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**RENTAL RATES AT
THE NEW SUNNYSIDE
APARTMENTS
HANDBOOK**



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Rental Rates at the New Sunnyside Apartments



Dec 12, 2022



Blake Billings

Mayor

- 4 year USA Resident
- Husband, Father
- PhD in Chemical Engineering



Natalie Cottle

Community Liaison

- 6 year USA Resident
- Wife, Mother
- Registered Dietitian
- Husband receiving Biomedical Engineering PhD



John Ellis

Campus Liaison

- 3 year USA Resident
- Husband, Father
- Doctor of Nursing Practice in Psychiatric Mental Health



Annie Pond

Communications Liaison

- 4 year USA Resident
- Wife, Mother
- Husband finishing Dental School

Dec 12, 2022



Summary

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University & USA Goals

Research

President Randall has set goals to boost research and "[become] an exceptional, top 10 public university with unsurpassed societal impact."²

Equity

"We aim to become a national model of an equitable and inclusive campus where diversity thrives."⁴

Affordable

"Community life, affordability and close proximity to the University of Utah campus. "...Primarily intended for students and their families."³

Opportunity

"Our apartment community fosters individual lifestyles and educational opportunities within a framework of responsible freedom."³

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200 Court Apartments

Background

The current University Student Apartments are old and need to be replaced. Built in the '60s and '70s, the buildings have housed generations of students attending the U.

As current residents and students, we appreciate the efforts to update and improve housing for families and graduates.



1100 Court Residents

Issue

The new rental rates are unaffordable for most families and graduate students currently living in the University Student Apartments.

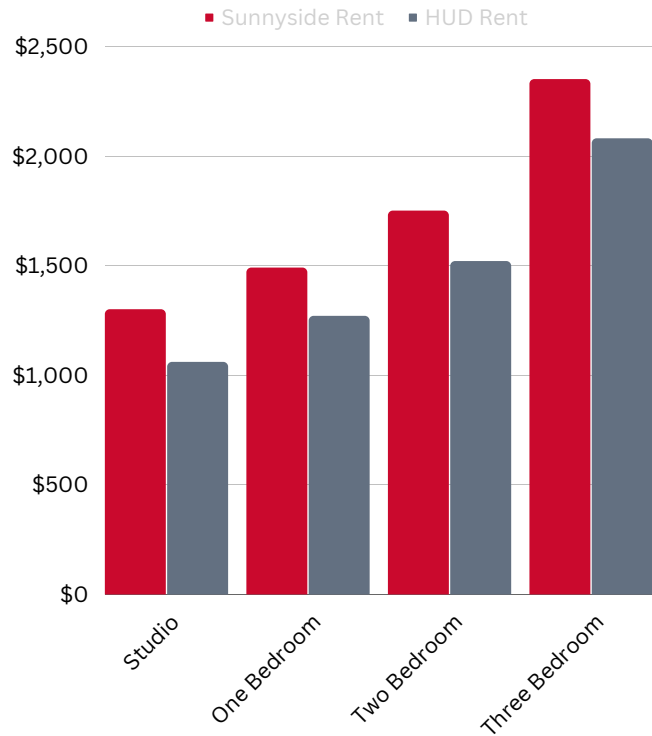
Just as undergraduate housing is an issue, if graduates and families cannot afford housing, they will not attend the U.



Fair Market Rent

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has established "Fair Market Rent" to be a bit below the Sunnyside Rates for the zip code 84108.

With included services and utilities, the new rates seem to be matching market rates in the area.



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Affordable Housing

"We define affordability as spending 30% or less of a household's combined income on housing costs (rent, utilities, fees, etc.)."

Erik Fronberg
 Community Development Grants Specialist
 Housing Stability Division
 Department of Community and Neighborhoods
 Salt Lake City Corporation

Housing Costs Reflect 30% of Specified Income

% of Area Median Income (AMI)	30%		50%	
	Income	Housing Costs	Income	Housing Costs
Household Size				
1 Person	\$ 21,500	\$ 597	\$ 35,850	\$ 996
2 Person	\$ 24,600	\$ 683	\$ 41,000	\$ 1,139
3 Person	\$ 27,650	\$ 768	\$ 46,100	\$ 1,281
4 Person	\$ 30,700	\$ 853	\$ 51,200	\$ 1,422
5 Person	\$ 33,200	\$ 922	\$ 55,300	\$ 1,536
6 Person	\$ 35,650	\$ 990	\$ 59,400	\$ 1,650
7 Person	\$ 38,100	\$ 1,058	\$ 63,500	\$ 1,764
8 Person	\$ 40,550	\$ 1,126	\$ 67,600	\$ 1,878

With new Sunnyside rates, students need to make \$59,000/year to meet the affordable housing definition. Average grad student stipends are \$18,000-\$35,000.



Impact

- Our current residents at University Student Apartments will experience between 50-100% increase in rent, while incomes will stay the same.
- The community built for graduate families and international students will likely not survive these increases, as it is financially unsustainable.
- Affordability of housing is a consideration future students take into account in choosing where to attend.

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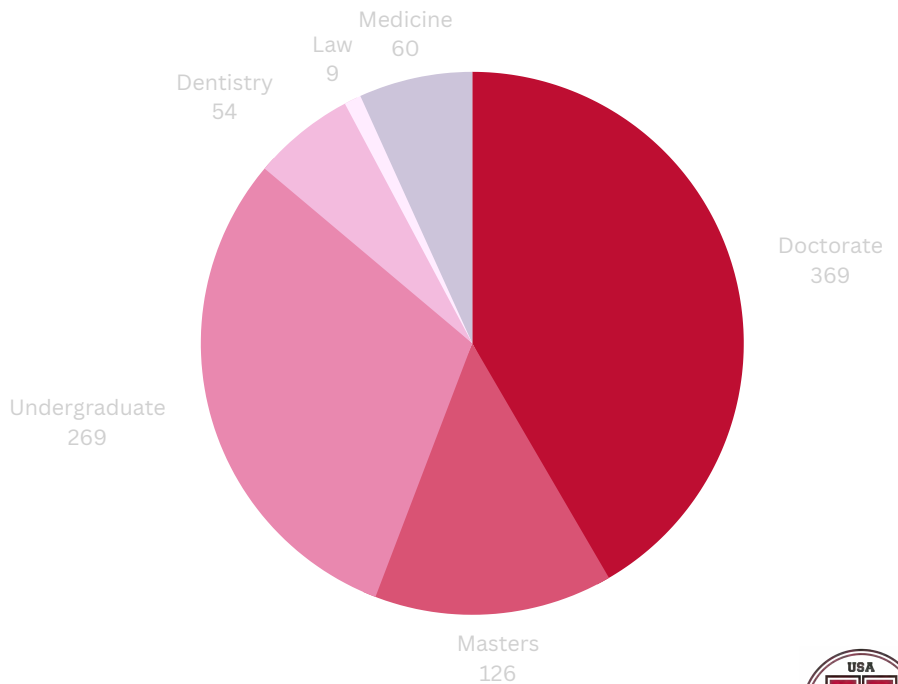


USA Summer Carnival



Our Community

- Total Adults & Children - 1,933
- Total Students - 887
- International - 40%

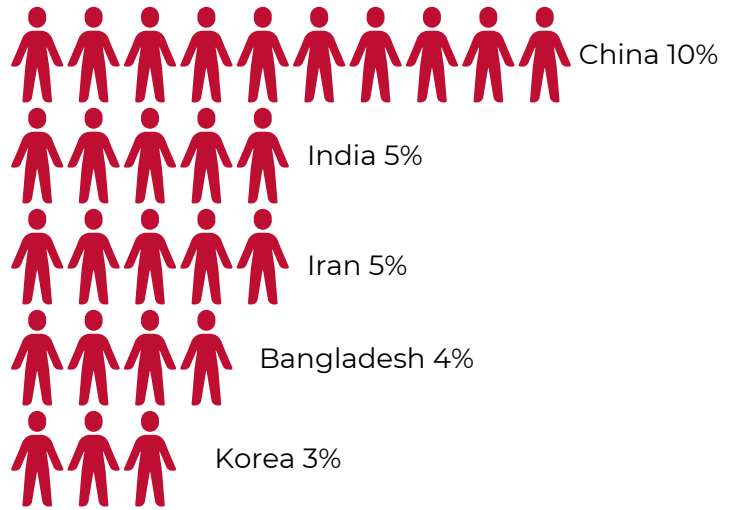


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Our International Community

- 40% International (roughly 354 students)
 - Around 15% of all international U students
- 53 Countries Represented



These are students on visas whose only source of income is savings, stipends, or possibly loans.

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Personal Experiences

Student family
PhD Student

Tara

Jennifer

Abeer

Jessica

Student family
Medical Student





Tara's children enjoying the community garden.

Tara

"The thing that made our decision [to come to the University of Utah] easy was the **AFFORDABLE** family housing the University of Utah offered. We specifically chose this University because it had the best family housing options for us.

"The West Village is minutes away from my husband's lab, close to good [elementary] schools, and most importantly gives us a community to rely on and enjoy while my husband is often not home. Having so many families, children, and graduate students live together helps make us feel **safe** in such a large city..."

"The current rates for a new 3 bedroom is **90%** of my husband's stipend....We are extremely stressed about where we will live, how my husband will get to his lab, and what that will mean for us as a family.

"We love the Village and would not have come to Utah without the **Village**. The Village has been our home for 5 years and the idea of leaving it before my husband graduates due to these changes is absolutely heartbreaking."

**Tara's complete story can be found in the handbook.*



Abeer

"I am an international student, doing a PhD, with two babies (a toddler and an infant). Most of my stipend goes to daycare and it is hard to meet the month's end sometimes.

"I shifted to University Apartments as it was a great alternative economically and also socially as I got to meet families like mine and I felt included. Also, it was close to my department and I want to be close as my kids are very young.

"I am in the 700 West Village court and have to move now because of our court's closure. Seeing the new prices, I am left with no option and added financial stress."

**Abeer's complete story can be found in the handbook.*



Resident Council Youth Soccer Program



Resident family friends

Jennifer

"I am a single mom with two kids. The University Student Apartments is a great enriching experience for my family. Being in a community with other grad students and postdocs with family was a big emotional boost not only for myself but for my kids.

"There is no way on earth I could afford this new pricing on my grad student budget, and I really don't know of many people who might be able to pay at these new rates."

**Jennifer's complete story can be found in the handbook.*



Jessica

"As we planned which school to go to, the housing options were a main deciding factor.... A major appeal to the University of Utah was the options and pricing for family student housing. To be surrounded by other peers in similar circumstances is very unifying in a community and strengthening while going through a long period of sacrifice. In addition, being so close to the school gives my husband invaluable time to focus on his studies, and be a present husband and father.

"Because neither of us are earning an income, we are dependent on loans. My husband receives about \$22,000 per year for our living expenses. This equates to \$1,833 per month. Our current rent is \$1,210...We have planned every dollar of our budget according to these limits. In our current situation, we are getting by, and our basic needs are met.

"If this housing option were not available to us, and we needed to pay market prices for rent, it is obvious we would not be able to afford anywhere else within reasonable distance for my husband to go to school.

"Living here has given us peace of mind, knowing we can afford our needs and provide for our family. If this option is taken away it would be devastating for our lives and create immense pressure.

"The community in the Village is irreplaceable and unique."

**Jessica's complete story can be found in the handbook.*



Jessica's family in their court after the Dental School's White Coat Ceremony



nature



Dec 12, 2022



⋮ Potential Solutions

- Lower the proposed rental rates for the new apartments.
- Increase graduate stipends and loan allotments, or promote housing waivers.

Short-Term

- Grandfather-in current residents with decreased rates in new apartments.

Long-Term

- Actively search for donors and alumni for a price reduction.

Dec 12, 2022



Get in Touch

Contact us to get more info

 usarescouncil@gmail.com



Discussion



References

1. Fronberg, E. (2022, November 18). University Student Apartments resident council.
2. Randall, T. (2022, November 7). *New University of Utah provost named*.
3. University Student Apartments. (2022). *University Student Apartments Home*. University Student Apartments - The University of Utah. Retrieved December 7, 2022, from <https://apartments.utah.edu/>
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PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: TARA

"When my husband was accepted into 4 different programs all across the country, I was nervous. We come from a small mountain community in California and I was worried about moving to a big city. The thing that made our decision easy was the AFFORDABLE family housing the University of Utah offered.

"We specifically chose this University because it had the best family housing options for us. The West Village is minutes away from my husband's lab, close to good schools, and most importantly gives us a community to rely on and enjoy while my husband is often not home. Having so many families, children, and graduate students live together helps make us feel safe in such a large city. We love that this community has activities at the community centers, block parties, gardens and a support system of friends and neighbors for this time in life while we are going through school.

"It is incredibly troubling to me that the new units are such an increase in rent. The current rates for a new 3 bedroom is 90% of my husband's stipend. It is scary because in the midst of a housing crisis and a struggling economy, the lack of transparency and the rent increase will mean that we have very few options and will not be able to stay here in the community that we so love.

"We are extremely stressed about where we will live, how my husband will get to his lab, and what that will mean for us as a family. The stress of it all has greatly impacted our family.

"We love the Village and would not have come to Utah without the Village. The Village has been our home for 5 years and the idea of leaving it before my husband graduates due to these changes is absolutely heartbreaking."



PERSONAL EXPERIENCES: ABEER

"I am an international student, doing a PhD, with two babies (a toddler and an infant). Most of my stipend goes to daycare and it is hard to meet the month's end sometimes.

"I shifted to University Apartments as it was a great alternative economically and also socially as I got to meet families like mine and I felt included. Also, it was close to my department and I want to be close as my kids are very young.

"I am in the 700 West Village court and have to move now because of our court's closure. Seeing the new prices, I am left with no option and added financial stress. It would be helpful if administration make prices affordable to students."

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES: JENNIFER

"I am a single mom with two kids. The USA apartments were a great enriching experience for my family. Being in community with other grad students and postdocs with family was a big emotional boost not only for myself but for my kids.

"There is no way on earth I could afford this new pricing on my grad student budget, and I really don't know of many people who might be able to pay at these new rates.

"I think the execution of demolition of old housing and rental policy of new housing has been mishandled with oversight into how grad students are being affected.

"I do think that admin can do better and I hope they reconsider their current pricing especially for students who have been misplaced from housing due to the construction."

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: JESSICA

"My husband is a first year medical student. We moved into the apartments with our two daughters and have thoroughly enjoyed most of our experience here. Our community is filled with students and families in similar circumstances as us. Our children are similar in ages and when the weather permits we love to play on the easily accessible parks in our court. The proximity to the school of medicine allows my husband to commute quickly and make use of the shuttle service.

"As we planned which school to go to, the housing options were a main deciding factor. We knew I would be at home with both of our daughters while my husband studied and we would be fully dependent on loans for these years. A major appeal to the University of Utah was the options and pricing for family student housing. To be surrounded by other peers in similar circumstances is very unifying in a community and strengthening while going through a long period of sacrifice. In addition, being so close to the school gives my husband invaluable time to focus on his studies, and be a present husband and father.

"Because neither of us are earning an income, we are dependent on loans. My husband receives about \$22,000 per year for our living expenses. This equates to \$1,833 per month. Our current rent is \$1,210. We depend on SNAP (food stamps) and WIC for our groceries. We also depend on Medicaid for our insurance. We have planned every dollar of our budget according to these limits. In our current situation, we are getting by, and our basic needs are met.

"If this housing option were not available to us, and we needed to pay market prices for rent, it is obvious we would not be able to afford anywhere else within reasonable distance for my husband to go to school.

"Living here has given us peace of mind, knowing we can afford our needs and provide for our family. If this option is taken away it would be devastating for our lives and create immense pressure. The community in the Village is irreplaceable and unique.

"Please find a way to maintain the option for affordable student housing with the University of Utah. Whether through additional funding, grants, etc. there has to be a way for this to work. If not, it will push out families from being able to live here."



OTHER PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Mohammad

"Because new rent prices are not reasonable and it would be around 3/4 of my stipend. How can I pay that really? No need to mention that as an international student the stipend from department is the only source of income for us and we are not allowed to work in the US on F1/2 visa. It would be very disappointing if the University Student Apartment administration cannot understand this."

Bruno

"Because as an international student with low stipend we need some predictability to plan our lives. Also, the prices are rising too fast every year and our stipends do not grow in the same proportion."

Nastaran

"As an international student living on campus with no other financial support except a modest amount of graduate stipend, new prices would be almost more than half of my monthly income, making it very hard to find a place to live considering the high inflation and more expensive off-campus housing options. This is adding more stress to my daily life as a graduate student and makes me feel worried about how to find a place to live given the newly forced evacuation notice."

Sydney

"One of the large factors that made it possible for my husband and I to get married was that we were able to find below market housing here at the U. When we found out the price increase for new housing, we were devastated. We knew this meant that new couples and families would not realistically be able to live there."

Alexa

"Hiking up the costs of rent would force us to relocate and impose incredible strain on my husband's education. For a University that claims to place such high emphasis on equity, this change seems to benefit only those coming from higher rings of the socioeconomic ladder, thereby further perpetuating issues of inequity. The purpose of student housing is to make education more accessible for those that would otherwise be unable to afford living close to campus and who do not have the means to commute."

OTHER PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Rylee

"My husband and I are current residents in the 900 court. We moved to the court in May of 2022, and have absolutely loved our time here. We have gained wonderful friends that I know we will keep with us throughout the rest of our lives and thank you for providing a wonderful place to live where students can learn and grow together. As residents of the court who love living here, we feel that it is very important to share our experiences and opinions with you because we know that there will be drastic changes to our lives and our friends' lives in the near future due to the current pricing of the new housing. I am a full time teacher with a bachelor's and master's degree. It has taken me many years to be in the position that I am to be able to work and receive a reasonable salary that can provide for my family. Right now, our rent makes up about 30% of the total monthly income that I bring in, which is the percentage cutoff that the Department of Housing and Urban Development deems not to be considered housing cost-burdened. We currently do not have kids, and we have very few monthly expenses. Since my husband has started attending dental school here at the University of Utah in Fall of 2021, we have also tried to pay for as much schooling out of pocket as we possibly can to try to keep our student loans as low as possible. Even though tuition costs us tens of thousands of dollars per semester, and this payment is due three times a year, we feel very proud of our ability to contribute the little that we feel we can out of pocket. We feel very blessed to be in our current situation where I am able to work full-time so that we do not have to borrow student loans for anything but some tuition. However, we know that there are very few families, if any, who live in the courts who are in a similar situation, since most of these families have children and are borrowing student loans for every aspect of living and school expenses. We also know that most families here do not have even one full-time income, let alone a full-time income on a master's degree level salary. If these rental rates do not change, my husband and I will be forced to live somewhere besides the Sunnyside Apartments. If we are unable to live in this new housing due to the outrageous rental prices, how are other families with more expenses and/or multiple full-time students expected to? We love the University Student Apartments, we love the community that we are part of here, and we absolutely feel like the courts are our home. We want to make the Sunnyside Apartments our home too. Please revise the rental prices to a reasonable amount for students who live on student income levels to afford."

OTHER PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Seth

"I have loved living in the west village as a single parent with my 3 year old daughter and the community shared there. Upon choosing the University of Utah a major deciding factor was the cost of housing. I have made budget for my years of school based on the current budget. It would create very much difficulty to have to pay such an increase."

Kaden

"As a medical student with a family, student housing has been the only way I could afford to go to medical school with a family. With the increase pricing, there is NO way I could have afforded to go to school. The price change only increases the marginalization that underserved student will experience. I am deeply disappointed that the administration would put profits ahead of the well being of students especially considering the grants they have received to provide struggling students with affordable housing. You have completely disregarded students who come from lower socioeconomic status. You are further perpetuating the gap in education between those with money and those without."

Mary

"Because as a single mom and current PhD student in chemical engineering, I may not be able to afford finishing my program if my rent is substantially higher than it is now. I would ask if the income lost the university due to research funding not gained by my leaving my degree is worth the extra rent brought in by forcing me to leave without my degree. I would suggest that the university's loss is on the order of hundreds of thousands of dollars. This is in addition to the personal damage and dubious morality of the act as I was lead to believe that the university intended to aid me with housing for the duration of my program."

Paige

"My husband and I just had a baby, weeks before the announcement was made about the new housing prices. As it is, we're barely scraping by each month. We can't afford to live anywhere else with prices being so inflated, and most of our friends in the village are in the same boat. We've built a wonderful community here and are devastated to think that it's going to be ripped apart with no thought for the residents who are trying to start their families and careers here."

OTHER PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Joshua

"I am a Physics & Astronomy (P&A) graduate student and the Chair of the P&A GSAC. As such, I have conducted a survey myself for current P&A graduate students to gather information on housing costs and housing experience. Of the 32 responses, most lived off-campus, some in places where they compromised their safety and comfort for a cheap enough rent to live on. Almost all of the responses included the difficulties of finding a reasonable house or apartment to live in. With graduate student housing unable to provide enough housing for students as well as increasing the monthly rent by so much, I believe many students will be forced to choose between their degree and their ability to live in Salt Lake City, and I don't know how I can stand by and see that happen without doing all I can to see the departments, colleges, and university administration fix this situation they have wrought."

Braden

"I have noticed that housing prices in general have been absurdly increasing, especially those offered by the university. In some cases, the rates offered by the University are more than those you can find off campus, although that is becoming more rare. Overall, it is becoming an issue where graduate students are paying 50% or more of their stipend on housing, not leaving much more for other needs and especially emergency situations."

Natalie

"A large part of the reason why most people live here is because it is actually affordable. We are all full time students, working multiple jobs in time that we don't actually have, just to get by even with the help of a Pell grant. My husband and I work 6 jobs between the two of us. Many of us also have children to support. We don't need all that fancy new stuff, we just need a modest place to live that doesn't require us to take out additional loans. So if the new housing that is being built costs twice as much because it is fancy and nice, you're not actually doing anyone any favors. I could actually argue that it is gentrification of students. How do expect to attract people of diverse backgrounds to the university if the only people who can even almost afford to live on campus are rich white students? And by the way, unlike many students in the more traditional dorms, I think I speak for all of the family and graduate housing residents when I say that our parents are not paying our rent."

OTHER PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Jose

"The rent is not affordable considering the low stipend phd graduate students receive. Especially for international student families whose partner couldn't get a job because of visa restrictions. International students from third world countries does not have the same resources and/or deep pockets as people from first world countries."

Madison

"I am a PhD student living in the medical towers. I have lived here since 2020, and I'm grateful that I only have to spend less than half my monthly stipend on rent. I rent an unfurnished two bedroom by myself (the wait list was short and I needed to move during the pandemic). It's a 5 minute walk from the lab I study in. I am not a student family, so I'm not eligible for family housing. This sudden change of closing the medical towers would either force me to pay over half of my monthly stipend on the one bedroom apartment offered by University Student Apartments. This is unattainable for many people including myself, since other costs of living like food are increasing due to inflation. The new housing that USA is offering is "partially furnished" so I assume I'll have to get rid of some of my furniture at a loss. I'm also priced out of many rentals in the city because the applications require 3 times the monthly income to be able to apply to rent an apartment, and my stipend does not allow for that. I was relying on living in the medical towers at a similar rent for the rest of my PhD. As compensation for forcing myself and many other students to move, USA offers us an application to the new apartments, but no guarantee of housing. USA is also giving any student moving to their new housing from the buildings that are closing a paltry \$150 rent credit for one month. This does not make up for the over \$300 per month I would have to pay for a smaller apartment. USA's decision to charge outrageous rent prices even for shared apartments is not in the interest of students, but in the interest of profit."

Andrew

"I was living there last year, but moved away to live with my parents due to financial issues with full time school and the ability to work. I was planning to move back with my wife, but due to the probable circumstances of there being no space of the older house, which are much more affordable. I am now not able to move back, and study on campus due to the outrageous and disproportionate increases."

OTHER PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Keaton

"We have lived in the villages for about 4 years now. We have lived in both the east and west villages and it has been great for us. The rent when we first moved in has been such a great way for us to save money while paying for a school. It has allowed us to live here and keep up with the workload that comes from school, work, and daily life. With the new constructions we had to move twice from the west village into the east village. We were not given a detailed timeline of when we had to move we were just told it was gonna happen. It was super frustrating trying to move around construction and find new apartments. To hear that we may need to move again and to a far more expensive apartment with real no increase to benefits of living here has really pushed us away and made us almost decide to move off campus. Moving would be difficult for us since we do not want to leave behind our friends or the closeness to the school and hospital where we both work. So we hope to come to a compromise through this petition where we can live in the housing and pay a reasonable price."

Haley

"We cannot afford to pay double rent. We are frustrated about the lack of communication especially on the timeframe of the construction. We moved in only a few months ago, grateful to have found something affordable and close to campus. We love the community here as well. We felt completely blindsided that we'd be forced to move out and pay significantly higher rent for the new apartments. We had planned financially to live in these apartments for the duration of our graduate schooling. Now, we're forced to appeal for an extension on our loans, increasing our debt. (If we even get approved for the extension)."

Victoria

"We have 2.5 years left in school and have been here for 3 already. I've loved that we can actually afford rent which has helped us focus on school rather than how we will make it each month. The goal for going to school is to make enough money in life, without the extreme rent decrease by living in student housing, we wouldn't be able to afford to go to school too."

OTHER PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Sahlil

"Being an international student, the upcoming housing changes is going to be disastrous for my academic experience. There is really no way I would be able to continue my studies properly with this additional tension of how to manage the expense of housing, food and other essential needs. I can imagine that hundreds of other international student families are going to be extremely impacted by this. WE DID NOT EXPECT THIS FROM THE UNIVERSITY THAT WE LOVE SO DEARLY."

Kaylee

"It's been so helpful not having to worry about financial prices of housing while also worrying about finances or school. I love living so close to the school, habit. A community of people in similar life situations and being a part of a community that values family living. If we get placed in the new apartments we won't be able to live on campus anymore and I don't think we will be able to afford living elsewhere while both me and my husband are attending school. We wanted to live at the village because of the pricing and convenience and did not know that we would be getting kicked out before our schooling was over or we would've made different choices."

Kebba

"I am an international student in the final lapse of my PhD program. It is already difficult trying to get through my program with extremely limited financial support/availability. Thus, literally forcing us to make a decision right now about moving to the new apartments next year, with super high rent is emotionally and mentally draining. I can barely afford rent with what I make as a TA right now. So it's going to put financial pressure/difficulty on me and many others like me."

OTHER PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Mikah

"We chose this housing because it is the closest to the medical school. My husband is a medical student on rotation and will graduate in 1.5 years. We will find out where we will have to move 6 months after they remove us from the Medical Plaza, so we will have to move twice in a year period.

"Because we won't be able to afford the new apartments since we are completely on loans (it would be our entire allotment for the year if we moved to the new apartments, thus we couldn't afford any other basic thing like food or fuel), and the West and East Villages are scarce, we will probably have to move off-campus and commute to school. This is taking us away from the resources on-campus provides and cutting back on the time we can spend as a family because of the potential 30-40 minute commute twice a day my husband would have to make."

Petition to U administration to address resident concerns for housing crisis

What is this about?

The recent demolitions and construction phases at the University Student Apartments, the egregious price increases for the new Sunnyside Apartments, the lack of transparency, and limited resources to support students and their families have created disturbances in students' academic, personal, and financial wellbeing. If you agree with the content of this letter, are a resident of the University of Utah student housing, or an off-campus resident who wants to support this request, please sign this letter so that a formal request can be made to the University Administration on behalf of its residents.

Current West and East Village housing options	1bd/1ba (543 sqft)	2bd/1ba (687 sqft)	3bd/1ba (1119 sqft)	
Price/sqft/month	\$1.59	\$1.43	\$1.08	
New construction family housing options	1bd/1ba (480-615 sqft)	2bd/1ba (820 sqft)	2bd/2ba (775 sqft)	3bd/2ba (1100 sqft)
Price/sqft/month	\$2.42-\$3.10	\$2.13	\$2.53	\$2.14
Price increase	52-95%	49%	77%	98%

What you can do:

1. Read the letter on the back side or in the QR code below.
2. Sign this petition and share your story:



Dear University Administration,

We are residents and families at the university student apartments. We are sending you this statement to respectfully voice our deep concerns about how the University of Utah administration is navigating the new housing constructions with current residents.

Firstly, the university has refrained from necessary transparency on several occasions and blind sighted incoming residents about their housing arrangements. Students have been moved into West Village and Medical Plaza apartments without clear communication that they would be forced to move out in a year or even less. Residents in buildings with up-coming demolition were given notice of forced relocation after they moved in. Any responsible administration should have a clear forecast of the demolition and construction schedules and phases that come with any planned construction project. Therefore, as part of the housing offer, student housing should have made it transparent when the resident will be most likely forced to move out based on prior knowledge of the construction plans.

Secondly, the university administration has moved forward with construction plans with disregard for the housing situation of student families that will need to relocate. Students that have reached out to the administration have been told that availability in the east village is limited. This means the housing situation of students that will need to relocate was not planned for as part of this construction project and left for students to figure out on their own. The main purpose and concern of university housing services should be to advocate for composed and peaceful housing of students, something that is not being reflected in the decisions made by the administrators.

Thirdly, the university administration is offering newly constructed apartments at per square feet rates up to 98% higher than current housing options and at best 49% higher. While we are confident that the university administration has already performed this analysis, please refer to the "Current student housing vs. New construction student housing price difference" table attached to this letter for comparison of these rates. Price hikes are even more egregious when new Single Graduate Student units (averaged at \$1148/bed) and current Aspen units and Medical Plaza units (averaged at \$578.5/bed and \$634/bed, respectively) are included in the comparison. When students voiced this concern, the administration repeatedly reasoned with a market rent comparison in the area. Once again, the main purpose and concern of university housing services should be to advocate for composed and peaceful housing of students, something that is not being reflected when students are blind sighted into circumstances where they face the same extreme inflation and supply-demand fluctuations as the market.

Negligence towards these matters by the university administration has put students, many of which are in critical stages of their education, under disruptive stress that could have been avoided. Many students are experiencing impossible circumstances due to the current state of the economy, with housing being very limited and prices being absurdly inflated. Current residents have been mindful and understanding of the noise pollution, dust pollution, walkway close offs, driveway obstructions, tree cutdowns, and utility shut offs involved with these housing expansion plans. We, students and families of the University of Utah, request the University of Utah administration to take timely action in addressing these issues to bring back peace of mind to the students and their families. Here are some helpful actions:

- Discount/Subsidize rents of new construction apartments for current residents that are forced to move and limit the price differences to an affordable range based on the students' incomes and stipends. Note that many of the current residents will graduate in a few years and rent discounts will only be temporary for a portion of current residents as acknowledged by the university housing director in the forum meeting.
- Involve university officials who do have the authority to make meaningful decisions about rent issues, if you do not have the necessary financial authority; and/or negotiate stipend increases at the graduate school level, proportional to market rent and inflation.
- Hold fund-raisers and request donations for the purpose of grandfathering the current residents and families into the new units with rent increase that matches their current incomes; they are facing imminent housing crisis due to the disproportionate increase of rent.
- The university housing director stated in the forum meeting that with the new units more students will be able to attend the University of Utah. The profits from their tuition payments can be advanced by the university to go towards grandfathering the current residents and families into the new units with limited rent increase.
- Lay out a clear long-term timeline of the construction and moving phases of each building and update residents of changes to this timeline so families can plan accordingly for the remainder of their time at UofU.
- Provide financial assistantships for moving costs with amounts based on the actual moving expenses of residents.
- Provide unfurnished graduate housing with lower rent to make those units more affordable for current Medical Plaza residents.
- Offer pro bono moving services to families and residents by subcontracting with moving companies.

Thank you for your attention to this request,
Students and families of the University Student Apartments

USA Fall Forum Summary

November 1, 2022

Panel Members: Jenn Reed, Valerie Green, Blake Billings, Natalie Cottle, John Ellis, Annie Pond

- **Welcome**
 - Thanks to residents for participation in the Block Party and youth soccer program (about 100 youth participants)
- **New Graduate Housing**
 - Based on surveys done over 20 years, results show that rental rates and community space are important to residents.
 - New Sunnyside buildings will have:
 - 280 graduate beds rented by bed
 - 285 family units
 - Bid was taken by Jacobson Construction and VCBO Architects, who then designed the buildings. UofU not very involved in the specific design because it was a Design/Build project delivery method.
 - Very important to administration to not close the current housing without some sort of construction started on new housing. Better for phased closures of current housing than to kick out students all at once.
 - Have learned from other universities who have done the “all-at-once” method that it was not a good decision.
 - Within the last 2 months, decision was made that Phase 2 of construction may move forward. Phase 2 is only possible with the demolition of the 100, 200, and 700 courts.
 - The current units are so old that...
 - Some apartments are impossible to repair when issues arise (repair parts are no longer made, etc.). Due to this impossibility, these units had to be closed.
 - No major refurbishment is possible due to the seismic qualities and outdated infrastructure.
 - Some basements may need to be vacated due to necessary repairs (that effect multiple apartments). These repairs cost around \$15,000-\$20,000 to tear up the concrete flooring and provide new sections of plumbing infrastructure. Though the cost is so high, Administration continues to do these repairs in order to keep the other units and student families in their apartments as long as possible.
 - Unless a building fails, there is the possibility of no other Cedar apartments closing for the next few years. The closure schedule for the remaining courts has not been finalized.
 - Residents that are being displaced will receive priority for the new Sunnyside building housing.
 - There will be no mixed-use space, or “retail” space in the Phase 1 of the Sunnyside buildings.
 - There should be enough housing in the new Sunnyside buildings for students who are displaced due to the current closures (based on the foreseen demand).
 - Parking

- Sunnyside buildings will have large Surface parking lots, and surface parking adjacent to the buildings for deliveries, move-in, drop-off, etc.
 - Rental Rates
 - The University has \$126 million loan for the Sunnyside Buildings construction.
 - Administration has kept the current rental rates low (extremely low based on SLC private market rates) as a benefit to the students and to not overcharge for the very old current units.
 - There is no debt on the Cedar or Aspen apartments, but all of the current rental payments pay for utilities and repairs of the current units.
 - These remaining apartments built in the 1960's and 70's require considerable annual funding for operation and maintenance. The biggest concerns about these older buildings are utility infrastructure and that they do not meet seismic code. Currently in emergency mode, trying to make the apartments last until the new housing to available.
 - Now with the new buildings, USA, as part of the university, has a lot debt. Cannot keep the rental rate low at the Sunnyside Buildings because as an auxiliary business unit, the debt payment will be part of the operating expenses of the new buildings.
 - Cedar Court rent will not increase to the same rate as the Sunnyside Buildings. A draft rental rate schedule for the 23-24 academic year is on the website now for the Cedar Courts. The rental increase is currently planned to be 5% on July 1, 2023.
 - Many students in the community now receive community help to pay a portion of their rent, and its working for them. Administration can refer residents to some programs, but understand this is not an option for everyone.
- **1200 Court Charging Station for Vehicles**
 - Haven't upgraded the EV stations because it is not possible with the electrical infrastructure of the current units/area.
 - Thanks to student requests, funding has been secured for additional and faster EV chargers to be added in the East Village.
 - Supply chain issues have caused delay in having the stations. Orders have been made months in advance, and still have not received the transformer required to install the new stations.
 - **Projects from students requested of administration have considerable weight when compared with projects coming from administration.**
- **Security issue of stolen catalytic converters**
 - Live cameras not possible due to the outdated utility infrastructure. There is currently no fiber to run live cameras. Tape cameras are not as useful to police (due to time delay with tapes).

- Valerie working with Chief Safety Officer to facilitate some meetings with residents. Possibility of residents to voice their concerns and possible solutions with Chief officer.
- **200 Court limited hot water for a few days**
 - In the current units, plumbing systems are at the end of their useful lives. Very sorry for this issue, but working hard to fix and minimize this occurrence.
 - If you ever have issues with water temperatures, never hesitate to call maintenance.
- **Transportation to and from new housing**
 - Commuter Services is one division that works directly for Jenn in her new role as AVP of Auxiliary Services.
 - Commuter Services and Jenn have been figuring out details for routes to accommodate students (including medical students) at the various hours students need transportation to and from the west village and health sciences campus. Details to come.
- **Questions**
 - Many international students don't have access to community programs. How are students going to afford the new rental rates, especially international students.
 - This impacts our international students the most. We are proud of our international community.
 - On-campus housing may not accommodate every student at the Sunnyside buildings. Some students will not be able to afford living on-campus and will have to turn to the private market.
 - USA does not currently house all of the international students. Approximately 7,000 students are currently paying market rate.
 - There is the option to not live with USA, but if a student wants to live near the University, it is likely that they will not find rental rates lower than the USA rates (including the new Sunnyside building rates).
 - Assumption that community rental assistance is referring to Section 8. Section 8 has been closed for over a year. Waitlist is 8-24 months out from helping people.
 - Administration refers students to UCA and recently have been helped much quicker than 8 months.
 - Closure notification email gave two options of going to private market or going to Sunnyside buildings. It would be helpful for Medical Tower residents to transfer to Cedar apartments. Or possibly not furnish the Sunnyside apartments to lower the rental rates.
 - USA has significant demand for furnished housing. Students are passing furniture down (there has been bed-bug issues because of this). Many students move here with a suitcase and backpack. Better for single students to have furnished homes. Years' worth of data collection (from previous graduate students) supports this, but we understand it is an inconvenience for the many graduate students that already have their own furnishings at the Towers

- Do not have enough Cedar apartments to house the family students who are being displaced. Housing students with families remains the primary mission of the Cedar apartments- they are built around playgrounds for young children, and for programming opportunities for families.
- Why can't we have an opt-in system for furnished apartments and paid programming (most paid programs are for families, not single students).
 - Residents rent pays for a very small amount of programming. Rent goes to pay the utility bills and plumber salaries. Most program funding comes from ASUU. The annual program budget is a very small percentage of the overall USA operating budget.
 - Current students will be in these apartments 3-8 years, whereas buildings will be here for hopefully 50 years. This construction is a long-term project.
 - The opt-in option for furnishing is worth a conversation with administration for students who are already in the Medical Towers.
 - Most single grads prefer to have furnished apartments based on years of data collection.
- Can USA honor current rental rates at the Sunnyside buildings? Is there a possibility of grandfathering rental rates for the current students whose apartments are being demolished?
 - The University understands that the SLC housing market is a limiting factor for students that want to attend.
 - Residents living in the buildings being demolished (with Phase 2 of construction) have been given the most advance notice out of any students. The purpose of this amount of advance notice is to help students find alternative housing options.
- Is it a recruitment issue, to not have housing in SLC available for students?
 - Yes.
- University received loans for this project, has the University done any fundraising events for donating.
 - A lot of construction is happening on campus and not a lot of donations.
 - University has been continuously working to receive donations.
 - Based on the feedback we are receiving today, it is possible that the stipend needs to be higher for grad students.
- There is no way to justify rental rates with the graduate stipend. Is there any possibility to decrease the rental rates.
 - Rental rates were based on data over a long analysis process. Now that the rates have been released and student feedback is coming, there is the ability for more discussions with the University. Not a guarantee that it will change, not sure they will, but there is the possibility.
- Will displaced families have priority for Cedar apartments and Sunnyside Apartments in the family buildings?
 - Yes, you must fill out the transfer application though.
- Grad students will be homeless due to the large rental rate increase.

- We are going to try and work with every student that will be impacted to ensure that they find alternative housing if the Sunnyside Apartments does not work for them because of price, or furnishings, etc.

- **Resident recommendations**
 - Showing the construction timeline that is subject to change, rather than not showing any kind of schedule.
 - Base rental rates on student income and stipends.
 - Grandfathering rental rates to current residents whose buildings are scheduled to be demolished.
 - Don't think the money from the rent payments of the current students displaced by building demolition will have a big impact on the 50-year budget.
 - Another forum requested before medical towers are demolished.
 - A petition going around amongst residents to be presented to administration, includes different resident concerns and stories.

- **Questions and comments submitted via Zoom**
 - Grant Russum: So why did the U prepare so poorly for the "eviction" of the students in the medical plazas and the areas that are being closed? They are essentially making us pay 180% of our current amount with the VERY limited amount reasonably priced housing available in SLC. I do like how much time they have given us, but do they have funds available for the medical students who are paying \$64,000.00 per year.
 - Grant Russum: Also, how can I be sure that I'll get an email about the Sunnyside apartments application?
 - Ludovica Farese: Will the recording be sent to us? To our emails? Thanks so much! I have to head out
 - Cherelle Vaidya: Why were students placed in 100D AFTER you stopped accepting Aspen applications and knew the 100 court would be torn down soon?
 - Anonymous attendee: When can we accept the application portals open ? in the poll we were sent we were told we will get an email telling us when the portal will open so any idea when that would happen?
 - Grant Russum: Will there be any garages near the new apartments? I'd like to have my car covered
 - Hoa Nguyen: As a graduate student, my monthly stipend is ~\$2200. If I rent a 2BR Sunnyside apt, then the only amount left for my living is \$400, which is impossible to be survive! I think this situation would be the same for many students, especially international students. How the UoU solve this problem?
 - Anonymous attendee: A LOT of people won't be able to afford to live on campus
 - Hoa Nguyen: Will the rent of the existing Cedar apartments keep the 3% increasing per year as they do now?
 - Spencer Roberts: will there be hookups for laundry in the new 3 bedroom apts?

- Ayse Mubine Turkmen: Can current med plaza students be grandfathered in? Can we have a lower rent? We will graduate soon.
- Husile Bai: WOW ~ did not expect to hear that but I want to say that the housing for single student does matters, and I feel like admins don't care about singles, especially international individuals. So right now it seems like it makes sense to not getting any donations. The wording in the closure email is very arragent and both me and my roommate are both frustrated.
- Husile Bai: We all have furnitures in our apartment now and who needs furnitures at this point?
- ROSIE OJEDA: I agree with the frustration being expressed in this meeting. Could they consider offering lower rent or more options for graduate students who are going into their final year the next academic year? Are decisions final or our comments being used in decision-making?
- Husile Bai: We are seeking an option like move to the cider with roommate.
- Grant Russum: Can you keep some of the rooms in Sunnyside apartments Unfurnished?
- Anonymous attendee: I am wondering (a) when did they realized the economics of lower than market rates are disastrous? (b) why can't they implement higher density housing?
- Spencer Roberts: I have a concern about transportation to the student Life center. With the new construction that is happening nearby, there is no parking available close to the gym. Additionally, there is no direct transportation from the villages to the student life center, which makes it very had to use. Are there plans to make a bus route directly to the gym? If not, how do we make that a priority?
- Anonymous attendee: Will there be a situation where inspite of being given priority we might not get housing in the new student housing. The reason I ask is because if there is no 100% guarantee then should we have a plan B?
- Husile Bai: Where's the survey from? from current residents or just the random data from the past decades? We've been here for more than 2 years and never took any survey for the new apartment.

FALL FORUM VIDEO LINK

University Student Apartments: Fall Forum 2022
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SR1CZYGPFvA>



From: Fronberg, Erik
Sent: Friday, November 18, 2022 11:27 AM
To: 'Programs Resident Council' <usarescouncilprograms@gmail.com>
Subject: RE: (EXTERNAL) University Student Apartments resident council

Hi Natalie,

I'm happy to provide some information! Sorry about the slow reply, I had a busy week. I don't have information about graduate students specifically, but here on some numbers about affordability that you might find helpful.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development considers "Fair Market Rent" in 2023 in zip code 84108 to be:

Efficiency (Studio)	One-Bedroom	Two-Bedroom	Three-Bedroom	Four-Bedroom
\$1,060	\$1,270	\$1,520	\$2,080	\$2,330

Fair Market Rents are estimates of 40th percentile gross rents for standard quality units within an area. Basically, that just means it is what the Federal government considers reasonably affordable for an area. New units constructed in the last two years are not used when creating these estimates because they are generally more expensive – but it is still a good measure of what rent is fair for an area.

We define affordability as spending 30% or less of a household's combined income on housing costs (rent, utilities, fees, etc.). Folks spending more than 30% have a hard time meeting other expenses (food, transportation, education, healthcare, etc.). Here's a table that shows what affordable housing costs are at various income levels. I don't know what the average income for graduate students at the U is – this is something you might have to look into – but I imagine that it is probably in the 30% AMI range.

% of Area Median Income (AMI)	30%		50%		60%		80%		
	Household Size	Income	Housing Costs	Income	Housing Costs	Income	Housing Costs	Income	Housing Costs
1 Person		\$ 21,500	\$ 597	\$ 35,850	\$ 996	\$ 43,020	\$ 1,195	\$ 57,350	\$ 1,593
2 Person		\$ 24,600	\$ 683	\$ 41,000	\$ 1,139	\$ 49,200	\$ 1,367	\$ 65,550	\$ 1,821
3 Person		\$ 27,650	\$ 768	\$ 46,100	\$ 1,281	\$ 55,320	\$ 1,537	\$ 73,750	\$ 2,049
4 Person		\$ 30,700	\$ 853	\$ 51,200	\$ 1,422	\$ 61,440	\$ 1,707	\$ 81,900	\$ 2,275
5 Person		\$ 33,200	\$ 922	\$ 55,300	\$ 1,536	\$ 66,360	\$ 1,843	\$ 88,500	\$ 2,458
6 Person		\$ 35,650	\$ 990	\$ 59,400	\$ 1,650	\$ 71,280	\$ 1,980	\$ 95,050	\$ 2,640
7 Person		\$ 38,100	\$ 1,058	\$ 63,500	\$ 1,764	\$ 76,200	\$ 2,117	\$ 101,600	\$ 2,822
8 Person		\$ 40,550	\$ 1,126	\$ 67,600	\$ 1,878	\$ 81,120	\$ 2,253	\$ 108,150	\$ 3,004

I hope this is helpful!

ERIK FRONBERG

Community Development Grants Specialist
Housing Stability Division

DEPARTMENT of COMMUNITY and NEIGHBORHOODS

SALT LAKE CITY CORPORATION

TEL 801-535-7291

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<https://www.slc.gov/housingstability/>

Current Income Levels to Rental Rates Comparison

The below figures compare different levels of income and the percentage of the income that would be spent on rent given the current and proposed rental rates of the apartments within University Student Apartments.

Figure 1: The comparison of income to percent of income attributed to housing with rental rates of the existing units within University Student Apartments. A 30% line has been added for reference to the affordable housing level.

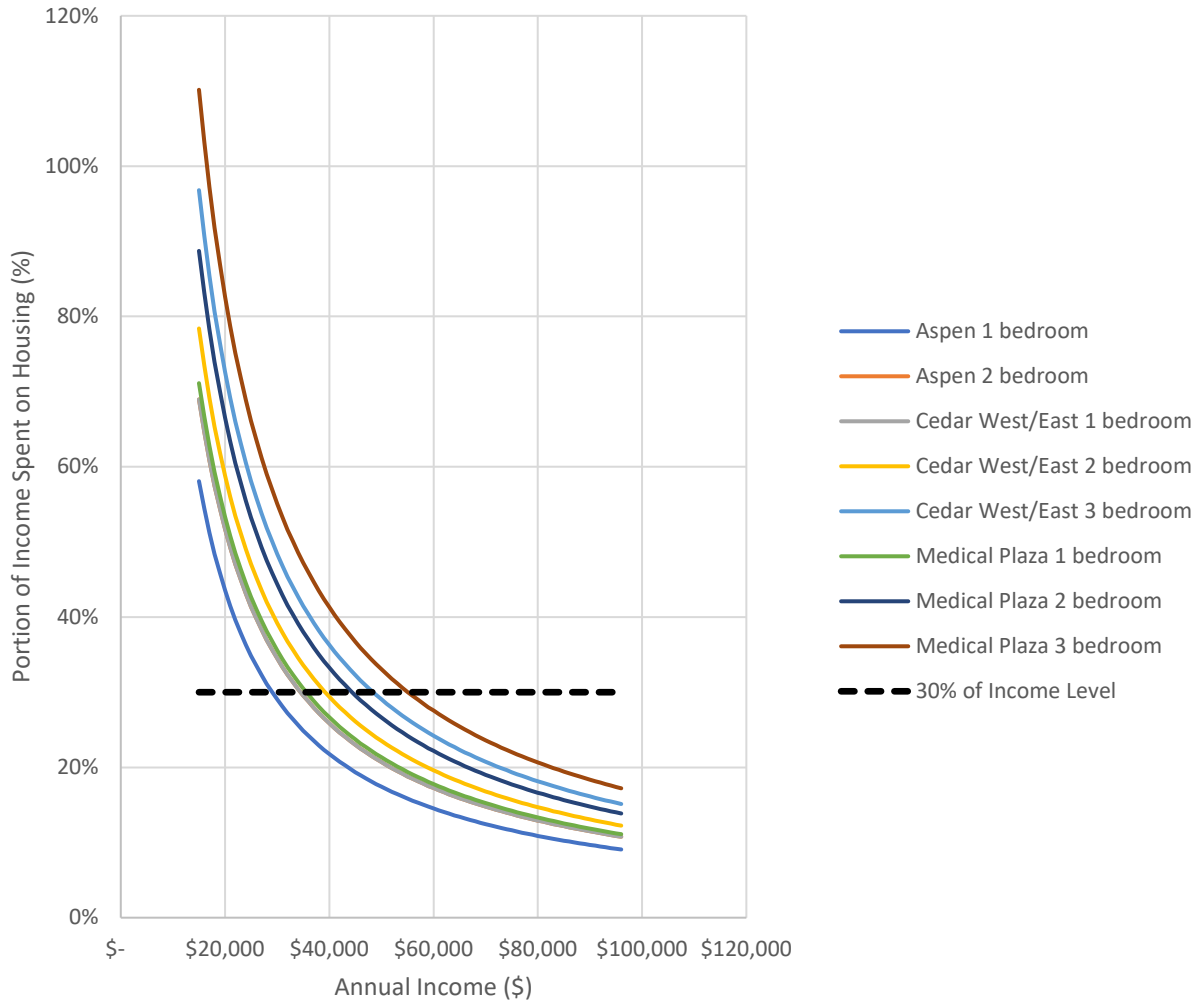
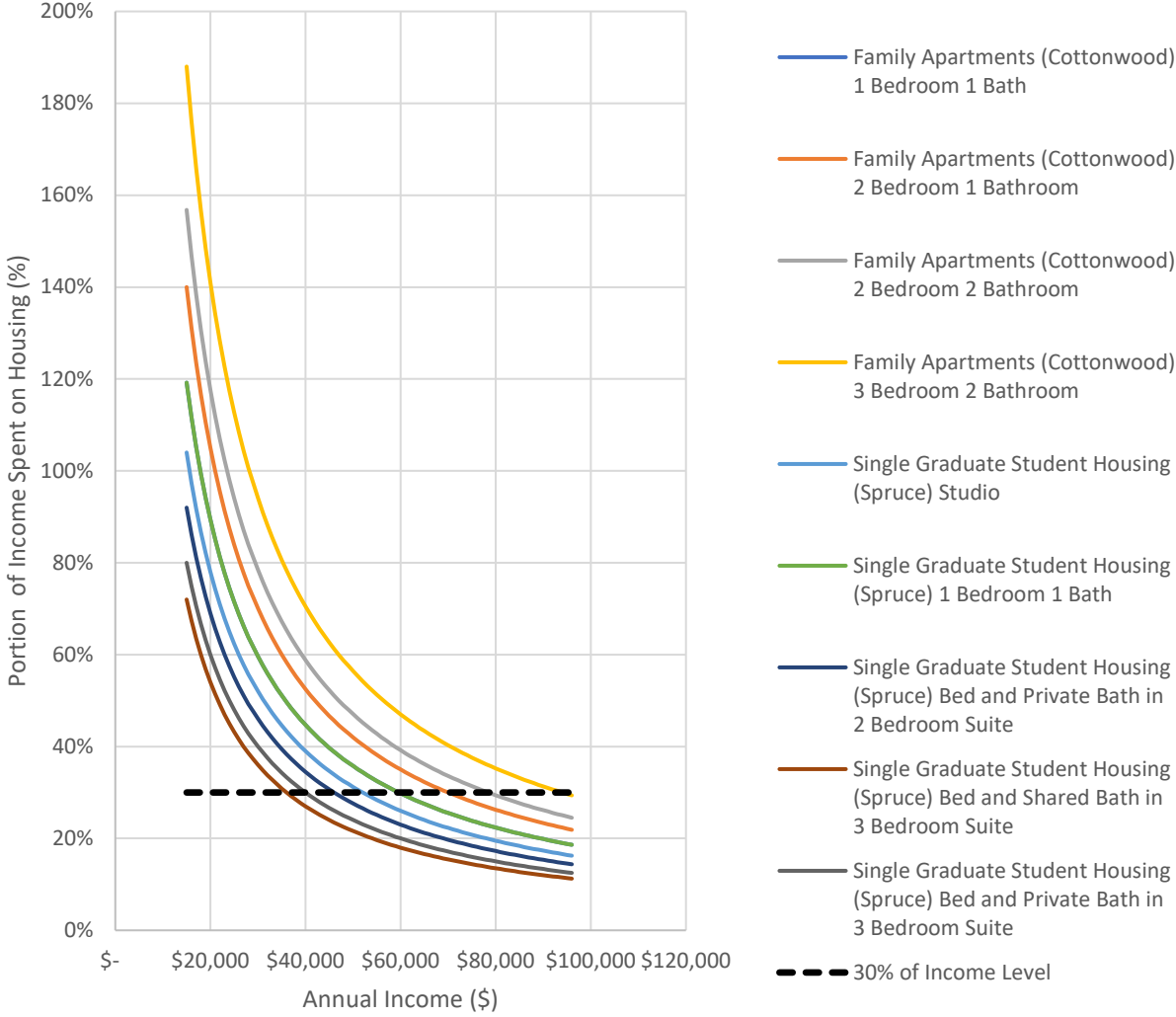


Figure 2: The comparison of income to percent of income attributed to housing with the proposed rental rates of the new Sunnyside apartments. A 30% line has been added for reference to the affordable housing level.



THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

'THROWING DOWN THE GAUNTLET'

Classes Are Canceled Across U. of California as Thousands of Workers Strike

By *Carolyn Kuimelis and Grace Mayer*

NOVEMBER 15, 2022



BRITTANY MURRAY, LONG BEACH PRESS-TELEGRAM, GETTY IMAGES

Union workers at UCLA were among the thousands demanding better pay and benefits.

This week, across the University of California's 10 campuses, many classes have been canceled or shifted to Zoom and research has stalled. Roughly 48,000 teaching assistants, student and academic researchers, and postdocs hit the picket line on Monday, calling for increased pay and better benefits.

Given the UC system's size, the scale of the strike is significant. United Auto Workers, the labor union representing the UC employees, says it is the largest work stoppage at any higher-education institution in history. If it continues, the strike could also disrupt final exams.

Many academic workers told *The Chronicle* that the disruption is necessary to pressure the university system to raise their pay. They said their current salaries fall well below the cost of living in California, one of the most expensive states.

FROM THE CHRONICLE STORE



REPORT

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Some teaching assistants are making [just over \\$23,000](#) a year, and 40 percent of graduate workers reported spending more than half of their income on rent, [according to a union survey](#). Their other demands include sustainable transportation benefits, reimbursements for childcare and international scholars' visa fees, and improved disability accommodations.

Some graduate students said the working conditions have made them consider leaving academe altogether. And professors said they're worried they won't be able to attract researchers to the UC system.

Union efforts among academic workers have picked up over the last decade, including many organizing campaigns and strikes since the pandemic hit. At the University of Kansas, 1,500 workers announced on Tuesday that they [intended to unionize](#), which would establish the first-ever union at the institution. Adjunct professors at New York University and the New School could soon go on strike. Graduate students at Yale University will [vote on unionization](#) later this month. Workers are bargaining for better working conditions and wages, especially since inflation has increased their financial stress.

“The quality of education that we’re able to offer also suffers when we’re struggling to make rent.”

All UC-system campuses will remain open during the strike, a university spokesperson wrote in a statement to *The Chronicle*, and “have been preparing to

mitigate the impact of any strike activity on our students by ensuring, to the extent possible, continuity of instruction and research.” The system is encouraging faculty members to provide additional support and resources to students during the strike, the spokesperson said.

“Additionally, campuses will be prepared for contingencies should a strike interfere with the conclusion of the academic term,” the statement added.

University-system officials believe the best path to an agreement with the union is through a third-party mediator, a spokesperson wrote in a statement to *The Chronicle* on Monday afternoon, which they have proposed to the United Auto Workers.

‘Plant the Seeds for Sustainable Reform’

Some faculty members said they’ve been left with questions about how to maintain “continuity” and proceed with their courses, as well as what right they have to respect picket lines amid the strike. Meanwhile, other instructors have canceled classes and paused their research in solidarity with the striking workers.

The Council of the University of California Faculty Associations, which is an umbrella group for faculty associations across the UC system, recently published a [guide](#) informing faculty of their right under California [law](#) to abstain from teaching and research in order to not to cross the picket line.

“It’s not the striking workers that are hurting undergraduates’ ability to learn,” said Charmaine Chua, an assistant professor of global studies at UC-Santa Barbara. “It is the university’s refusal to pay workers enough to live here that is harming undergraduate students’ ability to learn.”

Grad students said they hope the strike helps university officials realize how much they contribute to the university.

“We do the vast majority of instructional work and research at UC,” said Yunyi Li, a Ph.D. candidate in cinema and media studies and a teaching fellow at UCLA. Li also holds a leadership role in UAW 2865, one of the branches within United Auto Workers.

Li said this semester marks her ninth time working as a teaching assistant. She chose to live 10 miles away from UCLA’s campus, where rent was more affordable. Still, to pay her rent, she has had to work a second job and apply for awards and fellowships.

“The quality of education that we’re able to offer also suffers when we’re struggling to make rent,” Li said. “There were definitely times where, given the salary and working conditions, it has made me want to leave academia.”

Bernard Remollino, a graduate-student researcher and teaching assistant at UCLA, lived out of his car from 2018 to 2019, struggling to find safe parking spots every night while juggling his dissertation and teaching responsibilities. Before moving into his car, Remollino said he had to funnel 80 percent of his stipend back into covering rent for the graduate-student housing offered by the university. Sometimes, he had to decide between setting aside money for rent and eating dinner on a given night.

Remollino has now moved into an apartment that he shares with his partner. But he’s making just enough to get by — and that’s with a second job as an adjunct professor at a community college.

“We’re definitely not only doing this for the present moment,” Remollino said. “We’re trying to plant the seeds for sustainable reform within the university system.”

Faculty Voice Support

Since the strike began, research that is primarily conducted by graduate students has been put on hold. That includes important cancer experiments at the University of California at San Francisco, faculty members said.

Noelle L'Etoile, an associate professor in the department of cell and tissue biology at UCSF, said she believes a majority of faculty members support the union's demands, particularly increasing wages. But L'Etoile worries about where the funding will come from. In her lab, graduate workers' pay comes out of grants from the National Institutes of Health — “static amounts of money,” L'Etoile said. She wishes the university would find a way to help pay for higher wages.

If poor working conditions aren't fixed, professors will struggle to hire graduate workers, she said.

“Our jobs are on the line because we can't recruit students and postdocs to do the jobs that we need them to do,” L'Etoile said. “Because they could go elsewhere.”

Margot Bezruczyk, a union member who works as a postdoc at the UC-managed Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, worries about how the strike will affect the lab's research in the short term. But the low pay, she said, is leading to high turnover.

“It really hurts the quality of research that we can do in the lab,” Bezruczyk said. “If people were paid a salary that they felt comfortable with, we would be able to keep people longer, finish projects, and get better papers.”

On Monday, Tobias Higbie, a professor of history and labor studies at UCLA and a director of the Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, attended a rally in the afternoon. While walking across UCLA's campus, he saw picket lines surrounding academic buildings.

“A lot of faculty support the strike. They understand there are deep structural problems with the way we fund higher education,” Higbie said, “and that the way the graduate assistants are paid is a real problem and a long standing problem.”

At the UCLA rally, graduate workers carried picket signs and marched in a circle around the campus's central plaza. At UC-Santa Barbara, students and workers marched around campus for over an hour; at one point they came through the campus library, where undergraduates cheered them on.

“This generation is kind of throwing down the gauntlet for the older folks to reimagine what higher education could be like,” Higbie said.

Clarification (Nov. 18, 2022, 11:10 a.m.): This story has been updated to clarify the role played by the Council of the University of California Faculty Associations.

We welcome your thoughts and questions about this article. Please [email the editors](#) or [submit a letter](#) for publication.

LABOR

HIRING & RETENTION

CAREER PREPARATION

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IN THE CHRONICLE STORE

OUR COLUMNISTS

WHAT'S AT STAKE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA GRADUATE-WORKER STRIKE

The seventy per cent of Americans who support unions should understand that the future of organized labor won't be in coal mines or steel mills but in places that might cut against the stereotypes.



By Jay Caspian Kang

November 29, 2022

That rent is too high and pay is too low is the biggest unifying concern for the forty-eight thousand U.C. graduate students and postdocs on strike. Photograph by Tayfun Coskun / Anadolu Agency / Getty

For much of the public, organized labor has an image that's rooted in nostalgia: hands getting dirtied, faces smudged with soot, lives at risk from one piece of heavy machinery or another. This is an outdated vision of work and union organizing in a country whose industrial and manufacturing core is evaporating. But the fantasy that all labor is blue-collar persists, in large part, because organized labor itself has become much less of a daily presence in the lives of most Americans. People in leftist circles constantly circulate two facts that, at first glance, seem to be contradictory. The first is that only around ten per cent of employed Americans are part of a labor union. The second is that, despite the decline in participation, more than seventy per cent of Americans, according to a recent Gallup poll, support labor unions—the highest favorability since 1965.

The mismatch between public opinion and reality comes from a host of external pressures, whether globalization and the shipping of former union jobs to foreign countries; the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, which restricted union activity; or the aggressive, increasingly creative, and legally and societally condoned manner in which corporations break up organizing efforts. But there also seems to be a lag between the public conception of who participates in organized labor, and what jobs actually look like today.



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A few days before students filed out of town for Thanksgiving break, I spent some time walking around the campus of the University of California, Berkeley. Some forty-eight thousand unionized graduate-student and postdoctoral workers, who are represented by the United Auto Workers, across the ten campuses of the University of California (U.C.) system had recently gone out on strike. At first, many of the striking workers had gathered near Sproul Hall, the traditional protest space in town and the site where, in 1964, Mario Savio famously told his fellow-participants in the Free Speech Movement to “put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels.” But, on the day of my visit, that site had been largely abandoned because the conservative provocateur Matt Walsh had arrived on

campus for his “What Is a Woman?” tour. The workers didn’t want to get dragged into what many saw as a stunt.

Some graduate workers assembled, instead, in a small plaza near the law school. I followed a group who split off to form a picket line in front of the International House, where there was a planned furniture drop-off that day. An organizer said the goal was to block this to create as much disruption as possible. The vast majority of drivers passing by honked their horns, drawing cheers from the crowd.

The graduate workers’ list of demands is long, and has included child-care subsidies and better health care, but the main concern comes from the tension between the traditionally low stipends that graduate students receive and the high cost of living in California. A survey conducted by the U.A.W. found that ninety-two per cent of graduate-student workers spend more than thirty per cent of their salaries on rent, which qualifies them as “rent burdened” by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

That rent is too high and pay is too low is the biggest unifying concern for the forty-eight thousand on strike, but many also have grave concerns about their lives after graduate school. In the line, I met Joel Auerbach, a third-year Ph.D. candidate in the rhetoric department with the swarthy good looks and muted yet fidgety mannerisms of a young Mark Ruffalo. Like many doctoral students in the humanities, Auerbach faces a shrinking academic job market and great uncertainty about the employment value of his degree.

The graduate-student-worker arrangement, Auerbach told me, is premised on a kind of apprenticeship model. “You don’t make very much as a grad student, and you’re expected to do menial tasks for your professors. And eventually, you replace them and you have that job security at the end of the line,” Auerbach said. “That’s increasingly not the case today. Those tenure-track jobs have really dried up. So for many of us, that same deal that made the whole thing function is really no

longer on the table, which means that the way that we're paid in the meantime is much more significant."

Some strikers expressed a worry about a potential divide between science and math workers, and their colleagues in the humanities. This, at least to me, seems like the most concerning potential breaking point for the strikes. The difference is less ideological, and more a reflection of the state of job markets. STEM graduate workers are not beholden to the academy to pursue a career in their fields; in fact, many have little interest in staying in the academy after they receive their degrees when they can instead use their credentials to enter high-paying careers in tech, pharma, aerospace, or finance. The system still works, in large part, for them.

This is not true for humanities workers. Their degrees will likely help them find employment, but the connections between their studies and their labor will be far more tenuous, or, in many cases, more or less nonexistent. Right now, the great point of leverage that the strikers seem to have is the simple fact that finals are coming up, and it's difficult to see how undergraduates and faculty will be able to finish up their semester without the mass of graduate students who do everything from proctoring exams to grading papers. But, once that passes and the new year begins, how many STEM graduate students who have six-figure jobs waiting for them will grow tired of delaying their research and their dissertations? How long will solidarity last between people who, for the most part, have entirely different incentives for their graduate work?

One would think that, in a country where people are overwhelmingly in favor of unions, there would be broad support of the U.C. graduate-student strike. The comparison of average salaries and rent should be enough. But although there hasn't been much outward public resistance, there's still an undercurrent of head-scratching about what, exactly, a strike of graduate students actually means. Auerbach and his fellow humanities graduate workers, of course, signed up for this arrangement; the precarity of the academic job market isn't exactly new or something that has materialized over the past three years. If there simply aren't

enough jobs for humanities doctorates, should it follow that universities should enroll fewer humanities doctorates, over all, and that the ones remaining might receive better pay and benefits as a result? There are also questions about how seriously we should take claims of precarity from the academic elite—perhaps a doctoral student might not be able to find a job as a tenure-track professor, but their educational background would set them up for any number of stable positions in other fields.

These questions, whether fair or not, linger at the edges of the strike. I have heard them around campus, and in private conversations with friends and colleagues. They bring up the central contradiction at the heart of the country's perception of labor: people want to support unions, but their sympathies are limited by their ideas of what unions should be.

But the surplus of humanities doctorates, of course, is not an accident. Around the turn of the millennium, the number of students pursuing undergraduate degrees was exploding, and, as Kevin Carey wrote in a thorough breakdown for the *Times*, the proportion of stable teaching jobs wasn't keeping up. Adjunct faculty and graduate students were employed to make up for the shortage. If universities cannot function without a fleet of low-wage workers who are exploited under a false promise of better future employment, the solution seems relatively simple: abandon the apprenticeship model and all its sentimental trappings, and simply treat and pay graduate workers as professionals first, students second.

As I was leaving the strike, I saw a woman on stilts wearing a Rosie the Riveter dress and singing Woody Guthrie's "Union Burying Ground" into a megaphone. After she was finished, there was some discussion among her group about whether the lyrics might have been a bit macabre, or perhaps too obscure. This scene, I admit, was the sort of funny observation that reporters collect in their notebooks and seed throughout their pieces in place of pure editorializing about how they feel about their reportage. The image of graduate students at one of the most prestigious universities in the world draping themselves in the images of home-

front workers who built ships during the Second World War might carry a tinge of irony or, perhaps, misaligned nostalgia. Even so, the seventy per cent of Americans who support unions should understand that the future of organized labor won't be in coal mines or steel mills but in places that might cut against the stereotypes, in spaces that might be hard to recognize. The Rosie the Riveter museum is situated ten miles north of campus, on the waterfront of Richmond, California. One can honor all that it stands for—the ships, the labor, the camaraderie—while still recognizing that it is a museum for a reason. ♦

Share your thoughts and questions about this column by e-mailing the author at jaykangnewsletter@newyorker.com.

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Give all PhD scholars a living wage now

The cost-of-living crisis is a fundamental threat for PhD scholars and early-career researchers. They need to be paid properly.

Nature's periodic survey of PhD candidates and postgraduate students is our regular check-in with the next generation of scholarly talent. This year's survey should set loud alarm bells ringing for anyone involved with recruiting and training the next generation of researchers. It demands swift, decisive action from governments and funding agencies to secure the future of science and the broader economic and social benefits that flow from it.

As we report on page 189, some 85% of the self-selected 3,253 respondents from around the world are concerned about surging inflation. Three-quarters of them are PhD candidates. Forty-five per cent of all respondents tell us that inflation will "negatively impact" their decision to complete their projects or courses. "It's hard to feel like I'm valued as a researcher when I'm worrying about paying for car repairs or getting groceries from the food bank," one master's student told us in the survey's free-text section. This is by no means an isolated comment in our survey.

Financial distress isn't a rite of passage or a temporary inconvenience. It could be an existential threat to today's PhD scholars and master's students. If it is, then it will also be an existential threat to research itself. If students don't have the resources to support themselves, they can't put their full efforts into their training and development. And if their stipends aren't keeping pace with rising rents and the cost of groceries and fuel, any gaps will only grow with time – with devastating results for the ability of research to attract the best talent.

Student walkouts

Not that these results come as any surprise. Organizations that represent students and early-career researchers have already been trying to attract attention to their plight. On 11 October, a graduate-student group at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, staged a walkout as part of an ongoing protest calling for a guaranteed living wage and for the kinds of rights and benefits that come with academic employment contracts. The group is also looking to form a union, which it wants Dartmouth to recognize.

In September, Ireland's PhD students organized a protest in Dublin, as part of a campaign with the country's university association for a substantial increase in PhD stipends. They are also calling for paid sick leave and parental leave. In July, UK graduate students similarly organized protests

and launched a campaign demanding more funding support from the country's largest public funder, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

At the time, a UKRI representative told *Nature*: "We recognize the rising cost of living is affecting postgraduate researchers. As such, we are actively talking to other bodies across the sector about whether we could provide further support." To its credit, the agency followed through, on 1 October, by increasing the minimum PhD student stipend for 2022–23 to £17,668 (US\$20,400), a boost of more than £2,000 per year. However, even the boosted amount is still below £20,000, which is the amount a full-time worker paid the UK 'real living wage' of £10.90 an hour would earn over a year.

Graduate students' stipends are also well below the cost of living in the United States, a gap that has widened with increasing inflation, according to a survey conducted in May by two graduate students: Michelle Gaynor, a fourth-year PhD student in evolutionary biology at the University of Florida in Gainesville, and Rhett Rautsaw, a fifth-year PhD student in evolutionary biology at Clemson University in South Carolina. Globally, in fact, there are few examples of PhD programmes that pay a living wage.

The resulting financial pressures weigh more heavily on some than on others. They bear down particularly hard on people from low-income households, those who might be first in their families to go to university, and people from under-represented or historically marginalized groups – the very people whom universities are working diligently to recruit and retain.

If these students are unable to complete their research programmes, then research's mission to increase inclusion and diversity will be in jeopardy, too. "If programmes aren't meeting the basic cost of living, who are we selecting for? People who have financial support or external fellowships?" Gaynor told *Nature* in May (see *Nature* 605, 775–777; 2022).

Institutions need to re-evaluate their approach to PhD support. They could, for example, regard PhD candidates as employees subject to local living-wage rules. However, this might not be possible everywhere. Those universities unable to support a living wage should consider waiving any prohibitions on graduate students working during their PhD.

Advocating for change is physically and emotionally taxing for students and scholars on top of their day jobs. It shouldn't have to be like this. It shouldn't take organized protests and letter-writing campaigns to spur action. Stipends must pay a living wage, and it must be recognized that inflation erodes the value of salaries.

Greater funding is not always the answer to problems in research. But this isn't just a case of dollars, euros, pounds, or yuan. It's a matter of priorities. Universities, funding agencies and governments know that today's PhD candidates and master's students will be tomorrow's principal investigators and team leaders. They will be in academia, in industry, in the public sector and in non-governmental organizations. Research needs researchers to stay on to complete their studies – and that requires them to be able to pay their way.

“Advocating for change is physically and emotionally taxing for students and scholars.”

STUDENTS NOVEMBER 28, 2022

U grapples with graduate student compensation

REBECCA WALSH - UNIVERSITY OF UTAH COMMUNICATIONS

Graduate student pay is top of mind this fall at the University of Utah.

Protests by University of California teaching and research assistants and the phased demolition of family and graduate apartments in University Student Apartments West Village and Medical Plaza have raised questions about how graduate students are compensated and what they pay in rent for university housing.

University leaders are setting up a task force to study the issue and report back with recommendations in 2023.

“The University of Utah wants to be part of the solution to this structural gap challenging higher education institutions across our country,” said President Taylor Randall. “These students are a very important part of the future of higher education in this country. They will be future researchers and educators for generations to come.”

This fall, 8,650 graduate students are enrolled at the university and just under 2,500 are employed as teaching and research assistants. Most graduate student instructors and researchers are paid through a combination of state-funded tuition waivers and salaries set by their colleges and departments—ranging from \$7,890 per semester paid by the College of Fine Arts to \$25,000 per semester at the School of Medicine. The average is just over \$9,500 a semester.

All U graduate student instructors and researchers receive a minimum of \$24,000 in tuition waivers and health benefits. Each year, the university provides \$43 million in tuition waivers and another \$2.5 million in health benefits.

Still, following several years of escalating housing prices in Salt Lake City and nationwide inflation, David Kieda, dean of the Graduate School, is advocating for the university to raise graduate students' minimum compensation package.



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Adding to the pinch, some graduate students and their faculty advisors are upset about projected rent increases in new family and graduate student housing [currently under construction](#) at University Student Apartments' West Village at the corner of Sunnyside Avenue and Foothill Blvd. University of Utah Auxiliary Services sent notices on Oct. 21 to residents of the remaining 334 units in University West Village and Medical Plaza. The single and married graduate students who live in the apartments have until August 2023 to find off-campus housing or express interest and receive priority for new housing.

Proposed market-rate rents posted for the new buildings have raised alarms among many of the 490 residents impacted. University family and graduate housing are particularly critical for international graduate students, who may begin their work and education at the U. without the ability to qualify to rent other housing in the Salt Lake City market. Most do not have Social Security numbers and cannot complete a credit and reference check. University Student Apartments can help build that rental history.

The apartments were built in 1961 and 1971, and have long outlived their usefulness, said Jennifer Reed, associate vice president of Auxiliary Services. The bonds that funded the original buildings were paid off years ago and rents in the buildings have been kept artificially low—ranging from \$725 to \$1,550 per unit—as university leaders worked on a master plan to replace the aging apartments. With university apartment rents so low, the Medical Plaza and both University West and University East Village have 12-month-long wait lists.

At the same time, the university is beginning to struggle to maintain the aging buildings. Pipe breaks are common, including one middle-of-the-night flood over a Medical Towers student's bedroom this fall. The student had to be moved and the apartment closed.

The new apartments will cost between \$900 to \$2,350 a month, essentially the market rate for a downtown Salt Lake City studio or one- to three-bedroom unit. Laundry, internet and campus shuttle service are provided free of charge.

“We know these new rents have surprised some of our residents,” said Reed. “We have not kept up with the Salt Lake City market. But with the aging housing, we were providing, we didn't feel comfortable raising rents at the same rate as the city market. We may have done the students a disservice in the process.”

The adjusted rental rates were set based on \$126 million in bonds issued to cover the cost of the new construction. State law requires that auxiliary services—including parking, the Campus Store, the stadium and arena and student housing—be self-sustaining. Rental income from the buildings will be used to pay those bonds over the next 30 years.

The market-rate rents also are a matter of fairness, Reed said, with students in other campus housing, including residence halls, paying above-market rates in some cases.

“It is likely that there are some students who have lived in our apartments who are going to have to go off campus because the new rates don't meet their budgets,” she said, “which is why we tried to give them as much time as possible to find alternatives.”

Academic Senate members discussed the rent increases at a Nov. 7 meeting. And a group of village residents crowded into a forum with Auxiliary Services last month.

“It's a perfect storm,” said Vahe Bandarian, associate dean for student affairs in the College of Science. “Students are unhappy because they are not feeling much support and faculty are feeling the pressure on their grants as they try to increase student stipends.”

While graduate students have until August to prepare for the housing closures, the issue of any changes in graduate student compensation will be decided in the institution's budgeting process. Randall will present the university's budget to state lawmakers early next year. The next fiscal year begins July 1, 2023.

“Anyone in higher education these days is concerned about the rising cost of attendance,” Reed said. “It is hard to make ends meet with the cost of higher education right now. We all are concerned about the rising cost of attendance and what that's doing to access for students.”

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Some University of Utah students will lose their housing unless they can pay nearly double

Some grad students and families must choose pricey new campus housing or even pricier places in town.



(Illustration by Christopher Cherrington | The Salt Lake Tribune)

By Sofia Jeremias | Nov. 29, 2022, 6:07 a.m. | Updated: 2:44 p.m.

This story is part of The Salt Lake Tribune's ongoing commitment to identify solutions to Utah's biggest challenges through the work of the Innovation Lab.



That changed. Rental prices rose just as Kok and his partner welcomed a third member into their family. Surviving off their meager incomes grew more difficult with skyrocketing rents and a baby.



Luckily, about two years ago they managed to secure a spot in the U.'s affordable graduate housing. They moved into a two-bedroom apartment in a complex called the “West Village” which cost just \$980 a month.

Kok continued his research, which he described as, “focusing on different theoretical models for parasite research or parasite epidemiology,” as his partner worked part time at a preschool.

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That stability came to an end on Oct. 21. They received an email informing the family that in August 2023 they'd have to move out. Additionally, 334 other apartments would be shut down as part of a phased closure and demolition of the old, increasingly decrepit, graduate and family student housing they had called home for the past two years.

“We can just barely afford what we’re affording now,” Kok said. “I just don’t see how I can move my family out and afford what’s out there at the moment.”

Sunnyside Apartments, new graduate and family housing, will open next August. There will be 565 “total rentable spaces.” A two-bedroom unit will cost \$1,750 a month — a \$770 increase from what Kok currently pays.

He is just one of many U. graduate students who won’t be able to afford the new housing on campus. Apartments available off campus are [equally or more expensive](#). While a relatively small portion of the U.’s grad students live in the below-market apartments on campus, their plight sheds light on the precarity of students, especially those with families, attempting to survive off meager stipends in an increasingly unaffordable city.

“It’s an emotional toll,” Kok said. “How are we supposed to survive?”



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This past fall semester the U. offered **over 5,000 beds**, and U. President Taylor Randall hopes to provide about **11,000 students** with on-campus housing by 2027.

Meanwhile, the West Village, East Village and Medical Plaza, built between 50 to 60 years ago, have served families and graduate students at the U. for generations. Loans taken out to build the complexes were paid off decades ago, explained Jennifer Reed, associate vice president of auxiliary services. Without debt payments to make, the U. opted to keep the apartments' rents "artificially low."



(Trent Nelson | The Salt Lake Tribune) The Medical Plaza Towers at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City on Tuesday, Nov. 22, 2022.

The complexes are now nearly impossible to maintain, Reed said. Plumbing is disintegrating — in one case a pipe burst over a student's bed. The U. has had to put more and more students up in hotel rooms as major repairs are made. The buildings also do not comply with current seismic codes.

With all those factors in mind, a decade ago plans to eventually demolish and replace the apartments were set in motion, Reed said.

The notice on Oct. 31 marked an early part of that phased closure process — 208 apartments were already shuttered. By 2030, the Medical Towers and East and West Villages, which collectively counted 1,115 apartments, will likely be demolished.



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For now, apartments in the Medical Plaza and sections of the West Villages are closing.

Some students living in those buildings can sign up for the waitlist to move into another one of the older buildings yet to be slated for demolition, but demand exceeds capacity.

The new apartments currently under construction were financed with a \$126-million bond, which the university will repay over the next 30 years, Reed said. The U. must charge higher rates to pay off that debt, she said.

“It is likely there are some students that are going to have to go off campus because the new rates don’t work for their budget,” Reed said. “And that’s why we tried to give so much notice so that students had time to make those plans.”

She also noted that “the largest percentage of our students are renting off campus.” Roughly 490 graduate students are housed in University Student Apartments, while there are more than 8,000 students pursuing graduate degrees at the U.



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“We’re committed to housing a certain percentage of this population of students,” Reed said. “And I think it’s a really great opportunity. But we understand that this transition period, from old to new, is difficult for a lot of students.”

Agonizing and organizing

Facing the loss of their affordable housing, grad students are organizing.

In a [Nov. 1 forum](#), Reed addressed residents about the decision to close some of the apartments. The forum grew heated toward the end, as some students described the decision as “a slap in the face.”

“It’s a bit devastating for us,” another student said.

There’s some hope that administrators will have a change of heart and adjust rental rates for students finishing up their degrees.

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“We hope that they’ll do something to help the students,” said Blake Billings, mayor of University Student Apartments resident council and a PhD student in chemical engineering.

He said the demolition of the 700 court in the West Village and the Medical Towers came as a surprise to students. “There are students there who were planning on paying the rent in that building for the entirety of their degree,” Billings said. “And now they’re looking at doubling their rent to move farther away from campus.”



(Leah Hogsten | The Salt Lake Tribune) Blake Billings, a University of Utah chemical engineering PhD student, who also serves as mayor of the graduate housing resident council, in the University Student Apartments courtyard, Nov. 23, 2022.

A [petition](#) asking administrators to, in part, “limit the price differences to an affordable range based on the students’ incomes and stipends,” has circulated and meetings with U. administrators are in the works.

Ava Anjom and Mehdi Eskandari-Ghadi, who organized the petition, say they’ve received 158 signatures so far.

The pair shared some of the responses they received with the Tribune. “The new rental rates are unethical and will leave many grad students homeless,” one student wrote. Another shared that the new rent would be more than 60% of their income.

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In December, Billings and other students will discuss the situation with a group of administrators, including university CFO Cathy Anderson; Lori McDonald, vice president for student affairs; David Kieda, dean of the graduate school; and Reed.

“I think our administration is willing to listen to student concerns and then determine whether or not they can make a change to the decisions that have already been made regarding rental rates,” Reed said.

But, Reed continued, if the U. were to grandfather some graduate students into the new buildings at their older rental prices, this “provides a subsidy to some students that isn’t provided to others so we need to be careful about what sort of aid we’re providing based on circumstance.”

What about raising stipends?

“We’re trying to come up with a list of solutions,” Billings said. Increasing grad student stipends so they can actually afford rents on and off campus is one option.

Kok makes about \$23,000 per academic year as a research assistant at the U.

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About 2,500 graduates receive a tuition benefit, said U. Graduate School Dean David Kieda. That benefit includes “free base graduate tuition” and a stipend for teaching and research.

Kieda said the minimum stipend set by the U. is about \$9,000 each fall and spring semester and \$5,000 for summer. How much a graduate student is paid varies greatly by department, with STEM students tending to make more and humanities and social sciences students less.

After doing a quick calculation of rent, gas and insurance costs, Kieda estimated that graduate students making the minimum stipend have about \$65 a week to live on.

Life for those making that minimum stipend, Kieda said, is not easy. “If you go to the hospital, there’s a \$75 copay for the emergency room. So I get to choose between eating this week, or going to the hospital in an emergency.”

“We have to do better than that,” Kieda said. “We have to have more funds available and [give students] the ability to not live so close to the edge.”





potential way to ease financial stress for graduate students living both on and off campus.

Kieda is particularly worried about what the low stipends, paired with rising rents, will mean for first-generation or low-income college students' access to graduate degrees.

Living off \$24,000 a year is far easier if you have parents that can help out. For those that don't, they can take out loans, but students living on lower incomes also tend to be more debt averse, Kieda said.

"If you don't give students enough money, they're going to go out and work some other job, which has nothing to do with their teaching or their research. I'd rather have them do the research or the teaching."

Billings said with his \$38,000 a year stipend, he is "more blessed than most." His apartment complex is yet to be scheduled for demolition and he'll continue paying a lower rate. Even though he's luckier than others, with two children and a third on the way, his family must be cautious with their pocketbook.

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They take advantage of free programs on campus for entertainment and enrolled in [WIC](#) for help with buying staples like yogurt, eggs and cheese. "Most of my friends are on WIC if they have kids," Billings said.

He's trying to complete his degree without acquiring any student loans — "I don't know if it would be a reality if we had the higher rent," he said. And if loans were required to complete his education, "I probably would have gone to a different school," Billings said.

Kieda said he's spoken with the CFO of the U., and students like Billings are also speaking with administrators about raising stipends, or looking into housing subsidies. Then, on Monday at 5 p.m., U. spokesperson Rebecca Walsh emailed The Tribune stating that "university leaders have decided to establish a task force to look at graduate student compensation." The task force will report its findings next year, Walsh wrote.

That leaves students like Kok hoping that by next Aug. 1, when they're forced to leave their apartment, some solution will have materialized.

For now, Kok said, "I have to compartmentalize."



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Data Collected on College Student Mental Health

In 2020, suicide was the leading cause of death for Utahns ages 10 to 24 and the second leading cause of death for ages 25 to 44. Compared to other states in the United States, Utah ranks sixth highest for age-adjusted death by suicide (Utah Department of health, 2021).

Further research has highlighted that Utah students experience high levels of mental illness. Brown and Utah System for Higher Education (2019) performed a public survey of 5202 students in all Utah public colleges, including the University of Utah.

In 2019, college students in Utah endorsed alarming mental health statistics:

- 71.1% felt depressed

- 63% felt overwhelming anxiety

- 45.6% reported that their depression inhibited their ability to function

- 9.3% intentionally injured themselves

- 14.9% seriously considered suicide

University of Utah administration increased student counseling staffing by 75% to meet the growing demand for mental health services (Wood, 2020). In addition, all syllabi for courses taught at the University of Utah contain links to mental health resources for students.

Sources

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THE BIG COMEBACK

Today’s grad and family housing is better than ever, w updated facilities and resources that serve the whole li the student.

by Camille Perlman

When asked to reflect on what graduate and family housing looks like and he was designed in the 1960s and 1970s, people use words like *basic* or *bare*. A Jordan Gatewood, principal at Mackey Mitchell Architects, puts it, “These developments typically were devoid of charm and any real amenities. Many these family housing projects are often characterized by very basic two-sto buildings with outboard walkways, little to no accessibility, few amenities, and a good deal of def maintenance because it has been progressively devalued.” And because of the deferred maintena cost and continuous loss of value, many of these complexes were left as is and faded out of hou inventory in the early 2000s.

It wasn’t until the 2010s that grad housing started to make a comeback. Recognizing that graduat students are needed to further research initiatives and provide teaching resources, campuses beg build facilities that checked all the boxes for what grad students wanted in campus housing: that affordable, conveniently located, and well stocked with amenities. “Most campuses recognize tha graduate scholars are the lifeblood of the university,” says Jennifer Nelson Martinez, senior direc graduate and family housing at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). “They are involved an spearhead the labor behind the majority of research and teaching at the university. They are direc connected to significant amounts of grant funding that universities receive. As a result, campuse the country have prioritized graduate education to meet these research and teaching goals.”



IN THIS ARTICLE

FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

Complete a market analysis of housing options for students on and off campus. Review and update the housing master plan to make necessary changes to assumptions, strategies, or needs.

CORE COMPETENCIES: FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

Many graduate students have financial const that determine what kind of housing they ca afford. As Martinez explains, “Rental prices increased nationwide, further contributing tc graduate students being rent-burdened and l challenges meeting basic needs. Additionally, graduate students struggle with assistantship stipends that may not cover the cost of atter and have work restrictions that limit their inc Providing adequate amounts of quality hous

graduate students is key to attracting, retaining, and supporting top doctoral students.” Gatewo emphasizes the importance of accommodating non-traditional students as well, since they can a significant portion of the grad student population on some campuses. “As demographics shift, institutions are also recognizing the need to support enrollment goals by accommodating increas numbers of non-traditional students and veterans. Having this type of housing product on camp especially appealing to international graduate and doctoral students, both with and without famil

may prefer to live near campus and not have to deal with things that come with living off campus: landlord contracts, setting up utilities, transportation, etc.”



Graduate housing, like that at Texas Tech University, has to be able to compare with off-campus options. *Photo courtesy Mackey Mitchell Architects.*

Even though this type of housing is greatly needed, campuses, designers, and architects have had to work together to find that sweet spot between a reasonable cost to build the residential space and a need to maintain affordability for students. Gatewood explains that Texas Tech followed this for when they built West Village B for grad students who were looking for affordable housing conveniently located on campus. “Designed to compete with off-campus properties, the building provides spa-quality units, including full-size beds and full kitchens to compete with those properties, as well as a prime location for law and medical students.”

In some cases, smaller units can serve to meet graduate students’ needs. “Affordability, privacy, and functional amenities are at the forefront of graduate students’ needs,” says Allison Cyrus, market and business development director at KSQ Design. “Floor plan efficiency in the form of micro-housing has become an attractive solution for many graduate students, as the units are economical and satisfy the need for solitude. These micro-units mimic apartment-style living complete with bath, kitchen, and living space but focus on creatively reducing square footage to reach an economical price-point.”

David Damon, a principal at Perkins & Will, says he too has seen increased demand not only for studios or units, but also for outdoor space. Design teams have learned that campuses can’t make drastic cuts to square footage that the interior or exterior space neglects the design attributes that contribute to well-being. For some, the inclusion of details like natural light and open spaces, combined with privacy and amenities like in-unit laundry and kitchens, has been the biggest change in the approach to building grad housing. “The most significant change I have seen in graduate housing communities in the last 20 years has been the intentional move to create spaces that support the student,” says Martinez. “This change is most prevalent through the amenities provided. Previous goal was to provide a bed to sleep in. Today, the goal is to develop a feeling of home and belonging to increase graduate student connectedness. The amenities and common spaces help support wellness and the relational aspect of living in a community.” Martinez agrees that these kinds of amenities are not merely aesthetic; they support students’ health and well-being. “There is a direct correlation between

individual health outcomes and the quality of amenities provided and the design of the built environment in which residents spend their time. New graduate housing communities today are designed to support principles of wellness. One way this is done is through biophilia and connecting residents to the natural environment. Biophilic design supports cognitive function, physical health, and psychological well-being. This concept includes intentionally incorporating natural lighting, open spaces, and airflow. Additionally, to maintain affordability, today's construction projects balance the need for higher density with the need to provide privacy."



Upgraded amenities, like those in the Verano 8 complex at the University of California Irvine, help provide the accommodations graduate students are looking for. *Photo courtesy of Corey Tull, University of California Irvine. (Banner photo courtesy of St Zylus, University of California Irvine.)*

The Verano 8 grad housing complex at UCI, which opened in August 2022, illustrates the contribution that efficient design makes to well-being and a sense of belonging. "Graduate school is intense and stressful. In addition to building design, we have also worked to provide amenities that support wellness, resiliency, connectedness, and belonging," Martinez explains. The complex includes a variety of outdoor gathering spaces such as volleyball courts and community gardens. "We have a seed library that residents can use to get their garden started and a garden council to give residents a voice on guidelines and programmatic funds to help gardeners purchase tools." Family resource centers and wellness centers provide further support. "The Family Resource Center supports parenting students, dependents, and partners and generally strives to connect families with tools, resources, and support to facilitate belonging. Our wellness centers provide quiet places to de-stress or meditate." In addition, community centers offer wellness and fitness rooms, study rooms, recreation and music rooms, and lounges that residents can rent for parties, game nights, and gatherings. And the latest amenity to be added is a dog park for emotional support animals. "We want to support the increasing number of students coming to graduate school with support animals. To help these students feel welcome and reduce community living concerns around dogs off leash or dogs running around apartments due to pent-up energy, we are opening a dog park with an area for small and large dogs. The goal is to provide the animals a safe place to run and play off leash and to support residents in caring for the health of their animals."

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between a reasonable cost to build the residential space and the need to maintain affordability for students.


Design choices can ensure that particular features of the building are equitable, flexible, and accessible. As Martinez explains, “Research has repeatedly demonstrated the importance of inclusive environments in working to reduce isolation and support belonging. In addition to specific amenities, we also work to intentionally create inclusive, resilient communities. We have done this through design choices such as building gender-inclusive and family-friendly restrooms in public facilities. We did this by building floor-to-ceiling restroom stalls, each with its own ventilation. In addition, all public restrooms in community spaces have diaper-changing tables, and public facilities have nursing spaces for parents with infants. Continuing with public restrooms, we intentionally chose signage focusing on the function instead of the people. This ensures that everyone knows what to expect and avoids unintentionally defining what is normal or not normal, enforcing the binary. Additionally, in our new housing, which added 1,055 beds, all apartments are equipped with roll-in showers so that we can convert an apartment to meet ADA accommodations within a matter of days.”

Inclusive spaces both inside and outside the building provide a wide range of environments for residents to use for purposes of socialization. “We have also created a variety of inclusive spaces around the properties to develop choices for residents seeking connection through the use of shared adjacencies and proximity. These spaces vary by location but include barbecue grills, exterior seating areas, outdoor terraces, and patios, as well as lobbies or front patios with seating to provide a space to relax and gather. The idea is to create a ‘third space’ with a front porch feel and provide residents with choices and opportunities to know their neighbors,” says Martinez.



The Family Resource Center at the University of California Irvine. *Photo courtesy Corey Tull - UCI Student Housing.*

Graduate students with children struggle to find affordable childcare, a need that can also be met within the residential space. “More and more students are coming to school as caregivers to minor dependents. Access to affordable childcare is critical to success as a parenting student,” says Martinez. UCI’s new housing offers a mix of on-site and adjacent childcare facilities. And in April 2022 they opened the Family Resource Center, which functions as both a gathering place for student-parents and child-care providers, and a centralized network of campus and community partners that families can reach out to for assistance.

With all the changes in grad housing facilities outlined here, one remains at the top: “The biggest change is probably just the fact that it is making a comeback,” Gatewood notes. The need to recruit grad students is strong, and affordable housing with the right amenities can help during recruitment. Greenwood says, “I think we’ll see future developments, especially the larger ones, that incorporate childcare facilities and graduate and family housing as well as workforce housing for young faculty staff who face the same challenges of housing affordability and availability.” 

Camille Perlman is the managing editor of Talking Stick.