to not be a waste of resources, but barely. Finally, I found the rhetoric around the unique relationship between the residential campus, the college, the conservatory, and the museum to be empty. The Strategic Plan stated no tangible goals about nor benefits of this relationship, but merely reiterated its value without evidence. Finally, in creating the final draft, please make it more easily readable to all stakeholders of the institution. Parts of the introduction were literally copied and pasted from the body, and the verbiage was excessive.

### **Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Financial Accessibility. Strategic Recommendation 13 under Direction 3 provides a concrete and achievable way to increase Oberlin's financial accessibility. Lowering the comparative costs of tuition and living will not only attract more students, improving Oberlin's competitiveness, it will also attract a wider range of students, improving diversity. One way I would advocate to lower living costs would be to allow the expansion of OSCA.

Increase Diversity. For all its rhetoric about diversity, Oberlin remains strikingly homogenous, especially in the areas of race and political thought. Oberlin is at least 70% white (source: <http://bit.ly/1PPV7oB>), around the national average for four year colleges. In terms of diversity of thought, Oberlin is overwhelmingly liberal, to the point of shutting out students whose opinions differ, or are simply uneducated, about the liberal ideologies of political correctness. Diversity of thought was not at all mentioned in the Strategic Plan, and I think it needs to be considered when creating a diverse student body.

Financial Sustainability. Planning for the long term is important. Maintaining and increasing the endowment in order to provide a secure and continuing source of financial aid.

1:20:33 PM 10.29.15

**Ken Weiss**

*Alumni*

Mainly this is just nonspecific platitudes. If all you want is money to do whatever, then say so. If you want better academics, then say how. Hire faculty and students on the basis of real merit, not personal category labels. You can get both if you can attract the applicants.

Oberlin's great characteristics were described, but the Mission statement is not specific enough.

### **Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Academic (faculty) excellence. This is a seller's market and you should be able to recruit absolutely ace new faculty. Excellence of academic background should trump all other considerations. If you have positions to offer, you'll get applicants with the excellence and personal characteristics you want.

Increase student quality. Students are being lured to countless schools. Oberlin needs to show them (and, vitally, their parents!) that we are something special.

Maintain top level facilities. A focused list of facilities (labs, studios, study space, library, whatever) should be included--something specific rather than generic. Or else just say outright you want funds to do with as you see fit.

2:27:01 PM

**Gary Wheeler Stone '64**

*Alumni*

At a very quick reading, the plan seems sound. However, planning, no matter how excellent, fails without good implementation. On the topic of stewardship, I regretfully report that my stay in a brand-new dorm during the class of 1964's 50th reunion was disappointing. While the dorm had a comfortable design, implementation seemed poor.

Walls appear to have been painted with poor quality paint (taped art had pulled off finishes), the shower enclosures were poorly equipped, and the furnishings and bedding were miserable. This is poor stewardship as frequent repainting means more chemical manufacturing, replacing furnishings means more solid waste, and by the time that the building has been put into a good condition, you will have spent monies for the original fittings, disposing of the waste, and for the new finishes and furnishings. On a positive note, the campus grounds were much better maintained than they were in the early 1960s.

2:48:03 PM 10.29.15

**Nick Perry**

*Alumni*

A truly unfortunate truth about Oberlin is that as diverse as the community is, the ideological and pedagogical zeitgeist just ISN'T all that diverse. We constantly encourage dialogue and interaction across students, faculty, community and alumni but when we all get together and start talking, we by and large agree on most hot-button topics. Disagreement, in my experience at Oberlin, was not only stigmatized, it was ruthlessly attacked.

In my Junior year I was accused of being a racist (not just "making a racist remark," but BEING A RACIST) by a particularly politically active in the community student because in a classroom discussion about foreign language pedagogy during the 2012 Presidential election, I mentioned that I had never seen a "Vote Aqui" sign. It struck me as "weird," I said. Granted, "weird" isn't a very strong descriptor for anything but this student quickly jumped at me saying, "what? do you feel threatened by it?" Before this conversation went any further or I had an opportunity to explain myself, the professor abruptly ended the conversation and moved us in a new direction. Rather than hash out both of our feelings in class to understand where we both were coming from, we moved on, and later in the day I got a very nasty email from that student. When I explained that I had just never seen a "Vote Aqui" sign and suggested that a prioritization of Spanish over English seemed to me like it might rub some people, especially in rural Ohio, the wrong way, he doubled down saying I was just full of bullshit. This exchange regretfully grew less than cordial and ended with me asking him to never speak to me again, and today I rest my case with a finger pointed at Mr. Trump. Still, I was a prideful asshole and I wish I had the guts and patience at the time to just say, "I wish you didn't think that, but if you won't be moved, all I can do is continue being the person I know I am." We both should have been better and I do feel the college bears a small responsibility in our Socratic shortcomings.

We don't live in a rational world, we live in an emotional one. (I mean, the DEMOCRATIC debate looked like Monday Night Football!!) Oberlin needs to improve on teaching its students that the vast majority of the time people will not think like them, or won't feel as passionately as they do. Tolerance of the people who partly agree with you is of greater importance than tolerance of the people who don't. It's not enough to encourage dialogue and discourse, students need to be forced to have rational dialogue and discourse with people who will butt heads with them. They need some tough love

and they need some more talks like Karl Rove. (Which was by far the best talk I ever saw at Oberlin, not because I agreed with anything he said, but because the man was having so much fun trolling us it was an outstanding learning experience on the nature of winning and losing.)

I feel this big ideas cluster course plan has a lot of promise, and I hope it can one day be incorporated into a larger, inter-collegiate plan a la the Five Colleges in Massachusetts.

Oh, and if I see another headline about Oberlin spearheading the trigger warning and microaggression movements I will behave irrationally and never give a dime back once I actually make one. Take the curriculum back from these fucking punks and teach them a lesson they can take with them to the real world. I will not support this kind of coddling.

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Big Ideas Clusters. Grow baby, grow!

Oberlin 4+4. But make it broader! Make it inter-collegiate!

Recruitment and Retainment. But fewer career academics in the faculty. And let's get some poor people up in here!

3:18:33 10.29.15

**Coriana Close**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Sustainability. With the current arctic methane releases blowing holes in the arctic this is really the only one that matters in terms of long term survival. Oberlin cannot continue to claim progressive status without addressing the reality that business as usual is destroying any hope for a livable future.

Stewardship. See previous comment.

Divestment in fossil fuels. I am not sure why this was left out of the plan. Our liberal forbearers would be terribly disappointed in the lack of action on this issue. The college risks losing credibility if it continues to pretend that money is more important than the environment.

3:20:14 PM 10.29.15

**Deborah Smith '89**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Financial sustainability. This is a no brainer; no aid, no students.

Educational excellence. I almost dislike having this included since it seems to suggest that Oberlin is no longer academically excellent; shouldn't that be a given? Not sure this is the subliminal message we want to communicate.

Diversity. This seems to me to be the absolute last priority, frankly. As noted, the college is already quite diverse. I am also a bit concerned that Oberlin is going to date itself pretty impressively to 2014, 2015 in this strategic plan with the emphasis on gender neutrality. My children, who are in high school, recently received information from their father who is an Oberlin alum about the college's pronoun-neutral introductions at orientation. The news went over like a lead balloon because this issue is already over-dissected in high school communities like theirs, such that there is now a backlash against the continued emphasis on gender neutrality and transgender issues. It may still be relatively new stuff in some communities, but in another two years I would be surprised if this is still the topic du jour. I also think that the continuous string of qualifiers for diversity (race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, 1st generation, etc.) ends up becoming meaningless because it expands the view of what diversity is so greatly that Oberlin could adhere to the priority and find itself actually less diverse in areas of traditionally critical import. How about just saying we want to attract a "diversity of people, perspectives, and experiences", period.

**Eric DyReyes Bautista**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Strengthen the Sports program and popularity of (esp re: alumni/nus). Attract more Scholars/Athletes freshman applicants to College & Con.

Strengthen popularity of athletics program @ Oberlin (esp. football and baseball) two historically "American - popular" team sports which attracts money and interest.

...basically attract money and interest from all possible funding sources (corporations, alumni/nus, wealthy sponsors/people, and friends, etc.). Oberlin really doesn't have an educational problem....but an athletics/sports problem (not popular yet a very important incoming money source for other universities and colleges ).

Lastly to emphasize: Oberlin needs to strengthen its sports and athletics programs on par with the "bigger and popular" college divisions e.g. football, baseball and basketball which in turn attracts big money donors and supporters....liberal arts is Oberlin's strong point...sports and athletics isn't and needs to be strengthen and more popularized with better athletics and sports programs....

4:12:02 PM 10.29.15

**Kayle Sawyer**  
*Alumni*

I love Oberlin. I visited four times in the ten years since graduating. Here in Boston, Oberlin lore is so prevalent that my friends who aren't alumni make jokes about Harkness. I hope my passion and care shows through in my feedback. It is earnest.

The Strategic Plan is inspirational, but better context would ground it. What was unsuccessful about the 2005 plan? How is Oberlin failing now? Going forward, what policies can Oberlin enact to detect when things are going wrong, so it can shift strategy? The "fearless" PR campaign was a failure, but Oberlin shifted strategy quite well. The document should address the failure head-on, and indicate what will be done to avoid another one.

**Top Three Strategic Directions:**

Direction 2 (community): The Strategic Plan omits OSCA entirely. This is a gross oversight. The value that the cooperative brings to the school is immense, but easy to overlook. The organization provides accessible and serious experience running a complex system. Many positions (including DLEC, food buyer, cook and crew) all train students to get things done in a community. It already implements Direction 2 better than the College, and its values are directly aligned with Direction 3. OSCA provides great wealth to students, and it is glue that connects many alumni back to Oberlin. Although OSCA is a separate corporation not under the auspices of Oberlin College, it certainly deserves special recognition in the Strategic Plan. While I was a student, the administration spent more time fighting OSCA than promoting it. It is an ongoing petty power struggle that serves nobody.

The document rightly highlights the excellent lectures and musical events that Oberlin provides. It should at least mention the Cat in the Cream in passing. The Cat in the Cream contributes more to Direction 2 than city libraries, but is not referenced.

Direction 3 (sustainability, costs): The term "sustainability" is being replaced with "adaptability" and "resilience." It is impossible to keep things the same, and instead Oberlin should focus on a nimble and agile approach that adapts to inevitable change. The Strategic Vision correctly emphasizes this. The document also emphasizes the value of people, but should further promote empowerment of employees to make decisions without management oversight: My time at Oberlin was improved by the individual judgment of Safety and Security officers, faculty, and staff.

The plan should note the spending categories that are the largest proportions of the budget. In the past two decades, college administrative spending has ballooned while other spending categories have remained stable. The Strategic Plan should address how administrative spending will be reduced. Likewise, I commend the decision to increase upfront capital expenditures that reduce recurring maintenance costs. Is that what the following sentence is meant to convey? "All of this will require major upfront and

ongoing investments, and so our capital expenditures must be undertaken with a clear view of their long-term impact on institutional finances." Unfortunately, the new Science Center was not built with consideration to maintenance costs, and is an incredibly inefficient building. Have any policies been put in place to prevent this from happening again?

Oberlin 4+4 (Direction 1, Recommendation 2). Startup business culture is wonderfully addictive and expansive. I love the idea of harnessing it for good instead of pure profit (eg Uber). I worked with another Oberlin student on a startup. We would have loved the support to do something like that at Oberlin. As a side benefit, 4+4 approach might yield a few lucrative companies. Learn from Stanford.

Mental health support (Direction 2, Recommendation 10). First, developing good mental health habits and tools is essential for personal success, and we cannot improve the world without it. I struggled at Oberlin with procrastination and study skills, and many of my friends struggled with anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues that could have been treated. A progressive school should devote more attention to mental health. I predict the next big social justice battle will hinge on it. The impact will dwarf the results from our LGBT rights successes. Second, Oberlin abandons students upon graduation. The first few years after Oberlin are usually a painful mix of abandonment, confusion, loneliness, and despair (just ask Lena Dunham). It's like when a dear friend who has done so much for you moves away, and never checks in except to ask for money. Perhaps Oberlin could task a team of two for each student upon graduation: the advisor and someone from the career/alumni office. Each alumni should recognize their career/alumni officer's name (so no more than about 200 students per person). Check in twice a semester, and the summer. Don't ask for money (at first), and don't let that connection fail.

Support OSCA (Direction 2, Recommendations 9 and 12; Direction 3, Recommendations 13, 16, and 17). See my previous comments. OSCA provides immense benefits to Oberlin as an attraction for prospective students (the largest co-operative by proportion!), as effective training, and as a means of promoting long-lasting nostalgia and community among alumni.

3:39:03 PM 10.29.15

**David Snider, Class of 1964**

*Alumni*

### **Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

International Coordination. Shansi and a year abroad, also for science students.

Foreign Language Requirement. Students should be required to learn foreign languages in which a need exists: not French, not Latin, not Greek, not Spanish, but German, Japanese, Chinese.

Educational Excellence. Also, learning about being an entrepreneur and being in business.

3:46:12 PM 10.29.15

**Tom Gregory**  
*Alumni*

I wholeheartedly support the core values.

Increasing college access and success for first-generation college students is vital for the continued health and well being of the United States. It is probably implied that Oberlin's part in this endeavor is focused on particularly talented first-generation college students, or on those from particularly oppressed minorities.

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

(Strategic Recommendation 8: “Encourage and Support Faculty to develop...”): The effectiveness and reputation of the institution rests on the quality of its faculty.

(Strategic Recommendation 12: “Streamline all of our systems of governance...”): Life requires change. Entities that survive are those that change the most effectively.

(Strategic Recommendation 16: “Fund institutional priorities...”): Again, life requires change. Entities that survive are those that change the most effectively.

3:55:53 PM 10.29.15

**Ken Nelson**  
*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

EDUCATE HOW TO BE PRODUCTIVE IN THE WORLD.

In the draft - the word 'Global' was used 3 times; foreign culture used 1 time! Culture is used more times to describe OBERLIN. The role of foreign study is not addressed - does that mean it's not important?

Priorities should be described in a way that can be measured. How/who does the measurement for 'tailored' individual learning? What is the definition of a 'successful' Oberlin education?

If I'm a parent who is paying / will be paying \$\$\$\$ , how will Oberlin show why the tuition is a good investment, especially compared to other schools?

How should Oberlin handle social learning and emotional intelligence? How will Oberlin teach the skills involved with TEAMWORK? Look at the surveys that reports the

skills/abilities that many employers value - it's NOT how educated the individual is, it IS whether the person knows how to work WELL with others.

4:10:51 PM 10.29.15

**Thomas Spacht**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Highest quality of education. The quality of an Oberlin education must not be compromised due to financial constraints or anticipated restraints.

Better integration of liberal arts, the conservatory and other possibilities. New technologies provide opportunities to better integrate classroom learning with hands-on experience.

Support for diversity on campus, particularly in terms of global impact in terms of percentages of ethnic groups should be encouraged and developed. Oberlin has always focused on diversity and this should continue in the future.

4:23:27 PM 10.30.15

**Judy Karasik**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Resources and Sustainability. Strong financial resources ensure that we can do everything else on the list -- especially when it comes to access for less-affluent, especially first generation (which Oberlin's really a great fit for, not because it's an easy place but because the school does a good job of guiding and coaching the students through the whole "experience" of college) and those of color. I think there can be more ways to engage alumni and encourage giving. Are we looking at all the items we identify as assets and creating asks (and asking alums to ask other alums) around those assets? For example, for one group of my continuing Oberlin friends, I would ask for maintenance and improvement to Tank. For another, I'd ask for support of the English and Creative Writing program. Is this more trouble to manage than it's worth for the development office or can we build a stream of steady smaller gifts, solicited from friends to friends?

Strengthen Oberlin's educational community. This is our core. With this, nothing else.

Foster excellence throughout our students' educational experience, within and beyond the classroom. All of these are important. This final item is it's a great way to lead students into careers -- and the larger world -- which this generation is especially anxious about -- without falling prey to some of the un-Oberlinish materialism that some other selective schools oversell ("Our graduates make average starting salaries of \$X!"). For this, we need to be sure that (a) we support the faculty as they provide guidance and (b) we make

sure the students continue to get the best advisor possible as their interests change and grow. Attachment to a mentor appears to be key to success and completion in any PSE experience -- that's true from a range of commentators and researchers. One final word on diversity: we talk a good deal about our tradition of commitment to black students, and that's GREAT. Let's not forget, however, about the growing numbers of highly qualified Latino and Hispanic students -- how are we using the triad of College/ Con (thinking especially of the jazz program)/ Museum to make those applicants feel personally welcomed and encouraged.

4:26:18 PM 10.29.15

**Susan Fitzwater**

*Alumni*

There was a tremendous amount of high-level essentially meaningless "corp-speak" in this document. I expect that the only reason I did not see the words "paradigm shift" is that this one is so broadly mocked. One thing that I did NOT see in the Mission Statement, but which is extremely important, is teaching students How to Learn, especially in diverse environments and outside of traditional academic institutions. Learning this is the only thing that will give even the best education value over the long term.

### **Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Reduce the rate of increase in annual cost increases. This is the single most important thing that you can do to keep Oberlin Oberlin. I suspect that the proportion of your incoming class from solidly middle-class but full-freight-paying families has decreased significantly since I started in 1968. Oberlin was definitely on the radar screen of many bright, high-achieving, diverse, middle-class students then. It's not now. You can increase other kinds of diversity (laudable), but if you don't keep the middle class you won't have a truly representative student body.

"big picture" courses. You need a lot more specificity around this one. It could be really good - or it could be really bad. Give us some examples. The examples don't have to define what the courses will be, but they should give us an idea. I am particularly interested in whether the approach would lead students to tackle a "big topic" (reduced carbon, for example) with the kind of rigor that is needed to make valuable contributions, or whether it is just going to lead them to THINK they are equipped to tackle it.

Oberlin 4 + 4. Again, you need a lot more specificity here. This is actually pretty important since it is probably your best tool for countering some of this "ROI analysis". [Of course, getting tuition down would help a lot too.] You are probably never going to attract the kid whose real ambition is to be an analyst at Goldman Sachs. But some stories of how Oberlin education + connections were a key piece of helping a young person develop satisfying, useful, and self-supporting pursuits could go a long way to helping convince students and parents (especially parents) that they are not going to fork over \$250K only to have that student boomerang back to the basement after 4 years.....

5:11:55 PM 10.29.15

**Anthony Bonifonte**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

#3: Connect students and young alums to professional pathways... Oberlin provided a top rate educational experience, with very low support upon graduation. This direction should aid students in applying their education.

#4: Deepen educational collaboration among the Arts and Sciences, Conservatory... In the late 2000's, Oberlin had a surprisingly limited collaboration across departments and colleges.

#17 Use the campus year-round, offering programs ... Offering summer programs, winter term programs, etc. should increase revenues and increase the college's reputation.

5:13:10 PM 10.29.15

**John Colborn**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Excellent mission statement. My only suggestions would be (a) to highlight those elements that are unique to Oberlin.

I am especially excited about the connected learning and big idea course clusters, especially to the extent that the who [sic] can reinforce each other. The plan is to be commended for its commitment to deepen the college's socioeconomic diversity -- a critical necessity if we are to reverse the propensity for elite higher education to perpetuate class and inequality.

Diversity, especially socio-economic diversity. See above.

Connected learning. Increasingly, Oberlin students, their families, and their future employers are going to demand more evidence of practical and applied skills and knowledge. Connected learning it seems to me is a great way for Oberlin students to develop portfolios of experience without compromising on Oberlin's fierce commitment to a liberal arts education.

Big idea clusters of courses. This would seem to be especially powerful to the extent that it connects to and extends the connected learning agenda.

5:59:33 PM 10.29.15

**Mieko Kamii**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Recommendation #6 (“Recruit and Retain Students...”): Critical to Oberlin's core value of diversity and community.

Recommendation #7 (“Hire and retain an outstanding faculty and staff...”): Critical to Oberlin's core value of educational excellence.

Recommendation #13 (“Slow the rate of annual increases in student charges”): Necessary for achievement of recommendation #6.

7:39:03 PM 10.29.15

**Thomas C. Squier**

*Alumni*

Dead-on. I appreciated the many thoughtful ideas presented in the Oberlin Strategic Plan, which clearly builds on the strengths of the College, Conservatory, and Museum communities to create an integrative and safe learning environment to further enhance the Oberlin experience. One additional aspect that to me represents a primary strength of the Oberlin experience is the Oberlin Student Cooperative Association (OSCA). While at Oberlin in the 1970s I had the good fortune to be part of OSCA, which promotes so many of the values associated with the strategic plan, including a culture of active social engagement, entrepreneurial problem solving, and affordability. Further, when I toured colleges with my daughter two years ago it was clear that the OSCA experience was a very unique and strong driver that caused my daughter to pick Oberlin. This experience of “Learning and Labor” is a stand-out aspect of the Oberlin culture that has not always been fully appreciated by the administration at Oberlin and in my opinion belongs in a strategic plan that builds on Oberlin’s strengths.

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Engagement beyond the curriculum with a diverse population. Further enhancements in the community to include opportunities for problem solving and self-governance is so important to a well rounded education. In my opinion the OSCA experience represents a stand-out in this regard that can be further developed at Oberlin and should be embraced by the administration (see comments above).

Creation of individually tailored systems of guidance. A strength of Oberlin has been student-directed learning such that all students are taking courses that they are interested in and passionate about. This is in contrast to many institutions that designate many required courses for students that can diminish the passion for learning.

Create a culture of active engagement. More hands-on types of learning is important and can replace many lecture focused courses to increase student learning and leadership skills.

8:47:21 PM 10.29.15

**Richard Wolfson**

*Alumni*

Sheesh. Redundancy: "...the kind of community THAT we have to create...?" How about, "the kind of community we have to create..."

Absolutely agree in the fusion of college and conservatory where possible. A Con grad, most of my friends were in the College. May explain my going on to law school. Not being curmudgeonly, but "faculty are currently" is another redundancy. How about, "faculty are?" The active verb "are" makes "currently" unnecessary. Where did you guys go to school? I'm an Oberlin grad.

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Diversity. Inclusiveness. Acceptance of ourselves; understanding we are a forest of individual trees.

Collaboration. We are stronger working together, within and beyond those who cherish lifelong learning.

Service. Might have missed this one, but I'm sure it's in there somewhere.

9:06:00 PM 10.29.15

**Ann-Adele Lloyd**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Manage costs to students. This is an issue for most colleges, but the diversity goal will be hard to meet.

Promote Oberlin's distinctiveness to be better known. I was very disappointed when a Dean at UCSB didn't know of Oberlin.

Big Ideas Course Cluster is a great idea. I wish that had been available to me in the mid-50's.

22:19:29 PM 10.29.15

**Martin P. Kunstmann**

*Alumni*

Overall, this version of the strategic plan is much better than the initial draft. However, while I strongly agree with the statements that environmental sustainability is a must, I completely disagree about carbon neutrality! Carbon is essential to all life on our planet and as our population expands so does the need for carbon. The notion of carbon neutrality comes from the idea that CO2 in the atmosphere is causing global warming which in turn is causing climate change. If you have read the book *Dark Winter* by John Casey, you might not hold the belief that the planet is warming (especially as a result of increased CO2).

I have been in contact with NOAA personnel to determine the basis for the cyclic El Nino, which is the primary cause for climate change in our country (other than human causes such as drastically depleting water resources in the western states which is a major cause of the fires there as well as other calamities). So far I have not uncovered any evidence linking "CO2-caused warming" with El Nino. My suspicion is that heat generated under the Pacific Ocean (from the core magma) is the trigger for El Nino, but this also is just a theory at the moment. One of the scientists at NOAA indicated that there was "deep heat" under the ocean.

I commend you on indicating that part of the learning process is to always inquire why?, how?, etc. and not just accept anything as fact unless it is proven. I think that an inquiring mind is a real necessity in our society for its continued improvement and should be strongly emphasized.

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

NC.

NC.

NC.

9:29:50 AM 10.30.15

**Celise Kalke**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

I think changing the ranking in US News and world reports should be a priority. I think the arts profile of the Conservatory should be reevaluated with a lens towards varied arts careers of the alumni.

I think there should be better relationships with a diverse alumni and the alumni office should be easier to work with. Please see above.

Please see above. Please see above.

9:52:48 AM 10.30.15

**Leonard V. Smith**  
*Faculty, Alumni*

I have been hearing these basic strategic directions, virtually in the same words, since I first arrived at Oberlin as a student in 1976. I can only hope this this time, we mean it. Implementing all this implies very difficult choices and buy-in from diverse constituencies.

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Financial stability. We need to spend less from the endowment, and take the budgetary consequences that come with it. It seems extremely unlikely to me that we will ever make the physical plant much of a revenue stream. We are not Hanover, New Hampshire, or Middlebury, Vermont.

Academic excellence. While I yield to no one in my admiration for Oberlin's long commitment to high ideals, we are an academic institution, not a social justice theme park. We need to refocus our commitment to academic excellence for faculty and students.

Having an administrative structure that can provide leadership, cooperate with faculty, and facilitate making the difficult choices that actually implementing the strategic plan would imply. "Streamlining faculty governance" can mean a great many things, some welcome, others less so. The problem has always been separating faculty governance from fiduciary responsibility for the institution. Nothing useful is going to come out of the strategic plan unless cooperation among the administration, the faculty, and the trustees can successfully share input and responsibility.

10:08:56 AM 10.30.15

**George Rainbolt**  
*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

A strategic plan that is unique to Oberlin. The current draft plan is too generic. I suggest that a good strategic plan should pass the following test. Replace all instances of "Oberlin," "College of A&S" and "Conservatory" with "???" Then give the plan to the President of another high-selective SLAC. If the plan for Oberlin is a good one, that President should be able to quickly identify the plan as Oberlin's. I don't think that the current draft passes this test. It could easily be the plan of Reed, Haverford or many other highly-selectively SLACs.

Renewing Oberlin's commitment to socio-economic diversity. Here is an edited version of a message I recently sent to Oberlin.

From: George Rainbolt <gwrainbolt@gmail.com>  
Date: Mon, Oct 5, 2015 at 7:37 PM  
Subject: Cancel Monthly Oberlin Alumni Fund Gift  
To: giving@oberlin.edu

Dear Friend,

It is with deep sadness that I must ask you to cancel my monthly gift to Oberlin College. My most recent receipt is below. Could you respond to this email to let me know that the donation is canceled?

I would like to tell you why I am canceling and what I plan to do with the money I would have given to Oberlin. When I came to Oberlin, I was from a family of very modest means and received a huge amount of aid. As you can see here,

[http://www.jbhe.com/features/57\\_pellgrants.html](http://www.jbhe.com/features/57_pellgrants.html)

in 1983 (one year before I graduated from Oberlin), 20.2% of Oberlin students were Pell eligible. As you can see in the same article, by 2006, that percentage had fallen to 12.5% (but at least Oberlin was doing better than most SLACs). Three or four years ago, an Oberlin development officer came to see me to ask me to give to Oberlin. At that point, the IPEDS data indicated that the Pell percentage had fallen to something like 11.5%. The development officer indicated that Oberlin was starting a campaign to raise the percent of Pell eligible students. So I agreed to donate to that cause.

However, as you can see here

[http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/09/17/upshot/top-colleges-doing-the-most-for-low-income-students.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/09/17/upshot/top-colleges-doing-the-most-for-low-income-students.html?_r=0)

Oberlin's Pell rate as continued to fall. It is now 8% and only four schools on the NYT list have a lower rate. From 1983 and 2015, Oberlin has gone from a leader in this important metric to dead last among high-selective SLACs. I no longer think that dollars given to Oberlin are a worthy investment in the good of the world.

I have decided to give my monthly donation to another high-selective SLAC, one whose endowment per student is lower than Oberlin's but whose Pell rate is higher.

If, in the future, the IPEDS data (in particular the Pell rate) indicates that Oberlin has regained its place as an institution that seeks to help low-income students, you are welcome to contact me and I will consider re-starting my donation.

I sincerely hope that Oberlin can return to the days when it was committed to the success of low-income students. It would be wonderful if Oberlin could follow Hampshire's lead and go test-blind. It would be great if Oberlin returned to need-blind admissions with full-need financial aid. Oberlin's US News ranking would fall. But I care much more

about Oberlin's Pell rate than about its US News ranking. Let me know if Oberlin's Pell rate goes up significantly because I would like to support Oberlin.

Yours in peace,  
George Rainbolt, '84

See above.  
11:00:57 AM 10.30.15

**Carl McDaniel**  
*Faculty*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

No explicit comment. All OK.

Environmental sustainability. The College has committed itself to be climate positive by 2025. Not to explicitly state this at least in priority 3 is a serious omission.

2:38:20 PM 10.30.15

**Eugene Smith**  
*Alumni*

The statements are so vague and self-congratulatory that I find it difficult to agree or disagree.

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

I'll pass on that.

Try for a much more concise and specific statement with little or no self-congratulation.

3:15:08 PM 10.30.15

**Ira S. Steinberg (professor emeritus)**  
*Faculty*

There is much repetition and little meat. A lot seems inspired by the thinking in the Conant report which drove the curriculum of the '60s.

They are a repetition of them.

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Increase endowment. Reach should exceed grasp. Don't set sights too low as in the past.

Able diverse students. Diversity should not come at the expense of intellectual ability and drive.

Recruit and reward an excellent faculty. Oberlin needs a faculty that can get the most out of their students intellectually, and as contributors to the world they inhabit.

5:18:36 PM 10.30.15

**John E. Tanner, Jr.**

*Alumni*

Oberlin will always be a net consumer of energy. The best ways available to lower carbon consumption are conservation and sourcing electricity from nuclear plants. Always be mindful of tradeoffs between conservation and convenience/accomplishing a task.

The idea of programmed contact with alumni is good. I thought degree programs were already coherent.

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

#7: Attract faculty with outstanding academic and teaching qualifications. This is probably what I have valued most from Oberlin. #8 (“Encourage and support faculty...”) is needed to achieve #7.

#4 (“Deepen educational collaboration...”), extended. Oberlin already required a basic course in each of 7 disciplines, including art or music. The proximity of students from the conservatory and college in dormitories and as roommates enhanced broadening of experience. Not mentioned, but important was a well rounded program of varsity and intramural sports, with no one dominating.

#11, Stewardship, sustainability. Without sustainability Oberlin's other benefits would not exist. Oberlin should try to instill a feeling of loyalty and obligation. The college has borne the major part of the students' education. They should feel an obligation to pay back as they can after graduating.

3:35:11 PM 10.30.15

**Aimee Lee**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Diversifying student body. This makes a huge difference in each students' experience at Oberlin and beyond, to go to school in a bubble—but a bubble that more accurately reflects life outside of it

Retaining good people. If faculty and staff go through a revolving door, this is detrimental to the school's mission and day to day functioning (as well as financial waste).

Slowing tuition and other fee increases. Otherwise, we will price out of certain students who would make such a positive impact on campus and as alumni.

10:59:29 PM

**Barb Distler '84**

*Alumni*

As a staff psychologist in 3 college counseling centers for 16 years, I would add that the emotional well-being of students should be a very high priority. I know it is thought to be so, and I know there is a lot that Oberlin has been providing. But often schools strengthen what they can do when people need support or are in a crisis, which is crucial, but more attention needs to be paid to prevention and developing coping skills.

The draft states, "Develop new and enhance existing programs and services to support mental, emotional, and physical health and wellness." Yes, agreed! But compared to other parts of the document, it is quite vague. And vague goals are often pushed to lower on the list unintentionally.

The severity of the issues students struggle with these days is quite serious, and it has been getting more so every year (it's a national trend). I would want something about building resilient individuals in the mission statement, as well as more details in the plan of the 'how's.' And yes, I would be happy to be involved!

### **Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Direction 2, #10 ("Develop new and enhance existing programs and services to support mental, emotional, and physical health and wellness"). See above in earlier comments.

Direction 1, #3 ("Enhance student support for building personally meaningful pathways through the curriculum, from first-year seminars to culminating experiences"): This was not very strong when I was there--it's gotten better, but having a more solid sense of direction in one's curriculum choices is very useful. I was a guest student for one term at another school and was struck by how the students there were much more clear about this than we were at Oberlin.

Direction 3, #17 ("Use the campus year-round, offering programs that will both enhance the reputation and revenue of the Arts and Sciences and Conservatory and leverage our investments in improved facilities and physical assets"): As you know, when people visit campus, they tend to feel quite favorably toward Oberlin, even if they are not prospective students. Given our location, the more we are on people's maps (with positive associations), the better.

3:14:46 PM 10.31.15

**Max Coleman**

*Alumni*

### **Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Decreasing tuition (and slowing tuition increase). Many students cannot afford Oberlin, and the rate at which tuition is increasing will only make it harder to recruit and retain diverse students.

Retaining (NOT just recruiting) economically underprivileged students. Oberlin is decent at recruiting diverse students, but it has historically been weaker at retaining them (especially students of color).

Relying less on tuition funds. The less we rely on tuition funds, the less pressure there will be to raise tuition, lower aid packages, etc. Relying less on tuition is the primary means of ensuring our commitment to diversity. Otherwise, institutional pressures will always get in the way of that goal.

3:20:26 PM 10.31.15

**William Wally**

*Alumni*

### **Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Retain outstanding faculty and staff. Obvious.

Study and prioritize campus-wide educational and administrative technology needs. Obvious.

Use the campus year-round. Obvious.

6:50:25 PM 10.31.15

**Bill Hilton**

*Alumni*

In the second paragraph of the mission, I suggest changing the last word, "society," with "world." In the first paragraph of Core Values, I suggest adding to the second sentence the words "spiritual growth" after the word "careers."

### **Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Number 13 ("Slow the rate of annual increases in student charges—tuition, fees, room and board—while developing resources to ensure that we can offer an opportunity for enrollment to a student body from the United States and abroad that represents a broad range of racial, ethnic, gender identity/identities, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds"): None of the 18 strategic actions can be pursued in a vacuum, as they are mutually interdependent. Number 13, however, is in my opinion, the most crucial direction needed to preserve and protect Oberlin's special position in higher education.

#1 (“Create individually tailored systems of guidance and support through mentoring, advising and coaching that help students connect their academic, artistic, personal, social, and professional development at Oberlin and beyond”): In my alumni activities over the past 20 years, the need for coaching, mentoring and supporting student through their college lives was by far the most often and urgently mentioned by faculty, administration, and other alumni. Weak and missing supports cannot continue if Oberlin is to retain its high rankings, its strong community, and its quest to produce leaders. Indeed, people learn to be leaders primarily by observing and participating in leading.

# 15 (“Maintain commitments to achieve competitive faculty compensation”): Teaching, coaching and mentoring is what education is about. We in the Oberlin community must do all that is necessary to ensure the College and Conservatory have a shot at attracting the best faculty possible.

10:20:40 AM 11.1.15

**Dorothy Koster Washburn ‘67**  
*Alumni*

### **Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

In order to maintain the level of quality faculty and student educational experience, many more past and present Oberlin graduates should have been/be involved. If you tout an Oberlin education as a unique experience, those who prepare the strategic plans and those who fund raise need to have experienced this education themselves. For starters, EVERYONE in the Alumni office and in the fund raising offices should be Oberlin graduates. How else can you go out and ask for money if you cannot talk about Oberlin with the familiarity that comes from actually having experienced four years of life at Oberlin?

I very much agree that there should be more integration between the college, conservatory, art museum, libraries. One good avenue would be to improve the Winter Term experience. I worked with a student on campus several winters ago and found that support was wanting for access to a place to work and for obtaining materials prior to the term so that we would not have to wait--3 weeks is a very short time to wait for interlibrary loan materials. There were no all campus activities to bring students together who were staying on campus doing projects. In fact it appeared that the campus was pretty deserted. Too bad, for Oberlin has fantastic resources. It seems that many students engage in projects that do not challenge them. A better organized program that reaches out to alums for projects and support (I know that you do but it would be much better). Otherwise it appears that Winter Term is a vacation for the faculty. Perhaps the faculty would be compensated in some way for actively directing projects during that period.

Faculty quality is absolutely essential for a quality educational experience. More resources should be expended to attract the best. In addition, faculty mentoring during and after Oberlin is essential for helping a student to discover and develop a passion in a field of his or her interest and then helping them get into and succeed in graduate school.

4:05:08 PM 11.1.15

**Thelma Morris**  
*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

#7, Hire and retain an outstanding faculty and staff.... It is hard to attract good students without offering good faculty, and much harder to rebuild faculty. Also, faculty (diverse, engaged) are good role models for students. They also offer the front line of guidance and mentoring for their diverse, engaged students.

#16, Find institutional priorities by analyzing current expenditures, and redesign....plus #17, expanding campus use to leverage investments. #16 will insure that the administration and faculty look inward to react to changing needs and priorities, and 17 is worth exploring for potential returns on investment beyond endowment stabilization and augmented philanthropic gifts.

#3, Enhance student support for building meaningful pathways through the curriculum.... Oberlin College is an educational institution for young people in a complex world, not a nursery for maladjusted youngsters. Educational focus is important; other elements, while important, grow out of this fundamental requirement.

6:09:22 PM 11.1.15

**Peter Sachs Collopy**  
*Alumni*

Generally yes, but both could be made clearer and more succinct in order to convey and establish more precise commitments. The second sentence of the “education excellence” statement is particularly hard to parse, because the connections and integration it refers to seem vague. Could it be something like “An Oberlin education prepares students for successful lives and careers by enabling them to develop meaningful connections between intellectual and artistic disciplines, cultural participation, and action toward social justice”? One of the things I loved most about Oberlin was that nearly everyone I met had multiple interests that they were passionate about, not just one thing that excited them. I would really appreciate an institutional commitment to helping students (and faculty, and even neighboring residents) bring together their interests, whether intellectual, political, or aesthetic—but I think the current statement only gestures in that direction without really committing.

I think the strategic directions are fine. I appreciate having only three of them, and focusing energy tightly on a small number of priorities. The headings could be stronger, clearer, and more grammatically parallel.

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Mentorship. “Create individually tailored systems of guidance and support through mentoring, advising and coaching that help students connect their academic, artistic, personal, social, and professional development at Oberlin and beyond.” I experienced fantastic mentorship at Oberlin, mostly from faculty off the tenure track. I'm not sure that Oberlin needs to build more intentional structures of guidance for most students, and indeed I think I may have felt claustrophobic if faced with “individually tailored systems of guidance and support,” but I do think making mentorship available to students, checking in with students who are struggling, and valuing the work of faculty in advising students are all essential.

Faculty support. “Encourage and support faculty to develop as scholars, musicians, and artists throughout their Oberlin careers. Enable and encourage faculty and staff members to develop their abilities as effective, engaging, and innovative teachers, mentors, and advisors.” As a junior academic myself, I think teaching-focused institutions like Oberlin face a tricky question of how much to emphasize research or artistic achievement in hiring and evaluating faculty. I think faculty who are engaged in research can bring a whole additional dimension to the classroom; looking back, I also think the best teachers I had at Oberlin were often those doing the least research. If Oberlin expects more of faculty as researchers, it's essential it provide support and perhaps lighter teaching loads than in the past so that faculty can also continue to excel at teaching and not neglect it—as so many at research universities do—in order to focus on their research.

Governance. “Our governance models need to be as thoughtful, transparent, and as broadly participatory as possible.” This is a great standard to hold Oberlin to as an institution.

Two other notes:

“The development of problem-based ‘big question’ course clusters” sounds more valuable to me to faculty seeking collaboration in teaching than to students, who are unlikely to take more than one of the courses anyway; Oberlin already has too many great courses to pick between. Though I can imagine some benefit in informal conversation between students in different courses that have some premise in common, I still think as a student I would prefer a single course that integrated the expertise of multiple faculty. When I served on the Curricular Pathways Working Group last strategic planning cycle, we discussed such courses as possible collaborations between the College, Conservatory, and Art Museum. A medieval cultural history course, for example, could bring together at least members of History, English, Art History, Music History, and the Art Museum curatorial staff, if not more departments. Such collaborations are of course difficult to coordinate and expensive if they count as full courses taught by each faculty member. They're common in departments like Biology, if I recall correctly, for introductory courses, though. And I recall that some faculty experimented with having just two faculty—one College, one Conservatory—co-teach similar courses in about 2009. I think the plan needs either more explanation of how course clusters would work or a

consideration of alternative ways of organizing courses to encourage curricular collaboration.

Finally, this form itself was difficult to use. It requires answers to every question, preventing those who might run out of time or only have thoughts on some elements from providing feedback. It lacks an area for additional comments, leading me to put them here instead of in a space intended for such feedback. And when I left the form half filled in and put my computer to sleep, upon resuming I had to start over, losing a paragraph of writing that I'd spent some time on. I recommend using a different tool and a more thorough design process next time.

11:33:33 AM 11.2.15

**Thomas Ilgen**  
*Alumni*

As a faculty member at a liberal arts institution not unlike Oberlin (one of the Claremont Colleges), I find these core values compelling and important but not particularly distinctive--i.e., they sound much like those of any other liberal arts college. Why not draw upon Oberlin's distinctive history as the first such college to admit women or its long-standing commitment to the African American community? The core value of diversity mixes many different aspects together and loses any distinctiveness. It would seem that Oberlin's commitment to social justice might assume a more prominent position--again drawing on the historical aspects listed above. The mission statement also lacks distinctiveness--most liberal arts colleges would applaud and support this vision but there is little to separate it from other similar schools.

The strategic directions do align with the mission statement and the goals. I like some of the directions regarding students' educational experience. One area that could be significantly enhanced is the "engagement with the world." Oberlin suffers somewhat from its rather remote location in Northern Ohio and engagement with the world is more difficult than with schools located in major metropolitan areas. I have often thought Oberlin could be much more innovative in providing opportunities for students to study abroad--particularly in the less traveled parts of the world. A cultural immersion experience in Latin America, Africa, or Asia that combined learning with intensive language acquisition could be a tremendous asset for graduates and a way of bringing the world back to the campus and into the classroom via student experiences.

### **Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Foster students' educational experience. If the educational experience is compelling, the rest will follow...

Enhancing Resources and Sustainability. A strong educational experience must be supported by the appropriate resources.

Building Community. The Community is important but in my view already is relatively strong.

12:27:07 PM 11.2.15

**Kirk “Buzz” Ormand**  
*Faculty*

The plan as stated places disproportionate emphasis on services and facilities that are external to the core academic program; it runs the risk of encouraging us to lose sight of our central strength, which is the ability to offer a broad, rich, and diverse liberal arts education.

Again, too many of the Strategic Directions (16 out of 19 by my count) do not address the first "Core Value" which has to do with our educational programs.

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

#7 (“Hire and retain an outstanding faculty and staff from a broad range of racial, ethnic, gender identity/identities, sexuality/orientation, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds”): This will be difficult as long as our salaries lag behind our competitors.

#9 (“Enrich Oberlin as a community of learning by expanding support for academic programs and offices that help students develop the understanding and skills essential for interacting effectively across lines of cultural and ideological difference”): Support for academic programs is welcome.

#13 (“Slow the rate of annual increases in student charges—tuition, fees, room and board—while developing resources”): The key here is in the 2nd clause: “while developing resources to insure...” We can't do this without additional funds, and that is going to mean cuts somewhere. I would suggest that it not be in the core academic programs.

1:30:39 PM 11.2.15

**Lee Fertig ‘83**  
*Alumni*

As an accomplished educator myself, I only wish to add that innovative curriculum and pedagogy in 2015 and beyond is a non-negotiable feature of educational excellence. I think it is important to emphasize the 'nature' of the teaching and learning experience at Oberlin even more than what I see in the strategic plan draft. I fear that it is very easy to become complacent with traditional pedagogy if this issue is not explicitly identified as something that demands constant capacity building in the faculty and constructive oversight.

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

The emphasis on sustainability is very important. The competitive nature of the higher ed market is only going to get even more difficult. Oberlin needs to ensure it has a sustainable model of financing and resourcing in order to ensure mission integrity moving forward. I also believe the diversity item is critically important. And also the notion of interdisciplinary learning experiences (I like the idea of the clusters!).

3:08:09 PM 11.2.15

**Michael Millin**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Securing and improving the size of the endowment. A solid financial status is the key to being able to maintain the core value of the Oberlin experience.

Connecting with alumni. The alumni are the key to maintaining a solid financial status.

Diversity. The Oberlin experience is grounded in the idea of challenging status quo. In order to challenge, it is necessary to have diversity of thought.

3:41:33 PM 11.2.15

**Manny Caminis**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Financial integrity of the Endowment. Reduce withdrawals from and use of the Endowment to finance operating expenses

Rationalization of capital expenditures to enhance the applicant pool and physical plant. Remove or replacement aging structures or investment in non-performing (more expensive than the financial return) of physical plants.

Stabilization of per student costs to attend Oberlin. Enhance the number of endowed professorships and institute mandatory (all students) “work -for- tuition” programs.

5:38:57 PM 11.2.15

**Patricia Stevenson**

*Alumni*

I would have liked to see an explicit desire for innovation -- a way for Oberlin to stand out from other schools. How does Oberlin stand out?

I strongly disagree with this statement (page 15): “Oberlin doesn’t create people who create change; it draws students who are already committed to being a part of that change.” While it's obviously valuable to nurture students who are already a “good fit” for Oberlin, I would suggest that it should be MORE important to Oberlin's mission to

actively search for and mentor prospective students who might most benefit from learning how to create change but who may be more vulnerable, more hidden, or more quiet. I believe Oberlin can and DOES create people who create change, and the college should be actively seeking to do more of this challenging and potentially uncomfortable work, instead of looking only for like-minded people. One purpose of education is to open minds and explore what you may not have considered -- on every side of many, many stories. In my own experience, Oberlin has played an important role in creating change among people who may never have considered inclusion or diversity -- sometimes years later!

I would like to see Oberlin -- usually at the forefront of diversity, civil rights, and social justice -- become a leader in disability diversity and disability studies. It is especially striking to see the absence of meaningful disability diversity goals in this strategic plan in 2015, a full quarter of a century after President Bush signed the ADA, and especially given the passion with which the strategic plan describes the college's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and social justice. The interplay of disability with race and poverty makes it compelling as a social justice topic; disability in the world of art, literature, and history is almost limitless for research and study. For now, I would like to see language in the strategic plan changed to include physical and sensory disabilities being represented as fully as they are in the actual community. In the strategic recommendations #6 and #7, and in Direction #2, for instance, there is no explicit recognition of disability, even though race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity is mentioned. Is this intentional, or is this overlooked, as disability often is? I would like to respectfully ask: What bias, assumptions, or systemic processes may be operating in relation to the idea of disability studies at Oberlin? It's no different than any other area of scholarship. I would recommend explicit goals of adding courses in disability studies in the arts, literature, history, social sciences, and so on, as well as meaningful hiring in faculty and staff, and meaningful recruitment among students who have physical and sensory disabilities.

### **Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Individually tailored plans of advising. Mentoring and personal relationships make the biggest difference for a student's entire experience. Consider multiple points of connection so a student is not dependent on just one personality or style.

Connected learning. Alumni can be a major resource. My impression is that Oberlin alumni are more interested and connected than most colleges. This area is a bit vague, but you can allow alumni to develop it in an organic and creative way.

#11 ("Create new and diverse pathways for judicious stewardship of the institution by alumni and also by faculty, staff, students, and parents"): Consider establishing "Little Oberlins" in strategic areas, with alumni communities (perhaps retirement communities?).

10:25:29 PM 11.2.15

**Jan Heininger**  
*Alumni*

These seem to be stating the obvious. A side-by-side with the current ones would have helped.

Ditto above.

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Big idea cluster courses. Preparation for engagement with the world -- plus enhancing educational excellence -- would be well served by such courses.

Building endowment. \$\$ may be the root of all evil but it is essential for achieving Oberlin's goals. I recognize the obstacles having devoted time myself to raising money for Oberlin, but we'd be well served if someone would drop \$100 million on us. I'm stating the obvious I know. And no, I don't know of any great new ways to do so. Another Charles Martin Hall?

Using the campus year round. It's the most obvious source of increased revenue I can see -- certainly helps other institutions.

12:21:26 AM 11.3.15

**Nancy Roane**  
*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Slow rate of annual increases in tuition. This is a must. Shrink the administration if you have to; stop building buildings, cut down on free offerings to students unless it is on an as-needed basis (like mental healthcare -- a must for Oberlin students! Oberlin is very plagued by mental health issues), do whatever you have to do to make the school less expensive. Oberlin alums drowning in student debt is shameful.

More competitive salaries for professors. On top of this, Oberlin has an ethical duty to not hire adjuncts that have no hope for moving up or are made to be part time. I also disagree with the practice of hiring professors (besides extra-special occasions) that Oberlin does not plan to see through the tenure process -- if the professor knows they are only there for 1 or 2 years, they cannot be effective mentors and that hurts students (and professors). This goes against your Direction 1.

A coherent curriculum. It is great to allow flexibility, but there is not enough current clarity in what students need to take and the best way to go through their majors such that they have a grounded basis of knowledge. Learning the canon is not the be all end all, but I felt as a Comparative Literature major that I did not get enough of an idea of the canon of philosophy and theory to prepare me for graduate school (which I am currently

pursuing). To help push students to grad school in the humanities, courses need to have more of an element of background information and historical context -- even if that means more lecturing or background reading. Literature courses should be discussion based, but I found at Oberlin they were often too heavy on the discussion side with the students taking the class off the rails. Literature departments need to be more theoretical to be competitive.

1:02:47 AM 11.3.15

**Kennis Koldewyn**

*Alumni*

### **Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

#13: Slow rate of annual increases in student charges. The Draft Strategic Plan admits that "Oberlin is not yet on a sustainable financial trajectory", but the strategic recommendations in Direction 3 barely touch the cost side of the equation (#13, #16). Tuition has been going up at about double the rate of inflation for decades, and as any Oberlin graduate should be able to tell you, of two exponentially growing functions with different growth rates, the one with the higher rate of growth will grow exponentially larger than the other. In this case, what that means is that eventually almost no one will be able to afford an Oberlin education. Perhaps an example will help. My five-year-old daughter would, in the ordinary course of events, expect to enter college in 2028 and graduate in the class of 2032. Quick, off the top of your head, what do you suppose the total cost of her Oberlin education would be if she were accepted to Oberlin? (It's a worthwhile exercise—please come up with a number before you continue reading.) Making very conservative assumptions (tuition grows at this year's rate of 3.9%—only 4 years out of the past 50 had a lower increase; room, board, fees, books and personal expenses start at today's values from <https://new.oberlin.edu/parents/finances/tuition-and-fees.dot> and grow at the economist targeted inflation rate of 2%), the total bill would be nearly \$435,000—over \$100,000 \*every year\*. More than 80% of Oberlin students receive financial aid right now with inflation-adjusted costs 22% lower than that. What percentage of her graduating class will need financial aid? 90%? 95%?

This may seem like a problem for the distant future, but every year that tuition goes up faster than inflation is a year that we're accelerating toward a brick wall, and there's no way to tell when we'll hit it. When the total cost of an Oberlin education hits half a million dollars in 2035? When it exceeds a full million dollars in 2055? When it exceeds two million dollars in 2074? It may be much sooner than you think. Much of the exponential increase in college tuition costs across the country during my lifetime was undoubtedly fueled by three decades of overall declining interest rates and hence more accessible loans (see "Credit Supply and the Rise in College Tuition" from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York at [http://www.newyorkfed.org/research/staff\\_reports/sr733.pdf](http://www.newyorkfed.org/research/staff_reports/sr733.pdf)). That period has come to an end; rates can't go any lower.

Strategic recommendation #16 must go beyond "determining appropriate tradeoffs" and

"reallocating funding" to making extremely difficult and painful choices that would enable overall cuts in funding. Strategic recommendation #13 must at a bare minimum cap the rate of annual increases in student charges to the rate of inflation, period—and that will only allow us to stop accelerating towards the wall; it will do nothing to slow us down. How fast do we really want to be driving when we hit?

#16: Analyze expenditures, determine tradeoffs, reallocate funding. See comment for priority 1 above.

#13 and #16, as above. See comment for priority 1 above.

1:09:04 AM 11.3.15

**George Hannauer**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Excellence. Who can be against Excellence?

Community Service. Ditto.

Diversity. The pages cited (from page 10 on) are a confusing mishmash of "motherhood" statements. The key term 4+4 is never defined. At first, I thought it meant that a student spent eight years at Oberlin and got two degrees: from the Conservatory and the College. But this limits the program to students who (1) have enough musical ability to earn a Conservatory degree and (2) are willing to spend eight years at Oberlin. This is a small fraction of the student body. Maybe it means to spend four years at Oberlin, get one degree (from either the Con or the College) and then spend four more years out in the "real world" doing good works before settling down to Graduate school or a career. This makes sense to me, but it's a guess on my part. I find the document too confusing.

2:15:46 AM 11.3.15

**Dwan Vanderpool Robins**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

A diverse student body. The inclusion of a student body that is reflective of the greater society will serve to better prepare graduates to engage in the real world. Students will learn how to interface with individuals from multiple backgrounds.

Competent, outstanding and innovative faculty. Faculty that are competent, outstanding and innovative can help to motivate students toward excellence and can inspire the student body about learning. An emphasis on professional development and contemporary practices in pedagogy will help to strengthen our faculty.

Engagement between the campus and the greater society. It is important that Oberlin's stakeholders remain current and engage with the greater society to share their perspectives and to participate in shaping public thought.

2:58:18 PM 11.3.15

**Mike Palmer '66**

*Alumni*

I'm a Silicon Valley startup guy. Mission statements are kind of laughed at out here. For me, ignoring the mission statement for the moment, the goal should be to become a preferred destination for the best students we can get. If that happens, the other problems will be ameliorated. From a marketing point of view, the key applicant question that must be answered by the College is "what makes Oberlin different from the 30 other schools on my list and why should I go there?"

The strategic directions seem trite to me. --- The new plan took shape over the spring and summer of 2015. Its core conclusions were presented in the form of three powerful "directions for the future":

- Foster excellence throughout our students' educational experience, within and beyond the classroom
- Strengthen Oberlin's educational community, and
- Enhance our resources and sustainability

How this these [sic] differentiate Oberlin from the 30 other schools on my list?

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Answer the question: "Why should I choose Oberlin?"

Brag. You make a great list of Oberlin achievements re: PhDs, NAS, etc. ... You need to emphasize that Oberlin has achievers, not just academic dreamers.

Success. Most people go to college to become successful in their field of interest. Oberlin has good stories to tell here ... ranging from the arts to law to business. I think it's critical to point out that a LA education in a decidedly liberal institution doesn't preclude doing well in the real world.

4:39:39 PM 11.4.15

**J. Kristian Whitsett**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Build the endowment. Strong institutional foundation.

Maintain or increase applicant selectivity. This was not addressed (that I saw) in the

report, but I think it is critical. Everyone likes to criticize the *US News* ranking list, but Oberlin should not ignore it.

Slow the rate of student charges. Another way that Oberlin can distinguish itself among its peer institutions.

9:12:24 PM 11.4.15

**Jonathan Cummings**

*Alumni*

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Oberlin 4+4. Oberlin provided an exceptional [sic] while I was there, but I felt like I was largely on my own to find my path after Oberlin. Anything that Oberlin can do to aid students in the transition toward finding a career seems like the most influential change Oberlin can make from my experience ('05 grad).

Tuition rates. I don't have a recommendation for what to do here, but there are times I ponder if I would have been better served to have gone somewhere where I didn't come out with so much student debt. I highly value my Oberlin education, but I'm not sure it was wise financially. I would need some convincing to advise future students take on student debt rather than say go abroad or to a state school and come out debt free.

Curriculum career targeting. I didn't see this in the document, but how Oberlin constructs the curriculum in terms of what it aims to prepare students for seems like an important guiding decision. Does Oberlin aim to produce students that transition directly to career positions, or to provide the best education to enable students to enter graduate programs. Maybe these aren't mutually exclusive, but it seems to me that the goal [sic] to lead to different curriculum and resource allocation.

6:04:56 PM 11.7.15

**Paul Safyan**

*Alumni*

Should this statement state a desire for graduates to be employable and cooperative citizens?

I am not clear on the meaning of stewardship in this context and in the rest of the plan.

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Direction 1 #2 ("Connect students and young alums to professional pathways by developing and investing in Oberlin 4+4"): The 4+4 is at the heart of preparing for the future.

Direction 1, #5 (“Prepare students to connect effectively to their global environment by enhancing opportunities to study and engage with languages and cultures through coursework, study abroad, and international co-curricular opportunities, and assure they attain appropriate technological capabilities”): Co-curricular opportunities and service outside the classroom should be increased to develop marketability for life's challenges.

Direction 2, #9 (“Enrich Oberlin as a community of learning by expanding support for academic programs and offices that help students develop the understanding and skills essential for interacting effectively across lines of cultural and ideological difference”): Provide an emotionally supportive community. There is not a space for this: I do not see enough in this plan about the specifics of alumni involvement. Additionally, there is a qualifier about involving recent alumni. Older alumni, particularly retirees, are an untapped resource for the growth of the community. Finally, I suggest a 5 year plan of execution, not a 10 year plan.

1:23:59 PM 11.12.15

**Tom Bacon**

*Alumni*

For me, the strategic directions appear a bit like our federal budget priorities (lower taxes, increase spending, promote growth, lower the deficit) -- great goals but without any realistic plan to achieve. We may need to be more radical (as is our tradition!).

### **Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Reduce tuition hikes. High tuition is pricing us out of market.

Grow endowment. This probably has a short term and longer term element.

Cross cultural diversity. Recruiting foreign students may help diversity without increase in financial aid (we have historically had a terrific connection with Asia but may need to cultivate other international connections).

OKAY TO POST

9:16:16 PM 11.19.15

**Naomi Roswell, Student**

While I agree with the general ideas reflected in those pages I do not think the language is strong enough. When laying out priorities and compiling strides taken within those to date, I feel there is a significant lack both in terms of diversity and inclusion and support for students of color and in particular Black students, as well as environmental sustainability. I feel as if page five necessitates a paragraph on achievements and commitments that Oberlin has taken when it comes to honoring and protecting the environment.

The directions do align, but not in such a way that is actionable and prioritizes change that will positively improve the college's position in relation to the core values. I understand that an Implementation plan follows this step of the strategic plan, but what's here is not strong enough to pave the road for implementation.

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

Sustainability – environmental. “Sustainability” and “resources” are mentioned in this document with frequency. When I hear these words, I think both of environmental and financial resources and longevity that maximizes the present without compromising the future. It seems that here in this document, these words are used only in the context of money. It terrifies me that Oberlin is considering its priorities for the future and not explicitly addressing the threats of Climate Change. This is exaggerated by our previous commitments and our reputation. I think a great place to elaborate on this is bullet point 18. In addition, I think on Page 5, there should be a paragraph that elaborates on the “purposeful interventions” that Oberlin has taken recently in regards to environmental sustainability. This is important not just to congratulate, but rather to be sure that we are not hypocritical in terms of our supposed priorities and our actions. Defining “sustainability” is a huge priority, and being intentional about when this document is referring to fiduciary responsibility and when it is the broader sense of existence responsibility.

Diversity and Inclusion. This document must have clear, actionable, and sensitive commitments to increase the percentage of black students at Oberlin and find ways to support them and make a campus where they can be comfortable and learn.

College-Town relations. As with environmental consideration, Oberlin needs to prioritize the community around the campus.

11:08:25 PM 11.20.15

**Stephen C. Morrison, Alumni**

Suggest “critically evaluate” instead of “confront”--less adversarial. Specifics on facilities, selectivity, endowment, financial aid?

Enhance impact--use “comprehensive continuum of mentoring.”

**Top Three Strategic Priorities:**

None

None

None

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**Responses via E-mails**

2:30:00 PM 10.30.15

**Elizabeth Myers Houston**

*Alumni, Staff*

Dear Committee,

I haven't had the time to think about the strategic plan draft in depth, but since you have asked for immediate feedback, I will share my initial responses to reading through the draft:

- 1) The plan spends a lot of words congratulating Oberlin on things that we have or are already doing, and relatively few words creating a vision of the future. Perhaps this is common among strategic plans, but it seems a bit much.
- 2) There aren't really very many strategic directions and initiatives brought forth, and it feels like the document falls short of creating a broad vision for the future, with clear guidelines for how we we should prioritize the distribution of our scarce resources. It also introduces some new initiatives, without indicating where we might cut back on other items. It seems unrealistic to add new things without also giving a careful critique of how we are currently operating and suggesting ways to improve current processes or reduce things that we are spending money and resources on that produce results that we may value less than other projects. The strategic planning process should be an opportunity for us to evaluate all that we are doing, and to make some hard choices that we want to do less of X so we can do more of Y. I didn't see that in the draft.
- 3) Coming from an admissions background, and being aware of the fabulous students that we don't admit every year due to high financial need, I would like to see a firm commitment to increasing our ability to admit and fund low-income students, with some teeth behind it to show where that funding might come from. (Rather than just a vague promise to raise more funds.) Also, the directive related to recruiting and retaining a broad range of students lists so many different categories of diversity, with no indication of priorities. Realistically, we will make admissions decisions based on a hierarchy of which diversity categories matter most. If that priority of diversities is not spelled out in the plan, we as the Oberlin community might not be getting the types of diversity focus that we think we're getting. It seems particularly implausible to expect that we might recruit on the basis of sexuality/orientation, as that information is generally not known during the recruitment and admissions process.

Regards,  
Elizabeth

11.01.15  
*Alumni*

With a reaction. It won't surprise you to know that in my view a strategic planning process ought to be an opportunity to engage in disruptive thinking – to seriously examine basic assumptions and to make difficult choices among alternatives. I would think, given all the time and energy the participants have invested in the process, they

would to produce a strategic document and a conversation that enhances the unique qualities of Oberlin, and provides sustainability for the future.

The draft plan admirably articulates what makes Oberlin distinctive and affirms its commitment to historic values and priorities. It is particularly strong in its warm and inclusive tone – reflecting a community that is committed to working together to continue providing a liberal education that is unique in its commitment to the highest academic standards and preparation for its students to live rich, full lives; one that is well versed in the arts, particularly the traditional western tradition of classical music; and that is committed to social progress, particularly reflecting the current concern about growing economic and social inequality in this country and, indeed, the world.

In bringing the plan to final form, however, I would urge the participants to do more to rally the community around certain hard choices that need to be made going forward and to think a little more deeply about the factual basis for certain long-held assumptions.

1. Payout-rate. The focus on endowment payout, is in my experience and judgment, misguided and preferences the future over the present. While endowment growth DOES need to be the College's number one priority, it won't come through restricted payout. Much of the conventionally cited "research" on appropriate payouts rates is based on faulty assumptions and comes from interested parties (endowment managers). Instead, the focus for endowment growth should be on lowered costs of the investment process, and higher returns through a disciplined UNMANAGED practice, that does not seek to time the market or make speculative bets on particular companies or industries. While I am not privy to detailed data regarding the College's endowment, it is my sense that in recent years the Oberlin endowment has underperformed the domestic equity market. This MUST be acknowledged and reversed, if true. The leadership of the board investment committee has embarrassed the College and it must slash fees and expenses and create a disciplined investment process. More growth to the endowment may likely be internally generated, than can be externally generated from new gifts, given the endowments current order of magnitude.

2. While the plan admirably identifies the lack of sustainability of the current level of tuition and fees, it provides the community with no guidance about the choices required to implement such a goal. In fact, like most such higher ed planning processes, it seeks more of everything and suggests less of nothing. The college must stop expanding its capital plant; in needs to shrink the size of non-classroom costs (read: student services); and there must be a serious discussion about the need to limit compensation and benefits to college staff going forward. I recognize that this is the most difficult possible discussion – but people of good will on campus must come together and provide leadership for its peer institutions in selective higher education if there is going to be a future for the kind of high-touch, personal experience that Oberlin provides and that we all value. We will either have this conversation soon, however painful, or we will be forced to be transformed in ways that will contradict our values.

3. The College needs to deal realistically with its uncompetitive admissions and enrollment position and stop telling itself that every class is superior to the last. It must face the fact that it by no reasonable definition meets 100% of the financial need of admitted students. It isn't true now, and hasn't been for years (unless you are willing to accept the College's tortured definition of what constitutes need). The fact is that one of the most unsustainable aspects of the College is the small percentage of full-pay students on campus. Serious reflection about the campus culture must take place as to why this is so. Oberlin cannot have a middle-sized endowment among its peers and an outsized obligation to subsidize the education of middle class families. Most distressing to me about this situation is the low number of Pell grant (low income) students now at Oberlin, relative to its peers. This also needs serious, frank discussion. We know why this is – we can't now afford to educate them and at the same time fill our classes. But this situation calls into question the very essence of the College's mission. In order to fulfill its social obligation as well as its historic mission it must do more to promote economic and social mobility.

4. Finally, it would be good if the plan made explicitly clear the value at Oberlin of providing students with a broad intellectual experience; one characterized by healthy, respectful debate. The importance of reading deeply and broadly in widely recognized essential texts (and artworks) from a range of cultures, and then vigorously analyzing and discussing them is not sufficiently well appreciated in the public at-large (and perhaps by some members of the College community). A statement about the centrality of the art form of classical music to the Oberlin experience, and its value and to our society as well, would also be important. The significance of the conservatory to conserving that tradition should be highlighted and cannot be understated. I would also suggest that the plan proudly take ownership of the College's progressive leadership in educating the historically disadvantaged and that one of Oberlin's unique qualities is that it has long been a safe and welcoming environment for people of color, women, and members of the LGBT community – ahead of many of its peers. It is deeply distressing to me that this fact got lost in the discussion of the incidents of a year and a half ago. While we always aspire to be better and more inclusive, Oberlin is neither a racist, sexist nor homophobic institution/community. Those who refuse to recognize this are doing the College a disservice, distorting the facts and overlooking one of the College's strongest distinctive qualities.

That's my two (OK, maybe ten) cents. Those who worked on the strategic plan draft clearly brought seriousness of purpose and a commitment to Oberlin values to their work. I thank you and them for your excellent work. I would challenge them to dig a little deeper in order to produce something then can have a profound impact on College priorities in the next decade and will position Oberlin as a leader among its peers in creating a much needed sustainable model for the cherished and fragile institution of liberal education.

**Additional Alumni Feedback on the Oberlin College Strategic Plan Draft  
2016-2021: Shaping the Future  
Feedback received October 29 through November 2, 2015**

**Martin B. Hochman '62**

*Alumni*

With only limited time to read and the comment on the draft Oberlin Plan, there is just one comment I want to make. The plan seems to shy away from discussing the fact that ending up with a job that pays reasonably well is necessary if one wants to live a relatively good life, and have adequate time and resources to contribute to society. An Oberlin education and experience as set forth in the draft document certainly provides an excellent basis for achieving those results if one has money, but having sufficient money in life is for good reason a very important consideration for people. The plan seems to essentially ignore this except in a comment apparently trying to minimize its importance as a measure of success of a college education.

**Joel Montague '56**

*Alumni*

RE Strategic planning...The reason the US is so far behind the rest of the world in Education and academics, so the pundits tell us, is that college students piss away their time and their parents money by wasting time, as though it were endless, on athletics and parties, etc. When I was at Oberlin in the '50s (on two teams...though with little distinction) sports was all just fun...win or lose it was great exercise and a good break from study. Now every time I read the mail from Oberlin it is about a Heisman something (who the hell was he and why is he bothering me), some unbeaten whatever team. If all the emphasis at Oberlin is on winning teams believe me I'll find one of my other Universities I attended to donate to. Thusly in your planning try to get the balance right...not a bigger field house, or more astro turf, etc. Rgds.

**Jim Katzin '78**

*Alumni*

I just finished reading the draft *Strategic Plan 2016-2021: Shaping the Future*, and was going to respond using the link provided, but I find that type of response format too limiting and contrived for an adequate response.

I would just like to comment on Direction 2. Regarding student diversity, Oberlin has a long history of recruiting a diverse student body, and while I agree that that is a worthy goal, my experience at Oberlin and the strategic goals outlined in the draft fall far short of realizing the potential of a diverse student body. Let me just provide you with an anecdotal experience that my sister Louise (also class of 1978) told me. While at Oberlin, one night she found herself just kind of wandering around campus and decided to drop in on the athletic center. While neither she nor I were great sports fans by any stretch of the imagination, she found that there was an intercollegiate basketball game occurring when she went to the gym. Virtually every player was African American, and a great many of the fans were likewise African American. She had to ask herself if she was still at the same college she was attending. The point is, that as diverse as Oberlin is and was, I

cannot recall a single African American attending any of the classes that I attended, nor were there any in the numerous extra curricular activities that I participated in. So while Oberlin's student body may have reflected real world diversity, the same self selection of courses and activities that create a divided society were at work at Oberlin. Unless the strategic plan includes some way of truly integrating the diverse student population, the school will never realize its true potential. I'm not saying that everyone should be required to take an African America history course, or a women's lit course, or a queer studies course, but diversity for diversity's sake is not enough.

**George (Mell) Williams, M.D. '53**  
*Alumni*

Dear Andrea and Chuck,

I have read the strategic plan, and I must express disappointment. You have not truly addressed the greatest challenge, which is the increasing cost of an Oberlin education. I want to know the average indebtedness of the Oberlin graduate, for this will affect his life choices as much as his fine education. I just received photographs of the men's locker room, which rivals that of the Yankees. Our old locker room consisted of banks of lockers and a central bench. Is the locker room a place to "hangout" now? However, griping at spending for bricks and mortar wont fix our financial issues. The honest fact is that we have too many courses offered, and, as a consequence, spend way too much money for the only truly expensive budgetary item, the faculty. This is certainly an unpopular notion, but one that must be faced.

For example in 1953, I recall having one teacher in speech, (now communication), one in religion, four in chemistry, and 3 in biology. There was no neural science department which now teaches at grad school levels. I stopped by their bulletin board and saw the list of topics for upcoming seminars, and this could have been at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. We have expanded the curriculum greatly, and has anyone asked what constitutes the basic curriculum, and if this is expanded, how will we pay for it? If we must teach graduate level courses, will the profs have to have their support through NSF or the NIH as is the case in major universities. Should Oberlin insist that new departments find new endowments? I learned a great deal at Oberlin because the trim faculty was superb and devoted to teaching. The knowledge imparted by Clyde Holbrook has lasted a lifetime

I have five grand children in college, and none of them considered Oberlin seriously. One is applying now, and her decision will be predicated on scholarship help. The looming alternative to Oberlin is four years of state university followed by grad school, which was the choice of one grandchild.

I challenge you to tackle the hard financial issues.

**Joe Molder '53**  
*Alumni*

In June of 2006 as I was finishing my six year term on Oberlin's Board I wrote the following to the Board: "Our financial discussion tend to revolve around balancing the budget. Instead, in my view, we should be pursuing the much more challenging goal of reaching parity with competing colleges in developing our total financial resources.

Focusing on balancing the budget only will be misleading. The balancing of a budget is arbitrary. depending on such things as payout percentage, distribution of gift support, definition of what is a capital item, use of debt, and so forth. Comparative endowment growth or lack of it is a better overall indicator of financial health and whether or not a college is remaining competitive (see attached chart).

As to the future, from my analysis I fear that Oberlin will continue on the path on which it has been going now for many, many years. Relative to other colleges with which it compares itself, it will continue to grow its endowment less rapidly bringing on gradual negative changes (less competitive faculty salaries, less competitive financial aid, larger class size, and such ) leading toward a weakening of the college."

I do not know how Oberlin has fared since 2006 but since Moody has recently lowered Oberlin's rating I expect the concerns that I had in 2006 have not changed. If so, everything in a new strategic statement is secondary to the issue raised above. The Board must be willing to deal openly and directly with this financial issue even if negative and discouraging in order to set the college on its best course whatever that course should be.

*(As indicated on my comments sheet, it was difficult to answer the questions without going back to the document's fundamentals. I realize that this kind of response may be too late, but I am offering it anyway. This is really important. Too many things are at stake when doing strategic planning, especially given the range of challenges facing small, private, liberal arts institutions today. I have included a few general thoughts below. And, as previously stated, I am available to help, pro bono.)*

**Judith Light '76**  
***Alumni***

### **Comments on Oberlin's Strategic Plan**

#### **Overall**

--Strikes me that it's surprisingly (and sadly) lacking in inspiration, clear vision, substance, relevance, etc.

--Seems to be focused on the wrong things, at the wrong levels

--Comes off as muddled and wordy; tries to cover too many (possibly not-super-relevant) things

--Is not very "strategic" and does not offer good "anchors" for Oberlin's way forward

--As it is, your stakeholders and decision makers will not find it to be "easily implementable"

--It's a mistake not to look at this as an opportunity--not merely to define a new strategy and figure how to "maintain" Oberlin; rather, it's imperative to position for excellence and, in so doing, ensure future success

### **A Strategic Plan Should Be**

--A defining and galvanizing "anchor"--an opportunity to "grow" the Oberlin brand

--"Grounded" by a foundation that's accurate and reality-based, while also imaginative, flexible, distinctive and true to yesterday-today-tomorrow (Oberlin's roots, present aims, and envisioned future)

--Developed to enlist, recruit, bring together diverse stakeholders (current Oberlin College & Con community--faculty, admin, staff, current and prospective students, alumni; interested and prospective donors of all types; institutional partners including those from partner colleges; members of the business community; citizens from town of Oberlin, surrounding county, other parts of Ohio; etc.)

--A chance to refine and re-define the vision (where Oberlin will be in 5-7 years), and the mission (Oberlin's purpose and overall reason for being)

--Balanced and compelling -- creative and innovative, while also practical and implementable (organized into clearly-articulated, "actionable" necessary and sufficient goals)

--Built from top down (vision and mission or purpose), bottom up (key results), and the middle (those necessary and sufficient strategic objectives)

*[ Remember, vision, mission, and goals or strategic objectives should be clearly stated (and should, in my opinion, be framed differently than what's in the strategy doc that went out for comments) ]*

### **Tips for Developing Core Values**

--Remember, core values include those guiding principles, fundamental beliefs that support the Oberlin vision, shape culture, and direct internal behavior and relationships and overall engagement with the external world

--Ask and answer: Which ones (must) underlie your strategy?

--Ask and answer: What's important to the institution and its community?

--Ask and answer: Which core values will help us make future choices and decisions?

--When coming to a final list, remember: "necessary and sufficient" (which ones do you need, both taken together/as a whole and separately?)

--To frame them, be simple, clear, and concise; state each core value in one to three words (followed by a brief description, clarification, or a couple of examples in parentheses)

### **Going Forward**

--Strongly recommend figuring out how to re-shape the document, before putting it in front of important decision makers

--The doc needs to be taken apart and re-calibrated, to bring it up to its deserved level (looking at substance, format, and presentation "tone")

*(It's fine and important to solicit comments. And it's also okay to select which ones to use to help drive or shape revisions, refine the strategy's substance and presentation, and indicate some initial implementation planning steps.)*

### **Evelyn L. Wilson '71**

#### ***Alumni***

This looks like the committees addressed most things. I agree that tuition cannot keep increasing so there must be a focus on reducing costs. I did not see anything specific to address the recent racial animosity that has been displayed on campus.

### **David Carlson '08**

#### ***Alumni***

Due to firewall restrictions, I was not able to access the online form, so I am including my responses below:

1) Oberlin should cultivate and maintain an awareness of the financial challenges facing students and their families in paying for their education at Oberlin.

One way in which the college can help with this is by reducing the barriers to transferring in credits awarded from other institutions (whether earned while in high school or otherwise). While refusing to do so may in the short-run increase tuition revenues, it does so at substantial cost to students. Moreover, the burden falls disproportionately on students with fewer financial resources.

2) Oberlin should cultivate an awareness of the challenges facing Oberlin graduates as they enter the job market, which should extend beyond the career offices and into the academic departments and into student-advisor interactions.

This deserves elaboration. I do not suggest that students should suggest compromise their integrity. I do suggest that students be very strongly encouraged to keep one eye on their long-term trajectory options.

For example, it is *much easier* to support oneself as a starting artist if you've got the skills and background necessary to hold down a "day job" sufficient to pay living expenses. And "settling" for a career track in which is an imperfect fit to your dreams likely would be, for most students, preferable to shooting for unattainable perfection and instead winding up substantially dissatisfied (an unfortunate outcome I've seen realized by some of my Oberlin classmates).

When I was at Oberlin, the school was getting better at this (*i.e.*, the Oberlin Business Scholars program, which I took part in and was immensely helpful). However, the school still had a long way to go.

3) In closing, I echo that MOOCs give both opportunities and pitfalls. So far, attempts to make them actually work appear to have been mixed. Whoever figures out how to get it right (and capitalizes on that know-how) will be very well positioned going forward. There is no reason that Oberlin can't be the one to do it. *However, this means that Oberlin cannot be content to simply follow others' lead in this area.* Being a follower in this space seems to be the worst of both worlds – you get the brand dilution and distraction from core mission, without the corresponding change of the big payoff.

**Cristina Delgado '80**  
*Alumni*

I will say there is no one on the Board of Trustees nor on the Steering Committee that is Latino and arguably they are the most underrepresented group, not only in Oberlin but nationally. We also know from national statistics that Latinos/Latin Americans are the largest growing minority group in this country and our numbers grow yearly. It's a shame not to have a voice on the future direction of Oberlin. I see other groups well represented but not Latin Americans and this does give me pause.

**Kyran J. (Casey) Cook '74**  
*Alumni*

Dear Chuck,

I really have not gotten much traction with this concern and wondered if it is something that should be considered as part of the strategic planning initiative. This came out of a number of conversations I had with classmates, current faculty, students and faculty spouses during our reunion last year.

Thanks to Oberlin for a very positive experience at the 40<sup>th</sup> Reunion for my class of 1974. I had the opportunity to reacquaint myself with my classmates as well as the people from a wide variety of perspectives that make the College successful. I listened to President Krislov's State of the College speech and I understand the need to raise funds, and to defend the skills and values of a liberal arts education in a small college setting. Most importantly, I understand how educational opportunities are foreclosed by higher costs.

I came from a family with eight kids and few resources - I was in the middle. I struggled to pay the cost to attend Oberlin and I have never regretted that effort. My summer salary in 1974 covered about 25% of an Oberlin year. Today based on typical summer income for college students in my hometown of Iowa City, the ratio of earnings to cost of an Oberlin education has dropped to about 8%. I was dismayed by this and realized that were I the same student seeking a place at Oberlin today I would never make it. I suspect there are many of my 1974 classmates who could say the same. It is equally disconcerting that tuition at Oberlin is five times the cost for in-state students at the University of Iowa (\$48,054 versus \$8,079).

It occurred to me in the course of my interactions with faculty and their partners both at Oberlin and from other colleges how bright, engaged people attract bright, engaged people. My full professor wife and I have many friends here in our hometown that work at the University of Iowa or Kirkwood Community College that fit that profile. Faculty partners provide critical support for those who serve the College and yet their potential for substantive contributions is generally overlooked. At worst partners are viewed as a problem rather than a resource.

I am familiar with the problems of balancing two careers in a relatively small urban area. I suspected that given the size of the Oberlin community that situation is much worse. Conversations with several faculty members and their partners confirmed this suspicion. This is occurring when the model for teaching most particularly for small colleges is shifting dramatically. Put simply, the full professor is increasingly replaced by non-tenured track adjunct faculty and entry level lecturers. This trend is fundamental and compelling and it is most likely to accelerate given the imperatives of the academic economy. The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges noted that non-tenure track faculty increased nationally from 21.7% in 1969 to 57% in 1993 to 70% by 2011. (see May/June newsletter #3 volume 21 and January 19, 2014 article in New York Times "Crowded Out of the Ivory Tower, Adjuncts See a Life Less Lofty".)

Faculty are, to a large extent, hostage to their love of learning and their opportunity to teach. As long as schools continue to produce them at numbers that exceed demand it will be increasingly difficult to justify the spread between the costs at a small liberal arts college such as Oberlin and the public Universities. Salaries are not likely to rise under these circumstances but a second income is critical to a stable faculty. That is the point of this letter. How can Oberlin better engage the talents of faculty partners? Is there an institutional predisposition to support and hire faculty partners? Are there any educational or training programs aimed to retool partners and bring them into the pool of Oberlin

employees? Has any outreach been done to engage alumni in this process? Has there been any systematic study that seeks out best practices from other Colleges and Universities? Have partners of faculty ever had the chance to discuss these barriers with the decision makers at the College?

I believe there is much to be gained from ventilating these issues. It is bad enough those outside the tenure track are given second-class treatment. I believe that engaging the people that support them most directly would go a long way toward stabilizing their ability to teach and remain productive at Oberlin while building a long term loyalty. I think the cost of education is as much of a crisis (consider student debt) as just about anything facing students today.

Finally, I understand that a strategic planning initiative is now underway and I would encourage the College to bring this question into the discussion. I would like to know what if any opportunities there might be for me to be engaged in that initiative. I am an Oberlin Luminati and my background is in economics. I have also been a fully engaged faculty spouse for over 34 years most of which has been in Iowa City.

**Marilyn Johnson**  
*Alumni*

I haven't been active in alumni matters, though I still keep in touch with many people from my two years at Oberlin (1972-74). I transferred to U. Penn, but always felt tied to Oberlin, and the creative writing department and Field magazine were particularly kind, stayed in touch, and published my poetry into this century. I never got the alumni magazine, but when I started publishing books, I let the editors know, and was sorry not to be mentioned; then another alum interviewed me and wrote an article about my latest, published last year The piece never ran, reportedly because I hadn't graduated from Oberlin and wasn't a true alum. I thought I'd tell you because you explicitly asked — but what a shame your community does not include those of us who embraced Oberlin for fewer than four years. I was there wholeheartedly when I was there! I'd fill out the form but my computer isn't letting me....

**Rufus Peckham '52**  
*Alumni*

It is quite impossible for me to give this matter the careful study and thought it deserves and then give you a thoughtful reply in a mere 5 days. Ergo I decline to participate.

**Francis H. Schott '49**  
*Alumni*

Dear friends,

The Strategic Plan 2016-2021 draft is sensible and helpful.  
I have several suggestions for future action:

1. An Alumni nurture plan should be developed, with the aim of putting Oberlin in the top ranks of alumni financial participation among colleges. A 10-year plan may be appropriate.- The plan might include a detailed annual list of positive events on campus, more publicity for alumni who give back such as an honor roll of contributors for five consecutive years, 10 years and so on. The rate of return on gift annuities should be fully competitive. Legacy opportunities and responses should be made known. Basically, contact with alumni should be continuous, starting before graduation..  
Internal progress reporting should be at the highest level of administration and alumni councils. (Raising alumni giving from roughly 40% to about 60% is a concrete and achievable objective.)
2. Oberlin should aggressively seek grants emphasizing the college's historical achievements. E.g., Oberlin's pioneering efforts in women's and Black education can be the basis for renewed efforts in this direction, with history as a guide for content and appeal to foundations. (Oberlin could join the limited number of colleges offering a year of post-high-school prep for minorities provided proper financing is obtained. Aim for 95% college admissions of graduates.)
3. An exchange program permitting more specialization among nearby colleges and universities might be considered. E.g., the Oberlin Conservatory might make faculty and facilities available to neighboring institutions on a fee basis. The same idea could apply to the College for rarely taught courses.

**Michael Marvin '67**  
***Alumni***

To Whomever

Oberlin has been a very important part of my life. Though I only attended two years, it indelibly participated in the formulation of my beliefs, which has allowed me to live a life, which I am quite proud. As a sophomore, I married a graduating Obie. Though the marriage lasted less than 20 years, it produced 3 incredible children and 9 grandchildren. This introduction is only to communicate how important Oberlin is to me, so that my critical comments that follow will be taken as intending to be constructive and not dismissed. I have helped build more than 100 businesses and worked in and with more than a half a dozen colleges and universities in a variety of roles. My hope is that you find these comments useful and that you have the bravery and intestinal fortitude to do the right thing.

So with that in mind please read my comments. Thank you.

The first pass through the document was a scan, looking for the salient points of the plan. There were none. It was plain vanilla. What is Oberlin's mission? You, the

reader, can not tell me. It is lost in far too many words and platitudes. If you were in charge, what would you now do to execute this plan? I didn't have a clue and execution is one of my strengths. Everyone on campus could argue that they are already doing everything to execute the plan, right now. As a matter of fact, most people at any academic institutions would be able to argue the same thing.

I was the class of 1967. So in the last 50 years what I have been told by non-Obies about who and what Oberlin was, in order of frequency, is the following:

1. It is a music school.
2. It is very liberal and champions various forms of equality, race and women's rights in particular.
3. It produces pre-med and pre-law students.

The Oberlin plan should address these themes. Is this what you want? Do you want to change? I say, enhance these existing themes.

If so,

- Invest in making and maintaining the Conservatory as world renown. There is competition with lots of money and talent coming on strong from Asia. Europe produced most of the composers we listen to and the instruments we play. What are you going to do about it? What piece of music does Oberlin want to own? Be bold. State Big Hairy Audacious Goals, BHAGS, and go make them happen.
- The demographics of the world are compelling. The power base has been slowly shifting for hundreds of years. The reign of white man is ending in this world. People of color will be providing the majority of leadership going forward. Women will achieve their rightful place. Oberlin has had a leadership position in a country that has not had a history of supporting the previous statements. If Oberlin wishes to maintain (or arguably, regain) its leadership position, it needs to dramatically up it's game. Establish institutional themes with the intent of finding alternative solutions and consequences of failing to do so, Oberlin would need to create the environment and invite the faculty and students to address those themes, e.g. The Middle East, Palestine and Israel, China and the US, the United States of Europe and the US, religions, forms of existing governments, (representative democracies, dictatorships, socialism, and communism), over population and the environment, etc. By the focusing and recruitment of faculty and students, Oberlin can recreate the issues and identify alternative solutions. Oberlin can not select all of them, but could begin with one theme and develop overarching structural environment or methodology, which would allow others to be added. Oberlin could establish a microcosm of the world in the Midwest as a laboratory. Perhaps it could employ the newer technologies such as just-in-time distance learning, social media, big data, etc in the process.

- For pre-med and pre-law, Oberlin would have to determine what was compelling about the opportunity at Oberlin. Perhaps it would be to practice in geographic regions that Oberlin selected to pursue related to my second bullet. Perhaps you could provide scholarships to Law or Med schools to those who did commit to pursue careers in selected areas. What institution do you know that would provide scholarships to other schools? Oberlin would be once again be making a statement. Shortly after I left, the only alternative that was being considered was juicing the grades so that students would not be disadvantaged on their application for advanced degrees. Oberlin must aim higher.
- The first 3 bullets relate to comments I've heard most commonly associated with Oberlin. This bullet is about sports. Oberlin has always let everyone play. I think that is great. It was very important to me. However, excellence is also important. I would eliminate football. It is too expensive and produces lifelong harmful injuries to students who will never make it a career. I would invest more money and attention to women's sports. I would invest more in women's sports than in men's sports. I would try to be the best in the country at women's soccer. It is the world's sport and women are improving much more rapidly than men and are much further from all the negative controversies. For Obie's to be able to proud of their excellence at one sport and be able to participate in any sport would be a very health balance.

Recently, I have been helping a university establish a campus-wide entrepreneurial program. The best recent example of a plan for entrepreneurship we found was created by Princeton last year. I have attached it as an example of a plan well done. It contains: what they do and do not care about; demonstrates specific actions taken and to be taken; references strengths on which they intend to capitalize; and is short. Though it is not a plan for everything Princeton plans to do, I believe it is an excellent example of a plan for a theme to be executed by an entire institution.

If Oberlin is to be relevant, it must set its sights considerably higher. Its stock has deteriorated in the last 50 years. When I arrived, it was in the backdrop of having been the first college to integrate and to become coed. It was a highly selective school. When I visited President Dye some 40 years later, the only hot topic on campus was the injustice to the food workers on campus. A far cry from when we were out to stop an unjust war and social injustice across our entire country.

The increasing costs, increasing threat to campus life by online learning and other technologies, and need for employment are impacting higher education institutions in general, liberal arts schools in specific, especially those isolated such as Oberlin. My ideas could be considered high risk. I think the highest risk is accepting a plan like the one that has been developed. Oberlin must be brave and use its considerable intellect to forge an aggressive plan that clear establishes itself as a leader in something. It must develop a plan that everyone on campus and around the world can articulate. ( My first job was to help "Put a man on the Moon." It is simple, it is clear, and 10,000s of people in over 1000 companies with the entire nation, indeed the world knew what we were trying to accomplish. Oberlin needs that now. Anything less is too risky.

Thank you for listening. If I can be helpful you know how to reach me.

**William N. Wally '63 (Math major, physics minor)**  
*Alumni*

This draft plan needs an editor!

It is way too long, repetitive, and filled with cliches ("can and will succeed", "far-ranging and comprehensive", "working to make the world a better place for all", "challenging and fulfilling lives hereafter"...).

Get rid of all the conjunctions! Do you really need "challenging" **AND** "fulfilling", "far-ranging" **AND** "comprehensive"??? Just condensing them out would immediately reduce the number of words in the report by at least 15%.

Reduce it to a maximum of 6 pages (i.e. 3 double-sided sheets), and make the first page bullets that contain ALL the important points, on the (correct IMO) assumptions that

- Hardly anybody will get past the first page anyway
- Those that do read the whole thing might (like me) question why an Oberlin 5-year plan makes any more sense than did the former Soviet Union (or current Chinese Government) 5-year plans.
- The money/manpower cost in preparing such a plan might be better spent funding a scholarship, or maybe just a party to reward the Steering Committee for their high-quality "day jobs"...

Add some specifics (top-end budget numbers, expected percentage changes, enrollment numbers/changes, etc.)

Specify some metrics and deliverables, and also a process to monitor and possibly modify the plan as unanticipated events might require.

Finally, some quotes:

"A Mission Statement is defined as "a long awkward sentence that demonstrates management's inability to think clearly. All good companies have one."

(Scott Adams "The Dilbert Principle") See also

["http://dilbert.com/search\\_results?terms=Mission+Statement"](http://dilbert.com/search_results?terms=Mission+Statement)

"When my information changes, I alter my conclusions. What do you do, sir?"

— [John Maynard Keynes](#)

Curmudgeonly yours,

**Jeffrey A. Blakely '74**

*Alumni*

Dear Andrea and Chuck,

This is from Jeffrey A. Blakely, '74. The link was not organized for my comment, so I write you. Basically I found the plan quite reasonable and I strongly agree with it. My comment actually relates to a specific manner of implementation, or maybe actualization.

I teach at UW-Madison, but I am more of a researcher, although I do teach and I run an archaeological dig in Israel, one that Chuck might remember, the Tell el-Hesi dig where Tom Frank coordinated the student education program. My son went to Grinnell and my daughter is currently a Junior at Oberlin who is doing this semester abroad in Florence.

My comment relates to "educational experience beyond the class room" and "engagement with the world." Junior year abroad is a vital component that Oberlin does not push in any way comparable to Grinnell. This is the best way to accomplish the two quotes I noted. Emphasis and more direct Oberlin input in the programs would help. My daughter is the sole Obie in Florence on her program, which is fine, but more Oberlin faculty involvement in the programs is needed (like at Grinnell). In a related point, back when Chuck and I were students Tom Frank took students to Israel for the archaeological dig in the summer. This was my first international experience and quite important to me and my development. For those who might not be able to do a semester abroad, a summer project of any sort would be a viable option in my mind.

So, somehow, highlight study abroad via Oberlin in the implementation. Look at Grinnell.

**Max Rankeburg '98**

*Alumni*

2 November, 2015

Dear Authors,

The Strategic Plan looks good. I bet it looks very much like the last Strategic Plan. **What substantive changes have been made in terms of planning for the future in the last decade?** These are not reflected in this document.

There is not much to argue with or disagree about with the Strategic Plan because it does not really put forward innovative or challenging ideas. It hardly offers an argument.

Below I've commented on parts of the Plan as a draft-reader. These are not fully developed alternative ideas so much as points in the text that make me pause and reflect. Following these comments I'll summarize my position.

From page 5:

diversity on campus. We define diversity broadly, to encompass racial, ethnic, gender identity/identities, cultural, and socioeconomic factors. Toward this important end, Oberlin partnered with two high profile organizations that identify and recruit talented, motivated, high potential students from multicultural backgrounds who are low income. We have also sought out opportunities to partner with other community-based and educational organizations, domestic and global, to draw students to Oberlin from a broad range of cultural and social backgrounds.

What are these “high profile organizations”? Having trouble forming a diverse student body? **Lower the tuition.** Cut the tuition in half and you’ll have more students applying and many of these potential applicants will not only be excellent students but they’ll come from a socio-economic category that Oberlin doesn’t presently access: these students do not even *consider* applying to the school because they can’t afford it.

On a different note: I can’t believe the college pays a company to find applicants. What’s happened to the Yeoman spirit? Do it yourself, Oberlin.

page 6

To cite just two important pieces of evidence for this fact: Record numbers of high school students are now applying for admission to Oberlin, making us more selective than ever before. Meanwhile, philanthropy and engagement have increased across all segments of

There’s “selective” and then there’s “*selective*”. What does this mean? Is this only about numbers? Maybe a record number of high school students applied – I find this hard to believe and I don’t think, if this is a trend, that it will continue – but what’s the connection between the number of applicants and selectivity? The answer might seem obvious but I don’t think it is because the college doesn’t simply take 30% of its applicants: it *takes* certain kinds of students. If those kinds aren’t present in the applicant pool, then whether the college admits 30% or 40% or 20% doesn’t matter. It can’t *select* its students if what it sees in the applicants is a bunch of the same kind of people.

Unlike a great number of our peers, we do not have the financial resources to continue to increase the discount rate—the portion of tuition (“sticker price”) provided as financial aid from institutional resources. The last strategic plan called for the College to reduce the rate to achieve a goal of greater financial stability, and we have gradually done so and brought it down to a responsible level. This puts our finances on a more sustainable path for Oberlin’s long-term future and has positively influenced our credit rating, keeping our cost of borrowing low. We have maintained our commitment to meeting 100% of the demonstrated need for all admitted students; however, we recognize the consequences of reducing the discount rate include making the cost of attendance an issue for some students and prospective students. It also could affect our ability to admit and retain students with substantial need from underrepresented groups, which would be a concern in light of our commitment to diversity. We will seek to keep the proper balance between these goals.

That Oberlin looks at its “peers” for ideas or guidance or models is surprising and distressing. I don’t care what Amherst or Bowdoin or Kenyon or *any* of the other liberal arts colleges are up to. I want to see Oberlin in the headlines because it offers an excellent liberal arts education on its own terms and in its own way. (Needless to say: Forget about the US News World Report rankings. Forget it! Drop out of that pointless racket and students everywhere will pay attention.)

Next: “It also could affect our ability to admit and retain students with substantial need from underrepresented groups”! Who came up with this gem? **Of course** cutting financial aid affects who comes to the college. “It also could affect our ability”!! If the college really wanted a diverse student body, it would lower the tuition and, even then, offer substantial financial aid to anyone who needed it. The cost of attending Oberlin **should not be a factor** in the potential student’s application process. The college should encourage applications from everywhere, from all kinds of students; and then admit the best applicants *and then* deal with the money issue.

page 7

remain often require considerable assistance from multiple sources to send their children to college. While Oberlin has made progress on enrolling underrepresented students, it has not achieved its goals for diversity, a critical value of our institution. The economic challenges for students who are from lower income families and the first in their families to go to college, or are from historically underrepresented groups, continue to increase. At the same time, colleges and universities are facing demographic shifts in the student-age population—by 2022, nearly 50 percent of public high school graduates will be from historically underrepresented groups and many are expected to be first-generation—as well as increasing globalization, technological challenges and opportunities, and the emergence of new kinds of educational institutions in the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors that aggressively recruit students at a lower cost than Oberlin charges.

“its goals for diversity”: I would like to see these goals spelled out and explained. While a diverse student body *ought to be* valued by the college, and it has been valued, the obvious question we must ask now is this: How on earth can the college maintain “diversity” when it is one of the *most expensive* liberal arts colleges in the country? It is a simple question. The answer, and I would like to see it, is probably not so simple. “Diversity” is complicated. What is *not* complicated is the socio-economic split between the rich and privileged, and the struggling middle class and poor.

page 10

- **Diversity and community:** Oberlin is dedicated to diversity, inclusion, social justice, and an equitable educational environment, which are critical to the educational outcomes for all students and together enable community members to make important contributions to society.

One gets the feeling that the authors of the Plan are repeating certain keywords, mantras, to themselves, in the hope that reality might adjust accordingly. I don't want to argue against Oberlin's past successes in terms of doing things in socially progressive, equitable ways. But now, as above, how can Oberlin be "dedicated" to diversity and social justice when it, in fact, *excludes* many, many potential applicants because of its cost? These are students who do not apply to the college because it simply costs too much, and they fear that won't get financial aid, or won't even be admitted. The cost should not discourage potential applicants.

page 11

Oberlin is extremely well positioned to excel in every aspect of the education it provides for students. Direction 1 focuses on the concept of connected learning, an educational model that allows students to integrate coursework, advising, mentoring, internships and experiential learning, applied learning (that is, putting classroom learning to work in the real world), and personal support throughout their undergraduate careers. Connected learning is both *integrated* and *individualized*. It has proven itself many times over as a

When I attended Oberlin I integrated coursework, advising, mentoring, etc. etc., on my own, without anyone telling me to do so. I don't think we really had a choice. I can't imagine how students *can't* integrate these multiple parts of college life and get through college. Question: How is "connected learning" any different from what we had to do? What is this? A special name for "getting through college in five years without going nuts"?

page 12

At Oberlin, we believe the heart of connected learning is the subtle but powerful relationship among the College of Arts and Sciences, the Conservatory of Music, the Allen Memorial Art Museum, the Libraries, and the residential experience. The presence of these assets is unique among the country's top tier liberal arts colleges. Together—as core contributors to a larger whole—they help define us as surely as they influence the education of our students. The rich array of curricular, co-curricular, and

As above: "Connected learning". The education offered by these various parts – the college and conservatory, the libraries, museum, the community – is essentially what a liberal arts education is all about. It is not *that* unique, actually. I don't see what's important or fundamentally *new* about the "connected learning" plan. Save ink and paper: scrap it. It's already at work, it's what happens at a liberal arts college.

page 15

**What is new and distinctive** (see above for descriptions of each):

- 1) Oberlin 4+4
- 2) Connected Learning
- 3) “Big idea” course clusters

After reading the Strategic Plan I wanted to see more headings like this one: “What is new and distinctive”. Unfortunately what often follows the heading is not new or distinctive. “Connected Learning,” at least as it is described in the Plan, is nothing new. “Big idea” course clusters: They’re doing similar things, and have been doing similar things, *everywhere* for a long time now. (Who came up with this?) I’d cut it. Rethink. Revise.

page 16

How do we bring these great human resources—faculty, staff, and students—together for productive engagement? **A diverse community** is critical to fostering the spectrum of perspectives, interactions, and approaches upon which the most effective teaching and learning depend. We have a proud history of confronting and overcoming structural barriers to educational inclusion for African Americans and women. **This obligation to strengthen our diverse community is very much with us today.** Because general societal inequality makes some forms of diversity difficult for selective colleges to achieve, we must concentrate resources on surmounting those obstacles.

It is a *peculiar* sentence: “Because general societal inequality makes some forms of diversity difficult for selective colleges to achieve...” *Selective colleges*: Hmmmm, I think I get it. I mentioned this in an earlier comment. There’s “selective,” and there’s ***selective***. Clarify the point, authors. This is important. Is Oberlin a “selective” college in the way the Golf Course once was “selective”? (It encourages applications from *certain kinds of students*.) Or is it “selective” in the other sense, in terms of numbers? (It chooses the best candidates from its applicant pool.) This ambiguity is problematic and unacceptable. Rethink, revise.

honors its deep commitments to such critical goals as academic freedom and social change. **We are fortunate to have the Oberlin College Dialogue Center, a resource coordinated and overseen by the Office of the Ombudsperson. The Oberlin College Dialogue Center promotes social change through conflict transformation, mediation, community building, and dialogue, and it serves an important role in our community of active engagement.**

These next two are rich: “Oberlin College Dialogue Center”? Who came up with this? One of those high profile organizations? What do they do in this center? *What do they do in the Dialogue Center* that cannot be done in the classroom? In an open forum at the chapel? I can’t believe this. I don’t know a lot about the “Dialogue Center” but I bet it’s a

huge waste of money. Furthermore it's probably taking something important from the students' education: If dialogue is needed, they should start the dialogue themselves. They don't need a special person for guidance or a special place to go to in order to speak with each other about complex social issues. I can't believe this.

A recently created position, Special Assistant to the President for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, works with the campus community to implement Oberlin's sexual misconduct policy and further enhance institutional understanding of equity, diversity, and inclusion. This position has significantly improved Oberlin's ability to help not only our students but the entire community as we strive both to learn and deal effectively with these issues on our campus. Oberlin has made progress on developing initiatives to improve

Every "special" position created to solve whatever problem the college faces 1) takes money that could be used in better ways, in hiring another teacher, for example, and 2) misplaces the responsibility the students and faculty share in complex social issues, putting it elsewhere, in the lap of the Special Assistant. This position is absolutely unnecessary. I suppose on paper it satisfies some new-fangled expectation, but I have little doubt it is a waste of resources. "A Special Assistant for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion"? **What are teachers for?** I can't believe this.

So the college has a difficult time offering financial aid to students who "demonstrate" *need*, but it can create administrative positions like "Special Assistant to the President for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion"? And how much does this assistant earn each year? I'd like to see that spelled out in the next draft.

page 18

6. Recruit and retain students from a broad range of racial, ethnic, gender identity/identities, sexuality/orientation, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Develop additional future resources targeted to increasing the opportunity for enrollment of students from historically underrepresented communities in the United States.

Lower the tuition. Cut it in half, across the board. The students Oberlin wants will still apply, only there will be many, many more of them, and they will come from a far more interesting array of socio-economic categories than the present lot.

But the college needs the money: Fire the Diversity Specialist and other admin paper-pushers, phase out the varsity sports program, and cut the highest salaries of the faculty. (There – I said it!) If they leave, fine – you'll find better people who will accept less.

I went to a high school with about 3,000 students. We had one principal, a vice-principal, a nurse, a secretary, and many teachers. The classes were big, sure, but I received an excellent education. The cost: zero. Was it a diverse place? Without a question. In fact, now that I'm in reminiscence mode, I was immediately struck, at Oberlin, by just how *rich* my classmates were. I was moving up...

I wonder – are there studies? – what’s the connection between diversity in a student body and tuition rates? I’d like to see that spelled out.

Page 19

**What is new and distinctive:**

1) Develop new and enhance existing programs and services to support mental, emotional, and physical health and wellness.

2) Engage all members of the wider Oberlin community in stewardship of the College of

Again, what are teachers for? I’m not saying every teacher needs to *also* be a kind of therapist for each student, but teaching *does* entail many of these life-lessons. Teachers offer mental, emotional and physical support to their students. And *most* students, I think, cherish this support.

There are always exceptional cases. But I don’t think “developing new programs” is the right response.

The climbing wall, for example. Is that still around, in the gym? I saw a picture of it. I was speechless. *Really?* Is this candy to attract applicants? Really? Those *guys* are the kinds of people Oberlin wants? And how much did that cost? And how much did the special training the nurse in the gym needed to undergo in order to treat falling injuries cost? Sometimes, Dear Authors, it’s a no-brainer. Financial aid, or a climbing wall? Who makes these decisions?

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financial resources we need, and at the same time allow us to serve our students effectively and achieve our goals of diversity, inclusion, and access. We remain committed to meeting 100% of the demonstrated financial need of every student we admit and meeting these goals will require significant resources.

Pretty numbers. But what does it mean, exactly: “We remain committed to meeting 100% of the demonstrated financial need of every student we admit”? There’s a little hedging, isn’t there, in “remain committed to”? In other words: “We have the best intention of meeting 100%” etc., “but sometimes we fall a little short.” Clarify this point.

It looks good, at a glance, but there’s a quiet ambiguity here that’s kind of annoying. Does it mean: Financial aid is given to every student who needs financial aid *and* in the amount of aid the student requests? Clarify the point.

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13. Slow the rate of annual increases in student charges—tuition, fees, room and board—while developing resources to ensure that we can offer an opportunity for enrollment to a student body from the United States and abroad that represents a broad range of racial, ethnic, gender identity/identities, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The college will never have a student body representing a spectrum of students from different socio-economic categories as long as it remains one of the most expensive colleges in the country. I'm not an economist but it doesn't take one to see the obvious problem here. You keep saying "diversity" (or "a broad range of racial, ethnic," and so on and so on) but your audience isn't really that diverse – is it?

**What is new and distinctive:** Slow the rate of annual increases in student charges—tuition, fees, room and board.

*Stop* these increases. *That* would be new and distinctive. *That* might make new friends among the alumni. Save money by cutting administrative positions and closing offices that do work that could just as easily be done by teachers (teachers who probably earn less than many of the "Special Assistants").

Finally, to summarize my response to this draft of the Strategic Plan 2016-2021: With a tuition exceeding \$50,000 a year, the college cannot have the diverse student body it wants to have or purports to have. It is impossible. Who are you trying to kid?

Many potential students do not apply to the college or conservatory because the tuition is too high. You might pride yourself on being more selective than ever, on offering financial assistance to those in need, but so long as the tuition is so high there isn't much selection occurring: the price tag determines who comes to the door. Oberlin is indeed a very selective college.

I'm afraid Oberlin will become, if it hasn't already become, just another one of "those schools". The college and conservatory may have once stood out as models for a liberal arts education, but so long as the college pays so much attention to its competition against its so-called peers – and what does this competition actually entail? Spell that out in the next draft of the Strategic Plan – so long as the college looks at others for its methods and style, then Oberlin's reputation, alas, will only exist in the history books.

Cut administrative positions. For 2,900 students, just how many non-teaching staff or administration positions does the college actually need? Spell that out in the next draft. Fire the "recent addition" of the Diversity Supervisor, and offer a tenure track position in 20th century American History.

Phase out the varsity athletics program. Cut that fat from *that* side of student life and hire more faculty in geology, environmental science, and dance. The college will save

millions of dollars. The students will be happy – after a year or two of complaints and protest – playing intramural sports on the weekend, in their spare time.

Lower the tuition. \$50,000 for a degree from a liberal arts college is absurd. (I'd like to see a description of where every dollar goes. What exactly is so expensive about going to school at Oberlin?) Of course, the tuition can continue to increase, and students will still apply, and everyone can continue to line their pockets. But if that's what we opt for, then let's get serious about the kind of student body we envision for the future, in ten or twenty years, and let's have an honest discussion about where we see these students going after college and about what we see them doing. I know I'm addressing complex points in a simplistic way, but I read the news, I see just as well as anyone else what's happening in the world: as wealth gets isolated in certain sectors and with certain people, it seems to be harder and harder to stop or change the course of these trends. And societal violence – related to poverty, to perceived and real inequalities – is increasing, and not just in the states, but everywhere.

My point is this: Oberlin can respond to the economic trends, and can truly intervene in culture at this time, by addressing tuition rates. Lower tuition rates significantly, draw from a much larger applicant pool, and admit only the best students. The students will give Oberlin its reputation and secure its successes in the future. But the student body must be truly diverse. (Although the diversity question is difficult to answer, the Strategic Plan might provide more description on this point, on what exactly the college has in mind when it thinks of “diversity” in the student body.) Without diversity, it is not difficult to see, the college will continue to attract more of the same, in which case it will probably continue to follow policies that secure *more of the same*. I'm not an economist but if you, Dear Authors, think “more of the same” will suffice in ten or twenty years, or in fifty years, then you are wrong.

Something must change, and must change soon. This does not mean open a new administrative position! That is not novelty: that is old hat and a waste of resources.

Try something *radical*. Lower the tuition. Motivate *twice* as many, three times as many applicants to the college. Then let's discuss planning for the future.

Sincerely yours,

**Michael Millen '92**  
***Alumni***

In completing the Oberlin strategic plan survey I had hoped and expected that there would be a blank space to encourage alumni to express their thoughts. Since the survey was structured to encourage brevity, rather than encouraging an open dialog, I am responding directly to the Alumni e-mail.

It was with sadness that I read in the strategic plan the need for the Oberlin board to have to cut programs due to a decreasing endowment and increased financial

constraints. Although this message was not clearly stated, it was quite clearly heard in reading between the lines of the plan.

Yet, based on simple economic principles it is not surprising to hear of the need to cut programs.

Since graduating from Oberlin I have been quite dissatisfied with the Oberlin alumni office and the Oberlin office of financial development. Having had experience with other institutions of learning development offices I know that Oberlin could be doing better.

Rather than creating funky and confusing terms for a fundraising campaign, and expecting that alumni will all of a sudden start giving after years of not giving when someone happens to strike it rich, the offices should reach out to alumni on day one and ask for donations. Five dollars a year for ten years while someone is continuing in their education of higher learning may eventually turn into tens of thousands of dollars down the road. Yet, a pattern of not giving on the day of graduation leads to a continued pattern of not giving even when someone has financial means. Oberlin should push for 100% giving, of any amount, in addition to large donations from small groups.

The message of the most recent campaign, "Oberlin Illuminate" was so confusing, that my wife and I, after continuous giving every year since graduating, decided not to give to the campaign. I still don't get the point of the campaign. What exactly are we trying to "illuminate?" The campaign was so poorly organized and messaged to the alumni that we truly had concerns that we would be giving our money to an institution that could not responsibly manage our giving dollars. The message delivered to the alumni should be crystal clear - we need money to keep the Oberlin mission alive. Period. Give the student body, faculty, and alumni transparency of the books. Show people how expensive it is to run the institution and the fact that while tuition dollars are quite steep, the tuition probably doesn't come close to balancing the budget.

If Oberlin wants to keep the mission alive the best thing to do is invest in someone that understands how to run a development office. The reason the endowment is weak is not to due the alumni. It is due to the poor performance of the development office.

Reach out to the alumni early and often. Give us a clear message of the goals of giving. That will grow the endowment and keep the Oberlin mission alive.

Thank you.

**Nancy L. Nicalo '52**  
*Alumni*

I have a few comments.

Advisers should know as much as possible about the student's background: small school, private, small hometown with limited resources etc. This would be useful to alert for the need for support

I am pleased with the use of the campus year round.

I felt an overemphasis on rapid change .I prefer steady with time to digest. Too much in our world wants us to go faster putting unnecessary pressure on.

I was glad that Oberlin placed the international students in normal dorm situations rather than stashing them in an "international house". If possible some from each continent would be helpful, giving exposure to the world.

1:13:00 PM 11.12.15

**Corey Barnes, Faculty**

Hi Kathryn,

My apologies for offering comments after the requested deadline and outside of the suggested formats. The survey did not quite allow what I hope to convey, and my schedule has shifted, preventing me from attending this afternoon's faculty session.

I appreciate very much the planning committee's work in crafting this draft. More specifically, I find myself in strong agreement with the mission statement and the identification of these three strategic directions. In the hopes of continuing to refine the document, I want to offer a few remarks about what I view as room for improvement.

First, and though I understand this document intends to remain at the strategic level and to defer the tactical details of implementation to other bodies and venues, I hope the plan can include more specific guidance or a framework for the plan's implementation. I noticed this particularly under the second direction. Three of the numbered points indicate what will, ideally, happen, such as developing new and exciting ideas or new programs. Without identifying any specifics or even the bodies responsible for this task, this reads far too much like a recognition of the need for a plan rather than as a plan. In my experience, it is difficult to plan on developing exciting new ideas and programs.

Second, and not unrelated, I would enjoy the strategic plan offering some sense of the balance of priorities. I appreciate the purposeful sequencing of the directions, but I am unsure of what this implies regarding their relative importance. The root of my concern is that the board of trustees, college administrators, faculty, and staff will later be called upon to implement this plan. As it stands, this plan identifies important and vital values, but in so doing it also sets up the potential for interference or competition between these values. The most obvious example concerns promoting the college's financial health while also developing new programs and initiatives. While no plan can foresee the individual conflicts that might arise, I would hope the strategic plan could specify clearly and definitively what it takes to be the relationship between the directions. More specifically, in a time of clear financial uncertainty, I hope the strategic plan will affirm the necessity of balancing these three directions such that none eclipses the others. Though I am particularly concerned about the college's long-term financial health, I also firmly believe that we cannot pursue the institution's financial health in a way that

undermines or ignores the fundamental values that have historically defined the institution. The college's financial stability or even viability cannot, in my opinion, come at the expense of its identity. Rather, I hope the strategic plan can express and embrace the notion that it is only through the continuing promotion of these fundamental values that the institution can achieve its goals of sustainable finances.

Thank you,  
Corey  
11.19.15

**The Working Group on Disability and Access, *Student/Faculty/Staff Hybrid***

**I. Disability in Oberlin**

Disability intersects with all aspects of human identity, and disability in all of its forms—visible and invisible; physical, mental, and sensory; permanent, intermittent, and temporary—touches the lives of students, staff members, faculty, administrators, and guests of Oberlin College. While we applaud the inclusion of language of access and inclusion in the mission statement on page 9, we are concerned that little else of our response to the Preliminary Report seems to have been addressed in the current draft of the Strategic Plan. Our response to you today includes many quotations from our earlier response. These we have set off in italics.

Our biggest concern is for the severely limited view of disability that appears within the Strategic Plan. As we wrote in our Preliminary Report response:

*The “deficit” model of disability has long prevailed, suggesting that disability is a product of lack or weakness on the part of an individual. Yet scholarship and experience show us that complex social and historical factors—such as the presumption of incompetence or the lack of adaptive or assistive technology—can and do render a person disabled as much as any bodily condition.*

If the College continues to cast disability in terms of deficit then disabled community members will only be understood as people with needs who draw from precious resources. We advocate instead for a larger view of people with disabilities as full-fledged community members with gifts who contribute to Oberlin College.

Our earlier response to you included a telling figure:

*Students with documented disabilities currently comprise 20% of the Oberlin student body.*

We emphasized at the time that disability is never the only feature defining a person:

*Many of these students also identify with other underrepresented populations whom we wish to attract to the College. Disability is present, though under-acknowledged among the faculty, and staff. In recognition of intersecting identities, we are calling for a specific*

*discussion of the spectrum of learning styles and differences already or soon to be in our community.*

## **II. Disability and diversity**

Enlarging our collective view people with disabilities will only have a positive impact on our efforts to enhance diversity. As we wrote in September:

*Core Value #3, that “Oberlin must reaffirm and revitalize its historical commitment to diversity”, matters a great deal to all of us. Disability has as yet only a limited presence in Oberlin’s thinking about diversity, and we see this as an area for growth. We encourage the Strategic Planning team to bring new contours to this important discussion: what does it mean to value and include people with a whole range of differences? How might including bodily, sensory, mobility, and communicative difference expand our current understanding of diversity?*

*The Strategic Plan affords Oberlin the opportunity to take a clear, public stand on access and inclusion as issues of diversity. With a concerted effort, we can strengthen our foundations and connect currently disparate resources in order to realize our ideals. In particular, we ask members of the Strategic Planning Bicentennial group to address neurodiversity in the current and future student body.*

*(...) Oberlin has already done much to welcome students with disabilities, yet this [strategic planning process] opens up opportunities to do more. We are poised to become a national leader in higher education for students with disabilities, particularly those on the autism spectrum.*

The Strategic Plan should acknowledge that disability contributes to representational and to intersectional diversity on our campus. A fully inclusive community remains an ideal, yet we believe that we can only make progress toward realizing it if we are explicit about this goal. As we noted earlier:

*We recommend that the Strategic Planning team be specific about what equity means. In our view, equity entails providing pathways to success for all learners and employees here. Oberlin as an institution must take an active role in providing those pathways. The Plan should acknowledge that bringing together students and staff with a range of learning styles contributes to interactional diversity.*

## **III. Sustainability and Universal Design**

We applaud the Strategic Plan’s emphasis on sustainability as a key Oberlin value and guiding principle. In support of that value, we ask for a reframing of campus-wide goals—for architecture, for programs, for communications, for our curriculum, for our evaluation protocols—using the principles Universal Design.

Sustainability and Universal Design go hand in hand. As we noted earlier:

*We advocate for a comprehensive commitment to improved access to our physical plant, curricular and co-curricular programming, and communication. We need to wean ourselves from costly stopgap measures, i.e. purchasing expensive assistive technology on short notice in response to an individual demand. Our choices should be informed by Universal Design, a set of principles that enables us to plan for the greatest possible inclusion from the outset, as opposed to costly retrofitting. Because we can anticipate that more students with disabilities will come to Oberlin—and eventually become alumni who return to Oberlin expecting access to alumni events—we should regard accessible infrastructure and related accessibility services as necessary investments.*

The infrastructure for Universal Design is already here in our array of human and curricular resources in the College of Arts and Sciences, the Conservatory, and the Museum. We need to set aside time to inform ourselves about how to remove or mitigate barriers to full participation.

#### **IV. Accessibility deserves our time, attention, and money**

We applaud the Plan's commitment to building Oberlin's endowment. Too many disability-related initiatives are currently funded with short-term grants that cannot be sustained.

We applaud the Plan's commitment to slow tuition hikes.

We underscore the need to plan for the widest range of participants in any new program or facility that the College envisions. Existing programs and facilities must also be made more accessible to a wider range of users. We need not only accessible physical structures to support Oberlin's mission, but also widely accessible modes of engagement. Enhanced communication is vital. Innovative and sustainable technologies for communication are thus worthy investments. As we noted earlier:

*Welcoming, accessible living environments and dining options lead to better performance in class and in co-curricular activities.*

Welcoming and accessible working environments can only yield better performance among faculty, staff, and administrators.

#### **V. Implementing the Strategic Plan**

Implementation groups need to include disability-centered representation. Their moving forward should include disability in a more intentional way than the Strategic Plan currently details.

We see great potential in the proposed Innovation Zone. As we noted earlier:

*We are excited by the possibilities of the proposed innovation zone and envision many creative uses for such a physical and conceptual space. Because our overarching goal is to position Oberlin as a leader in educating students with disabilities, we propose that the innovation zone be used to introduce Universal Design into our thinking and planning. Such a “safe space” for experimentation would support instructors in developing classroom pedagogy as well as curricular design. The innovation zone would create supportive conditions for professors to try to take more risks, a goal recently articulated in the CCC listening groups.*

Our Working Group advocates constructive improvements appropriate for Oberlin and in accordance with the purposes of Universal Design. As we noted earlier:

*Oberlin should design for equitable access with the future in mind. The ever-changing nature of disability itself allows us to anticipate needs with some assurance. Any person can acquire a disability at any stage of life. It is not too far-fetched to propose that a non-disabled person today might, as a result of accident or illness, become disabled and need services later in the week. Alternately, disabling conditions can be temporary. It is therefore essential that support structures and services be readily available. Because we know that access is needed now and will still be needed later, let us plan for economic sustainability with regard to accessibility in curricular and facilities planning.*

12.2.15

**Oberlin College General Faculty Committee on Equity and Diversity  
Faculty Group**

Open Letter Response to the draft of the Strategic Plan circulated 27 October 2015

Dear Strategic Planning Committee,

As members of the Oberlin College General Faculty Committee on Equity and Diversity, joined by other faculty and staff, we write to express our disappointment in the draft of the Strategic Plan circulated on 27 October 2015. As a follow up to the letter of suggestions that we sent you, published on 5 December 2014 in The Oberlin Review (<http://oberlinreview.org/6977/opinions/open-letter-from-oberlins-equity-and-diversity-committee/>), we have the following concerns:

- The current draft of the plan fails to provide a definition of “diversity” that constructs a firm standard by which members of the College can judge future policies and processes. The draft uses language that does not articulate the imperative we see to dismantle systemic inequities and foster an institutional climate that effectively addresses the histories, cultures, contributions, and needs of historically underrepresented, lower income, first generation, and international faculty, staff, and students who are currently part of Oberlin and whom we call on the College to recruit and retain in greater numbers in the future. “Diversity,” while an easier concept to use to gain acceptance of all current Oberlin constituents, will not serve our future well.

- We also agree with the Working Group on Disability and Access that the current draft of the Strategic Plan has too limited a view of the issues of disability, barriers, and access. Oberlin College's policies in their current form adversely affect first generation and students with developing study skills, as well as students with physical, psychological, and learning differences. Questions of access also affect faculty and staff. Therefore we join the Working Group on Disability and Access in calling for the adoption of Universal Design as a primary guiding principle for Oberlin's future, and an expanded view of people with disabilities as full fledged members of the campus community, with gifts to contribute as well as needs for inclusion. All members of the community stand to benefit from making decisions with Universal Design as a guiding principle.
- "Diversity's" place in Oberlin's continuing mission as an elite liberal arts college and conservatory is most clearly asserted in the drafted Strategic Plan's second direction for Oberlin's future, "Strengthening Oberlin's community," but it is equally important to the other two directions discussed and deserves specific goals. The stress on "connected" learning in the first direction, for example, does not address the dire need of all US citizens and arguably all peoples in the world to better understand the complex origins of conflict that systems of colonialism, racism, and economic injustice have caused and which affect all other productions of knowledge in the academy. Furthermore the first direction does not address the complex differences that exist in various students' backgrounds and ongoing connections to their experiences of these forms of inequality, which will pose considerable pedagogical challenges to current and future faculty. Expanded curricular focus and pedagogical training needs to be devoted to the growing knowledge of historically underrepresented people and systems of social and economic injustice if Oberlin is to live up to our reputation as a leader for access and inclusion. Even in the second direction of the Strategic Plan, where the benefits of recruiting a "diverse community" are discussed most thoroughly, no specific goals for achieving clear and measurable outcomes are given.
- The document does not address the College's historical and current reputation for leading in issues of gender and sexuality. For example, inclusion issues for transgender students, faculty, and staff, which range from teaching and supervisory capacities to record systems and physical plant design that enable full recognition of an individual's identity, are not addressed in any section of the strategic plan at this time. Nor is there recognition that the intersection of identities means that such planning oversights disproportionately impact transgender students who are students of color, international students, disabled students, first generation students, or any combination of these and other domains of inequality.

As a result of these concerns, we propose that one concrete and achievable goal that Oberlin College can assert in its strategic plan is raising the number of Black and

Latina/o faculty in tenurable positions to 20% by year 2020. A comparable goal of recruitment and retention for Academic and Professional staff should also be set. By setting goals for recruiting Black and Latina/o faculty and staff we do not mean to preclude any efforts to increase hiring faculty and staff of other groups such as Native Americans, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Middle Eastern/Arab people. Rather we propose to address the longest deferred goals first, and expect that attracting more Black and Latina/o faculty and staff will help our institution evolve in ways that will more quickly make it hospitable to others we should seek.

Currently 7% of our faculty are Black (4% of whom are outside of Africana Studies) and 3% of our faculty are Latina/o. We know, however, that currently slightly over half of all children in the US under the age of five are minorities people of color and that by 2030, 25% of the US population will be Latina/o. To be clear: it is a certainty that the majority of Oberlin's student body will eventually be people of color, who will expect representation among the faculty and staff of the institution. It is similarly inevitable that at some point, the majority of faculty and staff in higher education will also be mostly people of color. The only question is whether our institution will be a leader in diversity efforts, or be forced to change through a process that will be far more painful and slow.

We believe that this is the most pressing need of our institution at this time and will lead to many other measurable benefits, including: a campus climate that better supports student well-being and the core missions of the College and Conservatory, increased recruitment and retention of students who are members of historically underrepresented or under-supported groups and reduced stress for those students, and curricular diversification through recruitment of a more diverse pool of faculty reflective of the U.S. and the world.

Making this change in the demographics of our faculty and staff is achievable in the next five years. We urge you to make this very specific goal a part of the Strategic Plan before it is presented for final approval.

Sincerely,

Members of the General Faculty Committee on Equity and Diversity

Rick Baldoz

Monique Burgdorf

Jan Cooper

Andrés Fernández

Janet Fiskio

Jennifer Fraser

Elizabeth Hamilton

Christopher Jenkins

Joy Karega

Shane McCrae

Pablo Mitchell

Meghan Morean

Meredith Raimondo

Matthew Wright

and other co-signers:

Naomi Campa  
Meredith Gadsby  
Sergio Gutierrez Negron  
Gillian Johns  
Leslie Kwakye  
Charles Peterson  
Chie Sakakibara  
Caroline Jackson Smith  
Harrod Suarez  
Natasha Tessone  
Clovis White

9:46:00 PM 12.06.15

**Roger and Helen Falcon**  
*Alumni*

Reflections on: Draft Oberlin Strategic Plan 2016-2021  
From: Roger Falcon '92, 1990s Decade Chair, Development Committee  
Date: November 10, 2015 (received 12.06.15)

The draft strategic plan rightly acknowledges Oberlin's many strengths and unique legacy while also recognizing current and future challenges. It lays out a solid vision and set of strategies for the next few years. Many elements are welcome, including a commitment to meeting the financial aid needs of all admitted students, as well as to ongoing efforts to insure diversity at Oberlin. In order to insure that resources are available to meet Oberlin's ambitious goals, current funding levels need to increase. Therefore, an expanded role for major gifts, the Annual Fund and the class agent program needs to be added as an explicit strategy.

There is much about ideas to increase exchange across the different areas of the school, including the Oberlin 4-4, a welcome focus on current students as they become young alums. As a College student who sang in the Choir and spent many hours in the Conservatory, and counted this as a particularly enriching aspect of an Oberlin education, the desire to reinforce collaboration among College, Conservatory, and Museum is promising. One initiative that deserves to be mentioned is the Oberlin Center for Languages and Cultures, whose focus is to encourage collaboration across academic disciplines and which is carrying out exciting projects such as ObieMAPS, a new way to visualize campus-wide academic content and activity. The manner in which "connected learning" also includes personal and professional development will serve to make Oberlin even more relevant to alums.

The support strongly expressed for a diverse student body is both crucial and welcome. The broad definition of diversity, to include first generation students as well as historical minorities and gender identification, is very important. The commitment to meeting the financial needs of all admitted students continues a return to Oberlin's historic position

that was briefly put into question in the early 1990s before the ship was righted. Such a commitment will help immeasurably with alumni engagement and fundraising. The fact that it is repeated with such insistency shows that the authors clearly understand Oberlin's history and deepest purpose.

The new mission statement is therefore welcome. One area that should be stressed is the "free and respectful exchange of ideas". Of late, Oberlin seems to have been in the press a fair amount for its efforts to "protect" students from material which they might find challenging. This makes it sound like Oberlin is joining the bandwagon of, say, removing Huck Finn from course lists because it contains the "n" word, which ignores the ways in which this book set out a radical challenge to dominant racial attitudes of the time. Surely it is possible to insure a positive and diverse learning experience without excluding texts or ideas but by encouraging and supporting students as they learn critical thinking skills and discernment.

Concerning the financial situation, the call for "life-long engagement with wise stewardship of the institution" is the base on which all else rests. For if Oberlin is to remain competitive and to continue to carry out its mission, financial resources must be assured. The fact that Oberlin's endowment is smaller than many peer institutions presents, as is noted here, an extra challenge. The reduction in the payout from the endowment will help, as will an analysis of current expenditures to insure efficiency. As a graduate of the early 1990s, I am particularly pleased to see oversight of spending included in core strategies; it is important to avoid the errors of this earlier period, for instance the cost overruns and poor design of the Stevenson Dining Hall. More recent construction of luxurious student housing also caused consternation. Recognizing Oberlin is competing for students against numerous peers, Oberlin nonetheless needs to focus its resources on areas such as educational offerings and faculty compensation that have a direct impact on the educational mission. On the positive side, such remarkable and well planned additions as the Lewis Environmental Center and the new jazz building, as well as the renovation of the movie theatre and expansion of film studies, will serve to keep Oberlin at the cutting edge for years to come. The recent renovation of the Museum was a farsighted preservation of the College's resources. An additional area that is receiving much needed attention is entrepreneurship. The naming of a director of entrepreneurship is exciting, which along with numerous efforts – LaunchU, the Ignition Fund, and more – represent another growing area of strength that will serve to engage alumni and the broader community.

The strategic recommendations for Direction 3 are all sound. A glaring omission, however, is the lack of an expanded role for major gifts, the Annual Fund and the class agent program. All three are hard at work, with a special mention for the terrific staff led tirelessly by Danielle Young in her expanded role. But more is needed if Oberlin is to maintain and grow available resources. The allocation of additional resources to this effort must be a top priority of the strategic plan. Even acknowledging the current rebuilding, the Fund staff is stretched thin. Neither staff nor committee members have much say in the goals we are supposed to meet, which results in sometimes unrealistic expectations and a feeling of not being heard. The transition of the committee to a board,

currently under review, is aimed at increasing the clout of the fundraisers. There must clearly be more to assuring financial sustainability than “analyzing current expenditures, determining appropriate tradeoffs, and reallocating funds accordingly.” Oberlin needs to bring in additional resources, and this should be stated front and center, as should the necessary commitment of additional resources required to make this possible.

*A culture of philanthropy* needs to become part of the Oberlin experience as well as an expectation of the broader community, particularly alumni. This is not true for the generation currently in and approaching their 50<sup>th</sup> reunions. Recent years have shown tremendous and humbling 50<sup>th</sup> reunion gifts. It is a significant concern for more recent alumni, notably those in and approaching their 25<sup>th</sup> reunions. In part, this is due to life circumstances, including the high levels of student debt incurred and the challenging economic context they have faced. Another aspect, however, is a lack of comfort of more recent Oberlin generations around money. A cultural shift is therefore needed. This is hardly to say that Oberlin will ever become a prep school for business school. It is, however, necessary to issue a call, one as clear as that for a diverse student body, for a culture of philanthropy to become an additional defining feature of Oberlin. Current students hear about and participate in a class gift, and ways need to be found to keep the momentum going after graduation, as loans hit – a common concern in academia. The more financial aid provided, the better current students are able to enter their post-graduation lives. In order to provide this, Oberlin counts on the generosity of its alumni. Hammering home this kind of simple message will reinforce this culture of giving back, which needs to spread throughout the institution. The strategic plan needs to say so, and should advocate expanded resources for fundraising, unambiguously.