



The Bulletin

Love in the Times of Oberlin: February 2025

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"Love in the Times of Oberlin" welcomes its third edition, this time with a contemporary spin. Rather than alumni and professors, we spoke with current students — five upperclassmen — to gather a comprehensive overview of dating culture on campus.

Of course, dating in college isn't all sunshine and rainbows. There are busy schedules, drama between friend groups, a propensity for hookup culture, summers often spent apart — the list goes on. Whether or not our existence on a 440-acre campus with just under 3,000 students enrolled makes for a good dating environment remains to be seen.

In the words of Carrie Bradshaw: "After all, computers crash, people die, relationships fall apart. The best we can do is breathe and reboot." Enjoy your Valentine's Day, Oberlin.

Pros

The rumor is that somewhere between 30 and 60 percent of Oberlin alumni end up with other Oberlin alumni. Whether they met at Oberlin or rekindled their affection some time after graduation, there's something special that makes Obies click.

College third-year Disah Lapidus met her boyfriend, Conservatory third-year George Rogers, in a manner reminiscent of an old-school meet-cute.

"My first-year roommate and I met both of our boyfriends freshman year," she said. "They were not roommates, but they were childhood best friends."

The pair became friends as a result of this chance connection, but didn't start dating until a year later.

"When you're at Oberlin, it's like, how could you not be with your partner all the time?" Disah said. "That's how people become so close, and they fall in love. A lot of like-minded people come here. Maybe people at Oberlin are into commitment."

Commitment has become foundational for Disah and George in their bicoastal relationship, where the former is from New York and the latter from California. While choosing where to spend summers and breaks can be challenging, Disah feels as though she's actually benefited.

"Being in a relationship teaches you new things about

different places," she explained. "I never thought California would be a part of my life. Growing up in New York, I thought, 'California's so lame; everyone there is just in show biz.' And now, I love show biz, ... and I love going to California."

Like Disah, College fourth-year Cathy Saccone shares the sentiment of Oberlin bringing compatible individuals together.

"Dating at Oberlin is special and good," Cathy said. "You're probably going to find somebody who's a book reader. We have a higher proportion of book readers than the rest of the population that I've encountered."

Cathy has had three charming first encounters with three on-campus partners.

"The first person I dated, I met because he was [in] my hall," Cathy recalled. "The second person I dated I met while I was walking into DeCafé with a mutual friend — I don't remember what I was buying. The third person I dated, I met in my English capstone class."

It may be difficult to ascertain whether or not it's the school's tendency to attract book readers, or the very nature of undergraduate studies, that draws Obies into lasting relationships with other Obies. Still, the size of the campus does prove advantageous, at least for some, in promoting closeness and meaningful encounters.

"When we're in a place that's so rural, we're probably not meeting many people our age who are in the community," Cathy said. "It makes sense that people end up in long-term relationships."

Sydney Banks and Jacob Epps, both College third-years, have

been together for two and a half years. They met before they got to Oberlin, but only through an even smaller Oberlin community. Both Sydney and Jacob are Posse Scholars, so they met a couple months before arriving on campus through their training programs and workshops. They became good friends while still in high school, and Jacob wound up going to Sydney's prom with her, as friends. By the time they arrived at Oberlin as first-years, they had been dating for three months.

"I think me and my partner have both changed so much, but we've stuck with each other in that evolution," Sydney said.

She explained that learning to love the different versions of each other that they had come to find during their time at Oberlin had helped them through the college transition.

Disah offered a word of advice, perhaps to younger Obies looking to date across the College/Con, East Coast/West Coast barrier.

"We have our separate friendships, but also, it's good to date someone your friends love, [someone] who actually contributes to social engagement," Disah said. "There's a big difference between being in a relationship at Oberlin and dating at large in Oberlin. If you find your best friend, then you end up in a relationship, that is really nice because you've found someone you're really interested in. Those special relationships don't happen because the dating scene at Oberlin is easy to find people, it just happens because there are great people here. So, dating can be really difficult, but there are also really amazing, special relationships that can be formed."



Margo Allnutt
Photo courtesy of Margo Allnutt



Cathy Saccone
Photo courtesy of Cathy Saccone



Cons (no, not Con)

By the third or fourth year at Oberlin, it can feel like everyone on campus has either been dating since their first year, has just gotten out of a long-term relationship, or is left pining for a first-year flame. Jaded upperclassmen go to The Feve each week, see the same faces, and leave with a disgruntled sense that it's either too much work to maintain a roster, or there aren't enough suitable bachelors or bachelorettes left.

College fourth-year Margo Allnutt has noticed a sense of weariness when it comes to dating at Oberlin, where it's easy for many to get bogged down in the semantics of what "dating" means.

"It's not like, casually seeing each other or just going on a date and seeing if it's [a connection] you want to continue in the future," they explained. "I feel like no one here wants to be like, 'Oh, you want to go out one night?' and see ... whatever happens, happens. Often, it's either a U-Haul situation or you hook up and never talk or see each other again."

Or, as they elaborated, you probably will see each other again, in line at Azariah's Café, in line for co-op dinner, or anywhere you may not exactly want to. At the core of dating at Oberlin is this social tension, where many are absorbed in one end of a spectrum: getting into a relationship or hooking up.

As another College fourth-year explained — specifically regarding the gay male dating scene at Oberlin — the perceived "cattiness" or "competition" can make it challenging to strike up a conversation or relationship. To him, there are a lot of barriers to connection,

given the smallness of the student body and the smallness of a community within that, where you see the same faces everywhere and preconceived notions of other individuals can become dominating.

Additionally, the challenge of where to go on dates is of paramount importance. And many wonder, is The Feve an overplayed locale for a first date? Is the risk of someone you know approaching you while you lean in for a kiss simply too great? Are the factors that bring the bookworms to Oberlin the same ones that make the chance of being converted to Satanism on a second date all the higher?

However, it isn't all bad. "Everyone [at Oberlin] is different, which I think is really awesome, because where I'm from, it's not the best experience," Margo said. "I've had more positive experiences here rather than where my parents live."

Perhaps instead of focusing on Oberlin's limiting selection, focus on the smallness that might have you bumping into your perfect Obie. While getting coffee, wandering through the library shelves, or walking along the same four blocks, you might find love where you least expect to. The repetition of seeing someone at the same study spot or lunch table is what could lead to wonderful romance.



Jacob Epps and Sydney Banks
Photo courtesy of Sydney Banks



George Rogers and Disah Lapidus
Photo courtesy of Disah Lapidus

