UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
ANCILLARY SERVICES

Housing for Students Who Parent Consultation

Final Report

January 2019

Table of Contents

Executive Summary:

The University of Alberta has spent the past ten months examining the role of the University in providing family housing.

In June of 2018, it was announced that Michener Park Residences, which provide housing for couples and families, will be closing permanently, in the summer of 2020. The physical infrastructure at Michener Park has exceeded its life expectancy and Ancillary Services has been challenged to operate and maintain Michener Park to a standard which drives student satisfaction and attracts sufficient rental revenue to remain economically viable.

Ancillary Services is required to operate on a financially sustainable basis having due regard for operating costs, addressing deferred maintenance, as well as maintaining operating and capital reserves for long term sustainability. No profit is sought from these operations, but no loss is acceptable either.[1] This reality has influenced decisions including the closure of Michener Park.

For many years, Michener Park has been an appealing choice for student families because of low rental rates. However, there was a need to gain a greater understanding of the needs of students who parent (SWP) to determine the future of family housing at the University.

To gain this greater understanding, Ancillary Services assigned resources and embarked on a 10-month consultation with SWP. This consultation engaged students from various demographics including International and Indigenous SWP.

What was learned was that housing is a priority for all SWP, but **not their primary concern**, when it comes to what supports SWP expect or seek from the institution.

The **most significant issue** raised by SWP related to **child care resources** or lack thereof.

[1] Guiding Principles for the operation of Residences and Dining Services operations (Appendix 1)

Though the most significant issue did not relate to housing, there was an appreciation from SWP that their voice was being heard by the institution. Students expressed that they feel the University does have a role to play in their housing needs; however, they suggested hope for **future rental subsidies** for students, rather than specific housing for SWP on university properties.

SWP face many challenges during their academic careers and what the consultation reflected was that most of these challenges are “day of” emergencies, which conflict with exam schedules, classes or additional academic requirements. The largest ‘want’ from the SWP population was temporary, emergency childcare on campus, which is not a focus or service Ancillary Services is able to deliver.

Background:

Michener Park has been part of the residence system since 1967, providing housing for couples and families. The residence has become very costly to maintain and the residents have increasingly expressed concern with the poor state of the facilities.

With the announced closure of the residence in 2020, the time was right to evaluate the future of housing for SWP and, as such, UAlberta launched a fulsome consultation process seeking clarity around the housing needs of SWP and the role of the institution in meeting those needs.

What was the Problem?

Michener Park has been running for fifty plus years and well over the length of time originally intended. For many years, general reports of poor suite conditions have continually increased and are exhausting maintenance resources by the sheer number and cost of daily maintenance requests.

Changes to Campus Demands:

Michener Park represents 8.5% of the residence inventory at UAlberta (prior to 2018). It has had a stable occupancy average of 97.5%, from 2013-2016, but the occupancy demand started to drop in the 2016 academic year, to 91.5% and to date, has not returned to its original demand.

Decision to Close:

Michener Park is one of the oldest residences owned and operated by the University and carries a significant and growing maintenance liability.
It has become increasingly challenging to run Michener Park to ensure students are satisfied with their unit conditions, and the daily maintenance demands have become extremely difficult for Ancillary Services to keep up with. Lengthy considerations revolving around replacement of current buildings at Michener Park have been fully assessed, however, a price point of approximately $200 million for the construction of a replacement residence is not a feasible avenue to pursue.

Consultation:

The University of Alberta took on the opportunity to assess family housing needs of SWP. The goal of the consultation was to understand if the University had a role in providing family housing on university properties.

Student input, as well as input from other Alberta Post-Secondary institutions and specific University of Alberta units who are particularly interested in residence support for students, such as FGSR, Dean of Students, and University of Alberta International, was used to gain a fuller understanding of the housing needs of SWP.

Student Participation Protocol

The University of Alberta Student Participation Process Protocol, which was released in January of 2015, was utilized to ensure consistency and fairness throughout the consultation process. The protocol is "intended to support effective conversations relevant to the student constituencies at the University of Alberta, recognizing that conversations will involve the Students' Union and Graduate Students' Association as the official representative bodies of their students" (Student Participation Handbook, University of Alberta, p. 4).

Consultation can be complex. The protocol handbook provided guidance to participants in understanding that consensus was not the goal of this consultation. Rather, the goal was collection of information from a unique student population. As the protocol notes: *"The resulting spectrum of potential participation is not about achieving consensus, convincing people, or providing any mechanism to resolve disputes regarding consultation—instead, it is intended to allow for effective and meaningful participation as one element of the University's decision making process, and the scope of that participation varies in accordance with the continuum" (Student Participation Handbook, University of Alberta, p. 4).*

The consultation work commenced in January, 2018, and student engagement opportunities to address housing needs occurred in May, September, and October of

2018. Determining the role of the institution necessitated input from the student body, specifically current SWP, with an appropriate timeline to ensure the maximum amount of student participation.

The decision on how best to consult with students was primarily achieved through in-person sessions, with simultaneous online submission opportunities. The questions and surveys were designed to address the needs of current, future, and prospective SWP.

The consultation was promoted and advertised to SWP and the broader University community in numerous ways:

- Regular announcements went out through the weekly Student Digest Newsletter
- Every Michener Park resident was personally invited, via email, and informed of each consultative opportunity
- The Students' Union and the Graduate Students' Association were engaged to promote and advertise the consultations through their channels
- Information tables at high-attendance orientation events in September of 2018
- Regular attendance at Parent Link meetings in the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
- All communications for upcoming consultation events were also shared with
    - The Office of the Dean of Students
    - University of Alberta International
    - The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
    - Students' Union
    - Graduate Students' Association
    - Residence Services
    - First Peoples' House

Principles of Consultation:

The primary goal was to better understand the reality for SWP, before making an informed decision around the future of family housing. The goal was to allow this

unique group of students to express their challenges and expectations around housing matters, to enable the best decision on potential future housing developments. Specifically, participants were asked:

1. What do you feel the role of the University is in supporting your housing needs?
2. What could the University do (better) to support SWP?
3. Is there a need for a family housing residence on campus?

The consultations were conducted from May through to November of 2018, aiming to provide data around:

- The number of students at the University who are also parenting children
- The current and future housing needs of SWP
  - The degree to which UAlberta is meeting these needs
  - The specific and unique needs of SWP and their families
- SWP expectations of the institution as it relates to housing
- A sense of reasonable level of institutional investment in support of SWP
- Unique requirements for international students initially and throughout their academic careers
- Unique requirements for Indigenous students initially and throughout their academic careers
- Expectations around affordability and standard of living
- Expectations around housing types preferable to SWP

In evaluating the results of the consultation it is important to note there are no existing mechanisms to confidently determine the number of UAlberta students who are also raising children. Many avenues were utilized to ensure that this target population was likely to receive some form of communication regarding the consultation.

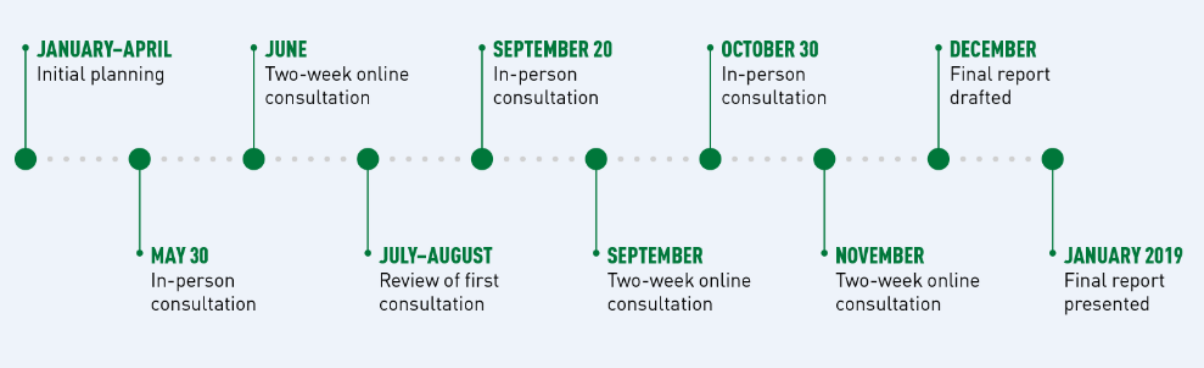
Despite these efforts, student engagement was quite low for all consultations. A total of 103 of the 1870 graduate students who self-identify as SWP responded. No numbers are available for undergraduate students.

While the consultation was advertised as being about housing needs, the overwhelming interest from the participants was related to student support needs provided by other university portfolios, not Ancillary Services.

Consultation Timeline:

Planning for Consultation: April 2018	Conduct Consultation: May - November 2018	Draft Report: December 2018	Present Conclusions from Consultation: January 2019

Student Engagement Opportunities in 2018:



Student Participation Numbers:

Number of Student Participants	First Consultation	Second Consultation	Third Consultation	Total
In-Person Participation	7	3	0	10
Online Participation	34	52	7	93
Total Overall	**41**	**55**	**7**	**103**

Outcomes of Consultation:

- SWP were very grateful for being asked about their concerns and were eager to participate in bettering the university for current and future SWP.
- Housing needs do not seem to be a primary stressor for SWP, with many having found external rental accommodations or being property owners. Students clearly communicated that among supports they would like from the institution, housing was a low priority.
- The consultation provided an opportunity to connect current SWP to resources and contacts across campus for support.
- It was learned that many students indicated, during in-person, online or focus group sessions, that they would much rather live off campus and be in closer proximity to childcare, their partner's place of work, or less expensive suburban rental areas than being on campus. Living on campus was a low priority for SWP, if a priority at all.

Student Reaction to Consultative Process:

Though the number of respondents was low, the students who did participate did so with great enthusiasm and many continued to stay in touch throughout the year, for focus group feedback sessions, and check-ins.

After the final consultation summary was released, approximately ten percent of the students who participated in the consultation (7 - 10 individuals) felt misrepresented, and voiced that the closure of Michener Park should have come after the consultation. Much effort was taken to separate the consultation from the closure of Michener Park, but a small group individuals still felt this sequencing of events was not appropriately addressed.

What We Learned:

The main issues raised in the consultations revolved around child care needs. There was significant interest around whether the institution would ever consider providing an on-campus, drop-in childcare service.

Childcare was the most prevalent and high stress issue raised by the participants, specifically getting their child(ren) into an appropriate facility. “Appropriate” equated to cost and proximity to their campus, work and home.

Students also raised the need for flexibility and empathy for SWP who are constantly balancing being a student with academic and research demands, in addition to their primary parental obligations. The participants reported ‘feeling invisible’ on campus and that their ‘at home demands’ have no room for accommodation with respect to exams, practicum placements, emergency absences, or class times on campus.

SWP also shared their perception of a lack of policy and protection on campus for being a parent. There seems to be a lack of understanding around what rights SWP have, and what protections they can be provided for child-related emergencies. Also what departments or resources are available could be better communicated to them.

What We Heard In Relation to Housing Needs:

Students felt the University has a role to play in their housing needs; however, they expressed clear preference for provision of rent subsidies rather than specific housing for SWP.

Housing issues revolved around proximity to a transit station, monthly costs, and a community who understood the unique needs of being a SWP.

> **Indigenous Student Voice:**
> Indigenous SWP are facing racial bias discrimination, when trying to attain private rental units in the Edmonton community. Incidents such as being

refused a previously agreed upon rental accommodation, a sudden increase in monthly rental fees, and on-the-spot increases in down payments are issues Indigenous students report facing when trying to find a home for themselves and their families.

International Student Voice:

International SWP described the relief they felt when being able to utilize Michener Park for housing, and confirm their accommodations prior to arrival to Canada.

International students also shared how working with University of Alberta International made them feel supported addressing their needs before and after arriving. Though this population expressed considerable concern about the announced closure of Michener Park. They generally agreed that the other residences may not be ideal options for SWP.

The consultation shows general agreement that students feel the University has a responsibility with respect to housing, but there was little agreement in defining what support would look like in terms of housing needs. The comments tended to focus on “subsidized” housing rather than availability of on-campus housing.

The purpose of subsidized housing models is to provide affordable housing for individuals who do not have a large income, with rental prices being based on incomes. A subsidized system assumes there is some other source of financial support for the housing infrastructure (such as government funding). Ancillary Services would not be able to operate and maintain the principles of quality campus housing, under a subsidized system, as Ancillary Services must operate on a cost-recovery basis and has no other source of revenue than the rents.

Students also reported that the sense of community at Michener Park was highly valued, and its loss was truly upsetting. It is an environment which cannot be replicated in other existing residences.

In summary, the key problems faced by SWP in finding appropriate housing identified during the consultation were:

- ➢ Child Care
- ➢ Affordability Issues
- ➢ Transit access issues
- ➢ Discrimination and racism

Child Care is the primary issue to resolve for SWP.

What do SWP need from the University?

SWP would like to be better recognized, but housing, specifically housing within the Residence system, is not one of their main priorities.

SWP have many fiscal, time, and family pressures, which they have to coordinate alongside their academic careers, but most live off campus and have no intention or desire to live within the residence system at the University.

The consultation did point to the need for additional supports for SWP, but the supports SWP are looking for, fall under the services provided by or direction of other offices and units at the University, not Ancillary Services.

Conclusion:

SWP face many challenges during their academic careers and what the consultation reflected was that most of these challenges are “day-of” emergencies, which conflict with exam schedules, classes or additional academic requirements. The most significant request from the SWP population was temporary, emergency childcare on campuses. This is not a focus or service Ancillary Services is able to deliver under its mandate and funding structure.

Though SWP agree that the University has a responsibility to support SWP in housing, what such support would look like was not clearly articulated by students. The loss of community, with the closure of Michener Park was mentioned, but students also understand that even if a new family residence were to be built, the location, cost and demographics would not replace Michener Park, and so that future possibility was not of interest to the majority of students who participated in the consultation.

Next Steps:

1. Evaluate the possibility to change the demographics for specific east campus residence buildings and open up currently operating residences to SWP.
    a. Newton Place, HUB, and Graduate Residences in east campus have the capacity and capabilities of supporting SWP.
    b. Occupancy on North-campus is not at 100%, nor are there consistent waitlists for the residences recommended above. This would allow the community of east campus to evolve, and allow, for the first time, families to live on north campus.
2. Clearly communicate to SWP the outcomes of the consultation process and the resultant decision not to commit to building a new dedicated residence for families on north campus; but a goal of exploring how existing residence systems might include development of family-oriented sub-communities.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Guiding Principles for the Operation of Residences and Dining Services Operations:

Along with the direction from the Student Participation Process Protocol, the Guiding Principles for the Operations within Ancillary Services were utilized to ensure the needs students articulated fell within the purview of the department.

To fulfill its mandate of providing an array of vital services in support of the University of Alberta's Institutional Strategic Plan *For the Public Good,* Facilities and Operations (Ancillary Services) operate a suite of self-funded operations. The following principles direct decision making this area:

1. Quality housing and good nutrition are critical to student academic and experiential success and we recognize this in everything we strive to do.
2. All funds received from students for shelter and food stay within the residence system.
3. No student tuition or government base, capital or maintenance funding is invested in residences or Dining Services operations.
4. Residence and Dining Services must operate on a financially sustainable basis having due regard for operating costs, addressing deferred maintenance, as well as maintaining operating and capital reserves for long term sustainability. No profit is sought to be made from residences and Dining Services, but no loss is acceptable either.
5. Residences will be operated as a system with long-term capital improvement and deferred maintenance plans which support all facilities (residences and Dining Services outlets) over time.
6. Student input is highly valued. Students will assist in shaping the development of plans and priorities to sustain and improve the residence and food system.

Appendix 2

Main Alberta Institutions and Family Housing:

Institution	Family and Couples Housing?	Operated By
University of Lethbridge	Yes	Housing Services
Mount Royal University	No	
MacEwan University	No	
NAIT	No	
University of Calgary	Yes	Residence Services

Appendix 3

Housing for SWP Committee:

A committee of individuals, from across campus, who specialize or work directly with SWP was created, to ensure that key departments on campus were kept up to date on the progress of the consultation and able to provide input throughout the process.

Starting in January of 2018, the committee met monthly to explore a breadth of topics which impact the experiences of SWP, eventually narrowing the focus to what emerged as key concerns: affordability, proximity to amenities, and safety. Many other high priority items students discussed were non-housing related, so the Office of the Dean of Students has collected this input to investigate in the future.

Future of Family Housing Committee		
Andre Costopoulos Vice-Provost and Dean of Students	Dean of Students	Project Co-Sponsor
Katherine Huising Associate Vice-President	Ancillary Services	Project Co-Sponsor
Aman Litt	Ancillary Services	Project Manager
Sarah Wolgemuth	Office of the Dean of Students	Project Team
Robin Everall	Faculty of Graduate Studies & Research	Project Team
Geoff Rode	Ancillary Services	Project Team
Shennella Blake	Registrar's Office	Project Team
Emily Ball	University Relations	Project Team
Doug Weir	University of Alberta International (UAI)	Project Team
Tricia Beaudry	First Peoples' House	Project Team
Zhihong Pan	Graduate Students' Association	Project Team
Andre Bourgeois	Students' Union	Project Team

Appendix 4

Summary Report of First Consultation:

Following the process outlined in the *Student Participation Protocol*, Ancillary Services and the Dean of Students Office launched their first of three consultations with the University community, regarding the needs of SWP.

The first in-person session was on May 30th 2018. An online version was launched on June 1st, which replicated the questions asked in the first in-person session and it was available for two weeks. An additional session was held at Michener Park on June 23rd 2018, to accommodate individuals who may have difficulty traveling to north campus, from said community.

Seven parents attended the first in-person session and most brought their child or children with them. Thirty-four SWP submitted an online response. Three students stopped in to the session at Michener Park.

In terms of the three primary factors which impact where SWP and their families live, the concerns, which were echoed the most were: affordability, proximity to amenities (e.g. childcare), and safety.

With respect to housing needs, the key areas of improvement were convenient access to reliable transit, affordability and community creation of like-minded individuals.

Students discussed that they do feel that the University has a role to play in their housing needs. SWP indicated they require safe, affordable housing, with a focus on better supporting students to build community.

There is a large feeling of being isolated and helpless as a student who parents. SWP expressed concern that they feel ignored by the University and that there is a lack of understanding of any duty to accommodate for issues arising specific to SWP.

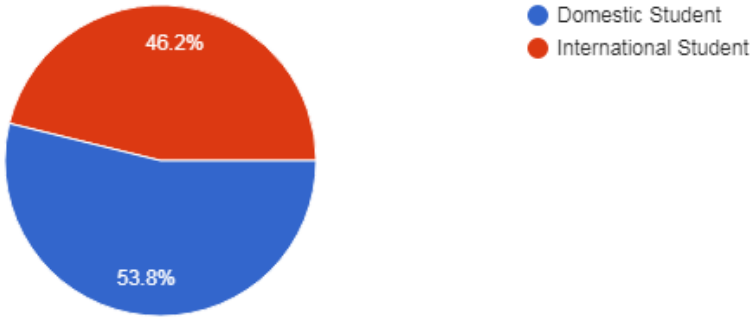
For the second consultation, Ancillary Services focused on discussing varying options of supporting SWP. Researching and presenting off-campus options, potential current campus options and assessing what better fits the needs of the community.

Appendix 5

Summary Report of Second Consultation:

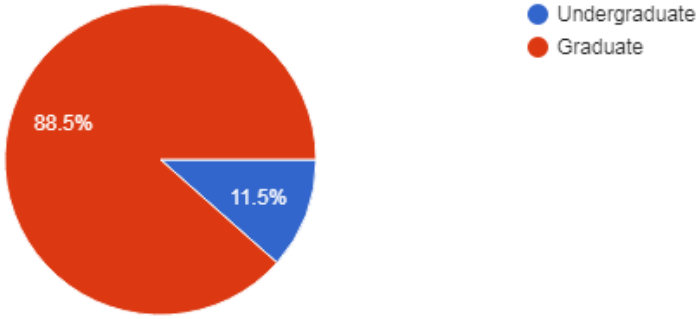
What type of student are you?

52 responses



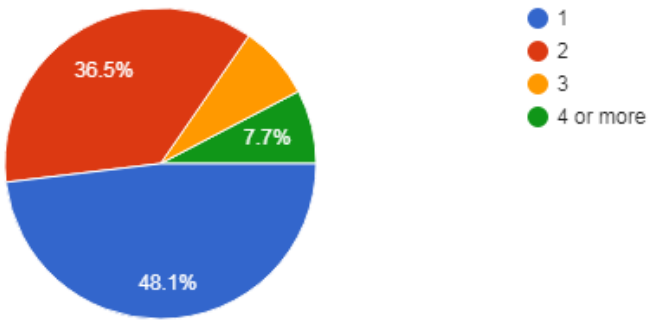
What type of student are you?

52 responses



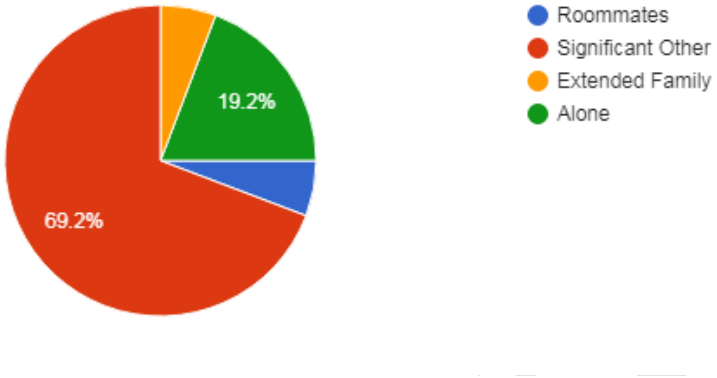
How many children do you have?

52 responses



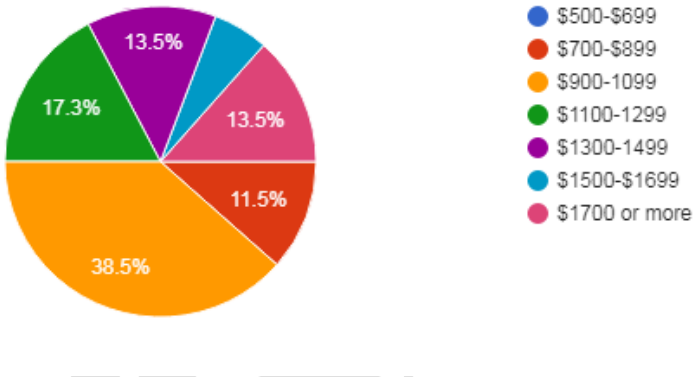
Who do you and your children live with?

52 responses



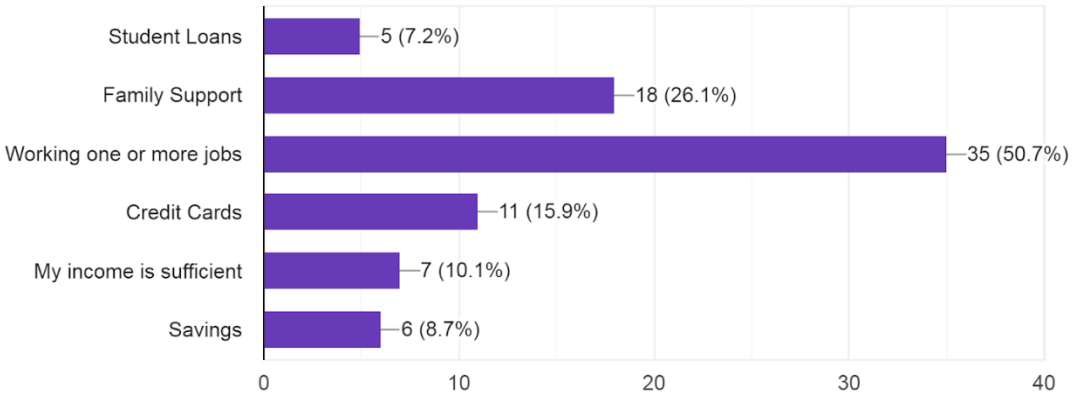
How much do you spend on rent or your mortgage monthly?

52 responses



How do you fund your education and family's living expenses? Please check all that apply

69 responses



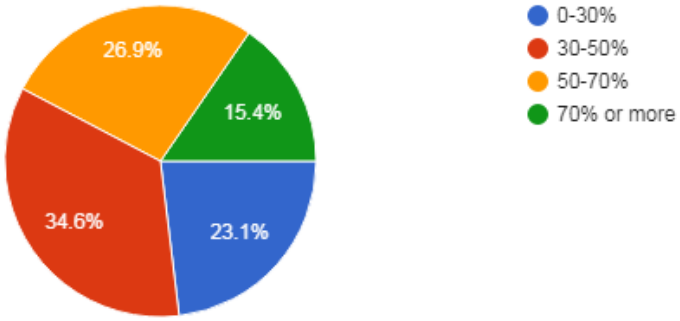
Please estimate your annual family income (include partner's income, if applicable)

45 responses

- Highest Reported Income: $130,000
- Lowest Reported Income: $10,000
- Average Income $55,273

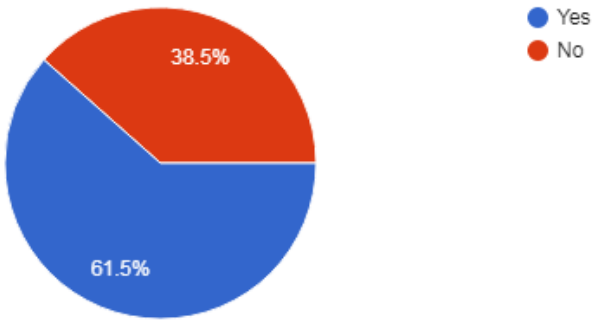
What percentage of your monthly household income goes toward rent and utilities (electricity, internet, heating, etc.)?

52 responses



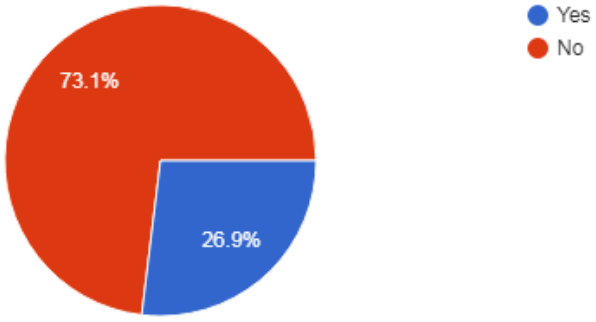
Has the cost of housing required you to find additional sources of income (including loans) to supplement your university stipend?

52 responses



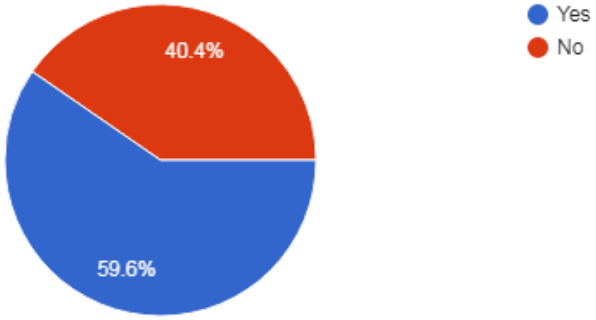
Has the cost of housing required you to take out a loan?

52 responses



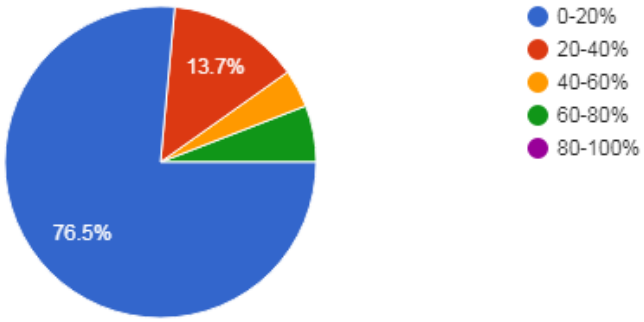
Do you pursue a job (full- or part-time) outside of your academic duties to help pay your housing expenses?

52 responses



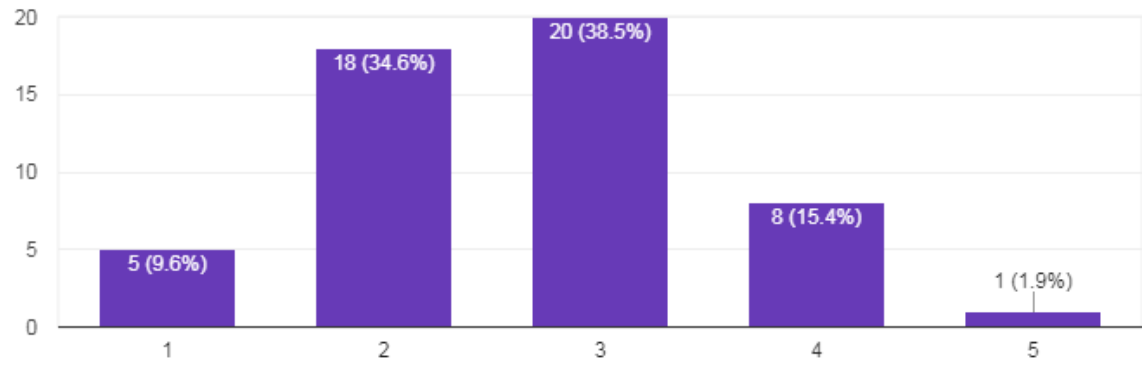
What percentage of your monthly housing expenses are covered through loans?

51 responses



How would you rate your financial stability?

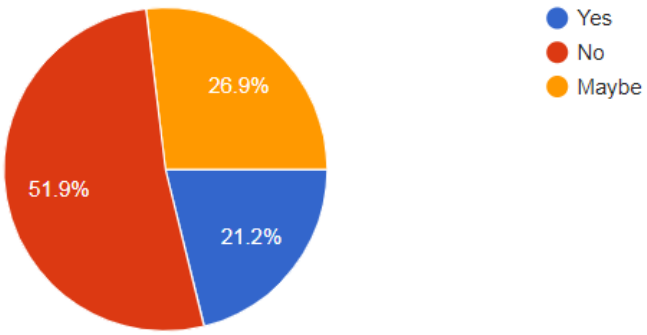
52 responses



1: Poor
5: Good

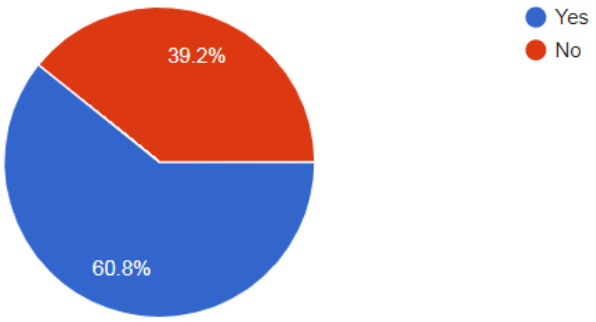
With the upcoming closure of Michener Park, does the change in family housing options affect your decision to continue studying at the University of Alberta?

52 responses



Newton Place (rent range is from $916-$1518) has been communicated as too expensive for current Michener Park residents. Is there a purpose in building housing for students who parent on south or north campus, if the cost will not be parallel to the current family housing option?

51 responses

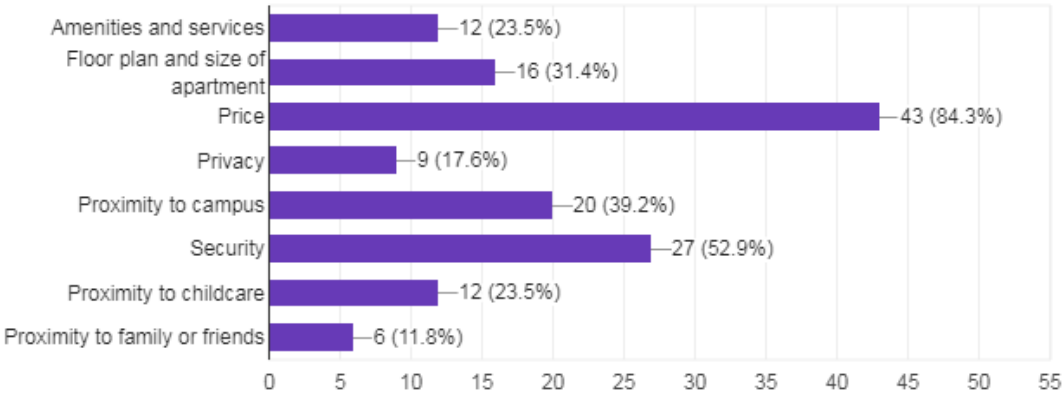


What is the maximum value you would be willing or able to pay for on campus housing? 41 responses

- Highest Rate: $1,600
- Lowest Rate: $650
- Average Rate: $1,094

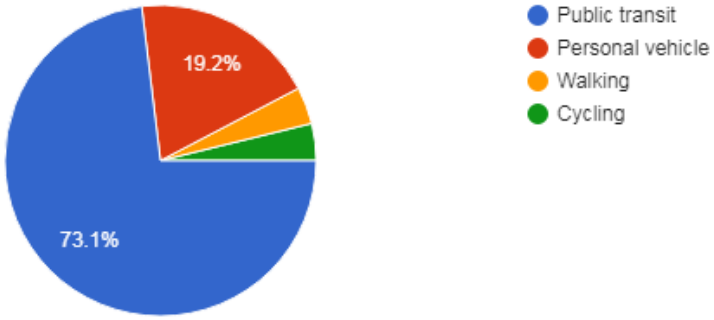
From the items below, what are the two most important criteria when considering your housing options?

51 responses



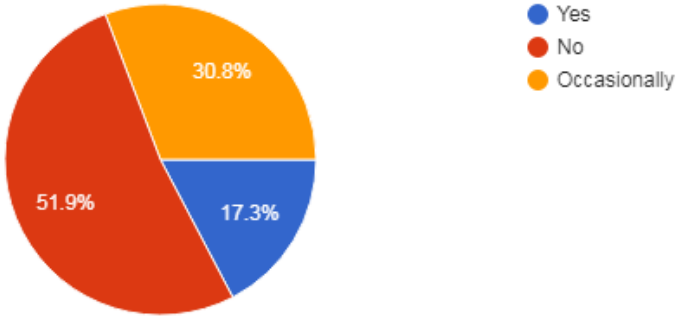
How do you get to campus?

52 responses



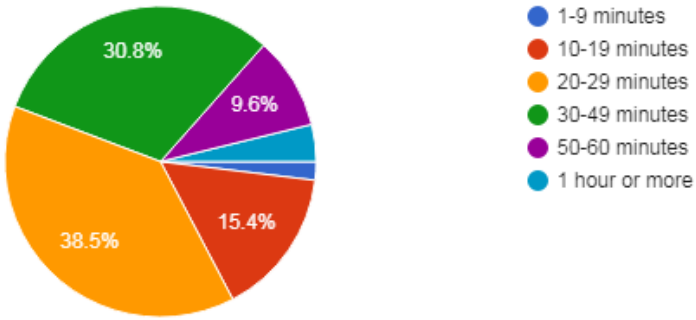
Do you pay for parking on campus?

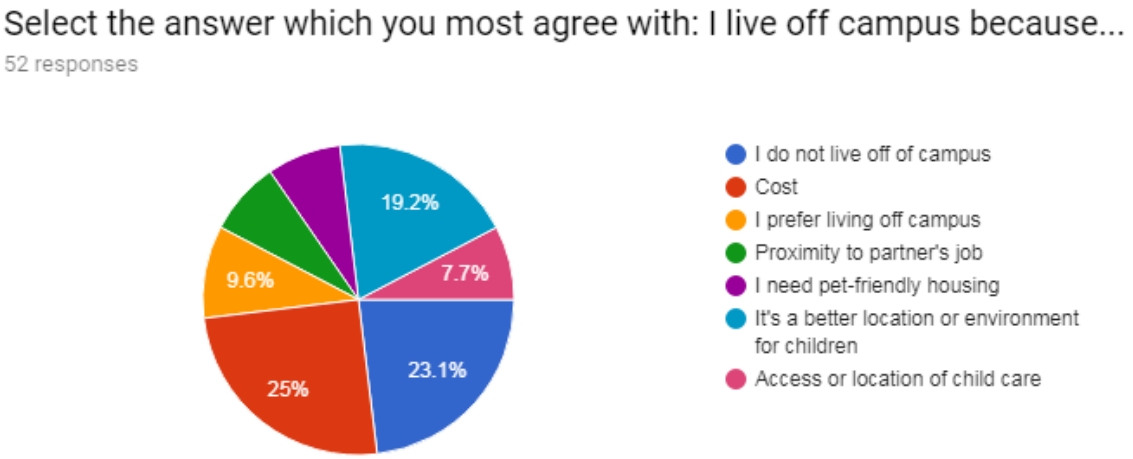
52 responses

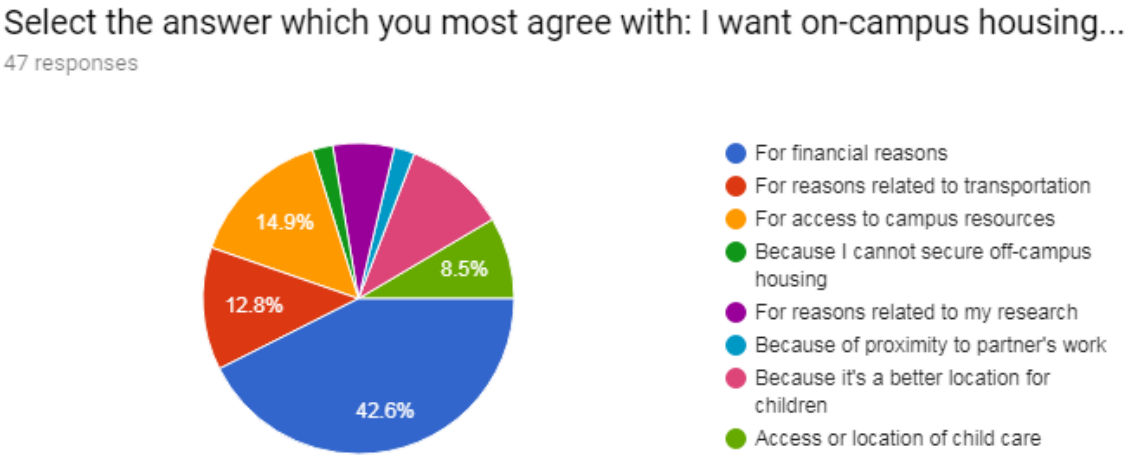


What is your average commute time?

52 responses







Will the cost of rent and cost of living be a determining factor as to whether or not you can continue your studies? Why or why not?

- *"Yes, it is the highest expense every month. How can one person study with that pressure?"*
- *"No, my partner is well-established in their job, so we are fortunate in that way."*

27 respondents said that it would be a determining factor, 18 said it would not and five were unsure at this point.

Is there anything else you would like to discuss or share?

- *"We came to Canada with two small kids and with no friends and family with us. Having the family housing in Michener Park was a great strength. I may be able to finish, before they close Michener Park, but there are many moms like me who will come in the future. Please consider providing houses for families at subsidized rates, especially for international student because it helps us adjust to new change and get ready for studies."*

- *“As an international student, in calculating the my expenses, living in University Housing (Michener Park) was the most cost effective choice. As international fees a a huge sum, having affordable, decent housing for ourselves and our children is really important as it allows us to feel more settled and be able to work as we should so we can successfully complete our studies.”*

- *“Although I personally do not want or need on-campus housing, this is because I am in a unique position with a partner who lives and works in Edmonton with a stable, well-paying job, and a home that I own. Yet I know many graduate students who are parents need family-friendly, affordable housing, particularly international students who are unfamiliar with Edmonton and with our childcare system, and who could not get access to childcare even if they desperately needed it. The wait list on university daycares is 1.5-2 years, and the expense very high, which precludes many students from accessing it. The university should provide reasonably-priced or subsidized housing to university parents, and should create more affordable daycare spaces--perhaps even restricted to students parents.”*

- *“If the UofA isn't able to build affordable campus family housing, FGSR should consider offering a monthly cash housing subsidy to full-time graduate student parents, based on the number of adults living / cost-sharing in their home, and the number of children in their care.”*

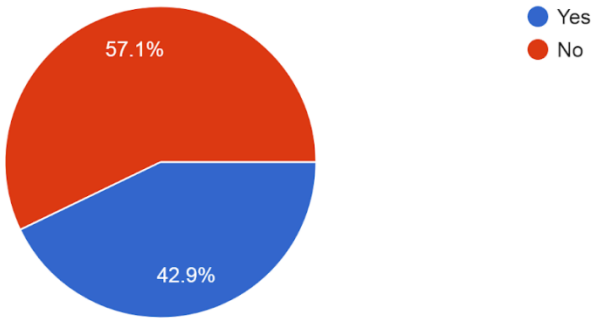
- *“I live off campus because we own our own home with works in proximity for our kids' needs and my partner's access to transit to commute.”*

Appendix 6

Summary Report Third Consultation:

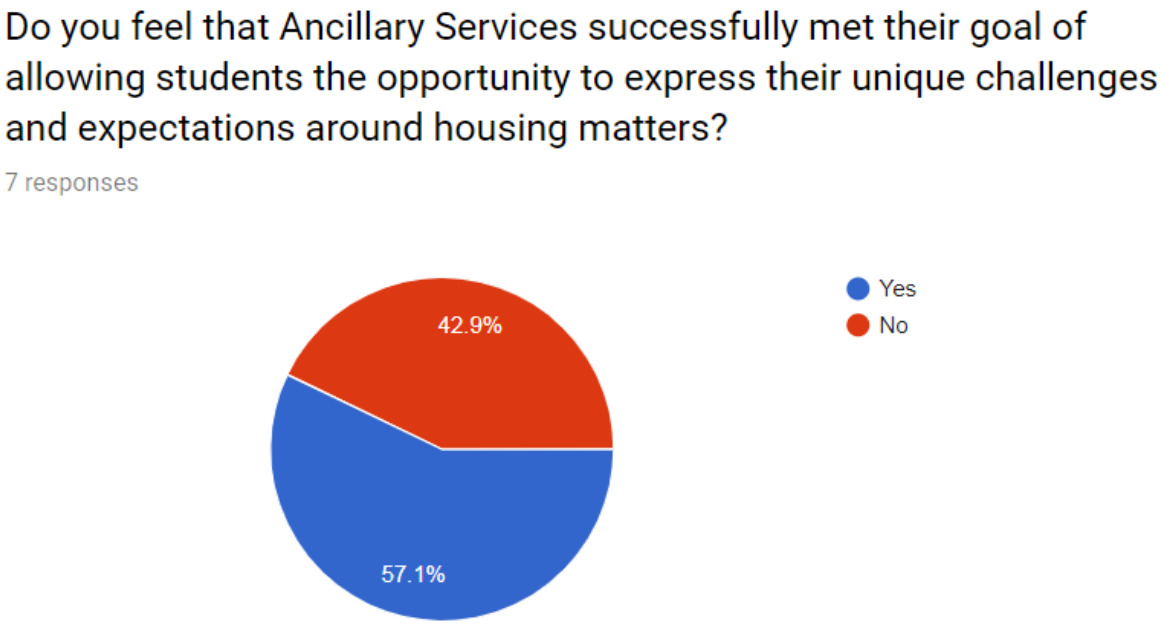
Do you feel the summary of the first two consultations well represented what students who parents need?

7 responses



If you answered 'no' to question one, please clarify what you feel was not reflected appropriately.

- *Provision of housing for students who parent should be a priority for Ancillary Services. Students who parent should be given the same considerations as other graduate students as regards accommodation.*
- *I find it hard to believe that 'housing is not a main priority', that's pretty much THE main priority for us, finding affordable housing close to campus.*
- *I find it difficult to believe that students who parent don't count housing as a key priority, with the exception of students who come from Edmonton. It would have been helpful to include the actual numbers of students who live at Michener Park. Especially first year students (both grad and undergrad). Lack of participation should be taken to mean low priority.*
- *That housing is not a priority for parent students*



If you answered 'no' to the last question, could you please further clarify why said goal was not appropriately met?

- *The low turnout of students from Michener park in the first two consultations was possibly due to the fact that many, like myself will be graduating before the residence is closed, therefore they did not see the need to attend. The views of those who attended do not reflect the views of all Michener Park residents.*

- *Please provide us (the international students) who live in Michener Park affordable housing. U of A has already many buildings for single couple students. When we have to live Michener Park by 2020, we cannot afford to rent the house outside.*

- *I feel like this survey is being to look like there was consultation. It is suspicious to me that the survey should come AFTER the decision has been made to close Michener Park, which was taken without consultation or even warning that such a thing was being considered. This may be the reason for such low participation.*

- *Ancillary Services did not successfully engage international student parents*

Is there anything else you would like to add?

- *As an international student, when I arrived in Edmonton, I knew no one here. Every housing agent I spoke with before I arrived wanted references, they wanted to see me, some wanted payments and I had no credit card. Then I found out that there was housing for graduate students, I paid my deposit along with my tuition, and I arrived in Edmonton with my family and received my keys that very day. What a relief! I was in a foreign country and I had a*

roof over my head. International graduate students have a lot to deal with academically, financially, socially and culturally. Please we need all the help we can get. Increase the cost if necessary, but let us have the options available to choose to pay or look elsewhere.

- *A greater effort needs to be made to gauge the numbers of students who parent at undergraduate level.*

- *Students who parent need affordable and accessible housing, but not necessarily on campus. There could also be affordable child care services provided.*

- *Ancillary Services should have gone door to door in Michener Park.*