Dear Classmates:

Yes, ’tis true, time for another letter from your friendly Class President!

Yours truly had the pleasure and privilege of visiting Oberlin in September for the annual Alumni Council Weekend. This is a weekend when upwards of two hundred committed alumni volunteers visit campus to conduct the business of the Alumni Association, re-engage with Oberlin and attempt, mostly unsuccessfully, to relive their college years.

I have been attending these weekends on and off (mostly on) since the mid-80s and always come away feeling reinvigorated and ever prouder of Oberlin and appreciative of my association with this outstanding institution of higher learning. As some of you may know, I have spent my career in higher education, and I can assure you that Oberlin’s unique combination of an extraordinary residential liberal arts college, internationally-renowned conservatory of music, and premiere college art museum is unique and truly special.

And can anyone tell me why the weather seems so much better now than when we were students? If this is climate change, it is one of its few benefits…

I am happy to report that, based on what was heard and observed during my visit, Oberlin is thriving. As ever there is much happening, and therefore much to report:

- A new recital hall has been completed in Bibbins and named for former Dean of the Conservatory David Stull ’89;
- A new graduate degree program: Master of Contemporary Chamber Music, has been created;
- LaunchU, an intensive program designed to accelerate the development of Oberlin entrepreneurs, by bringing alumni and students together around entrepreneurship has been implemented;
- The long-planned and badly-needed renovation of the Oberlin Inn is finally going to occur;
- In the student life realm, we learned of an enhanced emphasis on health and wellness, characterized by increased clinical, outreach and prevention services for students;

(over, please)
• Construction of the Knowlton Athletic Complex has begun, which will replace the old football stadium and create other badly-needed facilities for Oberlin’s student-athletes; and,

• A 2.27MW solar array has been installed on college property that will generate 12% of Oberlin’s electricity. Oberlin continues to be recognized as a national leader in campus sustainability efforts.

In addition, you will be pleased to note that Oberlin’s graduation rate is the highest it has been since such this metric has been tracked – 88.3% compared with 70% in 1981. Sixteen Obies received Fulbrights, Oberlin’s endowment is continuing to recover nicely from the financial collapse five years ago (now $711 million), admissions statistics point in a very positive direction, and we are 76% of the way ($191 million and counting) to fulfilling the $250 million goal of the Oberlin Illuminate campaign.

Finally, and lest you think we alums have been resting on our laurels, Jonathan Denk ’90 won a MacArthur Genius Award, Oberlin’s second graduate to win in as many years (Claire Chase ’01 won in 2012)!

Much of the weekend was spent thinking about ways to expand opportunities for alumni engagement with Oberlin. This entails a rigorous and creative re-thinking of how the Alumni Association is organized, how it communicates with alums and how its programming efforts can better meet the needs of a 21st Century alumni body. Outgoing Alumni Association President Jackie Hughes ’76, newly-minted President Chuck Spitulnik ’73, and organizational specialist and classmate Tina Graf ’74 (Go Tina!) are owed a debt of sincere gratitude for the skillful way in which they structured opportunities for those attending Alumni Council to consider the many issues and questions associated with positioning the Alumni Association for the future – an apt exercise in this, its 175th year!

You will be hearing much more about this project in the months to come, and we will be providing a variety of ways to solicit your input. To succeed, we need to hear from you!

No Alumni Council Weekend is complete without immersion in the incredible richness of Oberlin’s cultural life. Highlights included the Oberlin Orchestra’s rendering of Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 4, which left one’s senses tingling, and 1971 grad Gregory Fulkerson’s sublime performance of the Delius Violin Concerto.

We were also treated to a performance by Randy Newman (who also happens to be the father of a current Oberlin senior) in Finney Chapel, his first appearance at Oberlin since May 1973. I had the pleasure of meeting Randy at a post-concert reception, and used the occasion to remind him that, as Social Board Chair at the time, I had had the pleasure of introducing him to the crowd at Finney 40 years (!) before. Imagine my surprise when he said he did not remember ever playing at Oberlin before! Since he is even older than we are, I was able to quickly forgive this lapse of memory…

Finally, speaking of memories, old and new, I wanted to remind you about our upcoming 40th Cluster Reunion, scheduled for May 23-26. Please plan to attend. Many details to follow. If you
have ideas for fun and interesting programs and activities for our time together, please get them to me (steve.watter@gmail.com). I will be sure they are passed along to the committee (comprised of members of the cluster Classes of 1973, 1974 and 1975) charged with planning all aspects of the reunion. Not only do I want – selfishly – the pleasure of re-connecting with you, but, much more importantly, I also want you to experience as I have so often over the years the sense of awe at how Oberlin has retained that which has made it special throughout its history while continually moving forward in ways that we can all be proud.

Cary McGregor ’75 asked 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 letter 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. Also included is a Reunion Information Form. Please make any updates as needed and return it to the Alumni Office.

It is a true pleasure and privilege to serve as your Class President.

With all best wishes for good health and happiness, I remain,

Sincerely yours,

Steve Watter
1974 Class President