



Vice President for Communications
Oberlin College & Conservatory
Oberlin, Ohio

THE SEARCH

Oberlin College and Conservatory (Oberlin), one of the nation's premier liberal arts colleges and conservatories of music, seeks an experienced leader to serve as the Vice President for Communications (VP). The VP will be the strategic architect of communications at Oberlin. Working across the institution, the VP will be responsible for ensuring strategic alignment and execution across all communications and marketing, leading the promotion of a consistent, unified, and effective brand, and positioning Oberlin to amplify its role as a leading institution of higher education.

Oberlin comprises two internationally recognized bodies. The College of Arts and Sciences (A&S) enrolls approximately 2,400 students across 49 majors. The Conservatory offers world-class musical instruction to more than 600 students. Of that total, approximately 200 students pursue degrees simultaneously in both the College and Conservatory.

Oberlin is deeply committed to access and equity as the first institution of higher education to adopt policies admitting African American students and awarding bachelor's degrees to women. With its heritage and continued commitment to such ideals, Oberlin fills a leadership role with impact far beyond the scope of a liberal arts college. The exceptional quality of the academics and artistic programs, along with principled leadership on issues of social justice, firmly positions Oberlin as a public leader in higher education.

The VP will oversee and influence all communications efforts across the institution. They will work closely with President Carmen Twillie Ambar as the principal advisor for the President and her Executive Leadership Team on all communications-related matters and will serve as a key member of the Executive Leadership Team (ELT). This is a tremendous opportunity for a visionary, dynamic, and experienced communications professional to define and build an innovative strategic approach to communications that unifies messaging for Oberlin, supports and furthers the goals of the institution, supports and strengthens the brand, and engages all constituencies on and off campus. Working as a partner to the President, Chief of Staff, ELT, trustees, staff, alumni, and students across the community, the VP will assess the existing communications infrastructure, develop an institution-wide strategic communications plan,

lead effective crisis communications, work to position an effective brand that contributes to enrollment, serve as a public spokesperson for Oberlin, support advancement efforts, and manage a high performing communications staff. The VP will report to President Ambar and work closely with Chief of Staff David Hertz.

Oberlin College & Conservatory has partnered with Isaacson, Miller, a national search firm, for this recruitment. All inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in confidence to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT OBERLIN COLLEGE & CONSERVATORY

Oberlin is among the most distinguished of America's liberal arts colleges and conservatories. As an institution, it is deeply committed to academic and artistic excellence, to social justice, and to the use of knowledge to improve the human condition. Founded in 1833 by missionaries in what was then a frontier region, Oberlin has always aspired to change the world for the better. It was the very first college in America to adopt a policy to admit African American students (1835) and the first to grant bachelor's degrees to women (1841) in a co-educational program. At the turn of the 20th century, W.E.B. Du Bois calculated that Oberlin had educated one-third of all African American graduates of predominantly white colleges and universities. By admitting African Americans and women to the College in those early years, Oberlin exerted directional influence on the intellectual and humanistic values of American higher education. Today, that influence continues—whether by championing green innovation and sustainability or embracing a passion for understanding others and reaching across differences. Oberlin's historic commitment to justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion remains a current focus.

At the heart of Oberlin is its profound commitment to the life of the mind, both as an end in itself and as the foundation for achieving other worthwhile goals. Over the decades, Oberlin has produced more future PhDs than any other liberal arts college in the country. Its alumni include four Nobel laureates, several Pulitzer Prize winners, and more MacArthur Fellows than any other liberal arts college in the nation. Of the current members of the National Academy of Sciences, 30 have earned their undergraduate degrees at Oberlin. In 2009, Oberlin's world-class Conservatory of Music received the National Medal of the Arts, the highest award given by the U.S. government to top artists and arts patrons; only two professional music schools have been so honored.

Oberlin is distinct among liberal arts colleges for the breadth and caliber of its components, which in practice drives the institution to function more like a small university. With the College of Arts & Sciences and the Conservatory of Music, Oberlin boasts two distinctive and field-leading academic bodies. The Conservatory offers a joint degree program with the College of Arts and Sciences and a 6:1 student-to-faculty ratio. The College of Arts and Sciences enjoys a 10:1 student-to-faculty ratio. The College and Conservatory are each led by a Dean, who reports directly to the President. The deans' relationship is collaborative, but both operate with a great deal of autonomy due to the different academic missions,

degree programs, constituents, desired outcomes, and associated processes that each serves. In addition, the Allen Memorial Art Museum is ranked in the top five academic art museums in the country, housing nearly 15,000 works, with notable strengths in European and American painting and sculpture from the 13th century to the present; Asian art; and selected African, Islamic, Pre-Columbian, and ancient art. Likewise, the Oberlin libraries rank among the largest in the country attached to a liberal arts college, with 2.4 million items and access to an additional 48 million through OhioLINK, in addition to a full complement of electronic databases, journals, and e-publications.

OUR COMMUNITY

Faculty & Staff

Similar to the best of its peer institutions, Oberlin retains an intimacy between faculty and students. Faculty members are exceptionally dedicated teachers, mentors, and advisors who work closely with students through honors projects, independent studies, and collaborative research opportunities. They are nationally recognized for their active and important contributions as scholars, artists, and performers, and have received many awards for their scholarship and creative work. They routinely publish in leading journals and perform in national and international venues. Faculty work has been supported by grants and fellowships from numerous external resources, including the Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Science Foundation. Across the institution, there are 382 full-time and part-time faculty. Eighty-five percent of the faculty hold a terminal degree in their field (89% of faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences). In addition, Oberlin is home to over 600 administrative and professional staff.

Students

Oberlin's more than 3,000 students are referred to as "Obies." Oberlin's five-year Double Degree Program serves more than 200 students pursuing baccalaureate degrees in both the arts and sciences and in music. A limited number of graduate-level programs are also offered in the Conservatory.

Oberlin attracts students with a distinctive combination of intellectual intensity, passion for the arts, ethical commitment, and independence. Many are active participants in shaping the educational character of the institution, and faculty members are virtually unanimous in describing Oberlin students as stimulating and rewarding to teach. Furthermore, students are treated as intellectuals in their own right, pursuing original research or performing and creating original works. College grants are offered to allow students to collaborate on research with faculty. The Pathfinder program provides a structure, including rigorous feedback and learning opportunities, for students to develop a viable business idea with access to potential funding. Additionally, the Oberlin Experimental College (ExCo) offers students the chance to teach a course topic outside of the traditional curriculum for one or two credits, while Winter Term enables students to pursue self-directed learning through independent study, educational

experimentation, and experiential learning. Oberlin students are also encouraged to participate in study abroad programs, and they participate in over 175 student organizations. More than 400 student-athletes compete as members of 21 NCAA Division III athletic programs on campus.

To ensure student success both inside and outside the classroom, Oberlin has demonstrated a commitment to the whole student by providing a variety of services to support their well-being and their academic needs. These include, but are not limited to, Student Health and Wellbeing; Counseling and Psychological Services; the Center for Student Success; Student Support and Outreach Services; the Multicultural Resource Commons; Disability and Access; the Academic Advising Resource Center; International Student and Scholar Services; Office of Religious and Spiritual Life; Student Leadership and Involvement; the Writing Center; the Center for Learning, Education, and Research (CLEAR) in the Sciences; the Center for Engaged Liberal Arts (which includes Career Exploration and Development, The Bonner Center, Entrepreneurship at Oberlin, Fellowships and Awards, Undergraduate Research, and more); and the Shanks Health and Wellness Center for Athletics. Oberlin's four libraries provide strong teaching and learning resources for students and faculty. There are also numerous living and learning housing and dining opportunities.

Alumni

The Oberlin alumni voice is organized through the Oberlin Alumni Association, which is composed of over 40,000 graduates. The Association is an effective partner in supporting academic and artistic excellence. It directly supports current students and fellow alumni through mentoring, career and internship opportunities; it supports Admissions by conducting interviews, representing Oberlin at college fairs, and hosting admissions events in key cities; and it supports the Advancement Office in fundraising efforts. Like the active student body, Oberlin alumni are involved and vocal, holding their alma mater to a high standard, and communications must meet a like standard to successfully channel that passion.

Leadership

On May 30, 2017, Carmen Twillie Ambar was announced as Oberlin College and Conservatory's 15th president and the first African American leader in the institution's history. She joined Oberlin after nine years as president of Cedar Crest College, a private liberal arts women's college in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where she led significant institutional strengthening and transformation. Previously, she served as Vice President and Dean of Douglass College at Rutgers University, becoming the youngest dean in the university's history. An attorney by training, President Ambar began her career in the New York City Law Department as an Assistant Corporation Counsel.

A skilled leader and communicator, President Ambar brings a distinctive combination of candor, energy, humor, and results-oriented leadership. Each year, she reaffirms with her leadership team a set of values that guide her approach: fair play, creativity, transparency, boldness, collaboration, openness to new ideas, and a willingness to acknowledge mistakes. She is an engaged and supportive leader who provides

guidance and direction when needed while cultivating the trust and autonomy necessary for those who report to her to exercise their full expertise. The Vice President for Communications will report directly to President Ambar and will serve a key role in advancing Oberlin's voice, reputation, and priorities. She leads with considerable pace and expects those around her to take initiative, work hard, and remain focused on achieving meaningful results. Her leadership team reflects these expectations—self-starting, deeply committed to Oberlin's mission and ideals, and equally committed to creating a workplace in which people take genuine enjoyment and pride in their work. Together, they comprise a hard-charging team that is ambitious about Oberlin's future and committed to delivering results while maintaining a strong sense of trust, collaboration, and enjoyment in their work.

David Hertz has served as Oberlin's Chief of Staff and Strategy Officer since his appointment on January 1, 2020. He works closely with President Ambar across a wide range of institutional priorities and projects and brings deep experience in national media strategy to the leadership team. A true thought partner to President Ambar and her leadership team, David brings a strategic, collaborative perspective and serves as an important resource on institutional communications. Before joining Oberlin full-time, Hertz served as Managing Director of Media Relations at Dix & Eaton, where he worked with Oberlin as a consultant. Prior to Dix & Eaton, he was a news reporter and editor. Across these roles, teams led by Hertz have earned both Silver and Bronze Anvil Awards, as well as the Pulitzer Prize.

The ELT at Oberlin, which functions as the president's cabinet, includes the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; Dean of the Conservatory of Music; Vice President and Dean of Students; Vice President and Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid; Vice President for Advancement; Chief of Staff and Strategy Officer; Vice President, General Counsel, and Secretary; Vice President for Finance and Administration; Director of Athletics and Physical Education; Chief Human Resources Officer; and Executive Director of the Center for DEI Innovation and Leadership. The Vice President for Communications sits on the ELT, which has an established track record for decisive accomplishments and operating as a highly cohesive team.

ONE OBERLIN AND TRANSFORMATION

Upon her arrival at Oberlin, President Ambar and the Board of Trustees began a full-spectrum examination of the institution to ensure Oberlin's long-term resiliency. The process was rooted in Oberlin's core values, and as a result, involved extensive campus consultation led by a committed cross-section of faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, trustees, and students who formed a committee for the Academic and Administrative Program Review (AAPR). The organizational values of boldness, transparency, and collaboration are embodied in the process that has become known as One Oberlin, which culminated in a set of institution-wide recommendations regarding the curriculum, program structure, and allocation of resources that plan to address current and future financial needs, as well as areas for investment that are critical to Oberlin's future. The final One Oberlin report was endorsed by an overwhelming majority of the General Faculty in May 2019 and received unanimous support from the Board of Trustees. Under President Ambar and the ELT, and through the work and guidance of ten committees, implementation of

the recommendations contained in the report was undertaken. More information on the process, including the full One Oberlin report, can be found at www.oberlin.edu/oneoberlin. Stemming from One Oberlin, the institution launched newly updated and integrative Winter Term options, new collaborative programs between the College and Conservatory, including new concentrations and minors across both divisions, and integrative liberal arts concentrations in journalism, business, and global health.

Building on the momentum of One Oberlin, the institution has continued to invest in interdisciplinary, career-connected, and collaborative academic offerings. In the years since the COVID-19 pandemic, from which the institution emerged stronger than when it started, Oberlin has expanded opportunities across both the College and Conservatory. Through the creation of new majors in Business, Communication Studies, Data Science, Environmental Science, Financial Economics, Music Theater, and Recording Arts and Production, Oberlin's academic offerings continue to reflect emerging student interests and workforce needs while remaining grounded in the institution's liberal arts mission.

These additions complement Oberlin's existing integrative concentrations and further strengthen pathways that connect the arts, sciences, humanities, and professional practice. The Conservatory's new Music Theater program, which launched in 2025, represents a significant investment in interdisciplinary arts education and builds upon Oberlin's longstanding contributions to American theater and musical performance.

Oberlin has also deepened its commitment to experiential learning and community engagement in the region, particularly through the partnerships that are creating "Park Arts," which is an ambitious intergenerational center for artistic creation and humanities education in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Oberlin will add its newly established Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Fine Arts in Integrated Arts to this creative hub by providing BA+BFA students with a fifth-year opportunity to live and learn at Park Arts, which is scheduled for occupancy beginning in June 2027.

Oberlin's ongoing curricular innovation demonstrates the successful implementation of One Oberlin's vision of collaboration, academic distinction, and strategic investment in areas of emerging opportunity.

THE OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

The Office of Communications serves as Oberlin's central communications and marketing unit, with a primary focus on supporting student recruitment and enrollment goals for both the college and conservatory while advancing Oberlin's brand, reputation, and engagement with other key audiences.

Led by the Vice President for Communications, the division comprises 18 staff members, including six senior leaders who oversee web and digital strategy, marketing, social media, multimedia production, brand strategy and creative services, editorial strategy, internal communications, media relations, and conservatory event promotion. Together, these teams develop and execute integrated marketing

campaigns, support institutional priorities through strategic storytelling and brand stewardship, and produce print and digital content. Key deliverables include the biannual flagship publication Oberlin Alumni Magazine; a full suite of college and conservatory admissions publications; the daily internal e-newsletter; and Running to the Noise, President Ambar's monthly podcast featuring conversations with influential alumni and changemakers.

The Office of Communications works in close partnership with communications professionals in the Office of Admissions, the Office of Advancement, Oberlin Athletics, and other campus units to align messaging, strengthen the institutional brand, and address specialized communications needs.

ROLE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR COMMUNICATIONS

The VP for Communications is responsible for the comprehensive communications portfolio of Oberlin. This VP will step into the role of a proactive leader directing the strategic vision and orchestration of institutional communications and marketing while ensuring consistent, efficient, and effective communications, promotion, and branding across the full spectrum of efforts at Oberlin. While overseeing the Office of Communications and its staff, the VP will collaborate closely with the President, Chief of Staff, ELT, and key stakeholders across the campus to refine Oberlin's overarching positioning in ways that are authentic, respect Oberlin's past, address its current achievements, and reflect the institution's mission. They will likewise ensure a collaborative culture of campus partnership throughout the communications operation. When appropriate, the VP will be an active spokesperson for President Ambar and the institution.

The VP will be a key member of the ELT. Internally, the VP will guide senior leaders through their own communications topics, challenges, and projects, including media training and support and crisis communications. Broadly, the VP will serve as a strategic collaborator and thought partner for the ELT as they execute their portfolios and move to achieve strategic goals.

The VP will report to President Ambar and work closely with the Chief of Staff and Strategy Officer Hertz. The relationship is designed to ensure the VP is continually integrated with the President and the strategic goals and tactical operations of Oberlin. Further, the structure places the VP in a skilled trio of communicators with the President and Chief of Staff.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT

The VP will have the opportunity to address the following opportunities and challenges for the future.

Assess, evaluate, and refine the communications infrastructure.

The arrival of a new VP provides an opportunity for Oberlin to evaluate its communications operation in acknowledgment of the reality that the fields of both communications and higher education are rapidly evolving. The VP will assess the existing communications structure and strategic deployment of resources in conjunction with institutional goals and will work as needed to increase efficiency, strategic coordination, and effectiveness, along with access to and utilization of metrics.

Provide campus-wide strategic communications leadership.

The VP will craft and lead an overarching and comprehensive communications effort that engages the whole of Oberlin. Successfully enacted, such an effort will provide a strategic framework for and coordination of communications across the entirety of the institution, such that they are consistent and strategic through time, over various platforms, and across all units and departments. Such an effort will effectively tell the story of Oberlin, convey the mission and vision of Oberlin, and communicate the value proposition of an Oberlin education. The VP must orient these efforts through collaborative partnerships and timely, efficient service to engage with and support individuals and units across the institution.

Given Oberlin's breadth and complex structure, and the ambitious agenda driven by President Ambar, successful and effective internal communications are essential. The VP will lead this effort, ensuring the necessary structure, resources, and culture are in place to facilitate effective internal communications and close work with Admissions, Athletics, and Advancement to successfully meet strategic goals and coordinate strategies in support of enrollment and retention.

Support and enhance Oberlin's role as a national leader.

Throughout its history, Oberlin has been an exemplary leader in higher education. With the example of its own history, Oberlin is able to lead conversations in a way that other institutions cannot and can contribute to the narrative of higher education and society with a weight that exceeds the status of most small private liberal arts colleges. Looking ahead, Oberlin must leverage its positioning, and the VP will ensure that the institution is in the right places, positions, and conversations to exercise its voice of leadership. Through a strong knowledge of the issues at hand and in close partnership with the ELT, the VP will lead the institution to the right opportunities in which to make meaningful contributions to the greater landscape of higher education and society.

Lead effective crisis communication.

The need for effective crisis communications is a natural byproduct of higher education institutions and principled leadership. The VP will ensure that sufficient processes and infrastructure are in place to provide for effective and timely crisis communications as needed and lead such efforts when they are necessary. Oberlin is too often perceived through second and third-party interpretations born of crisis

(legitimate or not), resulting in a brand not entirely controlled by Oberlin itself. The VP must have effective, proactive, best-in-class crisis communication skills.

The active role that students play in leading and shaping the institution means that the student voice will often be present in crisis communication scenarios. While the VP role may not be predominantly student-facing, deep commitment to the student-focused institutional mission and the ability to successfully communicate and collaborate with students, both individually and as a group, will play an essential part in success.

Lead the positioning of the Oberlin brand to drive enrollment.

Oberlin is a world-class higher education institution, but like all colleges, it is challenged by the changing demographics of the country. Oberlin's College of Arts and Sciences must grow and diversify its applicant pool to meet future institutional enrollment needs. Recruiting such a pool will require sophisticated, forward-thinking communications across a variety of new and traditional platforms, able to reach a more diverse group of potential students. The nuance of Oberlin's mission, and the value proposition of an Oberlin education, is too often lost and reduced when Oberlin's brand is defined by outside sources. Communicating the academic excellence and depth with which an Oberlin education and commitment to equity and social justice intertwine, and the value therein, to prospective students is a task that requires intentional, skilled, and strategic communications.

Serve as the public spokesperson for the President.

At times, the VP will be a key voice for the institution, serving as a proxy for the President. As such, the VP must possess an engaging and authentic communication style suited to the significance of such a role.

Support Oberlin's advancement efforts.

Oberlin's 41,000 alumni are a key audience driven by loyalty to the brand and passion for the institution. As such, they hold their alma mater to a high standard, and their motivated engagement is a valuable asset. The VP will have the opportunity to collaborate with Advancement to develop a proactive, effective communications strategy that engages alumni.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The ideal candidate will bring many of the following professional qualities and experiences:

- Superior strategic and messaging skills and substantial experience leading, envisioning, and implementing successful strategic marketing, communications, and branding programs across a decentralized and complex enterprise with multiple constituencies and a variety of audiences;

- Experience working in higher education; familiarity with the various constituent groups and unique decision-making processes that exist in higher education, and knowledge of the challenges facing higher education today;
- A high degree of interpersonal competence, emotional intelligence, and the ability to collaborate, which lends itself to working closely with the President, the Chief of Staff, and members of the campus community;
- Experience in leading crisis communications;
- Keen creative and design sensibilities, with a strong understanding of the communications process from creative concept through production and fulfillment;
- A full understanding of the scope, impact, and strategy of evolving technology, new media, and social media;
- Substantial experience evaluating the strength of existing communications, positions, and marketing efforts and identifying opportunities for improvement;
- Unwavering focus on diversity, inclusion, equity, and anti-racism, and how this work is amplified in the language, images, and channels that are used by an institution;
- Ability to recruit, inspire, build, lead, mentor, and motivate staff; and to encourage change and growth in people and programs. A strong commitment to personal and professional development, metrics, and the ability to build and lead high-performing teams;
- A proactive, future-oriented leader; entrepreneurial by nature; driven and able to work at a significant pace; persuasive and able to work collaboratively and drive progress both inside and outside of a formal office structure. A strategic thought partner to leaders throughout campus;
- A deep appreciation for the history, achievements, and aspirations of Oberlin, and its identity as a global and inclusive liberal arts College of Arts and Sciences and Conservatory of Music. An ability to demonstrate a real understanding of the Oberlin mission and purpose, and effectively and eloquently articulate that to a diverse audience;
- An appreciation for and ability to articulate the value of the liberal arts;
- Ability and desire to be the visible face and voice of Oberlin;
- Ideal experience includes working with elite liberal arts institutions, arts conservatories, capital campaigns, school admissions, and local and national media outlets;
- Bachelor's degree required; advanced degree preferred.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website [here](#). Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged. If you require a reasonable accommodation to complete an application, participate in an interview, or otherwise take part in the selection process, please contact Harley Bartles at hbartles@imsearch.com.

Andy Marshall, Rebecca Swartz, Karson Freeman, Harley Bartles
Isaacson, Miller

Oberlin College is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer with a strong institutional commitment to the development of a climate that supports equality of opportunity and respect of differences based on gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation. Oberlin was the first coeducational institution to grant bachelor's degrees to women and historically has been a leader in the education of African Americans; the College was also among the first to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by Oberlin College. The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and information provided by Oberlin College would supersede any conflicting information in this document.