The New Alumni Leadership Council (ALC)
A reference to accompany the “Alumni Leadership Council Structure” document

Introduction

As the Oberlin Alumni Association works to evaluate and expand opportunities for alumni engagement, its ability to strategize, evaluate and modify activities, and respond more quickly to new opportunities, will be key to its continued relevance and success.

As part of these efforts, two years of discussions and careful considerations have led to the constitution of a new Alumni Leadership Council (ALC), to be the governing body of the Alumni Association, empowered to undertake and regulate any action of or on behalf of the Association. The following principles and “vision pillars” were identified as important for the new governing body and Association:

- 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 alumni;
- Opportunities for new volunteers to contribute ideas and talents at a high level;
- Strategic alignment with Oberlin’s goals and values;
- 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 just 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;
- Accurate data and state-of-the-art, user-friendly technology and tools; and
- Beneficial and realistic collaboration between the President of the Alumni Association and Oberlin College administrators.

There are a variety of models available for boards of non-profit organizations and alumni associations. Each organization has its own culture and needs to consider the right model for accomplishing its work of creating a vision, defining clear roles and responsibilities, establishing benchmarks for performance and monitoring them, and representing their constituencies.

The current structure for the Oberlin Alumni Council and Executive Board followed a management team model, which was very popular in the 70s-90s. A management team is organized around committees and activities along functional lines. Members are typically selected because they are members of a special interest or volunteer group. While this model works well for all-volunteer organizations, it has proven to be less suited to organizations like Oberlin that have professional management and full-time employees. More recently, there has been increased recognition of the need to differentiate between “governance” (the practices of leadership boards) and “management” (the practices of employees). The management team model can lead to board members making decisions they expect staff to implement, which, if not feasible, may result in dissatisfied volunteers and frustrated staff.
A newer nonprofit board model, called a policy board, is based on the view that the job of a board is to establish the guiding principles and policies for the organization, to delegate responsibility and authority to specific volunteer groups and staff, and to monitor efforts.

Policy board model organizations have few standing committees; board member training is given a high priority to ensure that new members are able to function effectively; and members are recruited for their commitment to the values and mission of the organization, as well as past volunteer service. The structure of such boards reflects strategic priorities and encourages flexibility and ad hoc groups. Board meetings are goal-driven, with emphasis on participation and action, as opposed to representation of a group.

The structure shown in the accompanying organizational chart, with membership detailed in this document, retains some features of the management team model, but provides the flexibility to move in the direction of a policy model, and addresses the principles identified above as important for the future of the Oberlin Alumni Association’s leadership body.

Membership Rationale

The Alumni Leadership Council is composed of the following representatives serving terms of two, three, or four years:

President [Four-year term: President-Elect (1), President (2), Past-President (1)]: The President is the executive officer of the Alumni Association and shall call and preside at each meeting of the Association and the Alumni Leadership Council. Among the President’s most important responsibilities is maintaining communication with the College through regular contacts with the President of the College and the Board of Trustees. At the fall meeting of the Alumni Leadership Council at the end of the President’s first year in office, the ALC shall elect a President-Elect, who shall serve in that capacity during the President’s second year in office. At the end of the President’s term in office, the President-Elect shall succeed to the Presidency.

Immediate Past-President [See “President”]: During the first year of the President’s term, the immediate former President shall serve as Immediate Past-President to provide for leadership overlap for incoming and outgoing presidents.

Secretary [Two-year term]: The Secretary, working with the Executive Director and the President of the Alumni Association, shall prepare periodic reports on the Association’s activities, including an annual report to the alumni body, and an annual report to the Board of Trustees. The Secretary, working with the Executive Director and staff, shall oversee all minutes of the Alumni Leadership Council prior to their distribution and shall be responsible for monitoring the Alumni Association’s official documents. The Secretary shall serve as the executive officer of the Association in the absence of the other two officers. In addition, the Secretary shall perform any other duties delegated by the President.

Chartered Group Members [Three-year terms]: Up to three chartered groups (previously known as “affiliate groups”) may each have a representative seat on the ALC. The process by which chartered groups may apply for seats on the current Executive Board will be continued and expanded to include any newly formed chartered groups. Upon receiving an application, the ALC will vote on whether to approve a chartered group for representation eligibility.
Multicultural Alumni Leadership Council Representative (MALC) [Three-year term]:
Oberlin’s alumni leadership body has historically maintained seats for leaders of the various affiliate groups (both identity and interest-based), with those seats filled via an application process. Recognizing the importance of securing a formal path of communication between the ALC and the identity-based affiliate groups, who have unique interests, perspectives, and needs that would go unaddressed without proper representation, a designated seat has been created for a MALC representative. The MALC representative speaks on behalf of the MALC membership, and by extension the organized identity-based affiliate groups. This should not be confused with serving as the lone voice for all historically underrepresented and marginalized groups and individual alumni. The ALC will commit to ensuring maximum diversity throughout its membership. The identity-based affiliate groups will also have the opportunity to apply individually for Chartered Group seats on the ALC. The MALC will strengthen networking opportunities and shared support among our identity groups and current students.

Regional Programming Chair [Three-year term]: Given the importance of off-campus programming, and the desire to enhance regional programming and opportunities for alumni to volunteer locally connecting alumni, faculty, students and parents with each other, it was deemed important to include a representative of regional programming volunteers on the ALC.

Class Officer Representative [Three-year term]: Recognizing the contributions of class officers who help engage their classmates and organize class reunions, and the fact that there are typically 60 or more class officer volunteers at any given time, it was deemed important to include a representative of class officers on the ALC.

Development Committee Chair [Three-year term]: The Development Committee will continue as a standing committee working with staff from Alumni Relations and Annual Giving. The chair of the committee, approved by the ALC’s Leadership Development Committee, will serve as a member of the ALC. The chair will also represent our corps of agent volunteers.

Careers Committee Chair [Three-year term]: The Careers Committee will continue as a standing committee working with staff from the Career Center and Alumni Relations. The chair of the committee, approved by the ALC’s Leadership Development Committee, will serve on the ALC.

Admissions Committee Chair [Three-year term]: The Admissions Committee will continue as a standing committee working with staff from the Admissions Office. The chair of the committee, approved by the ALC’s Leadership Development Committee, will serve on the ALC.

Trustee Search Committee Chair [Three-year term]: The Trustee Search Committee will continue as a standing committee working with the Executive Director of the Alumni Association. The chair of the committee, approved by the ALC’s Leadership Development Committee, will serve on the ALC.

At-Large Members [Three-year terms]: In order to create opportunities for new volunteers to contribute ideas and talents at a high level on the ALC; to provide the flexibility to recruit alumni depending on current needs; and to represent the diversity of our alumni across a wide range of class years, identity-based affiliate groups, talents, and geographical areas, a significant number of available seats (up to 11 representatives) on the
ALC are designated as at-large positions. The ALC will also commit to ensuring multicultural diversity throughout its membership. The percentage of Conservatory and Double Degree alumni in the alumni body is approximately 15%; the ALC will strive to be comprised of an equivalent representative proportion of Conservatory members, at a minimum.

**Student Representatives [Three-year terms]:** Stronger connections between alumni and students, increased student involvement in alumni programming, and a better understanding of student needs have all been outlined as important strategic goals for the future. Having student representatives (alumni in training) on the leadership board will ensure that student perspectives are incorporated into discussions and planning. The current plan is to have three student representatives, one each from the sophomore, junior and senior class. The first year the ALC is put into place, a rising sophomore and junior will be recruited. The following year, and every year following, a rising sophomore will be recruited. Students will serve three-year terms (until they graduate). If a student resigns, a student of the same class year will be found to fill the opening.

**Executive Director, Alumni Association [ex-officio]:** The Executive Director of the Association or the Executive Director’s designee shall be a non-voting member of the ALC and all standing committees, including the ALC’s Leadership Development (Nominations) Committee.

**Past Presidents [ex-officio]:** In order to retain valuable institutional knowledge and to tap into the experience and insights of past Alumni Association presidents, Past Presidents shall now be considered ex-officio members of the Alumni Leadership Council. They will continue to receive meeting information and updates in perpetuity and may attend any ALC meetings and participate as active members, although they will not be obligated to attend or have voting privileges.

**Staff Liaisons:** In order for ALC members to gain a full understanding of the programs on campus that utilize alumni volunteers, there is an interest in including administrative staff in more alumni leadership discussions. Staff liaisons from the Career Center, Admissions, Athletics, Development, Communications, and other areas such as the Multicultural Resource Center, will be invited to participate in meetings. They will not be considered official members of the ALC or have voting privileges; however, their participation in discussions will be valued and encouraged.

**Conservatory Alumni Representation:** The new leadership council is designed to build pathways for lifetime interactions, and to provide engagement connections and activities during all life stages for alumni of the College of Arts and Sciences and the Conservatory of Music. Due to these commitments, membership of the ALC must reflect different class eras and adequately represent the special interests of alumni who graduated from the Conservatory. The percentage of Conservatory and Double Degree alumni in the alumni body is approximately 15%; the ALC will strive for an equivalent representative proportion of Conservatory members, at a minimum.

**Subcommittees of the Alumni Leadership Council**

**Awards:** Recognizing the service and accomplishments of our alumni is an important role of the Alumni Association’s leadership. There is interest in reconceptualizing the awards program in order to involve more members of the community both in the selection process and in the celebration of those selected. Awards selection and management will also provide
a meaningful role for at-large members of the ALC, helping us address a concern expressed by past at-large members of the Executive Board who had no specific project responsibilities. Ideas for reconceptualizing the awards program include involving the student representatives of the ALC and other students in the selection of the Outstanding Young Alumni Award recipients, and including Past Presidents of the Alumni Association in the selection process for the Alumni Medal. Other thoughts involve expanding the audience for award presentations to more community members, including alumni, faculty, and students.

**Leadership Development (Nominations):** A subcommittee of the Alumni Leadership Council will be charged with soliciting nominations and reviewing the volunteer service, skill sets, and diverse perspectives of nominees in order to match the membership with the goals and priorities of the council. By having a subcommittee of the ALC charged with this work, ex-officio members can serve a meaningful role selecting new members based on their understanding of current ALC priorities. The Leadership Development subcommittee will be charged with building a diverse council, overseeing the nomination process, recruiting members and helping assure that volunteer roles suit nominees well, communicating with nominees about opportunities and expectations, and providing the training and support of council members. Ratification of standing committee membership will ensure the implementation of core values such as inclusion, diversity, community, and respect.

**Conclusion**

The overarching purpose of the new leadership structure is to serve and represent our more than 40,000 living alumni today and in the future, taking into consideration changing needs, lifestyles, interests, and technology.

The new Alumni Leadership Council, with nine (9) more members than the current Executive Board (27 versus 18), will provide more voices and perspectives, while also retaining the ability to foster robust discussions and arrive at effective decision making.

The Association currently has more than 2,000 volunteers. We want to focus our attention on all volunteers, by providing them with more relevant information and support, and expanding their number in service to the College and Conservatory.

While the new organizational structure is only one component of our alumni engagement initiative, it will serve as the underpinning that will facilitate new exciting directions and ensure regular review, assessment, rejuvenation, and sharing of our efforts with the broader alumni community.