



**UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO
GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION**

Research Report for Council

Municipal Housing Issues

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of housing-related challenges experienced by graduate students at the University of Waterloo (UW) and to summarize recent actions taken by university administration as well as local governments. It includes information, conclusions and recommendations to help inform potential revisions to the Graduate Student Association (GSA) Council's political positions and future dialogue between the GSA, university administration and government.

In summary, we make four recommendations:

1. The GSA should better leverage existing and new relationships with other stakeholders to advance housing advocacy on behalf of its members.
2. The GSA should explore opportunities for creating alternative housing options in conjunction with other partners.
3. While recognizing the specific needs of graduate students, the GSA's advocacy efforts should reject the harmful student/non-student housing binary employed in the media and other discourse.
4. The GSA's Political Positions and Ends should be revised to reflect the importance of this issue.

2. Issue

Housing supply in Waterloo Region has become more expensive over recent years, and the rental vacancy rate is 2.1% as of October 2019¹ (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation [CMHC] 2020). Despite this, "locals" express prejudice against student housing, typically due to perceptions of substandard living conditions, over-crowding of units and street parking, and raucous parties during events such as Homecoming and St. Patrick's Day. During the Fall 2019 semester, student-organized protests drew attention to a lack of affordable, adequate housing, student homelessness, and unethical or illegal landlord behaviour. Based on [analysis of news](#) and social media between May 2018 and present, Waterloo-area landlords have:

- 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
- Failed to license suites in accordance with the City of Waterloo's Rental Housing Bylaw (**BY-LAW 2011-047**)
- Requested first and last month's rent prior to suite viewings
- Illegally limited the number of residents per unit
- Failed to provide promised rental incentives (e.g. gift cards) at all or in a timely manner
- Not provided tenants with suites presented in remote (video) viewings

This is not an exhaustive list of challenges. Some of these practices are illegal according to the **Residential Tenancies Act**, S.O. 2006, c.17 as amended or in violation of local by-laws regulating

¹ This is the most recent data available from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).

minimum building and property standards. Others are not explicitly addressed by the law and exist in a “grey area” that leaves students vulnerable to exploitation. Due to circumstances surrounding COVID-19, students have expressed concerns about rent relief and cancelling their lease agreements since fewer students are required to physically live in the region for their studies.

Graduate Students

In addition to general student housing issues, University of Waterloo graduate students are more likely than undergraduates to be coupled, married, or have dependent children. These students are more constrained in their housing search, as their living space needs to accommodate these other people. They may need to be close to other services such as schools for children or a spouse’s employment. There is a recognized shortage of housing aimed at these students, within both the Waterloo rental market and university-affiliated housing (Glen Wepler, Director, UW Housing and Residences, Interview May 28, 2020). Private development of student-oriented housing has tended to cater to archetypal undergraduate student lifestyles (e.g. the standard practice of issuing four-year lease agreements).

Graduate students at UW are also more likely to be international students: 40% of graduate students were international students in 2019/20, compared to only 22% of undergraduates (University of Waterloo 2020). International students may face additional challenges in the local housing market. For example, it is well documented in social science research that immigrants and racial minorities face discrimination in the Canadian rental housing sector (Dion 2001, Hogan and Berry 2011, Mensah and Williams 2013, Teixeira 2008). International students may also be less familiar with navigating the Canadian housing system and local tenancy laws. Students coming to study from outside of Ontario, including those from other provinces, may have difficulty finding rental housing from a distance or immediately upon arrival to Waterloo, and may be particularly susceptible to misrepresentation of rental suites by landlords or to property scams.

Student Homelessness

In Canada, high-quality data pertaining to homelessness is difficult to find. Information about student homelessness has not been gathered by the GSA or UW administration. A recent survey administered by the Homeless Hub found that 4% of Canadian post-secondary students experience precarious housing or homelessness (Weissman et al. 2019). This translates to “80,000 students...couch surfing, sleeping in a vehicle, locker room, stair well, or shelter today” (Ibid.). This survey supports student accounts of homelessness at the University of Waterloo (Monteiro 2019, *Waterloo Chronicle* 2019). The rising cost of housing suggests that the number of students experiencing homelessness will continue to grow unless direct actions are taken by student organizations, universities, government, and other stakeholders.

3. Background

Local Context

Housing Situation of GSA Members

According to the Vital Signs Survey conducted by the GSA in Winter 2020, the vast majority of graduate student respondents (90.5% or 991 individuals) live off-campus (see Appendix A: Figure 1). While the majority of respondents agreed that both on and off-campus housing was *available*, the majority did not agree that either housing type was *affordable* (See Appendix A - Figures 4-7). Nonetheless, UW Housing and Residences contends that on-campus graduate student housing is underpriced relative to the market, with a sizable waiting list (Glen Wepler, Interview May 28, 2020). The vast majority of respondents (over 600) indicated that their share of rental costs were between \$500 and \$900 (See Appendix A - Figure 2). Unfortunately, without more fine-grained data regarding more precise rental and mortgage costs, actual affordability is difficult to measure or calculate. Student perceptions regarding what is affordable or not is

highly subjective and will be influenced by other variables, such as student funding packages, TA/RA rate of pay, personal/family savings, and the cost of housing in Kitchener-Waterloo relative to their community of origin.

Nearly half of graduate students live in 'Shared housing,' followed by 'Single housing,' 'Family housing,' 'Rented room in private house' and finally 'other' arrangements (see Appendix A - Figure 3). This survey provides a glimpse into the housing-related experiences of graduate students; however, a housing-specific survey would provide richer insights into the housing experiences of individuals studying at the University of Waterloo.

Housing Market

In October 2019, the rental vacancy rate reported by CMHC in the Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge Census Metropolitan Area was 2.1%, decreasing from 2.9% in 2018. This figure falls to only 1.6% for the City of Waterloo and Kitchener West (the part of Kitchener directly adjacent to Waterloo). As a result of this tight supply of housing, rents rose over the same period by an estimated 2.8% in Waterloo and 5.8% in Kitchener West, and 5.0% in the metropolitan area as a whole. Vacancy rates are lower for cheaper accommodations, which may make it even more difficult to find housing on a low budget (all figures from CMHC 2020).

Housing affordability issues in Waterloo are set within the broader context of the Greater Golden Horseshoe region in southern Ontario. Waterloo sees considerable housing demand not only due to strong local employment and university enrolment, but also due to spillover from the Greater Toronto Area's expensive housing market. Other factors include the business strategies of large firms that have consolidated ownership of apartment buildings in Canada (August 2020), including purpose-built student accommodations (Revington and August 2020), and the retreat of government from social housing provision (Leone and Carroll 2010).

Important protections of the area's environmental and agricultural resources also constrain housing development to some degree. Like other communities in Canada, dispersed, low-density housing development has historically been the norm in Waterloo region. Recently, the Region established a "Built Up Area" boundary along urban areas such as Uptown Waterloo, Downtown Kitchener, near iON transit stations, and designated nodes and corridors (Regional Municipality of Waterloo 2015, 11-12). In 2019, 73% of new residential units were built within the Built Up Area (Regional Municipality of Waterloo 2020). This centrally located housing is expensive and will likely be unaffordable for many existing Kitchener-Waterloo residents, including but not limited to students (Buekart 2017, Jackson 2019). Municipal interventions pertaining specifically to student housing are described in more detail below.

Despite public attention in Fall 2019 when (primarily) undergraduate students publicly expressed the unethical and illegal behaviours of property management companies and landlords, the media review reveals prevalent anti-student and anti-"student housing" sentiments within Waterloo Region. This is evident in:

- condemnation of "ugly" student housing on North King Street in Waterloo (*Waterloo Chronicle* 2018a)
- the "student ghetto" moniker applied to housing in neighbourhoods close to universities and colleges (*Waterloo Chronicle* 2018b)
- community opposition to denser student housing forms near Conestoga College in Lower Doon, Kitchener (Thompson 2019)
- discussions of an "over-supply" of student housing (McMenemy 2018, *Waterloo Chronicle* 2018c)
- perceptions that students are more likely to host large-scale, destructive parties, especially during homecoming and St. Patrick's Day (Pender 2019; *Waterloo Region Record* 2019)

Historically, the news media has perpetuated these attitudes by publishing articles and opinion-editorials with anti-student bias.

Public attention shifted during the Fall semester of 2019, when (primarily) undergraduate students publicly expressed the unethical and illegal behaviours of property management companies and landlords. This was accomplished through protests, social media, and news media. The issue was further amplified when thousands of unaddressed maintenance requests to two local property management companies were published on an online forum, revealing unsafe/substandard living conditions for students as well as a lack of responsiveness by the companies.

University of Waterloo WUSA

Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA) is currently engaged in housing advocacy. Their website provides [helpful resources](#) available for students procuring housing in the area. In September, 2019 they established a committee on Student Housing in Kitchener-Waterloo, open to all students interested in this issue. WUSA Council requested that the committee research the feasibility of emergency student housing to address student homelessness. The committee has drafted one report, which provides an overview of the housing system, and WUSA intends on issuing a survey to University of Waterloo undergraduate students in the Fall. The current contact person for the Student Housing in Kitchener-Waterloo committee is WUSA's VP - Education. This individual has extended the opportunity to GSA to partner in the design and dissemination of a housing-specific survey to all University of Waterloo students during the Fall 2020 semester.

On-Campus Housing: UW Housing and Residences

The elimination of Grade 13 in Ontario and the resulting “double cohort” of university entrants in 2003-04 brought about a shift in how UW allocated housing, as being able to guarantee housing to first-year undergraduates became an important component of interuniversity competition. A long-term implication of this shift is that the focus on incoming undergraduates leaves limited institutional capacity to house graduate students. This shortcoming has been recently recognized, as UW Housing and Residences has recently appointed a manager responsible for graduate and student family housing (Glen Wepler, Interview May 28, 2020).

Government

Housing falls within the jurisdiction of every level of government, depending on the specific issue in question. Therefore, successful advocacy by GSA regarding local housing issues facing graduate students will depend on targeting advocacy to the appropriate level of government.

Municipal Involvement

The City of Waterloo and City of Kitchener are responsible for regulating land-use through zoning bylaws and for enforcing bylaws relating to property standards, building codes, and fire codes. The Region of Waterloo is responsible for the provision of social (subsidized) housing.

Despite the prominence of student voices in at City of Waterloo council meetings, this issue was not directly addressed at recent Region of Waterloo or City of Kitchener council meetings.

City of Waterloo

Since 2011, the City of Waterloo has licensed rental properties with four units or fewer through the **Rental Housing Bylaw**. This bylaw is meant to promote the safety and property standards compliance through the licensing system, and replaced an earlier lodging house bylaw in place since 1986. Land-use planning

has also had a profound role in shaping the student housing market in the city, for example by enabling the development of private apartments targeted to students in some near-campus neighbourhoods (Revington et al. 2020). In particular, the City's 2012 Northdale Land Use and Community Improvement Plan ("**Northdale Plan**") allowed for higher-density development in the area between King St., Phillip St., Columbia St. and University Ave. The Northdale Plan also aims to provide a greater diversity of housing types and land uses (including retail) in the area, which to date it has achieved with mixed success (Revington 2020, Chapter 6).

The Northdale Plan was implemented after the earlier planning framework for the area failed to decant growing numbers of students from other nearby detached houses, leading to complaints from non-student residents. This earlier framework was based on a Student Accommodation Study and Height and Density Study carried out by the City in the early 2000s, and was premised on increased density along arterial roads only. A full history of planning related to student housing in Waterloo is available in Revington et al. (2020).

The City also convenes the Town and Gown Committee, which is intended to enhance "relationships, communications and policies among the universities, college, students, city, police and the community" (City of Waterloo, 2019). Local student organizations, including the GSA, have representation on this committee. While the committee addresses various aspects of the relationship between the municipality and higher education institutions, student housing has figured prominently in recent years.

A small group of undergraduate students presented housing concerns in a deposition to Waterloo City Council in Fall 2019. A follow-up meeting between the City and students never happened due to COVID-19. A City-led forum on tenant rights and responsibilities in partnership with WUSA, WLUSU, and community legal services and an exploration of more proactive bylaw enforcement options were also planned, but derailed due to the pandemic. Implementation in Fall 2020 will depend on the COVID-19 situation at that time (e.g. volume of students in the city, constraints due to physical distancing requirements) (Jeff Henry, City of Waterloo Councillor, Interview May 29, 2020).

City of Kitchener

The City of Kitchener is currently in Phase 3 of its **Affordable Housing Strategy** development in collaboration with the Region of Waterloo. As part of the Strategy, the City released a Housing Needs Assessment in January, 2020. It summarized how many households in Kitchener are struggling with procuring affordable housing (City of Kitchener 2020). It recognizes that Waterloo, McMaster and Wilfrid Laurier campuses are located downtown Kitchener and estimates that the three satellite campuses attract 750 full-time students to downtown. Conestoga College is planning on establishing a Business School for 1,000+ additional students in the near future (Ibid). The City of Kitchener acknowledges an "existing and growing" need for student housing (Ibid, 74). The Housing Needs Assessment concludes that:

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 2020, 74).

The assessment of the student population residing in Kitchener is especially important considering the rapid development in Kitchener. The city is particularly vulnerable to gentrification due to a growing technology sector and the completion of the iON LRT route (Bueckert 2017).

Most of the public conversations regarding housing for students in Kitchener have focused on the Lower Doon neighbourhood, near Conestoga College. In 2000, the City of Kitchener established a now defunct Student Housing Task Force which identified a need for more student housing near Conestoga (Bray Heritage 2020). While a Lower Doon Student Housing Study was prepared in 2002, little action appears to have been taken. Now, non-student residents in Lower Doon have complained about a perceived

overabundance of off-campus student housing (Ibid.). Based on a What We Heard Report, the City of Kitchener is currently considering the following actions:

- Proper licensing of rental housing, including duplex and third units
- Reconsidering density in Lower Doon
- Requirement for property manager if landlord not in country
- Allow for duplexing of homes in the neighbourhood
- Ensure that proper fire permits are procured
- Eliminating on-street parking
- Encourage Conestoga College to build more student housing
- Legalization of lodging housings
 - Limiting the number of lodging houses (Bray Heritage 2020)

Many of these changes would apply City-wide, and would therefore affect graduate students living anywhere in Kitchener. Thus, it is important for GSA and other student groups to continue to monitor housing related policy in Kitchener and to participate in future community engagement opportunities.

Provincial Involvement

The Province of Ontario delegates authority to municipalities. In other words, what the City or Region of Waterloo is able to do with respect to regulating housing issues is constrained to the powers they have been given by the Province. The Province is also responsible for legislation governing the landlord-tenant relationship, specifically the Residential Tenancies Act, and dispute resolution through the Landlord-Tenant Board. Moreover, the Province sets the guideline amount by which rents are allowed to increase each year. These guidelines only apply for the length of the tenancy; an unlimited increase is allowed between tenants. Frequent turnover of student renters means rents can be raised more frequently.

Broad concerns that fall under the jurisdiction of the Residential Tenancies Act should be brought to the attention of the Province. For example, Kitchener-Waterloo MPP Catherine Fife has presented a [petition](#) to the Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs to update the Residential Tenancies Act with mechanisms to ensure tracking of Landlord and Tenant Board of Ontario orders. She has also been involved with a motion to close the 1991 exemption loophole for improved rent protection for tenants (Catherine Fife n.d.).

Federal Involvement

Federal involvement in student housing is limited. Student housing received no mention in the 2017 *National Housing Strategy*. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), a Crown corporation, provides mortgage insurance for the development of apartments, intended to incentivize new housing supply. While this insurance is available for purpose-built student housing projects, it is subject to certain conditions (including higher premiums) (CMHC 2017). CMHC provides no direct financing for student housing.

4. Key Considerations

Funding for University-Affiliated Housing

Unlike research and teaching activities, universities in Ontario do not receive government funding for ancillary services such as student housing. Universities, including UW, have not completely absolved themselves from new student housing provision - as in the case of Claudette Millar Hall, opened in 2017 - but nor has it been a top priority, as institutions refocus on their “core” academic mandates.

To compensate for the lack of public funds for university-affiliated housing, some institutions have resorted to private partnerships with third-party real estate firms to finance, build, and/or manage student housing. UW and WLU have generally taken a hands-off approach to off-campus housing, including the proliferation of private developments geared to students. This new development has replaced many poor-quality, run-down converted houses with modern apartments, while incorporating amenities such as commercial spaces into the Northdale neighbourhood. From a university perspective, private student housing development offloads risks and capital costs to the private sector (Macintyre 2003). However, there is evidence to suggest that this type of housing development results in increased housing costs for students and others (Laidley 2014, National Union of Students and Unipol 2016, Revington and August 2020). Moreover, housing built and marketed specifically towards undergraduate students may not be suitable for graduate students with families, and reinforces a “town and gown” divide that can exacerbate student housing issues.

On-Campus and Off-Campus Housing Options

The anti-student sentiment held by many non-student residents creates opposition to new housing developments that might house graduate students, even if they are not explicitly built-for-purpose student housing, as well as to the conversion of detached houses to student rentals. As a result, housing options for students are constrained. The ability to delineate a distinct student housing submarket is advantageous for landlords, property managers, and developers, who are able to charge higher rents given the artificial constraints on supply imposed by such a distinction (Revington 2020, Chapter 5).

However, the proliferation of private, off-campus developments geared to students has created some additional space for graduate students in on-campus housing. COVID-19 may create new opportunities for housing graduate students in university-managed housing, if undergraduates - especially first-year students - choose not to live in residence, for example if they continue to live with parents while studying at a distance (Glen Wepler, Interview May 28, 2020).

Municipal Initiatives

The cities of Waterloo and Kitchener recognize the broader need for affordable housing, particularly as high housing costs are seen as an impediment to economic development. Both Waterloo and Kitchener continue to explore the feasibility of inclusionary zoning, a planning tool that requires new residential development to include a certain volume of affordable housing. Historically, planning in Waterloo has been receptive to managing issues related to student housing (Revington et al. 2020), suggesting a willingness to cooperate in improving contemporary student housing conditions. Meanwhile, in Kitchener, the focus has been less on student housing and more on addressing overall affordability. The conclusions in the recent **Housing Needs Assessment** could present an opportunity for the GSA and other student groups to engage more with the City of Kitchener.

Cities allocate bylaw enforcement resources based on the volume of calls they receive. The bylaw officers have no right-of-entry to housing, meaning they require a tenant invitation to enter premises to inspect alleged violations. Although many housing issues raised by students in Fall 2019 would fall within the scope of bylaw enforcement, the City of Waterloo did not receive complaints in proportion to the furor portrayed in the media (Jeff Henry, Interview May 29, 2020).

Landlord Relations

Residents may not be willing to file complaints against their landlord or property manager with local municipalities or the Landlord and Tenant Board due to:

- A lack of awareness about applicable bylaws, rental licensing programs, or the Residential Tenancies Act

- Ambiguity or lack of clear phrasing in applicable bylaws and the Residential Tenancies Act
- Concerns about damaging relationships with a landlord or property manager
- Concerns about becoming homeless if they report an issue with their rental unit

The pervasiveness of illegal and unethical behaviour by landlords and property management companies in the Region is indicative of the gross power imbalance between property owners and short term tenants. While informing students of their rights as renters and complaints-based processes is an important reactive strategy to address housing issues, proactive strategies to address the systemic causes of housing issues are also required. It should also be noted that due the high turnover of students, educational campaigns must be ongoing.

Not Just a Graduate Student Issue

Housing is not just a challenge to graduate students at the University of Waterloo; it is challenging to procure and maintain for undergraduate students at UW and Wilfrid Laurier University, as well as the student body at Conestoga College and lower to medium income non-student residents. The population the GSA represents is relatively small compared to these groups, which points to the advantage of aligning with other organizations while ensuring that graduate students with families or from other countries are adequately represented.

It is also important to recognize the relatively privileged position of many students relative to low-income non-student residents. Given the Regional backlog for social housing -- with a waitlist of about 4600 households, and wait times of approximately 13 years -- the role of social housing in any short-term solution to graduate student housing issues will be negligible (CBC 2019, Murray 2015). However, the GSA may nonetheless wish to adopt a long-term political position regarding members' access to social housing resources.

5. Recommendations

We make four overlapping guiding recommendations based on this report. In this Section, they are followed by specific, immediately actionable items. GSA resources (staff time, steering committee, or similar mechanism) should be allotted to ensure their timely and effective implementation. First, the GSA should better leverage existing and new relationships with other stakeholders to advance housing advocacy on behalf of its members. Second, the GSA should explore opportunities for creating alternative housing options in conjunction with other partners. Third, while recognizing the specific needs of graduate students, the GSA's advocacy efforts should reject the harmful student/non-student housing binary employed in the media and other discourse. Fourth, the GSA's Political Positions and Ends should be revised to reflect the importance of this issue.

Relationships with Stakeholders

The GSA should better leverage existing and new relationships with other stakeholders to advance housing advocacy on behalf of its members.

- The GSA should make use of its seat in the City of Waterloo's Town & Gown Committee to advocate for graduate student interests in the community, including local housing issues. There is an opportunity to leverage this seat at the table to guide municipal data collection priorities, too. Historically, the GSA has made less use of this channel than the undergraduate associations at UW and WLU.
- Similarly, the GSA can request involvement with the City of Kitchener's Affordable Housing Strategy to exchange information while providing feedback on changes to lodging houses, rental

housing licensing, and other topics that would directly impact graduate students living in Kitchener.

- The GSA should work with partners (including UW administration, WUSA, City of Waterloo, etc.) to make information regarding enforcement of rental housing regulations, rights and responsibilities easily accessible to members on a continuing basis, including how to report issues and to whom. These partners are already active in disseminating this type of information, and the GSA's efforts should complement rather than duplicate these initiatives. However, these educational campaigns should not be seen as an alternative to advocacy for improved rental housing conditions.
- The GSA should assist with the design and dissemination of the forthcoming WUSA survey into housing issues pertaining to Waterloo students. While the Vital Signs Survey touched on the topic, additional data is required to assess (a) which municipality students are living in; (b) specific issues they have experienced; (c) their knowledge of complaints-based processes; (d) prevalence of student homelessness. Additionally, asking students whether they have enough income to meet their needs after they have paid for rent and utilities will provide a more accurate understanding of affordability.

Alternative Housing Options

The GSA should explore opportunities for creating alternative housing options in conjunction with other partners.

- The GSA should consider direct support for affordable housing alternatives. This could be done in partnership with WUSA to leverage resources. An example of such a strategy is the Woodnote Co-operative in Montreal, sponsored by the Concordia Student Union and developed by a non-profit developer to provide below-market-rate housing for students (Woodnote Co-operative 2018). One possibility would be to partner with existing co-op WCRI to improve or expand their facilities. However, housing co-operatives can take many different forms and it is worth exploring what different options might be possible.
- The GSA should also encourage the University to pursue additional housing and/or mixed-use development with a strong housing component on the East Campus lands along Phillip Street and Northwest Campus (Columbia Lake Village). These land uses are in accordance with the Campus Master Plan Update (University of Waterloo 2009). In doing so, the GSA should advocate that an emphasis be placed on maintaining housing affordability, perhaps through a stipulation to any third-party developer to guarantee some level of affordability. At least a portion of this housing should be suitable for graduate students with families, including young children.

Reject the Student/Non-Student Housing Binary

While recognizing the specific needs of graduate students, the GSA's advocacy efforts should reject the harmful student/non-student housing binary employed in the media and other discourse. This binary contributes to tensions with the community and effectively restricts housing choice amongst the student population. It also creates opportunities for landlords to capitalize on this "niche" market and charge higher rents to students. This binary is especially inappropriate since graduate students are less suited for the typical, local purpose-built student housing due to age, family size, etc.

- Any future marketing or advocacy initiatives should avoid explicitly or inadvertently promoting the student/non-student housing binary.

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- Advocacy needs to recognize the diverse housing needs of graduate students, many of which overlap with needs of non-students.
- Since many housing issues faced by graduate students are also shared with other constituencies, such as low-income non-students, collaborations with other housing-related advocacy ongoing within Waterloo Region could allow the GSA to better leverage its limited resources. For instance, the Social Development Centre has been involved in tenant advocacy within the region.

Political Positions & Ends

In light of the extent and extremity of housing challenges, the GSA's political positions and ends should be updated to prioritize this issue. As the GSA considers future amendments to its political positions and ends, housing challenges and affiliated advocacy should be explicitly included.

- Appendix B includes proposed amendments pertaining to the GSA's current political positions.
- Appendix C includes proposed amendments and actions pertaining to the GSA's current political ends.

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Appendix A: Vital Signs Survey Results

Figure 1 - On Versus Off-Campus Housing

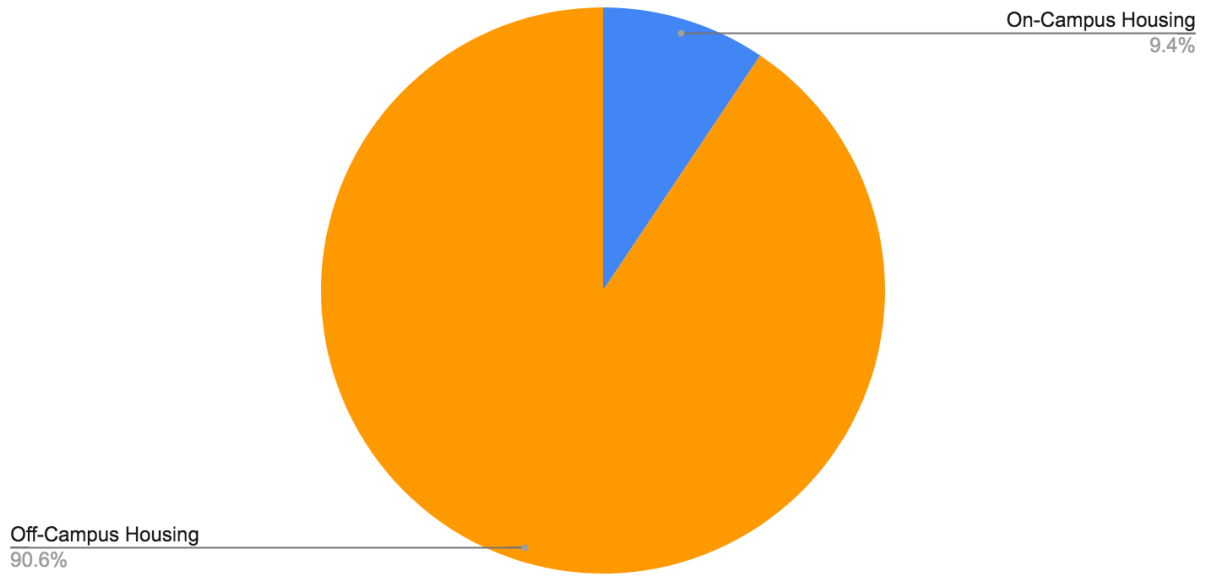


Figure 2 - Housing Type

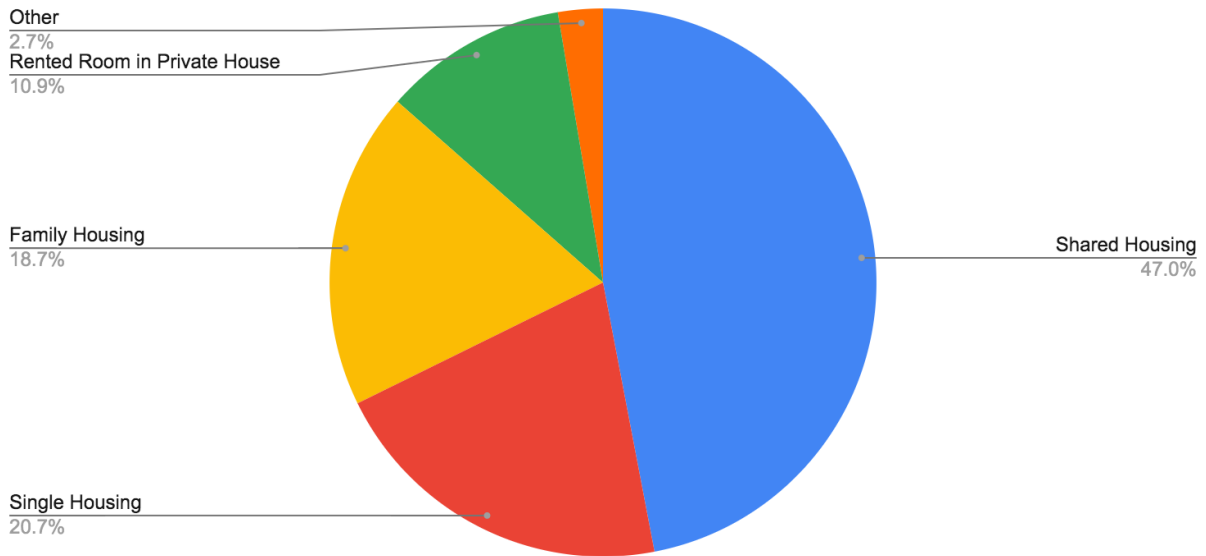


Figure 3 - Housing Costs

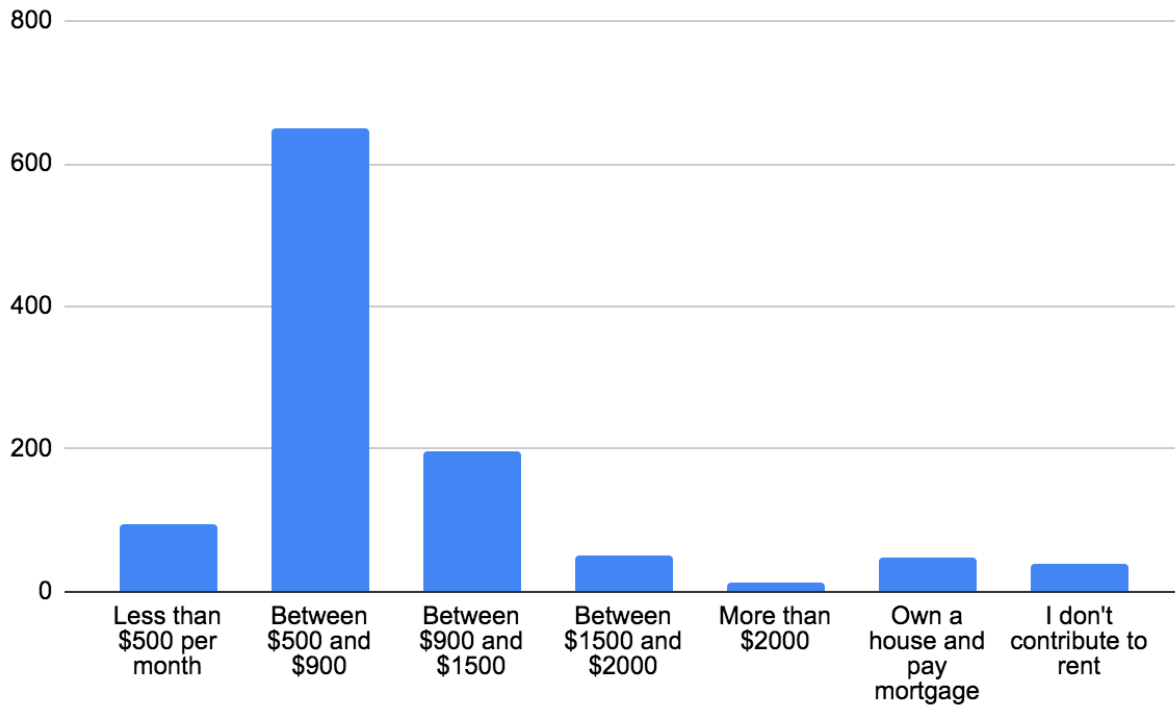


Figure 4

Availability of On-Campus Housing

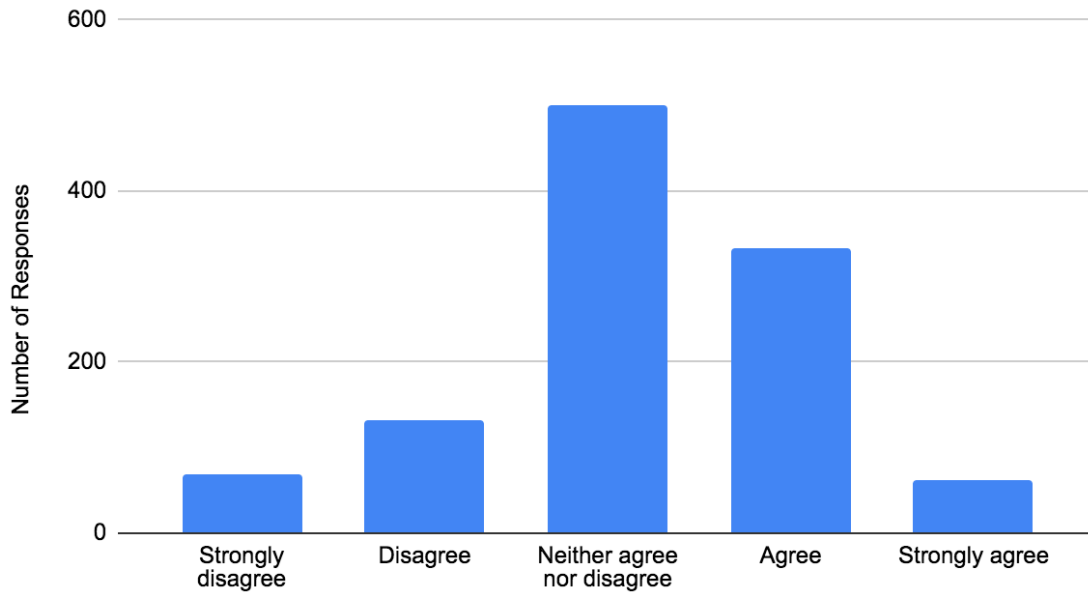


Figure 5

Affordability of On-Campus Housing

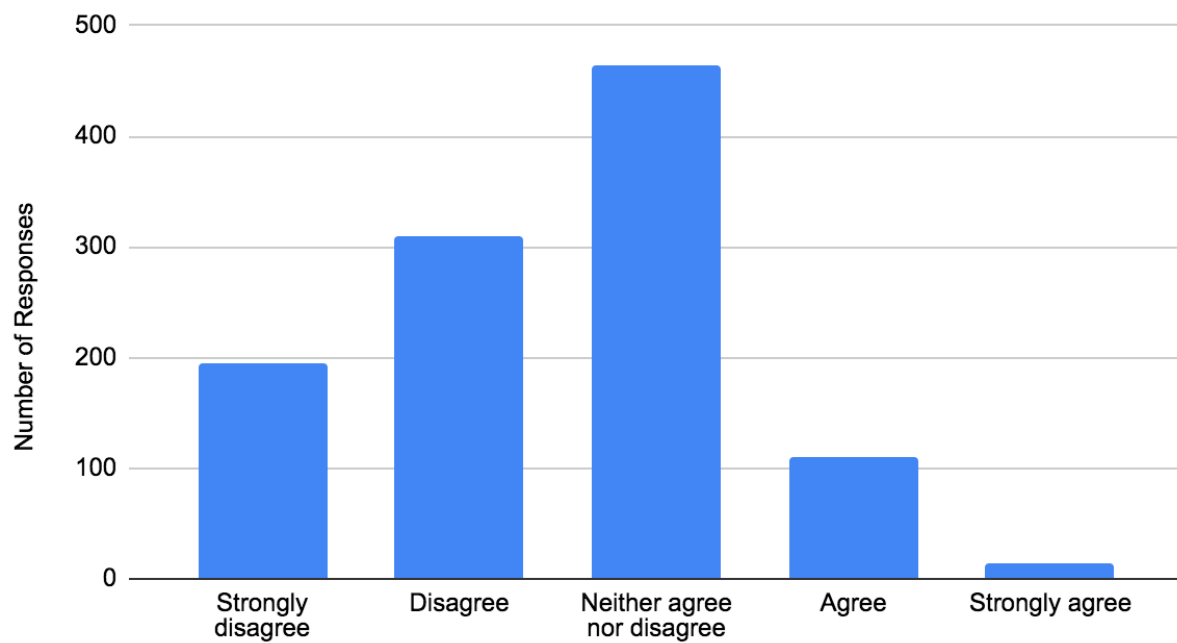


Figure 6

Off campus housing is available

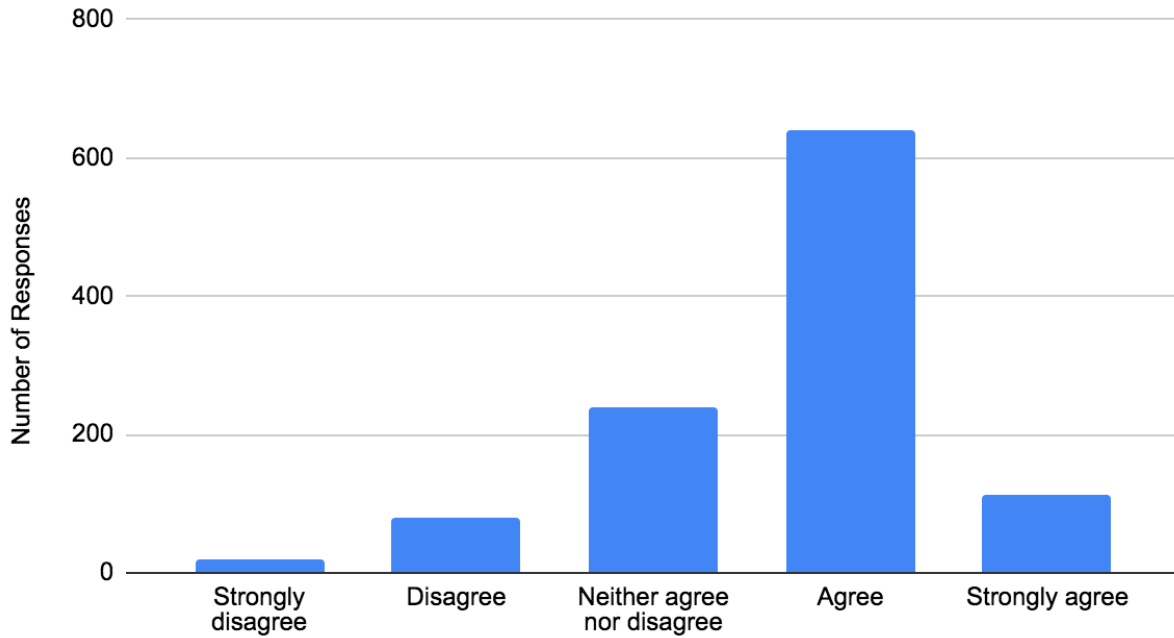
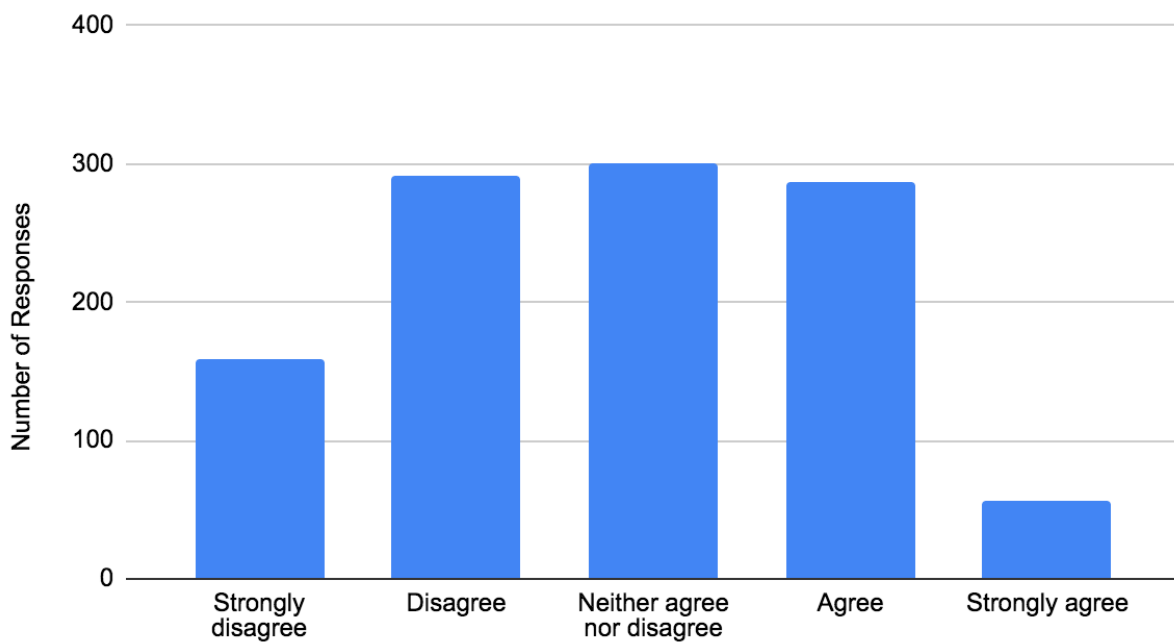


Figure 7

Off-Campus Housing is Affordable



Appendix B: Political Position

Existing wording is in blue text, proposed revisions are in red text.

The GSA's fourth political position pertains directly to housing; however, it focuses on the housing search and related services. Recognizing that procuring adequate and affordable housing is a challenge for individuals everywhere, including Waterloo Region, this position can be strengthened. Furthermore, on-campus housing options and the off-campus listing service could be improved upon. The following amendments (in red or struck out text) to this political position are recommended:

*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.

Appendix C: Ends

Existing wording is in blue text, proposed revisions are in red text.

Currently, the GSA-UW ends reference net funding levels relative to the cost of living in Waterloo(1.3), and that graduate students have access to on-campus housing (1.7). It is recommended that the GSA-UW add an additional end. Where:

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 non-academic 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.