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PSU Student Housing Insecurity Report

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Greene, J., Townley, G., Dickard, K.E., & DuBoise, D.J. (2023). PSU Student Housing Insecurity Report. Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative, Portland State University.

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Portland State UNIVERSITY

HOMELESSNESS RESEARCH
& ACTION COLLABORATIVE

PSU STUDENT HOUSING INSECURITY REPORT

December 2023

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SUGGESTED CITATION

Greene, J., Townley, G., Dickard, K.E., & DuBoise, D.J. (2023). *PSU Student Housing Insecurity Report.* Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative, Portland State University.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Andrea Garrity, Ashley Wendler, Erica Wagner, Lee Phillips, Scott Robison, Taylor Burke, Faviola Robles-Saenz, Graciela Segura, and Zach Markiss for their time and input.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Background

This study on student housing insecurity and homelessness was funded as part of a HUD FY2023 Community Project Funding Opportunity awarded to Portland State University. Phase 1 of the study included a literature review; a summary of past PSU student survey results; a description of PSU programs based on interviews with staff and administrators; an analysis of programs at other institutions; and a set of recommendations for better addressing student housing needs. Phase 2 of the study incorporated the results of a comprehensive student survey on housing insecurity and homelessness conducted in fall 2023. Additional reports by outside consultants on options for creating additional student housing and addressing policy barriers to effectively meeting student housing needs will be released in 2024.

Student Housing Insecurity and Homelessness

PSU conducted in-depth surveys of student basic needs, including housing insecurity and homelessness, in 2019, 2020, and 2023, and has included a question on housing insecurity in the Student Experience Survey every year since 2020. The 2019 and 2020 survey results showed that up to 16% of PSU students had recently experienced homelessness, while housing insecurity has consistently been as high as 47% over the past five years, with a temporary decline in 2021 that may have been a result of COVID pandemic relief. The most recent survey of PSU student housing insecurity, conducted in fall 2023, revealed increases in both housing insecurity (54.7% of students surveyed) and homelessness (19.1%), suggesting that expanded housing resources and new forms of relief are needed. Research studies have shown that housing insecurity and homelessness have negative impacts on academic performance, persistence, and graduation rates, while the provision of free housing has been demonstrated to positively impact persistence and graduation.

"I think PSU needs to be more proactive in providing quality affordable housing options to their students. If my situation isn't going to change soon, I anticipate that I will need to abandon PSU as my current situation is quickly becoming untenable due to the fact that I have four jobs as a full-time student and still struggle to meet all my expenses for the month."

Student Barriers

Homelessness and housing insecurity disproportionately affect PSU students who have experienced other challenges in their lives, particularly systemic racism and discrimination. Our 2023 survey of student housing insecurity confirmed that rates of housing insecurity and homelessness are higher among BIPOC and LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities, students formerly in foster care, first generation students, immigrant students, and students from other marginalized groups. In addition to these sociocultural barriers, when students were asked to identify their most persistent barriers to obtaining and remaining in stable housing, the cost of housing and required income were the two most

commonly cited barriers among all student groups, followed by having pets, application fees, personal health, and credit checks.

"On-campus housing would be convenient for someone like me who is a full-time student and who works on campus, but the price is just way too cost prohibitive, plus I feel uncomfortable sharing a room or unit with students who are much younger than me."

Meanwhile, when asked what factors help students obtain and remain stable in housing, support from family and friends were the two most commonly reported facilitators, followed by understanding renters rights/laws and having understandable and flexible rental contracts.

"The only reason I can afford to live where I live now is my fiance, I would likely be homeless currently otherwise."

"I can't stress enough how important it was to have included utilities and no deposits to move into campus housing. Beyond that I think that flexibility is so key, a lot of the time students can come up with funds just sometimes not on specific dates. The payment plans are helpful."

Housing Preferences

It is important to center student needs and preferences when developing new strategies for providing affordable and accessible student housing. National research suggests that rent price, location, and privacy are the key determinants in students' housing choices. A previous PSU housing demand analysis echoed the importance of privacy, with half of survey respondents stating a preference for a private single bedroom. Our fall 2023 survey of student housing needs and preferences also aligned closely with national findings. Across all student groups surveyed, price and safety were identified as the most important factors when considering a place to live, followed by access to public transportation, proximity to PSU, pet friendly housing, and private units. These stated preferences, along with the barriers noted above, should be the focal point for any new efforts to address housing affordability and availability for students.

Current Programs

PSU has implemented a range of successful, evidence-driven programs to help address student housing insecurity and homelessness: vouchers for temporary placement in University Place Hotel and local motels; a student-only shelter, The Landing, in partnership with a local church; a free housing pilot for Summer Bridge Program students; student emergency funds and assistance for SNAP-enrolled students that can be used for housing; and a partnership with College Housing NW to provide deeply affordable student housing. Unfortunately, a lack of funding has led to the closure of The Landing and an uncertain future for many of the other programs. Students also have a low awareness of resources (nearly ⅓ did not know about the Basic Needs Hub in the fall survey, for example) indicating a pressing need for better outreach.

Recommendations

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development provides a guidebook for addressing student housing insecurity in higher education, which should be used in conjunction with the Education Northwest Basic Needs Services Implementation Rubric and forthcoming Basic Needs Centers and Programs Standards from the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. The recommendations listed below, based on PSU interviews, conversations with national experts, and published literature, would help PSU substantially address current gaps in addressing student needs and implementing best practices and federal guidance.

- **Center Equity in All Programs:** given disparate rates of housing insecurity and homelessness, an equity lens that centers race while incorporating other factors of identity and experience is essential. Students, student resource centers, and the Office of Global Diversity and Inclusion should be engaged in program design, implementation, and evaluation. It is critical to identify different types of support and engagement needed.
- **Provide Free and Subsidized Housing:** student housing insecurity cannot be fully addressed without both free and subsidized housing. PSU does not currently offer free and subsidized student housing at the level recommended in research literature and implemented by many other institutions.
- **Address Safety Concerns in Housing:** along with the price of housing, safety was the most important factor identified by students when considering a place to live. It is important to work with a variety of student groups to better understand students' primary concerns pertaining to housing and to develop strategies for addressing these concerns.
- **Increase Availability of Student Housing Near Campus:** proximity to PSU was also one of the top factors identified by students when considering housing. Locating affordable student housing near campus connects students to both academic and basic needs resources that will promote their success and well-being. It also aligns with PSU's stated mission to be a powerful force in the revitalization of downtown Portland.
- **Expand Funding for Current Programs:** funding should be sufficient not only to sustain programs, but to fully address the direct costs of student needs and to ensure appropriate staffing levels and staff expertise.
- **Unify Emergency Fund Applications:** PSU offers a wide set of emergency funds, but differences in eligibility and application requirements create unnecessary barriers and confusion for students. Fund managers should develop a unified application and automatic process to route student requests based on eligibility.
- **Enhance Program Coordination:** the numerous programs, centers, and offices that help to address student housing needs should hold regular meetings to facilitate coordination, work to ensure that all academic advisors are aware of basic needs services, and proactively identify and reach out to students who may be in need.
- **Use Pell Grant Eligibility as a Proxy for Need:** Pell Grant eligibility can be used as a uniform method to identify and engage with students who may be experiencing or at risk of housing insecurity.
- **Ensure Comprehensive Outreach:** basic needs services and resources should be communicated to students, faculty, and staff through a comprehensive campaign that includes on-campus events, digital communication, syllabus statements, and partnerships with student government and clubs.

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

In 2023, PSU received a $750,000 award through the HUD FY2023 Community Project Funding Opportunity to address student homelessness and housing insecurity. Most of the award was dedicated to housing assistance for students at risk of or experiencing homelessness, with the reminder set aside for three studies:

1. **Barriers to PSU Student Housing Security**, managed by HRAC, to analyze drivers of student housing instability, conduct a literature review to identify best practices and potential programs, implement a student survey of homelessness and housing insecurity, and provide recommendations for new or scaled programs to address identified needs.
2. **Market Research, Development Opportunity Analysis, and Feasibility Analysis**, by an outside consultant hired through an RFQ process, to provide a housing market analysis, identify new or acquired building opportunities to house low-income students, and develop a financial feasibility report.
3. **Policy Barriers and Opportunities Analysis**, by a separate consultant hired through the RFQ process, to study local, state, and federal policy barriers for student housing security and to recommend potential policy changes.

This report was developed through a literature review of national studies, reports, news articles, and program websites; a review of the past five years of PSU reports and data on student homelessness and housing insecurity; a new survey of 2,291 students enrolled at PSU in Fall 2023 that included questions about housing needs, barriers, and preferences; interviews with six PSU staff and administrators managing programs related to student housing insecurity; unpublished research and data from internal PSU sources; and personal communications and conversations with national experts and administrators, staff, and faculty at peer institutions and research centers. Published sources are cited, while interviews, personal conversations and communications, and original research and calculations are not.

Due to the numerous offices, centers, and departments across campus that touch on student housing insecurity in some way, not everyone who is involved in such efforts was interviewed. Although the interviews showed a similar range of concerns and suggestions, some viewpoints may not be included.

STUDENT HOUSING INSECURITY AND NEEDS

NATIONAL RESEARCH

In 2023 the U.S. Department of Education released findings from the 2019-20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, which included questions on homelessness for the first time. The study, with responses from more than 100,000 students across 2,200 institutions, found that 8% of undergraduate students and almost 5% of graduate students reported experiencing homelessness in the previous 30 days (McKibben et al., 2023). A national survey of 195,000 students at 202 two-year and four-year institutions in 2020 found that 14% of respondents experienced homelessness in the previous year and 48% experienced housing insecurity in the previous year (The Hope Center, 2021). In a 2019 survey at 14 out of Oregon's 17 community colleges, 20% of students were found to have experienced homelessness in the previous year (The Hope Center, 2020). Student housing insecurity and homelessness are driven by a combination of high costs of attendance, a lack of sufficiently affordable housing on or off-campus, and inadequate pay or financial aid.

Every study listed above, along with PSU studies described in detail later, have identified major disparities in the rates of homelessness and housing insecurity between LGBTQ+ and BIPOC students, in particular Black or Indigenous students, and their peers. This reflects other local, state, and national studies that show homelessness and housing insecurity are often driven by or significantly worsened due to experiences of racism and discrimination in education, housing, employment, healthcare, and criminal justice systems (Olivet et al., 2021). National and PSU studies have also shown disparities in basic needs insecurity among current and former foster care youth, first-generation students, Pell Grant recipients, DACA students, parenting students, students with disabilities, and neurodivergent students. PSU studies on these disparities are detailed later.

Homelessness and housing insecurity have been shown to have a significant impact on academic performance, retention, and completion. A study conducted at the University of Massachusetts, an urban-serving public university with a broadly similar student composition to PSU, found that students "who had been homeless were 13 times more likely to have failed courses and were 11 times more likely to have withdrawn or failed to register for more courses" (Silva et al., 2017). National surveys have consistently shown lower grades among students at community colleges and universities who have experienced homelessness (The Hope Center, 2021). Conversely, a study of students who received free housing in Florida–22% of whom were experiencing homelessness–showed positive impacts on retention and graduation when compared to a randomized control group of their peers (Perez-Felkner et al., 2022).

PAST PSU RESEARCH

2019 HRAC BASIC NEEDS SURVEY

In the fall quarter of 2019, HRAC emailed a basic needs survey to all students then enrolled at PSU. The following excerpt from the report (Townley et al., 2020) details responses related to housing insecurity and barriers:

> Our survey was primarily based on procedures and instruments recommended or developed by (1) Crutchfield and Maguire (2017) in their work with the California State University System; and (2) Goldrick-Rab and colleagues (2018) in their national research with the Hope Center at Temple University. We also consulted with other colleges and universities conducting similar research when developing our survey and methodology. In addition to asking about student and employee experiences with housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity, we also asked questions about their employment and financial situation, types of assistance received (e.g., SNAP benefits, Medicaid, food pantry use), health (e.g., sleep and stress), and social connectedness. Because the focus of our report was on housing insecurity and homelessness, participants had to complete at least the housing and homelessness questions of the survey to be included in the study. A total of 3,511 students (15% of the 23,262 students invited to take the survey) completed at least the housing and homelessness questions, while 3,272 (14%) completed the entire survey.
>
> **In our student sample, 44.6% of respondents (n = 1,567) reported experiencing at least one form of housing insecurity in the past 12 months.** Moving in with other people because of financial problems was the most commonly reported form of housing insecurity. We also asked about a range of other experiences pertaining to housing vulnerability. Approximately 16% of students reported living in a home that is owned by a local housing authority or public agency, and 2.4% reported receiving a public housing voucher (e.g., Section 8) to subsidize the cost of their housing. When asked how safe they feel where they currently live, 27.1% of students indicated feeling only somewhat safe, 5.2% indicated feeling a little bit safe, and 1.7% indicated feeling not at all safe. Finally, 1.5% of students (n = 54) indicated that they slept somewhere on the PSU campus in the past year because they had nowhere else to go.
>
> Homelessness refers to not having a fixed, regular, or adequate place to live. To assess homelessness among PSU students, we first asked about lifetime experiences with homelessness. Nineteen percent of students (n = 667) reported that they had experienced homelessness at some point in their life, with 45.9% of those (n = 306) indicating that they experienced homelessness before age 18. Following the approach used by the Hope Center and other campus basic needs surveys, we then asked students to self-identify as experiencing homelessness in the past 30 days and past 12 months. In total, 1.8% of students (n = 62) self-identified as homeless in the past 30 days and 4.4% (n = 156) self-identified as homeless in the past 12 months. However, when we asked students about the places they have stayed in the past 30 days and past 12 months using a measure of homelessness based on definitions from both the U.S.

Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Education (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2017), the numbers increased dramatically. **Specifically, 7.4% of students in our sample (n = 259) indicated experiencing some form of homelessness in the past 30 days, while 16.1% of students (n = 567) experienced some form of homelessness in the past 12 months (see Figure 2).**

The most commonly experienced form of homelessness was temporarily staying with a relative or friend, which is also referred to as doubled-up or "couch surfing." It is important to use this expanded, more inclusive definition of homelessness because many students may not consider themselves homeless if they are not sleeping outside or in a shelter. A more restrictive definition of homelessness may discourage students living in doubled-up situations from seeking out resources and receiving the support they need [...].

BIPOC [...] students experienced high rates of basic needs insecurity. In particular, Native American students were almost twice as likely as White students to experience homelessness. In addition to BIPOC students and employees, LGBTQ+ students [...] also reported high rates of housing insecurity [and] homelessness, [...] as did students with disabilities and medical conditions. Transfer students, first generation students, current or former foster youth, veterans, and DACA students all reported higher levels of housing insecurity [and] homelessness [...] compared to students without such experiences. **These disparities were particularly striking among current and former foster youth, whose rates of housing insecurity and homelessness were double those of other students.**

The final question of the survey provided space for students to write anything else they wanted to share with us about their housing and food needs, to which over 600 students submitted responses. Almost half of these responses related to their financial concerns. Many of the students discussed having to make difficult choices about which of their basic needs to prioritize given their very limited budgets. Over 200 students described how costs related to the tuition and fees associated with attending PSU make it so that they are often unable to afford food or housing, even while working extra jobs as a full-time student. Further, some students described how the payment plan options for tuition and other PSU policies contribute to their financial difficulties. Finally, some students expressed frustration that required fees that go toward resources they do not use (such as health insurance or student recreation center fees) could be better spent on their basic needs.

Around 200 students also discussed the high cost of housing in Portland and how their income is not sufficient to address all of their financial needs. Students described how on-campus housing is neither affordable nor adequate to meet their needs. Considering the high cost of living in Portland, many students either must choose between housing and other basic needs, or they choose housing options that are more affordable but take a toll on students' lives in other ways, such as their safety. Alternatively, some students opted to live farther from campus and commute to PSU, which can create challenges related to the high costs of commuting and/or parking on campus.

2019 HOUSING MASTER PLAN

Brailsford & Dunlavey and Mahlum Architects were contracted by PSU in 2018 to conduct a student housing demand analysis and prepare a student housing master plan. The demand analysis included focus groups with nine students and a student survey distributed to all currently enrolled students. Roughly 6% of the student body, or 1,285 students, responded to the survey. The survey found that there was demand for an additional 1,096 beds on campus at that point, with a clear preference for specific amenities:

> Students were also asked about their top priorities for building amenities and features for a new student housing development. Within the top ten choices, **on-campus and off-campus students both valued the inclusion of an in-unit full kitchen and private bathroom as primary features.** A private single bathroom and in-room wireless Internet access also were top features that off-campus and students living at home recommended the University consider in a new residence hall.

A private single bedroom was also a preference of roughly half of survey respondents. These preferred building amenities echo the findings of the 2022 student housing affordability study summarized later in this section. No meal plan requirement, flexible payment terms, and flexible occupancy terms (9, 10, or 12 months) were the top three personal preferences of students regardless of facility or unit type.

2020 HOPE CENTER BASIC NEEDS SURVEY

In the fall quarter of 2020, PSU worked with the Hope Center at Temple University to administer the standard version of their national survey to PSU students. The survey found similar disparities to the HRAC survey based on student life experiences and identities. The following excerpt from the full report (The Hope Center, 2021) highlights items related to housing insecurity and homelessness:

> The 2020 #RealCollege Survey measured housing insecurity using a nine-item set of questions developed by our team at the Hope Center. It looks at factors such as the ability to pay rent and the need to move frequently in the previous year. How prevalent is housing insecurity at Portland State University? **47% of survey respondents experienced housing insecurity.**
>
> In alignment with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance-Act, students are considered homeless if they are identified as experiencing homelessness or signs of homelessness (for instance, living in a shelter, temporarily with a relative, or in a space not meant for human habitation). We use this inclusive definition of homelessness because students who are experiencing homelessness and signs of homelessness face comparable challenges.
> **In the 12 months prior to the survey, 15% of survey respondents at Portland State University reported experiencing homelessness or the conditions of homelessness.**
>
> Among students experiencing basic needs insecurity at Portland State University, utilization of campus supports was generally uncommon. Only 16% of students experiencing basic needs insecurity used emergency financial aid and 22% received help in obtaining SNAP benefits. For students who did receive emergency aid, the extra, flexible funds were critical. Many students at

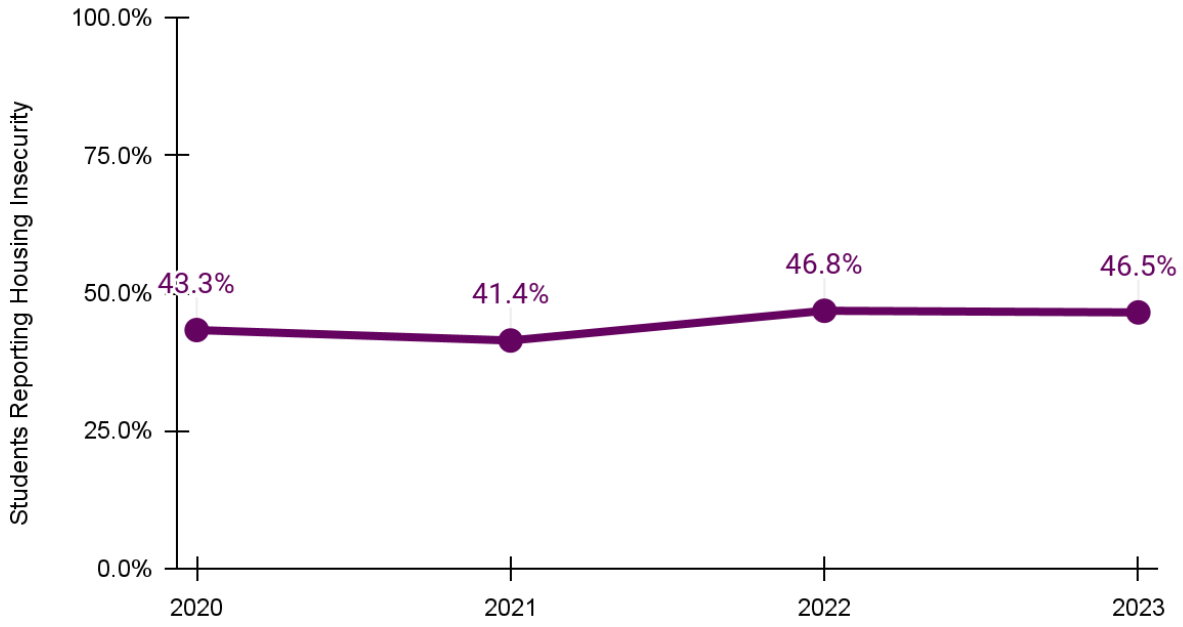
Portland State University used funds to stay enrolled, afford educational materials, and reduce stress. Among those students who did not seek out campus supports, 49% did not know how to apply and 77% thought other students needed the resources more.

2020-2023 STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY

Beginning in 2020, the student experience survey has asked "In the past 12 months, have you worried about whether you would be able to pay your rent or mortgage?" In 2023, 46.5% of students answered "yes" (see Chart 1)**.** This is nearly identical to the 2022 response of 46.8% of students experiencing housing insecurity, and an increase from the 2021 rate of 41.4% and the 2020 rate of 43.3%. The 2023 survey included 2,380 responses out of 12,141 degree-seeking students for a 20% response rate with a 2% margin of error.

The survey has consistently found similar disparities as the HRAC and Hope Center surveys: "Hispanic/Latino students, Native American students, Pacific Islander students, and International students reported higher rates of housing insecurity" (Garrity and Watkins, 2022). First-generation students, Pell Grant recipients, LGTBQ students, parenting students, disabled students, and neurodivergent students also reported higher rates of housing insecurity than their peers.

CHART 1: STUDENT HOUSING INSECURITY FROM STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY



2022 STUDENT HOUSING AFFORDABILITY SURVEY

In the winter term of 2022, PSU, Mt. Hood Community College, Clackamas Community College, and Portland Community College collaborated on a student housing survey in partnership with College Housing NW. A total of 1,371 respondents indicated they were currently attending PSU, although some were dual-enrolled at one of the community colleges (Sturley et al., 2022). The following responses and analysis are only from those students who indicated PSU enrollment.

Multiple students shared that they were experiencing homelessness at the time of the survey, including the responses below:

"Both my husband and I are students at PSU, and we are homeless and both are currently staying in a transitional homeless shelter here in Portland."

"I live in a homeless shelter because rent is too high."

Rent prices, as established in earlier PSU surveys and national research, are a major driver of student housing insecurity and homelessness. The 2023 Fair Market Rental price for a one-bedroom apartment in Multnomah County, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development,[1] is $1,610 (huduser.gov, 2023). **Only 3% of PSU student respondents to the survey indicated they were able to afford a rental at or above the fair market rate.**

About 47% of PSU respondents indicated they preferred a single-bedroom unit, 19% preferred a studio, and the remaining 34% preferred two or more bedrooms to accommodate their family. Roughly 20% of PSU respondents had dependents living with them, while 25% of all PSU students have children (Facts: PSU By the Numbers, 2022), indicating the need for family-friendly and multi-bedroom student housing options.

PSU respondents also made clear the need for amenities beyond what are typically available in dormitory-style housing. Nearly 83% said they would not live somewhere with a shared bathroom facility and 69% would not live somewhere with a shared kitchen facility. Air conditioning, on-site parking, washer/dryer in the unit, and included utilities were listed as specific amenities sought, but not necessarily required, by a majority of respondents, while just under half preferred pet-friendly housing and a dishwasher. A fitness facility and furnished units were sought by less than 20% of respondents for each. Only 48% of respondents used a car as their main source of transportation, so locating housing near campus or transit lines is important.

[1] "Fair Market Rents are estimates of 40th percentile gross rents for standard quality units within a metropolitan area."

2023 STUDENT HOUSING SURVEY RESULTS

METHODOLOGY

This survey was largely similar to the one used in 2019, which was primarily based on procedures and instruments recommended or developed by (1) Crutchfield and Maguire (2017) in their work with the California State University System, and (2) Goldrick-Rab and colleagues (2018) in their national research with the Hope Center at Temple University. We also conducted a literature review of best practices for asking about housing barriers and facilitators, as well as student preferences for housing. These questions were new to this survey.

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning at Portland State University provided the email addresses of 19,110 students enrolled at PSU at the time of the survey (fall 2023). An email invitation was sent to students at the beginning of the third week of the fall term, with reminders sent at the same time each week for the following two weeks. Interested participants clicked the link provided in the email, which sent them to a Qualtrics survey with a full explanation of the study and informed consent information. After completing the survey, participants had the option to enter a drawing for one of 15 $100 Visa gift cards.

Because the focus of our report was on housing insecurity and homelessness, participants had to complete at least the housing and homelessness questions of the survey to be included in the study. A total of 2,291 students (12% of the 19,110 students invited to take the survey) completed at least the housing and homelessness questions, while 2,044 (10.6%) completed the entire survey. This response rate is slightly lower than the 15% of students surveyed in our 2019 student but slightly higher than response rates typically reported by the Hope Center in their national surveys, which usually range from 8 to 10% (e.g., Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018). The sample was quite diverse, with nearly half of the sample identifying as BIPOC (43.1%) and over half identifying as LGBTQ+ (53.3%)

HOUSING INSECURITY

Housing insecurity includes a range of housing issues, including lack of affordability, safety, quality, and consistency in housing. Housing insecurity among PSU students was assessed using 13 questions drawn from previous college basic needs surveys (e.g., the Hope Center, California State University, NC State University) and created for this survey, including questions about evictions, difficulty paying rent, and frequency of moving. All questions were asked about students' experiences in the 12 months prior to completing the survey (see Table 1). In our sample, **54.7% of respondents (n = 1,253) reported experiencing at least one form of housing insecurity in the past 12 months**. This is 10 percentage points higher than our 2019 survey, when 44.6% of students reported experiencing at least one form of housing insecurity. Experiencing a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay and moving in with another person because of financial problems were the most commonly reported forms of housing insecurity in this survey. **We also asked what percentage of students' monthly income goes toward their housing, including rent, mortgage, maintenance, and utilities, and 72% of students (n = 1648) reported having to spend above the "cost-burdened" threshold of 30% of their income on housing.** Further, 15.8% of students reported that they help to pay for the housing costs of a family member they live with who is not a dependent, such as a sibling, parent, or adult child.

TABLE 1: HOUSING INSECURITY AMONG STUDENTS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS

Housing Insecurity Indicators	% Reporting
Experienced at least one form of housing insecurity	54.7%
Experienced a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay	24.1%
Moved in with another person because of financial problems	18.6%
Did not pay the full amount of a gas, oil, water, or electricity bill	17.2%
Took or added academic credits to quality for financial aid to help pay rent or mortgage	16.6%
Did not pay or underpaid rent or mortgage	15.1%
Had an account default or go into collections	11.1%
Left the place you were staying at because you felt unsafe	9.7%
Lived with others beyond the expected capacity of the house or apartment	6.9%
Moved three or more times	6.7%
Joined someone else's housing without telling the landlord	5.2%
Got thrown out of the place you were staying at by someone else in the household	2.9%
Got evicted from your home	1.6%
Received a summons to appear in housing court	0.9%

n = 2,291

HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness refers to not having a fixed, regular or adequate place to live. To assess homelessness among PSU students, we first asked about lifetime homelessness. **Almost one quarter of students (24.2%, n = 553) reported that they had experienced homelessness at some point in their life**. Following the approach used by the Hope Center and other campus basic needs surveys, we then asked students about the places they have stayed in the past 12 months using a measure of homelessness based on definitions from both the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Education (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2017). As Table 2 illustrates, **19.1% of students (n = 437) indicated experiencing some form of homelessness in the past 12 months**, which is three percentage points higher than our 2019 survey, when 16.1% of students reported experiencing some form of homelessness. Similar to the 2019 survey, the most commonly experienced form of homelessness reported in this survey was temporarily staying with a relative or friend, which is also referred to as doubled-up or "couch surfing."

Students in this study reported how their challenges with housing insecurity impact their lives:

"I had a good friend who I could stay with, but they suddenly moved out of state at the start of this school year. Which means I am having to couch surf a lot and pay for boarding for my dog while I am away."

"I'm sleeping in my car currently, and I feel uncomfortable coming to class because I haven't showered in weeks."

TABLE 2: HOMELESSNESS AMONG STUDENTS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS

Locations stayed overnight (students were asked to select all that apply)	% Reporting
Experienced any of the following forms of homelessness	19.1%
Temporarily staying with a relative, friend, or couch surfing until I find other housing	13.5%
In an enclosed area/space with a roof [and] not meant for human habitation, such as an abandoned building, car or truck, van, encampment or tent, or unconverted garage, attic, or basement	3.4%
Temporarily at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to	3.2%
In an RV or camper	2.9%
An outdoor location such as street, sidewalk, or alley, bus or train stop, campground or woods, park bench, or riverbed, under bridge or overpass	2%
At a treatment center, such as detox, hospital, etc.	1.1%
At a shelter	1%
In transitional housing or independent living program	0.6%
At a group home such as a halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance abuse	0.6%

n = 2,291

FOOD INSECURITY

Given how often housing insecurity overlaps with other challenges meeting basic needs, we also surveyed students about their rates of food insecurity in the past 30 days using the U.S. Department of Agriculture's six-item measure (USDA, 2012). In total, **53.9% of students (n = 1,127) experienced food insecurity in the 30 days prior to completing the survey**, which is seven percentage points higher than our 2019 survey, when 47% of students reported experiencing food insecurity. Over half of students surveyed reported not being able to afford to eat balanced meals, and 44% reported cutting the size of meals or skipping meals because there wasn't enough money for food (see Table 3).

TABLE 3: FOOD INSECURITY AMONG STUDENTS IN THE PAST 30 DAYS

Food Insecurity Statements	% Reporting
I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals	57.2%
The food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more	45.9%
I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food	44.3%
I ate less than than I felt I should because there wasn't enough money for food	43.3%
I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food (3 or more times in the last 30 days)	39.7%
I was hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food	36.2%

n = 2,092

Students were also asked about their knowledge and use of the PSU Food Pantry, Free Food Market, and the Basic Needs Hub. **31.7% of students (n = 661) utilized the PSU Food Pantry, while 17.4% did not know that PSU has a food pantry; similarly 12.2% of students (n = 255) had utilized the PSU Free Food Market, while 33.5% of students did not know there was a free food market. Finally, 12.1% of students (n = 253) had used the PSU Basic Needs Hub, while 32.2% did not know about this resource.** These relatively low rates of knowledge about available resources pertaining to food insecurity were echoed by students:

"Resources, like food pantries, free food market, aren't advertised well to students."

"The orientation talked about the food bank and the food resources. But how do I find them? Not helpful if I have to go track them down. Telling me where and walking me there would have been the most helpful. You can't expect someone embarrassed about not having money to go asking around where to find these things. This is a barrier!"

DISPARITIES

Homelessness disproportionately affects communities of color, particularly Black and Indigenous people, as well as LGBTQ+ individuals and people with disabilities. Below, report disparities in rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity by student demographics, disabilities or medical conditions, and life experiences.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

As Table 4 demonstrates, while housing and food insecurity are challenges among all racial and ethnic groups, students from historically marginalized racial or ethnic groups (e.g., Black or African American, Native American, Multiracial) experienced the highest rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity. **Middle Eastern or North African students, as well as Native American students, had the highest rates of homelessness and housing insecurity, while Native American students and Black students had the highest rates of food insecurity**.

TABLE 4: DISPARITIES IN HOUSING AND FOOD INSECURITY BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

	Number of Students	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
Race or Ethnicity				
Asian or Asian American	268	44.8%	17.5%	50.4%
Black or African American	115	63.5%	20.9%	63.5%
Hispanic or Latinx	363	58.1%	13.8%	60.1%
Middle Eastern or North African	45	62.2%	33.3%	44.4%
Multiracial	124	64.5%	27.4%	55.6%
Native American	74	64.9%	23%	68.9%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	39	56.4%	20.5%	56.4%
White	1,406	57.3%	19.9%	51.7%

Notes: Race and ethnicity classifications in the table are not mutually exclusive. Students were asked to select all that apply to them from the list above, and rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity are reported according to their self-identifications.

GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Students whose gender identity and/or sexual orientation fall into historically marginalized groups (e.g., non-binary students, queer students) also experienced higher rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity compared to students whose identities have been historically privileged (e.g., students who are men, heterosexual students) (see Table 5). **Transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, and agender students experienced disproportionately higher rates of homelessness and housing insecurity** than their peers who identified as women, men, or questioning/unsure, while genderqueer, non-binary, and questioning students reported the highest levels of food insecurity. Similarly, **students who identified as pansexual, queer, bisexual, lesbian, gay, or questioning/ unsure experienced higher rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity than heterosexual students**.

TABLE 5: DISPARITIES IN HOUSING AND FOOD INSECURITY BY GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

	Number of Students	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
Gender Identity				
Agender	29	62.1%	20.7%	48.3%
Genderqueer	59	64.4%	25.4%	62.7%
Man	506	45.1%	18.6%	45.1%
Non-binary	227	65.2%	27.3%	63%
Questioning or unsure	35	45.7%	11.4%	71.4%
Transgender (includes respondents who selected Transgender, Trans Man, or Trans Woman)	85	57.6%	23.5%	54.1%
Woman	1,100	58.5%	16.8%	54.1%
Sexual Orientation				
Asexual	83	49.4%	14.5%	60.2%
Bisexual	345	60.3%	20.6%	59.7%
Gay, Lesbian, or Same Gender Loving	181	56.4%	20.4%	59.1%
Heterosexual	93	51.0%	16.7%	45%
Pansexual	144	66%	27.1%	65.3%
Queer	240	64.6%	21.7%	58.8%
Questioning or unsure	59	61%	18.6%	69.5%

DISABILITY OR MEDICAL CONDITION

Students with disabilities or major medical conditions reported much higher rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity compared to students without disabling conditions (see Table 6). This was true for each disability or medical condition examined in this study, particularly learning disabilities and physical disabilities.

TABLE 6: DISPARITIES IN HOUSING AND FOOD INSECURITY BY DISABILITY OR MEDICAL CONDITION

	Number of Students	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
Learning Disability				
Yes	204	77%	30.4%	77.5%
No	1863	53.6%	17.9%	50.8%
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)				
Yes	660	67.6%	26.1%	64.5%
No	1407	50.5%	15.9%	48.3%
Autism Spectrum Disorder				
Yes	264	65.5%	30.3%	67%
No	1803	54.5%	17.5%	51.5%
Physical Disability				
Yes	169	68.6%	30.8%	68.6%
No	1898	54.8%	18.1%	52.1%
Chronic Illness				
Yes	321	70.1%	30.5%	62.9%
No	1746	53.3%	17.1%	51.7%
Mental Health/ Psychological Disability				
Yes	1041	66.4%	23.6%	63%
No	1026	50.4%	14.6%	43.8%

STUDENT LIFE EXPERIENCES

We asked students about a variety of life circumstances and experiences that may put them at a higher risk of facing housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity. Transfer students, first generation students, current or former foster youth, veterans, immigrant students, ESL students, DACA students, and students who receive the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG) all reported higher levels of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity compared to students without such experiences (see Table 7). **These disparities were particularly striking among current or former foster youth, whose rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity were nearly double those of other students.**

TABLE 7: DISPARITIES IN HOUSING AND FOOD INSECURITY BY STUDENT LIFE EXPERIENCES

	Number of Students	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
Transfer Student				
Yes	991	65.9%	24.1%	60.5%
No	1077	46.8%	14.6%	47%
First Generation Student				
Yes	791	66.6%	19.7%	65%
No	1277	49.3%	18.8%	46.4%
Current or Former Foster Youth				
Yes	51	78.4%	39.2%	80.4%
No	2017	55.4%	18.6%	52.8%
International Student				
Yes	127	49.6%	22%	54.3%
No	1941	56.4%	19%	53.4%
Out-of-State Student				
Yes	300	54.7%	25%	56%
No	1768	56.2%	18.2%	53.1%
ESL (English as a Second Language)				
Yes	88	65.9%	31.8%	58%
No	1980	55.5%	18.6%	53.3%
Veteran				
Yes	59	66.1%	25.4%	55.9%
No	2009	55.6%	19%	53.4%
Immigrant to the US				
Yes	89	61.8%	25.8%	51.7%
No	1979	55.7%	18.8%	53.6%
DACA Student				
Yes	13	69.2%	23.1%	61.5%
No	2055	55.9%	19.1%	53.4%
Parent of a Child Under 18 Who Lives with You				
Yes	138	69.4%	18.7%	48.7%
No	1095	54.6%	19.2%	54%
Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG) Recipient				
Yes	536	71.6%	28.7%	67.4%
No	1532	50.5%	15.8%	48.6%

ADDITIONAL STUDENT VARIABLES

Before shifting to housing barriers, facilitators, and preferences, there are a few more student variables worth noting in relation to housing insecurity and homelessness. **Students who had attended PSU for five years or more reported higher rates of housing insecurity (62.1%) compared to students who had attended PSU for one year or less (50.9%), and also had higher rates of and homelessness (29.5% compared to 18.7%).** Students who were housing insecure had slightly lower GPAs compared to those who were housing secure (3.44 compared to 3.54). Students who worked more than one job reported higher rates of housing insecurity (69.6%) compared to those working one job or fewer (51.5%), and also higher rates of homelessness (28.4% compared to 16.6%). Students who reported being on campus a few times or more per week reported lower rates of housing insecurity (53.1%) compared to students who reported being on campus no more than one day per month (62.7%). Similarly, students with the longest commute times (longer than one hour) reported higher rates of housing insecurity (63.6%) compared to students with the shortest commutes (five minutes or less; 48.1%).

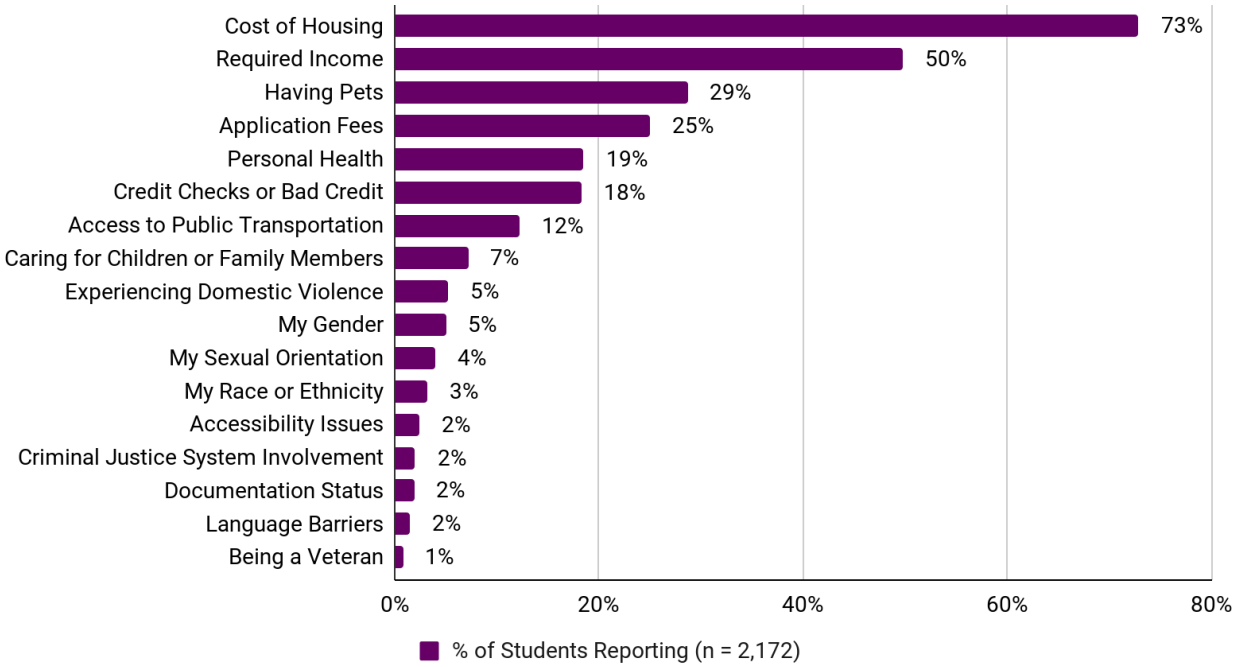
HOUSING BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS

In order to assess which factors help vs. hinder students' ability to obtain and remain stable in housing, we asked participants to complete checklists of housing barriers and facilitators (see Charts 2 and 3). The most commonly reported barrier was the cost of housing (reported by 1,584 students, 72.9% of the sample) followed by the related barrier of required income (1,081 students, 49.8% of the sample). Other frequently reported barriers also related to financial aspects of housing, including application fees (544 students, 25% of the sample) and credit checks/having bad credit (397 students, 18.3%). Over a quarter of respondents (624 students) reported having pets was a barrier to housing. Personal health was also a commonly reported barrier (402 students, 18.5%), as was having children or other family members that students were caring for (reported by 157 students, 7.2% of the sample). Access to public transportation was named by 266 students (12.2%) as a barrier. And while identity-related factors were less commonly reported as barriers, they still affect a sizable number of students, with 108 students reporting their gender, 87 reporting sexual orientation, and 69 reporting their race or ethnicity as barriers to obtaining or remaining in housing. **Finally, while only 2% of respondents (43 students) identified criminal justice system involvement as a barrier to housing, their rates of housing insecurity and homelessness were higher than any other group, with 88.1% reporting housing insecurity and 52.4% reporting homelessness in the last year.**

One student with a prior felony conviction shared their challenges with housing in this study:

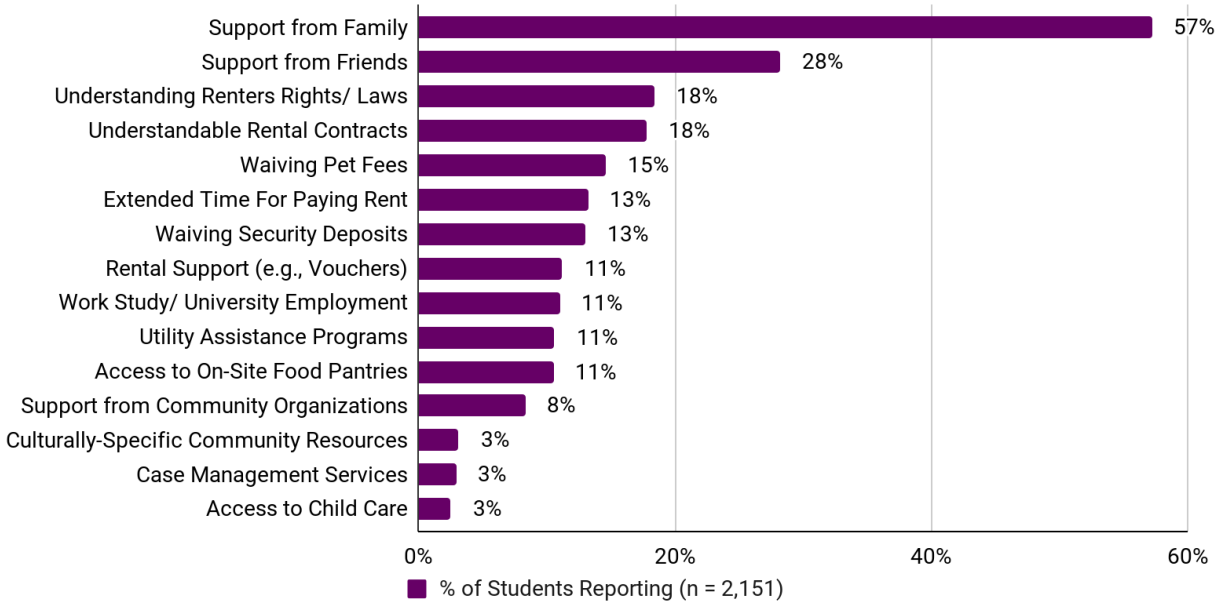
"I got kicked out of campus housing because I have a felony on my record, now I live in a motorhome, and I struggle everyday. I am an A student, I'm involved in all kinds of good stuff on campus, and my criminal record was a long time ago, and it was nothing violent or against any person. It was all drug related because I had a problem. I have been going to the clinic for years now though, and I'm trying to do good things with my life."

CHART 2: HOUSING BARRIERS REPORTED BY STUDENTS



The most commonly reported facilitators of housing were support from family (reported by 1,230 students, 57.2% of the sample) and friends or other sources of social support (606 students, 28.2% of the sample). Also in the top five facilitators were understanding renters rights (395 students, 18.4%) and understandable rental contracts (383 students, 17.9%). Waiving pet fees 315 students, 14.6% of the sample), extended time for paying rent (285 students, 13.2%), waiving security deposits (280 students, 13%), utility assistance programs (228 students, 10.6%), and rental supports (e.g., vouchers) (241 students, 11.2%) were all commonly reported facilitators, as was access to work study opportunities or other university employment (237 students, 11%). When students were asked to report other facilitators that were not included in our survey, responses included working a second job or working overtime; scholarships or loans; having roommates; and having a good relationship with the landlord.

CHART 3: HOUSING FACILITATORS REPORTED BY STUDENTS



DIFFERENCES IN HOUSING BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS

Given the greater housing challenges faced by students from marginalized groups, including BIPOC students, LGBTQ+ students, first generation students, immigrant students, students formerly in foster care, and students with disabilities, we also conducted analyses examining whether housing barriers and facilitators differed among these students. **In all cases, the cost of housing and required income remained the top two housing barriers, with having pets, application fees, personal health, and credit checks rounding out the top six. Support from family and friends were the top two housing facilitators for all students, with understanding renters rights/laws, understandable rental contracts, and waiving pet fees rounding out the top five.**

There were some differences among sub-groups. For example, students with disabilities named personal health as the third most frequent barrier, while it was the fifth most commonly reported barrier in the full sample. **A larger percentage of immigrant students also listed documentation status as a barrier to housing (12.4% among immigrant students compared to 2% in the full sample) as well as language barriers (6.7% among immigrant students compared to 2% in the full sample)**. However, the general pattern of findings pertaining to housing barriers and facilitators for students from marginalized groups was consistent with those reported by the full sample. To illustrate this, we have included barriers and facilitators specific to BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and first generation students in the appendix, which can be compared to the full sample charts presented above.

One student group who differed more substantially in their reported barriers and facilitators of housing were international students, who identified documentation status and language as barriers to housing at much higher rates than students in the full sample; and having pets and personal health at much lower rates (see appendix). They were also much more likely to identify work study and university

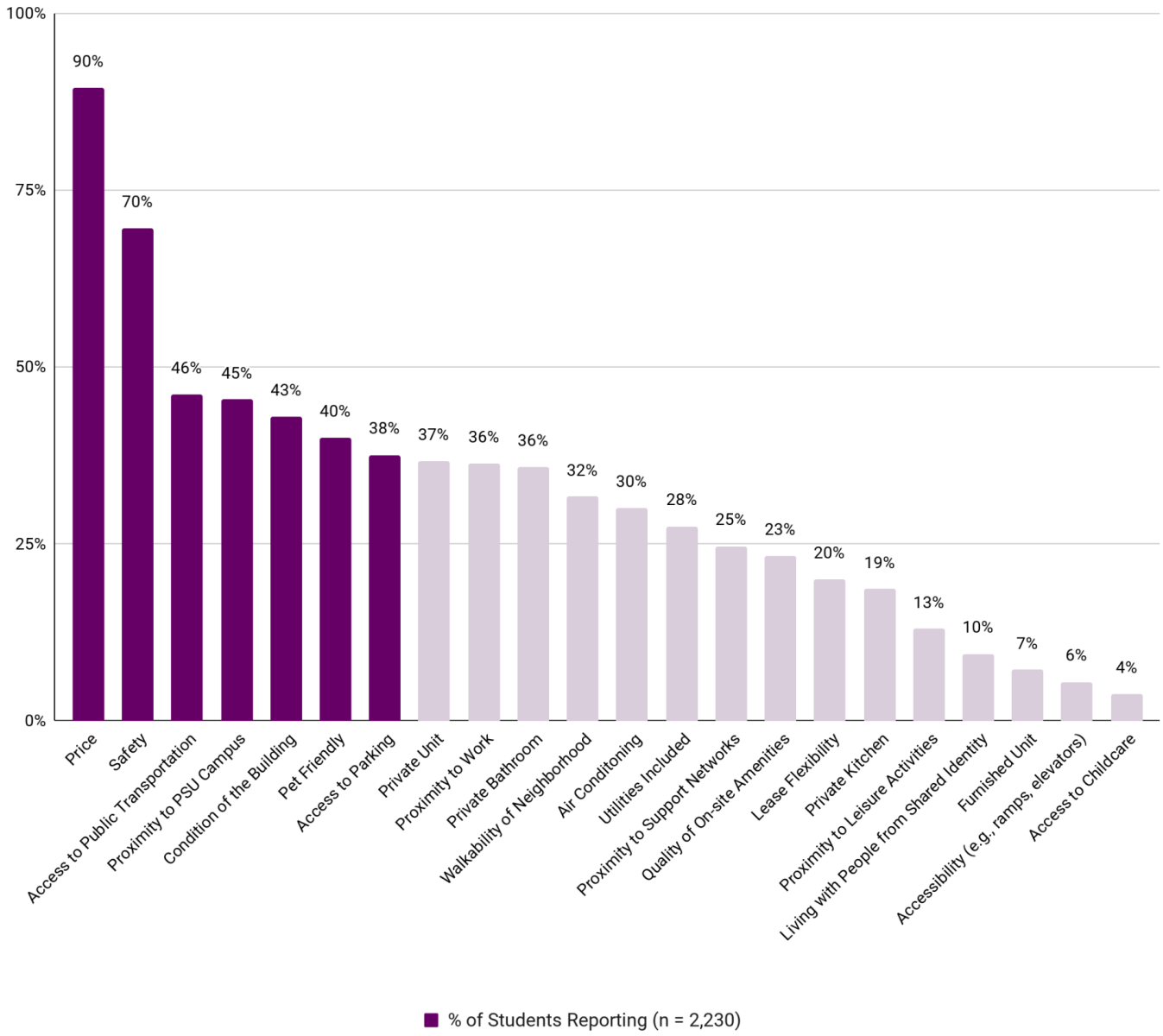
employment opportunities as facilitators of housing compared to the full sample (22.8% of international students surveyed compared to 11% in the full sample).

"As an international student, there are too many barriers for us. Language, habits, way of living, beliefs, social background check, working opportunities, etc. We pay like twice as much as a local student does; we are not allowed to work or apply for internships…"

HOUSING PREFERENCES AND NEEDS

To assess student preferences and needs pertaining to housing, we developed a list of 22 factors encompassing physical, social, cultural, locational, and financial features of housing. This list was developed by reviewing the literature on student housing preferences and by consulting with current Portland State students, including students with lived experience of housing insecurity and/or homelessness. We assessed preferences in two stages: first by asking students to select the seven factors that are most preferred when considering housing (see Chart 4), and then by asking them to select their top three non-negotiables or must-haves to gauge their most critical housing needs (see Chart 5).

In both cases, **price and safety were the top two most important factors when considering a place to live**. Further, the top ten overall factors were identical both when students named their top seven factors and their top three non-negotiables, though the ordering differed in some cases (for example, pet-friendly housing emerged as a higher priority when students were asked to select their top three non-negotiables). Proximity to work and to the PSU campus were top considerations in both rankings, as were access to publication transportation and access to parking. Having a private unit and a private bathroom were highly ranked needs, while a private kitchen was relatively less important. **Importantly, each of the 22 items were ranked by at least 2% of students as being a non-negotiable factor when considering a place to live.** That is, while certain features (e.g., price, safety, proximity to PSU, private unit) were much more likely to be selected as non-negotiable characteristics of housing, a sizeable number of students also considered factors such as living with people from a shared identity group, proximity to leisure activities, accessibility (e.g., ramps, elevators, ADA bathrooms), access to childcare, and furnished units as necessary features of their housing.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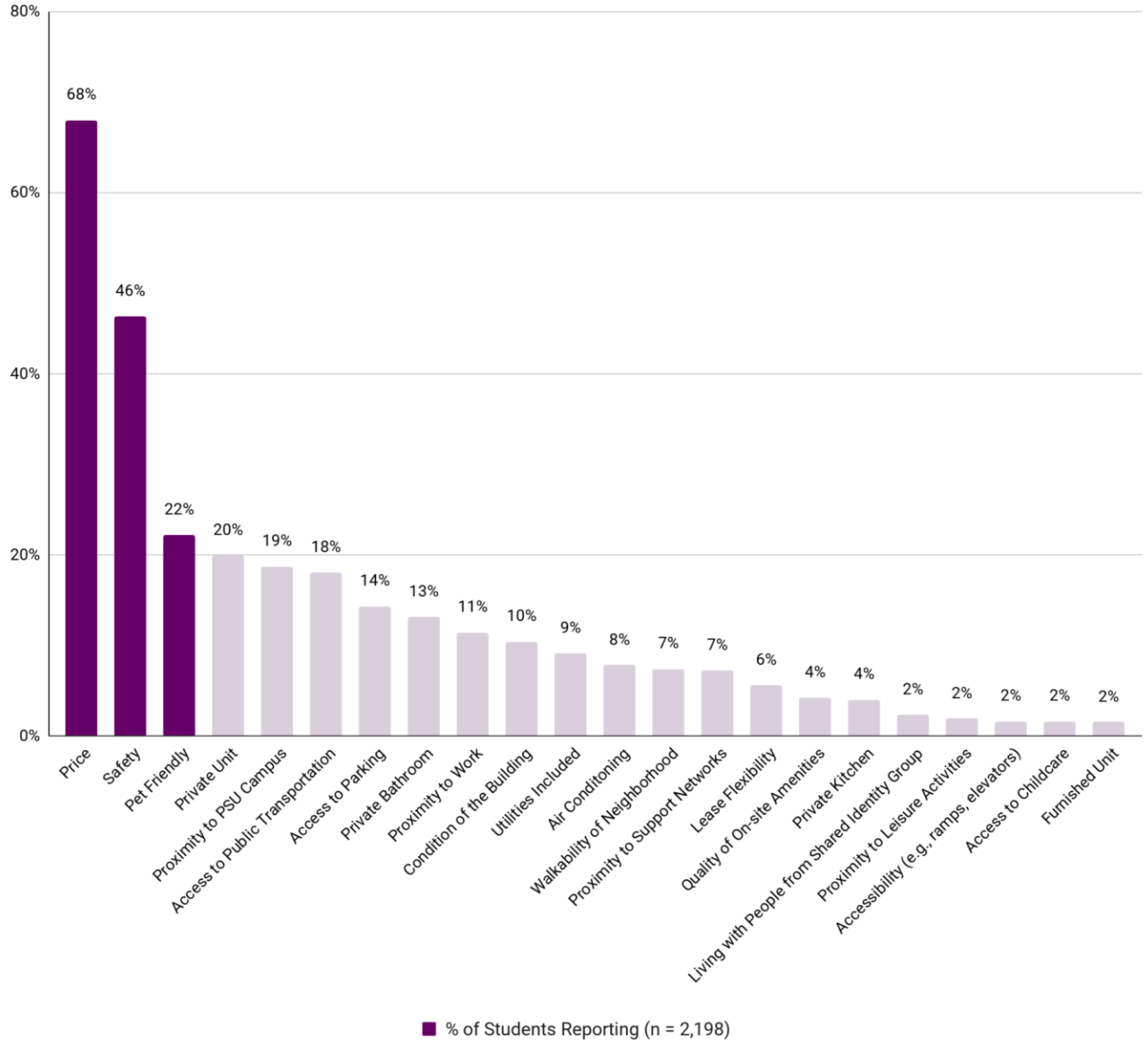
7%
6%
4%
Price
Safety
Access to Public Transportation
Proximity to PSU Campus
Condition of the Building
Pet Friendly
Access to Parking
Private Unit
Proximity to Work
Private Bathroom
Walkability of Neighborhood
Air Conditoning
Utilities Included
Proximity to Support Networks
Quality of On-site Amenities
Lease Flexibility
Private Kitchen
Proximity to Leisure Activities
Living with People from Shared Identity
Furnished Unit
Accessibility (e.g., ramps, elevators)
Access to Childcare
% of Students Reporting (n = 2,230)

CHART 5: TOP THREE NON-NEGOTIABLES WHEN CONSIDERING A PLACE TO LIVE



DIFFERENCES IN HOUSING NEEDS AND PREFERENCES

Similar to our examination of housing barriers and facilitators, we found that the patterns of findings pertaining to housing preferences and needs among students from marginalized and underrepresented groups were largely similar to those identified by the full sample. **Consistently across student groups, price and safety, followed by access to public transportation and proximity to PSU, were identified as the most important factors when considering housing**, both when rating the top seven most important factors and the top three non-negotiables. A few subgroup differences from our analysis of the top seven factors when considering housing are worth noting. First, pet friendly housing was rated as less important among BIPOC students (29.4%), immigrant students (29.2%) and international students (6.3%) compared to students in the full sample (40%). Second, living with people from a shared identity group was more commonly noted as an important factor when considering housing among LGBTQ+ students (15.1%) compared to the full sample (10%). Utilities being included was a more commonly reported housing need among BIPOC students (36.1%) compared to the full sample (28%); and lease flexibility was much more commonly reported as an important factor when considering housing among foster youth (41.2%) compared to the full sample (20%). Finally, international students were more likely to report that proximity to campus was an important factor when considering housing (67.7%) compared to the full sample (45%) but less likely to report needing housing to be close to work (15% compared to 36%).

STUDENT HOUSING PROGRAMS

PSU PROGRAMS

EMERGENCY FUNDS

PSU has a number of emergency funds for students:

- **Undergraduate Emergency Fund:** administered by the Office of Student Success, this fund is open to undergraduate students who face disruption to their education due to a financial emergency. Awards are typically $500, although higher awards are given based on student circumstances, and may be granted no more than once a term. During the two terms of the pilot, a total of $276,100 was awarded to 467 students.
- **General Student Emergency Fund**: administered by the Office of the Dean of Student Life, this fund is open to any student who is experiencing basic needs insecurity. Awards may not exceed $1,500; can only be utilized once per student; and cannot be used for tuition, books, dorm expenses, or fees. This fund is available to students during the academic year.
- **College and school emergency funds:** many schools and colleges at PSU offer a separate emergency fund program for students pursuing one of their degrees. Eligibility, application requirements, award amounts, and permitted use varies by school/college.
- **Resource Center emergency funds**: the Queer Resource Center, Native American Student and Community Center, and International Student Services all administer emergency fund programs.

Housing insecurity is a major driver of need for students applying to emergency funds: an analysis by the Office of Student Success shows that **56% of students who have applied for emergency aid indicated housing insecurity or the need for temporary housing as the reason for the request.**

FREE HOUSING PILOT

A donor-funded pilot providing free housing for Summer Bridge Program students (low-GPA, first-generation students) recently completed its second year. The pilot provides campus housing or $8500 in assistance for off-campus housing to 50 students a year. An analysis by the Office of Student Success showed that participating students persisted in their education at much higher rates than peers. Given the success rate of this pilot, continuing the program and expanding it to additional students with similar backgrounds would likely benefit student persistence on a larger scale.

EMERGENCY HOUSING

The PSU CARE Team provides hotel vouchers for students experiencing a housing crisis, but the vouchers typically last no more than a few days. Funding for vouchers comes from different sources and has no guaranteed amount, so ongoing availability for students is a concern. University Housing & Residence Life does not typically offer free housing for students in crisis due to revenue-generation requirements and concerns around how to equitably select students, but has supported short-term emergency stays

at the University Place Hotel on a case-by-case emergency basis. Referrals for emergency placements are made by the PSU CARE Team or the Basic Needs Hub. External partners such as New Avenues for Youth and the Homeless Youth Continuum can assist with emergency housing for students between 18 and 25 years of age who are experiencing literal homelessness. Student Legal Services also provides assistance to currently housed students facing eviction or lease disputes.

AFFORDABLE RENTS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS (ARCS)

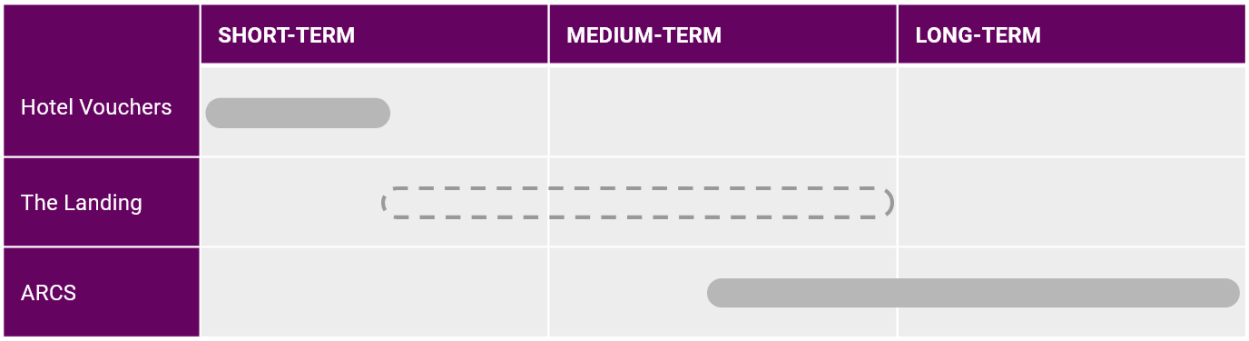
ARCS provides deeply affordable housing, typically at a 50% discount for units that are already offered at below market rate, for students experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. The program is managed by local nonprofit College Housing NW in partnership with PSU, Portland Community College, New Avenues for Youth, Mt. Hood Community College, Clackamas Community College, and Native American Youth and Family Center. ARCS also waives deposits and application fees and does not require guarantors, lowering common barriers to housing for students experiencing housing insecurity. Multiple interviewees listed ARCS as an essential resource for PSU students, although available spots are not currently sufficient to meet demand.

THE LANDING

The Landing was a shelter at First United Methodist Church (FUMC) in Goose Hollow for PSU students experiencing homelessness or a housing crisis. The shelter provided bathrooms, showers, washers and dryers, wi-fi, a food pantry, one meal on campus each day, free parking, and a mailing address. Students were referred by the CARE Team Basic Needs Navigator and could spend as much time in the shelter as they needed, typically in increments of a single academic term at a time. The shelter was operated by FUMC with support from a paid volunteer coordinator and a set of volunteers, including more than 200 housed PSU students who volunteered or engaged with The Landing through class projects. The Landing provided shelter to 18 PSU students since early 2022 (Powell, 2023), with a total capacity of eight students at any given time. Providing a dedicated shelter for PSU students, with peers as volunteers, kept students connected to campus community and avoided the need to access community shelters that may feel unsafe, be located far from campus, have an environment in which students struggle to study, or lack available beds.

In June 2023, The Landing closed due to a lack of funding. This closure garnered negative media coverage (Powell, 2023; Edge, 2023) and was mentioned as having significant negative impacts on students across multiple interviews. Due to the predominantly volunteer-run model of the shelter, as well as free rent and utilities from FUMC, The Landing requires at least $50,000/year to operate. This funding would be used to pay a part-time Volunteer Coordinator position as well as any temporary overnight staff needed to cover open volunteer shifts. Fully funding The Landing would cost roughly $110,000/year. The Landing's closure left a major gap in medium-term emergency shelter for PSU students, since hotel vouchers are only for a few days and the ARCS program often has a waiting list. OHSU and Mt. Hood Community College have expressed interest in partnering with PSU on The Landing if it can be reopened.

TABLE 1: PSU STUDENT HOUSING PROGRAMS BY LENGTH



SNAP EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING PROGRAM (SNAP E&T)

SNAP E&T, managed by the Office of the Dean of Student Life, supports students enrolled in SNAP benefits with education and employment coaching as well as payments for qualified expenses related to their education. Such expenses can include childcare, housing, tuition and fees, books, transportation, and personal necessities. The monthly program snapshot for April, 2023 (the most recent month for which full program data were available) showed that 51% of all student requests for assistance were for housing/utilities.

A USDA Food and Nutrition Services grant administered by Oregon DHS provides a 1:1 match for every dollar PSU invests in the program. Although such programs are common at community colleges throughout the Pacific NW, PSU was the first four-year institution in the nation to have an active program. Through June 2023, SNAP E&T has raised $630,000 in funding for the program.

NATIONAL PROGRAMS

SHELTERS

The UCLA Bruin Shelter, opened in 2016, is a shelter for UCLA students experiencing homelessness run by student volunteers in partnership with community organizations. The shelter has nine beds, similar in size to The Landing at PSU, and provides a bed for up to six months. Breakfast and dinner are served onsite. UCLA students studying case management, medicine, and dentistry provide service connections and exams (Robinson, 2018). A similar shelter at USC, Trojan Shelter, is operated by student volunteers and provides overnight beds, two meals, and case management connections (Trojan Shelter, 2022).

FREE/REDUCED-COST CAMPUS HOUSING

Massachusetts funds partnerships between state universities and community colleges to provide free campus housing, meal plans, and transportation to students experiencing homelessness (Chimelis, 2020). The ARCS partnership between PSU, College Housing NW, and other local institutions could serve as a basis for a similar program. Many other colleges and universities provide free housing, sometimes coupled with meal plans and transportation passes, for students who have indicated they are experiencing homelessness on the FAFSA or through other documentation. California, Maine, and Tennessee require student housing to give priority to enrolled students experiencing homelessness and to provide year-round housing (SchoolHouse Connection, 2022).

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Chicago

All Chicago, the homelessness Continuum of Care[2] for the Chicago region, has a student emergency fund for students who are resident in Chicago. The fund is:

> designed specifically to support Chicago's low-income college students at risk of dropping out of school due to an unexpected financial crisis. The short-term goal is to help students maintain stability through a crisis and remain enrolled in a school. The long-term goal is to boost rates of academic retention, success, and graduation for at-risk students.

College access and persistence agencies identify students, walk them through the eligibility requirements, refer them to the fund, and provide additional wraparound support. From 2017–2020, the fund helped 3,990 students and disbursed $1,795,591, with an average grant size of $450. In 2020, 13% of requests were for assistance in paying for housing and 7% were for utilities (All Chicago, n.d.).

[2] A Continuum of Care is a federally-mandated network of homelessness service providers and government agencies serving specific geographic regions that is responsible for homelessness estimates and distributing federal funding.

Los Angeles

The homelessness services nonprofit Jovenes operates the College Success Initiative in partnership with Los Angeles-area colleges and universities to provide housing for students experiencing homelessness. Programs include:

- Master-leased apartments near campuses that provide bridge housing while students work with case managers to find permanent housing.
- Rental assistance to subsidize the cost of housing while a student is enrolled in school.
- Dormitory-style housing near campuses, with both free and subsidized units, managed in partnership with the local college/university.
- A temporary, six-month host home program to provide housing while students are assisted in finding permanent housing (Jovenes, n.d.).

Tacoma

In Tacoma, the College Housing Assistance Program (CHAP) was a partnership between the Tacoma Housing Authority, Tacoma Community College, and the University of Washington at Tacoma. CHAP provided rental assistance to students experiencing or at high risk of homelessness through help with private market rentals, placements in housing authority units near campuses, and long-term contracts with private developments near campuses with rents paid down to levels affordable for students.

CHAP was closed in 2022 following a pair of evaluations that found:

- Only 25% of students accepted to the program were able to secure private market housing. Students who successfully leased were "more likely to be older, have stronger academic profiles, and less likely to be Black/African American."
- The fixed subsidy amount was not sufficient to support students with very low incomes.
- While the pilot program showed significant benefits to persistence, the full program showed little difference in GPA and persistence between students who received assistance and students who did not.
- "Students of color and students with children were more likely to be removed from the program for not meeting program requirements" such as a minimum GPA of 2.0 and 12 enrolled credits per term (Tacoma Housing Authority, 2022; Berk Consulting, 2020).

One evaluation found that a lack of comprehensive wraparound support from participating colleges and universities, particularly when students were seeking a unit to lease, was a key factor in the program's lack of success (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2021).

HOMESHARE PROGRAMS

Home sharing typically takes the form of a single-room rental in an owner-occupied house and is often more affordable than a market-rate apartment. Several university programs and partners across the nation have adopted home share models to serve students. The Housing Options for Students Today

(HOST) nonprofit in Raleigh, North Carolina matches college students at risk of homelessness with volunteer hosts for short-term stays (HOST, n.d.). The University of Michigan helps match student renters with home owners who are older than 55 (HomeShare, n.d.). Jovenes operates a program for college and university students experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles as described above. Platforms such as Silvernest and their local partner Oregon Home Share facilitate room rentals by homeowners, but aren't focused specifically on college students. Such programs are unlikely to be scalable to fully meet PSU student needs, may not be located near campus, thereby increasing transportation time and costs; and may expose students to discrimination or interpersonal conflict with hosts.

STUDENT CO-OPS

The North American Students of Cooperation (NASCO), which provides resources and support for those seeking to create a student co-op, defines housing cooperatives as "democratic, member-controlled, and member-owned entities that own and/or manage real estate" (n.d.). In the United States, housing cooperatives have a long history of providing affordable housing to students, typically in exchange for work to sustain co-op upkeep and operations. UCLA studied a successful co-operative housing model at the university and reported that it was the cheapest housing option available to students, and that "all of the tenants with whom we spoke cited cost as the number one reason they decided to live in the Co-op. A strong sense of community, proximity to campus, access to meals, and the ability to trade work shifts with other tenants were among their other reasons for joining" (Cuff et al., 2018)

Relatedly, many students in our 2023 housing insecurity study reported living with roommates or splitting expenses as a protective factor against housing insecurity:

"I think something that could potentially be added is cost sharing, especially for food or associated housing costs. Many people, myself included, can only afford good food because I'm meal prepping with other people, same with rent/utilities. My roommate is taking on more of a financial burden because they make more."

A co-operative model may not work for many students with family obligations or more complex needs and barriers than what has historically been viewed as a "traditional" college student. However, some cooperatives are focused around specific identities, and may offer students facing discrimination a way to find affordable housing and a welcoming, safe community.

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT (ADU) VILLAGES

Some universities are exploring the potential for ADU (individual bathrooms and kitchens) or POD (shared bathrooms and kitchens) villages as potential opportunities to quickly build basic housing for students. UCLA's City Lab explored the concept of leasing ADUs from local homeowners for students with intermittent housing needs (Cuff et al., 2018), and Pacific University in Forest Grove is considering a POD village for students experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness. However, POD villages are only feasible for institutions with unused land and are unlikely to meet the needs of a broad range of students, while backyard ADUs have the same risks as homeshare programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FEDERAL GUIDANCE

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), in partnership with The Hope Lab, developed a guidebook for addressing housing insecurity and living costs in higher education (Sackett et al., 2016). Key strategies to support students are listed below; this should serve as a checklist for all PSU staff, administrators, and offices engaged in helping address student basic needs. A preliminary assessment of how well PSU implements each strategy is color-coded below, but is highly subjective and requires additional information to be fully accurate. This assessment is included here only as a possible guide to areas where PSU may need additional focus.

TABLE 2: HUD GUIDEBOOK FOR ADDRESSING HOUSING INSECURITY

Key:

	Implemented at PSU, may need additional funding and support
	Needs additional investment, planning, and support at PSU
	Needs significant investment, planning, and support at PSU

Category	Strategy	How to Implement	
Outreach & Identification	Establish a Single Point of Contact (SPOC)	Assign a SPOC to coordinate campus assistance, including applying for federal student aid by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), referring students to campus offices, and building partnerships with community organizations. It is ideal if the SPOC has connections to local benefits programs, support organizations, and other resources.	
	Engage in proactive, systemic outreach	Use a variety of venues (new student orientation, student portal, classroom presentations, individualized alerts) and in ways that are sensitive to student concerns of stigma.	
Institutional Policies & Structure	Help students manage housing costs by changing the timing of aid delivery	Ensure financial aid is delivered in a timely manner, and where possible adjust payment deadlines until after students have received financial aid. Strategies include providing students with assistance earlier to help them pay security deposits, proactively reaching out to identified high-need students to help, reducing required housing fees for high need students, and allowing high-need students to pay housing costs once aid is disbursed.	

	Prioritize higher-need students for resources, including housing and work-study, and fill housing gaps during breaks and emergencies	Prioritize on-campus housing and work-study slots for identified high-need students (for example, Pell-eligible students, unaccompanied homeless youth), and provide or help arrange housing for students with need during breaks.	
Benefits & Support Programs	Partner with local agencies and organizations	Partnerships support an array of other strategies, such as coordinating with local Continuums of Care, partnerships with local housing agencies to serve students, or arranging Federal Work Study opportunities and other job opportunities.	
	Bundle academic support with other assistance	Institutions can bundle academic support, such as advising, with financial assistance (for instance, tuition waivers for high-need students), in-kind assistance, and organizational support and advising.	
	Connect students with benefits	Help students access benefits programs, such as food and childcare assistance, through a single hub with dedicated staff. You may consider an opt-out model for students who likely qualify.	
	Provide emergency aid / microgrants	Institutions can offer small grants to students. It is helpful to establish and communicate clear criteria for program eligibility, while providing for flexibility in unusual circumstances. Ideally, emergency aid programs supplement a campus benefits access program.	
	Address food insecurity with a campus food pantry, mobile food distribution, or meal point sharing	Campus food pantries directly provide food to students or staff. Local partnerships, especially with regional food banks, are critical. Dedicated staff should complement volunteers. Most institutions operate their pantry on the honor system and have not experienced issues.	
	Enable students to use SNAP on campus	Campus stores can apply to be eligible for SNAP purchases.	
	Provide assistance with housing issues and offer emergency housing	Institutions can help students address housing issues by providing free legal help, referrals to community organizations, short-term emergency aid, and emergency housing on or off campus.	
	Support student parents, including campus childcare	First, identify and connect with student parents on your campus. Provide campus childcare directly or offer individualized referrals. Institutions can also support student parents by reaching out and helping them transition to school, providing mentoring and peer support, and offering parent-specific academic support such as flexible class scheduling.	
	Support students' financial capability	Colleges can provide direct financial services or referrals, or they can partner with local organizations. Institutions can also provide Individual Development Accounts to help students save for educational expenses.	

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

The following actions are recommended to help PSU meet HUD guidance on addressing student housing insecurity and homelessness. Additional detail is provided based on an analysis of student surveys, suggestions from interviews, academic literature on related best practices, and conversations with national experts. Education Northwest has published a Basic Needs Services Implementation Rubric that should be used in conjunction with the HUD guidebook to assess progress in key areas (Brey and Hodara, 2023), and the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education will shortly release a set of standards for basic needs centers and programs that was developed with substantial input from this research team and other PSU employees.

Center Equity in All Programs

Multiple PSU studies have shown disparities in housing similar to those among the broader population, especially among students of color (particularly Black, Latinx, Native American, and Pacific Islander students), former foster students, veterans, transfer students, first-generation students, Pell Grant recipients, LQBTQ students, parenting students, neurodivergent students, international students, undocumented students, and disabled students. Justice-involved students are likely to face similar disparities, although data are lacking across many PSU surveys. Appropriate housing solutions will vary across different groups of students, but ensuring that housing approaches center racial equity and incorporate a broader equity lens into program design, management, and evaluation will help reduce disparities. Justice-involved, undocumented, and international students in particular may not be able to take advantage of specific funding or programs that receive federal funding, so alternative pathways and models of support should be provided.

Students in our 2023 housing insecurity study shared their unique challenges with housing as it relates to their identities and experiences:

"Due to my chronic illnesses and other life factors, finding roommates is incredibly challenging for me, and it's gotten less and less accessible over time. This combination is forcing me to go into debt to live alone. And now my rent is raised and I need to be out in one month"

To ensure equitable approaches, the Office of Global Diversity and Inclusion, Cultural Resource Centers, and service and resource centers under the Dean of Student Life should be engaged in all efforts to address student housing needs. Likewise, a diverse and representative group of students should be engaged in program design, programming, and evaluation.

Provide Free and Subsidized Housing

Many other institutions set aside free campus housing units for students experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness. Until its closure, The Landing fulfilled a similar role at PSU, but providing a range of free housing units suitable for different student household compositions (see Student Housing Preferences above) could effectively meet the same need. Students could be referred into these units by

the CARE Team and should be allowed to stay until they can be placed into permanent housing. Campus Housing & Residence Life would need to be reimbursed for the cost of these units. Partnerships, such as home share models or with for-profit housing providers, are likely to foster isolation or introduce additional complications and barriers for students who need sustained engagement from campus services and should be considered as a supplement, rather than a replacement, for free on-campus housing.

Deeply affordable on- or near-campus housing of a range of unit types is in high need by students experiencing housing insecurity. Parenting students with young children, in particular, are poorly served by current campus housing options. PSU should not only subsidize a range of current student housing units, but will almost certainly need to acquire or construct additional units. This will be explored further in a separate report.

"PSU overlooks the needs of older students across the board; even the SSWC only supports people with YOUNG children. My housing needs have everything to do with being a parent, specifically of a teen."

Address Safety Concerns in Housing

Followed by the price of housing, safety was identified by students as the second most important factor when considering a place to live.

"What I can afford just isn't safe anymore (I live off campus)… I've been attacked near where I live twice in the past two years. Grad school is hard enough… Safety and affordability is my priority. While I would love to stay downtown, I think my only remaining options are in the suburbs of Portland."

Safety is a uniquely important concern for students from marginalized groups, including LGBTQ+ and BIPOC students:

"Security, in all aspects, is essential for me to feel safe in housing. As someone who was assigned female at birth and is much smaller than others, it is difficult for me to feel safe in my own body at my apartment complex."

"As someone of color, even if I can afford certain places, PDX is very White so I never know if I will be 'safe' from the actions of someone who doesn't like me or think less of me due to my ethnic background. So, I am a bit nervous here."

Follow-up research and engagement is needed to determine the primary safety-related concerns students have, as well as measures that will make them feel safe in housing. For housing on or near campus, it is important to work with a variety of student groups along with the University Public Safety Oversight Committee (UPSOC) to identify and resolve safety concerns. For off-campus housing, neighborhood crime maps can help target areas of possible risk, though these sources can be biased, and triangulation with resident interviews is needed. In both cases, establishing clear and open channels

of communication for students to report safety-related concerns is essential for effective risk assessment and resolution.

Increase Availability of Student Housing Near Campus

Proximity to PSU was the fourth most important factor identified by students when considering a place to live: nearly 20% of students surveyed said that proximity to PSU was one of their top three non-negotiables when considering housing. We also found that rates of housing insecurity were higher among students who live farther from campus. Locating housing close to campus not only makes it easier for students to access their classes and traditional academic resources (e.g., the library), but it also connects students to more accessible resources for addressing their basic needs, such as food pantries and health services. Building affordable student housing and/or entering into partnerships with agencies managing apartments near campus would help address housing insecurity among PSU students while also aligning with PSU's stated mission to be a powerful force in the revitalization of downtown Portland.

Both the price of housing and proximity to PSU were among the most important factors students identified when considering a place to live. In the most recent survey a number of students shared that they would like to live on campus, but could not afford to do so:

"I wish I could live on campus. It would be really nice to be around other students, but it's so wildly expensive that I could never do it. I wish the housing/residence life people would stop complaining about the 'lack of demand for housing' because there is a huge demand for housing among students, it's just that no one can afford on campus housing and/or they don't want to share a room with someone for such a high price. If they lowered the prices, they wouldn't have so many vacancies."

Expand Funding for Current Programs

PSU has implemented a wide range of recommended programs and practices to address student basic needs insecurity that are managed and staffed by talented and committed employees. However, many of these programs are chronically underfunded and therefore unable to fully meet student needs, or have been forced to close entirely (as in the case of The Landing).

"There have been multiple times when we needed help the past few months where we were directed to certain PSU resources who told us they could not help us."

Although the university faces significant fiscal challenges, investing in basic needs has been proven to improve academic performance, persistence, and graduation–outcomes that would, most likely, not only pay for themselves in the long run, but also ensure the university fulfills its responsibility to support student success. Funding should be adequate for programs to fully address the direct costs of meeting student needs and to achieve staffing levels and attract staff expertise appropriate for the level and types of need. These types of services are essential when students are in need.

"The Queer Resource Center and Student Legal Services were huge helps when I was evicted."

Unify Emergency Fund Applications

The wide range of current student emergency funds, each with different application and eligibility requirements, can be confusing and challenging for students to navigate, as illustrated by the following quote from a student in the 2023 housing insecurity survey:

"I have tried time and time again applying for university emergency grants but have met endless roadblocks and bureaucratic backlogs. Due to that, I have missed rent and credit payments"

Providing a unified print/online application for all students, with information on the form that can be used to determine eligibility for specific funds and route the application to fund managers accordingly, would lower student barriers to accessing this essential resource. The application should be designed with engagement from all current fund managers and should minimize the amount of personal information required.

Enhance Program Coordination

Programs and services related to addressing student housing are widely distributed across offices, centers, schools and colleges at PSU. While this helps ensure a variety of access and information points for students, the reality is that services are sometimes uncoordinated. Employees working in these or related programs may not always be aware of the variety of services on offer, or even when they are aware of resources, handoffs can create barriers for students due to the time involved and emotional labor of making the case for their assistance more than once. To ensure that student needs are addressed in a timely and holistic manner, better coordination is needed across campus programs.

"The housing and resource websites are the most complicated and stressful to navigate especially when in a situation that they are needed. If the DRC could make body doubling appointments to work with students finding and filling out these applications it would be a big step forward."

Improved coordination can take several forms:

- Creating unified applications for assistance (see above for a specific recommendation around emergency funds);
- Holding regular meetings of staff and administrators involved in addressing student basic needs, organized by area (for example, all emergency fund managers);
- Ensuring that all academic advisors are trained on how to identify students dealing with basic needs insecurity, are aware of available services for students, and know how to assist students in accessing those services;
- Identifying students who may need additional support and proactively engaging with those students to build awareness of available services.

Use Pell Grant Eligibility as a Proxy for Need

Pell Grant eligibility may serve as a proxy for directly assessed student homelessness (for example, through the FAFSA homelessness determination or a case management meeting). Pell Grant eligibility holds the advantage of being recorded across enrolled students and accessible through current campus recordkeeping services. Pell Grant students could receive text or email "nudges" that notify them of additional services and resources or academic advisors could be prompted to provide the information during meetings. However, such outreach and engagement, as with all student basic needs engagement, should be done in a way that signals respect for student autonomy and choice and does not assume basic needs insecurity.

Ensure Comprehensive Outreach

The 2020 Hope Center survey of PSU students found that "49% of students experiencing basic needs insecurity did not apply for campus supports because they did not know how" (The Hope Center, 2021). This indicates a significant awareness gap among PSU students, and this gap was noted by numerous students in the fall 2023 survey, particularly in their lack of awareness of the Basic Needs Hub and Free Food Market. The university could work to build student awareness and understanding of basic needs services through methods including, but not limited to:

- Materials and events at orientation;
- Engagement in on-campus events;
- Periodic emails and/or text messages;
- Suggested syllabus statements for faculty members;
- Campaigns through student-facing centers and programs;
- Campaigns in partnership with student unions and student government;
- Cross-campus coordination between basic needs services (described above).

Messaging should focus on building awareness of and familiarity with basic needs services, as well as de-stigmatizing and normalizing the use of services, to reduce student confusion or reluctance around engagement.

CONCLUSION

PSU has a strong foundation and culture of helping to meet student housing needs. With additional funding and coordination, existing programs could be scaled to better support students. Federal guidance and national research offer clear frameworks to follow, which should be supplemented with employee and student suggestions and implemented using a strong equity lens. Our most recent survey suggests increasing rates of both housing insecurity and homelessness; in addition, almost three-quarters of students reported spending more than 30% of their income on housing, and thus being rent-burdened. When asked about the largest barriers they face to securing and remaining in housing, the price of housing and the income needed to afford housing were the most frequently reported barriers among all students surveyed. Similarly, price was the most important factor identified by students when considering a place to live. Emergency funds and campus resource centers play an important role in helping students meet basic needs for housing and food. However, substantial additional housing units offered for free or at reduced cost are needed to fully address student housing insecurity.

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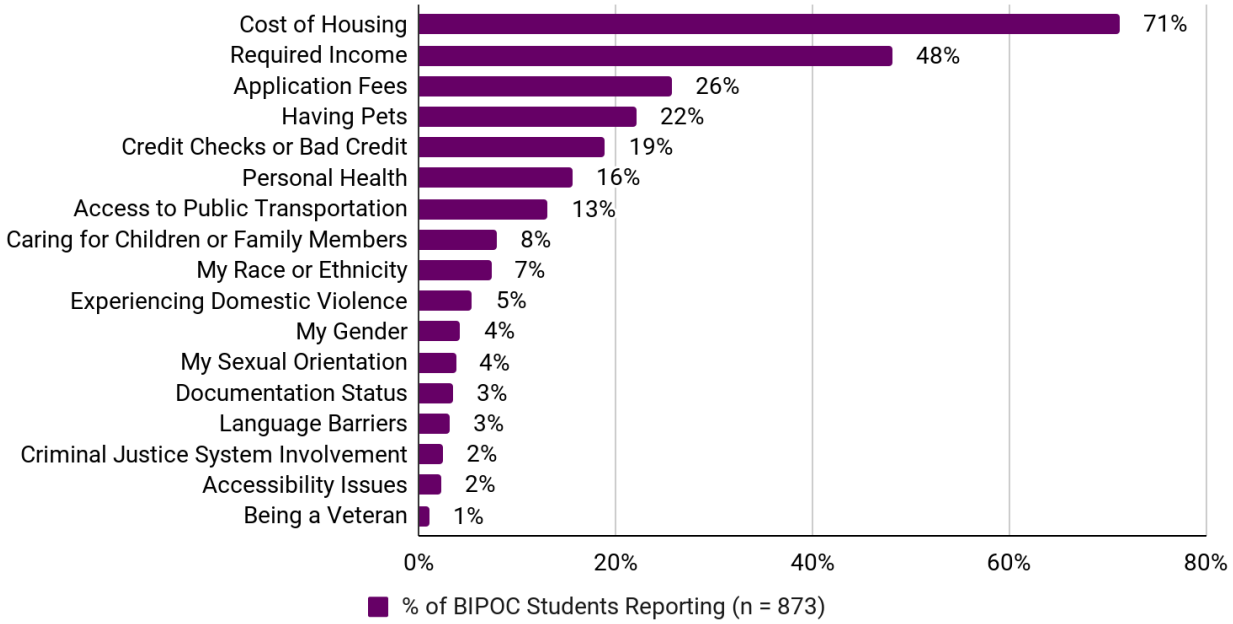
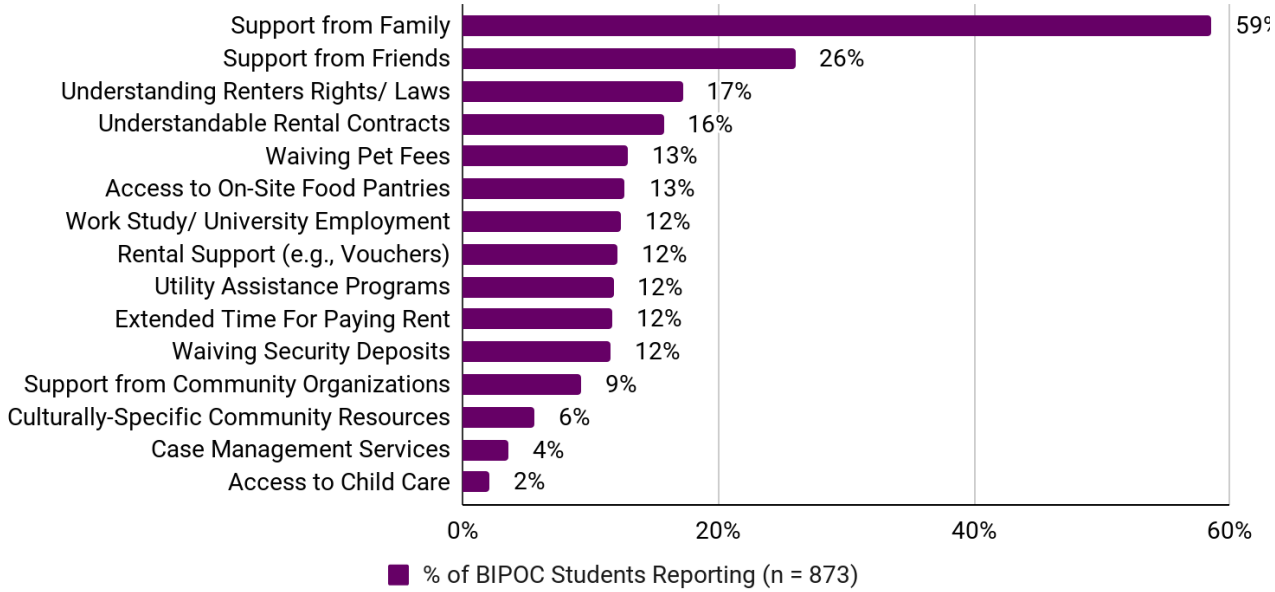
APPENDICES

HOUSING BARRIERS FOR BIPOC STUDENTS



HOUSING FACILITATORS FOR BIPOC STUDENTS



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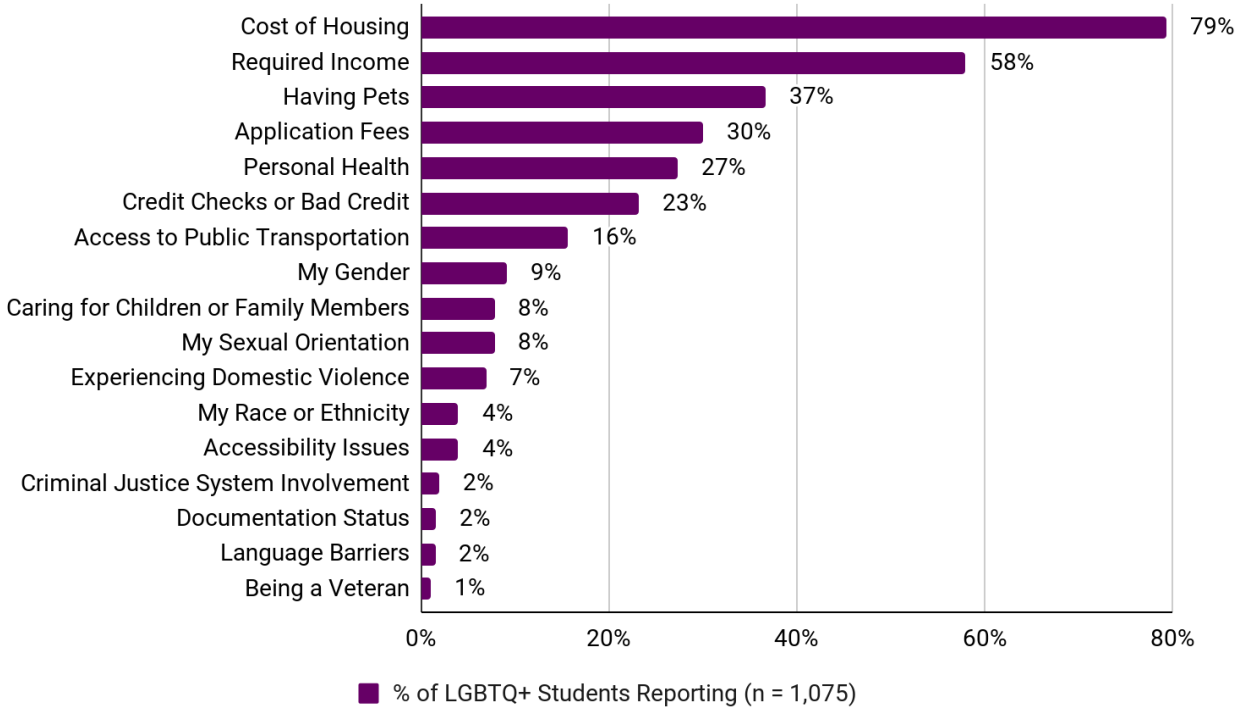

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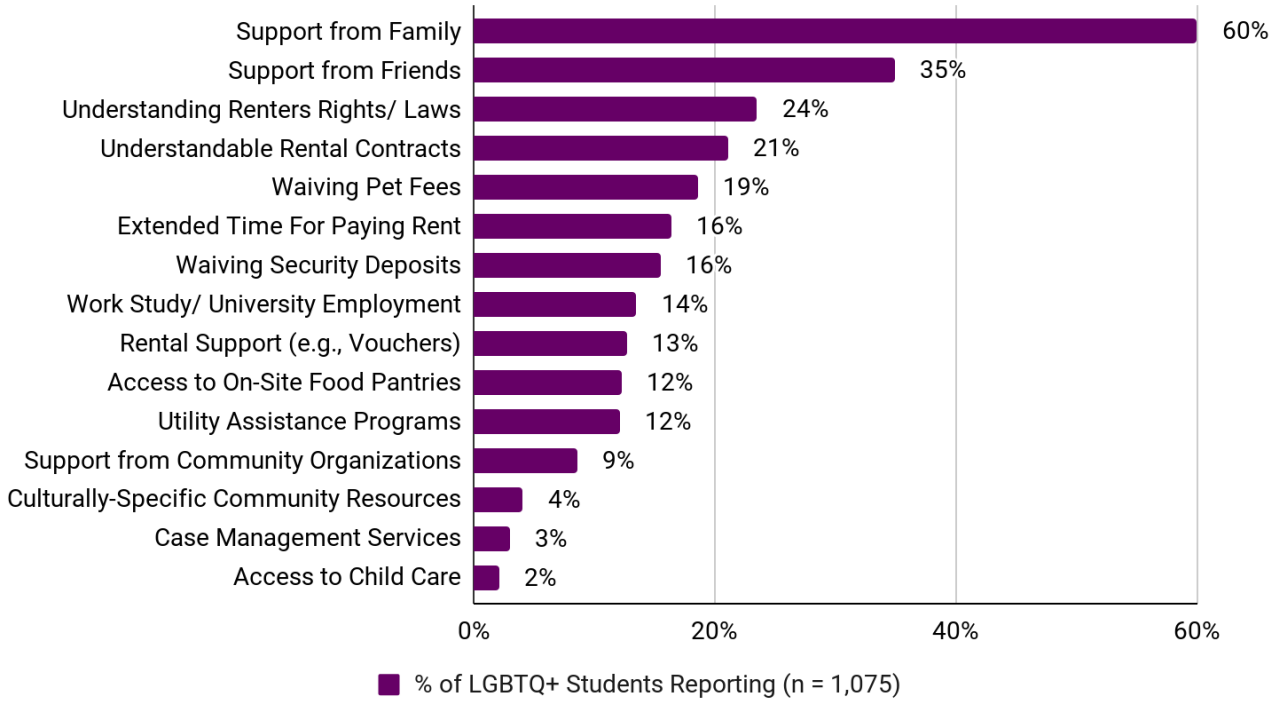

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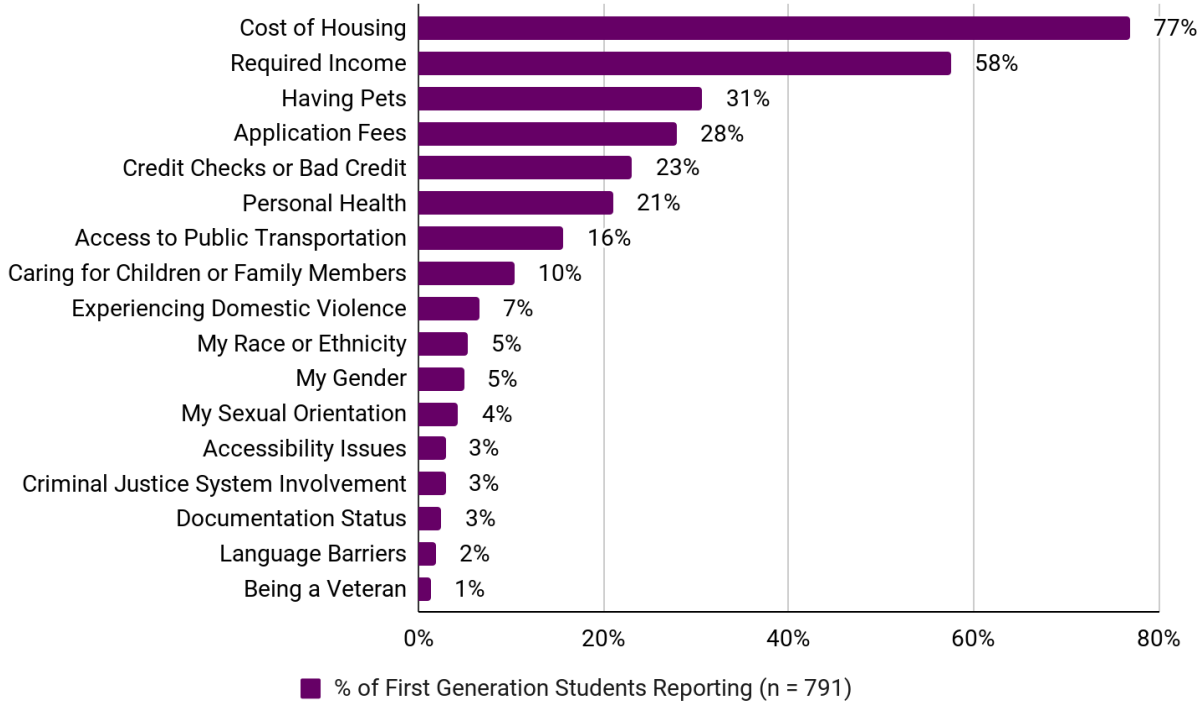

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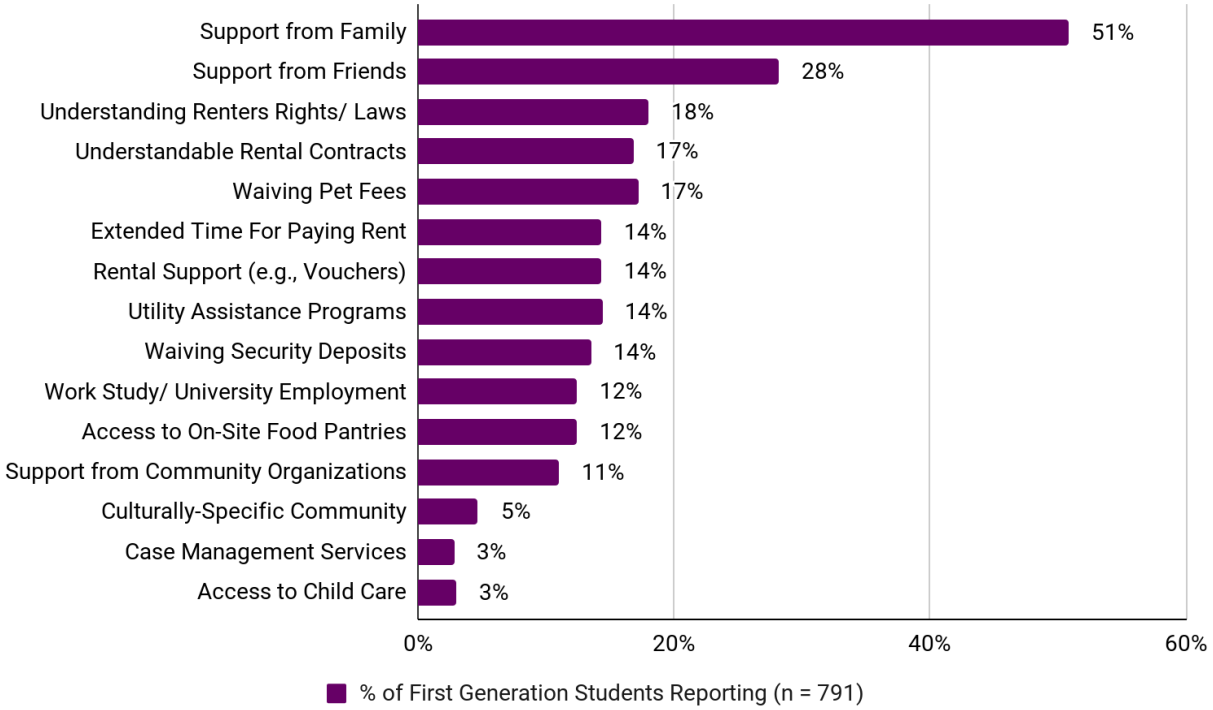

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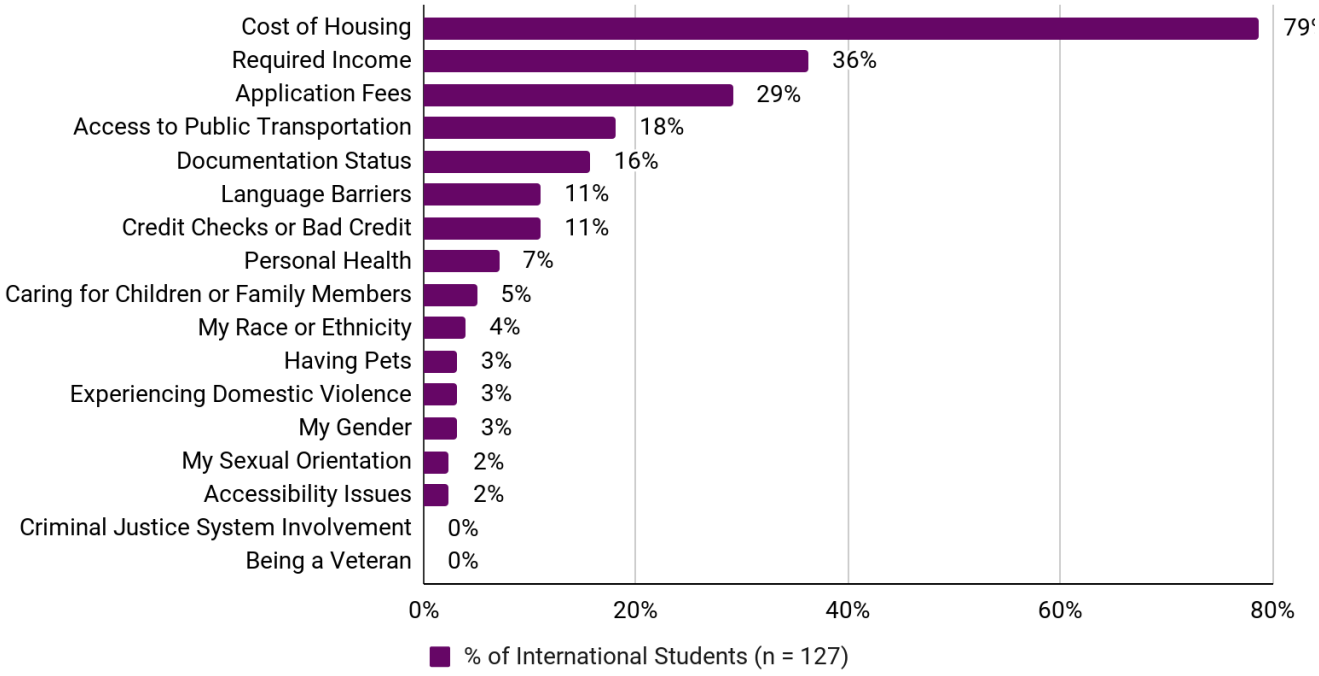

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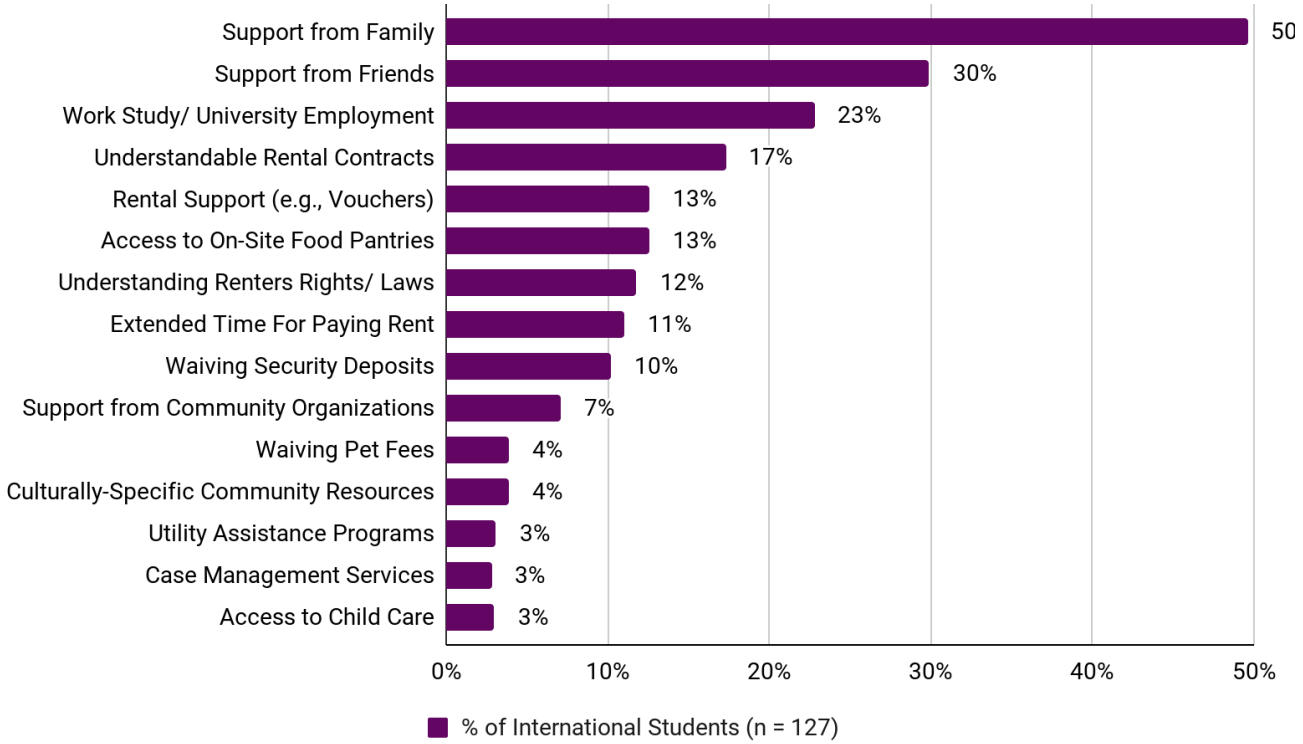

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Prepared by

Portland State University Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative

PSU-HRAC addresses the challenges of homelessness through research that uncovers conditions that lead to and perpetuate homelessness. Our goal is to help reduce homelessness and its negative impacts on individuals, families and communities, with an emphasis on communities of color.

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