

Oakland University Center for Civic Engagement
2020-2021 Action Plan
Strengthening American Democracy

Executive Summary

In the fall of 2018, Oakland University established its Center for Civic Engagement to:

- support efforts to enhance civic engagement and civic literacy;
- encourage student involvement in civic engagement and public policy through volunteerism, internships, and experiential learning;
- bring the campus and community together through non-partisan dialogue surrounding important issues of public concern; and
- promote research related to public policy to inform policy makers and the public.

The Center is the main avenue through which OU's efforts to increase civic literacy, democratic engagement and preparedness of students to be active participants in their democratic society.

The Action Plan for 2020-2021 was developed by the Center's Director with input from the Center's Campus Advisory Board. It establishes a course of action for the 2020-2021 academic year in the area of civic engagement on campus (as well as in the community) by leveraging the 2020 election cycle. However, this Action Plan is not limited to the 2020-2021 academic year. Rather, it extends the work to the Winter 2020 semester. We have a number of items planned for early 2020 that will create a springboard for our work in Fall 2020 and Winter 2021.

The components of the Action Plan will be carried out mainly on OU's main campus during the course of the next academic year. It will be the responsibility of the Center director to implement the plan, with the help of the Campus Advisory Board.

Leadership

The director of the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) will lead the work outlined in the 2020-2021 Action Plan. The director chairs the Campus Advisory Board as well as the Founding Advisory Board (this group of individuals from off campus features alumni and prominent members of the community). The Campus Advisory Board's role is to help implement the CCE's plans on campus; the Founding Advisory Board helps set the overall direction of the CCE in terms of ideas for events and is an important tie to the community.

Members of the Campus Advisory Board are from all parts of campus. Included on the Board are faculty from disciplines such as communication, journalism, and political science; a student representative from our Student Congress; the head of our alumni office; the director of the Center for Student Activities; and the chief research officer. The group meets as needed but the director will work with individuals from the Board to take advantage of their individual expertise.

In addition to engaging with the members of the Founding Advisory Board, the CCE will invite other groups to partner with our efforts. In the past we have worked with a wide range of partners including the League of Women Voters, Oakland Area, National Voter Registration Day, the Michigan Secretary of State, The New Foster Care, Parents For Educational Equity in

Rochester Schools (PEERS), Greater Rochester Area Inclusion Network (GRAIN), and different departments and offices on campus (e.g., Oakland University Student Congress, the Department of Political Science, the School of Nursing, the Division of Student Affairs and Diversity, and the Center for Multicultural Initiatives). These types of partnerships will be expanded as our work continues.

Commitment

The leadership at Oakland University including the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, the provost and the president could not be more supportive of our efforts. The development of the ideas behind the CCE were generated over a lengthy process, but once the goals of the CCE were well defined there has been great support. There has also been incredible support from others on campus who hear about the ideals of the CCE. For instance, we have successfully worked with University Advancement on philanthropy. We are also working to communicate with alumni and the local communities.

We do not have a specific focus on democratic engagement in our general education curriculum. Students have course options that speak to this topic but it is not required. The CCE's plan is to use extra- and co-curricular events to enhance student learning. Down the road, the CCE would like to establish a certificate for students who, through attending and engaging with CCE activities, are certified as a "civically engaged student."

The institutional commitment to the CCE's work is found broadly in its four goals – student success, scholarship, community engagement and diversity. The CCE can contribute to and impact each of these areas. More importantly, our leadership sees this and has responded very well to the idea.

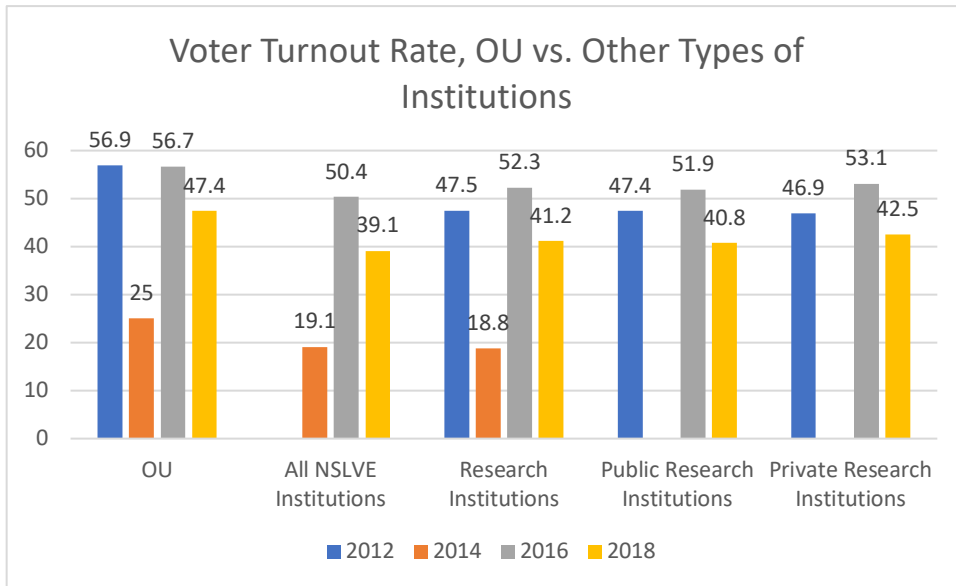
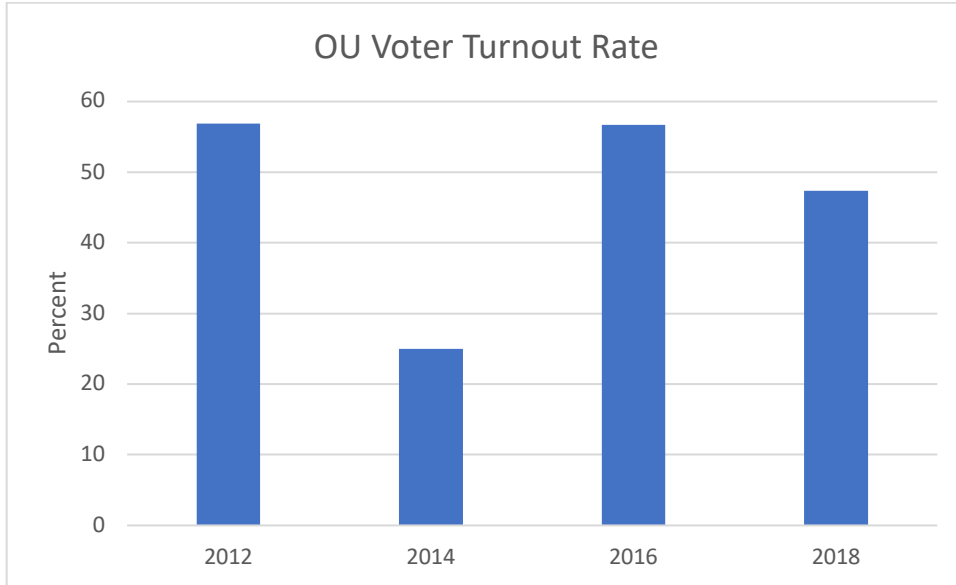
Landscape

The current democratic engagement landscape on campus shows mixed indicators. As noted above, there is currently no explicit goal, curriculum or learning outcome linked to civic and/or democratic engagement.

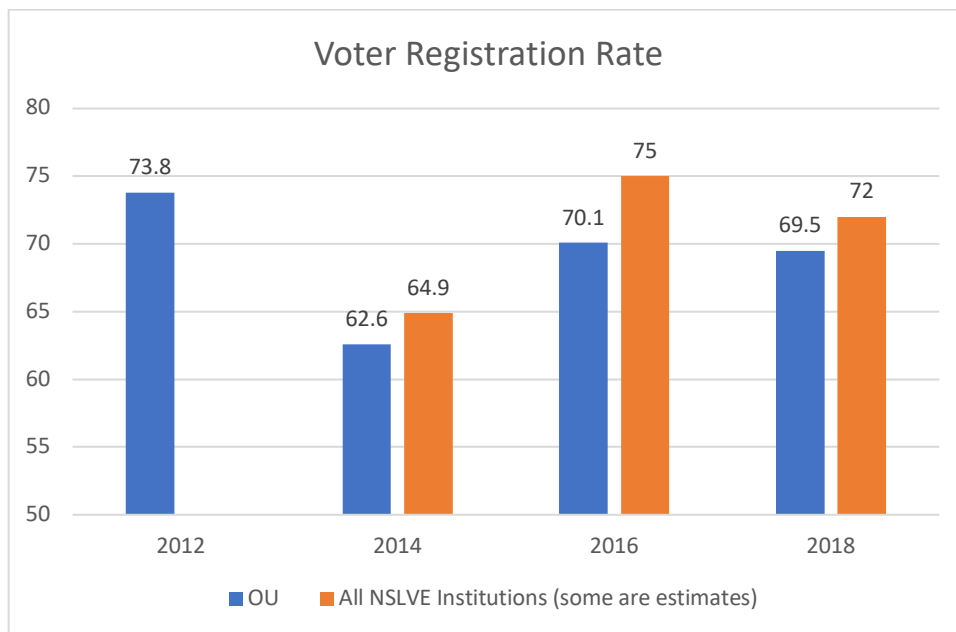
The activities of our students are also mixed.

According to our recent NSLVE reports, Oakland University students are relatively high performers. In 2016, 56.7% of students voted which was higher (by 6.3%) than the voting rate for all other institutions; but it was a slight decrease from 2012. However, in 2018, OU saw a jump in turnout from 2014 of over 22 points! In 2014, only 25% of students voted but this increased to over 47% in 2018.

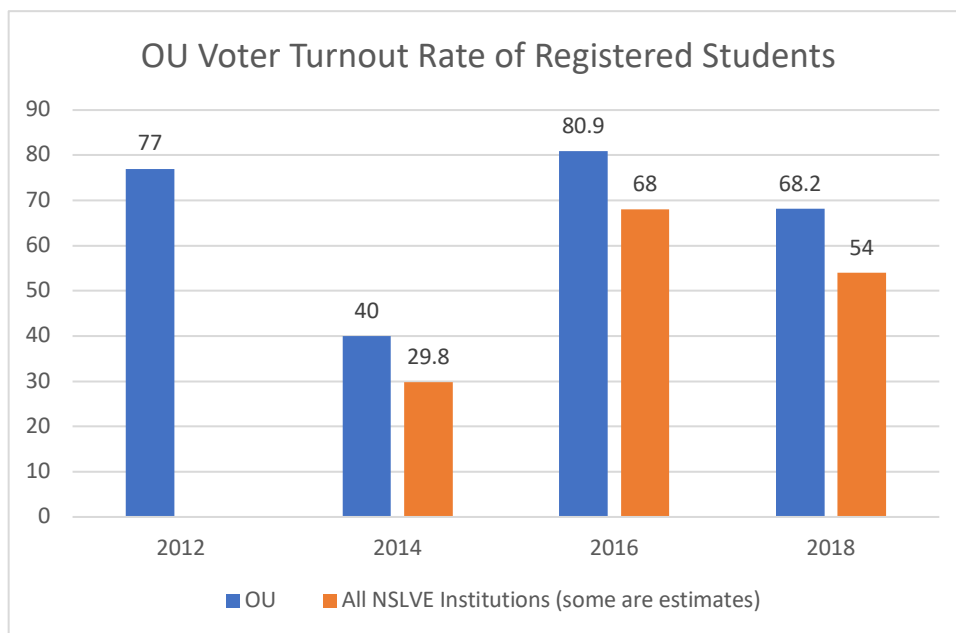
Relative to other institutions, OU compares favorably. In all years where we have data, OU outpaces other NSLVE institutions, including all the types of institutions measures.



We fall short of other institutions in terms of voter registration. Only about 70% of our students were registered to vote in 2016. This is lower than the rate for all other institutions; the same was true in 2014.



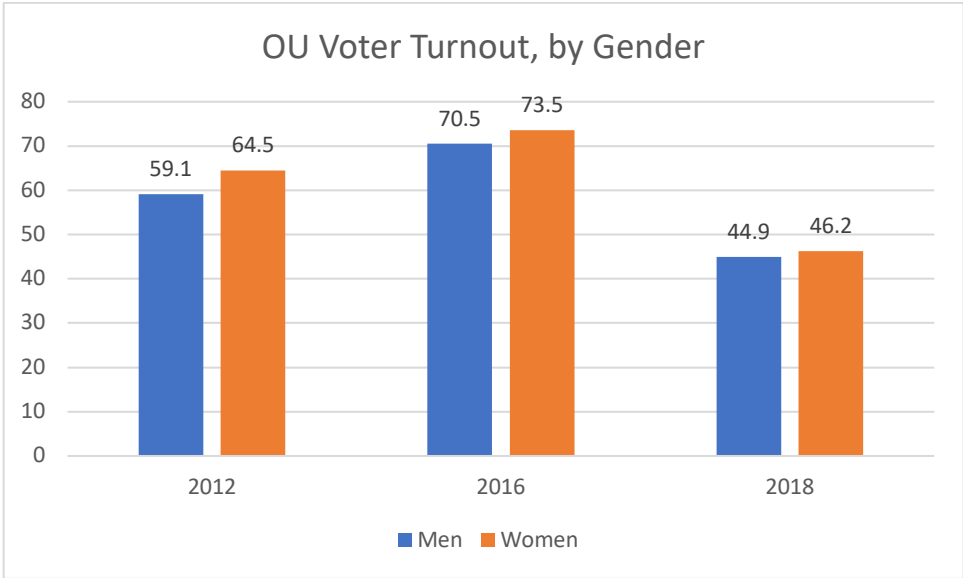
However, there is excellent participation from our students who are registered. Voting among the registered group was nearly 81% (higher than the rate for all other institutions).



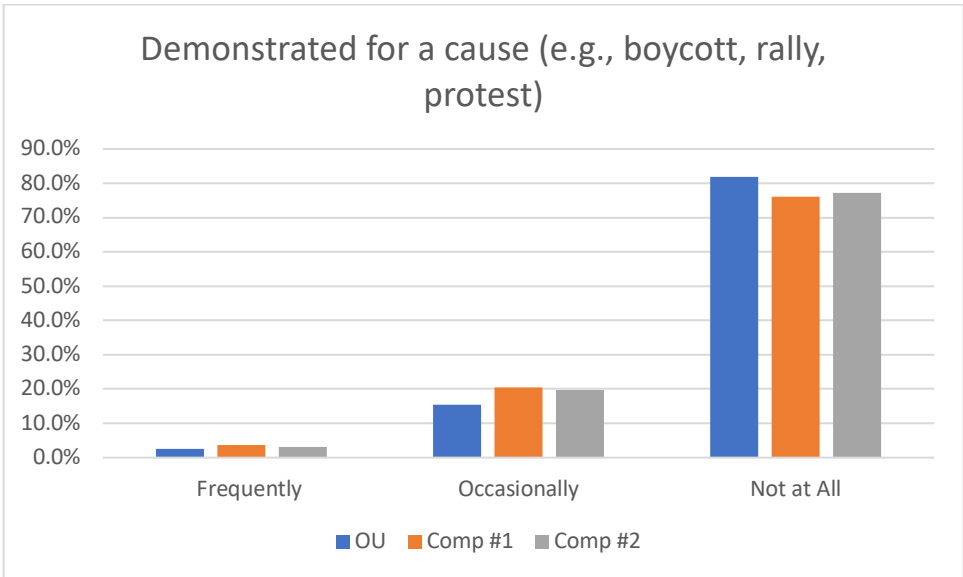
This is a reason for a focus on voter registration in our work – once OU students register, they vote at high rates. Recent changes in Michigan law may impact the registration rate of not only OU students but all citizens. More details on this and how it impacts our work are found in sections below.

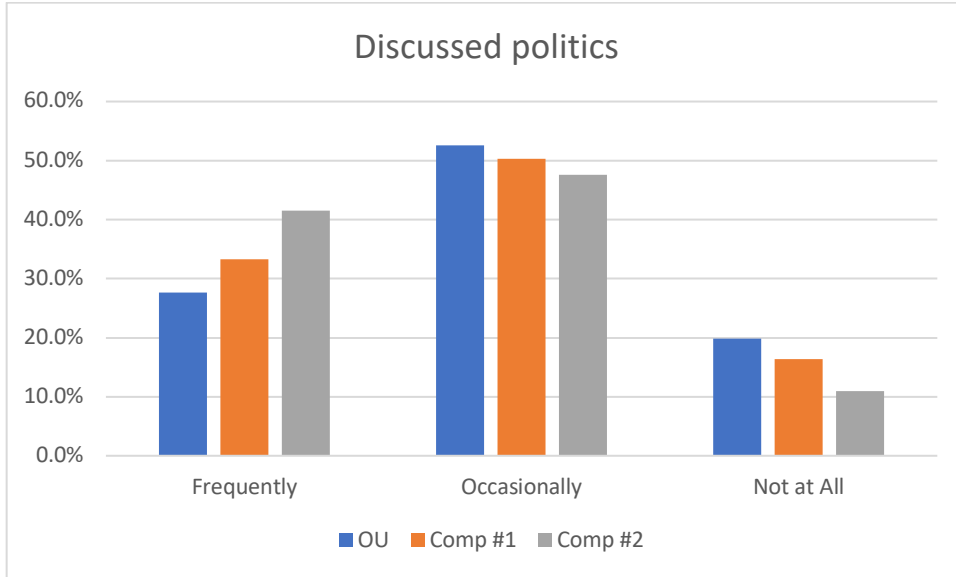
There is a wide range of participation in terms of field of study (like many colleges and universities). Engineering and some other professional fields saw much lower voting rates

compared to others including history, education, and philosophy. There are also differences across gender as 73.5% of female students voted in 2016 compared to only 70.5% of male students. The gender gap was smaller, however, in 2018.

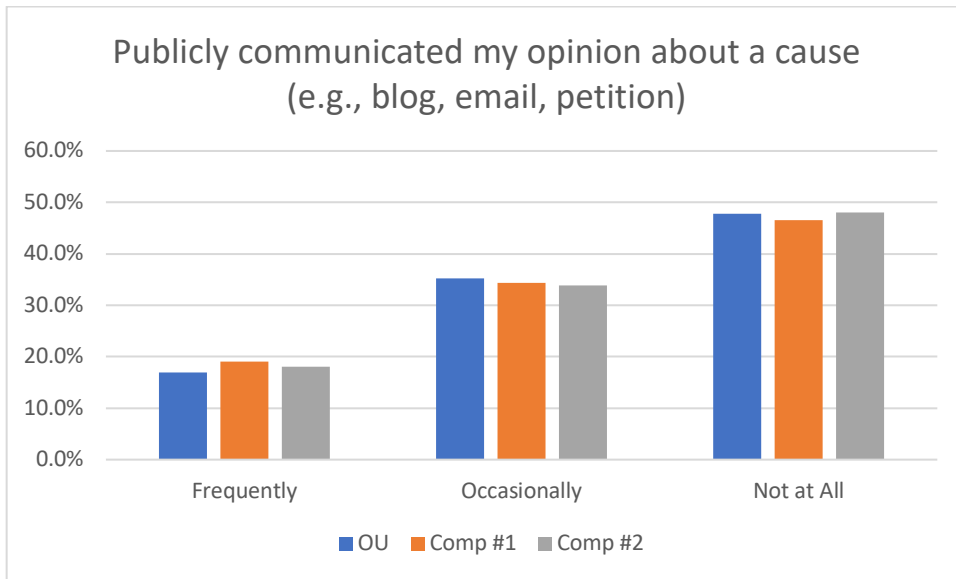


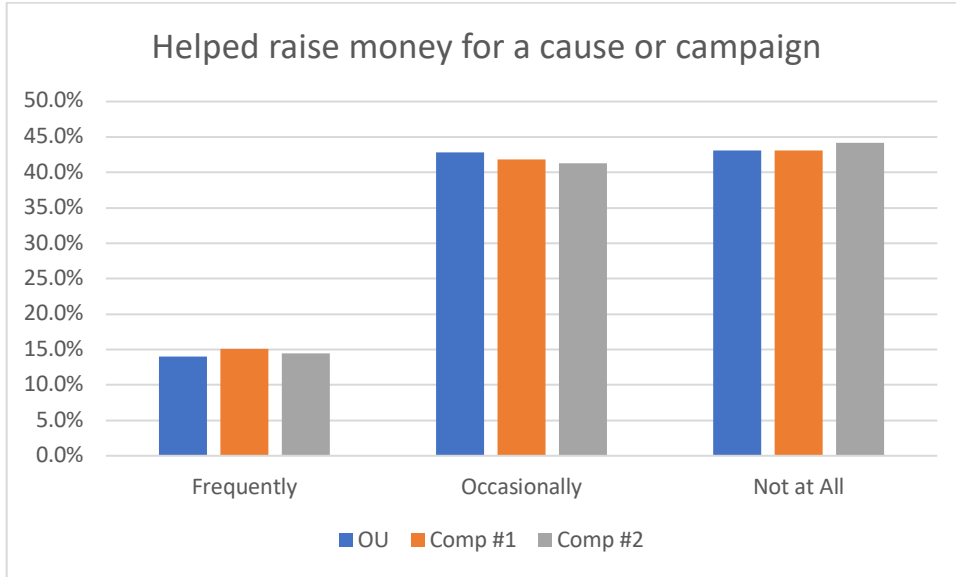
A recent CIRP freshman survey data also show some mixed indicators. For instance, fewer OU freshmen students engaged in activities including demonstrating for a cause, volunteering, voting in a student election or discussing politics compared to our peers.



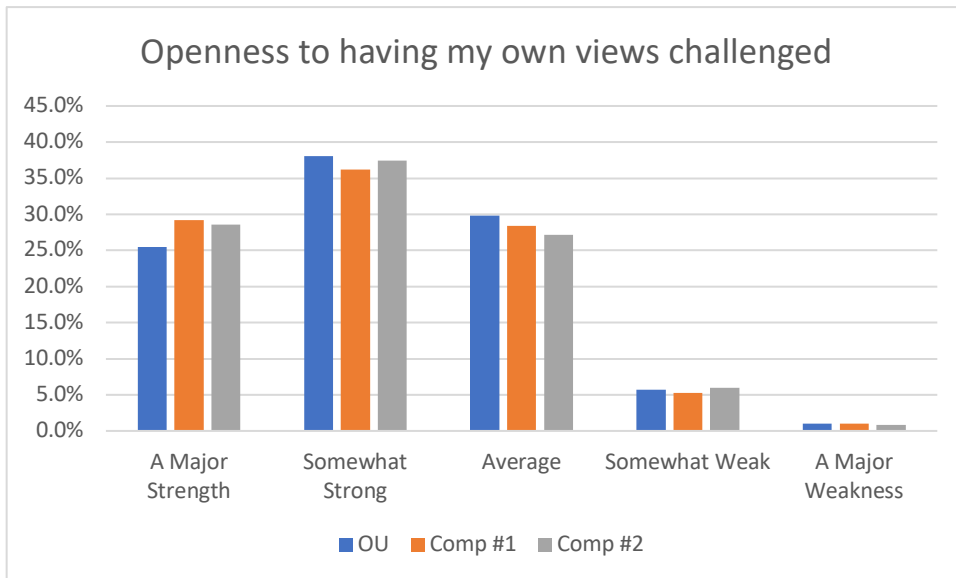


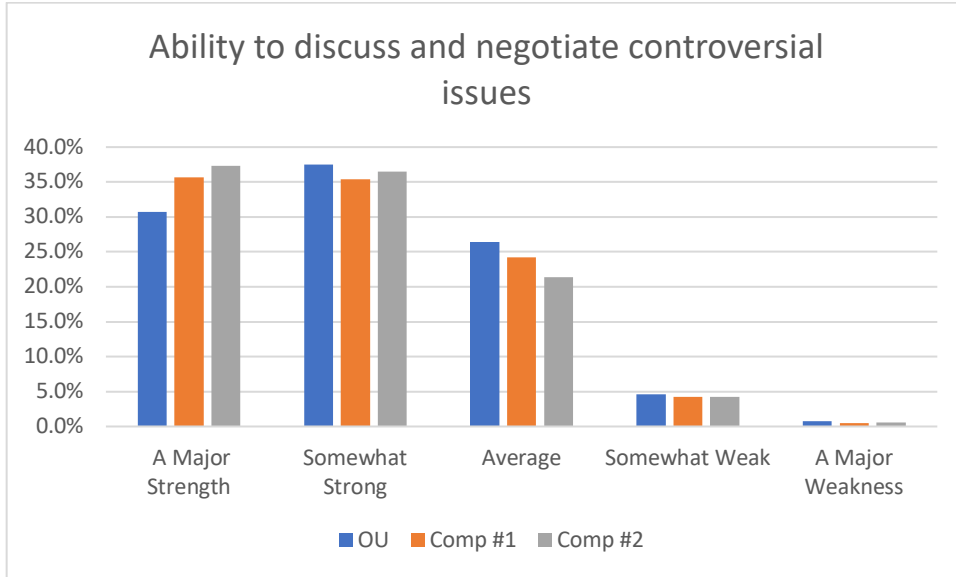
OU freshmen students were similar to our peer institutions in terms of publicly communicating an opinion about a cause and helping to raise money for a cause.



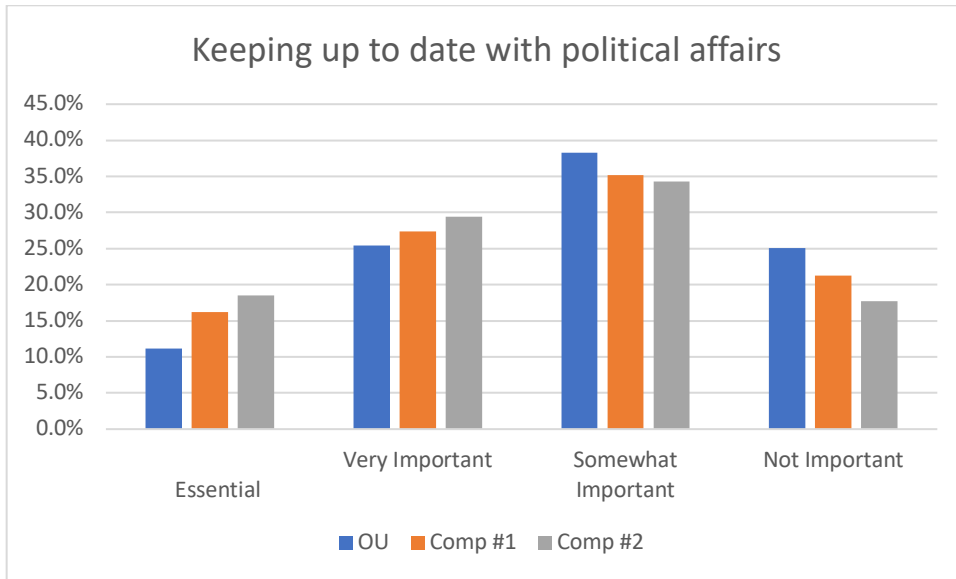


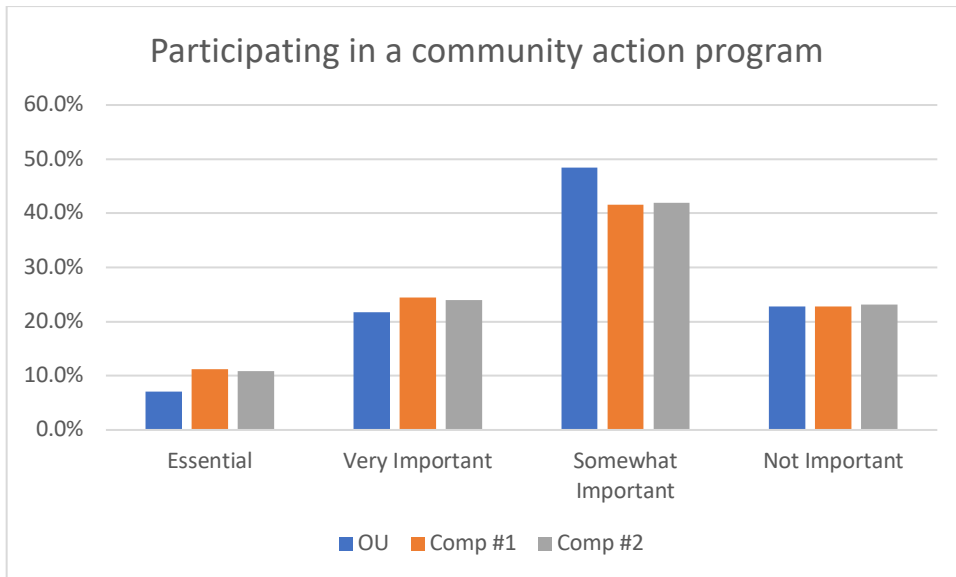
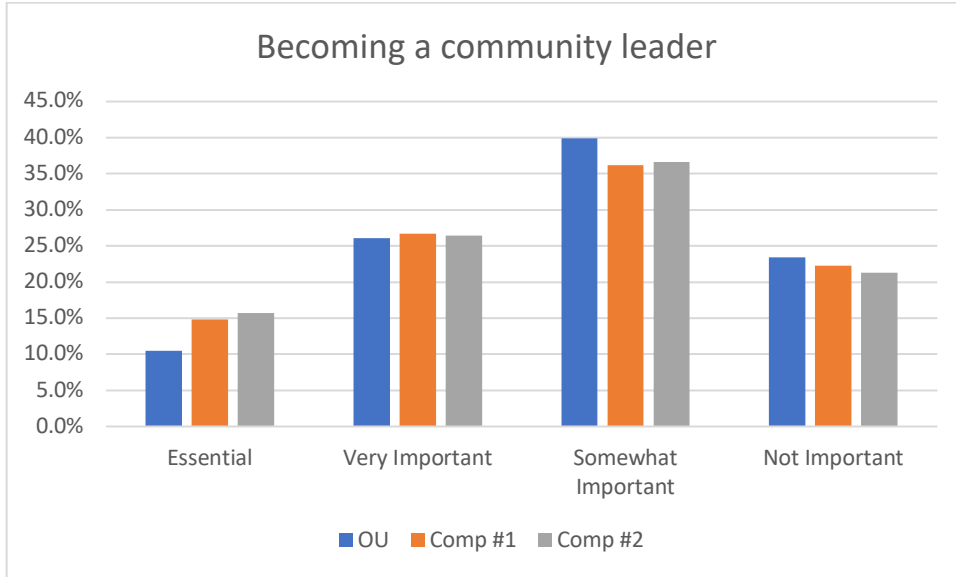
OU freshmen rated themselves lower than freshmen at our peer schools in terms of being open to having their views challenged and an ability to negotiate controversial issues, but the overall percent who saw these as strengths was surprisingly high.



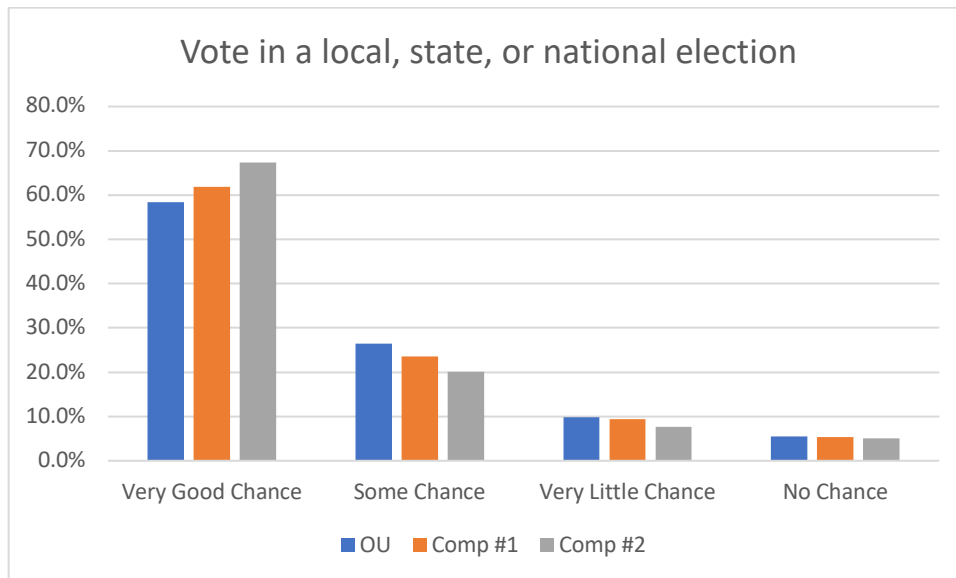


OU freshmen also reported a lower importance, relative to freshmen at our peer schools, for activities including participating in a community action program, keeping up with political affairs, and becoming a community leader.





OU students, however, are not different from students at our peer institutions in their forecasting of whether they will vote in an election. In addition, as the NSLVE data demonstrate, our students out-perform those on other campuses in this regard.



As noted, OU currently does not have a requirement of any kind that would guarantee students encounter civic engagement in their curriculum. CCE would like to develop, in the longer term, a certificate that recognizes students' (and community members') civic engagement in co- and/or extra-curricular activities; a more ambitious goal would be to create a minor in civic engagement.

Barriers – internal and external – are, at this time, impacted by the CCE being in its relatively infancy. Given that we launched only a little over one year ago, we face a lack of familiarity on campus and off. We have worked to build our name recognition (especially on campus) with different groups with the hopes of building relationships and expanding our capacity by bringing on other interested faculty, staff and students. That has started to pay dividends as a number of campus groups have approached the CCE about partnering on programs and events. Resources are important in any endeavor. As noted earlier, we have worked with University Advancement on philanthropic efforts; we have thus far secured \$130,000 in endowed gifts.

Goals

We are pleased to report that we made good progress on our goals from the 2018 – 2019 Action Plan.

2018-2019 Goals:

- Voter registration figures reach 65% in 2018 (this is based on the fact that in 2014, our registration rate was at 62.6%; we are assuming that it will be lower than in the 2016 presidential cycle again in this midterm year).
 - GOAL MET: the 2018 registration level was 69.5%
- Register 500 students.
 - GOAL MET: over 700 students were registered on campus during the 2018 cycle.
- Voter participation reaches 30% in 2018 and 60% in 2020.
 - GOAL PARTIALLY MET: 2018 turnout on campus was 47.4% (a 22.4-point increase over 2014).

- Create a culture where OU is seen as the “convener of conversations” around issues of public importance and concern.
 - GOAL PARTIALLY MET: we have continued to use this slogan and anecdotal evidence demonstrates that more individuals on campus recognize it as part of the CCE’s work.
- Develop and institute a “civically engaged” certificate for students and community members based on attendance of and engagement with CCE events.
 - Some preliminary discussions have taken place.
- Voter registration becomes a more regular initiative that is expected rather than an add-on
 - This has seen some progress as we adapted many additional registration activities. However, changes to Michigan law will impact how registration happens in our state which may impact how we conduct these activities (see below).
- A voting precinct added to our campus.
 - This will likely not happen. Our student government initiated conversations with two local clerks and each gave important and valid reasons for not establishing a precinct on campus. For instance, one of the cities – Auburn Hills – has a precinct across the street from our campus. It really makes little sense for them to move it.

Goals moving forward:

Before stating the goals for the next election cycle, it is important to note some contextual information about a recent change to Michigan law as it could impact how some of our activities are conducted. In 2018, voters adopted Proposal 3; this amended the state Constitution to bring reforms to how Michigan citizens engage in the election process. The changes include: automatic voter registration (opt out rather than opt in at the Secretary of State’s office), same-day voter registration, online voter registration, no-excuse absentee ballots, and others.

Given the voter-registration reforms, we are still discussing how that will change our approach to that activity and how we want to execute that work in the future.

Short-term goals:

- Identify the best way to provide voter registration for students (i.e., hard-copy forms vs. online registration at stations at various locations on campus, etc.) in the wake of Proposal 3.
- Achieve 75% voter registration among students in 2020 (based on 70.1% in 2016).
- Achieve 60% voter participation among students in 2020 (goal carried over from 2018-2019 Action Plan).
- Participate in the Michigan Secretary of State’s Michigan Collegiate Voting Challenge which will make awards in the following categories: highest campus voter turnout, most improved campus voter turnout, and highest student voter registration rate.
- Work with select departments and schools on campus that have shown relatively low turnout levels in past cycles to boost participation from those students.

Longer-term goals:

- Continue to build a culture where the CCE and OU are seen as the “convener of conversations” around issues of public importance and concern.
- Continue to explore a “civically engaged” certificate for students and community

members based on attendance of and engagement with CCE events.

- Expand our interactions with current and former elected officials.

Strategy

Our strategy is still emerging, given that this draft was prepared in December 2019. We have a busy Winter 2020 planned but are still thinking through some items for Fall 2020 and beyond.

Scheduled CCE events and activities in chronological order:

Winter 2020:

- *January 27, 2020: Human Trafficking: Myths vs. Reality*
 - A conversation featuring leaders in the fight against human trafficking and discover the myths and realities of this important issue. We are partnering with a local non-profit, Sanctum House, that assists survivors of human trafficking.
- *January 28, 2020: Civic Engagement Film Series: The Ides of March*
 - As part of the OU-Pontiac Initiative, students and community members will gather to watch the film at a theater in nearby Pontiac. Two political science faculty members will lead a discussion after the film.
- *February 5: Respect and Rebellion – Maintaining Relationships with Those Who Disagree with You*
 - Have you seen people lose friends on social media or not be able to talk to family members because of political disagreements?
 - The event will feature a conversation with two individuals who disagree politically but enjoy a strong friendship. We are partnering with Village Square and Better Angels for this event. It has broad support across campus including the Office of Student Involvement, Student Congress, and the Honors College.
- *March 3, 2020: The 2020 Oakland University Student Presidential Primary Caucus*
 - We are partnering with Student Congress, and the Honors College to host a students-only caucus in the style of the Iowa caucuses one week before the Michigan primary.
- *March 11, 2020: Civic Engagement Film Series: Enemy of the State*
 - As part of the OU-Pontiac Initiative, students and community members will gather to watch the film at a theater in nearby Pontiac. Two sociology and criminal justice faculty members will lead a discussion after the film.
- *Mid-March, 2020: Best Practices for Creative Funding in Pontiac Schools*
 - As part of the OU-Pontiac Initiative, we will host a “community conversation” around school funding in Pontiac that will feature local experts on best practices for moving beyond traditional, tax-based funding of schools.
- *Early May, 2020: Michigan Voter Summit*
 - OU is planning to host the 2020 edition of the summit that has taken place the last few years in our state with the help of Campus Vote Project.
- *Date TBD: Advocacy 101 – How to Be Effective When Communicating with Elected Officials*
 - We are partnering with the OU Writing Center, the College Republicans and the College Democrats for an event that will help students advocate for issues they care about when communicating with elected officials either in writing, on the phone or in person. This will be led by the staff of the OU Writing Center.

- *Date TBD: National Issues Forum: “A Nation in Debt”*
 - A small group of College Democrats and College Republicans will gather for a conversation on the national debt using the NIF issue guide. Ideally, this will be a springboard for future conversations about important issues.

Fall 2020:

Plans for this semester are still in the conceptual stage, but ideas include:

- *Constitution Café*
 - This would build on the success of a similar activity in Fall 2019 when we partnered with a local historical society for a conversation between OU students and community members about an aspect of the Constitution. The Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court also participated.
- *Presidential Debate Watch Parties*
- *Campaign Roundup 2020*
 - Since 2002, OU has hosted a post-election wrap-up for students, faculty, staff and community members. We will do so again.
- *Symposium on Digital Citizenship*
- *Voter registration push*
 - This will be based on our decisions on how best to proceed in the wake of Proposal 3.
- There are many other possibilities, but we would rather keep them under wraps at the moment.

Winter 2021:

Honestly, we have not even thought about this one yet...

The CCE director will be the main person responsible for this work, but will be assisted by the Campus Advisory Board as well as some student fellows.

Reporting

This plan will be shared via email with campus leaders and posted to the CCE website. We will also work to turn this text version of a report into a more eye-catching presentation so that it can be more easily shared with those interested.

Evaluation

The CCE director will work with campus leadership to determine assessment targets. For some this is straight forward – How many students were registered in the month of September? How many students attended the Contacting Your Representative workshop? (or how many letters or emails were written? or how many issues were written about?). The CCE director will work with advisory board members and others to create outcomes that can be measured at events like Campaign Roundup.

For some information, we will have to wait for the next NSLVE reports.