This was another strong year for the department. We graduated 11 students; 10 of them had jobs or graduate school admissions by early in the summer. Here is a picture of the class, or at least of the 8 members who came to the photo session.

Of the 11 students, 10 were male, a fairly typical ratio for us. The exciting news is that 75% of the class of 2012, 33% of the class of 2013, and 70% of the class of 2014 are women. We have not in the past attracted many women into our advanced classes or into the major. It is hard to grow the when we shut off over half of the student body from the major. So we are delighted with the gender mix in the upcoming classes.

We have decided to switch the programming language in our introductory (CS 150) classes to Python starting in 2012. We have used Java for a long time – since the late 1990’s -- and we intend to continue with Java in the second course for the major, CS 151. Though Python stated as a scripting language analogous to PERL, it is a full, general-purpose, object-oriented program-

ming language. It has a simpler syntax than Java and a rich set of application-oriented libraries that make it ideal as a starting language. Many other colleges and universities, including MIT, use it in their beginning programming courses. If you want to try it out, you can download a full implementation of Python from www.python.org.

Many of you knew or interacted with Nate Daniels, our sysadmin from 2003 to 2011. Nate was a great staff member for us, but after eight years (and getting married and starting a family) he needed job where there was more room for professional growth. This winter he took a job as a sysadmin for the Physics group of the research arm of the University of West Virginia in Morgantown. After a search we hired a Chris Mohler as a replacement for Nate. Chris grew up in the Oberlin and Wellington areas; his father Bill has been an electronics specialist for the Oberlin Physics department for many years. Chris says to tell you have he is a real geek; he runs servers and plays video games in his spare time. If any of you are having trouble with your occs accounts, you can contact him at chris.mohler@oberlin.edu.
Help With Our Search!

We have a tenure-track search going for a new faculty member in one of the Systems areas – Operating Systems, Networks, Compilers, and so forth. Perhaps you can be of help. We have advertised in the usual academic places – the CRA job list, mailings to departments, and so forth, but there might be people out there with Ph.D.'s who tried out the commercial/industrial sector and are missing the academic life. If you know of someone who would be good at working with students and who wants to combine teaching and research in their career, suggest that they contact us. Or send me their email address and I’ll take it from there.

The Class of 2013

Close your eyes and picture one of your computer science classes at Oberlin. What do you see? Rich Salter is talking about Scheme. Look at the students around you. They are almost all male, aren't they?. In the ten years from 1990 to 1999 we had 138 majors; exactly ten of them, a meager 7%, were women. Those numbers were low by national standards (in the mid 1990's about 16% of the undergraduate CS degrees went to women), but typical of other liberal arts colleges. Our demographics are changing. Right now, in the summer of 2011, we have 36 declared majors, from the classes of 2012, 2013 and 2014. Exactly half of those majors are female. We don't seem to be losing male students, we are gaining female ones and that is resulting in some of the largest classes we have ever had. The class of 2013 (those students just finished their sophomore years) has 21 declared CS majors. The only previous class with that many students was the class of 1998, which had 20 men and just one woman – Niki Fallen. If, as often happens, we pick up a few junior majors this year the class of 2013 could turn out to be the largest we have ever had. I thought it might be interesting to see why we are getting so many majors, so I asked our students in this class why they declared the computer science major and what they were thinking of doing after graduation (or I might just go for the straight computer science phd, or just work, or pursue music -- I'm also a serious oboist).

From Alex Amlin-Wolf: I took 150 in the fall of sophomore year and sort of became captivated. I'm still a Neuro major, but I'm definitely planning on incorporating computer science into whatever I end up studying after graduating (or I might just go for the straight computer science phd, or just work, or pursue music -- I'm also a serious oboist).

From Cecilia Mauceri: I took my first CS course because I enjoyed natural sciences in high school and I was worried that my first semester freshman schedule contained too many humanities. CS 150 was like a giant logic puzzle. All the inventive problem solving seemed like too much fun to be homework, so I kept taking classes.

From Jenny Ward: About halfway through my freshman year I decided not to audition for the conservatory and that I also liked computer science. I soldiered through Alexa's CS 151 class and decided that, since I'd made it all the way through the filter-out phase, I was cut out to be a CS major, even though I'm not a math or science person in the least.

From Kaitlyn Price: I was planning to major in CS before I came to Oberlin. My father taught me how program when I was eight years old, because my parents would rather that I make my own video games than buying a console to play games. However, computers were more of a hobby than anything until I got to senior year in high school. That was the year that I made it to the final round of the North American Computational Linguistic Olympiad, and it was by attending the hype that surrounds such an accomplishment that I realized that I was better at computer science than I had initially reckoned.

From Malcolm Balch-Crystal: I became interested in web design while here and after working on some projects I realized I liked programming more than designing. So I took 150 with Wexler, thoroughly enjoyed it, and decided to major in CS.

From Nicholas Towbin-Jones: I came here planning to study math or physics, and took 151 with Wexler by chance second semester of last year and it was the best class I'd ever had, so I suppose I was captured.

From Richard Townsend: I came into Oberlin planning on being a CS major. When I visited Oberlin as a prospie, I visited one of the classes and spoke to one of the faculty about the department and what Oberlin CS graduates went on to do in the real world. The entire program sounded like exactly what I wanted out of my education and I loved the rest of my visit, so I decided to come here!
From Whitman Schorn: My first CS class was CS151 with Alexa, and right of the bat I was floored - this was an order of magnitude harder than anything in high school! But I loved it. It was my smallest class - 9 people - and every class Alexa seemed to have some new amazing concept that turned my brain into a pretzel. I slaved over 151, I struggled. But at a certain point, I had an epiphany - I loved it all. I loved the subject, the concepts, the challenge, the freedom and empowerment that came from thinking about things differently.

A Conversation with Mok Oh

This year’s alumni profile is with Byong Mok Oh. Mok graduated from Oberlin in 1992 with a triple major in CS, Art History and Studio Art. After finishing a Ph.D. at MIT he founded several startups, including Everyscape.com, a visualization company that lets consumers interact online with businesses in a natural 3D environment. He is currently the Chief Innovation Officer at Where Inc, a company that develops location-based services over the Net.

Bob: I’d better let you say more about Where Inc. What does it really do?

Mok: Where Inc. helps connect people and places. We have four different products to help that vision. First, we have mobile apps on 12 different platforms, from simple cell phones to all smart phones. These apps will help you find places that are related to “eat, drink, play, shop” themes. Second, we have the largest mobile and location-based ad network in the US. This means that the mobile ads you see on, say, Pandora are sourced from us. Third, we have merchant services that let people who sell stuff (either products or services) to sign up and create instant deals and offers. So, if you see deals like, “$5 off your appetizer” on your mobile device, it’s probably from Where. Where was bought by PayPal in April, so expect to see some cool new stuff happening soon.

Bob: You are Chief Innovation Officer at Where. Cool title, but what does it mean?

Mok: I get this question a lot. I pretty much get to do a lot of different things -- wide and deep, both internally and externally. Internally, I’m involved with a lot -- from products, business development, engineering, R&D, etc. I also recently went internal and deep with relaunching our back end and API development. Externally, I do a lot of business development, talk to a lot of folks and businesses, and give talks and evangelize Where inc. You can think of me as the “special team” that does a lot of things depending on the situation.

Bob: You are one of three Oberlin CS students to earn a Ph.D. from MIT. How did you get to MIT from Oberlin? Were you ready for it? Was MIT ready for you?

Mok: Oberlin certainly got me ready for anything. I can honestly say my love for academics started in Oberlin. When I got out of college, I was accepted to both the School of Architecture (M. Arch) and the School of Engineering (Ph.D) at University of Pennsylvania. At that time, these two programs were very much apart, physically, academically, mentally, emotionally, and every -ally you can think of. I ended up leaving after a quick 1-year MS in CS and went to work for Andersen Consulting (now Accenture). A couple year stint atAccenture made me realize I wanted more - so went back to school. I was accepted to MIT which had a new program called Design and Computation, which fit my profile a lot better.

If you think getting into MIT is hard, getting out with a PhD is an order of magnitude harder. I saw many of my incredibly gifted and smart friends in LCS (Laboratory for Computer Science, now called CSAIL - CS AI Lab) leave without a degree due to lack of patience or the pull from industry. I had what I call “stupid tenacity.” In the long run, I think the brand of MIT PhD helped me out a lot in my career.

Bob: You have created several startups on your own. How do you make it as a startup?

Mok: Startups, I think, are a lot easier than Ph.D’s. That’s
why I did them. ;-) More seriously, startups also require you to be tenacious, but I think you have to be smart, be a team player, get used to rejections and failures, understand your strengths and weaknesses, understand the markets, understand the technologies, and many many more things you can’t learn in academics.

There are so many different “breeds” of people in business, and you literally have to learn to speak another language. Speaking and earning the respect from engineers is very different than speaking to business development people and to venture capitalists. One person can’t do everything.

Going back to the question of how does one “make it” as a startup, it really depends on what you want, and how you define “making it.” For me, it really is about challenging myself, learning something new, building something much bigger than you can ever do alone. If you are not pushing yourself and learning and getting better in something every day, then I think you’re good as dead. So keep going, challenge yourself, make meaning. (And I think one can do this anywhere, in any position).

**Bob:** You had both CS and Art majors at Oberlin. Has that served you well?

**Mok:** Absolutely. These days, it helps to be able to think in many different ways, both left/right brains. It’s not that different from learning how to speak “venture capital” or “engineering.” CS helped me think analytically; Art helped me be a better sales person (believe it or not, art really is about self branding and selling your creation).

**Bob:** What advice would you give to students just starting on their careers?

**Mok:** Be true to yourself, do something you love, give it all you got, and don’t be afraid of failures. On your deathbed, you’ll be so much prouder if you gave all you got and failed, than if you didn’t try at all. Life’s too short for any bullshit.

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**Memorabilia**

For our 25th reunion in 2010 we designed a poster with the names of all CS alumni of our first 25 years. We have registered that design with Cafe Press and you can have it printed on coffee cups, tee shirts, mouse pads, teddy bears, and yes, even boxers and briefs. To see the possibilities, go to www.cafepress.com/OCCS25th

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**Still Missing**

I haven’t been able to reach a number of our alums. If any of you know how to contact these people, send this newsletter to them and ask them to get in touch with me.