Report on the 2018/2019 SGA Omnibus Referendum

Data analysis and report composition by Executive President AJ Tsang

May 8th, 2019

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

For decades, the SGA has been working to enhance the shared governance of Johns Hopkins University. The most recent iteration of this effort derives from the April 2018 SGA Powers & Authorities Resolution. During follow-up meetings to discuss the resolution, Vice Provost of Student Affairs Kevin Shollenberger indicated that — to enhance the efficacy of the resolution and its policy objectives — it would be important for SGA to bring forward concrete data on student opinion. Recognizing a referendum as the most democratically representative form of student voice at the University, the SGA moved forward on implementing its first-ever omnibus referendum[1].

METHODOLOGY AND REPRESENTATIVENESS

Over the course of Summer 2018, SGA collected the 900 signatures requisite to hosting a referendum in the first place. In early September 2018, the SGA Internal Affairs Committee identified the 8 key issues that would be placed on the referendum ballot, taking into account public feedback and the responses to the open feedback question on the petition for a referendum. In late September 2018, the SGA Internal Affairs Committee finalized the questions that would appear on the referendum ballot, and wrote the "pro" and "con" paragraphs that would accompany each question.

Recognizing the questions of democratic legitimacy posed towards the Smoking Policy Survey of Spring 2018 and the numerical shortcomings of the 2016 Covered Grades Referendum, in which not enough votes were received to reach the binding threshold, the SGA opted to approach this referendum with two innovative approaches. First, the 2018/2019 referendum would include multiple issues and questions, so as to be an "omnibus" referendum that simultaneously captured student feedback on several issues. Second, the 2018/2019 referendum would stretch across at least an entire semester, if not an entire school year, to ensure students an adequate amount of time to vote.

[1] Please note that this report pertains to the 2018/2019 referendum conducted by the Student Government Association among undergraduate students enrolled in the Krieger and Whiting Schools of the Johns Hopkins University. This referendum does not speak to the opinions of non-undergraduates at Johns Hopkins University.

To analyze the referendum results, data was downloaded from Hopkins Groups, taking care to divest all votes of identifying information. Votes were tallied using COUNTIF functions on Excel. Simple algebraic formulae were used to calculate if questions had reached the binding threshold (a concept which is more thoroughly discussed below).

Statistically, the referendum maintained internal and external validity to the greatest extent possible. Internally, the referendum questions were screened for bias and each question included paragraphs describing the implications of a "yes" and "no" vote. In addition, the number of responses from the student body — 2,378 in total — allowed for reliable statistical analysis. Furthermore, voting rates for most questions remained approximately the same throughout the referendum. Thus, the referendum maintains external validity and generalizability to the student body's overall viewpoint on the 8 key issues contained therein.

NOTE OF CERTIFICATION & BINDING THRESHOLDS

The Office of the Executive President hereby marks the closure of the referendum ballot at 12:00 PM on Wednesday, May 8th, 2019. **Given the above note of internal and external statistical validity, the Office of the Executive President formally certifies the referendum results as democratically valid and democratically representative.** The Office of the Executive President also certifies this document as the final report of the 2018/2019 Referendum, as conducted by the 2018/2019 SGA.

5 questions have reached the binding threshold, and 3 have fallen short. For a given question to reach the binding threshold, the amount of students voting "yes" on a given question has to have amounted to no less than ⅓ of the student body. ⅓ of the student body equates to approximately 1,871 students, given a student body of 5,615 students (as provided by the December 2018 Johns Hopkins Factbook). If a question has reached the binding threshold, the SGA is obligated to represent and enact that viewpoint. In the legal analysis of the present office holder of the Executive Presidency, the SGA could only take a different stance if the viewpoint expressed by the referendum is reversed or expanded upon by a successive referendum.

Finally, the Office of the Executive President commends the historic amount of students who have voted in the referendum. With 2,378 total voters, the 2018/2019 SGA referendum has reached more students than any SGA ballot since 2012.

RESULTS — SUMMARY

Question	Yes (%)	No (%)	Status with regard to the binding threshold
Should the University create a private police force?	688 (28.93%)	1690 (71.07%)	Not binding. The SGA is not specifically bound to this outcome.
Should the University construct a student center?	1917 (80.61%)	461 (19.39%)	**Outcome is binding. The SGA is bound to this outcome until and unless reversed by a future referendum.**
Should the Board of Trustees fully divest from all remaining holdings in fossil fuels?	1879 (79.02%)	499 (20.98%)	**Outcome is binding. The SGA is bound to this outcome until and unless reversed by a future referendum.**
Should the University appoint one or more faculty members in each academic department to advocate for student mental health?	1970 (82.84%)	408 (17.16%)	**Outcome is binding. The SGA is bound to this outcome until and unless reversed by a future referendum.**
Should the University hire 3 additional investigators in the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE) to strive to ensure cases are addressed in less than 60 days?	1974 (83.01%)	404 (16.99%)	**Outcome is binding. The SGA is bound to this outcome until and unless reversed by a future referendum.**
Should the policy of first-year first-semester covered grades be restored?	1576 (66.27%)	802 (33.73%)	Not binding. The SGA is not specifically bound to this outcome.
Should there be an undergraduate observer member on the Board of	2042 (85.87%)	336 (14.13%)	**Outcome is binding. The SGA is bound to this outcome until and unless reversed by a future referendum.**

Trustees?			
May the SGA have the authority to amend the SGA Constitution by a ⅔ majority of the Senate?	1859 (78.17%)	519 (21.83%)	<u>Not binding; and as a result of its nature, not enabling.</u> Because this question directly relates to the powers of the SGA and exists at the level of a Constitutional amendment, the non-binding nature of the question means that SGA is not empowered to amend its Constitution by a ⅔ majority of the Senate, and future amendments to the Constitution must occur vis-a-vis existing processes.

RESULTS — TOTAL VOTES OVER TIME

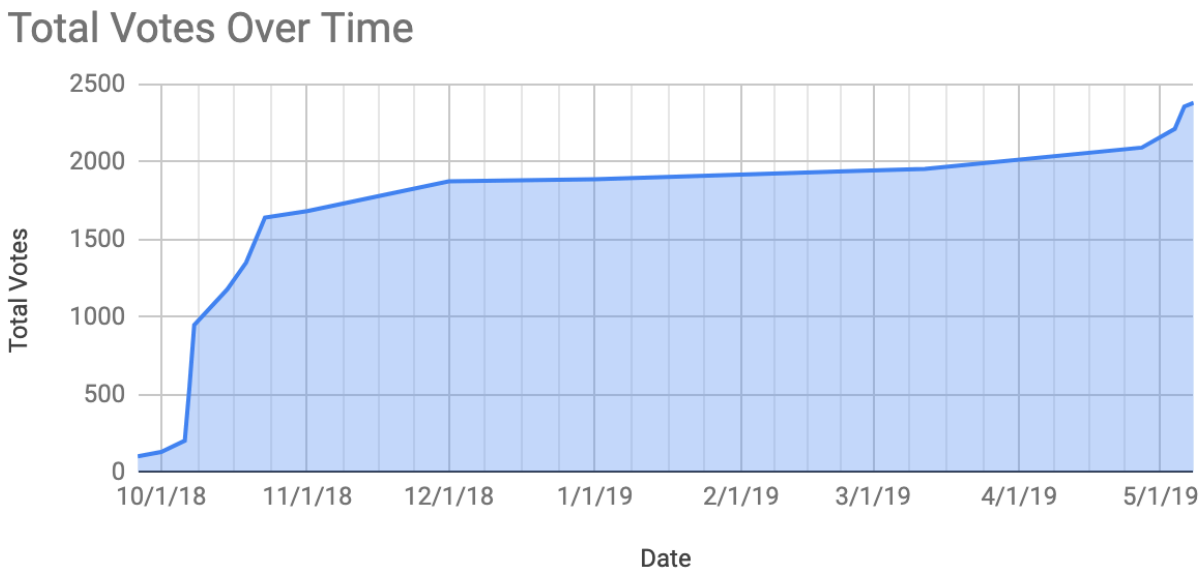


Figure 0: Total votes in the referendum, measured by month.

Observations and Explanations:
The SGA conducted a soft rollout of the referendum ballot in late September 2018, before releasing the ballot in an all-school email in early October 2018. During the following 2-3 weeks, SGA members hosted a number of events encouraging students to vote, from direct-message sessions to tabling at Brody and in dining halls. This report credits the Office of the Executive Secretary, Executive Secretary Aspen Williams, and the Communications and Marketing Commission (CMC) for much of this initial effort.

Voting rates began to level off in November 2018, and remained stagnant over the holidays. Voting rates rose slowly during the spring semester, then rose quickly in late March and early April 2019, as SGA members attempted a second wave of advertisement, in coordination with Exec and Class Council elections. Finally, voting rates increased rapidly in early May 2019, as SGA formally offered the incentive of $15 gift cards to 10 randomly-selected people who voted in the referendum. This report gives special credit to Senators Madelynn Wellons, Sam Mollin, Claire Gorman, and the Civic Engagement Committee for working to push forward this second wave of effort. This report also notes that Executive President AJ Tsang contributed personal funds to sponsor ads for the referendum on social media, and that SGA Advisor Calvin Smith was of considerable help in obtaining the gift cards.

RESULTS — QUESTION 1 (CREATING A UNIVERSITY POLICE FORCE)

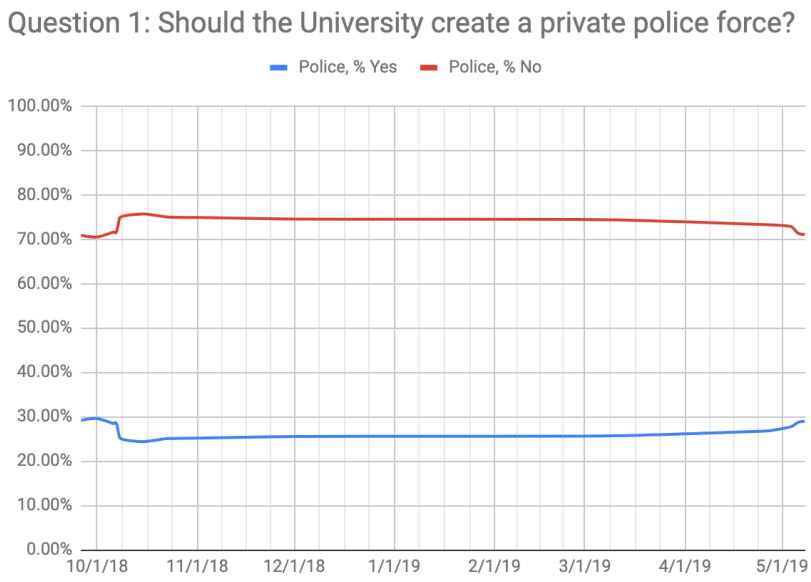


Figure 1A: Cumulative response rates on Question 1 over time.

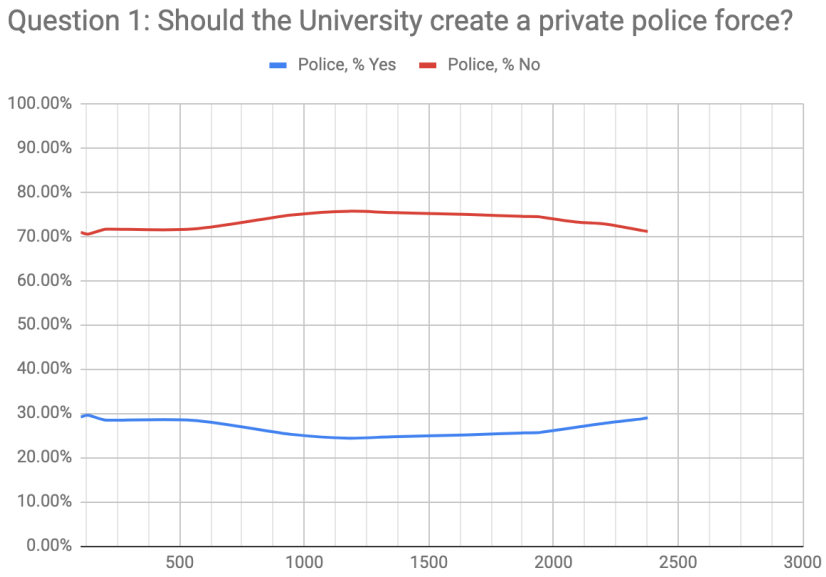


Figure 1B: Cumulative response rates on Question 1 over number of votes submitted.

Observations and Explanations:

Though largely level, the percent of *yes* votes and *no* votes fluctuated over time, with the amount of students voting in opposition to a police force slowly declining over time. Starting in early April, we witnessed a notable escalation in this trend. Of the students who voted in April and May 2019, approximately 45% voted *yes* (in favor of a police force) and 55% voted *no* (against a police force).

RESULTS - QUESTION 2 (BUILDING A STUDENT CENTER)

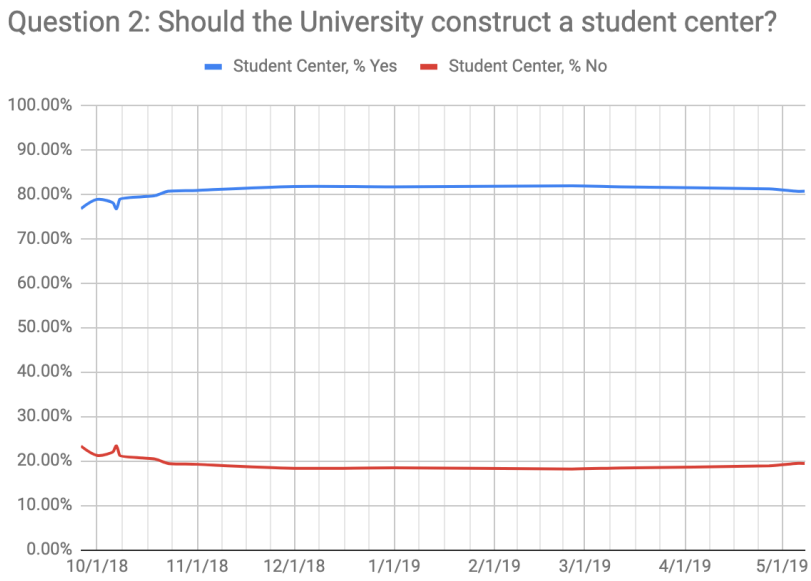


Figure 2A: Cumulative response rates on Question 2 over time.

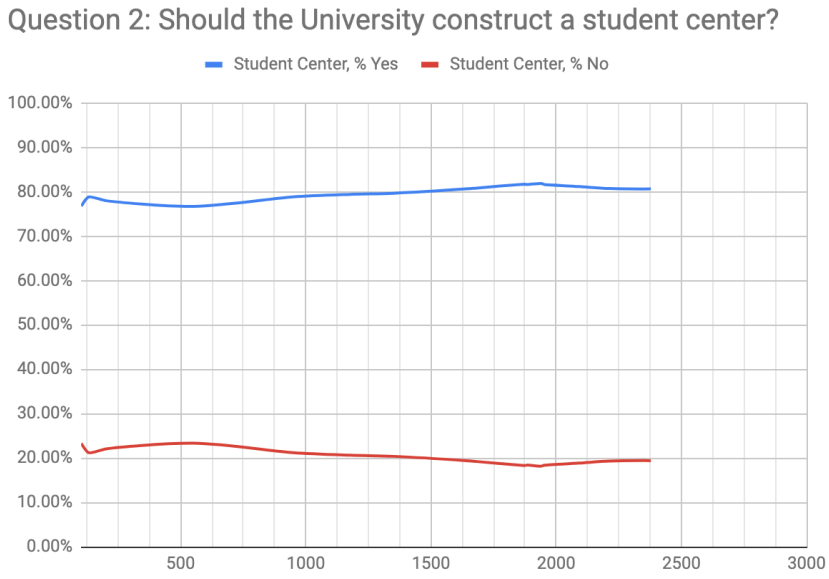


Figure 2B: Cumulative response rates on Question 2 over number of votes submitted.

Observations and Explanations:

Though largely level, the number of students voting in favor of a student center tended to increase over time, with a very slight decline in the percent of "yes" votes in early May 2019.

RESULTS — QUESTION 3 (FULL DIVESTMENT)

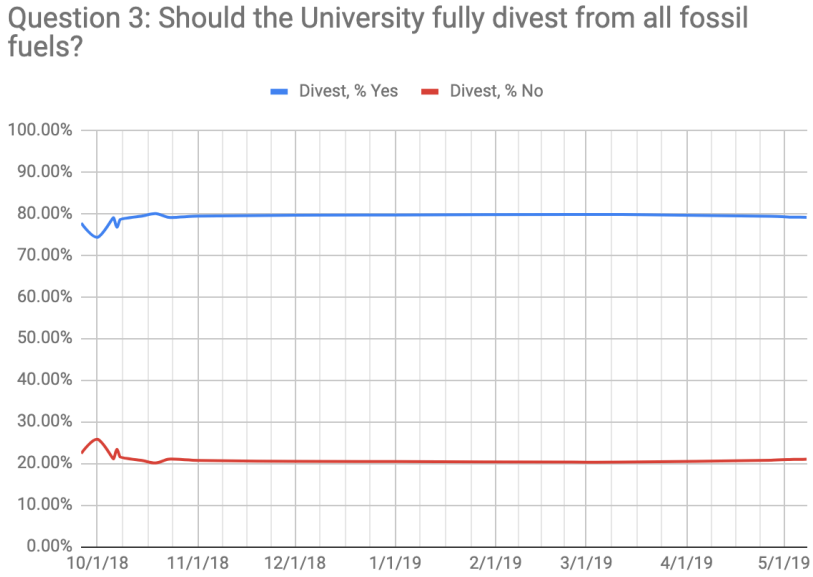


Figure 3A: Cumulative response rates on Question 3 over time.

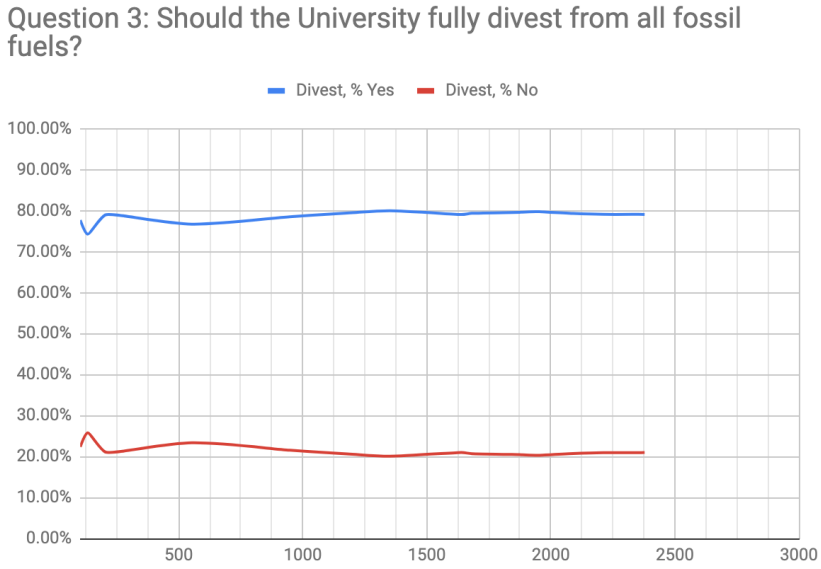


Figure 3B: Cumulative response rates on Question 3 over number of votes submitted.

Observations and Explanations:

Question 3 experienced the most notable variations in response rates in the first weeks of voting, but very quickly became more level. It remained among the most consistent questions throughout the referendum, with the percent of "yes" votes declining only very slightly in early May 2019.

RESULTS — QUESTION 4 (FACULTY MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATES)

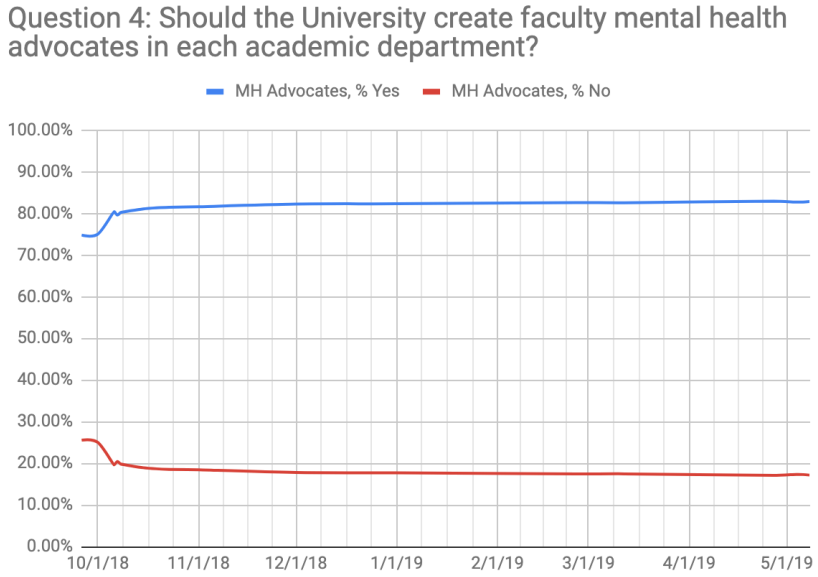


Figure 4A: Cumulative response rates on Question 3 over time.

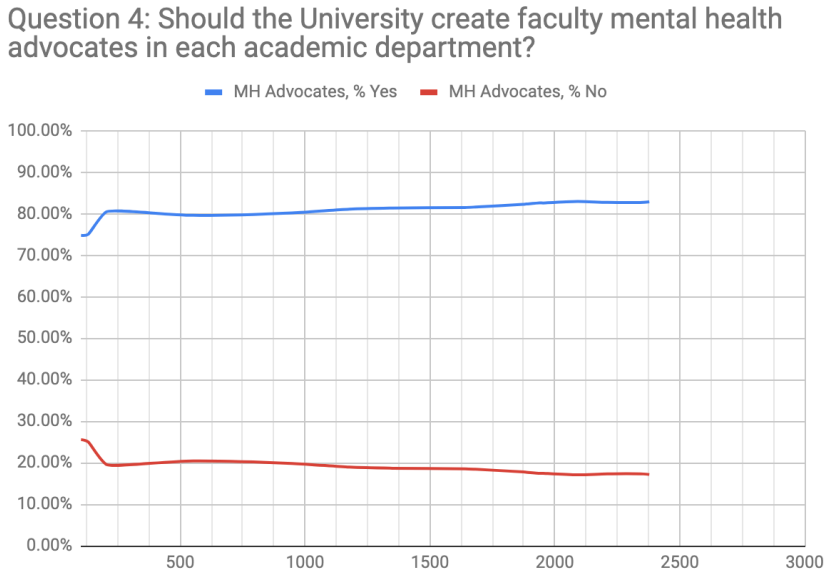


Figure 4B: Cumulative response rates on Question 3 over number of votes submitted.

Observations and Explanations:

Over time, Question 4's "yes" and "no" vote percentages remained very consistent. Over the number of votes submitted, Question 4 saw a consistent increase in the percent of students voting "yes."

RESULTS — QUESTION 5 (HIRING MORE OIE INVESTIGATORS)

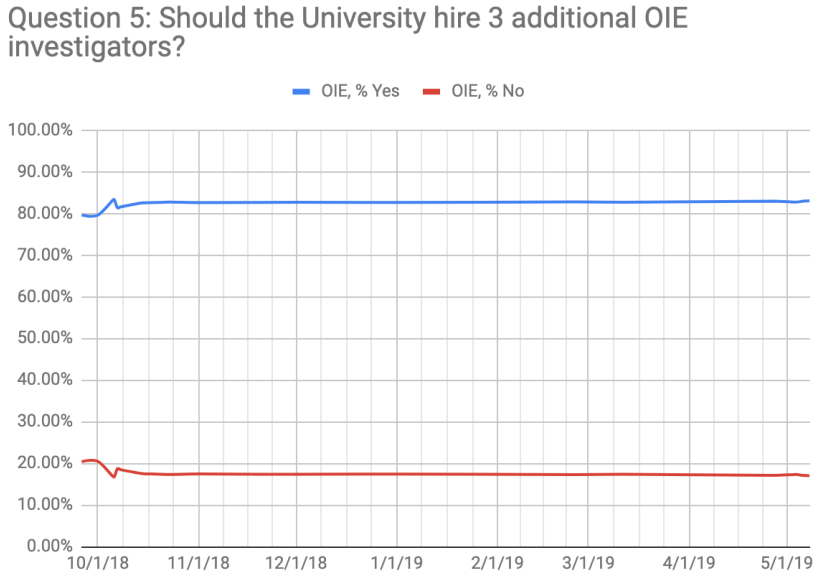


Figure 5A: Cumulative response rates on Question 5 over time.

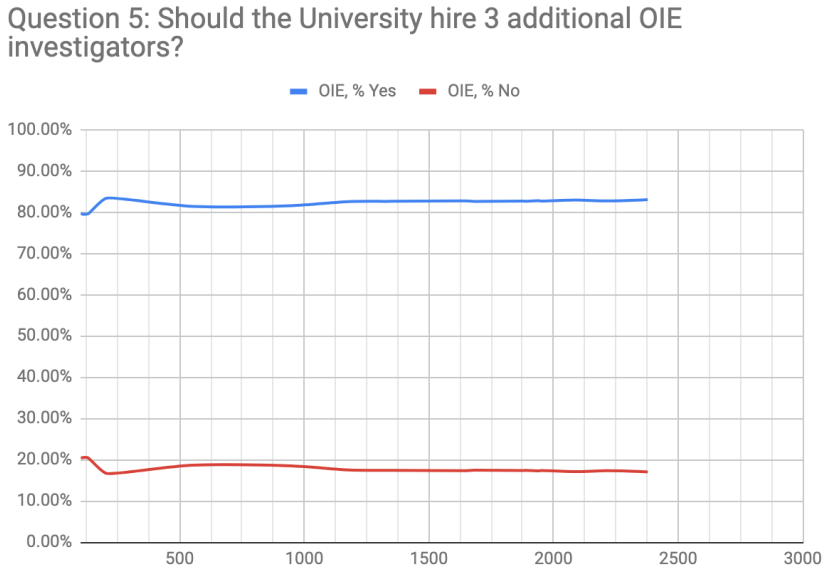


Figure 5B: Cumulative response rates on Question 5 over number of votes submitted.

Observations and Explanations:

Over time, Question 5's "yes" and "no" vote percentages remained very consistent. Over the number of votes submitted, Question 5 saw a slight decline in the percent of students voting "yes" during the first few weeks of voting, then a consistent increase until the end of the school year.

RESULTS — QUESTION 6 (RESTORING COVERED GRADES)

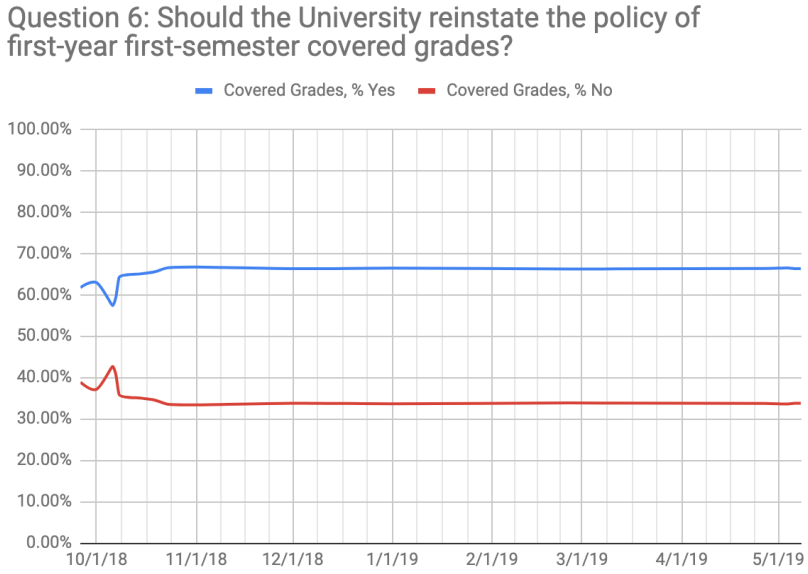


Figure 6A: Cumulative response rates on Question 6 over time.

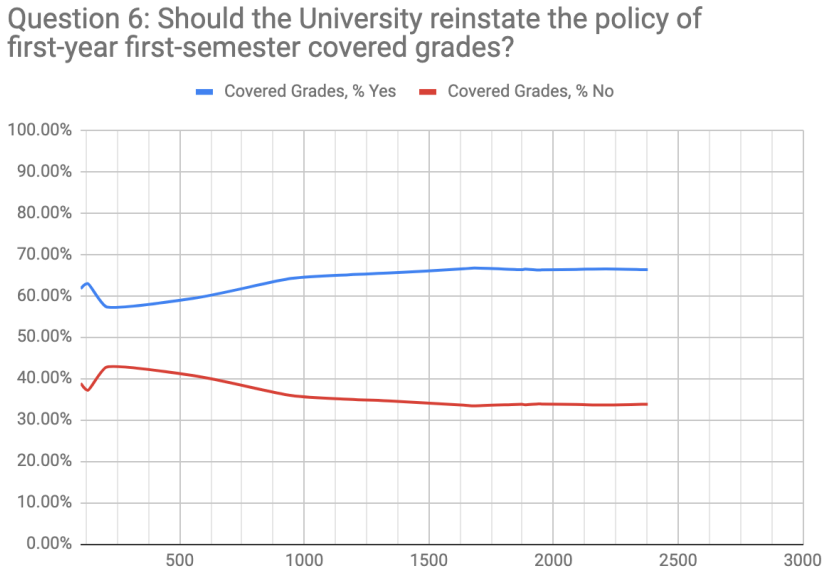


Figure 6B: Cumulative response rates on Question 6 over number of votes submitted.

Observations and Explanations:

Over time, Question 6's "yes" and "no" vote percentages remained very consistent. In relation to the number of votes submitted, Question 6 saw a significant increase in students voting "yes" between 200 and 1000 votes (roughly mid-October), suggesting a correlation with the academic stressors that commonly accompany that period of the year.

RESULTS — QUESTION 7 (UNDERGRADUATE OBSERVER ON THE B.O.T.)

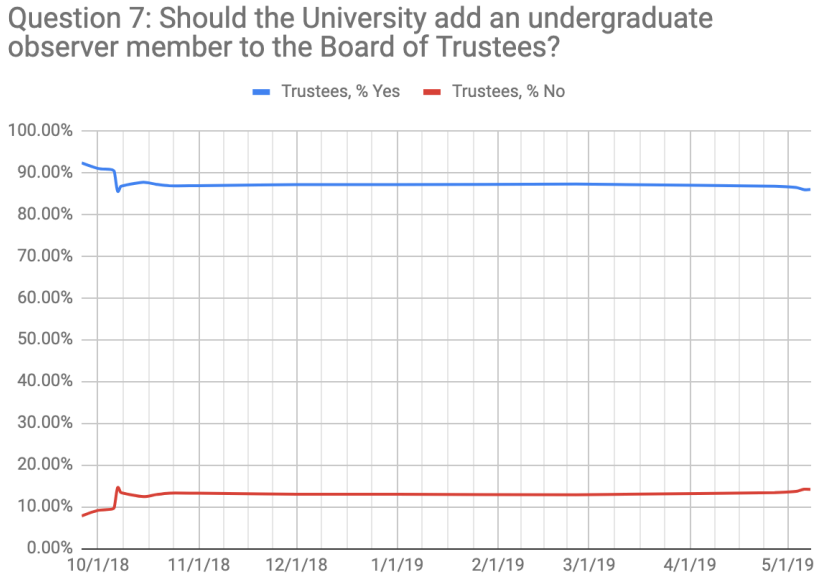


Figure 7A: Cumulative response rates on Question 7 over time.

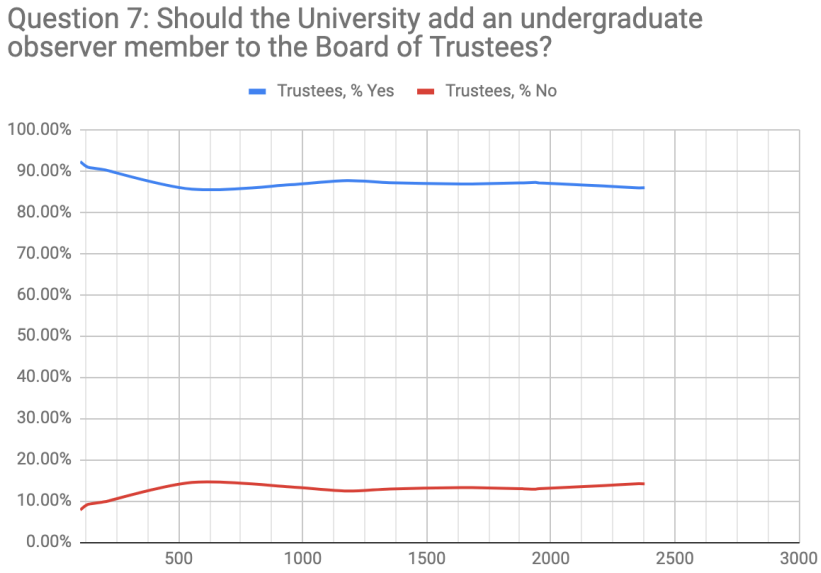


Figure 7B: Cumulative response rates on Question 7 over number of votes submitted.

Observations and Explanations:

Both over time and in relation to the cumulative number of votes, Question 7 tended to see slight declines in the percent of students voting "yes." There is no clear explanation for this tendency.

RESULTS — QUESTION 8 (AMENDING THE SGA CONSTITUTION.)

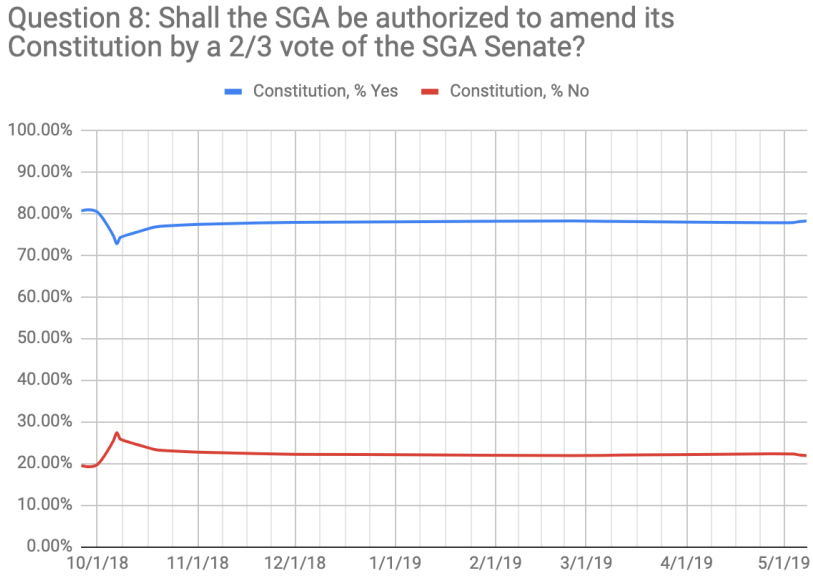


Figure 8A: Cumulative response rates on Question 8 over time.

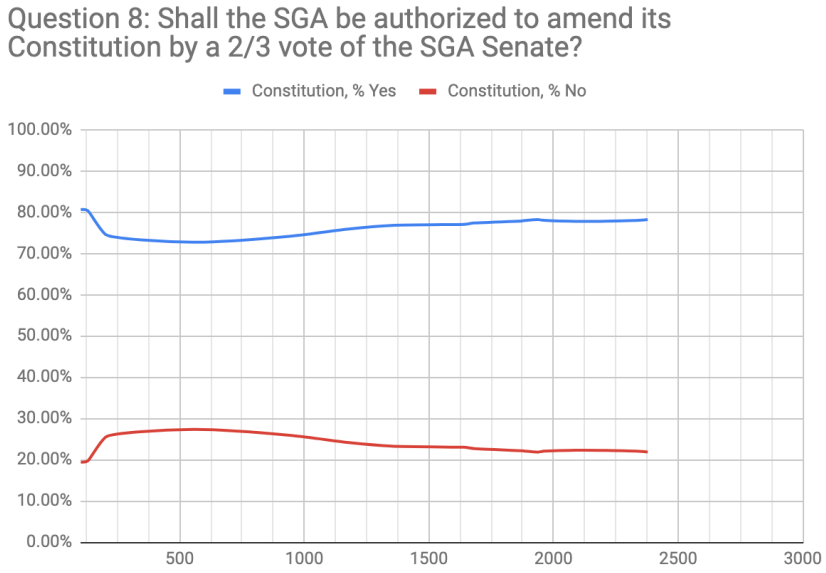


Figure 8B: Cumulative response rates on Question 8 over number of votes submitted.

Observations and Explanations:
Both over time and in relation to the cumulative number of votes, Question 8 tended to see increases in the percent of students voting "yes."

RESULTS — TABLE OF RESULTS OVER TIME

Date	Total Votes	Police, % Yes	Police, % No	Student Center, % Yes	Student Center, % No	Divest, % Yes	Divest, % No	MH Advocates, % Yes	MH Advocates, % No	OIE, % Yes	OIE, % No	Covered Grades, % Yes	Covered Grades, % No	Trustees, % Yes	Trustees, % No	Constitution, % Yes	Constitution, % No
9/26/18	103	29.13%	70.87%	76.70%	23.30%	77.67%	22.33%	74.76%	25.54%	79.61%	20.39%	61.67%	38.83%	92.23%	7.77%	80.58%	19.42%
10/1/18	132	29.55%	70.45%	78.79%	21.21%	74.24%	25.76%	75.00%	25.00%	79.55%	20.45%	62.88%	37.12%	90.91%	9.09%	80.30%	19.70%
10/6/18	204	28.43%	71.57%	77.94%	22.06%	78.92%	21.08%	80.39%	19.61%	83.33%	16.67%	57.35%	42.65%	90.20%	9.80%	74.51%	25.49%
10/7/18	553	28.39%	71.61%	76.67%	23.33%	76.67%	23.33%	79.57%	20.43%	81.37%	18.63%	59.31%	40.69%	85.53%	14.47%	72.69%	27.31%
10/8/18	948	25.21%	74.79%	78.80%	21.20%	78.48%	21.52%	80.17%	19.83%	81.54%	18.46%	64.14%	35.86%	86.60%	13.40%	74.16%	25.84%
10/15/18	1178	24.36%	75.64%	79.37%	20.63%	79.37%	20.63%	81.07%	18.93%	82.51%	17.49%	65.03%	34.97%	87.61%	12.39%	75.89%	24.11%
10/19/18	1350	24.67%	75.33%	79.63%	20.37%	79.93%	20.07%	81.33%	18.67%	82.59%	17.41%	65.48%	34.52%	87.11%	12.89%	76.74%	23.26%
10/23/18	1640	25.06%	74.94%	80.61%	19.39%	79.02%	20.98%	81.46%	18.54%	82.68%	17.32%	66.46%	33.54%	86.77%	13.23%	77.01%	22.99%
11/1/18	1682	25.15%	74.85%	80.80%	19.20%	79.31%	20.69%	81.57%	18.43%	82.58%	17.42%	66.65%	33.35%	86.80%	13.20%	77.35%	22.65%
12/1/18	1873	25.52%	74.48%	81.69%	18.31%	79.55%	20.45%	82.22%	17.78%	82.65%	17.35%	66.26%	33.74%	87.03%	12.97%	77.84%	22.16%
1/1/19	1886	25.56%	74.44%	81.60%	18.40%	79.59%	20.41%	82.29%	17.71%	82.61%	17.39%	66.38%	33.62%	87.06%	12.94%	77.94%	22.06%
2/25/19	1939	25.58%	74.42%	81.85%	18.15%	79.73%	20.27%	82.57%	17.43%	82.72%	17.28%	66.17%	33.83%	87.16%	12.84%	78.18%	21.82%
3/12/19	1953	25.70%	74.30%	81.60%	18.38%	79.72%	20.28%	82.54%	17.46%	82.64%	17.36%	66.21%	33.79%	87.05%	12.95%	78.03%	21.97%
4/27/19	2090	26.79%	73.21%	81.15%	18.85%	79.28%	20.72%	82.92%	17.08%	82.92%	17.08%	66.32%	33.68%	86.65%	13.35%	77.75%	22.25%
5/4/19	2211	27.77%	72.73%	80.69%	19.31%	79.06%	20.94%	82.68%	17.32%	82.68%	17.32%	66.44%	33.56%	86.30%	13.70%	77.79%	22.21%
5/6/19	2354	28.72%	71.28%	80.59%	19.41%	79.06%	20.94%	82.71%	17.29%	82.92%	17.08%	66.27%	33.73%	85.85%	14.15%	78.04%	21.96%
5/8/19	2378	28.93%	71.07%	80.61%	19.39%	79.02%	20.98%	82.84%	17.16%	83.01%	16.99%	66.27%	33.73%	85.87%	14.13%	78.17%	21.83%