HABITATS

STUDENTS IN THEIR MUNICIPALITIES
2016

OUSA
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

INTRODUCTION

Each year the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance releases its *Habitats* project: a series of case studies on municipal-level issues affecting undergraduate students. These case studies are written by OUSA campus researchers from our member institutions. This year's submissions come from Western University's University Students' Council, the University of Waterloo's Federation of Students, Queen's University's Alma Mater Society, Wilfrid Laurier University's Students' Union, and McMaster University's McMaster Students Union.

Topics in this issue include an examination of the student rental market in London, Ontario; student housing surrounding McMaster University; student housing in the City of Waterloo; campus mobility at the University of Waterloo; and the Student Maintenance and Resource Team at Queen's.

Universities in Ontario are integral parts of their communities. Our students recognize this, and understand that working together with their communities will help facilitate a mutually beneficial relationship that fosters an environment of growth and respect.

Habitats 2016 offers policymakers, journalists, students, and university administrators the opportunity to read unfiltered accounts of students' perspectives on university-community issues. These submissions contain real experiences of pertinent, contemporary issues but don't stop there. Ultimately, students want the relationship between themselves and their communities to be more than an arrangement. They want it to be a partnership. Consider *Habitats* 2016 a step towards building that partnership.

ABOUT OUSA

OUSA represents the interests of over 140,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight institutions across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable, and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.

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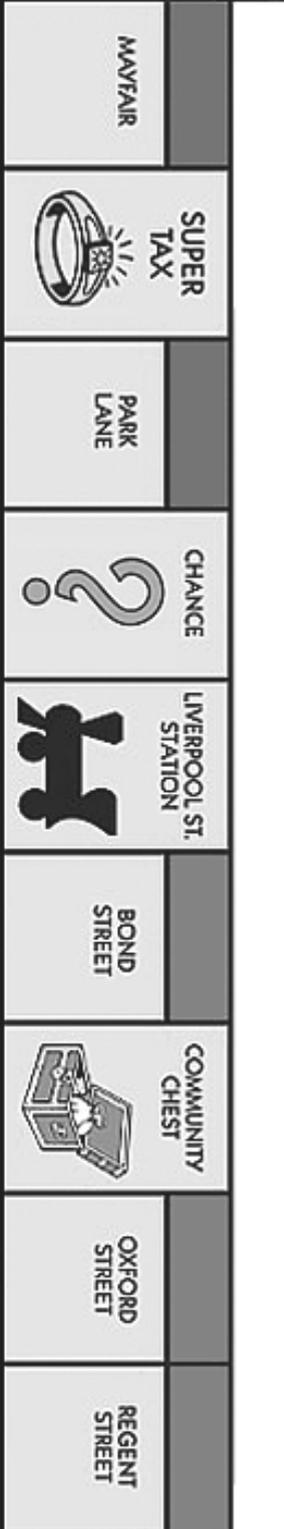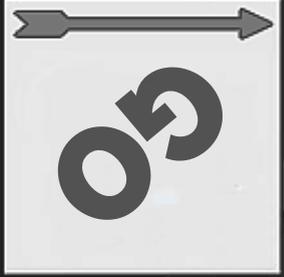
THE MONOPOLY IN LONDON'S STUDENT RENTAL MARKET

PASS GO TO PAY RENT

BY BEN McCAULEY

Universities and their students offer many benefits to cities where they are located. London, Ontario is home to both the University of Western Ontario and Fanshawe College, housing tens of thousands of students within and around the city. These large groups of students and their need for housing spurs a number of commercial enterprises, including rental companies. Landlords subcontract out the marketing of their properties and the search for tenants in exchange for payment.

Even with these companies targeting students specifically, many young people face problems when searching for quality and affordable housing. Students voice concerns of dishonest landlords that use rental companies, who use bright and energetic sales representatives to convince first-time renters to commit to run-down and unfit properties.

The student rental market in London has come to resemble a monopoly (or at best, oligopoly), where limited actors dominate and control the rental market. Generally unaware of this market dynamic, students continue to use these companies' services because of their strong marketing and presence on campuses.

METHODOLOGY
Research used in exploring this renting issue is a mixed-method approach, including both qualitative and quantitative data. An online survey was used to collect a sample of perceptions of student rental companies from students. Observational research was also used to further highlight the dominance of these companies in the student rental market. The survey, used through a free online service called Survey Monkey, comprised of seven questions ranging from closed-ended questions about students' comfort levels with rental companies as well as open-ended questions asking about personal experiences.

VISITING
JAIL IN
JUST
PENTONVILLE ROAD
EUSTON ROAD
CHANCE
THE ANGEL ISLINGTON
KINGS CROSS STATION
INCOME TAX
WHITECHAPEL ROAD
CO

PALL MALL
ELECTRIC COMPANY
WHITEHALL
NORTHUMBR'LD AVENUE
MARYLEBONE STATION
BOW STREET
COMMUNITY CHEST
M'BOROUGH STREET
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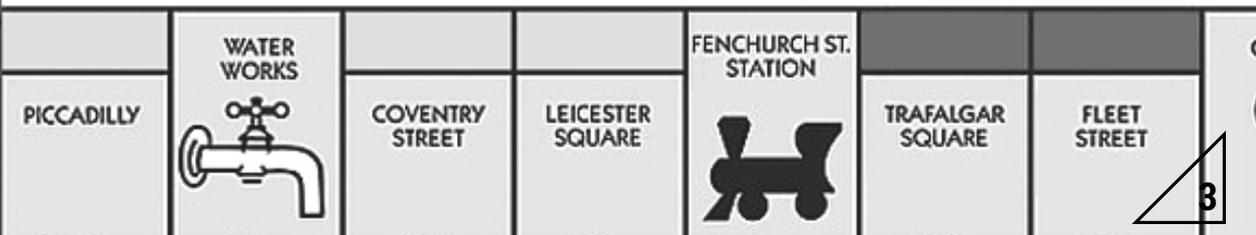
The survey link was posted in social media that a range of off-campus students had access to. An observational case study was completed in the southern side of Western's campus, where the number of rental properties within the area with a student rental company sign on the lawn was recorded.

SURVEY RESULTS

The survey asked seven questions and garnered 25 responses. One question was open-ended and allowed respondents to share their personal stories. The rest of the questions had yes or no answers, or were questions that required students to indicate if they strongly disagree, disagree, are neutral, agree, or strongly agree with three separate statements.

Forty-five per cent of the participants indicated that they found their current rental through student rental companies. From that sub-group, participants were asked to rate their experiences with their landlords, the quality of their property and its perceived affordability.

Overall, satisfaction and experiences were mixed, though there were some troubling indications. For example, only 57 per cent of the participants agreed (strongly agree + agree) that "the landlord was friendly, easily approachable, and responded to my needs."

Moreover, to the statement "the rental property was of high quality" 33 per cent of participants disagreed (strongly disagree + disagree) while only 22 percent agreed, suggesting that low quality housing is common.

However, results for question three, the statement: "the rental property was affordable" were more positive, with 30 per cent of respondents agree they were paying an appropriate price and 20 per cent disagreeing with the statement. The second part of the survey focused on gaining opinions from participants on the following questions. The answers available were "yes," "no," and "I don't know."

1. "Do you currently feel like the student rental companies have too much power and take advantage of students in London?"

An overwhelming majority (70 per cent) of correspondents indicated that "yes," the companies had too much power.

2. "Do you think student rental companies have too much of the market share of the properties for students?"

Similarly, the majority of respondents (70 per cent) indicated that "yes," the companies have too much market share.

3. "Do you have any personal experiences you would like to share about working with or renting from student rental companies?"

One response to this question illuminated the issue of student housing: "In my experience of searching for rental properties, it is a very intimidating process in which students are manipulated and coerced. Moreover, they take advantage of the situation students are in by exclusively offering 12-month leases even with the knowledge that the vast majority of us are only in the city for two-thirds of the year."

COVENTRY STREET
LEICESTER SQUARE
FENCHURCH ST. STATION
TRAFALGAR SQUARE
FLEET STREET
CHANCE
STRAND
FREE PARKING
4

OBSERVATIONS

Observations were made on a walk around a London block on the south side of campus, recording the number of rental signs on the lawns of student properties. Out of the total number of properties indicated by "for rent" signs (N=38), over 90 per cent were associated with rental companies and over half of them were associated with a single company.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From the study we can ascertain that students feel that rental companies possess too much market share. Students feel like these companies have too much power, using that power to coerce students into signing leases too quickly without enough time for deliberation and comparison to other properties.

Although some students may have communicated good experiences with companies, more students communicated negative experiences.

Interestingly, the cost of rental units was not the greatest concern for respondents of this study. The results here indicate that absentee landlords or low quality spaces are more pressing issues for students than the cost of rent.

Students coming out of residence and looking for their first rental property with no prior experience turn to student rental companies for guidance.

These companies, however, seem to be only motivated by the search for profits. Sales people are driven to close deals as quickly as possible without considering the real needs of students when looking for properties. Other than a ride back and forth between properties, these salespeople provide no informational resources to students.

This paper has two clear recommendations for cities that may have one or a few companies dominating the market share in the student rental industry. First, cities should consider introducing by-laws that prohibit rental management companies to market more than 50 per cent of the available rental properties.

This would make it much easier for smaller companies to enter the market and maintain a sustainable competitive level. Additionally, with more competition this may assist with keeping rental prices low.

London already has much lower real estate values than the Canadian average, and rental prices should continue to reflect that.

Second, large rental companies should seriously consider more comprehensive training for their sales staff.

A series of best practices, similar to licensed real estate agents and brokers, should apply to these types of companies.

It is imperative that sales staff ask the right questions, understand working with students, and responsibly address their needs regardless if it means there is not a sale or lease deal.

Students who are considering renting a property should be properly informed and seek out resources during the search process.

There is significant room for improvement within the student rental housing market in London, Ontario. With only a small number of key players in the market, an oligopoly of student rental companies exists and possess a majority of the controls within supply, quality, and pricing.

OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING AT MCMASTER

WHERE IT IS AND WHERE IT'S GOING

BY ALEXIA OLAIZOLA & DAYMON OLIVEROS

McMaster University's Off-Campus Resource Centre estimates that 10,000 to 12,000 McMaster students live in the Ainslie Wood and Westdale neighbourhoods surrounding our campus. As such, student housing is a major concern at McMaster, with roughly one-third of the student population living among Hamilton's permanent residents from September to April. There are many stakeholders in this issue, all of them seeking to answer questions about community responsibility, neighbourhood safety, and how to protect tenants in rental housing situations.

Historically, student-community relations were managed only on a small scale until about 2001, when the McMaster population began rapidly increasing. Between 2001 and 2011 McMaster saw enrolment numbers grow by 140 per cent, causing a massive student housing boom in the century old neighbourhoods of Ainslie Wood and Westdale.

This boom has had a magnifying effect on both the positive and negative effects that student housing brings to neighbourhoods. While some are quick to highlight the parties and property deterioration that come with high-density student populations, others will point to the economic benefits and cultural vibrancy that students bring to neighbourhoods. Regardless, students' increased housing needs come with a greater demand on resources, as well as opportunities for students to have their voices heard. In this section, we will offer a profile of the current state of McMaster's student housing situation; exploring off-campus safety, town and gown relations, and the importance of resource centres for student tenants.

OFF-CAMPUS SAFETY

Off-campus safety is a priority for universities across Canada, and McMaster is no exception. With students concentrated in the Ainslie Wood/Westdale area, our examples of public safety failures are drawn from this area of Hamilton.

Lighting is one particular problem, for example. There is a lack of lighting on major roads with highly concentrated student populations such as Leland Avenue, and after 11:00 PM there is no lighting on the Hamilton-Burlington Rail Trail (a pedestrian path that cuts through student neighbourhoods). Additionally, despite the fact that many students use bikes as their primary form of transportation, there is inadequate biking infrastructure on the major corridors around McMaster, and aside from the Rail Trail, there are no bike lanes in the south portion of Ainslie Wood forcing riders to drive on the road with cars.

The McMaster Students Union offers several services to address issues of off-campus safety. For instance, the Student Walk Home Attendant Team (SWHAT) is a service where student volunteer teams to walk students home from the hours of 7:00 PM to 2:00 AM – covering the entirety of the Ainslie Wood and Westdale neighbourhoods. SWHAT is an excellent initiative because it's accessible to students and consistent in its operation. However, SWHAT is just one piece in the off-campus safety puzzle and doesn't necessarily address the needs of students who might live outside of the immediate McMaster area.

The Student Community Support Network (SCSN) is another branch of the MSU that acts as a municipal advocacy service for students. The SCSN gives guidance when discussing the overarching strategy between the university administration, the city, students, and community members. Their programming ranges from week-long campaigns such as Discover Your City Week (a campaign which encourages students to leave the McMaster bubble and explore the City of Hamilton) to longer campaigns like Mac Lives Here, which seeks to educate about housing issues and promote the idea of self-advocacy with off-campus safety being a major component of the campaign.

Though these MSU services address some of the issues with off-campus safety, a recent survey showed that 21 per cent of students who live off campus feel either "unsafe" or "somewhat" safe in their off-campus housing. This indicates that attention is needed from both the university administration and the city.

STUDENTS, LANDLORDS, AND PERMANENT RESIDENTS

Another area of concern has to do with the relationship between students, landlords, and permanent residents. As with most university towns, there are tensions between students and the permanent residents in the areas surrounding McMaster. The Ainslie Wood/Westdale Community Association of Resident Homeowners Inc. (AWWCA) is the residents' association for the most student-dense neighbourhood in Hamilton.

Though the relationship between McMaster and the AWWCA has historically been amicable, there are still negative attitudes and communication issues. For example, noise violations are a frequent complaint between students, residents, and by-law officers.

The concept of "studentification" refers to the changes that come about in an area where there is a concentration of students, usually displacing long-time permanent residents in favour of student rentals. The term "studentification" is often used in a derogatory way, as though greater concentrations of students is the reason behind a neighbourhood's deterioration.

Though we admit that not all students are model neighbours, the greatest harms attributed to studentification have more to do with negligent landlords than students themselves. The downtrodden appearance of many student rental properties in Hamilton is the result of absentee landlords who do not perform necessary maintenance of their properties. Part of this is likely due to the fact that student housing has no standardized accreditation or licensing mechanism that ensures a standard of maintenance and safety. Furthermore, extra bedrooms are often added to student houses, causing a bloated and unsustainable number of tenants.

There are not nearly enough opportunities for student consultation in the rental policy-making process. To make matters worse, many students are first-time renters, unaware of their rights as tenants.

Compounding this issue, the city does not have an automatic regulation system for housing and community by-law violations. Even if students know their landlord is violating the law, they are often unaware of how to report these violations or are scared of being punished in some way by their landlord.

ADVOCACY

Current advocacy priorities for the City of Hamilton on the housing front include a landlord registry currently being pushed by Councillor Aidan Johnson (Ward 1, McMaster's Councillor) and Councillor Matthew Green (Ward 3). The MSU remains supportive of this initiative and wants to ensure that the city finds the best way to implement it. It is important that the burden of the registration is not shifted onto student tenants. To do this, the MSU is committed to strengthening its relationship with the city.

One way the MSU looks to address town and gown relations is through the SCSN's Peer-to-Peer program. The service employs six Community Assistants (CAs) who do weekly patrols around the Ainslie Wood and Westdale neighbourhoods to ensure that student houses are following Hamilton by-laws related to yard maintenance and garbage removal. If anything is out of the ordinary, the CAs will knock on the door of the home to inform them of their by-law violation, politely warning tenants before they get a ticket from the city.

This program also operates reactively, receiving e-mails about concerns (noise complaints or parking on lawns) from permanent residents about student neighbours. From there, two CAs are sent to inform the students about the complaint and remind them about neighbourhood standards.

The President's Advisory Committee on Community Relations (PACCR) is another initiative at McMaster intended to help the university integrate into the Hamilton community. The PACCR acts as an "open and visible" community liaison, identifying common student issues. Representatives from the neighbourhoods, nearby business improvement areas, the students' union, and the university administration sit on PACCR.

It is an excellent venue for conversation between campus and community partners. They discuss a range of issues from student perception on "studentification" to keeping the community aware of events on campus, such as Welcome Week.

Despite these initiatives, there are still several areas that need improvement. For example, though the Peer-to-Peer service is a step in the right direction, the SCSN is not able to effectively mediate more serious conflicts, partly because there is no formal follow up between permanent residents and students after an incident has occurred.

We believe that the MSU and the university should work with the city to implement a restorative justice model to deal with more complex issues in the community.

We also believe that more collaboration between the MSU and the AWWCA has the potential to strengthen town-gown relationships. As of now, we collaborate with the local community on events such as a seasonal Pumpkin Hike, the PJ Parade, Westfest, and Discover Your City Week, but we'd like to see this grow into a more productive relationship.

Along with this, there should be a formal agreement created between the MSU and the AWWCA to effectively advocate for students and improve community relations within the student neighbourhoods close to McMaster.

IMPORTANCE OF RESOURCE CENTRES

The importance of resource centres cannot be understated. When you have a large population of young adults living independently for the first time, there is a demand for services to help with that learning curve.

At McMaster, the Off-Campus Resource Centre (OCRC) acts as both an informational hub and rental listing website for students to find homes in the surrounding Ainslie Wood and Westdale neighbourhoods.

If student tenants or landlords were to walk into the OCRC or visit its website, they would have access to information regarding topics such as tenant rights, bedbugs, accommodation checklists, fire safety tips, and more.

Further, students can walk into the OCRC and receive professional advice on general issues they may have as a tenant. The centre will look over leases for students, as well as provide advice on how to address their landlords if problems arise.

In terms of areas for improvement, the OCRC could do more for landlord accountability and awareness of the services. These improvements are primarily resource based. With only one full-time staff member working at the OCRC, the landlord screening process is very limited.

In order to increase the service quality and broaden the impact of the OCRC, it would need to be expanded, financially and potentially with staff. For instance, in the current landlord screening process landlords are held accountable via a three-strike rule: if three student homes complain, the landlord can no longer post listings.

However, repeat offenders have been able to re-post their houses by changing their name in the sign-up process. More funding would help create a stronger infrastructure, which would further protect students.

The OCRC does the best they can with the funds they have and are a great hub for students to access resources when it comes to off-campus living. However, it needs more financial support so that it can better help students living off campus.

CONCLUSION

Issues of off-campus safety and landlord-tenant-permanent resident relations will not fade away on their own. It is recommended that the MSU, McMaster, and the City continue to work together to develop innovative solutions to these problems, including investigating and potentially implementing a restorative justice model, continuing to push for landlord licensing, and taking steps towards a formal agreement between the AWWCA and the MSU.

Students also want to place specific emphasis on increasing financial support for McMaster's Off Campus Resource Centre so it can provide essential services to off-campus students more effectively. By keeping lines of communication open and nurturing existing relations, student housing can remain a priority for all involved.

CENTRALIZED STUDENT HOUSING IN WATERLOO

THE CONSEQUENCES OF IMBALANCE

BY MATT McLEAN

Compared to a decade ago, the City of Waterloo's King Street North is barely recognizable. The once forgettable landscape has now been consumed by high-rise apartments spotted from virtually everywhere in the city. One would expect such a trend to correlate with a rising population, but no such correlation exists. Instead, the buildings are intended for one specific purpose: to accommodate students attending the two universities in the area: the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University.

Initially it seems good that students' housing needs are being met. However, student housing is being built at a far greater rate than university enrolment is increasing. While both Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Waterloo have enjoyed a slight increase in enrolment numbers as of late, this is expected to reverse in the near future.

This imbalance will have a number of different consequences, most notably in the way students are treated. With so many housing options in the area, students are treated like a commodity to be actively recruited and manipulated.

For starters, developers are in a rush to complete their buildings on time for the school year. As a result, corners are cut to ensure target completion dates are met. In some cases, the building itself is not yet finished but only the rooms themselves are ready for occupancy. One such example of this is the Sage 2 building on Spruce Street in Waterloo, where students have to get through a construction site in order to access the elevators up to their rooms. While the units themselves may be the quality students expected, the overall atmosphere and accessibility of the building is not.

The reason why developers do this is so they can have students sign leases sooner, resulting in more income to offset the costs of construction. As long as the basic necessities are met (kitchen, bathroom, bedroom), rent can be charged. While this may be allowed from a legal perspective, students are forced to pay for a quality of living they are not receiving, often having to go without amenities that were used to justify the rental cost.

In cases where construction is not completed on time and the building is deemed unfit for occupancy, students are sent to in alternate accommodations if the lease specifies as such.

Another concern is the way our international students are being treated. Given the language barrier faced by many international students, understanding the technical language in a lease and communicating with the landlord can be challenging. As a result, many are not properly respected. At Laurier, we frequently hear of cases where landlords enter units without notice, basic services like hot water and heat take longer to fix, and more.

While this is certainly not the case for every student it seems to happen more frequently with international students who do not have the same knowledge of Ontario laws. So what can be done to help address the mistreatment of students in university housing markets?
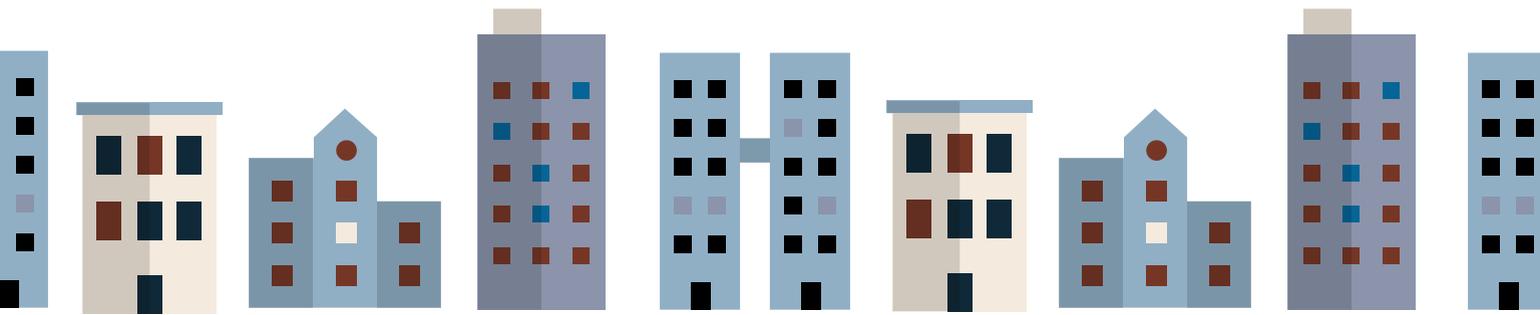
Again, however, these alternative spaces are often not the quality that was expected by the student when they agreed to rent the original unit. The primary reason that students are taken advantage of in this manner is that they are a captive audience and are largely unaware of their legal rights.

Students are often limited in their mobility and therefore seek accommodations that are as close to the university as possible. Most students have never signed a lease before in their life and are ignorant to troubling clauses they may encounter.

As a result, they can find themselves in circumstances they did not anticipate. The Students' Rights Advisory Committee at Laurier encounters this often. While a lack of research on the part of the student can sometimes be blamed, the more frequent culprit is misinformation and miscommunication on the part of the landlord.

The tempting answer would be that students should simply become more informed about their rights and obligations. However, many universities and students' unions already attempt to do this to no avail (not every student can be completely informed). Not only that, but it doesn't get to the fact that students have to deal with these manipulations in the first place.

To effectively address these issues, leadership by the government on both municipal and provincial levels is needed. One potential solution would be for the Government of Ontario to legislate the standardization of student leases.

In this way, landlords would be limited in what they can put into a lease. As a result, students would be less likely to encounter problematic clauses and could easily compare their lease to those of their peers. It would also be easier for the landlords because they would not have to seek legal advice on how to create a lease.

Finally, it would make the job of the Landlord and Tenant Board of Ontario much easier, as the range of scenarios they encounter would be lessened. Given these benefits, standardized leases are a policy option that should be more fully explored.

Another positive step in the right direction would be more regulation regarding inspection of student housing conditions. This would help prevent students from living in places that are not fit for occupancy, whether it be ongoing construction like in the example referred to or older buildings that do not meet basic building codes.

Either way, there needs to be more oversight in this area so that students are not misguided. No student should have to live in unfit conditions just because they are a first-time renter.

In cities like Waterloo where there is no longer a demand for more student housing, the city should be less willing to provide residential zoning permits to developers. Without doing so, property will continue to be purchased for unnecessary redevelopment.

Instead of allowing more buildings, the city should consider if the land being developed would be better used for another purpose. This would not only help improve the city, but it would also reduce the amount of deferred maintenance that will be necessary in the future. Given the quality of some buildings, that may not be far down the road.

CONCLUSION
These are only examples of different policy options that may help solve these issues, and are by no means an exhaustive list. The fact remains that leadership on this issue needs to be taken by government.

While I have suggested that some should come from the municipal level, their previous hesitancy to set new procedures will likely necessitate action from the provincial government.

In the meantime, students in cities like Waterloo should take advantage of the housing selections. More options mean that landlords will have a harder time finding people to rent their units, thereby giving students more leverage with looking for a place to live.

Not only that, but it allows students to look more in-depth without fearing lack of availability. In this vein, concerning contracts should not be signed nor outrageous rental prices paid. Despite what they may say to attract renters, units are not filling all that quickly.
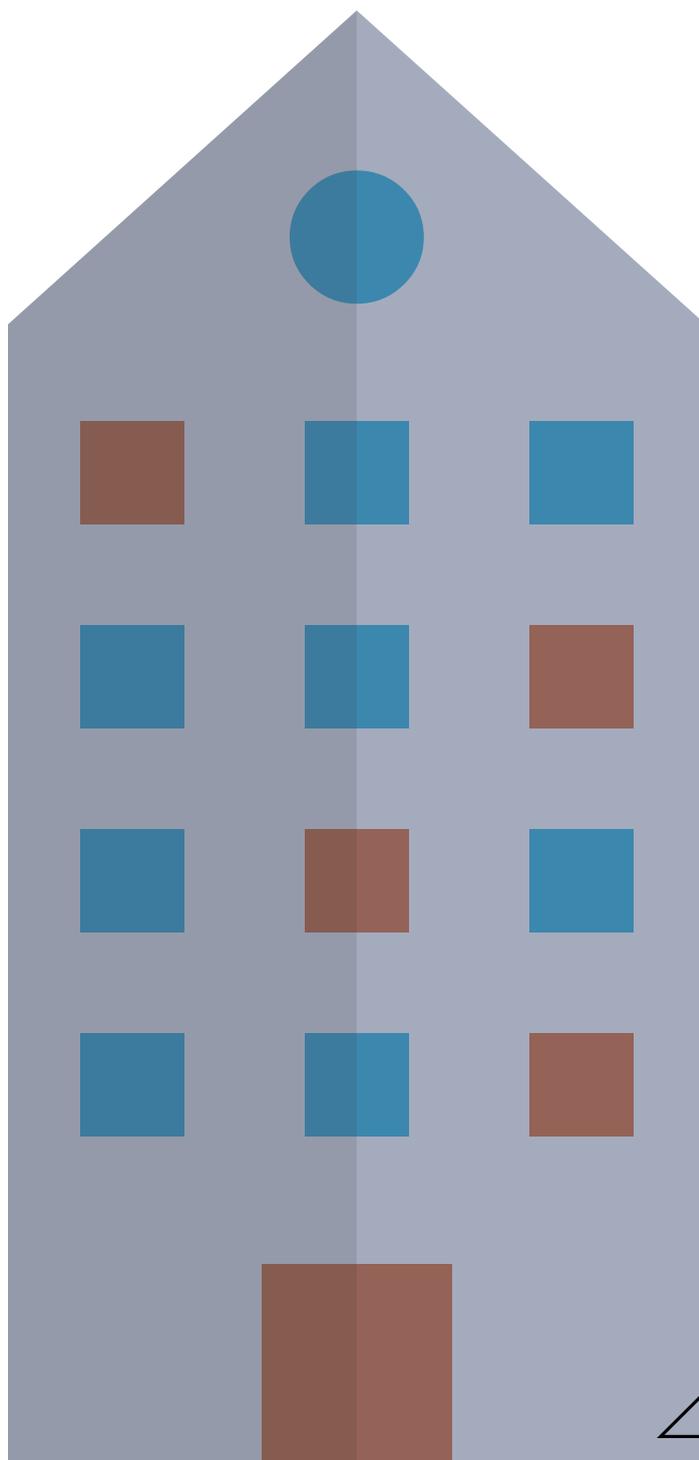
THESE ROUTES ARE MADE
FOR WALKING

BY ANDREW CLUBINE & ALEXANDER WRAY

Steps towards improved campus mobility in Waterloo

KNOW YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

Every day thousands of students, faculty and staff commute to Ontario university campuses. The majority of these campuses are located in urban areas designed decades ago, when most development prioritized the movement of private automobiles. Today, campus populations are largely dependent on other modes of transportation and universities must begin to adapt to this. Adding traffic signals or improving pathways are only effective solutions if they are parts of a broader vision for improved campus mobility.

Universities ought to have comprehensive campus mobility visions that accurately address the needs of their stakeholders. A former University of Waterloo (UW) director of planning wrote: "Many universities have oriented their campus to cars and now regret it... it is not the individual parts but the whole character of this university which is important." That was in 1963. More than 50 years later the UW campus has expanded, but these concerns remain. Pedestrians, cyclists, and public transit users constitute the majority of campus travellers on campuses across the province, but most campus environments do not reflect this.

Jeff Speck, an urban planner, popularized a concept of a "walkable city" as the solution for revitalizing American cities. While this project is admittedly a different challenge from improving mobility on a campus, Speck's principles can still teach Ontario universities about creating environments that suit the needs of stakeholders in and around the campus. Drawing from our experiences at the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University, two neighbouring, but vastly different campuses, we will make a case for adopting part of Speck's "Walkable Cities" model to create a vision for the walkable campus.

To be clear, the walkable campus is not only about nice walking paths and complying with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Although these are important features, the walkable campus is ultimately a vision for a holistic and balanced approach to campus mobility that logically prioritizes transportation modes that best serves communities.

THE SPECK METHOD

The University of Waterloo is characterized by Ring Road, a car-focused circulator that outlines the main portion of the campus. While a significant portion of the community travels by car, nearly all campus parking is found in lots outside of Ring Road. Similarly, most bus stops servicing the campus are outside of Ring Road. At UW, everyone is a pedestrian, at least for the last leg of their commute given that they must almost always travel from the periphery of campus, across Ring Road, to their destination. This results in tens of thousands of Ring Road crossings each day.

Speck explains that cars should not be unreasonably accommodated for. One area where the University of Waterloo has been successful at doing is campus parking. Nearly all parking lots are located on the periphery of campus. This is convenient for those who actually need to use a car to access campus (i.e. students, staff, or faculty who live outside the city). Unfortunately, recent efforts to improve pedestrian safety on Ring Road have not fully recognized that private through-traffic does not belong on a campus without municipal roads. Rather than eliminating private vehicle traffic, the university installed pedestrian yield signs in an effort to give vehicles priority when pedestrians are not present.

These have had the effect of causing confusion between motorists and pedestrians. Of course, each campus has unique layout and traffic patterns. However, we suspect that most campuses are similar to UW's in that pedestrian traffic ought to be prioritized over automobile traffic. Speck's suggestion to "put cars in their place" is a critical step forward for university campuses. At UW, this means closing off Ring Road to vehicle traffic other than public transit and service vehicles.

In contrast, Wilfrid Laurier University is a block-style urban campus in the city centre. It is well integrated with the surrounding community. It is bound by two major regional avenues, but the interior of the campus is closed to traffic. Admittedly, the challenge of accommodating vehicle traffic is more difficult at UW than at WLU, but the principle of prioritizing non-vehicular movement must remain.

Balancing the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and drivers is applicable to all universities, but current models of campus design significantly endangers student safety.

Recommendation 1: Municipalities and universities should focus on prioritizing active transportation to foster multimodal transit networks that integrate campuses with their surrounding communities.

LET TRANSIT DO THE WORK

Public transit is the second key piece of the campus puzzle. At UW and Wilfrid Laurier University, public transit is the most popular means of accessing campus. As Speck suggests, we must allow transit to "do the work." This means collaborating to design and implement transit infrastructure that meet the needs of the campus.

Waterloo region is a leader in public transit service for urban areas of comparable size. UW and WLU communities have benefited from this progressive transit planning. Both campuses are well served by over a dozen routes, including three cross-town express routes. Undergraduate and graduate students access service through an affordable universal transit pass. This use is sure to increase as the region's light rail system will be operational in Fall 2017. The rail line runs through the core of Kitchener-Waterloo, passing by WLU campus and through UW campus.

The project will benefit campus populations in many ways, including easier access to more reasonably priced rental accommodations, increased ability to travel through the core area of the region, and improved mobility of the student population. Furthermore, the introduction of all-day, two-way GO rail service between Kitchener and Toronto means the LRT will provide students with a fast and reliable mode of travel to connect with intercity rail.

At UW, although the university administration has identified pedestrians as a priority in the Campus Master Plan, to date it has failed to adequately address the aforementioned problem of private traffic on Ring Road.

Consequently, an opportunity to create an effective transit hub that is easily accessible to users is being missed. Meanwhile, WLU students tend not to frequent the area where the nearest LRT stop is located. It is necessary for the region, city, and university to partner to improve safety and accessibility to the LRT stop.

Ultimately, Speck's vision for communities encourages transit to make the movement of people more efficient, and prioritize pedestrians, cycling, and transit over the private automobile.

Recommendation 2: Municipal transit authorities should consult regularly with campus stakeholders to improve integration of transit service on campuses.

Recommendation 3: University administrations should establish working groups of campus partners to pursue the implementation of transit-friendly campuses.

Recommendation 4: The provincial government should earmark funding for improved transit integration on campuses and fund expanded GO transit service between campuses.

PROTECT THE PEDESTRIAN

On-campus safety is a top priority for all stakeholders, but especially pedestrians. Providing a safe campus environment can be challenging when universities are not focused on the quality of the pedestrian. As with most campuses, UW and WLU have many poorly lit areas and reduced transit options after-hours. Other campuses in the province face similar issues.

WLU has installed safety poles on campus to deter unwanted activity. While safety poles do serve a purpose, they are unfortunately a passive method to safety that is far from a pedestrian's best option. Active safety interventions are a more effective means of increasing campus safety. Currently, the WLU Students' Union offers a foot patrol program after-hours to increase campus safety and visibility and the UW Federation of Students offers an off-campus shuttle.

These are good examples of province-wide efforts to improve campus safety, but the root of most safety issues is campus design. The internationally recognized Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) standard encourages the implementation of plentiful lighting, defensible space, clear and well-marked pathways, and the creation of visually attractive spaces to encourage foot traffic at all hours of the day.

The goal of a safety-minded mobility must not be one that just gets people to and from campus. Instead, we must focus on campus safety at all times of day. As infrastructure and amenities are improved to create places where people want to be, "eyes on the street" will increase and safety will too.

This is something that institutions and municipal governments must collaborate on to pursue. To measure progress, student unions can perform walking safety audits on a regular basis. Such a program would help on-campus safety services improve by ensuring seamless coordination between campus police services and local EMS dispatch.

Recommendation 5: CPTED principles should be used as the standard to improve campus environments and student neighbourhoods.

Recommendation 6: The province should establish dedicated grant programs for student unions to develop campus foot patrols, safety apps, student-led safety audits, and other safety programs that actively promote creating a safe campus environment.

SHAPE THE SPACES AND CREATE COMMUNITY

A campus community should to be more than a list of names buried in files at the Registrar's Office. Community is created by the interaction of people and place on campus. Negative interactions with the campus environment can cause a weak sense of community and a feeling of disconnect (and even discontent) towards the institution. Even just natural foot traffic on a campus can promote a sense of community and vibrancy.

Physical communities can be created through well-designed open spaces, the provision of informal lounge and patio spaces across campus, and actual placemaking through art, landscaping, and street furniture.

UW has demonstrated capability to create places through the fire pits scattered across campus, while WLU has a distinct urban campus design that provides for ample informal sitting space.

The City of Waterloo and other local partners have proven a willingness to work with on-campus partners (especially the student unions) to create this sense of community. For the past two years, the UW Federation of Students has partnered with the City of Waterloo, the local BIA, and the transit authority to host "World of Waterloo", an orientation week event where thousands of first-year students explore a variety of places in Uptown Waterloo. This event has been successful in extending the campus' community beyond its own borders.

Recommendation 7: Municipalities should work with universities to develop plans for campus area development.

Recommendation 8: Universities and student unions should jointly develop campus vision plans that serve as long-term guides for creating safe, vibrant, and accessible spaces.

CONCLUSION

A walkable campus is not an ideological prescription to replace roads with walking paths. It is a vision for creating an environment that serves the needs of the community as a whole. Currently, many Ontario university campus areas do not adequately serve these needs.
While some universities and municipalities have initiated projects to improve campus design, access, and safety, an explicit vision to address each of these issues is lacking.

It is crucial that plans to achieve this vision be jointly developed by universities, student unions, and municipalities in collaboration with other community stakeholders for it to be truly both comprehensive and attainable.

THE STUDENT MAINTENANCE AND RESOURCE TEAM AT QUEEN'S

MAKING THE
SMART CHOICE

BY JOYCE WAI, DANIEL McKEOWN & MICHAEL NIVEN

INTRODUCTION

At Queen's University, the majority of students did not grow up in Kingston. Given the demand for temporary housing while attending the university, the "University District" was developed. The District houses a high concentration of students and offers convenient access to both the campus and Kingston's downtown area. Notably, the outskirts of the University District transition into residential neighbourhoods. This has presented a challenge to the university's relationship with the City of Kingston. Moreover, the partying culture has engendered and reinforced the stereotype that Queen's students do not value the cleanliness and liveability of the area in which they occupy as members of the Kingston community.

This stereotype has led to antagonistic local attitudes towards students, as Kingston residents who take pride in their city find the actions of Queen's students to be disrespectful. The events of Queen's University's Homecoming in 2005 exemplify why many Kingston locals hold these negative perceptions of students. In this instance, a street party on Aberdeen Street, notorious for being a hub of rowdy behaviour, resulted in over $200,000 in policing and cleaning expenses for the city. Eventually the university cancelled Homecoming in 2008 amidst continued concerns regarding student conduct.

In 2012, the Alma Mater Society (AMS) founded the Student Maintenance and Resource Team (SMART) under the purview of the Municipal Affairs Commission. While not created in direct response to the cancellation of Homecoming, the service's mandate to "beautify" the University District sought to alleviate the issues that were particularly acute during events such as Homecoming and St. Patrick's Day. According to Matt Kussin, the AMS' current Municipal Affairs Commissioner, the SMART program was an effort to demonstrate a shift in student culture and to show that students did care about the community in which they live.

The SMART program has improved, and continues to foster, positive town-gown relations by proactively addressing sources of tension for the University and the municipality's residents.

SMART SERVICES

After its ratification by the AMS in 2011, the Student Maintenance and Resource Team began to operate as a not-for-profit enterprise in 2012 as one component of the University District Initiative. The SMART program hires students for work from May to November, and offers three core services, all of which aim to ensure the cleanliness and liveability of the University District.

The first service of the SMART program is contracted property maintenance during the summer and fall seasons. Students, other residents, landlords, or property management companies can hire SMART staff for services such as garbage removal, lawn mowing, hedge trimming, leaf removal, and general maintenance.

This service, typically offered from May to November, allows clients who are otherwise unable to maintain their properties to have students do so on a regular basis. SMART's twelve summer employees also assist with house checks during the summer, where they are dispatched to inspect properties for signs of damage, burglary, or other concerns as requested by the tenants of the property.

Second, the SMART program offers a "Red Cup Cleanup" service. This service, at an affordable cost of $25 per hour, dispatches SMART employees to help students clear their yards. The "Red Cup Cleanup" differs from SMART's property maintenance service, as it is offered on individual bases and focuses on improving property cleanliness through garbage removal.

Third, the SMART program is known for its community clean-up service. This SMART program is financed by the Municipal Affairs Commission and comes at no cost to residents in the District. SMART staff perform regular clean-ups of the University District, with large-scale clean-ups occurring immediately after major events such as Orientation Week, Homecoming, Halloween, and St. Patrick's Day. During these large-scale clean-ups volunteers are also recruited. This past Homecoming saw an unprecedented volunteer turnout, as over 50 SMART staff and student volunteers collected 60 bags' worth of garbage the morning after Homecoming celebrations.

Although SMART has only been operating for a few years, the program has seen considerable growth. The SMART team maintained approximately 30 residences through its property maintenance service in 2013. This number has since risen to approximately 150 residences this past year. Kussin also emphasized the increased frequency and range of the community cleanup service. It is anticipated to continue along this trajectory as awareness of its services proliferates.

IMPACT ON TOWN-GOWN RELATIONS

Concerns have been raised regarding the cleanliness and liveability of the University District due to the high volume of house and street parties. These parties often leave garbage, shattered bottles, and other debris scattered on streets and properties within the University District, posing a safety hazard and detracting from the aesthetic of the area. The AMS' University District Initiative seeks to move away from perceiving the area as a disorderly "student ghetto." This sends a message that students both respect and care for the community that they live in, even though they are not permanent residents of Kingston.

Additionally, SMART is seen as a shift in student culture at Queen's. While students tend to identify very strongly with the University, the creation of SMART shows that students also are responsible members and citizens of the City of Kingston. This shift is seen especially in the dedicated volunteers that participate in community cleanups alongside SMART employees. During the school year, major events can cause widespread disorderliness across the University District due. For instance, St. Patrick's Day drew a crowd of over 1,000 students last year that left piles of garbage behind on the streets of the University District.

The proactive volunteerism of Queen's students shows the university, city, and Kingston residents that students are prepared to take responsibility for their District as citizens of the Kingston community.

CONCLUSION

SMART has been instrumental in improving town-gown relations, effectively making a positive impact on an issue that has been contentious. Both the university and the city have commended students' efforts and shared vision for the University District. Kingston Police thanked the Municipal Affairs Commission and the SMART team for helping to "[ensure] a safe and successful Homecoming weekend for the past, present and future," and the Queen's Gazette called the program a "SMART idea" that would improve the quality of life for those within and nearby the University District.

SMART has not only provided a valuable service through its property maintenance operations, but most significantly offered a venue through which interested volunteers can organize themselves and coordinate community clean-ups. By changing the student culture to reflect consideration for the environment, SMART and the AMS are inspiring local confidence and trust in students, showing that students can immediately clean up after major events.

This has been, and will continue to be, integral in fostering positive relationships between university students, administrators, the City of Kingston, and permanent local residents. It is entirely possible for students to have fun and party while engaging in mutually supportive relationships with the city, and SMART is living proof that these relationships only improve the student experience at Queen's University.

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ONTARIO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ALLIANCE

RECOMMENDED CITATION