

Oklahoma State University Retirees: Involvement with the University and Community

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Once retired, do Oklahoma State University (OSU) retirees simply rock away their earned retirement years on the front porch? In January 2019, an online survey of OSU Emeriti Association members was conducted to determine the extent to which retirees remain active in retirement. As results herein confirm, OSU retirees stay active in many ways, including continuing to support the university and community where they live.

Respondents' Profile

An online survey via Survey Monkey was sent to all email addresses available to the OSU Emeriti Association office. Of about 265 emails sent, we received 110 usable responses (41.5% response rate) from two mailings. Note that some retiree couples use the same email address and only one response was possible from a single address. In that case, respondents were asked to complete the survey where possible for both spouses. However, note that findings presented are likely to slightly understate actual results.

Male respondents represented 67% of all respondents. Nearly three-fourths self-reported they were in a faculty or administrative position when they retired, and another 18% were in a staff or administrative position. The remaining 11% were in varied other positions. Most respondents (87%) live in Stillwater or within 10 miles of Stillwater.

Respondents reported the years since they retired. Relatively speaking, responses were evenly spread across three time periods: less than 5 years, 38%; 6-15 years, 33%; 16 years or more, 39%. Age also was distributed over a wide range but most heavily in the 70s. Age distribution was: less than 70 years, 18%; 70-79 years, 51%; 80 years or older, 32%.

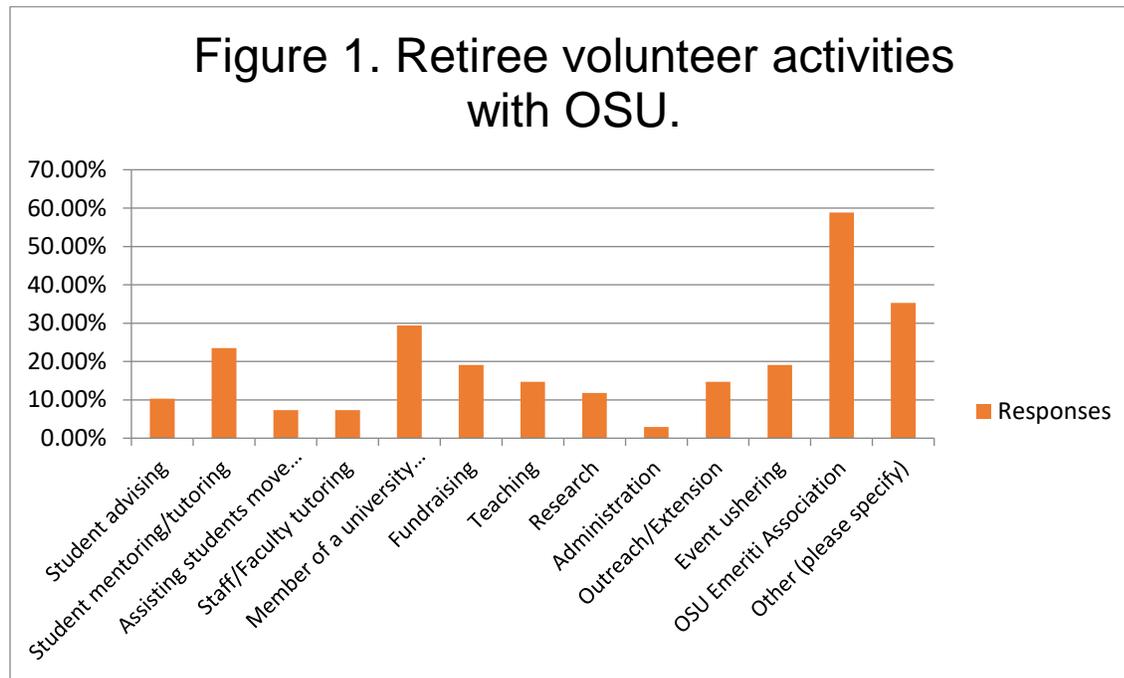
Work Income Since Retirement

Once most respondents retired from OSU, they stayed retired; but not all. Three-fourths or more of retirees indicated they neither returned to a paid position at OSU (86%), a paid position in a business (83%), nor held a self-employed position (78%). Some took part-time positions at OSU (14%), part-time with a business (12%), or were self-employed part-time (21%). The type of part-time positions provided by respondents ranged widely, from teaching to ranching, tax preparation to housing development, sorority house director to consulting.

Retirees and Volunteerism

Retirees are often sought out to volunteer because they (presumably) have more time and skills that can be used by many organizations. OSU Emeriti Association respondents were no exception. Over half of all respondents (57%) indicated they have engaged in volunteer work for OSU. Figure 1 indicates volunteer work takes many forms, with volunteering with the OSU Emeriti Association leading the way (59%). Others have served on university committees (29%), engaged in student mentoring or tutoring (24%), fundraising for OSU (19%), and event ushering

(19%). Some volunteer activities listed as “other” included volunteering at the Botanical Garden, helping at OSU graduation ceremonies, and volunteer classroom teaching.



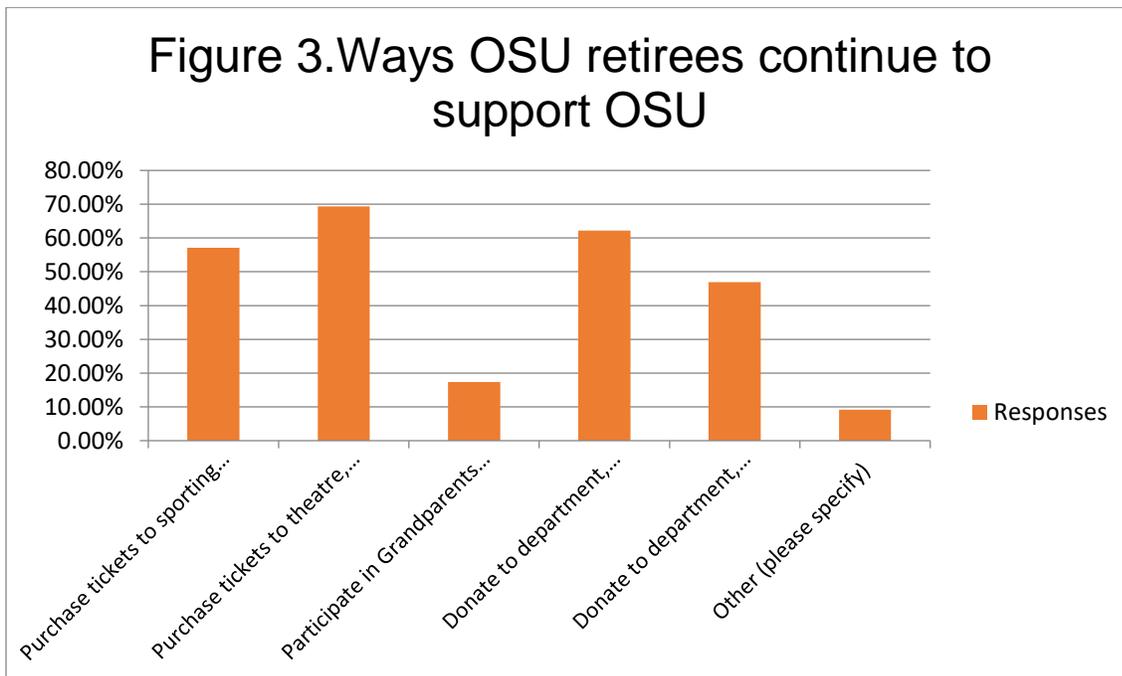
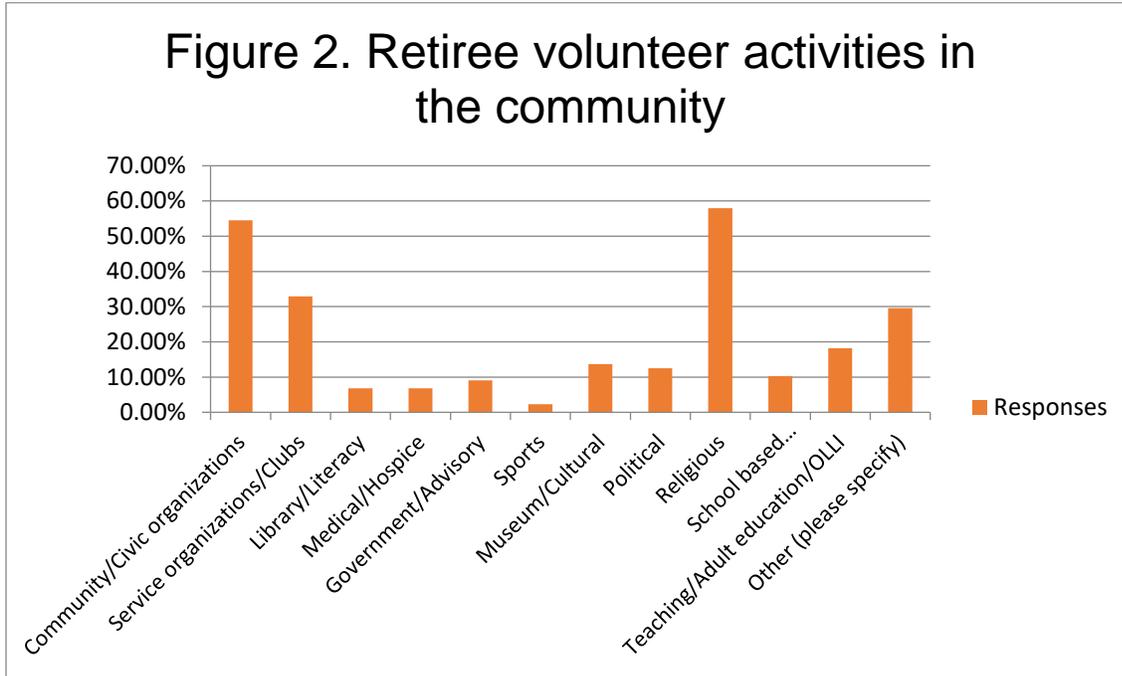
Nearly four in five retiree respondents (79%) volunteer in the community. As with volunteering at OSU, community volunteerism takes many forms, as indicated in Figure 2. Topping the list is volunteering with religious organizations (churches) (58%). Over half (55%) also indicated volunteering with community or civic organizations and another third (33%) volunteer with service organizations or clubs. Nearly one in five (18%) have continued their interest in learning, teaching and adult education, including OLLI (Osher Life-long Learning Institute). Those marking “other” indicated volunteering with several nonprofit agencies, local businesses, or city programs.

Emeriti Support for OSU

Importantly, OSU emeriti continue to support the institution from which they retired in many ways. Above, it was reported that many retirees continue to volunteer with OSU, giving of their time and talent. Here it is noted that many also donate financially. Of respondents, 69% support OSU by purchasing tickets to theatre, music, and arts events. Attendance enhances their cultural experience and also supports OSU students, faculty, and staff involved in these events. Similarly, 57% support OSU athletics by purchasing and attending sporting events.

Direct donations were frequently noted. Among respondents, 62% donate to department, college, or university scholarship programs. Clearly, retirees recognize the importance of providing financial assistance to incoming and continuing students. The OSU Emeriti Association endowed a university scholarship in 2016 and can now give two students a \$1,000 scholarship each year. Another 47% donate directly to department, college, or university fundraising campaigns. Those

marking “other” specifically listed donating to KOSU, research programs, the OSU Alumni Association, and award programs that did not involve scholarships.



Employees of OSU support the university when family members attend OSU. While not strictly a retirement activity, 89% of retirees have had family attend OSU. Leading the list was children (81%) and spouse (58%). Several had brothers or sisters attend OSU (18%). And the legacy continues with 28% noting that grandchildren have attended OSU.

After retiring, many retirees continue to remain active in their respective professions. In fact, over half (62%) continued being active in their professions into retirement. Professional activities varied. Most common was service on professional committees (49%) or on professional boards and committees (36%). Several continued to author papers for professional conferences (26%) and book authors or editors (13%). A third of respondents (33%) presented papers or made presentations at professional conferences. Other activities mentioned were grant writing and lobbying for higher education.

Retirees continue to support their OSU Emeriti Association in several ways also. By far most frequent was attending the Monday Night Dinners (87%). Next was attending OLLI classes (59%). The Association has a few interest groups and nearly half (49%) have attended the Making Most of Retirement programs. Two others are the technology interest group (22%) and investment club (9%). One in four respondents (27%) has served as officers, council members, or committee chairs in the Association, while another 21% have served as committee members or representatives of the Association on campus committees. Others have served as ambassadors, helping with graduation, (22%). Lastly, 24% have participated in travel trips sponsored by the Association.

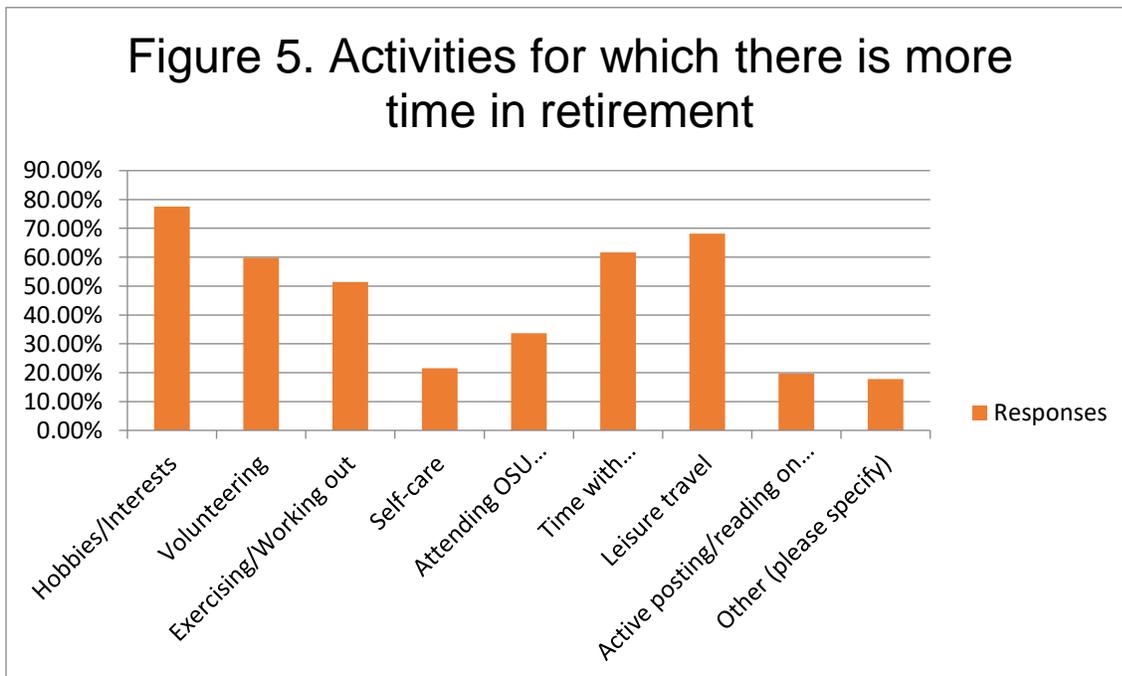
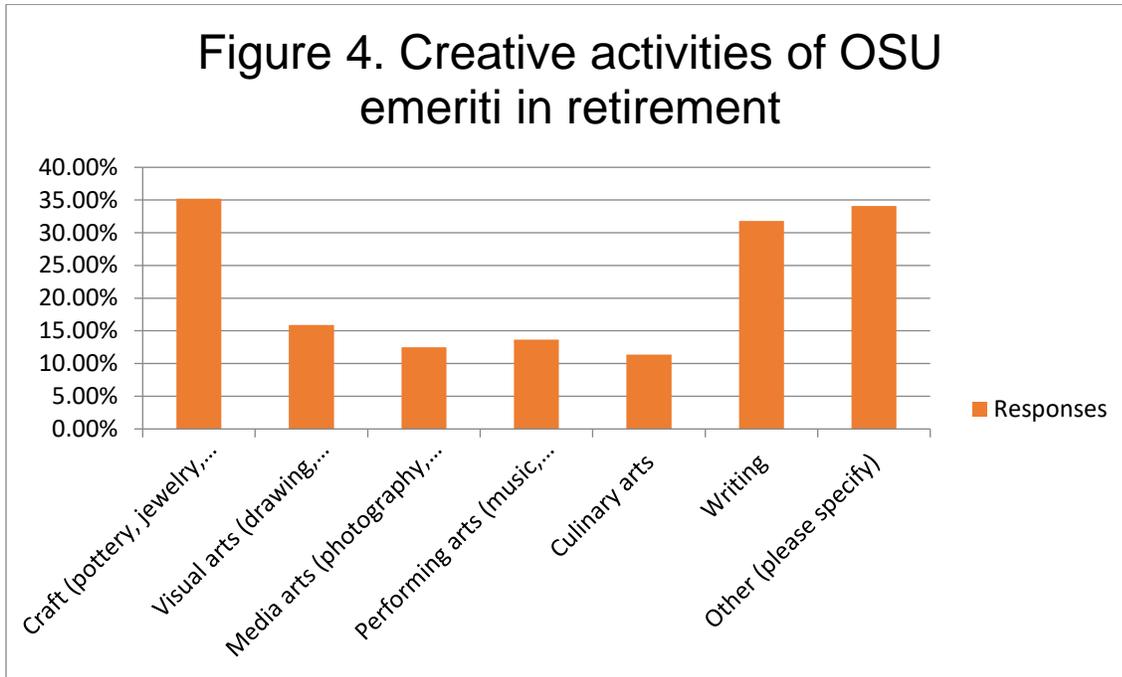
Personal Activities of Retirees

Clearly, OSU retirees remain active with OSU, in the community, and with their retirement organization. However, their activities extend far beyond their former or continued professional life. Older Americans hear constantly that they should remain active, physically and mentally, as much as health permits. Continued activity of many types can contribute to good physical and mental health, potentially ward off physical and mental decline, and contribute to a better quality of life.

In early retirement years, many retirees are still in that “sandwich” generation, where they may have care-giving responsibilities both with children and parents. Many also have similar responsibilities with grandchildren. Further into retirement, the likelihood of having to care for someone in the family increases. Of respondents, 40% have been in a part-time care-giving role and another 6% in a full-time care-giving role in retirement. Most common was caring for a parent (42%) followed by a spouse or partner (24%). Retirees also may be asked to care for another relative (22%), children and grandchildren (16%), or a friend (12%).

OSU emeriti frequently engage in creative activities in retirement. In fact, 83% of respondents indicated they have engaged in some sort of creative activity in retirement. Figure 4 shows the broad range of creative activities. Pursuing crafts of various sorts (pottery, jewelry, quilting, woodworking) was most common (35%). Another 32% engaged in creative writing. Retirees participated in the arts: 16%, visual arts (drawing, painting, sculpture), 14%, performing arts (music, theatre), 14%, media arts (photography, cinematography), and 12%, culinary arts. Several activities were listed as “other,” including learning a new language, amateur radio operator, flower arranging, and wine education certification.

Time is a limited resource while one or both spouses are working. In many cases, retirement can free up time to do things for which there was not time when she/he was still fully employed. Figure 5 indicates what retirees do with the “extra” time they have in retirement.



Retiree respondents indicated having more time for hobbies/interests (78%), followed by leisure travel (68%). Retirees also spend more time with children/grandchildren (62%). As noted above,

many have more time for volunteering (62%) and just over half of respondents (51%) have more time for exercising and working out. Thirty-four percent have more time to attend OSU events. And one in five retirees has more time for self-care. Some retirees (20%) have more time for reading and actively participating on social media (20%). Of respondents' indicating "other," examples of responses included card groups, gardening, and churches.

Concluding Remarks

This survey of OSU Emeriti Association members was patterned after a similar survey conducted in California of retirees from the California university system. I customized the OSU survey to better fit OSU retirees. Survey results reported here parallel results for California in one primary way. Retirees are active members of the university community as well as local community. Clearly, too, they pursue a number of creative and personal activities and have more time for what matters most in their life.

Survey results show clearly that retirees continue to support Oklahoma State University in many ways. They continue to contribute their time and talent as well as their financial resources for the continued success of OSU.