FAQ regarding the Initiative to Increase Alumni Engagement and Revise the Alumni Leadership Body

Why was this Initiative undertaken?
In survey responses and conversations Oberlin College and Conservatory alumni have expressed a desire
• For more diverse opportunities to engage with Oberlin in ways that meet their own current life stage needs and interests
• For continued active involvement in the Oberlin community, and
• For participation in activities both on- and off-campus.

The alumni leadership body needs to be able to strategize, evaluate and modify activities, and respond to opportunities and new alumni initiatives more quickly than it has in the past.

Two years of discussions and careful consideration have led to the rollout of new initiatives to engage a wider array of alumni and to the reshaping of the Alumni Association’s governing body, to be called the Alumni Leadership Council (ALC).

What are some other ideas that are being considered?
In September 2013, participants in 17 focus groups expressed interest in the following types of alumni programming:
• Increased streaming of events and programming from Oberlin;
• Increased communications with and among alumni;
• More online options to stay in touch with Oberlin and its alumni;
• New alumni groups based on special interests and life stages;
• Opportunities for Continuing Education from college faculty, students, and each other;
• Opportunities for targeted and informed donations to departments/faculty and student groups;
• Opportunities to support alumni businesses;
• Opportunities to connect with fellow alumni while traveling, and economical alumni trips within the United States.

For the full summary of ideas generated by these focus groups, please see: Alumni Council Weekend 2013 Focus Group Findings

What are the principles behind the new initiatives?
The following principles and “vision pillars” anchor the proposed changes:
• Recognition of the great value of alumni engagement to alumni, the Oberlin College and Conservatory, and the Oberlin community;
• Many and diverse pathways for meaningful and rewarding involvement and volunteer experiences for increasing numbers of alumni regardless of their time availability and ability to travel to campus;
• Opportunities for new volunteers to contribute ideas and talents at a high level;
• Strategic alignment with Oberlin’s goals and values;
• A smaller, more nimble leadership team consisting of highly committed and active alumni, allowing for involvement, deliberations and a quicker decision-making and voting process; rather than merely serving as a “rubber stamp;”
• Numerous forms of multi-directional communication between and among Oberlin constituencies;
• Diversity and adequate representation of Conservatory alumni, and identity-based groups and alumni;
• Building pathways for lifetime interactions and community (student to grad school to career to family changes to retirement); and
• Leveraging state-of-the-art, user-friendly technology and tools for alumni connections and communications; and accurate data for evaluation.

How will we engage and include more alumni?
Currently, many alumni equate volunteering with attending Alumni Council Weekend. We want to shift the paradigm to a more inclusive model where all Oberlin College and Conservatory volunteers are recognized and have opportunities to share information with each other, the college, faculty, staff, and students. We want to make the concept of volunteerism more inclusive, and to provide more opportunities for alumni and volunteers to participate in on-campus, off-campus, and online activities and training. Additionally, we would like to expand the number of alumni who are welcomed back to campus to include associate agents, alumni recruiters through the Alumni Recruiting Network, regional club steering committee members, and those involved in new efforts around mentoring, professional-based communities, and other affinities in addition to class year.

Who will be represented on the Alumni Leadership Council?
The ALC will work to represent the concerns of all Oberlin College and Conservatory alumni with the following representation:

A designated representative from:
• Three of the Chartered Groups, previously called Affiliate Groups
• The Multicultural Alumni Leadership Council, which includes members of the identity-based chartered groups
• Regional Programming Volunteers
• Class Officers

The Chairs of the:
• Development Committee
• Careers Committee
• Admissions Committee
• Trustee Search Committee

11 seats for At-Large Members, to represent a diversity of perspectives:
• Identity groups
• Class years
• Geographical areas
• Conservatory and Double Degree alumni
• Talents and current needs of the board
• New and experienced volunteers

Three Student Representatives representing sophomore through senior classes

Ex-officio members:
• Executive Director, Alumni Association
• Past Presidents

Staff liaisons from the Career Center, Admissions, Athletics, Development, Communications, Multicultural Resource Center and other areas will be invited to participate in meetings. While they will not be official members of the ALC or have voting privileges, their experience
and perspectives will contribute to more thoughtful and well-rounded alumni leadership decisions.

**What are other initiatives that are being put into place?** We have plans underway to:

- Enhance regional programming;
- Expand the affiliate group model to include professional interests and life stages;
- Encourage “grassroots” alumni efforts by creating and communicating clear and diverse ways in which alumni can connect;
- Move from a single Alumni Council Weekend to more focused gatherings with a broader range of volunteers and affinity reunions throughout the year, with staff able to devote more attention to each group;
- Revamp the alumni online community (OBIWeb) into a modern network tool to take advantage of opportunities for alumni to give to and receive from the Oberlin community;
- Increase opportunities for professional networking and mentoring to utilize alumni expertise, not only for students, but also alumni-to-alumni;
- Stream events, updates, and other content from Oberlin on the web;
- Support more chartered group and off-campus reunions;
- Develop a formal process to gather alumni-defined interests to be addressed by Oberlin College and Conservatory staff and volunteers;
- Identify ad hoc volunteer groups for short-term projects and initiatives;
- Offer focused on-campus and virtual training opportunities for volunteers; and
- Enhance partnerships with staff and administrators across campus.

**What is the timeline for this process?**

Some new engagement initiatives are already being implemented, such as videotaping sessions of Alumni Council Weekend and making the information available to the broader alumni community and the conversion of the alumni online community to a new and enhanced platform. New programmatic directions and revised bylaws have been drafted. The Alumni Council will vote on the new bylaws on Saturday, September 20, 2014. A process for implementing the new ALC over the course of the following year as seamlessly as possible will be established.

**What on-campus resources are in place to support these initiatives?**

In recent years the administration has been very supportive of alumni engagement efforts; the Alumni Office staff has increased by two full-time positions in the past four years, and we are investing more in technology. The Career Center now has a full-time staff member charged with career-related programming and developing connections with alumni. The recent integration of the Alumni Office and Oberlin Annual Fund teams, under Executive Director Danielle Young’s leadership, is another way to create staffing efficiencies and collaboration to support future alumni programmatic efforts. We are looking at existing programming to determine what must be maintained, what may no longer be relevant, and where new technology can better support volunteers and staff.

**How will this change the role of class presidents and how we get information?**

Class presidents will continue to be key communicators with their class and reunion planners. A shift towards community building by gathering more information about classmates (class notes and contact information) and the sharing of class-specific news and era-specific volunteer and event opportunities has been incorporated into revised class officer guidelines (to be shared with volunteers in September 2014). More intergenerational
sharing of ideas and programming for Commencement/Reunion Weekend will be encouraged through opportunities for class officers across reunion years to share ideas and gather best practices.

**How will we measure the success of these initiatives?**

In broad terms, we will be successful if there are more alumni volunteering for Oberlin College & Conservatory, and our volunteers receive better support (currently there are more than 2,000 volunteers); more alumni attending Oberlin events on- and off-campus; more meaningful student-to-alumni and alumni-to-alumni connections through activities like mentoring, internships, educational sharing, etc.; and increased online connections. By being intentional and measuring what we do moving forward, we will be able to test new ideas and determine whether they are working or not. Some initial potential benchmarks include:

- Number of contact and career information updates submitted by alumni
- Alumni attendance at Commencement/Reunion Weekend and off-campus events
- Number of Winter Term, Summer and post-graduation internships offered by alumni
- Number of donors to the Oberlin Annual Fund
- Numbers of alumni taking advantage of online streaming, discussions and forums
- Number of votes cast for alumni-elected trustee candidates
- Number of responses to future alumni surveys

**How can I be involved?**

Share these new initiatives and stay involved! Encourage other Obies to attend events, volunteer, and spread the word to other alumni. If you have specific recommendations on how we can connect with more alumni and get more alumni actively involved, let us know!

Ideas or questions? Contact President Chuck Spitulnik ’73 and Executive Board members by sending a message to alumni@oberlin.edu.