Subject: Important Oberlin Alumni Council Information

Dear Friends and Fellow Members of the Alumni Council:

One of the great anthems of the turbulent years that I spent at Oberlin was Bob Dylan’s “The Times They Are A-Changin…” (Go ahead, pause, sing a few verses. I’ll wait.) Since becoming an alumnus, I’ve had the pleasure of being an active participant in Alumni Association activities. The organization, the way we need and want to reach out to our members, and to interact with the at large community of this amazing institution have changed. Two years ago, the leadership of the Council recognized a need to find new ways to reach out and engage with alumni and to forge continuing, lifelong connections between us as individuals and as an Association and the students, faculty, trustees, and staff of the College. To figure out what a new way of thinking and acting meant, we did what good Oberlinians do—we studied the matter. Over the past two years we looked at Alumni Council and the Executive Board from all angles to find out how we can be more responsive, more flexible, more creative, and more energetic in our leadership of this Association.

As I said, we’ve studied the matter. We looked at how other comparable institutions (OK, say it. there’s really no other place like Oberlin, and we all know that) structure their alumni association leadership and the way they provide important information, services, and training to their volunteers. We looked at what pieces of our current structure serve the alumni well, and listened to alumni responses to our survey reflecting frustration with the Association, its leadership, or the College. We took that information and assessed how it might inform a new structure for us, and a novel way of bringing renewed energy to the Association leadership and new flexibility in creating paths for engagement. We’ve heard—in focus groups on campus last year and, in discussions around the country and with the staff of the College—that alumni want more regional programming, that alumni are looking for more ways to come together with other Obies around common interests, and that we need to find more and better ways to use the gifts that technology and social media bring for enhancing communication among us. While Alumni Council Weekend is a great opportunity to see our friends and colleagues from other years or other eras, we’ve also heard frustration that there’s not enough time to adequately serve the interests and needs of all of the groups that have convened at that one time.

So, the times are changing—have changed, for sure—and the Executive Board has concluded that the leadership structure of the Association needs to change to meet the alumni body where we are now. This brings me to the supporting materials you are receiving and that are posted on the 2014 Alumni Council Weekend website. You’ll find an organization chart that describes a new “Alumni Leadership Council,” a group of 27 that will replace the Alumni Council as the decision-making body of the Association (and will be larger than the current 18-member Executive Board). The objective of a group of 27 is to be able to gather and act more quickly and respond to new initiatives more nimbly than the current 300-member Alumni Council. The proposed structure reflects our commitment to diversity in this new Leadership Council, while at the same time ensuring that the voices (and other instruments, too, of course) of the graduates of the Conservatory are heard and appropriately represented. To ensure that we have a thriving, vibrant Association in the future, we propose to include students on the Leadership Council—these are the alumni of tomorrow, after all. We want to listen to their interests and needs—how
can we alumni help them? how can they help us?—early in their careers at Oberlin so that we can begin forging those paths of lifelong engagement that I mentioned earlier.

This proposed change requires changes to the bylaws, and the proposed revisions are included as well. One of the changes that will affect current Alumni Council members is our proposal to tinker with the schedule of when different volunteer groups return to campus. We want to guarantee volunteers have sufficient time to interact with faculty, staff and current students, which is necessary to do their jobs effectively. At the same time, we want to preserve the opportunities for alumni with differing interests and from different generations to gather at the same time. It is a delicate balance.

I know that this is a great deal of information, but please read it over carefully and come to campus in a few weeks ready to discuss and to vote on the proposed bylaws changes. There will be ample opportunity throughout the weekend for conversations, both structured and informal, to answer your questions. Members of the current Executive Board will be attending committee meetings and gatherings of the various volunteer groups to discuss this proposal, and we’ll have “office hours” where you can drop in to talk with current members of the Executive Board as well. And please feel free to contact us at alumni@oberlin.edu if you have questions. We’ll do our best to get back to you as quickly as possible.

I am looking forward to being with you on campus this September 19-21. This is an exciting time, and I am thrilled to work with each of you to make our Association an even better vehicle for us to stay connected to each other and to the entire Oberlin community. If you haven’t registered for the weekend, please do so before September 5. We want you to be part of this important gathering!

Wishing you healthy and sunshine-filled weeks until we see each other.

Yours truly,

Chuck Spitulnik ’73
President
Oberlin Alumni Association

Attachments:

Alumni Leadership Council Structure
New Alumni Leadership Council Description
FAQ for Engagement Initiatives
Revised Alumni Association Bylaws (clean copy)
Revised Alumni Association Bylaws (edits tracked)