



# Local Housing Issues

GSA Research Contract  
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# About the authors

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Former GSA Director  
(May 2018-June 2020)

PhD - Planning (2020)

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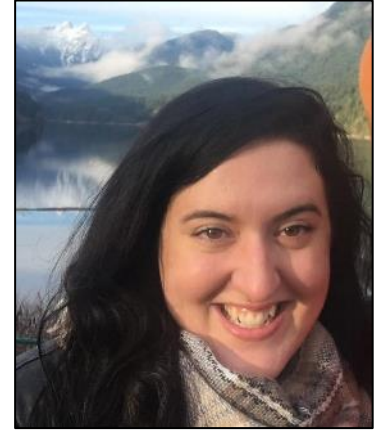
GSA Councillor

MA - Planning (2020)

Thesis: "Accessible Communities," Inaccessible Housing Systems: Housing for People with Disabilities in Waterloo Region (Working Title)

Completed eight-month internship with City of Edmonton's Affordable Housing Team (2019)

Graduate Research Assistant: COVID-19 & Urban Density





# Outline

- **Purpose**
- **Issue**
- **Background**
  - Local Context
  - University of Waterloo
  - Government
- **Key Considerations**
- **Recommendations**
  - Leverage Relationships with Stakeholders
  - Explore Alternative Housing Options
  - Reject the Student/Non-Student Housing Binary
  - Revise Political Positions and Ends

# Purpose

- Provide an overview of housing-related challenges experienced by graduate students at UW
- Summarize recent actions taken by UW administration and local governments
- Offer recommendations to inform GSA Council's political positions and future dialogue between the GSA, UW administration and government





# Issue

SUNVIEW

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519-720-0300  
UNIFIRST.COM  
Commercial Opportunities and More  
All Garages and Storage Units  
Clean, Safe and Secure Units  
Available for Rent  
Rent Values in Dollars

# Issue: Student Housing Challenges

- Limited housing stock, low vacancy rate
- High housing-related costs (rent, mortgage)
- Illegal & unethical landlord behaviours → exploitation of student populations.
  - Illegally requested key deposits larger than the value of key replacements (as much as \$1000) and failing to return key deposits in timely manner
  - Failed to ensure that rental suites meet occupancy standards by the beginning of lease dates
  - Encouraged students to cancel leases so the company can rent units at higher rates to other parties
  - Participated in gross failure to respond to maintenance requests, including requests to manage pests and maintain heating/cooling systems

# Graduate Students

Graduate students are more likely than undergrads to

- Have spouses or partners
- Have dependant children
- Be international students

...and therefore face additional housing challenges

# Student Homelessness

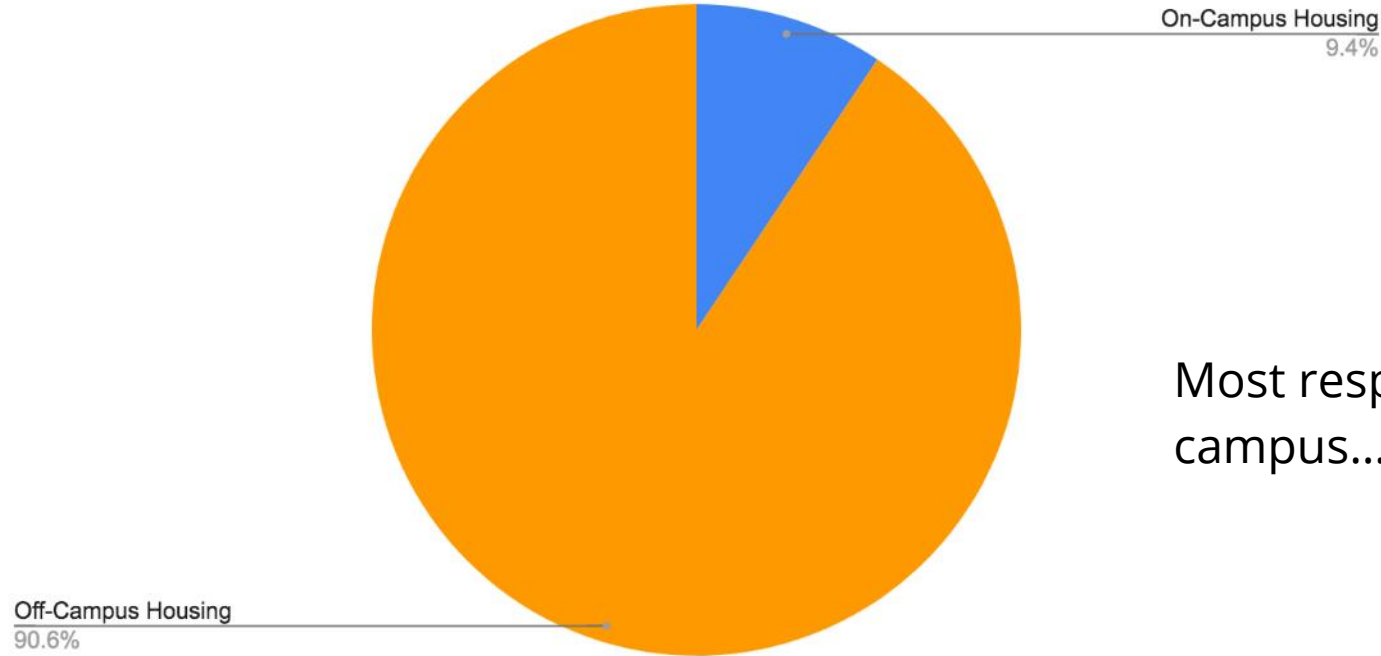
- 4% of students in Canada (80,000 individuals) experience precarious housing or homelessness

A photograph of a residential neighborhood. In the foreground, there are several single-story houses with light-colored siding and gabled roofs. Some houses have small porches with railings. The middle ground is obscured by a semi-transparent white rectangular box. In the background, several tall, modern multi-story apartment buildings with many windows are visible against a clear blue sky. Power lines and a utility pole are also present in the scene.

# Background



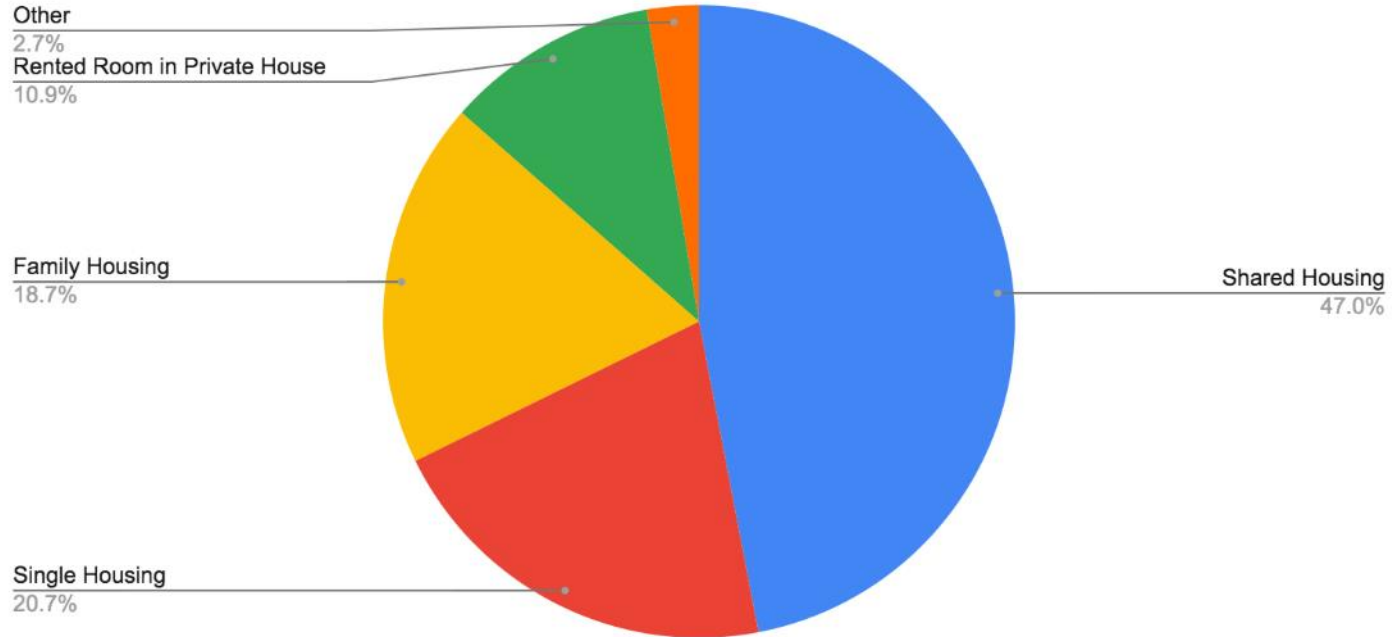
# Local Context: Housing Situation of GSA Members (Vital Signs Survey)



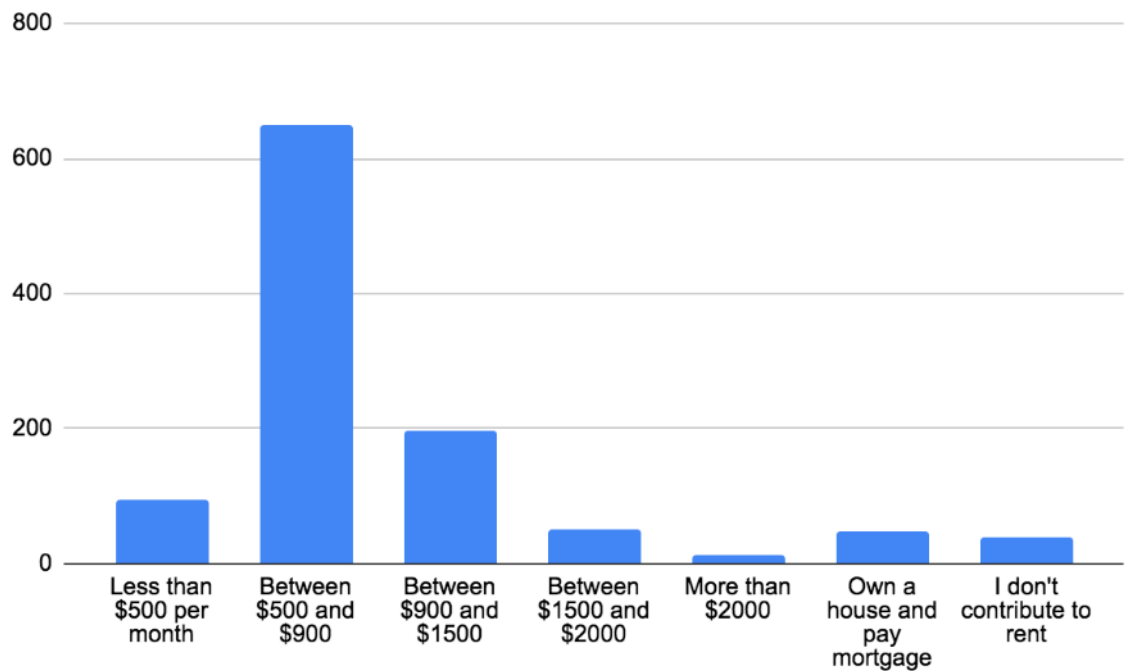
Most respondents live off-campus....

# Local Context: Housing Situation of GSA Members (Vital Signs Survey)

...and in shared accommodations



## Local Context: Housing Situation of GSA Members (Vital Signs Survey)

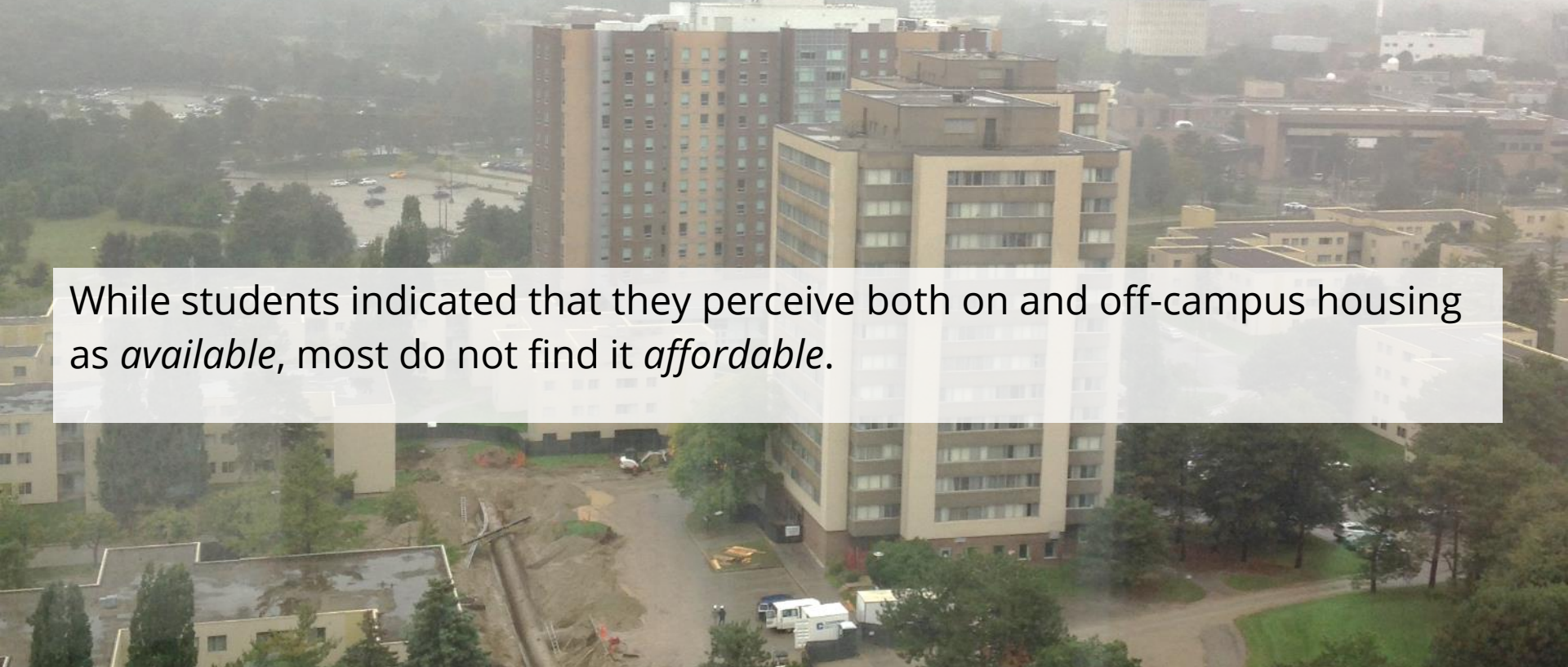


Most pay between \$500 - \$900, but without additional information, we do not know if this is “affordable” for students.



## Local Context: Housing Situation of GSA Members (Vital Signs Survey)

While students indicated that they perceive both on and off-campus housing as *available*, most do not find it *affordable*.



# Local Context: Housing Market

## Vacancy rates (Oct. 2019)

Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge CMA: 2.1%  
(was 2.9% a year earlier)

City of Waterloo: 1.6%

Kitchener West: 1.6%  
(the part adjacent to Waterloo)

*All figures from CMHC.*

## Annual rent increases (Oct. 2019)

Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge CMA: 5.0%

City of Waterloo: 2.8%

Kitchener West: 5.8%

Factors: Strong employment growth, spillover demand from GTA, consolidation of the apartment sector, retreat of government from social housing provision.

## Local Context: “Town and Gown” Conflict

Anti-student (or anti-student-housing) sentiments, perpetuated in local media:

- Perceptions of student housing as “ugly”
- “Student ghetto” moniker used for near-campus neighbourhoods
- Opposition to denser development
- Perceived “over-supply” of student housing
- Concerns around partying, e.g. Homecoming and St. Patrick’s Day

But, recent high-profile media attention to illegal and unethical landlord behaviour due to student protests and Accommod8u data leak.



# University of Waterloo

## WUSA

- Currently provides housing resources and information to students.
- Committee on Student Housing in Kitchener-Waterloo
- Actively engaged in housing-related advocacy
- Opportunity for collaboration on housing-specific survey to all UW students this fall

## UW Housing and Residences

- First year undergraduate on-campus housing guarantee focuses on housing younger students
- UW Housing and Residences has recently appointed a manager responsible for graduate and student family housing

# Government

## Municipal Involvement: City of Waterloo

### Rental Housing Bylaw

- Licenses required for all residential rental properties with  $\leq 4$  units
- To promote safety and property standards compliance

### Northdale Plan (2012)

- Enabled high-density development geared to students in the area between King, Phillip, Columbia & University
- Meant to promote diversity of housing types and land uses (e.g. retail)

### Town & Gown Committee

- To enhance “relationships, communications and policies among the universities, college, students, city, police and the community” on a range of issues, including student housing
- Has student representation (WUSA, WLUSU, WLUGSA, Conestoga Students Inc., GSA-UW)

A city-led forum on tenant rights and responsibilities, in response to recent protests, was planned but derailed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Government

## Municipal Involvement: City of Kitchener

### **Affordable Housing Strategy**

*Additional information and analysis is required to further investigate not only the existing proportion but also the estimated projected growth of the student population and what the housing needs may be (City of Kitchener Housing Needs Assessment, 2020, p. 74)*

- Recently recognized that not much is understood regarding the student population in Kitchener.
- Recognizes that overall affordability is a challenge to many residents.
- At risk of further gentrification, especially due to the growing technology sector and iON route opening

### **Lower Doon Land Use Study**

Following community engagement near Conestoga College in the Lower Doon neighbourhood, the City is currently considering the following actions, which would affect graduate students living across the City.

- Proper licensing of rental housing, including duplex and third units
- Requirement for property manager if landlord not in country
- Ensure that proper fire permits are procured
- Legalization of lodging housings



## Government

### Provincial Involvement

- Province delegates authority to municipalities
- Province is responsible for legislation governing the landlord-tenant relationship
  - Through the Residential Tenancies Act and the Landlord-Tenant Board
- Sets the guideline amount for rent increases annually
- KW MPP Catherine Fife has advocated for changes that could positively influence the housing experiences of graduate students
  - Petition to update the Residential Tenancies Act
  - Motion to close loophole for improved rent protection

Government

Federal Involvement

- Housing for students not included in the 2017 National Housing Strategy
- CMHC provides mortgage insurance for the development of apartments, some of which is available for purpose-built student housing
  - No direct financing for student housing



# Key Considerations

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- Universities do not receive government funding for ancillary services, such as housing
  - UW & WLU have taken a “hands off” approach to off-campus housing
- Community opposition to new housing development that might house graduate students
  - Off-campus housing developments and COVID-19 related vacancies could create additional space for graduate students in on-campus housing
- Kitchener and Waterloo recognize the broader need for affordable housing and will likely be receptive to engaging with students
  - Currently exploring the feasibility of inclusionary zoning
  - Existing by-law enforcement process can help to address some challenges experienced by students

# Key Considerations

- Gross power imbalance between landlord/property managers and tenants
  - Tenants may be hesitant to report issues
  - Suggests need for proactive strategies to address issue and ongoing educational campaigns
- The lack of adequate, affordable housing is not just a graduate student issue
  - It would be advantageous for the GSA to align with other groups
  - Students may occupy a relatively privileged position relative to other residents in region
  - GSA could consider adopting a long-term political position regarding members' access to social housing





# Recommendations

# Recommendation #1

Better leverage existing and new relationships with other stakeholders to advance housing advocacy on behalf of GSA members.

- Make use of Town & Gown Committee seat
- Request involvement with City of Kitchener Affordable Housing Strategy
- Work with partners to make information easily accessible (but do not let educational campaigns replace advocacy for improved conditions)
- Partner with WUSA to collect additional data on students' housing issues

# Recommendation #2

## Explore alternative housing opportunities with partners

- Direct support for affordable housing options (e.g. modeled after Concordia Student Union's Woodnote Cooperative in Montreal)
- Encourage university housing development, including
  - Stipulated affordability requirements
  - Options suitable for graduate students with families

# Recommendation #3

Reject the student/non-student binary, which creates tensions in the community, restricts students' housing choice, and allows landlords to charge higher rents.

- Avoid explicitly or inadvertently promoting the student/non-student binary
- Recognize diverse housing needs of graduate students, and overlap others' needs
- Collaborate with organizations advocating for the housing needs of other constituents (e.g. low-income non-students)

# Recommendation #4

Update political positions and ends to explicitly recognize widespread housing challenges and prioritize advocacy on these issues.



# Political Positions

*Graduate students require safe, reliable, **adequate**, and affordable housing options that allow them to focus their time and energy on their scholarly pursuits. No student will be forced to change their desired academic path due to housing-related concerns, including but not limited to homelessness. Any graduate student who wants to find housing near campus will find it.* ~~They~~ Students are not always in a position to search for housing before their arrival at the university, particularly if they are an international or out-of-province student. They need to be able to trust that residence is a good choice, or that the off-campus listing service is user-friendly and trustworthy. Moreover, there are many services offered to both on- and off-campus students that go unnoticed or under-utilized, such as grocery shuttles, online housing listings, counselling, social events, etc. Thus,

- a. Graduate student housing should continue to be an area of development to the Department of Housing and Residences at the University of Waterloo. In particular, aside from access for all graduate students to on-campus housing, focus should be placed upon housing allocation for out-of-province and international graduate students.
- b. Targeted marketing of available social and academic services available in residence as well as off-campus housing-related resources would be an important component to achieving the desired focus on graduate students.
- c. That landlords posting to the off-campus housing listing undergo a vetting process to ensure that their listings are legal, licensed suites. Consider the establishment of a complaints-based system to protect student renters from negligent landlords.
- d. Establish a procedure to procure emergency housing for students experiencing homelessness.

# Ends

1. Every graduate student at the University of Waterloo has an overall positive social and academic experience.
  - 1.1. Graduate students have a dedicated secure working space, independent of any “wet” research lab, reasonably close to their research group and supervisor, and unrestricted access to a computer.
  - 1.2. Graduate students are aware of and have full access to any required accommodations recommended by a medical professional to promote their studies and research, and students who require these accommodations are evaluated equitably.
  - 1.3. Research-based graduate students’ net student funding levels (total funding minus tuition fees, mandatory incidental fees, and taxes) are no lower than the cost of living in Waterloo.
  - 1.4. Graduate students are not required to take non-academic work to afford their education and living costs.
  - 1.5. Graduate students at the University of Waterloo are able to pursue academic and/or nonacademic paid employment from commencement of their studies to completion without negatively impacting their funding.
  - 1.6. Every graduate student has equitable opportunity to take leaves without negatively impacting their present or future status in Canada.
  - 1.7. Graduate students have access to on-campus housing, and there exists targeted marketing of available social and academic services in residence and off-campus housing related resources.
  - 1.8. Graduate students are supported in their search and enjoyment of off-campus housing. Supports ensure that no student experiences homelessness.



Thank you!

Any questions?