Class of 1959

Dear Classmates,

This coming May 23-26 will be our 55th reunion. If you’re free and able to come, I hope you’ll be there. As is always the case, that weekend will be commencement weekend and general reunion weekend at Oberlin, so there will be lots going on and lots to do (or not, as you see fit). Our specific reunion will be a cluster reunion with the classes of ’58 and ’60. You’ll be getting more information as the time gets closer, but one heads up: the Oberlin Inn, which usually houses people from our classes and older, will probably not be available, as its renovation (really, de- and re-construction) is slated to begin this winter. Our reunion headquarters will be in Asia House, which has some rooms available for housing. (Asia House is the old Theolog dorm behind Fairchild Chapel.) But probably the majority of our cluster reunionees will be staying at the La Quinta Inn, Cleveland Airport West. The dorm rooms at Asia House will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. So if you want to stay there, you’ll probably need to send your reservation in as soon as you get the forms, in early March. I’m told that Asia House has been recently renovated, and in particular, has air conditioning and elevators (in fact, is ADA accessible). Nevertheless, remember that the dorm rooms there are still college dorm rooms, the bathrooms down the hall, etc. Bottom line: Asia House will of course be a handier location but the hotel will have more comfortable rooms with private bathroom, a pool, free breakfast, etc. (And there will be frequent complimentary shuttles from the hotel to the College.)

Nancy (Ames) McEwen, our class head agent, and Polly (Dyck) Carroll, our class vice-president, joined me for the reunion planning and other sessions at the annual Alumni Council Weekend in late September. The focus of the weekend was on ideas for new ways in which we alums can connect with Oberlin and Oberlin with us. Conceited guy that I am, I naturally thought the best new idea was mine: a “share a couch” program for Obie travelers. There’s such a program on the web already for the general population, but it would be a lot less scary for the host and traveler if each knew the other was an Obie grad. Plus you could expect some pretty interesting conversations between the Obie host and Obie traveler. We’ll see whether the idea will take.

As usual, there’s lots of information to convey about what’s happening at Oberlin and I can only hit some of the highlights. The incoming class looks very good – talented, diverse, and smart (SATs near 700 on reading, writing, and math; ACT average = 30). The diversity includes economic diversity. On average, 80% of Oberlin students qualify for and receive, some form of need-based financial aid. A much bigger percent of Oberlin’s operating budget goes to financial aid than that of most other colleges, a fact not taken into account by the U.S. News &
World Report rankings. Speaking of rankings, there was a recent ranking of colleges by the average salary of their graduates. Oberlin ranked pretty far down. Now although making lots of money isn’t the main concern of most Oberlin grads, nevertheless it was pointed out to us that this ranking was very misleading. It only considered BAs and specifically excluded the salaries of alums with PhDs, MDs, LLDs, and other advanced degrees. Now around two-thirds of Oberlin’s grads go on for an advanced degree – possibly the highest average of any college or university in the country. So all those higher earning Obie grads – the great majority of our grads – were automatically excluded from consideration! Beware of rankings.

One academic change is that all courses at Oberlin are going to be “normalized” to a 4 credit value, with students taking four such courses a semester and 32 to graduate. Now although homogenization is not Oberlin, apparently there had been such a proliferation of courses of various credits that it was getting hard to figure out if graduation requirements had been fulfilled. On the topic of graduation, Oberlin’s six-year graduation rate has been going up for many years: in 1981 it was 70%, last year 88%.

As always, Oberlin needs your financial help. As I write this (late September), our class participation rate since July 1 is a paltry 4%. We’d like to get back up to our 50th reunion rate of 82%. So please send something into Oberlin, even if only $25. Also, Oberlin needs your help finding “lost alums” from our class, listed with this letter. If you know the whereabouts of any of them, please send it to the Alumni Office at Oberlin or alumni@oberlin.edu. Also included is a Reunion Class Directory Information Card. Please be sure to fill this out and return it to the Alumni Office (or email information to alumni@oberlin.edu) if you would like information included in our 55th Cluster Reunion Directory.

One last item. We are calling for nominations for class president. I’m willing to continue but would be very, very happy if there’s anybody out there who wants to take over – and you can nominate yourself. Email alumni@oberlin.edu.

Hoping to see you next May, I am

Rich Hall
1959 Class President