

The Oberlin College Strategic Plan Steering Committee
Meetings June 4-5, 2015
Summary of meetings revised 033116

Meeting June 4, 2015, 1:00-6:00 p.m.

In attendance: Co-Chairs D. Yu, M. Krislov; K. Stuart, B. Doan

B. Alegant	M. Frandsen	A. McKee	<u>Coordinator:</u>
H. Arp (Zoom)	M. Gadsby	C. McGuire	K. Stuart
R. Cheung	B. Geitz	U. Mvurya	B. Doan
M. Coward	A. Hargrave	M. Peters	<u>Guests:</u>
T. Cooper	C. Howell	L. Wagner	J. Babyak
S. Davis	J. Howsmon	A. Wurtzel	B. Barlow
(Zoom)	E. Inglis	S. Zagarell	D. Chermonte
M. Deane	A. Kalyn		C. Christ
A. Derstine	R. Lemle		E. Estes
L. Edwards	L. Manz		R. Peacock
T. Elgren			F. Protzman

June 4, 2015: Oak/Elm Room, Oberlin Inn

1. Introductions

Pres. Krislov began with opening remarks that thanked everyone for their work and acknowledged coming changes on the Steering Committee. Diane Yu laid out the agenda for the Thursday and Friday meeting schedule.

2. Presentation on Finances and the Strategic Plan

Mike Frandsen gave a detailed Power Point presentation on Oberlin's finances, and how this would shape strategic planning.

- There was then a general discussion on Mike's presentation; topics included:
 - Expectations for investment returns.
 - Revenue from new sources.
 - What competitors will be doing in comparison to Oberlin. The trend overall is for discount rates to be increasing.
 - Should we make a bigger decrease immediately?
 - Some institutions are finding ways to freeze tuition (and maybe financial aid) at the price it was when a student matriculates; it was noted that this model has not worked well at other schools.
 - Oberlin's loan model and its financial aid. The average loan burden for Oberlin students is around \$24-26,000. The national average is \$35,000.
 - Reducing benefits; examining building usage with the goal of reducing number.
 - Technology and utilities are also expenses.
- Mike offered some recommendations:

- Offering more summer programs sponsored by or connected to the College and Conservatory.
- Thinking about early retirement as a tool.
- Looking at benefits programs (for instance, offering a new health insurance “option” to faculty and staff, rather than just one universal program).
- Investigating whether we’re at the right levels of staffing across campus.
- Examining financial aid and determining whether or not are we using our merit aid program effectively.
- Exploring facilities costs—taking a hard look at what we can take offline.
- Other suggestions from the large group included: having rolling admits in the second semester; developing a 3-year degree program; working to increase February admits.
- It was asked what the costs of tuition for families of faculty/staff are, and how that discount affects revenue.

3. Discussion of Summary Document

- Kathryn Stuart offered a breakdown of the numbers and statuses on responses to the Preliminary Report.
- Diane Yu then opened the meeting to questions, comments, and a general discussion of the document. Comments included:
- Reduce the size of the document and remove redundancy.
- Timing of the Preliminary Report’s release and if we should recirculate the document now in hopes of getting more responses.
 - Important to get buy-in and feedback, and educate community about challenges we’re facing.
 - Could we be more purposeful about creating focus groups to have such discussions next fall?
 - Decision not to recirculate

4. Second Plenary Session: Small Group summaries

Tappan Room Summary

- Mission Statement: The second sentence is moved to become the third sentence. Add “residential” before “liberal arts.” Added “re-champion education and access for all...and an enduring commitment to a sustainable and just society.”
- Delete Core Values: Everything we hold dear as a core value is contained in mission statement, except sustainability, hence the sentence above.
- Missing: Reference to city of Oberlin (and/or how to define such a reference); teaching/excellence in teaching should be highlighted; we need the concept of the residential college added to Mission Statement; continuing to be “best-kept secret” doesn’t help us—how do we define our brand? We should make more explicit in the document.
- Reshaping/reframing via “Guiding Principles”: These are pillars or buckets—we should be able to test our strategies against these 7 items (in order to streamline):
 1. Financial
 2. Faculty
 3. Students

4. Sustainability
 5. Interaction with the Oberlin Community
 6. Synergy between parts of Oberlin College and Conservatory
 7. The context of higher education and Oberlin's response to its changes (this seventh is not currently in the document).
- Next Steps: The Strategies are there, and are the basis of what we should be doing (in relation to Guiding Principles): For instance, “embrace innovative learning” maps to three of those guiding principles. We don't lose content, we just lose language/jargon.

Oak Room summary:

- Like the Mission Statement, but would like a Vision Statement—one sentence we can all say, remember, and be proud of.
- End of the mission statement vague—“change value in the world”—how can we make that more concrete? Like the forward-facing nature of it, but perhaps we should add a paragraph about Oberlin history.
- Core Values: Align them more with the Mission Statement, and expand them.
Proposed five Core Values:
 1. Educational experience and excellence.
 2. Centrality of role of faculty in teaching, scholarship and advising.
 3. Commitment to diversity of community.
 4. Expansion of environmental sustainability to one about social engagement and environmental sustainability.
 5. Financial accessibility.
- Strategic Directions: Expanded section on staff to talk about competitive compensation. Discussed reorienting the financial model, and engaging community in that process. Strategic Direction K (governance): not clear which Core Value/s that was in service of.

Elm Room summary:

- Mission Statement: Edited to shorten: “here's what Oberlin does and why.” Worried about the clichéd sound of some of the Mission Statement language.
- Core Values: They came up with Five:
 1. Faculty and staff (reworked to talk about faculty and staff themselves, rather than the student experiences those people provide).
 2. The “Big 3” (Combination of College/Con/Art Museum).
 3. Diversity, equity, inclusion, and civil discourse (with a desire to pare down this section).
 4. Environmental sustainability (which stayed the same as on the edits handout).
 5. Financial stability (1a and 1b on document—shifting the from a Strategic Direction to a Core Value). They Eliminated Core Value 2, and felt the remainder are all really Strategic Directions.
- Strategic Directions: They thoughts these could be reconfigured to fit under the above 5 values.

5. Discussion of Small Group Reports

Where are alignments of 3 small groups' suggestions today?

- General agreement that 10 core values is too many, and there is overlap/blurring with strategic directions; Oak and Elm came up with the same 5 values; there are overlaps with Tappan's 7 values (we can therefore find 5-7 that work).
- Combine Guiding Principles and Strategic Directions under those 5-7 Values. Don't lose ideas, but trim and consolidate them.
- Some Core Values: city/community; teaching excellence; perceived value of Oberlin education and Oberlin as a residential college; uniqueness of College, Conservatory and Museum blend; "civil discourse" as part of diversity; governance piece.
- How does the Strategic Plan reflect the unknown? What's the balance between "bold experimentation" or "vision" and the practical unfolding of it?
- Long-term, ongoing strategic planning happens all the time, and we need to think of it as a habit of mind rather than a one-time process.

Group leaders will send their notes to Kathryn and Brian, who would synthesize the materials and create a working draft within the next couple of weeks.

6. Schedule

- By early Fall, should have a re-written mission statement, shortened/rewritten Core Values and appropriately-placed Strategic Directions, and some recommendations. Material to various communities in different forms—questions, focus groups, small groups. Go to departments and programs for specific suggestions on implementation of recommendations, working with Deans, alumni, student groups, and Administrative and Professional Staff on the proper communications.
- Building on Mike's financial model over the summer to provide good potential responses to Preliminary Report respondents' concerns about money.
- Concerns about when process will be done—either at the December board meeting or March board meeting? Kathryn noted that, in order to make sure the vetting process with all communities takes the time it needs, a December approval means GFC would have to approve it by November. This seemed unlikely. Perhaps the more judicious way to go would be March 4-5 Board meeting. There was a general approval of this idea.
- The conversation turned toward planning the next set of meetings. Hope to have two Zoom meetings in summer, and one long meeting in early September, then begin to vet recommendations. The meeting then adjourned.

June 5, 2015: Oberlin Inn Dining Room

1. Introductions

- Clyde McGregor opened with remarks thanking everyone for coming, recognizing new and retiring Board members, and laid out the schedule for the rest of the day.
- President Krislov introduced the Strategic Planning discussion, talked about the Preliminary Report and its responses, and offered a rough schedule/timeline for future work.

- Diane Yu introduced Steering Committee members.

2. Small Group summaries

Dining Room summary

- Group liked Mission Statement, although they want to add “residential” to it.
- Are we truly providing access for all as a selective college?
- Be sure Core Values reflect the Mission Statement. Focused on the “mess” of Core Value 3 in relation to Core Value 4, which they felt needs to be clearer about compositional diversity as valuable for education, as well as outside-of-class education.
- How many Core Values do we need? Should we add one around shared governance around Finney compact, etc.? Clearer to have governance as a Core Value?
- Strategic Directions: a lot of overlap with Core Values. For instance, Strategic Direction A2 discusses “global citizens,” but not strongly articulated as a Core Value or Strategic Direction.
- Document as whole—should make things short and to the point. Is there a way to work with Ben Jones and his staff to create a “click-through” document? Is linearity too “old-school”? Does the document need to be more “organic”?

Aspen/Birch summary

- Questions about the “Innovation Zone”—could we more explicitly define?
- Mission Statement—mention a plurality of viewpoints. Mention of a “residential campus” was noted.
- How to address financial constraints—perhaps a study to determine 10% cut in expenses, to get to 2% tuition increases without a deficit.
- Positions and the importance of student/alumni relations worth noting, as is the role of the Career Center.
- Core Value shouldn’t “renew” commitment; should be “have commitment.” Core Value 2: Flip so that teaching is first among what faculty do. The importance of globalism, internationalism, and the external world needs to be emphasized more. Wellness was mentioned as something important, but it’s not in Core Values.
- What kind of student should Oberlin recruit? What are the metrics to measure that? How do we get to that, in terms of students we attract? Perhaps we should say something more explicit about why we’re not a MOOC school?
- One term that is not in the document but should be is “entrepreneurialism.” It should be included, because it would allow us to talk about Oberlin looking out to the external world, and inviting that world in to refresh and teach us.

Oak/Elm summary

- On the Mission Statement, there was general support, with one caveat—Oberlin exists for variety of reasons, but document should state clearly that the student is at the center of Oberlin.
- On Core Values and Strategic Directions, what is missing is a sense of priority/hierarchy—what’s most urgent, what should come first, what’s most clear

from prior Core Values? The number of Values and Directions could be pared back, and made more concise.

- It's the Recommendations that need to be more numerous. There was a brief discussion about Oberlin's capacity to undertake the changes the Strategic Plan will be setting out for the institution: Financial, Governance Structure, etc. That should be more the important focus of this discussion, and the document.
- In addition to Values and Directions, include the context against which the recommendations are being made, in order to give them more relevance.