

SPOTLIGHT ON OU

“Freshmen Show Rising Political Awareness and

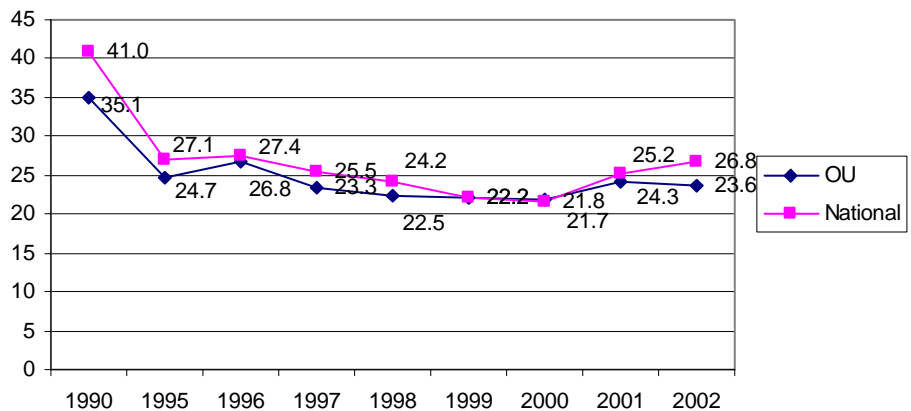
Changing Social Views” claimed a headline in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (January 27, 2003). Just two years ago, the headline read **“Looking Inward, Freshmen Care Less About Politics and More About Money”** (January 26, 2001).

Both articles 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 2002 norms are based on the responses of 282,549 students at 437 of the nation’s baccalaureate colleges and universities¹; Oakland University respondents included 1,543 (578 males and 965 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.

Politics play more central role in students’ lives

After a long term decline in interest in politics, with the entering class of 2000 recording an all-time low, ‘keeping up to date with politics’ has increased in importance for the second year (see Figure 1). Linda J. Sax, associate director of the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at

Figure 1: Keep Up To Date With Politics



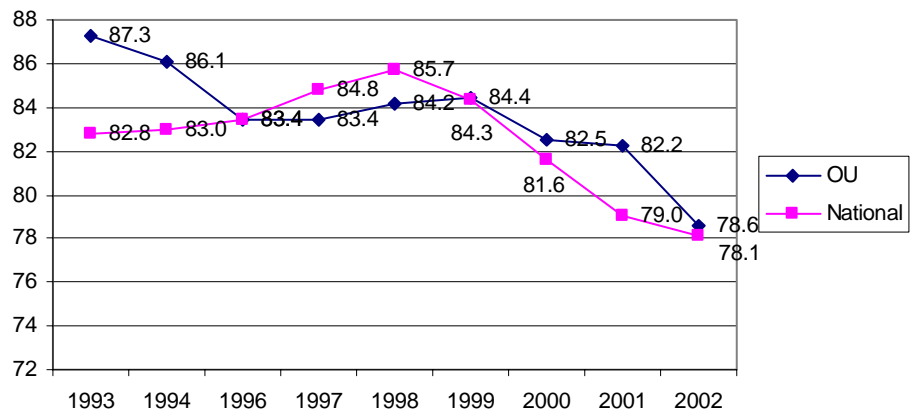
¹ In this report, OU data is compared to the CIRP national norms for 4 year Public-Medium Selectivity Universities.

Los Angeles said, “. . . this two-year upswing likely reflects two events that have re-ignited America’s interest with politics: the hotly-contested 2000 presidential election and the events of September 11, 2001.” OU first-year students also showed an increased interest in politics in 2001, although their interest dropped slightly in 2002 (see Figure 1).

Recent events might be influencing entering freshmen’s views on some political issues as well. A record high number (47%) of 2002 freshmen agree that ‘federal military spending should be increased,’ which is 26% higher than 1993, the last time this question was asked. ‘The federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns’ has been declining for four years in a row and reached a record low in 2002 (see Figure 2). The 2002 CIRP report notes the change in first-year students’ political orientation, “. . . 2002 signals a modest shift back towards more moderate and conservative political orientation.” However, students’ political orientation in 4 year Public-Medium Selectivity Universities shifted towards ‘middle of the road’ (2% more than last year). OU first-year students shifted more from the right to the center. 1.5% more OU students identified themselves as ‘middle-of-the-road.’

OU students’ responses are similar to the national trend toward conservative views on military spending and gun control. 46% of OU FTIACs support more military spending, 25% more than in 1993. 4% fewer 2002 OU first-year students agree that ‘the federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns’ than last year (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: More Control on the Sale of Handguns



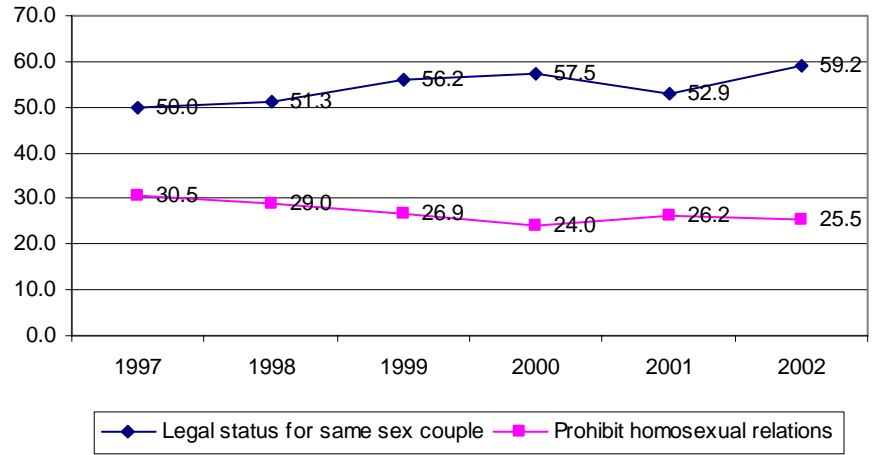
Social attitudes become more liberal

In contrast to first-year students’ conservative views on the military and gun control, their attitudes towards other social issues tend to be more liberal. 62% of students agree with ‘same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status,’ compared to 57% last year.

Meanwhile, the percentage of students (23%) who agreed ‘it is important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relationships,’ was the lowest ever.

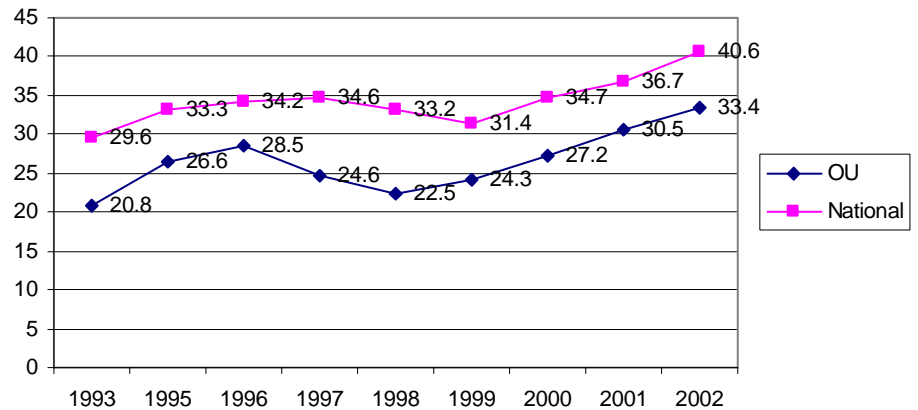
While OU students follow this national trend toward the support of gay rights, they are still more conservative than the national norm on both issues (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Gay Rights
Oakland University**



Another social issue in which first-year students’ opinion has become more liberal is regarding ‘marijuana should be legalized.’ The highest percentage of students ever agreed with this statement (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Marijuana Should Be Legalized



Drinking, smoking, and partying

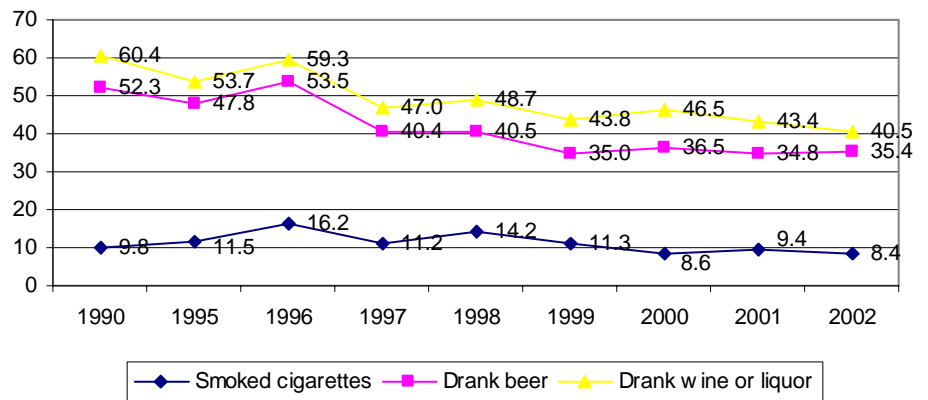
Cigarette smoking has been declining and dropped below 12% this year. Drinking beer (57%) decreased 1.5%, and drinking wine or liquor (53%) continued lower than prior years, although slightly higher than in 2001.

Also, about 4% fewer first-year students spent six or more hours partying in their last year of high school (34% in 2000).

Over the years, OU students have consistently reported lower rates of smoking and drinking than the national norm (see Figure 5). The percent of entering OU students who report drinking beer has been around 35% in

recent years, which is 22% lower than the national norm. OU first-year students report the fourth consecutive year of decline in partying, reaching the lowest percentage (23%) in 8 years. This may be due to self-selection. OU does not have a “party school” reputation, so those students for whom drinking and partying are a high priority may be less likely to choose OU.

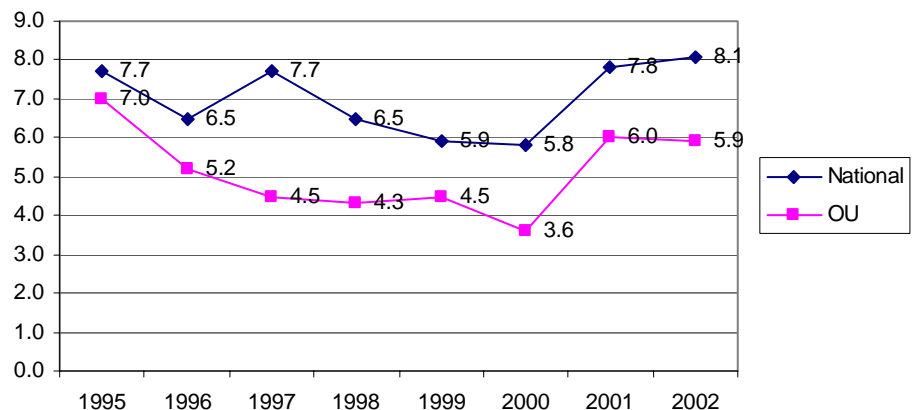
**Figure 5: Cigarettes and Alcohol Use
Oakland University**



Hard to get in?

In her *Chronicle* article, Megan Rooney points to increasing numbers of first-year students who are attending their third or lower choice colleges as “. . . a sign of the ever-increasing competitiveness of college admissions” (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Third or lower Choice



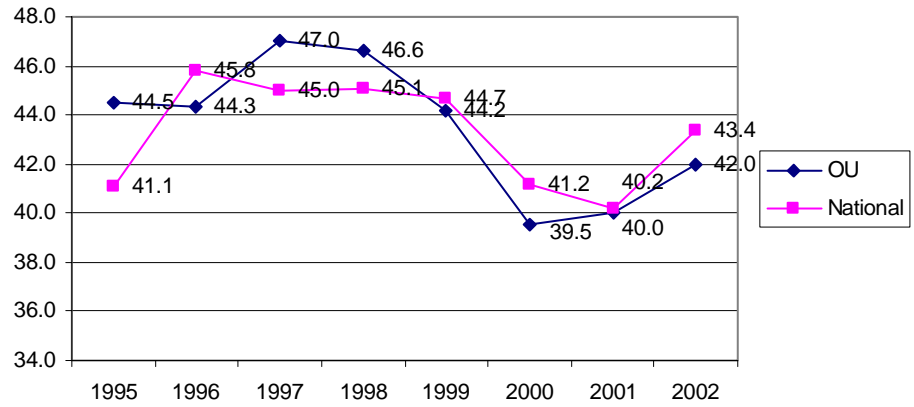
In contrast, the number of students who are attending their first choice college has dropped to only 68%. Another trend is for increasing numbers of today’s students

applying to six or more colleges (6.1%). Only 43% of first-year students indicated there is a good chance that they will be satisfied with the college they are attending (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Good Chance That You Will Be Satisfied With Your College

Again, OU

students' responses track closely to the national data. OU is the third or lower choice for 6% of 2002 first-year students (see Figure 6) and first choice for 68% of 2002 first-year



students (about 2% lower than 2001). 3.1% of OU students applied to six or more colleges, which is a little higher than previous years (compared to 2.8% last year and 1.6% in 1993). 42% of incoming OU students believe they will be satisfied with OU (see Figure 7). However, when the NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) survey asked 2001 FTIACs about their satisfaction with OU after their first semester, 70% rated their overall educational experiences as good or excellent, and 84% answered definitely or probably 'yes' to 'if you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending?' It appears that students are more satisfied with college than expected.

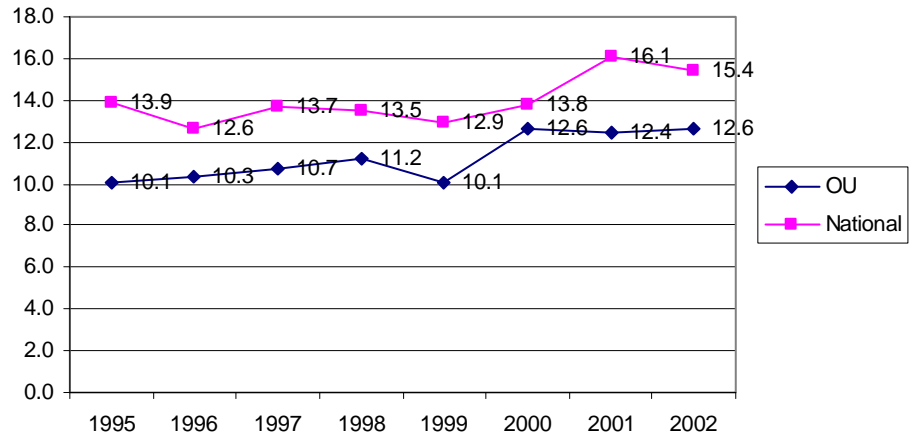
The CIRP reports that college websites were influential in 7.7% of first-year students' decisions to enroll at their present institutions (up from 6.4% last year). OU students' responses are consistent with the national trend. 5% of students used the web site to get information about OU compared to 4.5% last year and 3.5% in 2000.

Rising interest in the Arts, declining interest in Business

Interest in the arts continues to be strong, with ‘creating artistic work’ rated as essential or important by 15% of students, while 14% of incoming students consider ‘becoming

accomplished in one of the performing arts (acting, dancing, etc.)’ to be essential or important (see Figure 8). The percent of entering freshmen who played a musical instrument in the last year reached 38%.

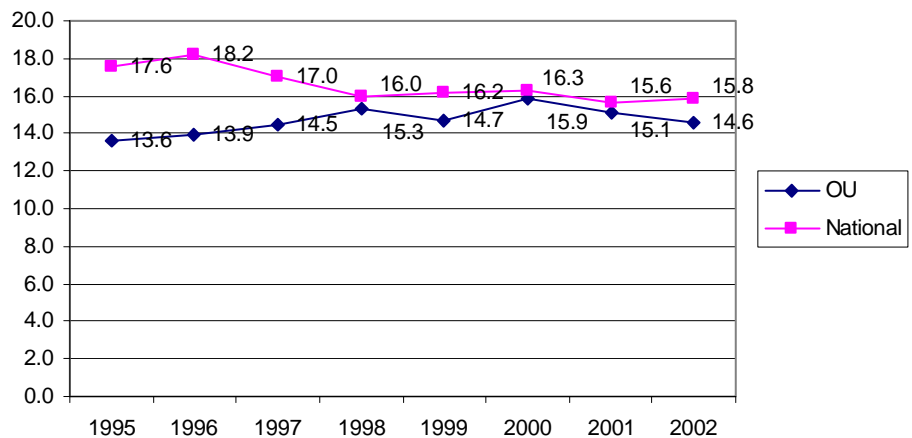
Figure 8: Creating Artistic Work



While students’ interest in the arts has been gradually increasing, interest in business appears to be declining somewhat (see Figure 9). Along with the

decline of interest in majoring in business, fewer students plan to choose business executive as their possible career (7% this year vs. 8% in 1996).

Figure 9: Business Major



Overall, OU

students’ responses reflect the national trend towards increasing interest in the arts and somewhat less interest in business (see Figure 8 and 9). OU first-year students’ interest in both majoring in business and selecting business careers are down from a high of 16% and 14% in 2000, to 15% in the major and 11% in business careers this year. Table 1 presents actual FTIACs’ enrollment by School and College since 1999.

Table 1: FTIACs' Actual Enrollment by School and College

	1999	2000	2001	2002	% Growth (1999-2002)
Arts and Science	29.1	27.7	30.9	29.4	1.0%
Business	14.4	12.4	12.1	13.3	-7.6%
Education	11.5	10.7	10.0	10.4	-9.6%
Engineering	17.4	13.2	15.5	15.3	-12.1%
Health Science	6.8	4.2	3.8	4.4	-35.3%
Nursing	3.9	4.8	5.0	6.6	69.2%
University Program	15.5	25.9	22.4	20.6	32.9%

Spending less time studying and more time surfing the net

The CIRP report finds a low (22%) of today's entering freshmen report studying or doing homework six or more hours per week during their senior year in high school. This figure has dropped by 21 percentage points since 1990 (see Figure 10). The percent of students who report studying less than one hour per week has also increased dramatically since 1997 (from 12% to 19%). At the same time, first-year students' frequent usage of a personal computer hit a record high (80%) (see figure 11). Also, 76% of students used the Internet for research or homework during their last year in high school.

Figure 10: Studying or Doing Homework 6 or more hours per week

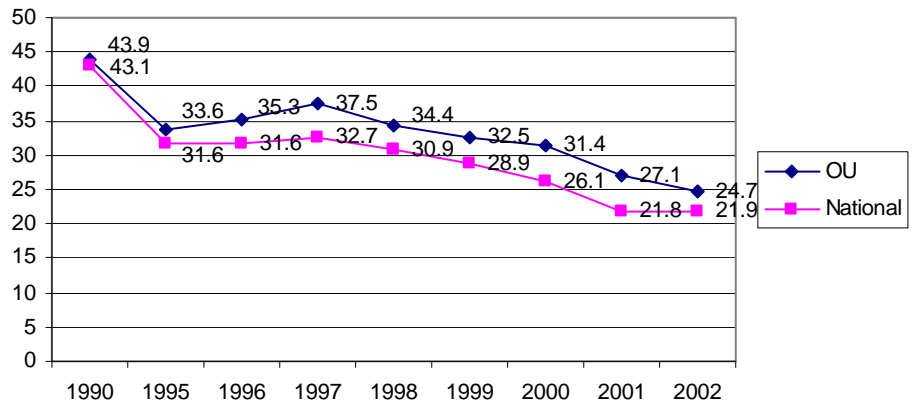
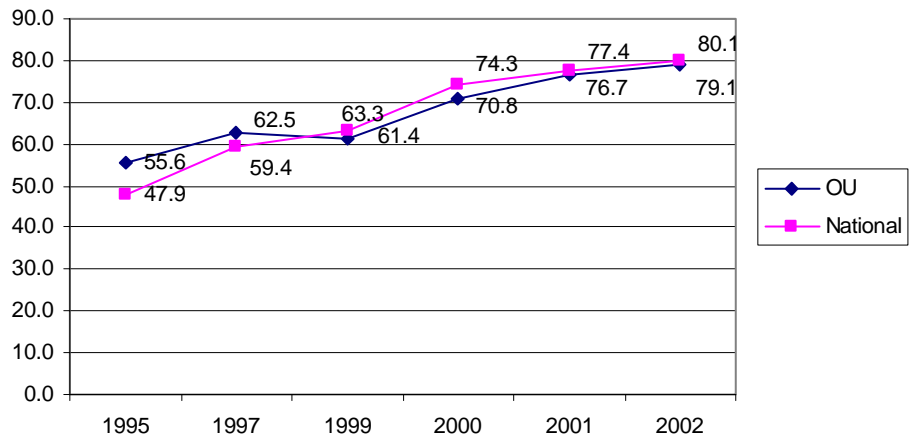


Figure 11: Used a Personal Computer



OU students also reported spending less time in studying and more time on the computer (see Figure 10 and 11). A record low of 25% of OU first-year students answered that they studied six or more hours per week, while 15% of students reported they studied less than one hour per week during their last year in high school. However, 21% of first-year students responded in the NSSE survey that they spent more than 15 hours per week studying in their first semester.

76% of OU students used the computer for their research or homework and 54% used the computer for other purposes.

More students expect to work during college, especially women

The highest percentage of first-year students in 8 years report that ‘chances are very good that he/she will get a job to help pay for college expenses (see Figure 12).

While there have always been gender differences, the percent of women who expect to get a job increased by 4% over last year, compared to a 2% increase for the men (54% female and 42% male). The gap between male and female is now 14%.

OU students are following a similar trend. The percent of OU students who say they expect to work for their college expenses hit a high of 56% (see Figure 12). OU students have always been more likely to work than the national norm, and that may be why they

Figure 12: Get Job to Pay Expenses

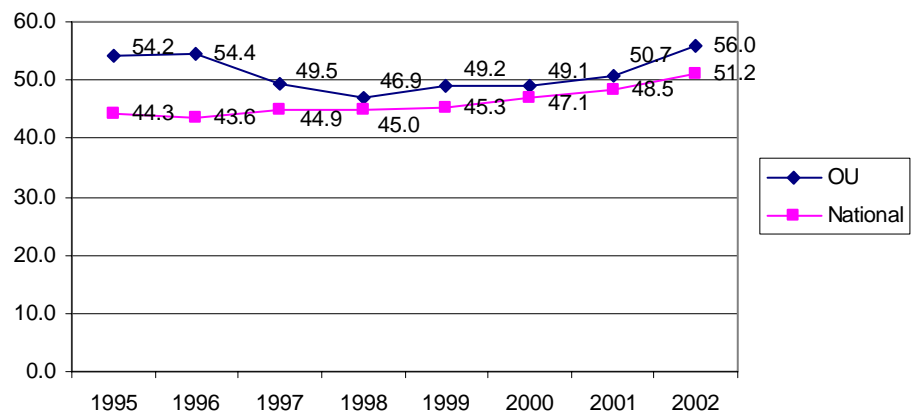
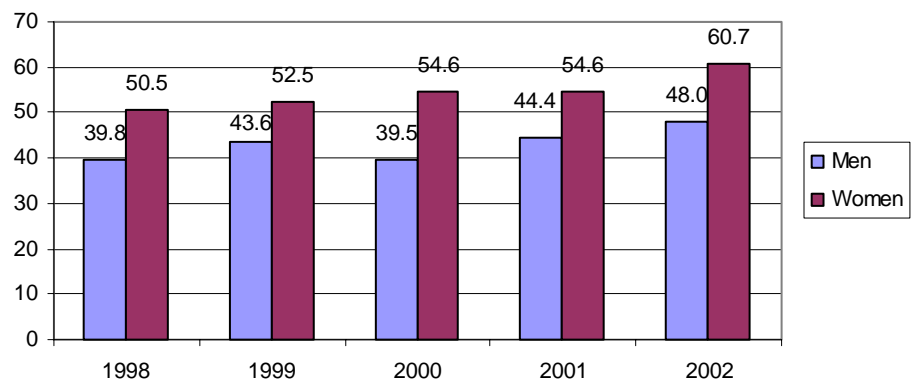


Figure 13: Get a Job to Pay Expenses by Gender Oakland University



have tended to have less concern about financing college (63% OU vs. 67% National).
The gender difference is also clear among OU first-year students (see Figure 13).