Hello, Alumni!

As we draw close to the end of another year of operation (our 61st!) we have quite a bit to reflect on. Our organization and its members have continued to confront the unique challenges of running a student co-op with ingenuity, enthusiasm, and – when necessary – grit. With fewer than two months left in the semester, we can look back on our work this year with a sense of accomplishment and the knowledge that we learned a lot along the way.

OSCA continues to be a vibrant organization whose reputation attracts new members and the interest of others in the cooperative movement. We continue to fill our nine co-ops to full capacity (currently 626 members) and our Winter Term Co-op program drew a record number of participants this January. We sent nearly twenty-six OSCA members to the NASCO Institute in Ann Arbor, Michigan last November to learn about the other co-ops in North America, and we networked with co-ops in places like Portland, Oregon, Austin, Texas and Berkeley, California. Meanwhile, progressive-minded students from several college campuses across the country have contacted us to ask how they can follow our model and start student co-ops of their own.

Individual co-ops are still demonstrating their spirit, their creativity, and their love for community and good food. Harkies play games of intramural soccer against other dorms, a fierce sight in their body paint and colorful clothing. Members of Tank take pride in their excellent special meals, and Pyle members in their bread and desserts. Keep members still jam on the porch all evening long.

During Food Week in mid-March, the co-ops teamed up for an all-OSCA bake-off and made a host of scrumptious desserts with locally grown apples. Last year during our rent negotiations with Oberlin College, we agreed on a plan to exchange Old Barrows Co-op (which the College has wanted to close due to maintenance costs) for a new grocery-based co-op in Fall 2011 in the “language maze” complex that contains the Spanish, Third World and German program houses. As of now, the plan to open this new co-op has been deferred until Fall 2012 to allow more dialogue between OSCA and the College and also between OSCA and the residents of the three program houses. Members have been highly involved in brainstorming how the co-op might work and many have expressed enthusiasm for the possibilities that a new co-op offers.
Also impacting plans to open the new co-op are a series of food safety issues that arose in a few of our dining co-ops earlier this year, attracting the attention of the Lorain County Health Department. It’s unlikely that we will obtain the license to operate a new co-op kitchen until these issues are addressed. However, our cleanliness and operations staff has been unflagging in their efforts to improve our kitchen environment and have made great steps toward resolving the problem.

Meanwhile, OSCA members look toward our future. The long-range planning committee, in conjunction with our sister corporation, OSCA Properties, continue to research the possibility of creating a community-based grocery co-op or buying club. The OSCA Properties Board is in the process of selling its off-campus property, Fuller House, and finding new ways to achieve its goal of community development and cooperative education. Last year we celebrated our 60th anniversary with a host of events that included “OSCA Prom”. OSCA Prom was so popular that we’re gearing up to for it again at the end of April. Rest assured that OSCA is in the process of selling its off-campus property, Fuller House, and looking for new ways to achieve its goal of community development and cooperative education.

Our outstanding student staff and employees have again gone above and beyond to make sure that our organization runs as smoothly as possible. Sid Stech, our new Business Coordinator, completed her first year of work for us and Arlene Muir, our Office Assistant, completed her second. Our Food Safety Advisor, Rachel Beiser, and our Financial Manager, Iris Hunt, have continued to devote their full time and energy to our success. Thanks for the great work, everyone!

As a parting thought, I’d like to sincerely thank all of you, the alumni who have continued to show interest in our organization and spread the ideals and the energy of OSCA through your pursuits in the outside world. It is an honor and a privilege to serve an organization whose alumni have shown such a sustained commitment to their ideals.

In Cooperation,

Dylan Rees
OSCA President 2010-2011

A Letter from the Alumni Team

We are sending you this newsletter as a way of updating you on the activities, future plans, and stories of this year’s cohort of OSCA alumni. It is our hope that they will amuse or interest, or at the very least remind you of your time spent in the co-ops.

This year has been one of shake-ups and new opportunities for OSCA. This semester there was no Alumni Coordinator, so instead a collaborative team of the two Education Coordinators, the Theory History Coordinators, and the Membership Secretary have been working since March to collect articles and interviews for the publication. Unlike in years past this newsletter is electronic only, accessible via the OSCA website, so both reduce paper waste and make the Alumni Newsletter more widely available. We’ve also begun planning for the Alumni Picnic, which looks to be a blast! There will also be tours conducted by the Education Committee of all the co-ops so people can see the changes that are taking place.

Other Alumni related events for the future include Oral Histories with the Theory History Coordinators and Co-op Historians and a call to once again submit to the OSCA Alumni Listserv.

We look forward to seeing you in May!

Yona Koch-Fienberg, Kat Lamp, Toby Irving, Lucy Smith, Rae Eaton

Make yourself a part of OSCA History!

The Theory & History Coordinators will be collecting Oral Histories at the Alumni Picnic. Stop by and share stories, rumors, myths and memories with interested co-opers.
The Future Is Now: Thoughts from the President-elect

My name is Yona Koch-Fienberg, and I have been elected as the OSCA president for the 2011-2012 academic year. OSCA was one of the main reasons I came to Oberlin College, even though I could barely boil water. This hindrance aside, I have been involved in the co-op system since arriving at Oberlin. In my first year in OSCA, I filled various internal positions in Tank co-op, including Toilet Unclogger and Fire Marshall. In my second year in OSCA I served as Membership Secretary while living in Harkness. Seeing OSCA in these capacities has laid the foundation for understanding the role and responsibilities of OSCA President, as well as OSCA’s role at Oberlin College and in the greater Oberlin community.

In the 2010-2011 year, OSCA faced several challenges, including a reduction in its dining license to a risk level 3 dining hall (essentially, we can’t keep leftovers), and the decision to put off the closing of Old Barrows (and the consequent opening of a new co-op) until next year. However, OSCA has emerged an even stronger organization, ready to face the challenges and promises of the new year, and the future.

As mentioned, we are working on opening a new co-op in place of closing Old Barrows co-op. This co-op will most likely be a grocery-style co-op built near several of the Language-based Program Houses. We look forward to spending the 2011-2012 year brainstorming ways for the OSCA community and the Program House community to collaborate. However, the new co-op is only one of the many ways OSCA will evolve as the years go on. The Board of Directors is also considering re-evaluating its structure. These changes, should they happen, will make OSCA a more progressive movement as a whole.

OSCA has some exciting and fun events coming up, too. During Commencement, OSCA will host the Annual Alumni Picnic, which will take place on the Old Barrows lawn (see you there!). Some newer traditions will continue this year, including the Tank Co-op Pig Roast, OSCA Prom, and - in its first year - the OSCA Folk Fest. These are only a few examples of the activities that OSCAnes are planning for this year, and hopefully for years to come.

OSCA looks ahead to the 2011-2012 year with enthusiasm and an open mind for any changes that may be essential for OSCA to continue being as successful as it has been. The core of our success thus far can be attributed to the commitment and devotion of countless OSCA members. As President, I hope to continue this tradition with an eye on our past and towards our future.

In cooperation,
Yona Koch-Fienberg

photo by Yona Koch-Fienberg

Spring 2011 OSCA Board Members on their Board Retreat at Mohican State Park
The President Goes to . . .

As November approached this Fall, I knew that I couldn't pass up attending NASCO, since this would be my last opportunity to do so as an OSCA member. I'd heard more than enough stories from friends of mine who had attended in the past to know that meeting other co-opers and attending workshops in Ann Arbor would be a blast.

My primary reason for attending NASCO this year was to witness the induction of our Financial Manager, Iris Hunt, into the NASCO Hall of Fame. I had the great privilege of introducing Iris at the award ceremony and watched as Iris took the podium and the audience, full of long-time NASCO staff and co-op members, erupted with applause. Formal recognition of Iris's long dedication to OSCA has been long overdue, but still more rewarding was discovering how widely Iris is already recognized by peers in the cooperative movement.

I also came to NASCO in the hope of honing very specific aspects of my knowledge in order to be better informed about the decisions I would make as an OSCA Officer later on this year. The first workshop I attended was on the topic of zoning for cooperatives, and it offered a case study of the Madison, Wisconsin cooperatives in their struggle to promote the development of co-ops within their city. For the Madison co-ops, garnering the support of city planners and their own communities was an uphill battle until they were able to draw attention to the merits of adding co-ops to one's community and dispel many of the myths that surround the notion of a co-op. (City planners imagined that Madison's housing co-operatives were closer to filthy, poorly-managed flophouses than equitable and communal housing.) In time, representatives of Madison's co-ops were able to secure a special zoning category specifically for their housing co-ops, and through broadening their city's understanding of the cooperative movement, set up future successes for collaboration with their own communities and furthering their ideals. I and two other members of OSCA Properties attended this particular workshop and hope to use the lessons we derived from the workshop in OP's future endeavors.

Other workshops I attended were also applicable to specific projects within OSCA this year. A workshop I attended on the second day addressed the creation of a co-op web site, drawing examples for co-op systems such as the ones in Berkeley and Lansing, Michigan. We learned about several of the open-source management packages that are in heavy use by these co-ops and studied how other co-ops use their web sites to simplify communication among their members and coordinate rent payments, event promotion, work shifts, and other aspects of their management. On the final day, I attended a workshop that addressed the co-operative movement in a broad sense by giving examples of co-op participation at every stage of one's life, from daycare co-operatives to education co-ops to worker and grocery co-ops to cooperative retirement homes. Getting a glimpse of the vast number of ways that co-operative ideals can transform our day-to-day lives leads me to consider new ways that OSCA and OSCA Properties could expand its own operation in new directions and integrate with our community.

One of the other primary reasons for my attending NASCO was to represent OSCA in NASCO's Annual General meeting, at which NASCO member co-ops gave short presentations on their activities in the past year (which was a lot of fun, since OSCA has been so active) and voted on changes to NASCO's by-laws. None of these changes were sweeping or controversial, and all of them passed with ease. Nonetheless, it was exciting to observe the co-operative network of which we're a part operating on its highest level, with constituents from all over the continent converging to discuss and make changes to their system.

I found that wherever I went, whether to workshops or to the Ann Arbor co-ops, I found other OSCA members. Our presence at NASCO this year was significant, and throughout the weekend, I felt proud to be an OSCA Member.

Dylan Rees
An Interview with Iris Hunt

This year, Iris Hunt was honored for 25 years of dedicated (and spectacular) service to OSCA. In a ceremony conducted at NASCO, Iris was presented with a NASCO Lifetime Achievement Award. Kat Lamp talked to her about her time spent with OSCA:

1) What is your name, co-op, and history with OSCA? Iris Hunt. Employee of OSCA for the past 25 years.

2) What is your first OSCA memory? I went to a house party at Old B Co-op back in the mid-1980s. This was my first contact with co-ops. Had a blast!

3) Do you have a favorite thing to cook? I don’t cook in a co-op, but hundreds of co-ops and OSCA alumni join me and my family for meals. So many favorite meals: eggplant lasagna, garlic bread, and spinach/feta salad; pesto, cornbread, and bleu cheese salad; and, of course, traditional Puerto Rican meals.

4) What is your All-OSCA position, what do you do? Financial Manager. I manage the $2.5+ million that flows in and out of OSCA and OSCA Properties each year, and perform/oversee most of the professional duties in the area of finance. I issue room and board bills, pay invoices, deposit checks, create financial statements, calculate and pay refunds, prepares taxes, assist in the creation of financial policy, and business planning. I also train new Officers, staff, and employees.

5) Why did you want to become more involved? I began part-time in 1986 as OSCA’s Bookkeeper. When the full-time Financial Manager position was advertised in 1991, I was so in love with OSCA members that I wanted to apply for the job. I attended my first NASCO Institute conference to help me decide whether to change my career to co-ops. I got back to Oberlin so high on co-ops, I applied for the job and was hired.

6) What are your favorite aspects of OSCA? During my 25-year association with OSCA, I have become intimately familiar with the various jobs, obligations and responsibilities of OSCA members. Their competence, maturity and reliability are crucial to the operation of the organization. I love teaching these OSCA staff members to learn the intricacies of operating a multi-million dollar cooperative business.

These co-op members truly follow the College’s motto, “Learning and Labor.”

7) What do you think being involved with OSCA will mean for your future? Retirement!

8) What is your fondest OSCA memory? Having two OSCA members assist me with birthing one of my sons at home. It was such a beautiful experience. (Thanks, Sandra and Laura!)

9) What is something about OSCA that you think everyone should know? In my opinion, OSCA is the most complex, intense, and authentic "real life" experience available to Oberlin College students. OSCA will change your life!

10) What has been your favorite All-OSCA event? OSCA-sponsored co-op month events at Tappan Square: making apple butter over an open fire (we still have that kettle!), co-op chili cook-offs, pumpkin carving, face painting, etc. Co-ops and community members from the whole town participated.

Iris Hunt receives the NASCO Life-time Achievement Award - Fall 2010
Is NASCO Really Worth It?: A Brief History of OSCA-NASCO Relations

Is NASCO worth it? It's a question that's come up more than once in OSCA's history, and I'd like to bring it up again with regards to my own experience. I'll begin with a brief history of OSCA and NASCO, and I'll finish with conclusions I was able to draw after attending this year's NASCO Institute Convention.

After many years of exchanging visits with Oberlin's sister cooperative organization in Ann Arbor, Michigan (the Inter-Cooperative Council, or ICC), OSCA accepted the invitation to join NASCO for a small fee in 1975 or 1976. Less than ten years later, in 1983, OSCA decided to drop out because of a dues increase and a failure of NASCO to repay an earlier loan of close to $8,000, which was finally repaid...eight months late. However, according to a Fall 1985 Board Packet, the reasons went beyond money value and engendered deeper threads of discussion. "Many OSCA members felt that NASCO failed to provide a program worth any support...its programs had little relevance to the particular needs of...[the] membership." Further, as many NASCO programs seemed more directed to boards and staff rather than general membership, there was the worry that NASCO was becoming "elitist." Another important point made was that less than 5% of the OSCA membership was being sent to the Convention, many of them all-OSCA Officers or Staff, while the dues for being a part of NASCO were being paid for by everyone co-op member.

In 1984, OSCA rejoined NASCO, acknowledging the benefits, and resigning itself to the ideology of "it's the best (read 'only') one we got." Even though it was considered "deeply flawed" and "filled with financial as well as political problems," OSCA decided to rejoin, most notably given the fact that it seemed as though NASCO wasn't about to die any time soon—at least not as soon as they'd hoped. (Yes, I'm not kidding. OSCA wished death upon NASCO. I quote the 1985 Board Packet when I write: "Best thing right now would be for NASCO to die.") OSCA's plan after rejoining was to institute change from within, to "do an inside job on NASCO." By clearly answering the question of "what ought NASCO to be," OSCA hoped to make a difference in NASCO, to redirect the organization's focus from large business-like co-ops to helping smaller start-ups, and to better bring NASCO "down" to the membership of OSCA.

In spite of wishing death to NASCO in 1985, the Board voted to continue membership with the organization based on its educational, developmental, and networking benefits. But discontent still reigned, and in 2002, the issue was brought up once more. The proposal to the Board was called "Withdrawal to Save NASCO" and was submitted the Spring of that year along with a proposal to withdraw from CCDC for financial reasons as well. However, "save" holds a double-meaning when applied to NASCO. Not only did the proposal call to save money, it also called to rescue NASCO, which it believed was not taking the proper steps in anti-oppression and diversity promotion. The People of Color Caucus and the first person of color appointed as a staff member of NASCO were not considered adequate advances. Lots of drama ensued and discussions continued for weeks within OSCA about the decision, as well as between OSCA, NASCO, and other co-ops. (If you're interested in the debate, much of it is included in the Board Minutes from Spring/Fall 2002, but also e-mails and letters sent between parties are included in the 2002 issue an earlier issue of the OSCA Publication.)

But what does this all mean? 2002 was a dramatic year for OSCA. Just check out the Publications and Board Packets. There was actually a proposal to rename Harkness "First World Co-op" to better reflect the white, privileged demographic the anonymous author experienced within the co-op. But 2002 wasn't the only year membership within NASCO was reconsidered or even dropped. My experience at this year's convention lends some credence to the naysayers of yore. I, personally, found it extremely difficult to network, probably due to my diffidence, but also a little bit due to the large OSCA contingent, which made it easy for shy little me to hide. My secondary goal, of becoming closer to other OSCA members I'd never met before, also went unrealized. All I really wanted to do after dark was go back to cozy Lester House and finish my Japanese homework while chatting with a fellow OSCAn over a cup of tea. (This did not happen.) I felt lonely and isolated. As far as workshops go,
you've heard their praises sung in other articles, which only leads me to believe that I chose wrong. As always, when flustered, I chose my workshops haphazardly, and it shows in my dissatisfaction with what I learned. I found I wasn't inspired. I was just tired and a little bit bored.

But, see, that's just my experience, and, in spite of the fact that I'm just not cut out for the social environment of NASCO, obviously OSCA's still a member, and clearly, from reading the other articles, it's a worthy venture. So many people had their eyes open to methods of combating systematic oppression. So many people met so many new people and became acquainted with how other co-ops run. Other people learned things, and other people shared those things they learned with people at the Conference and with you all. I don't feel I have the vocabulary or extensive knowledge of past issues to begin discussing whether or not NASCO has improved on diversity and anti-oppression issues; however, I think that, by helping to make these Publications a success, attendees (although many were All-OSCA Members) have begun to bring their experiences to the membership, and I think these experiences are wholly applicable to OSCA today and tomorrow. I may not have picked the right options in my Choose-Your-Own-Adventure: NASCO Edition, but the important thing is that other people did, and that they've shared this information with you in the hopes that it can benefit all of OSCA.

So, in the long-practiced tradition of our honorable cooperative association: Is NASCO worth it?

Jen Graham

Blueprints!? The New Co-op Design Committee

As you may have heard, the end of last year's rent contract negotiations brought about some pretty big changes to OSCA, in particular the eventual loss of Old Barrows Co-op. While the College will be reclaiming Old B sometime in the future, in the interim they have been working closing with OSCA's New Co-op Design team to design a new space in the Language Maze (the area inside the dorms of Harvey, Kade, and Price). Although negotiations and plans have been set aside for now, there's hope that next year will bring about some meaningful changes. To get an idea of how the planning has gone this year, we talked to members of the New Design Team:

1. What was OSCA's role in the co-op new design? Our primary role has been planning and carrying out meetings with Oberlin College representatives of the Kade, Harvey and Price program houses, and OSCA members on the New Co-op Design Committee. We also collaborated with other OSCA and Oberlin College staff to design a possible floor plan for the new co-op.

2. What will be the role of the new co-op in OSCA? How will this role be different from Old B's? As of the end of Fall semester, we envisioned the new co-op as a halfway point between Brown Bag Co-op and one of our more traditional dine-in co-ops. Members would cook for themselves and would have Village or off-campus housing status but would also have access to a small kitchen and a dining area within the space. As of this Spring, we have at least another year of discussion ahead of us before this new co-op becomes a reality. It's hard to know what the next year will bring.

3. How was working with the College on such a big project? As students, we rarely get to work with the College administrators as equals and collaborators, but the new co-op project has allowed us to do just that. It's been interesting to see the College's perspective on this project as it has unfolded.

4. What's a favorite proposal about the new co-op? Someone on our committee suggested that we try to get blast chillers for our new co-op. They're like freezers on steroids, and they'll cool down your cooked foods to a safe storage temperature very, very quickly.

5. What would you hope this new co-op would be like in 15 years? That the co-op be a vibrant community that shares a lot of its activities with the program houses adjacent to it; to see members of this co-op cooking meals with Harvey, Kade and Price and helping with their programming efforts as well.

Rae Eaton
Please Join Us

OSCA Alumni Weekend
and 61st Anniversary Celebration

Alumni Picnic
Saturday – May 28, 2011 – Noon
Old Barrows Co-op

Walk Down Memory Lane
Sunday – May 29, 2011 – 1:30pm
Harkness House

Workshop:
Utilizing Fresh and Local Foods
Sunday – May 29, 2011 – 4:30pm
Harkness House Kitchen

CALLING ALL ALUMNI !!!!!

Each year the OSCA community grows a little more as students learn about the good cheer, delicious food, and loving community of cooperative living. Part of what makes OSCA so special are the fond memories of everyday life, or the stressful board meetings, or that time that Tank almost caught on fire, or when a meat buyer bought buffalo hearts. OSCA wants to hear your favorite memories of OSCA – the good times and the bad. Throughout Summer and Fall of 2011 OSCA’s Theory and History Coordinators are launching “General Feelings: An Oral History Campaign.” Co-operators will be trained in gathering oral histories and will be engaging all interested alumni and current co-ops. After the completion of this campaign a special edition newsletter will be produced. Please email OSCA@oberlin.edu with your contact information if you want to be part of this amazing experience.
WHAT'S NEWS WITH YOU?

New Address? New Job? Just want to say hello? We'd love to hear from you . . . .

Name:

E-mail address:

Co-op(s) & Year(s):

Your News:

Change of Address:

Comments:

YES! I want to support OSCA

☐ I can offer a winter term project
   specify:

☐ I can offer an internship, job or housing
   specify:

☐ I'd like to visit or speak at an OSCA event
   specify:

☐ Other:
   specify:

Here is my donation to support:

☐ OSCA Alumni News
☐ Financial Scholarship Fund
☐ Nicaragua Sister Partnership Project
☐ Other:
   specify:

Please make check payable to OSCA.

Note from the OSCA Treasurer:

Did you know that if you donate money to Oberlin College you can specify that it go to OSCA? Support OSCA's mission at Oberlin College!
An Interview with Dylan Rees

As OSCA's President prepares to leave his post and his OSCA, Kat Lamp caught him with a few questions about his time as a co-op.

1. What is your name, co-op, and history with OSCA? I'm Dylan Rees, OSCA’s President. I've spent four semesters in Harkness, three semesters in Tank, and one semester in Pyle. I've also been a breadmaker, a Housing Loose Ends Coordinator, and the OSCA/ Oberlin College Liaison.

2. What is your first OSCA memory? The psychedelic murals in the Harkness lounge. Also, that nice, musty Harkness aroma, which hasn't changed a bit after all these years.

3. Do you have a favorite thing to cook, or have you had a really great special meal? You can't go wrong with co-op sandwiches made from scratch. Last year in Tank, we did a made-to-order sandwich special meal with fresh loaves of bread, tempeh bacon, custom dressing, and fresh tomatoes. Fond memories abound!

4. What is your All-OSCA position, what do you do? As OSCA President, I oversee OSCA's management and chair the Board of Directors. I also help represent OSCA in our meetings with the College. The position gives me an opportunity to get involved at every level of OSCA’s operation.

5. Why did you want to become more involved and take an All-OSCA position? As a first-year, I became convinced that OSCA's co-ops were a vital part of the Oberlin College community. They're a locus of student activism and creative leadership, and I've always felt a great personal investment in OSCA's continued success.

6. What are your favorite aspects of OSCA? I love the way that each of the individual co-ops is a distinct entity with its own attitudes and ideals. Despite the high turnover rate in OSCA's membership, each co-op has a particular way of doing things that's become very institutionalized and persists semester after semester.

7. What do you think being involved with OSCA will mean for your future? I'll try to stay involved in the cooperative movement in any way possible. I even fantasize about applying the skills I've picked up in OSCA to start a co-op of my own.

8. What is your fondest OSCA memory? The Roman-themed special meal in Harkness during my sophomore year. We lounged around in togas and ate grapes and ambrosia. Afterward, we stormed toward Keep wheeling a Trojan Horse (read: a modified shopping cart) that was filled with cookies.

9. What is something about OSCA that you think everyone should know? We're one of the largest and longest-lived student co-ops in North America!

10. What has been your favorite All-OSCA event? OSCA Prom '10 was terrific. The second annual OSCA Prom is coming up, and I'm pretty thrilled.

The OSCA Lottery: Tradition Continues

Every Spring hundreds of Oberlin College students enter the OSCA lottery in the hopes of being assigned to a co-op for the following academic year. This year was no different. OSCA had a record 790 upperclass students compete for 540 spaces. OSCA posts the co-op wait lists outside the OSCA office so that students can keep track of their progress.