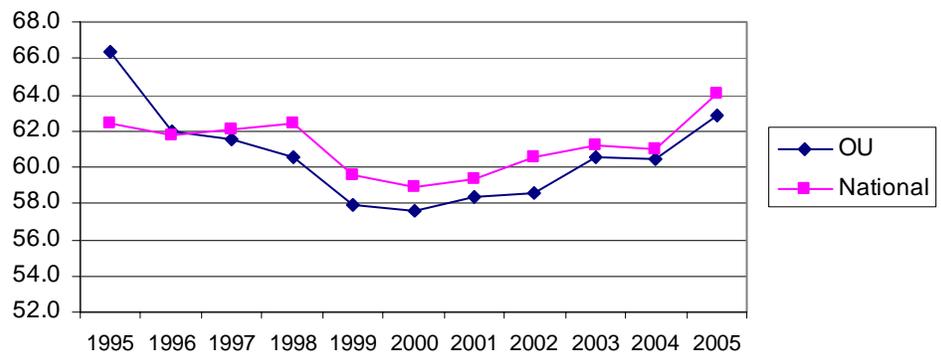


SPOTLIGHT ON OU

“More Students Plan to Lend a Hand,” claimed a headline in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (February 3, 2006). This article reviewed the report on the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey issued by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. The survey has been administered annually since 1966, and Oakland University (OU) has been a participant since the beginning. The 2005 norms are based on the responses of 263,710 students at 385 of the nation’s baccalaureate colleges and universities¹; Oakland University respondents included 1,634 (617 males and 1,017 females) first year students, surveyed during freshman orientation. Responses reflected the students’ experiences in the last year of high school and their expectations for college.

“The recent natural disasters may have influenced students’ interest in social outreach.” John H. Pryor, director of the survey, pointed out in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* article (February 3, 2006) based on the survey findings. College freshmen are showing more interest in “helping others in difficulty,” with 64% responding that it is essential or very important. 18% said there is a very good chance that they will be “participating in volunteer and community service work.”

**Figure 1: Help Others in Difficulty
Essential or Very Important**



¹ In this report, OU data is compared to the CIRP national norms for 4 year Public-Medium Selectivity Universities.

OU’s trend line continues to parallel the national data. 63% of OU freshmen said it is essential or very important to help others. This is 3% more than last year, largely due to a substantial increase in the numbers of men who agreed this was important. In 2004, the gap between men and women on “helping others in difficulty” was 18%, but this year the gender gap decreased to about 13%. In a related question, 78% of OU freshmen volunteered frequently or occasionally during their senior year in high school, the highest percentage in 11 years. However, only 15% said “they will participate in volunteer and community service work,” while in college, indicating that the majority of freshmen do not recognize this to be an important college experience.

Why they come to college, and why OU?

Nationally, when incoming students were asked what reasons were very important for going to college, the answers differed for men and women. “To learn more about things that interest me” and “to get training for a specific career” are equally high reasons for women (78% of women vs. 70% men, and 78% vs. 69%). These two reasons have always been the top two reasons given by women. Men’s top reason to go to college has consistently been “to be able to make more money” (77% of men vs. 71% women). Men and women value “to be able to get a better job” about equally (73.6% vs. 73.1%).

Table 1. Gender Differences in Selected Reasons for Attending College at OU

	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	Difference (%)
Why Attend College?				
To get training for a specific career	74.3	68.8	77.6	8.8
To be able to make more money	73.3	75.4	72.1	-3.3
To be able to get a better job	71.3	71.8	70.9	-0.9
To learn more about things that interest me	70.6	65.9	73.4	7.5
To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas	58.1	50.7	62.6	11.9
To prepare myself for graduate/professional school	56.2	52.4	58.5	6.1

OU students’ responses are similar. Table 1 shows the top 6 responses of OU freshmen. “To be able to make money” is also the top reason given by Oakland men and has always been higher for men than for women. Oakland women continue to focus on practical issues like training for a specific career, although learning about things of interest to me is second, similar to the national trend. Their focus may be a reflection of the proportion of OU women who come in planning to major in Education (17%) and Nursing (16%). The gender gap in reasons for going to college shows up most starkly in

“to gain a general education and appreciation of ideas” followed by “finding my purpose in life” (53% women vs.43% men).

The influence of parents in the decision to go to college has risen to its highest point in 11 years.

Figure 2 shows that

49% of OU students say that “my parents wanted me to go” is a very important reason to go to college, even higher than the national (45%), which is also up. This appears to be a

reflection of the close relationship today’s college students have with their parents. Moreover, 37% of OU freshmen report that a reason to choose OU is that they “wanted to live near home” (25% national). The percentage of OU students who live less than 50 miles from college is consistently much higher than the national (90% OU vs. 52% national).

Politics and Beer

After a long period of decline in interest in politics, three events, the presidential elections of 2000 and 2004 and the events of September 11, 2001, have influenced first year students’ interest in

politics. Nationally 30% of incoming first year students feel that it is essential or very important to keep up to date with politics. 9% worked on a political campaign during high school.

Figure 2: Reason for Attending College: "My Parents Wanted Me To Go"

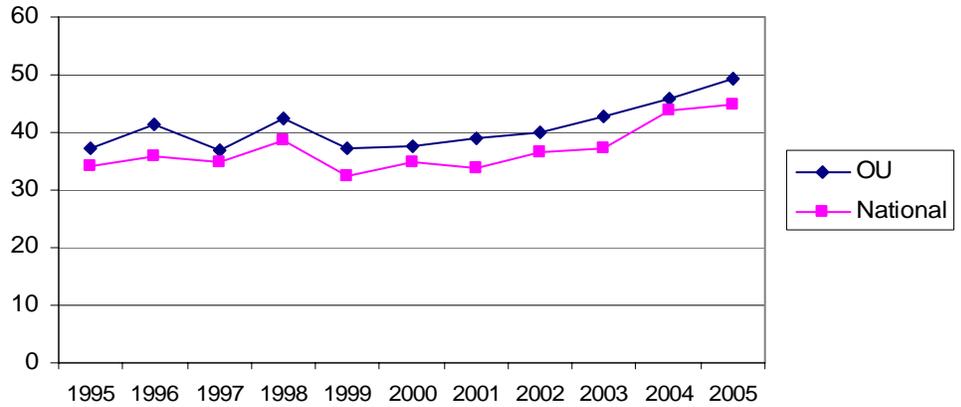
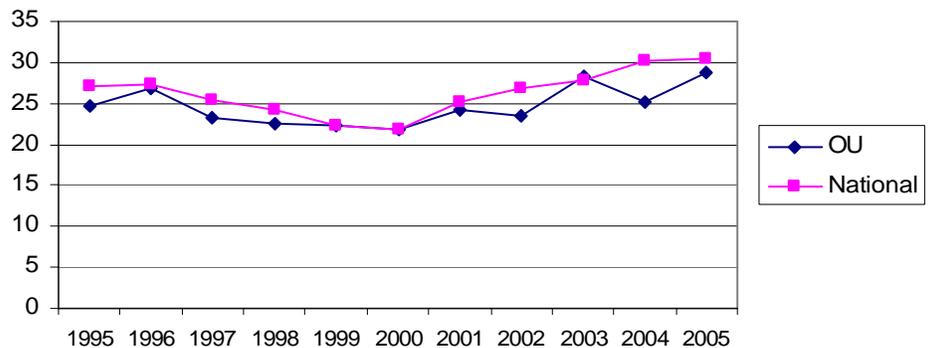


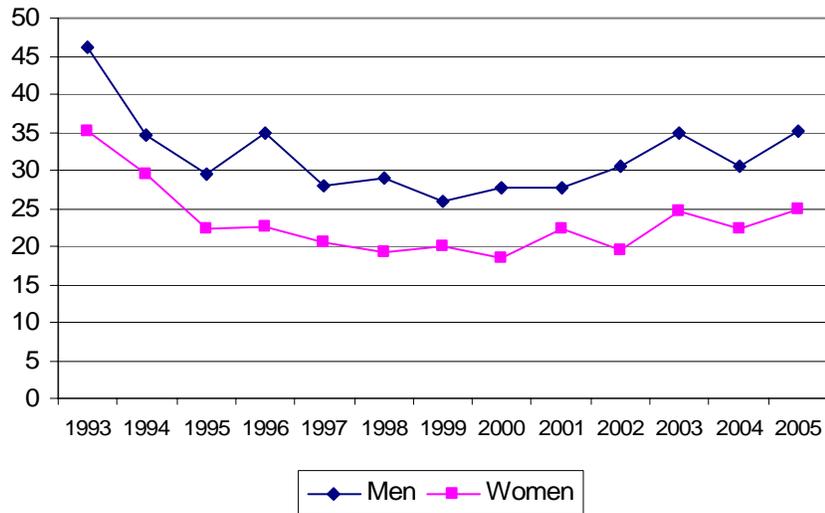
Figure 3: Keeping Up to Date with Political Affairs Essential or Very Important



OU students have also followed this trend (see Figure 3). This issue is considered essential or very important by more men more than women (see Figure 4). Typically, the gender gap at OU has been about 9% on this

issue. A new question, “dissent is a critical component of the political process” was supported strongly or somewhat by 59% of students nationally and 55% of OU freshmen. 51% of OU students

**Figure 4: Keeping Up to Date with Political Affairs at OU
Essential or Very Important**

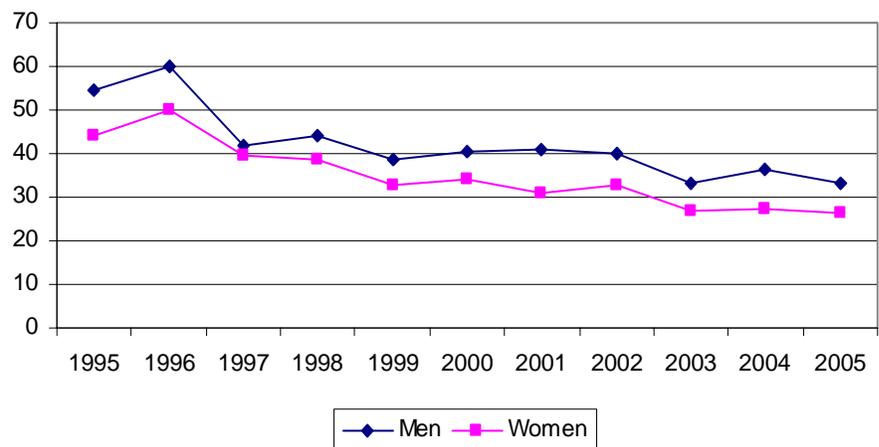


participated in organized demonstrations last year, the largest proportion in 11 years.

The percentage of entering college students who report that they frequently or occasionally drank beer during their senior year in high school has been declining for years and has dropped by more than 10% since 1996 (55%) nationally.

Over the years, OU students have also followed this trend and additionally have consistently reported lower rates of drinking than the national norm, 29% OU vs. 44% national this year.

Figure 5: Drank Beer by Gender at OU



OIRA theorizes that students who are seriously interested in drinking and partying are less likely to choose OU. OU men report drinking more than women, but with similar declines in both genders (see Figure 5).