What Can You Do With a Liberal Arts Degree?

The question most frequently addressed in The Office of Career Services is “what can I do with a liberal arts degree?” At Oberlin College, that is one of our favorite questions. The very act of asking such a question demonstrates one of the most exciting aspects of a liberal arts education—choices. In fact, choices for liberal arts graduates continue to increase as employers shift away from hiring specialists in a particular field. A liberal arts education does not provide training for specific occupations. Instead, a liberal arts education sharpens analytical and communication skills, teaches students to learn, and provides students with a body of knowledge that can be applied to larger contexts, and it does these things better than any other type of college or university preparation.

The Choice is Yours

A liberal arts education at Oberlin College prepares students for anything and everything. The Office of Career Services helps you sort through the many options to determine a good career fit or a path to follow after Oberlin. Programs and services are offered for College and Conservatory students throughout their undergraduate years and after they graduate. These services focus on:

- self-assessment
- career exploration
- internships
- summer and part-time employment
- competitions and festivals
- employment after graduation
- graduate or professional school

Explore

Oberlin College encourages students to develop their curiosity, embrace uncertainty, and explore. Self-assessment is the first step in figuring out the careers that fit you. Because it is important to start assessing basic interests early, we urge you to begin the process during your first year by meeting with a Career Advisor. Once you identify your interests you can explore and experiment with them. The Office of Career Services offers extensive resources on its website at www.oberlin.edu/career for College and Conservatory students.

Oberlin alumni are among the best resources available to Oberlin students. Current students are allowed full access to the College’s online alumni directory. Talking to alumni about their careers is the best way to learn about different fields and to obtain additional career mentoring. The Office of Career Services also provides opportunities for students to connect with alumni by coordinating on-and off-campus alumni-student programs.

For students pursuing business, law, education and health careers, pre-professional advising is also available through The Office of Career Services.

Get Experience

Internships are an important way for students to experientially enhance their academic program. Oberlin student interns apply information they’ve studied in classes to real-world situations, test tentative career plans, build skills, and gain important work experience. Oberlin College supports internships in a number of ways. Career Services staff members assist students throughout the internship application process providing help with self-assessment, locating appropriate internship opportunities, writing resumes and cover letters, and developing interview skills. Additionally, Oberlin is a member of the Liberal Arts Career Network, a consortium of 30 liberal arts colleges, and the University Career Action Network, a consortium of 21 universities and colleges. These consortia provide our students with recruiting databases containing more than 15,000 job and internship listings in a variety of fields.

Summer is the most popular time for students to complete internships. Students are eligible to earn academic credit for approved internships. Oberlin students have completed summer or academic-semester internships at a variety of organizations, including:
Winter term (the month of January) offers Oberlin students a unique opportunity to complete an internship. The Office of Career Services coordinates a winter term internship program, offering internship options for students in a variety of fields and locations. Career services staff members work with alumni to create meaningful internship offerings that relate what students learn in the classroom to the world of work. Recent winter term internships include:

- Manhattan Legal Services
- National Geographic Explorer
- James Taylor’s Recording Studio
- Office of the Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi
- American Folk Art Museum
- Environmental Protection Agency

**Connecting with Employers**

The Office of Career Services provides a number of opportunities for students to connect with employers, including a very active web-based system for posting jobs and internships that allows students to easily apply online. The office also hosts on-campus employers and graduate schools including Peace Corps, Capital Group Companies, Morningstar, the FBI, Yale University’s School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, and Georgetown University’s Master of Science in Foreign Service program.

The largest recruiting program the office offers is the Regional Interview Day program, a product of the Selective Liberal Arts Consortium—a consortium of 14 top liberal arts colleges. The consortium coordinates interview days in New York City, Boston, Washington D.C. and Chicago with over 80 top employers in the fields of finance, consulting, publishing, public policy, government, science and technology.

**Graduate School**

Throughout Oberlin’s history a majority of our graduates—roughly 75 to 80 percent—have gone on to attend graduate or professional schools. According to the National Science Foundation’s CASPAR Database, during the years 1997-2006 Oberlin College ranked first among four-year, primarily undergraduate comparable colleges, in the number of graduates completing the Ph.D. degree. Oberlin also was first in the subcategories of life sciences, math & computer sciences, social services, and arts & music and was among the top six colleges in the subcategories of humanities, psychology, geosciences, social sciences, physical sciences, education, architecture & environmental design, communication & librarianship, and religion & theology.

Among American colleges and universities, Oberlin has one of the most laudable records of producing future scholars. In addition to three Nobel Prize winners and seven MacArthur fellows, Oberlin graduates can be found studying at the nation’s most esteemed graduate and professional schools, teaching at all of America’s 60 top colleges and universities and earning Ph.D.s at an unsurpassed rate.

Students are encouraged to work with faculty when determining a graduate program of study and appropriate schools. The Office of Career Services also helps students and alumni by providing information and assistance throughout the application and admission process.

**What Are Our Graduates Doing?**

In recent post-graduation surveys close to 70% of graduates chose employment or service directly after graduation, 16% went directly to graduate or professional school, and 10% chose some other path. When asked to indicate their long-term degree aspirations, 85% indicated they were planning on
attending graduate or professional school within the next five years. These outcomes reflect the trend of students opting to work before committing to further education. The same survey indicated that most graduates were working in the field of education, followed by business, research/science, fine and performing arts, nonprofit/human services, and environmental concerns. The top five cities in which they live and work are New York City, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Boston, and Chicago.

**Where Recent Graduates Are Studying**

Boston University  
Brown University  
UC Berkeley  
Columbia University  
University of Chicago  
Georgetown University  
Harvard University  
Johns Hopkins University  
Juilliard School of Music  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
University of Michigan  
New England Conservatory of Music  
New York University  
Northwestern University  
Ohio State University  
Oxford University  
Peabody Conservatory  
University of Pennsylvania  
Princeton University  
San Francisco Conservatory  
Stanford University  
University of Southern California  
University of Wisconsin  
Yale University  

**Where Recent Graduates Are Working**

ACNielsenBASES  
AFL-CIO Organizing Institute  
American Greetings  
American Institutes of Research  
Canton Symphony Orchestra  
Case Western Reserve University  
CBS News Radio Network  
Chamber Music Northwest  
Chicago Climate Exchange  
Chicago Public Schools  
City Year Cleveland  
Civic Orchestra of Chicago  
Congressional Hunger Center  
DC Teaching Fellows Program  
Earthwatch Institute  
Ernst & Young  
Federal Reserve Bank  
The Field Museum of Natural History  
The Foundation Center  
Goldman Sachs  
Harper Collins  
Harvard Medical School  
International Monetary Fund  
JET Programme  
Julia Dykman Andrus Memorial Hospital  
Lansner & Kubitschek  
L’Oreal  
Massachusetts General Hospital  
Memorial Sloan-Kettering  
Morningstar, Inc.  
Museum of Chinese in the Americas  
National Institutes of Health  
New York City Board of Education  
NYC Teaching Fellows  
Office of Chief Medical Examiner, NYC  
Peace Corps  
Random House  
Smithsonian Institution  
Teach for America  
The Urban Institute  
U.S. Department of Commerce