

Oakland University Center for Civic Engagement
2022-2023 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 2022-2023 was developed by the Center's Director with input from the Center's Campus Advisory Board. It establishes a course of action for the 2022-2023 academic year in the area of civic engagement on campus (as well as in the community) by leveraging the 2022 election cycle. However, this Action Plan is not limited to the 2022-2023 academic year; rather, it extends the work to the Winter 2022 semester.

The Action Plan also takes into account some new realities that we must acknowledge when planning this kind of work. First, we are still in the throes of COVID-19 pandemic. This creates unique yet, by this time, established problems including uncertainty around whether we will be able to host in-person events. Relatedly, online virtual events are worn out; students, at least on our campus, are tired of this format. Attracting participation in these is a battle when students are tired of online classes and other extra-curricular activities. Second, Michigan has adopted online voter registration and is moving toward automatic voter registration. These changes will mean we do voter registration work in a different manner moving forward. We are not deterred by these new realities. We simply must adapt our work to them.

The components of the Action Plan will be carried out mainly on OU's main campus during the course of the next several semesters. 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 2022-2023 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.

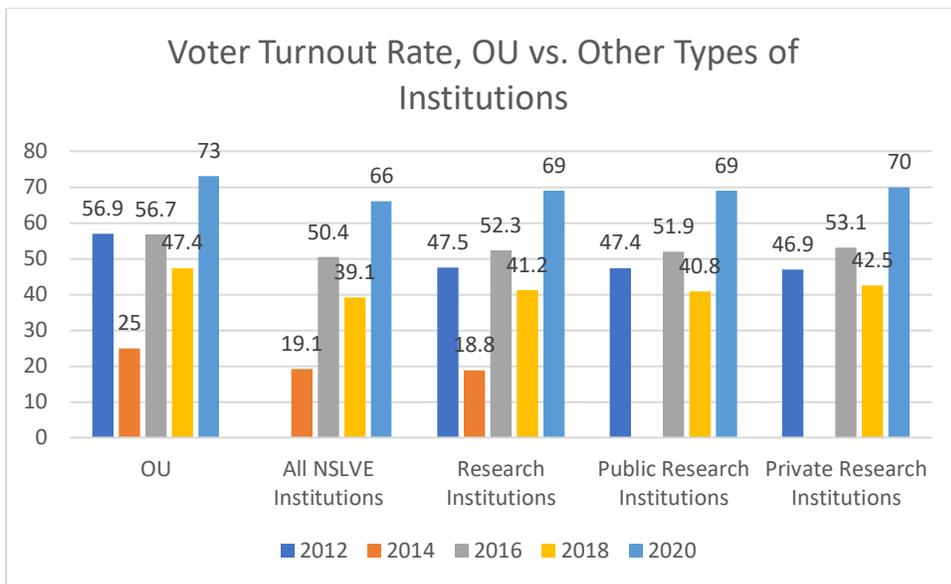
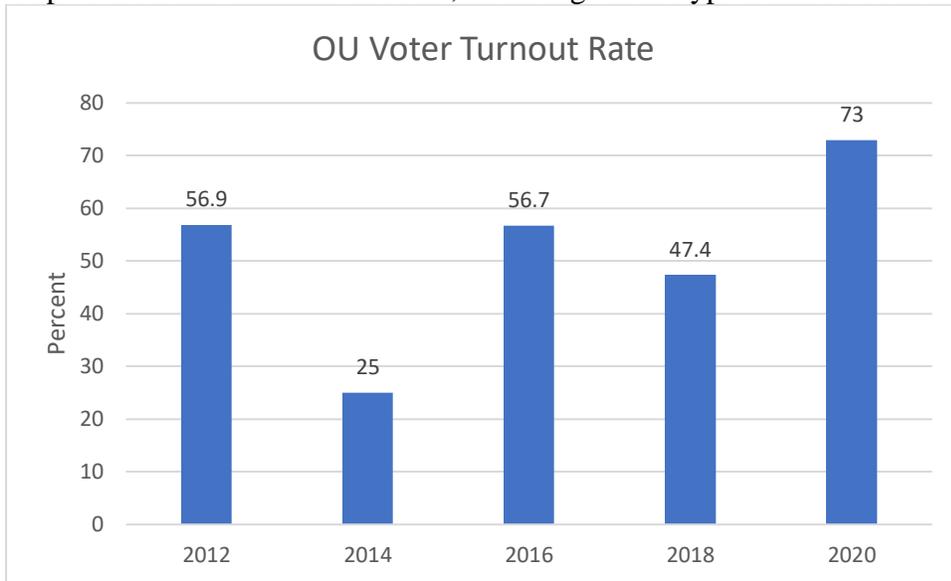
Landscape

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.

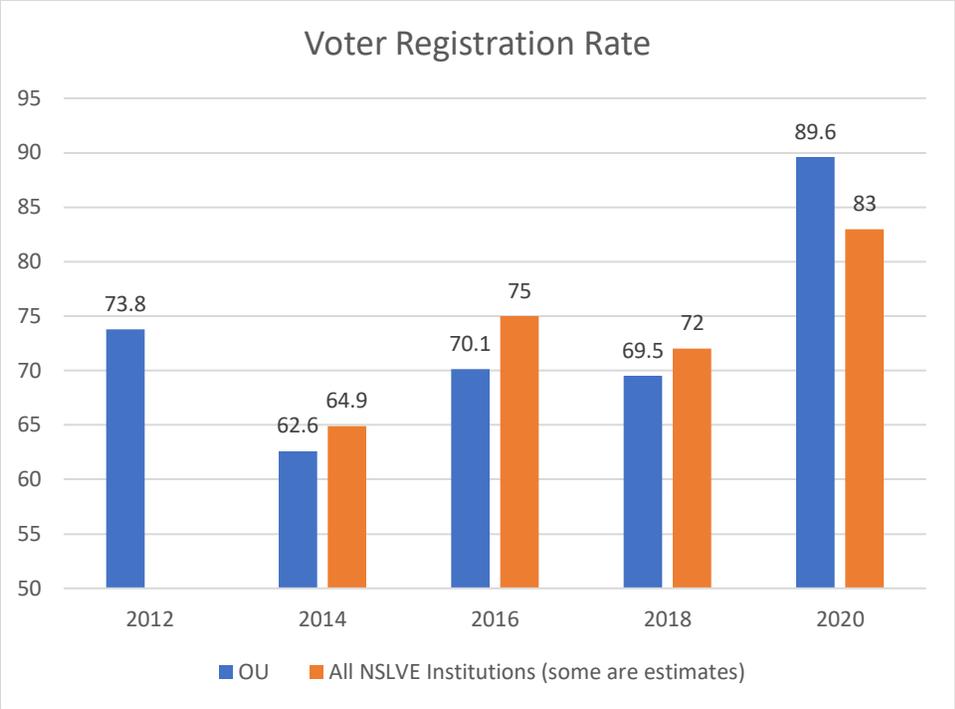
The activities of our students are also mixed.

According to our recent NSLVE reports, Oakland University students are relatively high performers. In 2020, 73.4% of students voted which was higher (by 7.4 percentage points) than the voting rate for all other institutions; it was a large decrease from 2016 (16.1 percentage points).

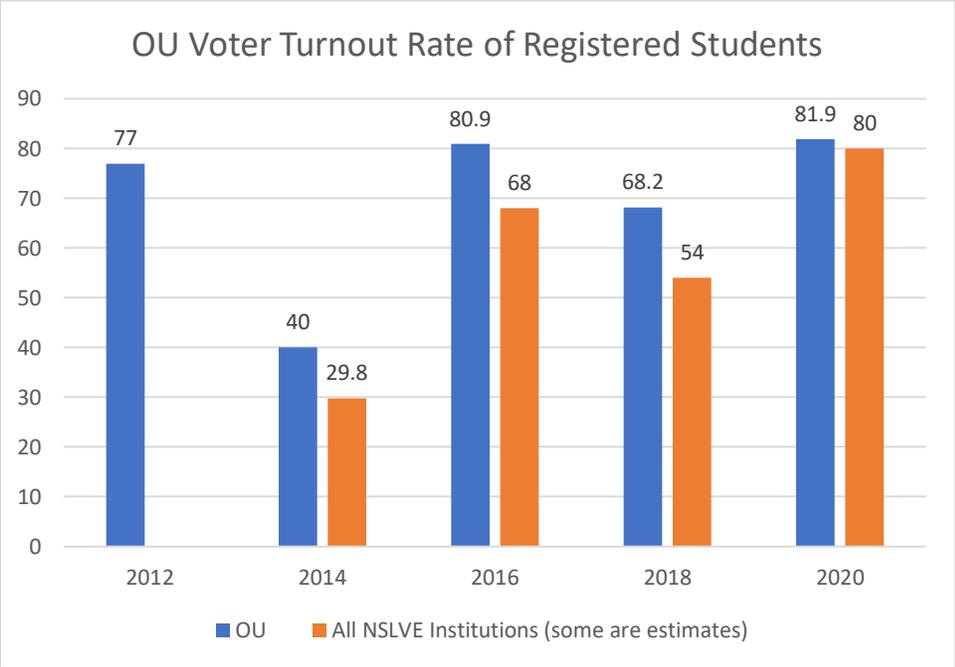
Relative to other institutions, OU compares favorably. In all years where we have data, OU outpaces other NSLVE institutions, including all the types of institutions measures.



An interesting change is seen in registration rates. While OU lagged behind other institutions on this front from 2014-2018, in 2020, OU students vaulted past other NSLVE institutions with nearly 90% registration compared to 83% nationally.

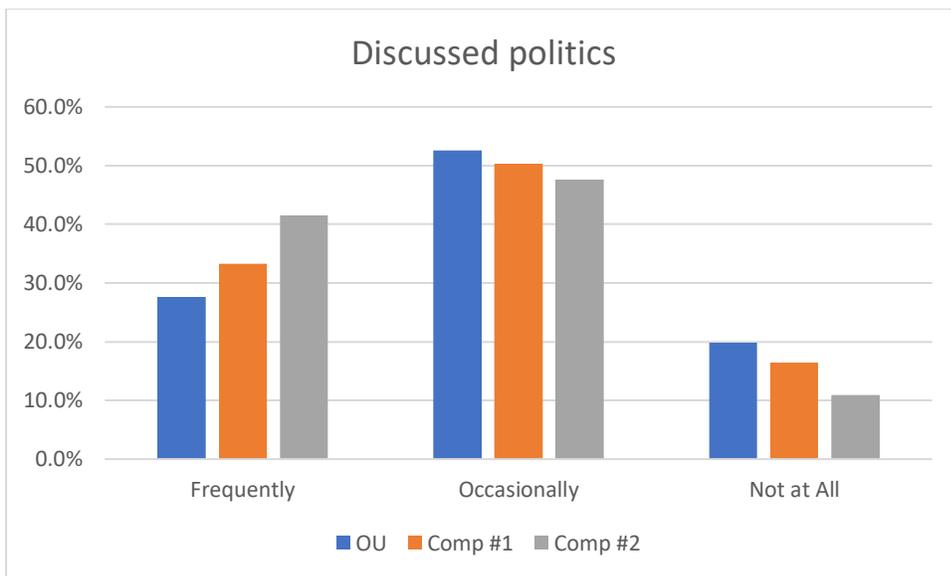
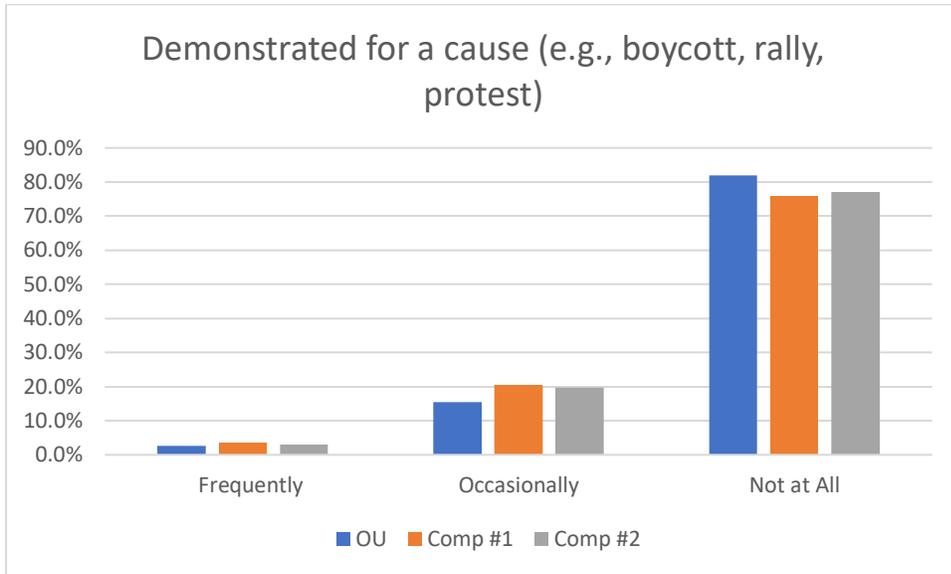


OU continues to see excellent participation from our students who are registered. Voting among the registered group was nearly 82% (higher than the rate for all other institutions).

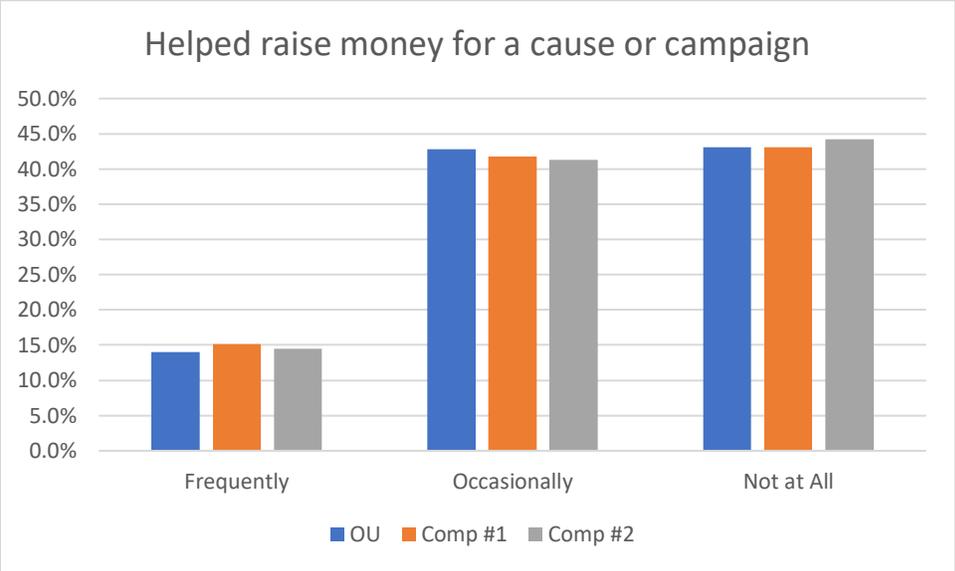
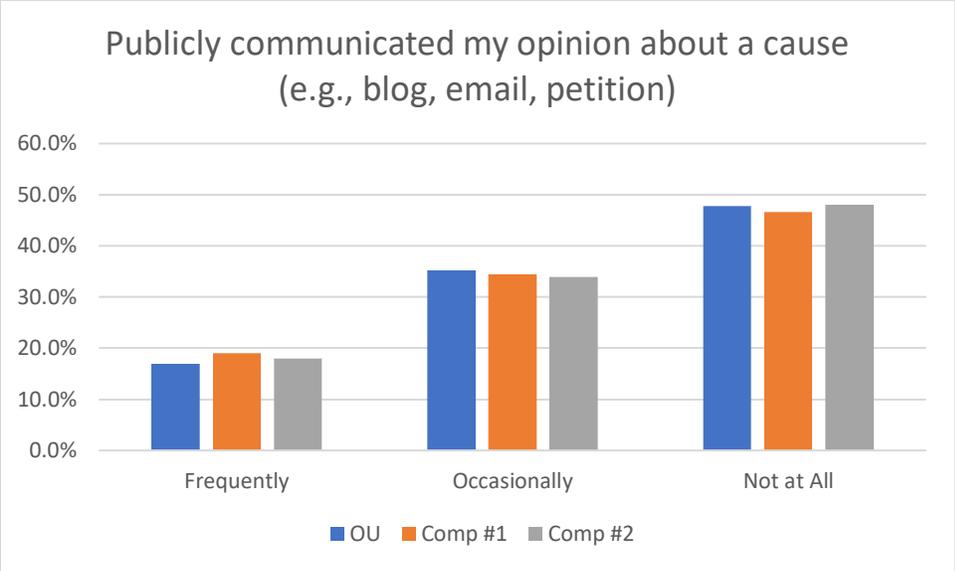


There is a wide range of participation in terms of field of study (like many colleges and universities). Engineering and some other professional fields saw much lower voting rates compared to others including history, education, and philosophy.

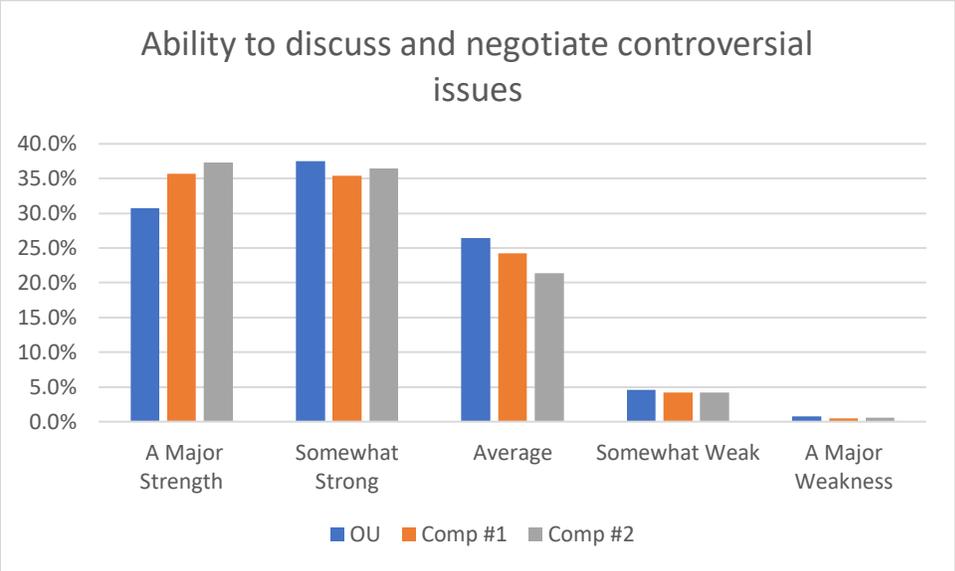
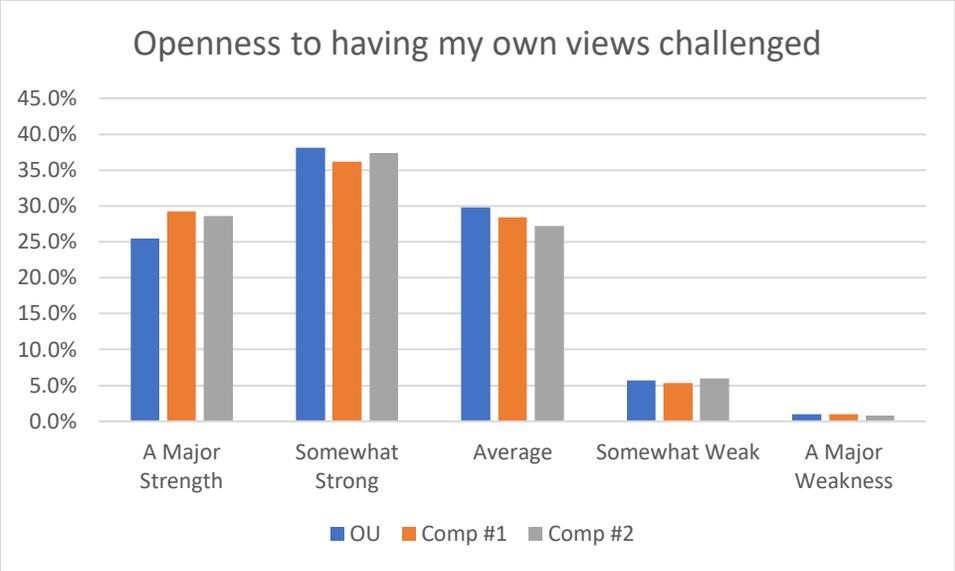
A somewhat dated CIRP survey also shows some mixed indicators. For instance, fewer OU freshmen students engaged in activities including demonstrating for a cause, volunteering, voting in a student election or discussing politics compared to our peers.



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.

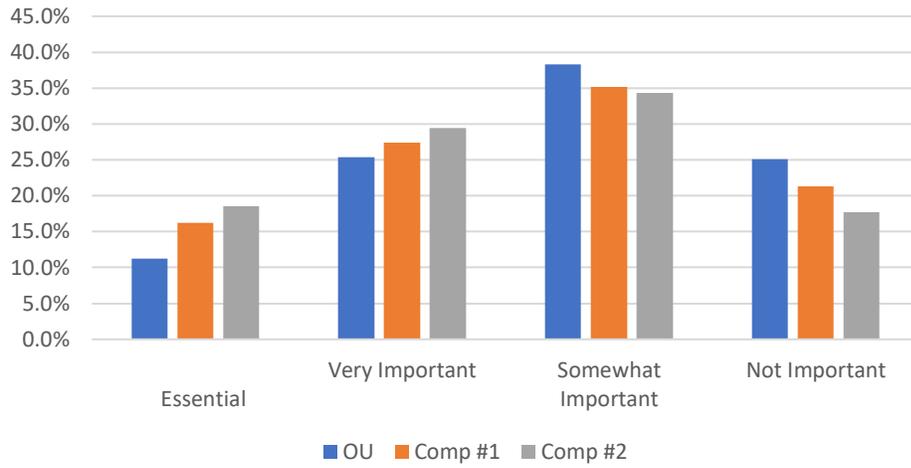


OU freshmen rated themselves lower than freshmen at our peer schools in terms of being open to having their views challenged and an ability to negotiate controversial issues, but the overall percent who saw these as strengths was surprisingly high.

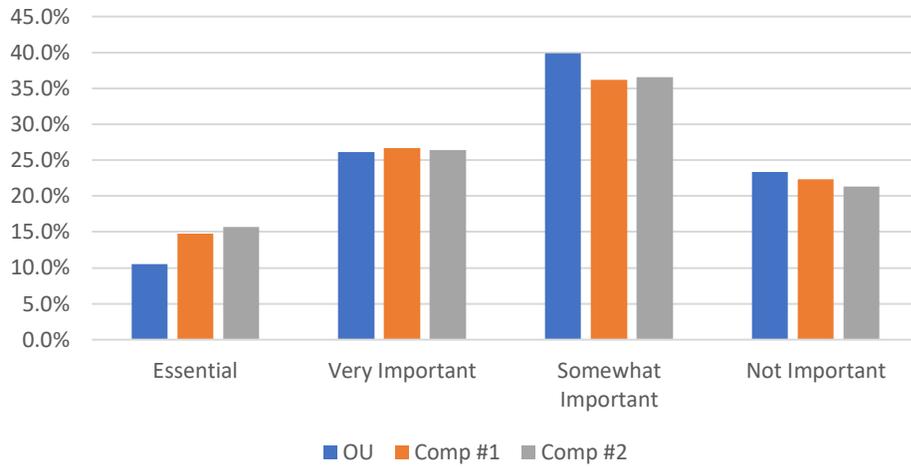


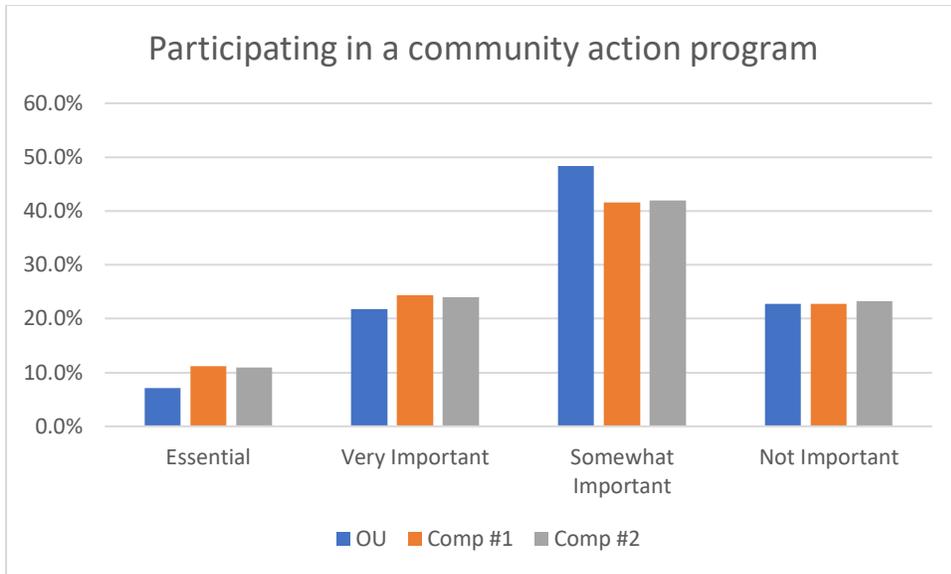
OU freshmen also reported a lower importance, relative to freshmen at our peer schools, for activities including participating in a community action program, keeping up with political affairs, and becoming a community leader.

Keeping up to date with political affairs

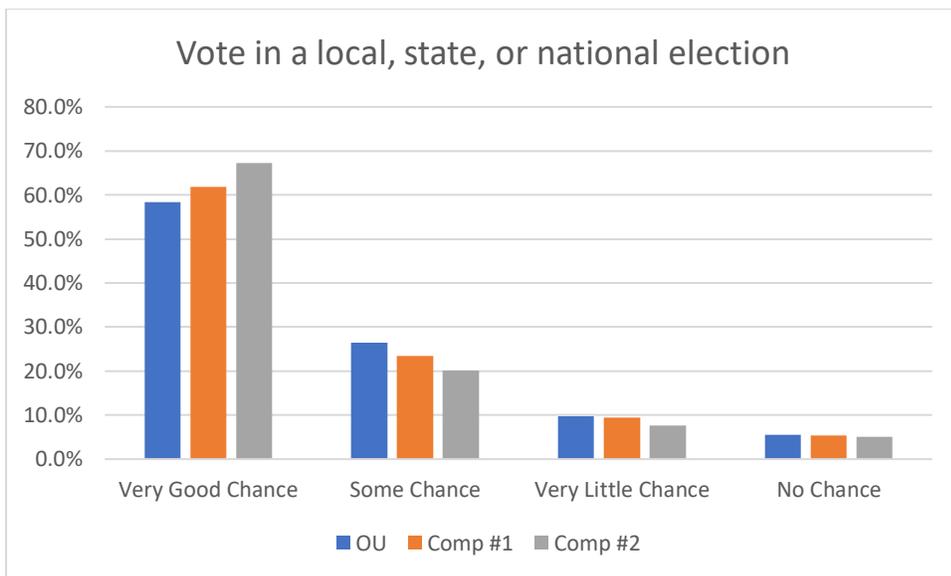


Becoming a community leader





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.

2020-2021 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 passed in 2018.
 - This picks up on the new realities mentioned above. In a way, COVID-19 coming in early 2020 made us confront this earlier than we anticipated. The pandemic made tabling and other tried-and-true activities less useful. We have not yet cracked the code for how best to do voter registration in the new environment of online registration.
- Achieve 73% voter registration among students in 2020.
 - GOAL MET: 89.6% voter registration!
- Achieve 60% voter participation among students in 2020.
 - GOAL MET: 73.4% voter turnout!
- 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.
 - GOAL MET.
- Work with select departments and schools on campus that have shown relatively low turnout levels in past cycles to boost participation from those students.
 - This was interrupted by COVID-19. Other departments were, rightly so, focused on delivering their programs.

Goals moving forward:

Before stating the goals for the next election cycle, it is important to revisit the contextual changes noted above. 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.

- Maintain a roughly-90% voter registration rate. This folds into the point above about new voter registration methods. With automatic voter registration, we may be at or near the top end of what is possible. A change from recruitment to maintenance is likely a wise move.
- Achieve 70% voter participation among students in 2022 (based on 68% turnout in 2018).
- 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 and tactics are still emerging, given that this draft was prepared in January 2022 and updated in May 2022.

Long-term Strategy

- Involve more campus partners
 - We need to better involve on a regular basis a wider swath of the campus community. This mainly involves reaching out to faculty and administrators in our professional schools – e.g., engineering, health sciences – to involve them in our work. This will help us reach goals like working with departments and programs that show lower performance in registration rate and voter turnout. We are about to remake our advisory board so this may be an opportunity to find and establish greater connections.
- Develop closer ties to university administration
 - This will help us take steps to “institutionalize” this work, be it in terms of annual reminders on the student web portal on voter registration or the development of a co-curricular “engaged student” badge or designation.

Short-term Tactics

Scheduled events and activities in chronological order:

Winter 2022:

- *Center for Civic Engagement Office Hours Virtual Series*
 - Thursday, February 10, 2022
Inflation, the Supply Chain, and COVID: How the US Might Traverse an Uncertain Business Environment
 - Thursday, March 10, 2022
Political Hot Topics: Redistricting Results and Campaign 2022
 - Thursday, April 14, 2022

Now What? A candid look at mental health as we enter year three of COVID-19

- *The Abraham Accords: Can they Bring Peace to the Middle East?*
 - March 29, 2022
 - Two former US Ambassadors will visit campus to discuss the historic peace agreement.
- *Note:* These were all successfully completed.

Fall 2022:

Plans for this semester are still not yet defined.

- We do believe a change in strategy around voter registration and engagement – based on the information above – is warranted.
 - This change would be a shift away from signing students up to vote (as was done with paper forms in the past) and toward student voter education. Here we would center our efforts on same day registration, getting absentee ballots, where to find your precinct, etc.
 - We will focus on digital marketing with these efforts.
- In the Fall 2021 semester, the CCE launched a partnership with OU's Athletics Department. The Director spoke to several teams about civic engagement and was the keynote speaker at their November DEI Forum.
 - We hope to continue to expand this partnership and create a voter registration competition among the teams at OU.
- In 2020, under the leadership of the OU Student Congress, we were able to get the OU administration to add a reminder to mySAIL – the student online portal – about voter registration. Additionally, OU Student Congress was able to implement Free Stamp Friday, a service that allowed students to collect free stamps for absentee ballots.
 - We will work to get both implemented again for 2022.

Winter 2023:

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.

As we usually do, we will work with campus allies to spread the word on our work – including voter turnout data – with the campus and the broader community. We will do, as we have done in the past, have stories for the OU News and Oakland Post (the student paper), written about NSLVE data as well as events we hold. We drafted a guest column for a regional news outlet earlier this year based on the NSLVE data we received on 2020, but the outlets passed because it was both too far removed from 2020 and too far from 2022.

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.