

Central Student Government executives reflect on successes, failures during tenure



LSA senior Cooper Charleton speaks at a Central Student Government meeting on January 12, 2016. Marina Ross/Daily

[Tim Cohn](#), Daily Staff Reporter, Tuesday, April 12, 2016 - 9:57pm

Tuesday, newMICH members LSA juniors David Schafer and Micah Griggs were sworn in as president and vice president of Central Student Government, marking the end of LSA senior Cooper Charlton's and LSA junior Steven Halperin's terms in office.

The Make Michigan party ticket was [elected](#) in late March 2015 by a margin of only five votes, defeating The Team's ticket of then-LSA junior Will Royster and LSA sophomore Matt Fidel.

The party ran on a [campaign platform](#) that included a number of initiatives to improve campus safety, such as introducing new safety-focused mobile applications and installing more off-campus street lighting. Additionally, Make Michigan advocated increasing diversity on campus by revamping the course certification process for Race & Ethnicity requirements, improving diversity and inclusion training and connecting admissions offers with financial aid packages, as well as implementing a school-wide honor code.

Throughout Charlton's tenure as CSG president, some of these goals were challenged by the University administration and, in the case of the street lighting, the city of Ann Arbor.

In an April interview, Charlton said the goals often had to be redefined to address issues of relevance to the student body.

Ultimately, many of the CSG resolutions and actions implemented throughout the year were in areas not heavily emphasized by the Charlton and Halperin ticket during their campaign. Over the past year, CSG pushed for policies like renewed student access to [course evaluation data](#), [early dining hall hours](#) on game days to improve safety during student [game day tailgating](#) events and [on St. Patrick's Day](#), as well as a change to the Board of Regents bylaws to [reintroduce a provision](#) eliminated in 2011, Section VII, which would increase student voice in University affairs.

The issue of mental health also saw sustained attention from the assembly. [Beginning with the class of 2020](#), all MCards will have the 24-hour Counseling and Psychological Services crisis line printed on the back, in part due to CSG advocacy. Another mental health resolution, which was co-sponsored by Schafer, would allocate \$900 dollars to produce an informational video aimed to raise awareness about [drug abuse on campus](#).

Many of the body's actions required a reallocation of funds to implement the programs. Business senior Kevin Ziegler, who served as CSG treasurer, said he thought financially, the assembly did a good job.

"The CSG Fifth Assembly, executives and commission chairs also all did an excellent job of putting student fees to work, benefiting both current and future Wolverines," Ziegler said.

Schafer cited several initiatives as strengths of the outgoing assembly, saying he thought Charlton and the body succeeded in advocating for students.

"From stressing the importance of student presence at the highest levels of our university's administration to advocating for the release of course evaluations, Cooper and his administration constantly fought to expand the opportunities and enhance the voice of students," Schafer said.

However, Schafer added that despite the progress made in areas like mental health awareness, course evaluations and early dining hall hours, CSG experienced difficulty putting their plans into action in many areas of concern for University students.

"Some of our initial work has been, and will continue to be, in the area of relationship-building with both University and city officials to achieve some of the goals of previous years that might remain unrealized," Schafer said. "This involves sitting down and having conversations on how to, say, enhance off-campus safety."

Campus Safety

Improving off-campus safety was one area where Make Michigan's campaign plans lost momentum. One proposed remedy to off-campus safety concerns was the installation of more street lights. This idea was [proposed](#) by a previous administration following a lift on the moratorium on new city lighting in February 2014. The new lighting projects were proposed to include the areas of Hill Street, Oxford Road and Geddes Road.

Though this campaign promise was one that garnered widespread support, especially from students who live off campus, CSG was unable to make progress in this area.

Charlton cited the lack of cooperation between CSG and the city, and the overwhelming costs of light installation, as reasons the platform point went unfulfilled.

"Off-campus lighting was probably our most ambitious plan for this year, but what gave us the most hope was the lifting of the moratorium by the city on the expansion of street lighting so that we could

have at least a conversation about expansion,” Charlton said. “But we ran into two issues: the first problem is that it can cost as much as \$400,000 to \$600,000 per corridor for installation, so assessing the finances of the operation was a hurdle that we were unable to overcome. The other problem that we faced was with cooperation from the city. Ann Arbor city officials were not very open to collaboration, and I don’t think that our relationship with the city was nearly strong enough.”

CSG also made little headway in the past year on another campus safety proposal — the development of a campus-safety app. The assembly from the year before, under alum and former CSG President Bobby Dishell, launched several projects in this area, including [SafeRide and Night Owl apps](#).

LSA sophomore Anushka Sarkar, the CSG chief programming officer, noted that Charlton’s administration did nonetheless address multiple campaign promises successfully while in office

Sarkar was newMICH’s campaign manager and a member of Charlton’s Executive Committee. She emphasized CSG’s work on mental health issues in particular as an area of success this past year.

“The work that has been done over the past year is impressive — between the expansion of the Wolverine Support Network, the availability of course evaluation data and the Race & Ethnicity Requirement hearings that were held, Cooper, Steven and this administration have a lot to be proud of,” she said.

Campus Life

Objectives like the expansion of the [Wolverine Support Network](#) — a student-led mental health resource — and the implementation of the honor code were also all campaign platform points for Charlton and Halperin during the 2015 CSG elections.

Last November, CSG proposals for the University’s Statement of Student Rights and Responsibilities were presented to the Student Relations Advisory Committee. Among the [proposed changes](#) to the rights and responsibilities statement was the proposed formalization of a student honor code.

The code was an area of particular importance to CSG this past year after the destruction of a [ski lodge](#) by members of the Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity in January 2015. The proposal to introduce an honor code to the Statement of Student Rights and Responsibilities was endorsed by both CSG and by SRAC chairman, statistics Prof. Edward Rothman, who acknowledged the importance of building awareness about the causes of student misconduct.

According to Charlton, however, this proposal failed because of dilution by SRAC.

“SRAC was extremely out of touch with the student body, which left us fighting with them rather than working together,” Charlton said. “And because of this, the honor code that we brought into the process, by the time that it made it through the process, had essentially been disassembled, deconstructed into a shadow of what it once was. Therefore, it was no surprise that once the honor code was brought to President Schlissel, he was not able to approve it because it lost many of the key elements that were initially featured.”

Academics

Another area CSG heavily emphasized this past year was the strengthening of the Race & Ethnicity course certification process. [Last November](#), CSG members heard from students about their concerns with the requirement.

In January, Angela Dillard, the associate dean for undergraduate education, and members of CSG conducted a [review](#) of the course certification process and the necessary requirements for course designation.

Following the review, CSG Chief of Staff Sean Pitt, an LSA junior, called for Race & Ethnicity classes to be smaller in an effort facilitate more discussion and dialogue on sensitive issues, implement required Intergroup Relations training for GSIs teaching Race & Ethnicity classes and to create a support network similar to the Sweetland Writing Center for Race & Ethnicity classes.

One of CSG's most contentious battles this year was over the publication of course evaluations for student course selections. When CSG faced opposition from the administration over the release of course evaluation data, CSG filed a Freedom of Information Act request.

"Our biggest source of opposition for course evaluations came from the faculty," Charlton said. "We didn't want to simply tell the University, the professionals who are in charge of our education, to do what we want them to do. And there definitely were collisions and conflicts, but because we were honest with each other we were able to come to a compromise that will benefit students, and in time, the faculty too."

As a result of the FOIA request and the compromise made between CSG and the administration to not release course evaluations in their entirety, some course evaluation data will be available under the University's stipulations for the fall 2016 semester with Provost Martha Pollack's approval.

CSG Assembly also passed a resolution, [A.R. 5-009](#), to support featuring information about University mental health services in [course syllabi](#) distributed at the beginning of each semester. This policy was introduced because of the strong correlation between academic success and good mental health, according to Schafer, who introduced the resolution.

This resolution was inspired by similar policies at other major U.S. universities, like Columbia University and the University of Minnesota.

"No student should come to the University of Michigan and be shut off to these resources because they don't know these resources exist," Schafer said in an October 2015 interview with the Daily.

Looking Forward

The past CSG administration enjoyed successes in areas like publishing of course evaluations, early dining hall hours and mental health resources. Schafer said CSG, in the upcoming year, will look to build upon these successes and address issues where CSG fell short of accomplishing their goals.

"Some of our initial work has been, and will continue to be, in the area of relationship-building, with both University and city officials to achieve some of the goals of previous years that might remain unrealized," Schafer said. "This involves sitting down and having conversations on how to, say, enhance off-campus safety. Even with this past successful year, we believe that there is room to strengthen the relationship between students and CSG."

Charlton said these conversations to address CSG's shortcomings are now mostly possible because of the administrative successes of CSG in the previous year. He added that he remains optimistic that subsequent CSG members will be able to continue making progress in areas he and others emphasized this year, saying he didn't care about short-term credit for accomplishing things.