

University of British Columbia  
English 301-Technical Communications  
Professor: Erika Paterson  
Assignment 2.3 Formal Report Draft

## Determining Cause, Impact and Possible Solutions of Expensive Student Housing at UBC

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To: Mr. Andrew Parr, associate Vice-President, Student Housing and Community Services (SHCS)  
at UBC.

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## *1. Abstract*

Canada as one of the world's top study destinations is growing painfully exorbitant to live in. Across provinces, students who seek rental housing have reported an increasing number of horror stories of finding a livable place to rent in Canada due to a rising housing crisis. Having affordable housing on and off-campus has become significantly challenging for UBC students, and the lack of places to live has far-reaching effects on both mental health and wellness. UBC's "*Housing Action Plan*", provides a detailed overview of development and goals for future housing projects and programs, to address the affordability challenge and sustainability issues.

Some goals included are:

- Enhanced academic success for students who can spend more time on-campus.
- Strengthened sustainability benefits through more on-campus residents who are affiliated with the university.
- Proceeds from UBC's land base support the University's endowment

The plan, to be completed by spring 2025, will be guiding the university's future actions on this front. The report aims to uncover whether there is potential room for more improvements to bring down students' cost of living and provide more housing options.

## *II. Introduction*

### Background

Student Housing affordability is one of the most challenging issues students face nowadays, both financially and emotionally. Living on campus has become more expensive every year, yet housing fees charged by the university have become a crucial source of income, more needed than ever. Many students nowadays demand a housing fee reduction.

### Definition of housing affordability

For the purpose of this report, affordable housing can be defined as living in an available place one can afford to “rent, lease, or purchase without having to spend more than 30% of pre-tax household income on housing costs (including rent or mortgage, strata fees and property taxes)” (“Housing Action Plan”).

### *Statement of Problem*

Housing need at UBC is increasing, in part because the demand to live in residence at UBC has greatly exceeded the number of vacancies and in part, because UBC has made new other development projects in the future that need funds. Heavy investments were made to support remote education. These costs combined with recent declines in income from UBC residents due to expenses related to power consumption and food services have placed the school in a difficult financial position. Therefore, this is a complex issue both for students and the university.

Student Housing and Community Services (SHCS) will continue to have a central role in providing and improving options for on-campus living for all students, and staff. However, the school governors are also facing a few factors which restrain the potential provision of housing.

- **Metro Vancouver’s Rising Real Estate Values:** Our university locates next to some of the most beautiful as well as the most expensive living area, this indicates that students and staff will have to face longer commutes to find more affordable housing options. Land values are surpassing significantly than incomes, affecting all businesses and residents in the region. Even with the recent softening of prices in Greater Vancouver, the affordability challenges remain. (“Housing Action Plan”)
- **UBC’s Reserved Land:** Upon the establishment of UBC, the government offered a fair amount of land endowment to be used for future research and teaching expansions. Therefore, the use of this limited land asset needs to be meticulous and sustainable, balancing the needs of today and future generations. (“Housing Action Plan”)
- **Rising Inflation Rate:** The cost of living is rising and is putting strains on students' finances. The province's inflation rate already hit 6.5% in May, as measured by the Bank of Canada. When inflation gets high, the cost of goods becomes unstable. This includes necessities like groceries and transportation. (YONSON,2018)
- **High Stress within the living environment:** Some research studies focused on the lone factor of on-campus housing, with the majority holding the belief that the idea of a brand new lifestyle could lead to anxiety issues and could cause poor academic

performance in students and less involvement in campus when living on the campus. This also puts pressure on the residence management team and staff, because they need to ensure the quality of life living on campus for all students.

## Purpose of Report

Student Housing and Community at UBC Services have considerable power to take action. Firstly, there is a great need to acquire more land (or capacity) for affordable housing. The school can reach out to several parties (local government, and commercial housing entities) for potential cooperation where more housing is available to accommodate students. Such as building University-affiliated student apartments or houses that allow students to live off-campus without sacrificing the best parts of the college experience. Secondly, UBC should also enforce sustainable power consumption measures. It has come to many students' attention that many UBC residence buildings do not have a programmable thermostat, where unnecessary heating or cooling occurs frequently. Lights are constantly left on in empty rooms. I believe being energy efficient can reduce the cost of living as well.

## Scope of Inquiry

To address the complex issues of renting affordability and how it affects student housing, I will pursue five areas of inquiry:

1. Perspectives of students living/renting at UBC
2. A Review of the changes/differences in the recent years
3. Why is it hard to cut down the price for students and the school?
4. Potential housing acquisitions and development

## 5. Other tools to curb rental prices

### *Research Methods*

For the purpose of generating this report, a surveying method was conducted, providing all student participants with a questionnaire regarding the issue being addressed above. It was reiterated to the participants including residents at UBC, staff and students who have knowledge and experience in school living. I provided a short survey that took no longer than 5 minutes to complete. The questionnaire was distributed via email and published on the internet to individuals. The responses to the questionnaire were completely voluntary and anonymous. I have received 37 responses. The responses to the questionnaire from the participants were sufficient to generate the report, however, any supplementary information that helped in the writing was gathered through web research on Google by referencing statistical data and quoting reliable articles.

### *III. Data Collection*

#### *Survey Questionnaire for Participants*

During the past few weeks, I have been interested in observing the participants of my research. To gain a sense of student demand for and preferences for housing at UBC, 23 responses were received and were analyzed to provide descriptive information regarding housing satisfaction and decision.

*(Refer to Appendix A)*

## Overall trends

- 84% of respondents believe that living on campus is more very convenient than living outside.
- Only 30% of students think it is easy to find a place to live.
- A majority of students (58%) reported that most of their total income (including wages, scholarships, family support, or any other sources of income) is used for rent/housing costs.
- 42% of respondents or 163 students reported that they had experienced difficulty paying rent in the last six months.
- Thus, the high cost of housing in Victoria has a significant impact on students and negatively affects their financial security.

(Lotay and McGovern, 2014)



Key Finding 1 – High cost with a high level of satisfaction

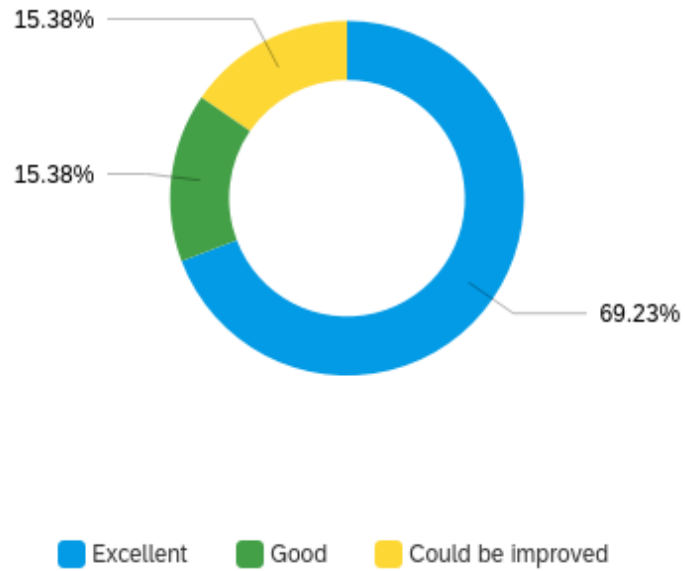


Figure 1: Responses to the question “In general, social activities while living on campus are:”

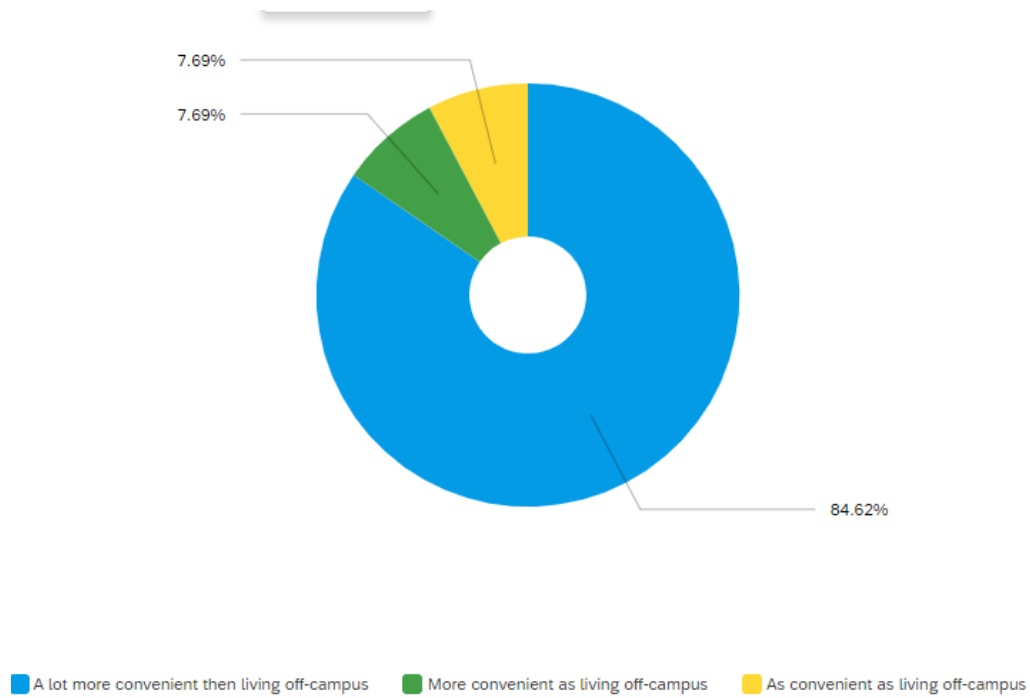


Figure 2: Responses to the question “In general, living on campus is:”

Survey data indicates that the majority of student residents living on campus would agree that it is expensive to live in residence, yet proximity to school also becomes an advantage that affects housing decisions.

The price of gas these days is making on-campus living a much more competitive choice in housing arrangements. There is also the time factor to consider. Therefore, proximity to a classroom is also highly regarded in terms of the housing choices that students make

Despite this, anecdotal information gathered from other institutional sources reveals that the cost of meal plan options to students is a source of frustration for many students. Therefore, organizers should consider this. “The meal plan itself has been the subject of student complaint since the beginning of the year and we can attribute the negativity that surrounds our meal plan specifically threefold: price, transparency and quality. (Michouris, 2017).

#### Key Finding 2 – Housing Availability is tight

Understanding the availability of dormitories is critical to planning student residences.

Q7 - Did you have a difficult time finding your current home?

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Figure 3: Response to questions “Did you have a difficult time finding your current home?”



Figure 4: Response to questions “would you have moved to town if you had found affordable housing?”

Q6 - What type of accommodations are you now living in?

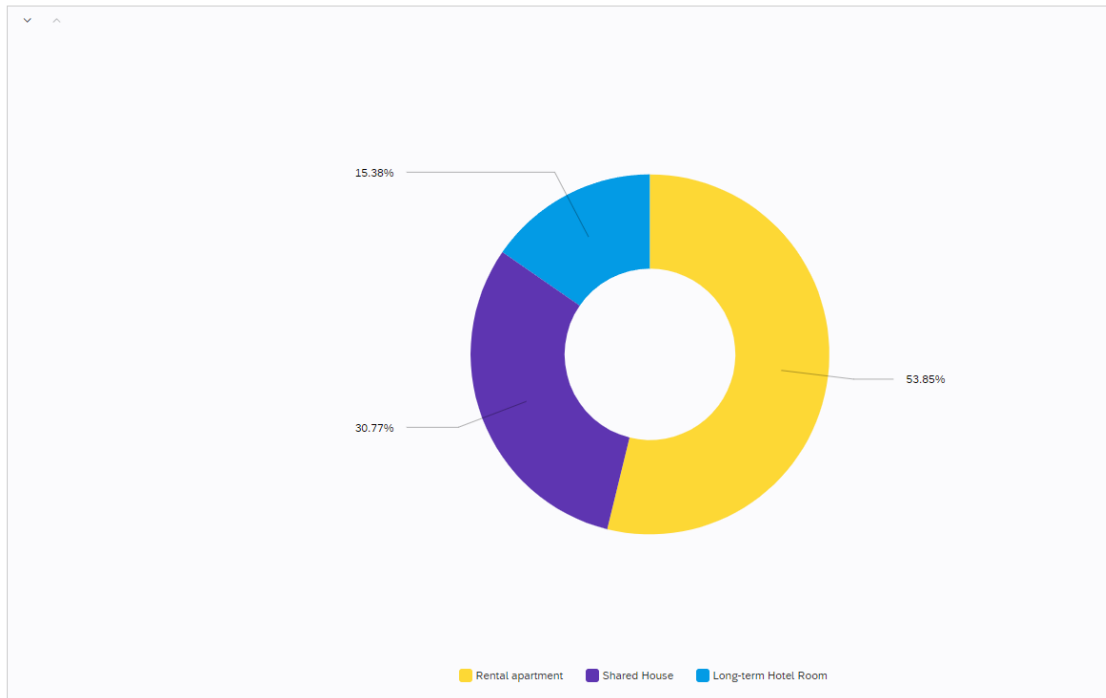


Figure 5: Responses to “What type of accommodations are you now living in?”

Students are often required to look for housing in a competitive environment. The Greater Vancouver Region has shown some of the lowest vacancy rates and highest rentals in history. The current rental market conditions do entangle students to have appropriate choices to where they live and can lead to ongoing affordability stress.

Data from survey participants suggests that individual living units in an apartment are the most preferred arrangement over other rooms, and nearly 70% of students find it hard to get a place to live.

“ Neighbourhood development patterns can also have an impact on the profile of the housing

stock as single detached homes which were previously rented are sold or demolished to build new ownership units.” (YONSON,2018)

## *IV. Conclusion*

### Summary of Research

The surveys distributed for this report aimed to grasp the level of satisfaction for on-campus living at UBC that relates to several factors that may influence a student’s housing decision.

Despite the fact that the overall response rate is relatively small, the results do indicate insightful information. Therefore, to assist organizers in the Student Housing and Community Services (SHCS) at UBC, based on the information I collected, certain aspects below should be considered:

- Individual living units are the most demanded room type as well as the least available, therefore it can also put pressure on the price. Cost and proximity to campus play a significant role in current and prospective students’ housing decisions.
- Despite this, data gathered from other research shows that the price of some meal plans is too high

### Proposed Solution

Student Housing and Community at UBC Services have considerable power to take action.

Firstly, there is a great need to acquire more land (or capacity) for affordable housing. The school can reach out to several parties (local government, and commercial housing entities) for potential cooperation where more housing is available to accommodate students. Such as

building University-affiliated student apartments or houses that allow students to live off-campus without sacrificing the best parts of the college experience.

Secondly, UBC should also enforce sustainable power consumption measures. It has come to many students' attention that many UBC residence buildings do not have a programmable thermostat, where unnecessary heating or cooling occurs on a frequent basis. Lights are constantly left on in empty rooms. I believe being energy efficient can reduce the cost of living as well.

## *V. Literature Cited*

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## *VI. Appendices*

### Appendix A. Survey Questionnaire

#### Introduction

I am a UBC student participating in a technical writing course. This survey aims to collect primary data for a formal report concerned with the cost of living on the UBC campus. The finished report will be presented to Andrew Parr, the acting Associate Vice-President, Student Housing and Community Services (SHCS) at UBC. The data gathered from this survey will be used to prepare recommendations for decreasing the cost of living and improving the housing situation on campus. The survey should take 5 minutes, and your responses are voluntary and anonymous. Your participation is appreciated.

#### Q1

In general, housing on campus is:

- Easily Affordable
- Affordable
- Costly
- Too costly

#### Q2

In general, social activities while living on campus are:

- Excellent
- Good
- Could be improved

#### Q3

In general, living on campus is

- A lot more convenient than living off-campus
- More convenient as living off-campus
- As convenient as living off-campus

Q4

Do you think students living on campus do better academically?

- Yes
- No
- It's not related to where you live

Q5

If you travel/commute, would you have moved to town if you had found affordable housing?

- Yes
- No

Q6

What type of accommodations are you now living in?

- Rental apartment
- Shared House
- Long-term Hotel Room

Q7

Did you have a difficult time finding your current home?

- Yes
- No

Q8

Is living on campus cheaper than living off campus?

- Yes
- No