Dear Classmates,

Last year, Alumni Council Weekend (ACW) was the kickoff of a major fundraising campaign. This year, ACW was again very different, as much of the weekend was devoted to an examination of how the 40,000 College and Conservatory alumni view their relationship with the College/Con, and how it can be improved. This focus was prompted by several factors: the structure of the Alumni Association has not changed since the 1970s and it’s time to see if it still works. Also, since so many alumni now get information online, is the traditional class president’s letter (which I have been enjoying writing for many years) an archaic mode of communication? Finally, how might we increase interaction between alumni, between alumni and students (beyond such established vehicles such as hosting Winter Term students), and between alumni and current Oberlin faculty. There is, of course, a financial motivation as well: only about 38% of Oberlin alumni make a contribution each year, a figure well below that for peer institutions. Getting alumni more engaged will hopefully increase this percentage.

One way these topics were explored during ACW was though small brainstorming groups of about 10 ACW members (the Alumni Council is composed of class presidents, lead agents, regional coordinators, committee members, Affiliate Group chairs and Executive Board members). Many ideas were proposed, e.g., web sites where alumni can blog about their own activities, such as concert performances, papers being presented, job changes, etc. Another idea was to facilitate alumni creating their own affiliate groups, whether “vegan musicians” or “science fiction writers.” All the ideas will be considered by a small team, and recommendations will be presented at next year’s ACW meeting.

Changes were proposed for the class president’s letter. Some great ideas are providing links to photographs and videos. For example, what better way to communicate the energy of the campus than videos of student performances or convocations in Finney Chapel? (During ACW, we were treated to a concert in Finney by Randy Newman – of “burning” Cuyahoga River fame, who currently has a child enrolled at Oberlin.) In my past letters I devoted significant space to statistics on the makeup and achievement of entering and graduating students. Is this of value to you, or would you just rather go to a web site? Do you prefer a paper letter like this, or is email better, especially since links to photos/videos can be added to the email? Please let me know: you can send email to me at eric75@world.oberlin.edu.
This weekend was also the kickoff for our 40th reunion, which is a cluster reunion with the classes of 1973 and 1974. Representing 1973 is Chuck Spitulnik (president-elect of the Alumni Association) and Steve Watter represents 1974. While much is yet to be planned, we did have consensus on the following (note: nothing is yet finalized, so things can be changed if you communicate your wishes). First, we will not have panel discussions, since nobody felt strongly about topics for panels. Second, we want as much music as possible. We will (again) have a concert by conservatory musicians in our cluster. We will have a Gilbert & Sullivan sing along (operetta to be decided). We will have one or more sessions where amateur musicians (including me) can play with others – one sessions might be for guitar and such, and another sessions might be for a swing band (I have charts) or concert band. Your thoughts on this? What else would you like to see at your reunion?

The reunion will be Memorial Day weekend, May 23-26, 2014 (starting Friday evening). We loved the Asia House space we had in 2009, but it is not available, so we will be in Noah Hall. We are again hoping to get Jerry Greenfield to come with tubs of ice cream. The weekend coincides with Commencement, so there will be much going on.

Cary McGregor ’75 asked me to include the following: “If you lived or dined at Fairchild during the 1971-1972 school year, and would like to meet up with your dorm mates and friends from Fairchild during our May 2014 Cluster Reunion Weekend, please send a note to FairchildReunion1971@gmail.com for more information.”

Included with this letters is a list of “lost” classmates, classmates for whom the Alumni Office has no current contact information. If you can share any updates, please let the Alumni Office know by emailing alumni@oberlin.edu.

Now for some details of what is happening on campus. Many of you heard about bias incidents on campus (e.g., hateful graffiti and a possible sighting of someone in KKK garb). This received attention in the national media, and prompted mailings to all alumni. Yet, to my dismay, this incident was not discussed during ACW. Many of us attending ACW would have liked an open discussion.

To other topics, in no particular order. After the major new buildings of the past few years, such as the Kohl addition to the conservatory, there is currently no major building under construction. But it is definite that the Oberlin Inn will be razed, and a new building, serving the college/con as well as the town, will replace it. The Dean of the Conservatory David Stull ’89 resigned to become president of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Sean Decatur, the Dean of the College of Arts and Science, resigned to become president of Kenyon College. We met the interim Deans during the weekend, and a search is on to fill these positions. There is a new MA degree program in contemporary chamber being music. “LaunchU”, an intensive campus-wide creativity and leadership program, designed to accelerate the development and launch of Oberlin entrepreneurs, will bring alumni and students together around entrepreneurship – there is an increasing demand by students for such programs.
And big news for students: a major change to the graduation requirements: the concept of courses worth 3, 4, or 5 credits contributing to a graduation requirement of 112 credits has been scrapped. Now all courses (with exceptions such as Exco) count equally, and students will take four courses per semester, with a requirement of 32 courses to graduate. It is not entirely clear to me why this is better, especially for science majors whose labs clearly take substantial extra time and effort.

Last year I wrote that I was investigating assisted living arrangements for my mother, who can no longer live alone. I received many communications from you, sharing your experiences, or offering support. I thank you for this. In fact moved Mom to a very nice place, near me, in December, where she is doing well, especially since several other active but memory impaired women have also moved in. Why is it that the most alert and active residents there are women and not men?

The most important part of this letter is about the reunion next May. Please email me with your ideas for this event. You will be receiving more letters about reunion plans.

Sincerely,

Eric Rosenberg
1975 Class President