

# When One of America's Most Liberal Colleges Wasn't So Liberal

Oberlin College in Ohio is ranked as one of America's most liberal colleges, and has become something of a microcosm of the PC culture that pervades college campuses today. Last year they were in the news for publishing [an official document](#) advising faculty to avoid presenting potential "triggering material." Most recently, [we highlighted](#) an article in *The Atlantic* that discussed Oberlin's [Microaggressions site](#), which provides a forum "for students who have been marginalized" at the school.

Oberlin's progressivism has some provenance, though in the past it was a progressivism that both liberals and conservatives today would applaud. As reported on [their website](#), they were "the first institution of higher education in America to adopt a policy to admit African American students (1835) and the first college to award bachelor's degrees to women (1841) in a coeducational program."

But it looks like Oberlin may have been a bit less progressive when it came to its past curriculum standards. [100 years ago](#), Oberlin required entering students to have read at least 15 of the following classic works:

*Chaucer: The Prologue*

*Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice, Macbeth, As You Like It, Henry V, Julius Caesar, Twelfth Night*

*Spenser: The Faerie Queene, Book I*

*Milton: Comus, Lycidas, L'Allegro, II Penseroso (the last three to count as one item)*

*Bunyan: The Pilgrim's Progress, Part I*

*Addison and Steele: The Sir Roger de Coverley Papers*

*Pope: The Rape of the Lock*

*Goldsmith: The Vicar of Wakefield, The Deserted Village*

*Irving: Life of Goldsmith, Sketch Book*

*Coleridge: The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

*Scott: Ivanhoe, The Lady of the Lake, Quentin Durward*

*Franklin: Autobiography*

*Palgrave: Golden Treasury, First Series, Parts II and III,  
Part IV*

*Lamb: Essays of Elia*

*De Quincey: Joan of Arc, The English Mail Coach*

*Hawthorne: The House of the Seven Gables*

*Thackeray: Henry Esmond*

*Carlyle: Heroes and Hero Worship, Essay on Burns*

*Macaulay: Essay on Addison, Life of Johnson, Lays of Ancient  
Rome*

*Burke: Speech on Conciliation with America*

*Washington: Farewell Address*

*Webster: First Bunker Hill Oration*

*Mrs. Gaskell: Cranford*

*Dickens: A Tale of Two Cities*

*George Eliot: Silas Marner*

*Blackmore: Lorna Doone*

*Ruskin: Sesame and Lilies*

*Byron: Mazeppa, The Prisoner of Chillon*

*Lowell: The Vision of Sir Launfal*

*Arnold: Sohrab and Rustum*

*Longfellow: The Courtship of Miles Standish*

*Tennyson: Gareth and Lynette, Lancelot and Elaine, the  
Passing of Arthur*

*Browning: Ten selected lyric or narrative poems*

I also thought it interesting to read this statement from  
Oberlin's 1915 catalogue:

*"From the beginning of its history Oberlin has been an  
avowedly Christian College, and has steadily aimed to build  
on the deepest and most solid convictions of the best  
Christian people. It has sought to furnish an atmosphere in  
which parents desiring the completest education and the  
highest development in character would gladly place their  
children. Its fundamental convictions have been that all  
truth is one and to be fearlessly welcomed; that character is  
supreme; that Christ is the world's one perfect character and  
completest revelation of God; and that the church is the one  
great world organization for ideal ends. It has intended to  
lay a practical daily emphasis on the ethical and spiritual  
in education—on life and faith, and at the same time allow  
the fullest freedom of thinking within the broadest Christian  
lines. The College has never had a creed or any  
denominational control; but it has believed in a loyalty to  
Christian truth that should manifest itself in a persistent  
and earnest application of that truth to the life of the  
world."*

Today, this is the kind of literary prerequisite list and statement of faith one would expect to see at a conservative college such as Hillsdale or Grove City. Interesting how things have changed...

[Image credit](#)