Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association*
Students’ Council Agenda

Regular Meeting
via Microsoft Teams

Speaker: Benjamin Easton  Secretary: Matthew Schwarze
*operated by Federation of Students, University of Waterloo

ATTENDANCE

Please convey regrets to speaker@wusa.ca.

Attendees:

- Easton, Benjamin (President)
- Schwarze, Matthew (VP, Operations & Finance)
- Simpson, Abbie (Chair of the Board)
- Ren, Andy
- Bains, Angad (President, SOPhS)
- Souza, Angela
- Kelly, Ava (Designate, SJUSU)
- Dong, Catherine (VP, Student Life)
- Rettinger, Connor
- Kohli, Dyuti
- Yang, Edward
- Hallen, Frances
- Bhandal, Harleen (President, MathSoc)
- Dhillon, Jaskaran
- Chen, Jason
- Lan, Jay
- Phillips, Jenna (President, ESS)
- Sharma, Kanan
- Von Friedl, Katherine (President, EngSoc A)
- Sharma, Manaswi
- Jolicoeur-Becotte, Marie
- Sybersma, Mary (Designate, MathSoc)
- Casale, Matthew (President, EngSoc B)
- Rodrigues, Neaa
- Akram, Nuwair
- Dragusin, Rebecca
- Varghese, Rosanne
- Devani, Sahil
- Ismail, Sonia
• Ye-Mowe, Stephanie (VP, Education)
• Chen, Tristan
• Sathyamoorthi, Vaishavi (Designate, SciSoc)
• Ikeno, Vicky (Designate, RASC)
• Macri, Vincent
• Zhang, Yuhan
• ASU Designate
• Engineering Caucus Representative
• Health Caucus Representative

Expected Absences:
• Chen, Caroline
• Science Caucus Representative
• Science Caucus Representative
• Science Caucus Representative
• Science Caucus Representative
• Science Caucus Representative
• WASA Designate
• Kitchener Campus Representative
• Stratford Campus Representative
• GBDA Society Designate
• Renison Representative
• Nathoo, Sarina
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1  **PRELIMINARIES**

*Adding items to the agenda requires a two-thirds vote, although new items of business can still be raised without needing that vote once the entire agenda is complete.*

1.1  **CALL TO ORDER**

*Be it resolved that* the Speaker calls the meeting to order at 10:30 AM.

1.2  **TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The Students’ Council of the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association acknowledges that we live and work on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishnaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, land promised to the Six Nations, which includes six miles on each side of the Grand River.

1.3  **ELECTION OF THE OFFICERS**

*In accordance with Council Procedure 9, the Election of Officers shall supersede all other business. As such this item cannot be rearranged. Council may not adjourn or proceed with the agenda until a Speaker is elected.*

Speaker:

*Be it resolved that* Council elects ____ as Speaker.

Deputy Speaker:

*Be it resolved that* Council elects ____ as Deputy Speaker.

Secretary:

*Be it resolved that* Council elects ____ as Secretary.

Assistant Secretary:

*Be it resolved that* Council elects ____ as Assistant Secretary.

1.4  **RATIFICATION OF SOCIETY AND Pro Tem. DESIGNATES**

*Per Policy 55, Society Presidents and Designates on Council, the selection of a society designates or appointment of a pro tempore councillor by a constituency society must be ratified at the first Regular Meeting of the Students’ Council following such appointment. Ratification may not be unreasonably withheld by Council.*

5
Be it resolved that the Students’ Council ratify the appointment of *pro tempore* and constituency society designates, as presented.

Be it further resolved that the Students’ Council ratify the appointment of Mary Sybersma as a *pro tempore* representative for mathematics.

1.5 APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

*The Speaker assumes the motion to adopt the Agenda, as presented or amended*

Be it resolved that Council approve the Agenda, as presented.

2 APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Minutes are the official record of business conducted in a meeting. Council may withhold approval if there are concerns about the accuracy of the minutes.

No minutes have been received for approval at this time.

3 ITEMS FOR ADOPTION BY CONSENT

*In accordance with Council Procedure 9, items on the consent agenda will be considered in gross, without debate or amendment. Items will be moved from the consent agenda to the regular agenda upon the request of any member. The purpose of the consent agenda is not to suppress debate but to allow Council to quickly consider and approve uncontroversial items.*

3.1 RATIFICATION OF SERVICE COORDINATORS

Be it resolved that the Students’ Council ratify the Service Coordinators for Spring 2021, as presented.

Submitted By: Vice President Dong.

4 REPORTS

*Motions arising directly out of a report may be considered immediately after its presentation. No action is required to receive a report. If Council decides to adopt or accept a report, then it is endorsing the entire report and not just the recommendations.*

4.1 EXECUTIVE REPORTS

Each executive will highlight key aspects of their written reports in an oral report that lasts no longer than 2 minutes, to be followed immediately by a question period lasting no longer than 10 minutes per executive.
1. President (Benjamin Easton)
   - WUSA Box Initiative (Information)

2. Vice President, Education (Stephanie Ye-Mowe)

3. Vice President, Operations and Finance (Matthew Schwarze)

4. Vice President, Student Life (Catherine Dong)

4.2 BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT

The Chair of the Board will highlight key aspects of their written report in an oral report that lasts no longer than 2 minutes, to be followed immediately by a question period lasting no longer than 10 minutes.

4.3 REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS

To be delivered orally or in writing by Councillors or the Constituency Caucus. Any questions relating to the report or any other matter may be asked following the oral report.

   1. Applied Health Sciences Caucus
   2. Arts Caucus
   3. Engineering Caucus
   4. Environment Caucus
   5. Mathematics Caucus
   6. Science Caucus
   7. Cambridge
   8. Kitchener
   9. Stratford
   10. St. Jerome’s
   11. Renison

4.4 OFFICERS OF COUNCIL REPORTS

To be delivered orally. Any questions relating to the report or any other matter may be asked following the oral report. The individual whom typically fills a role shall give the report of that role.

   1. Speaker (Benjamin Easton)
   2. Secretary (Matthew Schwarze)
4.5 STANDING COMMITTEES OR COMMISSION REPORTS

To be delivered orally or in writing by the Committee chair or Commissioner. Any questions relating to the report or any other matter may be asked following the oral report.

4.5.1 REPORT OF THE STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY COMMISSION

Be it resolved that the Students’ Council accept the WUSA Accessibility Report, as presented.

Submitted By: Vice President Ye-Mowe.

5 SPECIAL ORDERS

A special order is an item of business that will take precedence over all other business at the designated time for the special order. As it suspends the normal rule that each item must be disposed of before another can be brought up, setting or removing a special order requires a two-thirds majority vote unless originally included in the agenda.

There are no special orders.

6 BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Business arising from the minutes is business carried on to a meeting from a previous meeting.

6.1 WATERLOO HOUSING REPORT

Speaker’s Note: The following item was considered by Council in April 2021 and tabled to this Governing Year.

Whereas student leaders in the Vice-President, Education portfolio have carried out extensive primary and secondary research on housing in Waterloo; and,

Whereas future student leaders in the Vice President, Education portfolio will continue housing advocacy based on the findings of the report; then,

Be it resolved that the Students’ Council adopt the WUSA Housing Report, as presented.

Submitted By: Vice President Ye-Mowe.
6.2 **Response to the UW Responsible Investment Working Group**

To consider a response to the draft report of the UW Responsible Investment Working Group.

Submitted By: *Councillor Hallen*.

7 **General Orders**

*A general order is an item of business that is ordered to be taken up at a meeting. Time limits to discussions indicate the point at which the Speaker will end the discussion unless Council directs otherwise.*

7.1 **Standing Committee Elections**

*Speaker’s Note: Per Council Procedure 10: Committees of Council, any remaining committee vacancies may be filled by said committee, pending ratification at the subsequent Regular Meeting.*

Joint Committees of Board and Council

*Whereas* the Board of Directors proposes to strike with the Students’ Council a Joint Committee on Governance; and,

*Whereas* the Board of Directors has adopted provisional Terms of Reference for the Governance Committee; then,

**Be it resolved that** Council suspend Procedure 10(J)I *Policies & Procedures Committee*; and,

**Be it further resolved that** Council strike with the Board of Directors a Joint Committee on Governance, to assume the responsibilities of the Policies & Procedures Committee; and,

**Be it further resolved that** Council accept the provisional Governance Committee Terms of Reference and task the Governance Committee with returning Terms of Reference for ratification by the end of the Spring Term; and,

**Be it further resolved that** Councillors ____ and ____ be elected to the Governance Committee; and,

**Be it further resolved that** Councillor ____ and at-large member ____ be elected to the Budget and Appropriations Committee.
Standing Committees of Council

Be it resolved that Councillors and , and at-large members and be elected to the Campus Life Advisory Committee; and,

Be it further resolved that Councillors , , and , and at-large members and be elected to the Co-op Students’ Council; and, Speaker’s Note: CSC members must be enrolled in a co-operative education program.

Be it further resolved that Councillors , , and , and at-large members , and be elected to the Education Advisory Council; and,

Be it further resolved that at-large members , , , and be elected to the Elections and Referenda Committee; and, Speaker’s Note: Normally, at least two elected members of ERC should be at-large members. No members of ERC may stand for election, join a referendum committee, or support any candidate or referendum position.

Be it further resolved that Councillors and , and at-large members and be elected to the Internal Administration Committee; and,

Be it further resolved that Councillors , , and , and at-large members and be elected to the Internal Funding Committee.

Standing Committees of Board

Be it resolved that Councillor and at-large member be elected to the Planning, Student Spaces, and Works Committee.

Submitted By: President Easton.

7.2 Approval of By-election Dates for Spring 2021

Be it resolved that the Students’ Council approve the following timeline for Spring 2021 by-elections:

- 6 July: Nominations open
- 12 July: Nominations close and all-candidates meeting
- 15 July: Campaigning begins
- 19 July: Voting begins
- 21 July: Voting and campaigning end

Submitted By: President Easton.
7.3 **Meeting Dates for Spring 2021**

*Be it resolved that* the Students’ Council hold its Regular Meetings at 10:30AM EDT on ___ June, ___ July, and ___ August 2021.

Submitted By: *President Easton.*

7.4 **Reduction of Nominations Required for Elections**

*Whereas* Council Procedure 6: *Elections and Referenda Procedures* requires 100 nominations for Executive candidates and 25 nominations for Council candidates to stand for election; and,

*Whereas* all elections in the Winter 2021 term were uncontested, except for Mathematics Councillors; and,

*Whereas* low student interest caused turnout in the Winter 2021 election to fall to 5.07%; then,

*Be it resolved that* the Students’ Council amend Council Procedure 6: *Elections and Referenda Procedures* to lower nomination requirements to 25 for Executive candidates and 10 for Council candidates.

Submitted By: *Councillor Lan.*

7.5 **Ratification of New WUSA Fee Model**

*Whereas* the Board of Directors has approved a return to a mandatory fee model in light of legal challenges to the Student Choice Initiative; then

*Be it resolved that* the Students’ Council ratify the following changes to the WUSA fees for FY2022:

- Student Life: $35.00, including Community-Building Services, Clubs Funding, Health and Safety, and Events fees
- Academic Support & Advocacy: $15.39, including Academic Support, University Advocacy, and Government Advocacy fees
- Operations: $29.58
- Orientation Fee: $117.17
- Student Refugee Program: $5.01
- Capital Program Fund: $15.11

*Be it further resolved that* should the Student Choice Initiative come back into force, the WUSA fees return to the existing optional framework, adjusting for increases to the Consumer Price Index.
Submitted By: *Vice President Schwarze*.

7.6 **Ratification of Fee Adjustments for WUSA Staff Salaries**

*Whereas* the Board of Directors has approved the 2021 WUSA Workforce Plan, as redacted; then,

*Be it resolved that* the Students’ Council ratify an increase of $5.08 to the Operations fee.

Submitted By: *Vice President Schwarze*.

7.7 **Incorporating Equity into the Enterprise, Opportunity, and Innovation Fund**

*Whereas* the FY2021 Annual Plan included the creation of an Equity Fund; and,

*Whereas* the Internal Funding committee recommends the proposed changes to Students’ Council Procedures 15 and 16; then,

*Be it resolved that* the Students’ Council approve amendments to Council Procedures 15 and 16, as presented.

Submitted By: *Vice President Schwarze*.

7.8 **Health & Dental Plans for Part-time Students**

To consider if part-time students have a similar need for insurance coverage as full-time students, and whether a similar opt-out model should be adopted for this group.

Submitted By: *Vice President Schwarze*.

7.9 **Return to Campus & Vaccination Requirements**

To discuss student safety in the return to campus, including a stance on vaccination requirements for participation in on-campus activities.

Submitted By: *President Easton*.

8 **New Business**

Any Councillor may raise any item of concern during new business by proposing a motion or topic of discussion. A two-thirds (2/3) majority vote is required for consideration of the item to proceed.
9 ANNOUNCEMENTS

Any Councillor may make an announcement not exceeding 1 minute in duration, which may be followed by up to 2 minutes of follow-up questions. No motions may be introduced from an announcement.

10 ADJOURNMENT

Be it resolved that the Chair adjourns the meeting no later than 4:30PM.
APPENDICES
Society Representatives and Pro Tempore Designates

WUSA Students’ Council – Spring 2021

**Arts Caucus**
Society Representative - Vacant

**Engineering Caucus**
Pro tempore Designate - Vacant

**Health Caucus**
Pro tempore Designate - Vacant

**Mathematics Caucus**
Pro tempore Designate - Vacant

**Science Caucus**
Society Representative - Vaishavi Sathyamoorthi
Pro tempore Designate - Vacant
Pro tempore Designate - Vacant
Pro tempore Designate - Vacant
Pro tempore Designate - Vacant

**Cambridge Campus**
Society Representative - Vacant

**Kitchener Campus**
Pro tempore Designate - Vacant

**Stratford Campus**
Society Representative - Vacant
Pro tempore Designate - Vacant

**Renison University College**
Society Representative – Vicky Ikeno
Pro tempore Designate - Vacant

**St. Jerome’s University**
Society Representative – Ava Kelly
Pro tempore Designate - Tristan Chen
# WUSA Service Coordinators for Spring 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Coordinators for Spring 2021</th>
<th>Wren Tourout</th>
<th><a href="mailto:retourou@edu.uwaterloo.ca">retourou@edu.uwaterloo.ca</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OCC (1 year - Spring- Winter)</td>
<td>Caitlyn Wilsie</td>
<td><a href="mailto:crwiltsi@uwaterloo.ca">crwiltsi@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Bank (Winter-Spring)</td>
<td>Coral Markan Davidson</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cmarkand@uwaterloo.ca">cmarkand@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bike Centre (Winter-Spring)</td>
<td>Kunall Vadgama</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kvadgama@uwaterloo.ca">kvadgama@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bike Centre 2 (Spring-Fall)</td>
<td>Jess Zhang</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jess.zhang@uwaterloo.ca">jess.zhang@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRT (ops) (Winter-Spring)</td>
<td>Christina Zanella</td>
<td><a href="mailto:czanella@uwaterloo.ca">czanella@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRT 2 (admin) (Spring-Fall)</td>
<td>Sophia Wong</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sfywong@uwaterloo.ca">sfywong@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-op (Spring-Fall)</td>
<td>Shreya Pahwa</td>
<td><a href="mailto:skpahwa@uwaterloo.ca">skpahwa@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glow (Winter-Spring)</td>
<td>Midas Beglari</td>
<td><a href="mailto:pbeglari@edu.uwaterloo.ca">pbeglari@edu.uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glow 2 (Spring-Fall)</td>
<td>Sarah Mather</td>
<td><a href="mailto:skmather@uwaterloo.ca">skmather@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICSN (Winter-Spring)</td>
<td>Nathania Simowibowo</td>
<td><a href="mailto:nsimowib@uwaterloo.ca">nsimowib@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Centre (Winter-Spring)</td>
<td>Kristy Wong</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ts4wong@uwaterloo.ca">ts4wong@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Centre 2 (Spring-Fall)</td>
<td>Jennifer Xie</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jennifer.xie@uwaterloo.ca">jennifer.xie@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATES 2 (Winter-Spring)</td>
<td>Abby Postma</td>
<td><a href="mailto:anpostma@uwaterloo.ca">anpostma@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATES (Spring-Fall)</td>
<td>Sam Woolven</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sewoolve@uwaterloo.ca">sewoolve@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAISE (Spring-Fall)</td>
<td>Celine Isimbi</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cisimbi@uwaterloo.ca">cisimbi@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAISE 2 (Winter-Spring)</td>
<td>Fatima Awan</td>
<td><a href="mailto:f3awan@uwaterloo.ca">f3awan@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPS 2 (Spring-Fall)</td>
<td>Rania Datoo</td>
<td><a href="mailto:R3datoo@uwaterloo.ca">R3datoo@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPS (Winter-Spring)</td>
<td>Michelle Angkasa</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mangkasa@uwaterloo.ca">mangkasa@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSP Commissioner (1 Year -Winter-Fall)</td>
<td>Michelle Angkasa</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mangkasa@uwaterloo.ca">mangkasa@uwaterloo.ca</a></td>
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WUSA Box Initiative

WUSA Box 2.0 Project Outline

Initiative Overview

We will provide up to 8500 new incoming students a welcome kit from their student association. The kit will be comprised of WUSA branded and Waterloo spirit items to introduce students to us and make them feel a part of the Waterloo community.

After the positive feedback we received on this initiative last year, we’d like to continue to build this into our new student welcome plan moving forward, especially while we remain primarily/ partially virtual.

2020 Results

1. Upper year student sign-ups
   - 2325 total sign ups during our 3-week sign up campaign
   - 5687 bit.ly link clicks from our IG bio to the sign-up form
   - 4% increase in IG followers during this campaign

2. Visits to the WUSA Box webpage to learn more about our wellness supports
   - 3149 unique views to the FAQ page
   - 1311 unique views to the first-year page (15% of recipients)
   - 484 unique views to the upper-year page (22% of recipients)

3. Increase in followers to the @yourwusa Instagram account & engagements
   - 14% increase in IG followers during September campaign
   - 111 #gotmywusabox shares via IG stories/feed posts
   - 128 total contest entries across FOMO & WUSA Box recipients

4. Additionally:
   - Opportunity to connect with faculties and partner on giving them a chance to have items in the WUSA Box.
   - Based on the number of international student follow ups, students were excited to get their boxes.
   - Based on number of departments on campus now looking to send things to students, feel this shows the value students gave to having a physical connection to campus.
   - Way for Orientation leaders to still engage in welcoming new students with in-person programming cancelled.

2021 Goals

1 – Generate awareness of WUSA with new members
2 – Welcome/ celebrate coming to Waterloo!
3- Educate about key services/ supports available to them (campus wide)
Changes from Last Year

- Removing upper year boxes and focusing on new students only
- Obtaining external sponsorship to help fund the project
  - Not using reserve funds this year
- Reducing shipping costs by having students in K-W pick up on campus (when safe)
  - While still being able to reach those studying abroad

Financial Overview:

This initiative will be managed centrally through the WUSA team and be charged out as a marketing cost, covered through WUSA Admin fees. After sponsorship we are budgeting for the project to cost $100,000 this year.

WUSA will collaborate with on and off campus partners to provide meaningful items in the kit for our members. These partners will be assessed a rate to contribute to offset the fixed costs of the project. We will ensure to partner only with trusted sponsors we believe bring value to students.

Expenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPENSES</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swag Costs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Box</td>
<td>10 x 8 x 4 size, domestic printing</td>
<td>$25,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swag items</td>
<td>2 - 3 items</td>
<td>$80,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Postcard</td>
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<td>$1,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shipping Costs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>assume 4800 units @ $6/unit (60%)</td>
<td>$28,800.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>assume 800 units @ $30/unit (10%)</td>
<td>$24,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local/pick up</td>
<td>assume 2400 units (30%)</td>
<td>$-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packaging Costs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing and food</td>
<td>assume 1000 hours @ $15/hour</td>
<td>$15,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packaging materials</td>
<td></td>
<td>$3,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
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Revenue
### Kit Content

The Welcome Kit will consist of:

- 10 x 8 x 4 WUSA branded box – 5 lbs weight restriction
- WUSA branded item
- Waterloo spirit (likely goose) branded item
- Potentially an Orientation water bottle (TBD based on funding allocation)
- Welcome postcard with WUSA info driving to New Student Website with information on supports and services (allows for tracking and minimizing paper in box)
- Faculty specific items
- University department and External sponsor items TBD
- Student deals coupon book

### Delivery & Logistics

WUSA has been in contact with Central Stores shipping management. The shipping department is ready to support WUSA on this initiative by leveraging University of Waterloo shipping volumes to pass on a lower cost of shipping for our initiative.

This year we will continue to mail boxes to those outside of the Waterloo area, but plan to minimize shipping costs by once again delivering in person to those living in on-campus housing, and having pick-up for those back in the area.

### Potential On Campus Partners

Societies, Student Success Office, Athletics and Recreation, Print & Retail Solutions, President’s Office, Accessibility Office, The Centre, Wellness Services, Equity Office, Co-Op, Housing, Alumni, Office of Research
Possible Off Campus Partners

Studentcare, Sobey’s, Region of Waterloo. Food delivery companies (uber, skip, door dash), CIBC, Pharmacy, Campus Dentist, Rouge Media, Netflix, Rogers, Bell, Local Restaurants, Student Life Network

Timeline

May 2021 – Design and order items and seek partners to add to kit content

June 2021 – Further sponsor outreach, develop New Student Website and prepare email content for address collection

July 2021 – Receive swag orders from partners and prepare social content for new students

Early August 2021 - Packing + Shipping – 2000 kits/day x 4 days
WUSA Accessibility Report

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1. Accessibility Report Overview

1.1 Introduction

To understand accessibility on campus and issues student may face as a whole, the WUSA student council approved the creation of this project and committed to researching the lived student experiences regarding accessibility at the University of Waterloo. Thus, the Accessibility Commissioner alongside the WUSA research team developed the accessibility survey and conducted video interviews with students.

Overall, the goals of the accessibility project were to:

- Identify physically inaccessible areas on campus
- Understand the scope of systemic issues students face at AccessAbility Services in accessing accommodations needed to succeed
- Determine other services or university systems where students encounter accessibility issues
- Assess the effectiveness of current accessibility policies and resources
- Identify existing gaps pertaining to accessibility within the university landscape
- Determine meaningful ways WUSA can prioritize and address accessibility issues moving forward

1.2 Data Collection Methods

Survey

The Accessibility Survey opened on December 14, 2020 and closed on February 13, 2021. A total of 474 responses were received, 75.3% (357 submissions) of which were complete. Complete responses here refers to respondents that completed all survey questions and submitted their answers at the end. 117 of the responses were partial, meaning the respondents left the survey before a final submission. The survey link was sent out 34,459 enrolled undergraduate students and with 474 total responses, the response rate was 1.38%. While this response rate is incredibly low, this number is not of particular concern as the survey was targeted to students with accessibility needs, who make up a smaller proportion of the general undergraduate population. As there is a smaller number of responses, all of them (partial or complete) are used for this data analysis.

Focus Groups and Interviews

To complement the survey and to gain a deeper understanding of student experiences, individual interviews and focus groups were conducted via Microsoft Teams between February 24, 2021 and March 23, 2021 based on participant availability. In total, 7 students participated in these approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour video interviews. Students were able declare their interest in sitting for an interview by submitting a Google form published on WUSA social media channels in February. The form asked about participant availability, preference for a group or individual interview, and topics they wished to discuss.

Based on the provided information, the Accessibility Commissioner organized a Microsoft Teams call with participants and the Student Research and Policy Assistant, who was the designated note-taker. Each interview utilized a 10-question template created by the Accessibility Commissioner to ensure reliability of results. This template can be viewed in Appendix B of this report.

While data collection interviews were ongoing, 6 students who did not participate in video calls provided written answers to the 10-question template via email or discord chat. This alternative method allowed for students who were not comfortable being interviewed to still participate in the research process and have their voice heard.

All interview materials have been anonymized and identifying information, besides the participant’s faculty when applicable, will not be included in this report or any accompanying materials.
1.3 Demographics

Demographic information was provided by participants who filled out the Accessibility Survey. Participants were asked which faculty they were in with the majority (25.95%) being in the Faculty of Arts, followed by Science (14.56%), Engineering (11.6%), Math (11.18%), Health (10.13%), and Environment with 9.92% (Figure 1). Overall, the percentage of participation from each faculty besides Math and Engineering are within 3-4% of their total enrollment population at the university, making this survey a fairly representative one (University of Waterloo, Enrolment, 2021). However, it should be noted that the Math and Engineering faculties are under-represented in this survey. To mitigate this, data from video interviewees in those faculties are highlighted throughout the report.

![Figure 1: Responses to 'I'm in the Faculty of:'](image1)

![Figure 2: Responses to 'I'm in year:'](image2)

This same even split is also evident in the year of study demographics collected, with each year receiving between 17% and 28% of the response. The smallest demographic, year 5+, only received 12% of the survey response (Figure 2). In the survey results, only 11% of respondents indicated they were international students while 89% of survey participants were not. For comparison, 22% of the total undergraduate population in 2020/21 identify as international students (University of Waterloo, International, 2021). To ensure that international students were represented in all data collection methods as their experiences are unique and may reveal issues domestic students do not face, 1 video interview participant also identified as an international student. Survey participants were also asked if they identified as a mature student, to which 15% were and 76% were not. For this question 9% of survey respondents selected the ‘no answer’ or ‘prefer not to say’ options.

Shifting from general questions to ones with an accessibility focus, survey participants were asked if they identify as a person with a disability, which 58% did. This is an important question as those who indicated ‘no’ (29%) or ‘no answer/prefer not to say’ (13%) were not shown some subsequent questions that asked about specific experiences or services those who identify as a person with a disability may have encountered. However, all survey participants were able to provide feedback for some general accessibility questions later in the survey.

Moving forward, those respondents who identified as a person with a disability were asked exactly what type of disability they identify as having. This was presented as a “select all that apply” question where students were able to highlight multiple types if applicable. The most common type was a ‘mental illness disability’ (42%), followed by a ‘learning disability’ (26%), and ‘physical disability’ at 16% (Figure 3).

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1 Defined as an undergraduate who has been out of high school for at least 2-4 when applying for postsecondary education
For those who selected ‘other’ and wrote in a type of disability; neurological, cognitive, and ADHD were common answers provided.

![Figure 3: Responses to 'What type of disability do you identify as having?'](#)

As a follow up, respondents were asked what sort of functional limitations they experience due to their disability, again in a “select all that apply” fashion. Most commonly, mood (31%) and ability to focus (37.5%) were selected (Figure 4). Other frequently selected answers include reading (16%), ability to understand social cues (12.2%), and handwriting (9.7%). It is important to note that the presented categories do not represent all limitations a person may experience and even with the write-in answers (e.g., energy limits, communication needs, chronic pain) provided, the full spectrum of possible functional limitations is not represented.

![Figure 4: Responses to 'What sort of functional limitations do you experience due to your disabilities?'](#)
The final demographic question asks students if they have a service animal. The majority of survey respondents (95%) said no they do not have a service animal, while 3% said yes and 2% indicated they preferred not to say.

2. UWaterloo Services

Students were asked a series of questions about their experiences with the various services affiliated with the university. Survey respondents were asked what difficulties they had accessing these services and interviewees were asked to describe their experience with services in general.

2.1 AccessAbility Services

In particular, student experiences with AccessAbility Services were important to collect as this service is the most well-known office for academic accommodations offered at the university (AccessAbility, About AccessAbility Services, 2021). For students curious about AccessAbility Services, information available on their website state that the service supports “all students with known or suspected disabilities or disabling conditions” by creating individualized plans for each student that include a wide variety of accommodations for academic, housing, and medical needs. According to the registration process detailed on the AccessAbility website, students must apply for AccessAbility online and provide supporting documentation such as medical documents, mental health diagnosis, or physical mobility verification if needed. Following this, students meet with an accommodation consultant to finalize registration with the service and create their support plan with a list of eligible accommodations. Finally, students must request their accommodations for each course every term and it is then the responsibility of AccessAbility Services to convey each student’s accommodation plan to the appropriate course instructor (AccessAbility, Applying for Academic Accommodations, 2021).

Survey respondents were asked multiple questions about AccessAbility Services, including if respondents know how to register as a student with a disability with AccessAbility. The majority of respondents (69%) indicated yes, they were aware, while 23% said no, and 8% selected no answer or prefer not to say. As a follow up, respondents who identify as a person with a disability were asked if they were registered with AccessAbility, of which 89% were while 9% were not. The remaining 2% selected ‘no answer’ or ‘prefer not to say’. This indicates that the target audience of AccessAbility Services is in fact utilizing it, and that awareness of the service’s existence is high.

Registration Process

However, just because students are registered with the service does not mean the process to do so was easy or accessible in a timely manner. Both interviewed students and survey respondents frequently discussed the cumbersome registration process, especially with regards to the amount of paperwork required. One student lamented,

“[the] large paperwork packages to access accommodations can be difficult to navigate and understand with issues such as executive dysfunction or fatigue due to chronic illness. Complicated systems to access services that students are largely left on their own to figure out. Mostly large chunks of text that can be difficult to process/understand for students with learning disabilities.”

Other students agree with this sentiment, adding the following:

“[AccessAbility Services is] decent once accessed or registered, but generally cumbersome to access. I understand the need for uploading documentation to register with AccessAbility Services, but sometimes this can cause a delay in urgently needed services or act as a barrier. The semesters I was suffering with depression, I typically didn’t go to a doctor or counsellor about it until the end of term. It’s hard to
find motivation or energy to get signed up for help oftentimes, even after making the decision/realization.”

The long registration hinders student use of their needed accommodations and can be a huge barrier to a student’s academic success if registration is not completed in a reasonable amount of time. One student detailed how their “1st term lab accommodation process was so long it wasn’t resolved until 2 months into the semester and by then the student had already missed assignments and their grades suffered.”

Another student expressed frustration at the multi-step registration process, revealing that “my condition is not something that is going to change and I don't need ongoing treatment. It was VERY difficult to track down all the forms and get the right information, making an appointment was a struggle as well. I didn't have access to accommodations in my first semester which resulted in me failing most midterms.”

Even some students that entered university with the proper documentation and diagnoses had to wait months to become fully registered because of extended wait times for intake appointments. For example, one student “went into university with diagnoses so they could get accommodations. [They] called the university before coming onto to campus to make sure accommodations were all set up – was told they HAD to be on campus to do that. When on campus [they] were told they needed a meeting before setting up accommodations but had class every day and couldn’t get the meeting scheduled for over a month.”

Now, it is important to note that not all students registering with AccessAbility run into these issues, some research participants had few to no issues with the service at all. But for those who do, these issues can severely impact the student’s ability to succeed at university.

**Re-Registration for Previously Enrolled Students**

After completing the rigorous registration process, students are entered into the AccessAbility Services system and can utilize the accommodations they selected with their service advisor for that term. In subsequent terms, students are supposed to re-apply for accommodations themselves through the service’s online portal. Students select from their list of previously used accommodations and are not required to meet with an AccessAbility Service advisor if they do not need to change that list or the type of accommodation they want to receive (AccessAbility, Requesting and Managing your Accommodations, 2021). This is meant to streamline the process for registered students and ensure that their accommodations are communicated to instructors as soon as the term starts before any issues can arise.

However, for many research participants, this has not been the case, as students detailed experiences where AccessAbility Services required them to re-submit paperwork, re-do intake appointments, or re-do other aspects of the registration process despite them having been registered with the service in the previous term. One student divulged:

“For the most part, Accessibility services are doing a fantastic job. However, I sometimes find it difficult when I send in requests for accommodations that I have documentation on file for, and am still requested to book an appointment. In those times, it difficult for me to make those arrangements, and it's frustrating that an appointment is necessary. There seems to be a lack of consistency when it comes to this matter.”

Another student explained that there is “so much paperwork, and changes in forms and requirements, which forced me to go back and forth between them and my doctors, and it was pretty ridiculous! Also, lack of communication regarding change of requirements, and forms, as well as benefits for students who register with AccessAbility.” It is clear that this is a burden for students and should be re-evaluated to ensure that students have a smooth experience with AccessAbility Services once registered.

Other students seconded this and explained how the re-justification of their need for accommodations negatively impacts their academic experiences and view of the service. One student exemplified this, explaining how “[they] felt like it is sometimes really tedious...seeking help with accessibility makes them fill out a form every time they want an accommodation and it is tedious to re-explain the entire
situation and their disability every time they need some accommodations. [The student] feels like they are constantly re-explaining their situation and constantly having to prove their disability and need for accommodation while advocating for themselves instead of having accessibility advocate for them like they are supposed to.” In more extreme cases, students expressed that “the accessibility process is very draining, and the waiting process is very long and going through that process is exhausting and could cause more anxiety and issues.” These situations are not ideal for students who are trying to access a service meant to relieve stress and anxiety about academics. They are especially not ideal if the student has already gone through the long and extensive registration process.

Communication of Service and Student Responsibilities

In conjunction with problems registering and re-applying for accommodations, students reported numerous concerns about communication issues they have experienced at AccessAbility Services. This includes communication about the scope of AccessAbility Services, the specific forms needed to register or change accommodations, expectations of instructors to accommodate students, as well as many other lapses in communication. One student said that a difficulty they’ve had accessing this service is not “knowing which forms to submit and who to contact when seeking support from Accessibility regarding communication of disability related course needs to profs.” Another student had “difficulty exercising my AccessAbility accommodations as laid out in my accommodations plan. Professors don’t seem to know about my accommodations and neither does the first year office.” It is clearly stated in the guidelines for student academic accommodations that it is the responsibility of AccessAbility services to communicate and provide direction on accommodation plans to course instructors to ensure accommodation requests are carried out (AccessAbility, Responsibility of AccessAbility Services, 2019). As shown above, in some cases this responsibility is not being followed through and students are becoming concerned and confused about what their role is and what the responsibility of AccessAbility Services is. Additionally, some students have been given contradictory information, further confusing them as they navigate various systems meant to improve their time at university. These experiences as well as many similar ones documented in this research indicate that there is a lack of communication between AccessAbility and service users that clearly outlines each party’s responsibilities and expectations.

This lack of communication regarding division of responsibilities is also present when discussing the scope of the service. Students have indicated that at times they have reached out to AccessAbility for help and have been told that the service did not address those issues even though students believe someone from the service would have been helpful in addressing their concerns. For example one student explained:

“When I first approached AccessAbility Services for support a couple of years ago, I was told I needed confirmation of diagnosis in order make an appointment with a consultant or access any of AccessAbility’s services, even though I suspected something was amiss with my ability to perform well at school and could have used guidance from a qualified consultant on what it might be and how I might be able to get assessed.”

Another student stated that they had “recently called campus asking for support and for information about the process to get a new diagnosis and they [AccessAbility] told them to just “google it”, now doing that process privately through parent’s insurance.” These instances and others like them, imply that information about the scope and general services provided by AccessAbility are not being effectively communicated to students. This fosters a lack of knowledge about the service that is harmful to students when they reach out to AccessAbility and are brushed off because it is not in the service’s purview at the moment.

Taking a deeper look into AccessAbility communications, some students have expressed displeasure at the way accommodation options are presented to them and the lack of variety amongst them. One student:
“...found them to be a bit underwhelming, I don't really feel like the services/accommodations that I have access to are actually what I need and sometimes you don't actually have the full picture of what is available to you for me dealing with accessibility felt like “these are the accommodations we use, and X and Y are the ones that are closest to your needs” rather than “these are your needs, and we can do X and Y to try to level the playing field” like I generally don’t feel like what I was offered for accommodations actually helps me.”

Here students feel like AccessAbility is not communicating the full spectrum of available accommodations, limiting their ability to think critically about all the options and select the ones that would be the most helpful to them. Another student outlined their overall experience with AccessAbility like this; saying “the process of signing up for AAS [AccessAbility] was hard and laborious – a bit of a hassle trying to get everything set up. Didn’t know what was available as an accommodation at AAS and just picked what the consultant suggested – didn’t know what was available and what might have been helpful otherwise.” This lack of knowledge about the variety of accommodations obtainable to students also affects students in the cooperative education program, details of which are outlined in the employment section of this report.

Interpersonal Communication at AccessAbility

Besides the general service wide communication issues, students have reported a multitude of concerns about the interpersonal communications occurring between themselves and their AccessAbility advisor or contact at the service. Unfortunately, many students shared experiences of discrimination, ignorance, or other negative commentary directed at them by AccessAbility staff. While not all students have experienced this and not all staff members behave in such a way, it is incredibly important to highlight these experiences in this report. One student had “Accessibility effectively say I wasn't disabled enough for accommodations. This is discriminatory and in some instances, illegal. I firmly told them so when they denied me and I didn't receive a response.” Another student had a:

“Accessibility advisor [tell] me if I stopped taking all my medication I would get better and that it was pharmaceuticals that were causing my disability. I have a genetic disease... I’ve had proctors in the accessibility office comment on my spinal brace to me and stare... if you're working in that office, maybe you shouldn't comment on people's assistive devices? I don't wear it because it’s ‘cool and looks like armour’...”

These are very serious incidents that students have encountered, made even more serious by the fact that they occurred with people hired to work with and be responsible in some respects for students with accessibility needs.

These experiences imply that any training completed by AccessAbility employees may not be robust enough or that any reporting process for discriminatory behavior is not effective enough. In particular, students voiced concerns about AccessAbility staff’s knowledge about permanent disabilities. For example, “when I registered for academic accommodations some people I talked to didn’t really know what to do about my disability and I had to talk them through it, correct them on incorrect knowledge they had about it, etc, so it would be nice if there was more broad knowledge of different disabilities students might have.” Another student compared their experience with the service to one of their peers:

“[The peer] has had to fight for every minute of extra time and for the first few months of University they had to go without the hearing equipment they used in high school that would allow them to hear the lectures. They have been told multiple times by staff at accessibility that they don’t need what they are requesting even though they are only requesting what they need to succeed. I have faced none of these issues and all I had to do was set up a meeting to get my needs attended to whereas they have faced tons of discrimination from accessibility services themselves...”
Furthermore, one additional student wrote into the survey to discuss how they faced “systemic discrimination, [and AccessAbility] refusal to accommodate a medically verified disability (diagnosed and verified by an Educational Psychologist, a General Physician and a Psychiatrist).” Incidents like these are of great concern as they not only affect a student’s ability to receive their academic accommodation, but they may affect the student’s mental health and wellbeing, their ability to succeed in their course work, and their willingness to utilize university services in the future. Therefore, strong recommendations aimed at improving interpersonal AccessAbility communication and expanding knowledge about disabilities are outlined later in the report.

**Student Suggested Changes**

Students provided suggestions for changes they would like to see from AccessAbility to make the service a more efficient and inclusive place. These are not the final recommendations of this report but serve to ensure student voices are heard. First and foremost, students desire AccessAbility staff to undergo more sensitivity training and become more knowledgeable about how to work with people with accessibility needs. For instance, “there was one AccessAbility advisor who was assigned to assist me with talking to my professors and he kind of gaslit me about my symptoms and made me feel like my illness was my fault. I would suggest the office goes through all of their staff to ensure they go through sensitivity training and flag any who need to be retrained...” Another student “…felt like they were coddled and talked to as if they were a child and patronized when they use the service.”

Additionally, students desire a stronger process for accommodating incidents after they occur. As students currently must apply for their accommodations at the beginning of each term, it can be hard for students to predict situations that may arise in the middle of term that may require different accommodations than the ones they selected at the beginning. One student detailed how “I wish it was easier to get in touch with the accessibility advisors. Having to email and then call doesn’t sound like a lot, but it’s very stressful. It would also be easier if some of the teachers would give the accommodation even before the paperwork and stuff so that the stress of missing grades is taken away earlier.” Increasing academic flexibility for students with accessibility needs is of concern for the AccessAbility system as well as the instructor/academic policies. That need for flexibility is detailed in the academic experiences section of this report.

The final main change students would like to see concerns the notetaking service AccessAbility provides. This accommodation is when volunteers take notes for other people in a course that need them. However, students involved in this research stated:

“...the volunteer note taking service is broken. I’ve been on both sides of it and been so frustrated. the website to sign up as a note taker frequently just bugs out and doesn’t go through. I tried to volunteer in 1st or 2nd year and had to email support and they never did get the system working...also never get people volunteer to take notes when I needed that accommodation, and later found out that people tried but had the same thing happen where the system wouldn’t put it through.”

As the notetaking service is used frequently by students and is critical to their ability to participate in courses, issues with this service are very concerning.

As a whole, student experiences with AccessAbility are variable. Some students found AccessAbility to be incredibly helpful and welcoming while others encountered ignorance and discrimination while trying to apply for their accommodations. It is crucial for essential services such as AccessAbility to ensure that all students who need accommodations are provided them in a safe, inclusive environment. Thus, many recommendations outlined later in the report are meant to improve advocacy and work surrounding AccessAbility, with the goal to improve access and quality of the service for all its users.
2.2 Health and Counselling Services

Besides AccessAbility Services, students with accessibility needs most often interact with health and counselling services on campus. These services provide mental health and medical care to all students at the university and are crucial to students with accessibility needs; both because students may need their medical services but also because professionals in these departments are used for AccessAbility documentation and can recommend students for accommodations to other departments within the university system.

Health Services

One of the most pressing issues brought up by students about health services is their lack of LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. Multiple students with a variety of gender and sexual identities have reported instances of transphobia and judgement leveled at them from campus doctors. One student described the service as “...one of the single most transphobic places on campus, not only do they dead name you constantly if you are trans, they frequently ignore your corrections and never update the databases to correct it, and that’s even though you’ve filled out all the proper paper work with the university over a year ago, even then you're lucky if you’ll be listened to in general...It says a lot about the on campus health center when one of the first things you learn about it as a queer person is how rampanty transphobic it is.” Another student “went to health services once and it was so horrible they have never been there since.” Not only are these experiences awful for the students, but they also impact student ability to receive on campus healthcare in the future. This is very concerning, especially if students are not from the Waterloo region and cannot see an external family doctor regularly or if their external doctor documentation is not up to AccessAbility standards to use for accommodations.

Another major concern students have about Health Services is the quality and consistency of care provided to students. Of note, the psychiatry and psychology departments within health services had the greatest number of concerns voiced in this research. This is because those departments, particularly psychiatry, deal with medications which can severely impact a student’s wellbeing. Unfortunately, one student reported:

“[They were] severely mistreated by one of the psychiatrists at Health Services. To my knowledge, she is no longer a psychiatrist here, but the fact that it was allowed to happen in the first place is dangerous and possibly fatal. She continuously raised the dosages of medications despite their ineffectiveness and dangerous side effects I was experiencing. All concerns were brushed off and I was given an even higher dose than before.”

In this example, the quality of care provided by Health services was incredibly low and may have resulted in irreversible damage to the student because their concerns were not taken seriously by anyone. Of course, not all students experience care this way and not all doctors at Health Services behave in this manner, but these are not the only examples that describe mishandling of student medication by a health services doctor. Indicating there may be a need for a more thorough investigation into these departments and the oversight in place to ensure a high quality of care is being provided.

Despite the very negative experiences some students have had with psychiatry at UWaterloo, it is a very needed department that is currently not equipped to meet all student needs. As one student explains:

“For the love of God hire more psychologists and psychiatrists, for some reason the university went down from having multiple psychologists and psychiatrists to having only one psychologist that works a few days every other week and a few psychiatrists via arbitrary budget cuts. This created extensive, arbitrary wait times for numerous students to see even a single psychologist in order to start being diagnosed with anything in general such as ADHD. This needs to change, being treated for mental health issues on campus is already a joke, this just shows how bad it is in detail.”
If students cannot access quality doctors who know how to navigate the university system and provide help with other services (i.e. AccessAbility and Counselling) consistently, numerous aspects of their lives are impacted negatively.

This sentiment can apply to general doctors employed at health services as well, many students have “heard stories from other people about difficulties getting medication – especially male doctors when trying to get birth control – there is sexism at health services. And [the student] experienced this as well.” As well as experiences where students “felt attacked by individuals. And refusal to switch me to a different doctor when I had a bad experience due to my mental health. I had to argue and fight for a new doctor.” Implication being, there may be personal biases at play regarding student access to certain types of healthcare that need to be addressed service wide in order to provide all students with equitable access to high quality care.

Counselling Services

Counselling Services is the main office on campus that provides mental health and wellness care to students at the University of Waterloo. This office works in conjunction with Health and AccessAbility services to supply medical documentation and quality counselling so that students can be supported from all angles while in university.

However, the biggest concern students have about the service is the lack of long-term, consistent care provided through counselling as well as health services. Currently, counselling services has a 6-session limit, meaning that students can only make 6 appointments with a counsellor and after that they will not be scheduled. It is unclear if the limit is for sessions per term or per academic year (Sept-April) and that distinction is seemingly variable from student to student. Numerous students have highlighted this issue, saying “it would be really nice if counseling services had longer term care options/connections for people with chronic problems, because 6 sessions a year doesn't go very far, and having the same counselor for a longer period is actually really helpful.” Another student reported that:

“counseling has been good, but there is a big issue with the 6 sessions per year limit at uwaterloo, it is hard to open up in 6 sessions and when those are up you have to find something outside of waterloo which defeats the purpose of the counselling session especially if you take a long time to open up to a counsellor. Really want more than 6 sessions at counselling services, that would make everything so much better and would better contribute to healing.”

This session limit affects student ability to receive the mental health care at the level they need in order to succeed at university.

Additionally, students are having trouble getting consistent care from the same counsellors at this service. Some students have been assigned numerous different counsellors that each require the student to start their counselling process over again because a consistent counsellor is not assigned. For example, one student “had counseling that stopped without any explanation, leaving me without access to mental health support. I have also been unable to continue seeing the previous counselor, making me have to start from the beginning all over again with someone new, only to have my appointments stopped again without explanation.” This prolongs the student’s time at counselling services and may even impact their ability to receive academic accommodations if counsellors change so frequently. Another student details exactly this, describing how “when working with my chosen counsellor, being accommodated appropriately has been a non-issue. However, when not with that counsellor; it is extremely difficult to have professors work with my accommodations. A lot of the conversation consists of microaggressions and blame shifting…” These experiences, and many others like them indicate that clarity is needed from Counselling services about the session limit and the scope/length of care they can provide to students. Therefore,
recommendations for improved communication from counselling services to students is detailed later in the report.

Finally, extended wait times at counselling and health services are frustrating and discomforting students. One survey respondent wrote in:

“the counsellors are overbooked a lot. The wait list is very long and we're limited to a certain number of appointments per year. If they don't believe you're at risk of harming yourself or others, it'll take a while. Even the counsellors mention how they dislike the Waterloo system and it's impossible to actually help a student. They don't even offer proper recommendation to appropriate outside sources and can be dismissive as well. It’s strange how a University with such a terrible track record for mental health has never taken major steps to improve these services.”

All these experiences imply that while the care most students have received from counselling services has been helpful, there are logistical issues which impact the quality of the service. It is crucial that these concerns are addressed so that students do not have to worry about which counsellor they will have next or when to strategically schedule their very few appointments, and instead can focus on themselves and their health.

2.3 Other Services

In addition to AccessAbility Services, Health Services and Counselling Services, there are numerous WUSA and University run programs in place that students may interact with throughout the course of their tenure at the University of Waterloo. To capture this, general questions about student use of various services were asked in the survey.

All survey respondents were asked if they knew how to submit a Verification of Illness Form (VIF) with the university; o which, 58% of respondents said yes, 23% selected no, and 7% provided no answer or preferred not to say. This indicates that a majority of students are aware of how to submit this critical form if needed, as a VIF is normally the only acceptable way for any student to receive a retroactive accommodation for a missed assignment, test, or lab. Students must submit a VIF within 48 hours after a deadline to start the process of a retroactive accommodation. VIFs must be signed by an acceptable medical professional and while Health Services will complete this form, students must pay a fee that is not covered by OHIP/UHIP (i.e., students must pay out of pocket to have this form signed) (Registrar, 2021).

When provided the opportunity to write-in about various aspects of their experiences with accessibility on campus, many survey respondents discussed this current VIF process and expressed displeasure with it. One student explained how under the current system “securing a VIF each time there's a symptom flare-up can be expensive, time-consuming, and emotionally exhausting. On some level, it would be nice if I could just be trusted to self-report the impact of my disability on my ability to work in that moment instead of needing it affirmed by a councillor/doctor every time.” Since the VIF must be submitted within a 48 hr timeframe every time a deadline is missed, students with chronic or longer-term conditions are forced to pay for and resubmit a VIF potentially multiple times a term.

Many other students also discussed how technicalities of the form could result in them not receiving accommodations, leading to inconsistencies in student experiences. For example, one student detailed:

“I had my academic advisor try to deny my VIF once, that was terrifying. Counseling had told me 100% that I should not be writing a midterm and that they would give the VIF and then I could discuss with my prof how to move things around according to the syllabus and my academic advisor emailed me after the midterm date passed saying that it would not be accepted because it was not marked "severe" on the form.”
This miscommunication of form technicalities between the various departments involved in VIFs has caused students to be denied their appropriate accommodations and created more stress for them. As this is currently the most acceptable way for students to retroactively ask for accommodations, it is crucial that this process is effective and consistent for all students.

Additionally, participants were asked what University of Waterloo services they have used in relation to disability accessibility in a ‘select all that apply’ format. This was an important question to ask as these services are foundational for the student experience as a person who identifies as having a disability. Most commonly (43%), students used AccessAbility services, followed by Health (25%) and Counselling services (24%). Additionally, 3% of students accessed MATES, a WUSA peer-to-peer support service, while 2% of respondents have not used any services (Figure 5).

As a follow-up, students were asked if they had any issues accessing the above services, including physical accessibility into the building, complications with paperwork, or any other barriers. Fortunately, 61% of respondents said no, they had not run into any issues. However, 32% had encountered access issues and 7% of respondents selected ‘no answer’ or preferred not to say. Those who answered ‘yes’ to the previous question were then asked to identify what services they have had issues with in a ‘select all that apply’ format. The majority of students (45%) indicated they had issues with AccessAbility services, followed by Counselling (29%) and Health services (22%). Other services like the Equity Office and MATES each received 2% of the response to this question. This indicates that just under half of the people who experienced issues accessing services had those issues with AccessAbility.

Other issues students brought up about the UWaterloo services in general include issues with coordination between services, alternative class and appointment options, as well as the petition process for course withdrawal. Some students have found it to be particularly difficult:

“The fact that I am not treated like every other student when it comes to enrollment and administrative tasks. These accommodations are not a benefit, they are to make sure everyone’s post secondary experience to be equal. I have to sign up and register with accessibility every term and ask permission to get accommodations for each class and term, other students just enroll and go to class, I have three more steps before I can go to class and feel included… I should not have to fight and apply a second time each term to get accommodations intended and often causing me extra stress and using much of my time. This is all extra work and stress those with disabilities do not need to endure and is a frustration and reminder that I don't get to go to school like everyone else.”

The extra effort and amount of time it takes a student with accessibility needs to be prepared to start a study term is so much more than other students. And if there is a lack of coordination and communication between university services, the process is just that much harder on students.
Students also expressed a desire for more alternative options to forms, appointments, and courses besides the traditional idea of going in-person or making a phone call. One student wrote, “with a visual impairment - the paperwork I had to fill out upon enrolment with the [AccessAbility] service was difficult for me to read. In addition when writing exams or tests, accessibility services can only blow up the test to 11x17 paper which is often not large enough to read without eye strain.” Especially in a virtual environment, the need for alternative communication methods (e.g., captions on lectures, transcriptions, larger text, number of video calls vs emails) may be forgotten. This is a problem because those methods are crucial for people who need them.

Finally, students want more information about how to petition the university for retroactive accommodations (i.e., course withdrawals, incomplete courses, dispute over an assignment, etc.). For one student, they “want there to be a better accommodation process for students to withdraw from a course and not have to petition. Faces anxiety when trying to complete the withdrawal forms and that has been a barrier in completing the process.” Despite many students indicating they had gone through this, withdrawn from a course or had to go through the petition process, many students were unaware of services like CAPS (Centre for Academic Policy Support) that could help them through the petition process (CAPS, 2021). When another student was asked “would it be helpful to have someone help write petitions?” the student replied that they “don’t know what the administration needs from the student sometimes but has been successful in the past even though it has been really draining. Would be nice to have someone walk them or support them through that process as that process could make the student really anxious at times.” This desire for support and someone to walk them through the process is a part of the service CAPS provides. It is unfortunate that awareness about the service is not reaching all the students it could. Thus, a recommendation for the promotion of CAPS is outlined later in the report.

3. Professor and Academic Experiences

Outside of student experiences with various services on campus, students were asked about their experience with professors and coursework as someone who identifies as having a disability. As the University of Waterloo is first and foremost an educational institution, the academic experience and interactions students have with their professors is incredibly important to include in this report.

In a “select all that apply” format, students were asked to indicate any nonphysical accessibility barriers they had faced on campus. The most common accessibility barriers students indicated were barriers related to teaching/learning structure (27.4%), followed by stigma against disabilities at 20.89% . Less than 10% of survey respondents indicated they did not face any nonphysical accessibility barriers on campus or preferred not to answer (Figure 6). This implies that the vast majority of students who identify as a person with a disability do face a wide variety of barriers during their university tenure unrelated to the built campus environment. Many of those barriers relating to academics and interpersonal communications between students and university systems.

Figure 6: Responses to ‘What, if any, non-physical accessibility barriers have you faced on campus?’

Table: What, if any, non-physical accessibility barriers have you faced on campus?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers related to teaching/learning structure (e.g., workload)</th>
<th>27.49%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systemic barriers in University policies</td>
<td>18.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma against disabilities</td>
<td>20.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of recognition for accessibility accommodations</td>
<td>17.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of understanding and support for disabilities</td>
<td>19.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of signage in buildings</td>
<td>5.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of urinal in buildings</td>
<td>1.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>1.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>6.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of non-physical accessibility accommodations</td>
<td>13.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To build on the previous question, all survey respondents (including those who do not identify as having a disability) were asked if they feel their instructors are understanding and accommodating enough when it concerns disabilities, including mental health. 30% of respondents said yes, they do feel their instructors are understanding and accommodating, while 43% of respondents said no, their instructors are not accommodating. 19% of participants were unsure and 8% provided no answer or preferred not to say. It is concerning that the majority of survey respondents feel that instructors are not understanding enough, enough amongst respondents that do not identify as having a disability. This indicates that that instructor behaviour is very noticeable, and a lack of instructor understanding for accommodations impacts all students at some level.

The final question in the Accessibility Survey allowed students to expand on their answers regarding professors, many of which indicated that some instructors were great about providing accommodations and some were not. This medley of instructor behaviour led a few people to select ‘no’ on the previous question even if they had experienced a few professors that were understanding. One student wrote in: “Regarding the last question: there are some instructors who are really understanding and seem to care about their students. However, there are also those who impose hard deadlines and will not even listen to/consider reasons for why people may need extensions or resubmissions or whatever else it may be, even during the stress of online learning.”

Many students, both survey respondents and interview participants, mentioned specific faculties where they had heard or encountered a spectrum of instructor behaviour regarding accommodations. Of course, these are not universal experiences, and few generalizations can be drawn from the small sample size utilized in this project, but from the data collected some trends can be seen. For example, responses that name-dropped the Faculty of Health and the Faculty of Environment indicated those faculties were decently good at understanding and accommodating students. This is in part due to the small faculty size, students have repeat professors who can better recognize the students’ need for different accommodations over multiple terms. As one environment student explained; “[They] have friends that are in science and engineering faculties who are shocked at how accommodating the professors are in environment, [they] say that that would never happen in the other faculties. [This is a] part of the small program feel – professors really get to know their students.” A health student agrees and continues on to say:

“I think [Health] does a good job of normalizing discussions surrounding disability and mental illness. However anecdotes from colleagues in other programs would suggest that other faculties are not particularly aware of or accommodating of the mental distress students often experience on campus due to the pressure of exams and the challenges in getting support for these issues (most of which are personally difficult to disclose to strangers).”

Of the other students who specifically mentioned a faculty, Math, Science, and Engineering came up most frequently when sharing negative experiences with instructors. In general, students in these faculties who participated in this research expressed feeling that instructors did not provide reasonable accommodations to students and that the faculties were designed without accessibility needs in mind. In particular, one science student “feels like the people involved with labs don’t take accommodations seriously and don’t believe students may need accommodations and the student finds it very discouraging to be in the labs with people who are quick to take off marks and are not even thinking about the idea that maybe a student needs accommodations.” This student went on to explain how only 1 professor tried to help them get accommodations while others did not seem to understand the student’s need for them. Another student had a similar experience “in engineering, [the student] went to talk to professor after they missed midterms and one professor told them they weren’t working hard enough and that their mental health issues weren’t that bad, they [just] weren’t working through them enough.” Other engineering responses detailed how mental health and the faculty structure are not very compatible in its current form.

Refusal to Accommodate
Besides the actual design of the program, instructor beliefs about the necessity of accommodations is another common issue students encounter when trying to communicate with their instructors. As mentioned earlier, many times professors do not seem to believe in accommodations and refuse to provide them to students. For example, one student wrote into the survey:

“I’ve had profs deny my accommodations on the basis that they didn’t want to bother the grad students with late work. I’ve also had advisors and profs not believe my condition despite being connected with accessibility services. I’ve had profs openly not give me accommodations state[d] on a plan that is emailed to the prof at the beginning of the semester. I’ve also experienced a lot of microaggressions from profs and students alike with respect to my disabilities and need for accommodations.”

Another respondent explained that “I had a prof make fun of my disability and tell me I was trying to find the easy way through school. A lot of professors are insensitive to disabilities and make people feel bad.”

These types of interactions can severely color a person’s viewpoint of that class, their faculty, and the university to a degree, especially as the university employs these instructors who have immense power over a student’s mark in that course.

Additionally, many students report that some instructors believe providing accommodations would be biased against the rest of the class because the accommodation would be too advantageous. As an example, a student “had an awful experience with one professor that said giving the student an accommodation would be ‘unfair’ to the rest of the class despite definitely needing it and providing evidence of their need.” Another student detailed:

“Peers of mine have had their registered AccessAbility accommodations DENIED by instructors based purely on whim (i.e. the instructor didn’t feel they needed the extra time and felt it would be TOO advantageous for them)…I myself have had similar experiences in which certain assessment types…I have never felt more stupid than trying to “tough out” those assessments, because “other AccessAbility students were able to complete these assessments just fine without accommodation.”

These experiences are problematic on many levels and are, as mentioned, incredibly harmful to a student’s wellbeing and academic achievements. Thus, various recommendations aimed at improving professor understanding and response to students asking for accommodations is detailed later in the report.

In an effort to combat instructor dismissal of accommodation necessity, students feel as if they must share their private medical information with the professor personally, to justify their desired accommodation for that course. This is tactic employed by a few students interviewed, for example:

“Every single time (every class) the student felt they needed to share everything about their disability and medical history with every single professor in order to get some sort of accommodation. The student feels like the professors don’t believe them unless they share everything about their medical history which is very personal, and they don’t want to share that information with all of their professors.”

Students feel that they must personally address instructors to receive their approved accommodation because the instructors decide accommodations are necessary. This also applies to doctor’s notes and professional opinions, instructors have created “…a pervasive ideology that students with accommodations should be responsible for defending their doctors’ suggestions if their professors disagree. What I’d like is that if professors disagree with a doctor’s medical opinion of the student and suggestions for accommodation, it would be the professor’s responsibility to argue against the accommodation, rather than make it the student’s job to appeal while handling their own
challenges.” Students feel as if they are forced to share personal details with instructors they may or may not know at all just so that they can justify to that instructor their need for an accommodation.

Besides the many privacy concerns and mental toll retelling personal details incurs, students are also frustrated at the university systems that allow instructors to ignore or flat-out deny reasonable accommodation requests that come from within the University. Additionally, the idea that class policies and assignment deadlines are iron-clad is also harmful to students who may need last-minute extensions or other accommodations because of their accessibility needs. A survey respondent discussed this topic, writing:

“I’ve had professors tell me that because of my physical disability that I should start my work earlier to avoid penalties instead of being understanding and working with me on a deadline that is flexible. My health issues are unexpected and I cannot inform them in advance, but most profs say they will not grant extensions if they are asked within 72 hours of a deadline. These policies do nothing but add to my mental stress, as I can’t control being physically unwell. Lastly is the issue of mandatory attendance. I should not be losing marks if I physically cannot get out of my bed…”

The rigidity of the course policies and harsh penalties for late work pre-COVID-19 (see the next section about online learning during COVID-19) unduly affects students with accessibility needs and is not conducive to succeeding while at university.

**What Instructors Should Understand**

As students continued to talk about their experiences with instructors, a general theme of what they want their professors to understand about their needs and the desire for flexibility, emerged. The sentiment that problems will come up, emergencies will happen, people are human and deserve to not be penalized for needing an extension or an accommodation were pervasive in student responses. One student revealed that “when I do feel energetic enough, it’s fleeting and by that time I usually would have missed many course components. I try to cram and study everything while I find myself happy and energetic enough to do so but due dates would have already passed by then. So, I feel like there’s no safety net or flexibility in course structures to prevent me from failing.” If instructors better understood accessibility needs and listened to other university systems (i.e, AccessAbility, Health, and Counselling services), then policies and course deadlines can be adapted and improved for students who need accommodations.

Students “want professors to keep in mind that mental health is an ongoing issue and there will be flareups that do not revolve around their deadline…” They “want the professors to be more understanding about the potential needs for accommodations from students enrolled in lab courses.” To create meaningful change that improves the lived experiences of students with accessibility needs, professors and other instructors must understand student’s needs, their rights, and why it is important to listen to AccessAbility services.

To enact these changes, research participants outlined various ideas of ways professors can be involved in the process. Most importantly, communication between university systems needs to improve. Particularly between the professors and student advocates/advisors at AccessAbility services. One science student expressed this need saying; “[they] want more communication from the get go between accessibility and the lab to organize everything because if it doesn’t happen then they get marks off. Doesn’t feel like there are a standard accommodation process for students in labs, the extra time in labs requests are not being accommodated.” Improving communication between departments would allow for better standards to be set for students with accessibility needs. That student goes on to explain how they “believe there is something going on in the science faculty because of all these issues that were encountered…there are clearly some gaps between the promise of getting accommodations and not getting them because the professors aren’t listening or connecting with accessibility services correctly.” Improved communication is one thing, and a recommendation to improve communication and education about accessibility needs is
outlined in a later section, but ensuring that instructors provide accommodations is another. That is why one student suggested “there should be an easier process for reporting profs that are dismissive of/not accommodating to students with disabilities (learning, mental, or otherwise).” An improved reporting process would allow students to share experiences with specific courses where their registered accommodations are not honored and hopefully point out specific areas for faculties and services to target to enhance understanding of accessibility needs.

Overall students have varied experiences and opinions about their professors and their academic experiences at the University of Waterloo. Some experiences and classes, as discussed earlier, are have been understanding of accommodation needs. Other experiences have not been so positive for students. While individual instructor behavior may always cause a problem for some students, there are larger, more systematic changes that can be made to drastically improve the academic experience for students with accessibility needs.

4. Online Learning During COVID-19

Expanding on students’ experiences with professors and classroom accommodations, research participants were asked about their specific thoughts regarding online learning in the past year due to COVID-19. The transition to virtual learning has been a major adjustment for educational institutions during this time and has resulted in a steep learning curve for everyone involved. However, it is important for this report to highlight the exact issues and barriers students with accessibility needs have encountered during this year of online learning.

The main concern that students report regarding online learning is the lack of accommodations they were receiving. Many students were under the impression that professors were supposed to accept all accommodation requests without question; however, some professors were not doing so which is worrisome especially as one student has “found it [online learning] very challenging, [the student] feels like online there are less accommodations offered through AccessAbility services.” A blanket accommodation acceptance policy can certainly be helpful, especially in terms of cutting down paperwork and processing times at AccessAbility Services. Unfortunately, if professors do not follow through with said policy and AccessAbility Services does not respond to an intervention request, serious issues can occur for students.

A major drawback of online learning, especially for students with accessibility needs, is that professors and classmates do not see each other in person and therefore cannot diffuse a stressful situation – for example, concerns about public speaking – in the moment. One student put it this way:

“Online school has made disability accommodations limited. Out of sight & out of mind. Profs can’t see when I’m struggling to use my hands and am in pain. Profs can’t see the change in my behaviour when I’m experiencing a prolonged depressive period. And there is the mentality that everyone is struggling so everyone should have the same accommodations in the class without any consideration of how this pandemic is amplifying the negative mental health impacts on those with pre-existing conditions…”

The virtual environment strips away those safeguards that are only available to students in-person and can let more students ‘slip through the cracks’ of online learning. An example of the ‘out of sight, out of mind’ mentality students see their professors exhibiting is how certain standard accommodations have not transitioned online when requested by students. During in-person education, transcripts, notes, and other aids could be provided to students should they need them. Online however, students are finding that these accommodations are not being provided. For example, one student explained: “During online learning professors are made aware of disability in the classroom and are asked to have transcripts available but then ignore the request...This is happened because the professor talks too fast, too quickly or simply does not consider that they have students with accommodations in their classroom.” Similarly, another student explained that they would really appreciate mandatory captioning of all videos in online courses. Without
reasonable accommodations like transcripts or captions, students may have immense difficulty completing their coursework and understanding the concepts presented to them in class.

These issues, in conjunction with focus and workload concerns, have made online learning a huge adjustment for students with accessibility needs. On the other hand, some aspects of virtual education have been very helpful for students. For example, the asynchronous schedule allows students to work when they feel at their best and in their own space. They do not have to worry about logging in at a specific time for a class or worrying about missing live lecture material. However, the downside to this model is the amount of participation activities and weekly assignments some courses are requiring instead. The following quote demonstrates a common sentiment among survey respondents:

“Essentially it’s just tough to be engaged and care about keeping up with work. Weekly quizzes or discussion post requirements can sometimes help with this but other times [are] too overwhelming so it’s hard to find a balance and I don't think there's really a one size fits all approach for this. However, if there were more leeway for students to choose their participation venue (or lack of maybe) for each course that might be very helpful...”

It is important to note that all students are struggling through online learning in this past year due to COVID-19. But students with accessibility issues who may already have concerns about receiving their proper accommodations during in-person education have been especially impacted. As such, recommendations detailed later in the report seek to address some of the issues students face in a virtual learning environment. While virtual learning is the only type occurring as of May 2021, it is hoped that a return to in-person education post-COVID-19 will negate many of the issues that students face in a fully virtual setting. In addition, if virtual learning does continue in some way, the needs of students with accessibility concerns will need to be addressed.

5. Employment

Another important aspect of the overall student experience at the University of Waterloo is employment and cooperative education. Thus, it is of particular importance to understand how students with accessibility needs and those who identify as a person with a disability experience work and co-op during their university tenure.

Students participating in video interviews were asked about their experience working as a person with a disability, either as a co-op student or in general outside of the university system. As a whole, the interviewed students did not feel they had to disclose their disabilities to employers unless a situation arose where they might need an accommodation. Of course, this experience is not transferable for everyone at Waterloo, and some students may have visible accessibility needs that are more easily discernable by employers. Unfortunately, those students may be less likely to participate in a co-op program as the highly variable nature of co-op (i.e., the potential to have to move every term to a new place for work) may not be accessible for students who identify with a disability. One student explained this when they stated that they “have concerns about friends [who] chose not to do co-op because of their physical disability and that’s an issue, the moving around nature of co-op is not really accessible for some people.”

Even for students in the co-op program, various components of the process are inaccessible or can contribute to an aggravation of a student’s disability. One student explained how “sometimes they found a job they wanted to apply for and then read the description and realized they couldn’t do that job at all — they just didn’t apply.” Another student mentioned that “the process of finding a job is more stressful and flares up disability more than the job itself.” This is unfortunate and an especially tall hurdle for students to work around when the job types available to co-op students are inaccessible and not conducive to their needs. When students cannot apply to certain types of positions it limits their job choice options,
increasing stress as there may not be as many back-up positions available to them as to other students who
can apply to all types of jobs.

Another concern for students during the co-op process is the interview stage, when students have one
chance to make an impression on potential employers no matter how they are coping with their disability
that day. This is brought up in one student’s experience where they have “had periods of time when
interviews were occurring, and the student was feeling poorly and went to the interviews anyway. Those
interviews went badly, and it sucks to know an interview went poorly.” The rigidity of the co-op process
makes it very difficult to reschedule interviews if a student is not feeling well the day of, and CEE (Co-
operative and Experiential Education) penalizes students if they do not show up (Co-operative Education,
2021). Students are aware of this and, as demonstrated in the above quote, will go to interviews even
when they do not feel their best due to their disability.

This is in part because the vast majority of interviewed students did not know that AccessAbility Services
can provide various accommodations at job interviews for students registered with their service. The one
student who mentioned this area of accommodation “didn’t know that AccessAbility Services could be
involved in co-op interviews and that definitely could have been useful during their co-op
experiences – doesn’t think people know about that and it could have been so helpful for that.” In
addition, one student reported “never [having] a conversation with someone on campus
about appropriateness in the workplace and accommodations in the workplace (especially with regards
to fidget toys and focus help). Everything they figured out about accommodations in the workplace they
have figured out on their own.”

While there may be folks at CEE and AccessAbility Services that willing and trained to talk to students
about accessibility needs while being employed, students are unaware of these resources or where to find
information about them. In one student’s case, “the mental health struggles noticed during co-op were
hard to deal with because I didn’t know if there are any university supports while on co-op.” There
appears to be a gap in communication between various departments on campus and students about the
variety of services offered students involved in the co-op process. If students are not aware of the
services, they cannot utilize them, as such a recommendation for improved communication and
conveyance of services is detailed later in the report.

Overall, students with accessibility needs are not being supported correctly with regards to employment
despite the present accommodations and services in place that could help them. The issue is making sure
all parties, from CEE to AccessAbility to the student, are aware of each other and communicating
properly to ensure that all needs are met. People who identify as having a disability deserve to have
access to the appropriate accommodations, many of which already exist in the current coop system but are
not being applied to all those who need them.

6. Built environment

6.1 Buildings on campus

Issues surrounding physical mobility around the University of Waterloo campus was also captured in the
survey and interviews. In particular, survey respondents were asked to select all physical accessibility
barriers they have faced on campus in a “select all that apply format.” Fortunately, the most common
answer was ‘none’ with 28% of participants indicating they have never faced physical accessibility issues
on campus. Other popular responses include ‘improper clearing of ice and snow on accessible pathways’
(13%), ‘inconvenient accessibility paths between buildings’ (10%), ‘lack of elevators’ (7%), and ‘small
sidewalks’ (7%). All options presented in this question did receive responses, indicating that students
experience a variety of physical barriers around campus. The full list of barriers presented in this question
can be seen in Appendix A, question 17.
Another question regarding the built campus environment asked all survey respondents, regardless of their identity as a person with a disability, if they feel the University of Waterloo campus and its buildings in general have been made accessible to them; 50% of respondents said yes, the campus did feel accessible to them, while 10% said no and 25% of respondents said they were unsure if campus had been made accessible. The other 15% of survey respondents preferred not to say or indicated ‘no answer’ to this question. This breakdown of responses is concerning as there is clearly some uncertainty amongst all students as to how accessible the campus actually is. Students who commented on this and other building questions often started off saying “While I have not personally faced physical issues around campus…” and continued on pointing out various built issues like lack of ramps, signage in buildings, and accessible elevators that could impact any student, not to mention those with mobility issues.

As a follow up, all survey respondents were asked if they feel there is a particular building which is especially inaccessible. All 95 answers to this question were categorically coded by the building or area of concern on campus (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Relevant Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applied Health Sciences Complex</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts Quad</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libraries</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics and Computer (MC)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needles Hall</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology, Anthropology, Sociology (PAS)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.R Coutts Engineering Lecture Hall (RCH)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Buildings</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General classroom concerns</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older Buildings</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General concerns</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Summary of buildings or locations of accessibility concern around the University of Waterloo main campus

While students discussed a variety of specific buildings, some themes emerged regarding what exactly was of concern in each building. These include signage inside of buildings (maps of classrooms, bathrooms, exits, etc.), inaccessible or inconvenient entrances to the buildings, steep staircases both throughout the building and in classrooms, ergonomic design of desks and tables as well as unreliable elevators.

In particular, the irony of accessibility issues at Needles Hall is apparent in student submissions, one respondent expressed the following: “from a design perspective the long wheelchair ramp and the stairs upon stairs when you enter the building feel the opposite of the buildings function. I am talking about the needles hall building where [AccessAbility Services] is located.” Additionally, stairs and signage inside buildings is of great concern. As one student mentioned, “All buildings need better maps. Buildings should all have elevators that are easy to find. Buildings should have entrances that don’t have animals or bugs.” Other students go on to say that “Any of the old engineering buildings feel very imposing; have few bathrooms and also are almost impossible to navigate if you can’t walk up and down stairs” and “Older buildings on campus lack multiple entryways that are accessible to those who have physical disabilities.” It clear from these responses that students are keenly aware of the variety of physical accessibility issues on campus.

In summary, students generally ascribed to this sentiment; “I think that we should be focusing more on making our older buildings accessible for all students before we continue to build newer ones, since this only means that certain areas of campus are lagging farther and farther behind.” Based on this response as well as suggestions to improve physical accessibility on campus, a recommendation addressing these concerns is outlined later in the report.
6.2 Student Safety

In addition to building accessibility, students also had the opportunity to discuss general safety issues on campus. The majority of feedback received on this subject regarded outdoor maintenance and transit around campus, particularly in the winter when campus can become covered in snow and ice. As mentioned in the previous section, improper clearing of snow and ice was a common response to the question about physical accessibility barriers experienced on campus. One student indicated that “I am not physically disabled, but I know that campus can be VERY slippery in the wintertime, which is a huge issue for those whose disabilities affect their mobility.” Recommendations for changes in this area include ideas such as more de-icing, bigger sidewalks and overall “improved winter maintenance to ensure that all areas of campus are fully accessible to those who require assisted mobility.” This is an on-going, large scale issue with many moving parts and as such next steps for WUSA are detailed later in the report.

6.3 Housing

The final aspect of the built environment discussed with the research participants was accessibility issues or other concerns about University of Waterloo residences and off-campus housing. By researching this topic, a more holistic view of lived experiences by people with accessibility needs can be presented in this report, allowing for more cohesive recommendations and actions to be taken in order to improve said experiences.

Survey respondents were asked if they feel Waterloo residences have taken appropriate and effective action to ensure that residences are accessible to them; 34% said yes, residences were accessible while 8% said no and 29% were unsure if residences had taken appropriate actions for accessibility. The remaining 29% of respondents said ‘no answer’ or preferred not to say for this question. Students were then able to provide written responses, of which many mentioned that Waterloo residences did indeed have physical accessibility issues that would restrict students’ choice of living arrangements on campus. One student noted how “REV and V1 are largely inaccessible to wheelchair bound students because there are no elevators…” and another explained how “the UWP residences are old and have no elevators or fast pathways between buildings.” In just these two quotes alone, 3 out of 7 on-campus residences are mentioned as inaccessible or as having serious accessibility concerns, calling into question the level of accessibility for on-campus housing.

The other area of concern regarding on-campus housing is the accommodation process, whereby multiple students interviewed correctly applied for residence accommodations but had a difficult time confirming and actually receiving their accommodation. In one case a student “Had a 15-email exchange with someone [from UW Residence] over the summer to get the room changed, [the student] had indicated in the housing request form that the only thing they needed an accommodation for was a bathroom thing and they weren’t accommodated as promised.” Another student “Specifically applied for single room with gender neutral washroom and eventually got it. [The student] kept asking UW housing for confirmation because they needed their accommodation and UW housing never answered and wouldn’t confirm – that stressed them out.” To expand on these experiences, a student revealed:

“I felt like I had to explain my entire medical history to a random housing services employee in order to get the accommodations accessibility services had already noted – I felt concerned about confidentiality of the random housing services employee…Felt that because I was already registered with accessibility for accommodations, I shouldn’t have had this issue.”

These experiences indicate that a lack of communication between UW Housing staff, AccessAbility Services, and the students who had applied for accommodations correctly can cause severe, unnecessary stress about the housing process and medical confidentiality in students.
On the other hand, students typically did not run into many physical accessibility issues in off-campus housing; however, it should be noted that as this is a small sample size no generalizations for this aspect of the student experience can be conclusively drawn. Instead, students reported barriers of financial strain and the high cost of housing to be an issue for them when looking for an accessible living arrangement off-campus. One student noted “I generally use either Kijiji or the UW Off-Campus Housing to find housing. A lot of the easy to find and accessible buildings are much higher in price and in large student apartment buildings. It’s a rock and a hard place situation since those cost more, have worse maintenance than a rented house, and unpredictable roommate pairings.” Another student mentioned how “The housing market is incredibly expensive and unaffordable to find something decently livable...Students are worried that prices might get much more expensive once we return to in-person classes.”

The concern about cost of off-campus accessible housing in Waterloo can be contextualized in the broader student housing trend exemplified in a recent WUSA Report. For students with accessibility needs the combination of rising housing costs and any prices associated with their accommodation or medical needs may escalate the strain they are under.

7. Finances

In addition to housing costs, students participating in the video and email interviews were asked about the financial aspect of being a person with accessibility needs. Overall students participating did not experience excessive financial strain regarding their accessibility needs. However, participants did note that various accessibility services and devices did cost money and could be an issue for other students. One student “has some physical accessibility needs and medical requests, [and] has noticed it costs lots of money and can be a barrier for people in need who don’t have secure funding.” This same student went on to describe how “AccessAbility services requires money to get products needed after a trial period, which adds up...[AccessAbility] was able to help the student get a grant to cover initial costs of buying an audio recording device for notetaking which was nice, but the student has to cover refills now...” This sudden onset of cost for a device a student is already using can be detrimental for students with financial constraints. Students may have to stop using the device, switch to a different one that may not work as well for them, or adjust already tight budgets to make room for this new cost.

This phenomenon is also evident when students discuss their experiences with insurance. Navigating insurance plans and coverage is complex at the best of times but the effects of a misstep or change in health insurance can be especially immediate and severe for people with accessibility needs. For example, one student “switched from an external insurance to student insurance and had a bit of a challenge getting prescriptions outside of the SLC [Student Life Centre] pharmacy, [the student] couldn’t figure out how to show their insurance card to the other pharmacy and had to pay all fees upfront and get reimbursed later which wasn’t great or preferred.” Luckily, that student had enough money to cover fees upfront and to wait for reimbursement. Other students, like this participant, may not be financially stable enough to do so;

“[The student] had to go off their medication recently because of issues with their health insurance. Because of COVID, the family finances have been impacted and [the student] was unable to become fees arranged for the term because of that. As a consequence, the student’s health insurance was unable to be renewed and then they were unable to buy their needed medication or make a doctor’s appointment for months – [the student] has been feeling severe side effects from being off their medication.”

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2 The WUSA Housing Report is being finalized in May 2021 and discusses various aspects of the lived student housing experience by University of Waterloo students.
For students not eligible for OHIP+ (e.g., out of province, international, or students over 24), prescription coverage may be costly and hard to come by, further barring students from accessing accessibility aids.

There can be a great many costs associated with being a person with a disability that have a great impact on that person’s life, especially in university. As this theme is based on a small sample size, few generalizations can be made but it is important to note that financial constraints are of concern to students with accessibility needs no matter their personal experiences at UWaterloo. Students understand that changing financial situations can have an immediate impact on their ability to access medical care, academia accommodations, and other resources needed to be successful at university.

8. International Students

While this research project unfortunately was not able to collect as many accounts on international student experiences with accessibility on campus as desired, the data that was analyzed is incredibly important. Specific issues and concerns that only apply to international students can often be unintentionally overlooked in a space dominated by domestic students. Stress of permits, transport to Waterloo, lack of familial support due to distance, and other concerns may have a negative impact on a student’s management of their accessibility needs.

For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all students in various ways, but for international students the effects of it are especially severe. One student revealed, “I could have gone home to [my home country] during this pandemic to save my parents from covering my high living expenses here in Canada, but on top of the difficult and ever-changing travel regulations both here and in [my home country], they felt I'd be physically safer in Canada.” While this student may be physically safer in Canada, this decision affected the student’s mental health and coping mechanisms as they “were not able to go home in over a year and feel very alone while staying in waterloo – my friends went back home and I do not have a support network here.” For some people with accessibility needs, it may already be hard enough to maintain a strong support system when everyone is in the same area, to lose that geographical proximity may make it so much more difficult to maintain those needed relationships.

An often-used tactic of UWaterloo to help students manage their health and disabilities is to suggest lighter course loads (i.e. only taking 3 classes instead of 5) or taking a semester off, meant as a break to allow students to prioritize themselves and lower stress levels. As one international student explains, this may have the opposite effect and increase stress for international students; “Unscheduled breaks [in course load/schedule] have an impact on my eligibility for a post-graduate work permit (PGWP) which I desperately need because I don’t see decent prospects for me at home or anywhere else without that additional experience after graduation.” By not taking immigration and permit requirements into account when proposing accommodations for students, the “break” students receive may not be a break at all and may raise concerns they did not have before. Thus, it is important for any accommodations offered to international students take their unique social and legal status in Canada, and any plans for permits post-university, into consideration.

9. General and Other Concerns

Besides questions about professors, services, and employment, the accessibility survey asked participants about their general experiences on campus as well as if they could provide any other information about their experiences as a person with accessibility needs at the University of Waterloo.

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3 Ontario Health Insurance Plan Plus, covers prescription medications for anyone under 24, on provincial healthcare, and not covered by a private plan (Ontario, 2021).
One question asked students if they feel there is enough awareness for disability accessibility on campus. 52% of survey respondents indicated that no, there is not enough awareness on campus, while 13% said yes, there enough awareness. 29% of respondents were unsure and 6% selected ‘no answer.’ Subsequently, survey participants were asked if they felt there was enough awareness for different types of disabilities on campus. This question received a similar breakdown of responses as the previous one with the same number of total responses, where 64% of respondents selected no while only 7% indicated yes, they did feel there was enough awareness of different disability types. For this question, 23% of respondents were unsure and 6% selected ‘no answer.’

These questions, as well as many of the lived experiences documented in this report, indicate that students face a lack of knowledge and awareness about accessibility issues on campus, impacting their academic experiences and potentially influencing the level/quality of support they receive from various university systems. Multiple students have discussed this phenomenon, stating “the disability policies should strive to reduce variance for those that use them. It should not be a big deal, or require you go out of your way to get access to the supports needed. Disabled students should be able to have similar if not the same experience in their education as their able bodied counterparts.” As well as feelings where “I have to admit that I'm concerned with the levels of understanding that various members of Waterloo Campus have regarding disabilities…”

Overall, students just want people on campus to understand accessibility needs more and they want people to listen to their concerns and take them seriously. Students “…wish that the uni would listen to their students more. with things like bad profs or problems with the curriculum it usually just feels like the students have no power and you just have to deal with it until you're out. especially in eng when you're in a cohort and don't get to pick your pros and don't get to pick many courses until 4th year.”

There is a running theme of inconsistency with staff members at the university, where equal care is not provided because of a lack of staff knowledge. This has lead to negative experiences where “every time I’ve attempted to seek help from UW in regards to my mental health, my experience with the staff ended terribly. they don’t seem to care, don’t provide accurate information, the process itself is very back and forth and its hard for someone with a mental health disability to maneuver through the process when there isn’t clear instructions on how to receive them. it’s getting old hearing an institution promote mental health but not make any real changes to better students lives.”

Despite all the negativity expressed in this report about the numerous issues with accessibility at UW, most students have had a positive time at university. They have made friends, joined clubs, and found positive spaces for themselves. But when they have trouble accessing services or systems meant to provide them equitable access to academics, potentially making them feel like university system is stacked against them, their overall experience is severely impacted. Based on the experiences outlined here, there is an incredibly strong foundation for improvements and changes to be made to ensure that all students, but especially those with accessibility needs, are provided with all the resources they need to succeed at the University of Waterloo.

10. Recommendations and Desired Activities

This report has covered numerous areas and systems at the University of Waterloo that students with accessibility needs interact with. The issues mentioned touch all levels of the university system, from individual instructors and advisors, to the policies and protocols for entire services/faculties. The report serves as a holistic, well-rounded piece to provide context for and an introduction to some of the issues students with accessibility needs face. Recommendations for future actions are outlined here to address some of the concerns brought up in this report.

10.1 Actions by WUSA

Promotion of CAPS
WUSA should raise awareness about CAPS (Centre for Academic Policy Support) through advertisement on WUSA’s various communication channels. This service is a WUSA, student-run resource for people who need to file a petition, grievance, or appeal with the university to address issues with University academic policies. The coordinators at CAPS help students complete the correct forms, explain academic policy, and advise students on other available resources.

As highlighted earlier in this report, many students with accessibility concerns have needed to file a petition or appeal during their time at university. Rarely was CAPS mentioned by students themselves even though they indicated help with the filing process would have been appreciated. Increasing awareness about this service would allow more students to utilize it and benefit from the support CAPS provides while going through a complicated filing process.

Additionally, as some students may not think to file petitions or grievances because of misconceptions about their ability to do so, the promotion of CAPS also serves to educate students about the ways they can advocate for themselves to the university. This may result in students who would not otherwise file a petition, file one because they now know about the service. WUSA is recommended to include CAPS in all communications about the WUSA run services and to highlight CAPS in other communication methods (i.e., emails, social media, etc.) more frequently.

Physical Accessibility

It is recommended that WUSA take the data and information provided with regards to the built campus environment and move them to the Student Safety Committee portfolio. The Student Safety Committee has already collected information on physical safety around campus and has established areas of concern which align with the issues presented in this report. The Student Safety Committee will supplement their existing evidence using the data presented here for their future actions to ensure all students are physically safe on campus.

Areas for the Student Safety Committee to include:
(i) Internal Signage within buildings (exits, bathrooms, stairs, etc.)
(ii) Reliable elevators
(iii) Ice and Snow clearance
(iv) Maps of internal building layouts (i.e., where classrooms are)
(v) Accessible building entrances

10.2 Creation of an Accessibility Committee under WUSA

In order to generate appropriate recommendations and actions for multiple university systems, it is recommended that an accessibility committee is formed within WUSA. This committee will draw on the data and experiences highlighted here to establish detailed recommendations and work with other university systems as needed to move suggested changes forward.

As this report is only highlights a few students’ lived experiences via video interviews and survey data, it cannot serve as an adequate representation of the entire student community who identify as a person with a disability. Additionally, as many issues brought forward have to do with other university systems (i.e., AccessAbility Services, Faculties, Health Services, etc.) it is crucial to have conversations with said systems to enact meaningful changes that will improve student experiences. Thus, a committee which can collaborate with various stakeholders and gather detailed information regarding current polices and procedures would be ideal.

The rest of the recommendations outlined here serve as areas of interest for the committee to investigate once it has been formed. The committee is encouraged to start with the desired changes as mentioned in this report as these changes have been recommended by the Accessibility Commissioner and the student research respondents themselves.
AccessAbility Services
The new accessibility committee developed in the previous recommendation is encouraged to prioritize improvements to AccessAbility Services. This is a crucial area for development to positively improve student experiences. Based on the concerns highlighted in this report, 3 main aspects of AccessAbility are suggested starting points: Registration, communication of responsibilities, and advisor training.

The registration process at AccessAbility Services can be quite complex and drawn-out for students, especially for those which require multiple pieces of supporting documentation from very specific sources. Wait times for medical and intake appointments are often long and affect student ability to receive accommodations at the start of term, these times may be even longer if a student must re-submit documentation because of a technicality. Thus, the committee is recommended to investigate how to streamline the registration process for students. This includes clarifying where students can get documentation and what that document needs to look like, the average enrollment time, as well as what other resources or contacts are available for students as they go through this process. This also includes examining internal AccessAbility processes to ensure that student registration is streamlined for advisors. Ensuring that students would not be required to re-register in a subsequent term for an already documented accommodation.

In conjunction with a streamlined registration process, better communication of services and the student role in the accommodation process is needed. As detailed earlier in this report, the large amount of paperwork and text-blocks presented to students can be hard or even inaccessible to read. Additionally, students were also unclear on where to reach out within AccessAbility to ask for help or clarification on issues, such as which party is responsible for notifying instructors about the student’s accommodation plan. The accessibility committee should strive to improve communication from AccessAbility Services to students in a more accessible format while addressing concerns about which entity (the service or the student) is responsible for each part in the accommodation process. This improved communication should also include the scope of AccessAbility services (i.e., what they will or will not help students with) so that students are better informed about what resource is best suited to their needs as well as improved awareness of the variety of accommodations offered. Streamlined communication channels would also allow students to report any inconsistencies of accommodation provisions to the appropriate AccessAbility Services contact to take further action on behalf of the student to ensure all accommodation plans are implemented. Overall, the accessibility committee should work to make AccessAbility Services transparent and easily accessible through clear communication for all students.

The third starting point for the accessibility committee involves internal AccessAbility Service structures and personnel behaviours to ensure all students are feel welcomed and included within that space. Allegations of discrimination, ignorance, and gaslighting from AccessAbility Services employees towards students are incredibly serious and should be fully investigated. The committee is highly encouraged to work with AccessAbility Services on developing improved and more inclusive training for employees as well as better oversight and reporting structures for incidents. It is important for the committee to emphasize this recommendation as front-line employees who work directly with students can have the most impact on the quality of a student’s accommodation experience.

Health Services
It is recommended that the new committee also look into Health Services as they relate to accessibility needs as students have pointed out areas in need of further investigation and improvement. As this service intersects with AccessAbility Services and other departments on campus quite frequently with regards to setting students up with appropriate accommodations, it is important to take student concerns into consideration.
The new accessibility committee is encouraged to advocate for the development of a stronger reporting and oversight system for harmful interactions students may experience at Health Services. As evidenced earlier in the report, students have faced ignorance, judgement, and concerning health directives from Health Services professional employees and have not seen any action taken to address their concerns. Improving and clarifying the reporting process for interactions at Health Services will allow students to safely advocate and protect themselves from harmful interactions which may impact a student’s ability to meet their accessibility needs.

Coinciding with a stronger reporting process, advocacy for a more inclusive environment, particularly with regards to LGBTQIA+ students is strongly encouraged for the committee. Health Services should recognize and consistently use a student’s preferred name, pronouns, and gender on forms and during appointments. Incidents of this nature should be included in the reporting and oversight system suggested previously to allow for investigation and appropriate subsequent actions to be taken.

Additionally, the committee is recommended to work with Health Services to expand access to long-term, consistent care for students with long-term needs or chronic conditions. This issue has been brought up by multiple students throughout this report, who indicate that receiving care from consistent providers over the course of their tenure at University of Waterloo has been a struggle and potentially detrimental to their health. Expanding access to long-term options within the university system or creating a more robust and collaborative network of care options outside of the university is crucial to the health and wellbeing of students who need it.

Counselling Services
Similar to Health Services, the new accessibility committee is encouraged to work with Counselling Services to improve areas of concern as pointed out by students in this report. Counselling services quite often works with Health and AccessAbility Services to formulate a robust accommodation plan for students and intersects with academic departments throughout the university as well. Thus, it is very important that student experiences at Counselling Services are as positive as possible.

The new accessibility committee should work to clarify the scope and nature of Counselling Services as well as the variety of resources available. In particular, clarification of a session limit per term or per academic year is needed. Students report disparities and confusion on what the limit is and the time frame where the limit applies, prompting the need for clear messaging from Counselling Services about the scope of their services and what level of help students can expect.

On the topic of a 6-session cap, students report that this is not nearly enough time to improve their mental health, especially when students may not see the same counsellor for all 6 sessions. The accessibility committee should advocate for an increased number of sessions per student and work to ensure all students stay with a regular counsellor throughout their time in Counselling Services. The session cap not only hurts students in the short-term, but students with long-term or chronic needs are severely impacted by this limit and inconsistency in care providers.

University Wide Inclusion Training
As a final area the new accessibility committee should investigate, the mandatory disability inclusion training for all university staff should be improved. Many students report negative interactions with university employees (i.e., instructors, academic advisors, etc.) because they are unaware of various disabling conditions and do not understand the need for accommodations. This in turn affects student ability to receive reasonable accommodations as well as the student’s perception of the university as an accessible, inclusive place.

Improving disability inclusion training would include added information about more conditions, the need for accommodations, and most importantly, the expectations of student facing staff when presented with
accommodation requests or plans from AccessAbility services. The accessibility committee should advocate for these and other changes to be made to the training, especially with regards to expectations of staff, to ensure that all university employees are well educated and trained in serving all students with accessibility needs.
References


11. Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. I’m in the faculty of:
   a. Applied Health Sciences
   b. Arts
   c. Engineering
   d. Environment
   e. Math
   f. Science

2. I’m in year:
   a. One
   b. Two
   c. Three
   d. Four
   e. Five +

3. Are you an international student?
   a. Yes
   b. No

4. Do you identify as a mature student? A mature student is typically defined as an undergrad, who has been out of high school for at least 2-4 years when applying for postsecondary education.
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to say

5. Do you identify as a person with a disability?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to say

6. What type of disability do you identify as having? Select all that apply. -> if answered 5a
   a. Physical disability
   b. Visual disability
   c. Hearing disability
   d. Learning disability
   e. Mental illness disability
   f. Prefer not to say
   g. Other, please specify

7. What sort of functional limitations do you experience due to your disability? Select all that apply. -> if answered 5a
   a. Mobility
   b. Reading
   c. Handwriting
   d. Speaking
   e. Hearing
   f. Ability to focus
   g. Ability to understand social cues
   h. Mood
8. Do you have a service animal? -> if answered 5a
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to say

9. If needed, do you know how to register as a student with a disability with the University of Waterloo’s AccessAbility Services?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to say

10. Are you registered with the University of Waterloo’s AccessAbility Services? -> if answered 5a
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Prefer not to say

11. If needed, do you know how to submit a Verification of Illness Form with the University of Waterloo?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Prefer not to say

12. Which University of Waterloo services have you used in relation to disability accessibility? Select all that apply. -> if answered 5a
    a. AccessAbility Services
    b. Health Services
    c. Counselling Services
    d. MATES
    e. Equity Office
    f. I have not used any of these services in relation to disability accessibility.
    g. Prefer not to say
    h. Other, please specify

13. Have you had any issues accessing any of the services above? This can include physically accessing the buildings, complications completing paperwork to register for the services, or other barriers. -> if answered 12 a, b, c, d, e, h
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Prefer not to say

14. If you answered yes to Question 13, which services have you had issues with? Select all that apply. -> if answered 13a
    a. AccessAbility Services
    b. Health Services
    c. Counselling Services
    d. MATES
    e. Equity Office
f. Prefer not to say

g. Other, please specify

15. If you answered yes to Question 13, what difficulties have you had accessing these services? -> if answered 13a

16. Do you feel that Waterloo Residences has taken appropriate and effective action to ensure that residences are accessible to you? -> if answered 5a
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure
   d. Prefer not to say

17. What, if any, physical accessibility barriers have you faced on campus? Select all that apply. -> if answered 5a
   a. Difficulty finding accessible entrances
   b. Lack of accessible entrances
   c. Difficulty finding elevators
   d. Lack of elevators
   e. Difficulty finding wheelchair ramps
   f. Lack of wheelchair ramps
   g. Difficulty finding accessible washrooms
   h. Lack of accessible washrooms
   i. Improper clearing of ice and snow on accessible pathways
   j. Inconvenient accessibility paths between buildings
   k. Small sidewalks
   l. Lack of physical accessibility accommodation
   m. None
   n. Prefer not to say
   o. Other, please specify

18. What, if any, non-physical accessibility barriers have you faced on campus? Select all that apply. -> if answered 5a
   a. Lack of braille in buildings
   b. Lack of signage in buildings
   c. Lack of understanding and support for disabilities
   d. Lack of recognition for accessibility accommodations
   e. Stigma against disabilities
   f. Systemic barriers in University policies
   g. Barriers related to teaching/learning structure (e.g. workload)
   h. Lack of non-physical accessibility accommodations
   i. None
   j. Prefer not to say
   k. Other, please specify

19. Do you feel that the University of Waterloo campus and its buildings in general have been made accessible for you?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure
   d. Prefer not to say
20. Do you feel there is a particular building which is especially inaccessible? Which building and why?

21. Do you feel that there is enough awareness for disability accessibility issues on campus?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure
   d. Prefer not to say

22. Do you feel that there is enough awareness for different types of disabilities on campus?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure
   d. Prefer not to say

23. Do you feel that instructors are understanding and accommodating enough concerning disabilities (including mental illness)?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure
   d. Prefer not to say

24. If there is anything else related to your disability accessibility experiences at the University of Waterloo that you would like to mention but we have not asked about, please tell us now.
12. Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How do you find services for people with disabilities on campus?

2. What is your experience as an undergraduate student at UW?

3. Do you have any accessibility issues as a student at UW? If so, can you share?

4. How do you find housing to be in the Waterloo community? Do you find any barriers when finding appropriate housing for your needs?

5. How do you find your experience with online learning as someone who identifies with a disability? Is there anything you would like to improve?

6. How do you find the professors in your faculty to be in accommodating your disability?

7. Do you find your disability impacts your access to employment opportunities (e.g. part time work off/on campus, co-op opportunities etc.)?

8. Do you think there ways in which employment opportunities at UW could be made more accessible to people with disabilities?

9. Is there anything you would like to improve about student life at UW? (etc academics, services, landscape, social aspect, residence)

10. What has been your experience with the financial aspect of being a student registered with accessibility services?
WATERLOO HOUSING REPORT

WUSA Housing Report

Jaskaran Dhillon, Aisha Shibli, Mariuki Njonjo, Teresa Tan, Amelia Cammy, Jordan Daniels

April 2021
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1. Overview of Actors

1.1 The Federal Government

The federal government’s National Housing Strategy Act, unveiled in 2017, focuses on providing housing for those in greatest need. The document states young adults as one of these groups. Section 4 of the Act also recognizes the right to adequate housing as a fundamental human right affirmed in international law, central to human dignity, well-being, and community. The Strategy commits to building 125,000 new homes from 2017-2027 (Young, 2019). Much of this will go to those already on social housing waitlists and does not explicitly target students in any way. A report from CIBC states that Canada is short about 300,000 housing units due to failure of accounting for students that go home for summers in national housing statistics (Tencer, 2019).

The State-run Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation also does very little in regard to students navigating the housing market. They do offer flexible financing options to help developers build, buy, or refinance student housing. This includes resources like:

- higher loan-to-value ratios
- loan advances up to 75% of the lending value during construction
- lower debt coverage ratios
- preferred interest rates
- amortization periods up to 40 years

Additional flexibilities are given to developers whose projects qualify as affordable housing, meaning:

- the total residential rental income must be at least 10% lower than market rates, and
- 20% of the units must rent for less than 30% of the median household income for your area

For tenants, the CMHC provides information on tenant rights, responsibilities, and rental practices. There are very few CMHC services outside of this for short-term tenants like most students are.

1.2 The Provincial of Ontario

As of December 19\textsuperscript{th}, 2019, the Government of Ontario has partnered with the Federal government on a $1.4 billion housing benefit deal. The deal provides a $2,500 yearly rental subsidy for those on, or eligible for, a social housing waitlist. The initiative largely targets families and survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking, with no mention of students (Gallagher, 2019). In April 2018 the Residential Tenancies Act was amended to include a standardized lease. This was made possible by WUSA advocacy along with other groups.

Both City Councillor Jeff Henry and Regional Councillor Sean Strickland have stressed the need for inclusionary zoning to help alleviate problems caused by rising rent prices. The current Provincial government’s Bill 108 introduces limits to inclusionary zoning. The bill states that municipalities “may contain inclusionary zoning policies in respect of an area that is a protected major transit station area or an area in respect of which a development permit system is adopted or established in response to an order made by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing under section 70.2.2, as re-enacted” (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2019). This would effectively eliminate the possibility of any inclusionary zoning policies being enacted in the Northdale neighbourhood, where majority of the University’s students reside.

1.3 Regional Government

The Region of Waterloo has committed to building 632 units of affordable housing from 2019-2029. These would be priced at or below 80% of average market rent. Historically, these units are instantly...
filled, with many of those applying ending up on waiting lists for years. The Region of Waterloo also offers incentives for private developers and landlords to develop affordable housing units. These incentives also apply to homes with secondary suites and those who are willing to make units available for people on the affordable housing wait list (Region of Waterloo, 2019). The Region’s focus when it comes to housing, however, has been on mostly families and other vulnerable populations. There is very little in terms of Regional action on student housing. The Waterloo Region Housing Master Plan 2020-2040 makes no mention of students or young adults and their needs. The Master Plan’s Consultation Summary also fails to mention students or young adults. Feedback was obtained from several stakeholders within the Region, but neither the post-secondary institutions nor their student groups were consulted (Region of Waterloo Community Services, 2018).

The Region’s Affordable Housing Strategy 2014-2019 mentions student housing just once, when it states, “while there has been an increase in rental housing construction, the majority of new units have been for students or higher end rental housing.” The strategy’s predominant concern is that of affordability for low to moderate income households, which most out-of-town students do not fall into. The strategy also created 350 affordable housing units, most of which are also quickly occupied, leaving remaining families on waiting lists (Region of Waterloo Housing, 2019).

The Region of Waterloo is also responsible for emergency shelters and transitional housing, described as safe places for people to stay while they work to find stable housing. The Region provides funding for seven shelters in the Region; with 4 in Kitchener and 3 in Cambridge. All of the Kitchener shelters are located within Downtown Kitchener, with the closest to UWaterloo being 6.9km away (Region of Waterloo, 2019). The Region does not fund any shelters or transitional housing in the City of Waterloo. Regional Councillor Sean Strickland has said the presence of a shelter would not be a feasible option for students due to the people they attract. This includes those with drug addictions and other domestic issues, deeming a potential Waterloo shelter an inviable option for most students in need.

1.4 Municipal Government – City of Waterloo

Ward 6 Councillor Jeff Henry has stated that any affordable housing initiative proposed by the City of Waterloo will be taken in partnership with the Region. As of December 2019, the Region does not have any plans to collaborate with the City of Waterloo on any housing project or initiative. Henry has also mentioned the city’s focus on ensuring mixed-use developments, especially in the Northdale area. The possibility of inclusionary zoning implementation has been limited for the time being by the Ontario government’s Bill 108. This is especially pertinent in Northdale, which is not in the vicinity of any major transit station areas but contains the majority of Waterloo’s high-density development conducive to inclusionary zoning.

The Northdale Plan, passed in 2012, has guided much of the development in the neighbourhood since then. Its vision for the neighbourhood abandons single detached homes in favour of high-density, mixed-use developments. The Northdale plan’s objective is to create a diverse urban neighbourhood. However, some feel it’s instead on track to become an expensive enclave increasingly off-limits to certain residents. Proximity to universities often leads to gentrification as can be seen in areas around UBC like West Point Grey (Revington, 2018). Mixed-use zoning can also have adverse impacts on affordability, as the largest mixed-use areas in Canada are among the most expensive.

Currently, the City of Waterloo does not require apartment buildings to have a license to carry on a residential rental business in accordance with by-law 2011-047, item 2.7c. Licenses are issued or renewed to all, except where:

(a) the past conduct of the person who applies for the license affords the Director reasonable grounds to believe that the applicant has not or will not carry on their Residential Rental Business in accordance with applicable law or with honesty and integrity;
(b) the Director reasonably believes that the issuing of a license to a person might be averse to the public interest;

c) the property on which the Rental Unit is situated is subject to an order, or orders, made pursuant to (or by):
   (i) the City’s Property Standards By-Law;
   (ii) the Building Code Act, 1992 or any regulations made under it, including the Building Code;
   (iii) the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997, S.O. 1997, c.4, as amended (the “Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997”), or any regulations made under it, including the Fire Code; or,
   (iv) the Medical Officer of Health;

d) the Rental Unit itself, the Building in which the Rental Unit is situated or the property on which the Rental Unit is situated is not in compliance with a Zoning By-Law; or,

e) the person who is applying for the licence is indebted to the City by way of fines, penalties, judgments or outstanding (past due) property taxes (The Corporation of the City of Waterloo, 2016).

Under these circumstances, many apartment landlords in the Northdale area would likely be at risk of not being issued licenses, which would only be possible through the amendment of by-law 2011-047. The City of Waterloo often uses the Town and Gown Committee to allow for advocacy on issues related to housing. The committee was also responsible for the creation of a student accommodations ad-hoc subcommittee to discuss the state of student housing in the city which is then used to inform a biennial report for Council.

1.5 Developers and Landlords

Much of the student housing action currently taking has been caused by a data breach of Prica Global Enterprises Inc. (herein referred to as Prica). The breach, which occurred on September 8th, 2019, led to the maintenance requests of Accommod8u being leaked. Issues varied, ranging from heating and cooling issues, to pests, to plumbing and electrical defects, as well as issues like mould and problems with carbon monoxide detectors. In an infographic created by reddit user u/accommod8u, 14% of the maintenance requests took over a month to be marked completed. The longest wait time was 6 months. There were thousands of complaints, with 1017 of them considered flouting the law. The breach also had many requests marked as completed by Accommod8u, which were then found to be not completed by repeat requests, and sometimes several repeat requests by tenants (u/accommod8u, 2019).

An Accommod8u spokesperson responded to the leaks saying, “To draw conclusions about a management company’s performance, quality or care without contextual information or response data, is insufficient, if not irresponsible” (Jackson, 2019). Andrew Macallum, president of the Waterloo Regional Apartment Management Association, said he fears the city will use the data leak as an opportunity to create more bylaws and rules around rental housing in the city when the province already has regulations in place (Jackson, 2019).

The type of apartments constructed by developers in the Northdale neighbourhood has also started to shift in recent years. Most purpose-built student accommodation prior to 2015 offered units with three to five bedrooms. Developers like Prica and ICON have now shifted to offer units with two or fewer bedrooms, in addition to units with more. Glen Weppler, the University’s director of housing commented on the five-bedroom units, saying “when you put that many students into a space, it doesn't promote student success” (Outhit, 2017).
According to Nick Revington, a UW PhD student, five financialized landlords own 24% of the housing stock in Waterloo. This boom in purpose-built student accommodations has also coincided with drastic rent increases. Rents in Northdale have increased by 25% from 2003 to 2014, along the same time period student accommodations in the neighbourhood grew. Revington’s study also found that students in Waterloo paid 10% more in rent prices compared to employed households (Revington & August, 2019).

1.6 University Housing System
The University’s housing system largely centres around on-campus accommodations catering to first-year students. In 2017, it added Claudette Millar Hall, with space for 539 first-year students (Outhit, 2017). Chris Read, Associate Provost, Students; has said that after first year, the interest in on-campus accommodation is quite minimal for students. Most choose to live off-campus likely due to several factors, paramount among them being lower costs. He also states that many of the designated upper-year residence spaces often go unoccupied due to a lack of applications.

Sean Strickland, Regional Councillor for Waterloo, proposed the idea of the University partnering with private developers, such as WLU’s partnership with Rez-One. When asked about this, Chris Read said this was considered by University administration, however the quality of off-campus development options was not up to standards deemed suitable by the University’s department of housing and residences. He also said partnering with private companies is not required now or in the near future due to the large supply of units in on-campus residences which can accommodate all first years and often have vacancies for upper-years.

The University also operates an off-campus housing portal open to both students and landlords. The website provides off-campus listings advertised by landlords and classifieds for students looking to sublet their units. As of December 2019, the listings are all up to date and organized by date and term of availability, making the ease of use quite high for all students (University of Waterloo, 2017). However, as will be explored in the Housing Survey results below, students have become increasingly critical of the University of Waterloo’s off-campus housing listing website.

1.7 Other Student Associations
The City of Waterloo accounts for 42% of the purpose-built student accommodations in Canada with 17,567 beds; a number which will only continue to grow (Revington & August, 2019). The dominance of this type of housing in the city puts it in a very unique situations as compared to other Canadian cities with universities. Many of the issues arising by the financialization of these accommodations are the first of their kind anywhere in Canada. Hence, there has been very little action taken in regard to this problem elsewhere. This is no different from other student associations, who have not been faced with a housing crisis to the extent that Waterloo has. Cities like Montreal and Toronto have faced similar affordability problems of student accommodations; however, these have mostly arisen from the overall market of the cities as the two largest urban metropolises’ in the country.

StudentDwellTO is an organization created in 2017 by the presidents of each University in Toronto. It was formed to research how the current conditions in Toronto’s housing market were affecting students at these universities. It also cultivates student-led research projects in affordable housing strategies, as well as organizing events to address the affordable housing concerns, and students through several ways like focus groups and community arts programming. They’ve held several events since their creation such as a free StudentDwell Symposium with speakers from all four universities including several faculty members, the chair of the Canadian Federation of Students, and representatives from all three levels of government (StudentDwellTO, 2019).
Many student associations such as those from McGill University and the University of Calgary have partnered with Places4Students. The website offers a similar service to that already in place through the University of Waterloo’s off-campus listings portal. The University of Victoria has also partnered with RentSmart. According to their website, RentSmart offers a course which provides prospective tenants with modules regarding legal rights as a tenant, effective communication and maintenance skills, money management for rent payments, and how to find a home that meets your needs (RentSmart, 2019).

2. Actions by WUSA

2.1 Previous Actions and Reports

Many of the existing problems in the Waterloo student housing environment have existed for a long time. Although they have certainly increased with the financialization of student housing, many of the issues have been seen for a long time. Previous actions taken by what was then known as FEDS include a Legal Resource Office, advocacy efforts, and OUSA policy papers.

The Legal Resource Office was a service provided by FEDS in the early 2000s. It essentially acted as a landlord-tenant information office for students. Through office FEDS documents, it was shown to have handled dozens of issues per year, most of which were simply information requests due to many students being unaware or unsure of their rights as tenants. In some ways, it could be said to occupy the same realm of the current legal service provided by WUSA. It could also be seen as redundant today due to the extensive advising and informational efforts WUSA undertakes in order to ensure students are well-aware of their tenant rights.

2.2 Advocacy Efforts

Municipal advocacy in regard to housing has largely been done through dialogue as part of the Town and Gown Committee. The committee also created a student accommodation ad-hoc committee in 2014, to discuss and research the student housing environment in the city and report these findings back to council in a biennial report. The next report is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2020. Members from WUSA have sat on both committees to advocate for students.

WUSA’s provincial advocacy has had success with the VP Education advocating for amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act to include a standardized lease. The amendments were announced in February 2018 with the introduction of a standardized lease. The standardized lease, officially known as the residential tenancy agreement sets out strict guidelines as to what must be included in the lease and how. This amendment likely helps students sign leases as first-time tenants by eliminating the potential for illegitimate and/or complicated clauses in leases created by landlords. Landlords are legally obligated to use this lease (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2018).

2.3 Advising Efforts

WUSA has various online resources for the benefit of students as tenants. These pages include housing tips, tenant rights, and links to the Residential Tenancies Act (Kuepfer, 2018). In 2018, WUSA also created a tenant rights pamphlet in support of a “know your rights” campaign. The campaign included a video shown in UW buildings which informed students of their rights as tenants in Ontario. However, as will be demonstrated in the Housing Survey results later in the report, these awareness efforts from WUSA may need to be enhanced. The Legal Service provides case-by-case legal advice for both non-housing cases and housing such as LTB disputes. The service is only available through phone call, which can often have long wait times during holds. Due to its relatively recent implementation, there is very little information on student satisfaction rates with the Legal Service and how much it has helped. Through some student testimonials, however, the legal service has been said to be helpful, although slow
2.4 Actions taken by and in partnership with OUSA

OUSA’s 2017 policy paper Housing, Transit and Community Development includes both an analysis of transit and housing in various university communities and recommendations for their improvement. The recommendations consisted of:

- Consciously planning and developing near-campus neighbourhoods
- Increasing accessibility of campus for students with mobile concerns
- Monitoring bylaw implementation and enforcement
- The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing developing accountability measures for municipalities to ensure they remain in compliance with the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Municipal Act.

Aside from several articles and blog posts, this remains OUSA’s only advocacy measure on housing (Pierre, 2017).

3. Enforcement Measures

3.1 Landlord and Tenant Board

The LTB has exclusive jurisdiction over residential tenancy matters, including whether they can be brought to court, making it incredibly vital to the Waterloo housing environment. The LTB has frequently been criticized by students for having excessive fees to file complaints. An application about tenant rights or maintenance requires a fee of $50, and the cost to review an order is $55. During Quarter 1 of 2019, the average number of days to the first LTB hearing was more than 35 days. Quarter 3 of the 2018 was even longer, with the average at nearly 45 days, with only 11% of complaints having a hearing within 25 days (SJTO, 2019). Some have called for a shorter LTB process, which will help short-term residents, most of which are students. This would almost certainly make the eviction process easier as well, likely putting vulnerable groups like students at risk (Revington & August, 2019).

3.2 Rental Housing Enforcement Unit

The Rental Housing Enforcement Unit (RHEU) enforces what’s set out in the Residential Tenancies Act. Complaints can only be made through phone call and cannot be anonymous, while documentation is required for complaints of any issue. There is no cost for filing a complaint unlike the LTB. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing makes certain convictions available online. Waterloo landlord Turnkey Property Management Inc. can be found in this database for charging and withholding $200 key deposits (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2019).

3.3 City of Waterloo By-law Enforcement Unit

Waterloo residents can request inspections through the City’s eServices portal, by email, or phone call. Responses are said to occur within 2 days and after review of the unit, the city may issue an order to the property owner. The property owner is then free to appeal an order within 14 days. Many of the problems faced by UW students like key deposits, move-in dates, and payment schedules are not regulated by the city. These can be dealt with by the RHEU or LTB. Student groups have called for the bi-weekly inspection of Waterloo’s 25 largest apartment buildings, many of those managed by Prica. The City of Toronto implemented a similar initiative in 2000 to deal with the growing number of high-rises. However, units in buildings in Waterloo can only be inspected through an invitation by one or more of its tenants. Shayne Turner, director of municipal enforcement services for the City of Waterloo, has said he is considering this idea and will discuss its feasibility with municipalities with similar initiatives.
At WUSA’s Tenant Legal Rights seminar in November, Turner also stated enforcement services are usually called less often by students as compared to other residents. He credits this to the relatively new student housing apartments, which likely do not have problems that come with older infrastructure. He also described the nature of most calls from students as centring around heating or water. These problems were also shown to be most prominent in the Accommod8u leaks. This could be because they genuinely occur more often than other issues, or simply due to their impact on daily living conditions which usually outweigh other problems like mould and broken carbon monoxide monitors.

4. Housing Supply, Demand & Pricing

Students attending a post-secondary institution typically do not require housing, however, in recent years, the number of international students and students from outside their host city has steadily increased. As of April 2019, over 1.3 million students enrolled full-time in one of 84 major Canadian universities, 12.5% of which are international students (McLean, 2019). What is dubbed the “Trump Bump”, universities across the country are using their reputation for “openness and safety” to attract students from their home regions, resulting in international, and national, enrolment rates doubling over the past decade (Fischer, 2017). Canada is expected to attract 450,000 international students by 2020, a 22% increase since 2015 (Revington & August, p.5, 2019). With increasingly high enrolment rates, students need housing, and while most universities provide some form of housing to its students, such as on-campus residences, or off-campus housing such as apartments, or townhouses to name a few, host cities are struggling to meet the growing demand.

The Waterloo Region’s population is younger on average than Ontario and Canada, and this is largely due to the student population in the region. Obtained from the Region of Waterloo Planning and Analysis (2019), the graph below illustrates the region’s past and future population:

The Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge area, including the townships of Wilmot, Woolwich, and North Dumfries, saw an increase of 2.6% growth from 2017 to 2018; this metropolitan area welcomed over 14,000 newcomers. However, the influx of international students accounts for some of this growth (Davis, 2019).
The influx of students has made it difficult to accommodate the student housing market, therefore, in attempt to meet the demand for student housing, particularly the demand for purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA)\(^1\), the region of Waterloo is adjusting their building stock. With over 40,000 university students, Waterloo is “leading the edge of the financialization of PBSA in Canada” (Revington & August, p. 5, 2019). With a 40-60% turnover in student housing every year, this means that the region must have the “capacity to house 38% of students” in PBSA’s, compared to the 3% in Canada (Revington & August, p. 12, 2019). Yet, despite Waterloo being hailed as one of the most successful cities in addressing the demand for PBSA’s, the number of off-campus developments is still below the student population. With a student population of over 42,000 students attending the University of Waterloo or Wilfrid Laurier University, there’s a little over 23,000 off-campus beds (McLean, 2019).

The growing demand of student housing has not only created a “lost sense of place” for residents who continue to remain in the region, it is driving up the prices of housing, particularly for students who are paying an “estimated 10% more rent employed households” – well over the provinces guidelines for rent increases (Revington & August, p. 12, 2019). Landlords are well aware that rent control does not apply to vacant residential units, and with the annual turnover of student housing, with students occupying a space from September to May, these spaces are typically not subject to this provincial guideline. PBSA’s particularly benefit from this, as rent now becomes decontrolled due to the high turnover. Despite the provincial Liberals attempts at ensuring all rental units comply with the rent control guidelines, the provinces Conservative government put a halt to this decision and has since ended “rent control for all newly built or newly converted units as of November 15, 2018” (Jackson, 2018). Landlords and developers have argued that rent control is the “wrong tool to make housing more affordable”, maintaining that “rent controls lead to a shortage of housing when the price is artificially suppressed, curtailing new supply and stoking demand” (Jackson, 2018).

With the rise in rent rates increasing gradually over the past five years, the disappearance of affordable rental housing is also increasing. The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) saw the “average rent increase from $870 per month in 2012 o $1,042 in 2017” for a two-bedroom apartment (Jackson, 2018). This number is projected to reach $1,300 in 2021 (Senoran, 2019). The rise in rent mirrors the overall increases in prices in the housing market. Due to the rental market competition in neighbouring regions, students are “willing to pay higher prices just to ensure they have a roof over their head”, thus providing landlords the opportunity to further “maximize their rental revenue” (Jackson, 2018). 2018 data collected by the CMHC shows that both the rent and vacancy rates across the region:

- “Bachelor units: 2.5 per cent vacancy, $796 average rent;
- One-bedroom units: 2.9 per cent vacancy, $1,021 average rent;
- Two-bedroom units: 3.1 per cent vacancy, $1,210 average rent;
- Three-bedroom units or larger: 1.7 per cent vacancy, $1,254 average rent” (Jackson, 2018).

With increasing property values across the region, the average cost of a three-bedroom apartment has recently exceeded the average mortgage payment (Jackson, 2018). Due to the increase in the supply that has outpaced the demand\(^2\) the region built over 1600 units in 2018 (Jackson, 2018). However, the

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1 Purpose-built student accommodation is a type of housing specific to student needs built by private investors who offer modern and good quality amenities. Some of the PBSA’s are newly built apartments or townhouse condos, or they are redevelopments of existing housing buildings. It is built with the intention of freeing up housing for everyone else, while also providing an opportunity for investors. PBSA’s are typically rented by the bed, and not by the door. This sector was not available nearly two decades ago when the only appealing housing options available to students were university residences or converted homes for multiple occupation (HMOs). The PBSA’s operate under Ontario’s Landlord and Tenant Acts and must “enforce the codes-of-conduct which the local university or college applies to their on-campus residences” (McLean, 2019).

2 To view the 2016 student housing supply and demand chart collected in 2017 by the Waterloo Town and Gown Committee, please view Appendix A.
ongoing concern is that the affordable units are not being built, and when affordable housing becomes vacant, the potential tenants can be waiting up to eight years. Over the past five years, regional investment saw 200 new affordable housing units being built, however, with only 61 currently in development, this still does not address the ongoing concerns (MacDonald, 2019). Due to the limited availability of affordable housing, the growing housing need in the region, strong population growth, and a decline in vacancy rates in Waterloo, in September 2019, the region approved $5.4 million to create 58 new affordable homes (Senoran, 2019). However, because the definition of affordable housing remains inconsistent, as rent gradually rises, students continue to struggle to afford housing, and the constant pressure to make housing affordable plays a large factor in determining what the rental market looks like.

The CMHC believes that Waterloo will outpace the Toronto rates in student population growth (Davis, 2019). With two high-tech universities and increases in enrolment, particularly international students, Waterloo has one of the most advanced housing markets in Canada (Revington & August, p.15, 2019). Revington and August argue that because development is now heavily concentrated in Waterloo, redesigning the Northdale area both “physically and socially” is in fact “creating a segregated student-oriented district, and engendering displacement and gentrification”, which in turn, is “reshaping local affordability, driving high rents that affect both students and non-students alike” (p.15, 2019). The Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) offers a maximum annual living allowance of $12,540 for full-time students only, however, this amount does not account for the cost of housing. When OSAP estimates your costs, tuition, education expenses, compulsory student fees charged by the institution, childcare expenses, and living expenses are included, however, the total amount is not explicitly allocated to rent, rather, it is an estimated amount that is calculated according to a particular formula that OSAP uses. This greatly affects students, in particular, who are already taking on debt during their studies, and not to mention, the growing complaints of unsafe and unsanitary living conditions in student rental units (Revington & August, p.15, 2019).

5. Homelessness & Emergency Shelter Options

With student housing market being saturated due to the influx of international students, student homelessness is on the rise. A 2017-2018 Housing Stability Data highlights the number of challenges related to poverty, access to affordable housing and access to services to help those experiencing homelessness in the Waterloo Region (Pye & Schlichter, 2018). It is estimated that 4% of post-secondary students in Canada experience homelessness; this means that about 80,000 students in the country are living on the streets, sleeping in their vehicles, couch-surfing, or live in a homeless shelter (Weissman et.al, 2019). The University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier provide alternate housing options to students, but this does not mean that housing is guaranteed. Students are often forced to seek out other options within the city. In a recent study conducted at York University, it was revealed that many students are “living in slum housing; densely overpopulated regular market town homes, sleeping in cubicles separated by simple sheets of drywall and paying $600-700 CDN for each space to shady landlords” (Weissman et.al, 2019). Despite students living in these illegal and often unsafe conditions, this information was not commonly known until recently (Weissman et.al, 2019). Amongst the most common complaints from student tenants include but not are limited to issues with heating and cooling, electric issues, unsafe appliances, furniture and fixtures, mold, or mechanical concerns.

With a population over 113,000 residents, 65,000 of which are post-secondary students (including 20,000 co-operative education students) the City of Waterloo lacks a homeless shelter. Although homeless shelters exist in the cities of Kitchener and Cambridge, the overcapacity of the shelters not only deter students from seeking the free service, but the conditions further discourage them. The region offers little

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3 Affordable housing is defined as “as housing that does not cost more than 30 per cent of yearly income or is at least 10 per cent below market rates” (Jackson, 2018).
temporary housing options that are available to students, however, the lack of available affordable housing plays a large role in the increase in the overcapacity (Bueckert, 2019). The House of Friendship, the Lutherwood Homelessness and Housing Umbrella, the YWCA Kitchener-Waterloo Emergency Shelter, and other various emergency shelters in the region are often available to students who do not have a place to sleep. Yet, in an attempt to encourage students to search for affordable housing, some shelters close their doors for a few hours (Bueckert, 2019). Yet, students are “discouraged by the lack of available housing and may be option to not connect with service providers” which perpetuates the cycle of homelessness amongst students (Bueckert, 2019).

The research conducted at York suggests three solutions to address student homelessness in the province:

1. “Institutions need to re-examine their role as landlords and housing providers and must create safe spaces to discuss student housing precarity;
2. Governments, housing ministries and research funders need to support efforts to understand the dimensions of post-secondary student homelessness and explore culturally intelligent solutions to student housing;
3. Students must be involved in creating and designing safer student communities and housing options” (Weissman, 2019).

Although Canada has a national poverty strategy, a program that specifically targets student homelessness in the region does not exist simply because it has “never been identified as a particular problem” in comparison to family poverty, or poverty amongst primary and secondary school student (Fraser, 2018). However, by 2025, the Province’s goal is to end chronic homelessness, while the Federal Government hopes to reduce chronic homelessness by half over the next ten years.

6. Information

There is plenty of information available to students that is easily accessible and understandable. As discussed above, students have various avenues to seek redress namely: The Landlord and Tenant Board (herein referred to as LTB), The Rental Housing Enforcement Unit (RHEU) and the City of Waterloo By-law Enforcement Unit. Information about enforcement and seeking redress from these agencies can be found on their respective websites, alongside contact information and even an online portal (City of Waterloo By-law Enforcement Unit) where students can lodge complaints. The Rental Housing Enforcement Unit is particularly swift in taking action if they establish that an offence under the Residential Tenancies Act has been committed. While seeking redress from the City of Waterloo By-law Enforcement and the RHEU is straightforward and easily accessible for students, the LTB which functions as a legal Tribunal is a process. The LTB does not respond to legal queries and therefore cannot provide advice on disputes. They are able to answer questions on filings and fees. Students are encouraged to read LTB brochures to determine if they should file an application with the Board. Furthermore, students can consult the Legal Protection Program (information available on the WUSA website) to help determine if they should bring an application to the Board and any other assistance students may need. The Legal Protection Program can also provide students with information about their rights and responsibilities as tenants. This information can also be found the LTB website.

In regard to postings, the University of Waterloo has a dedicated website with information on off-campus housing. The website has extensive information including a dedicated portal for student listings and classifieds. On the off-campus housing website, students can also find information about rent, cost of living, tenants’ rights, important tips, community outreach, leasing, subletting and even garbage and recycling. The website essentially serves as a one-stop shop for all off-campus housing needs. WUSA does not maintain any such website that can provide students with information on housing. However, WUSA provides a Student Legal Protection Service administered by Studentcare. Information about this service can be found on WUSA’s website. Despite all this, the largest platform for listings and landlord
reputations is Facebook. Tens of Facebook groups allow students to connect and share information about landlords, listings and parking information. Students self-list either to transfer their leases, sign a new one or sublet a unit. Facebook is preferred because it easily accessible for most students and produces desired outcomes fast. Students report being able to lockdown housing within hours on Facebook.

Despite the available information and previous actions taken by WUSA and other actors, the landscape of housing in Waterloo still remains a particular concern for students. This makes it important to explore University of Waterloo students’ experiences and perspectives on housing to ensure that WUSA’s efforts to support them moving forward align with their particular needs.

7. Housing Survey Overview

7.1 Introduction
To explore the housing experiences of University of Waterloo students – including their satisfaction and behavior related to housing – WUSA and GSA collaborated on designing a Housing Survey. Overall, the main goals of the Housing Survey were to:

- Determine what difficulties students may be having with the Waterloo housing system;
- Understand the most important housing factors and considerations for students when looking for housing and signing a lease;
- Determine in what ways the housing system in Waterloo may be unfavourable to students;
- Assess the effectiveness of current housing supports available to students;
- Determine students’ knowledge and understanding of housing bylaws and standards that affect them; and
- Determine how WUSA can further support safe and affordable housing for students in the Waterloo region.

These goals were captured in the design of the Survey Questions, which can be viewed in Appendix B of this report. The Housing Survey opened on December 7, 2020 and closed on January 22, 2021 and received a total of 2,159 responses. WUSA specific responses made up 73.78% of the data with 1,593 responses. Of the WUSA responses, 1,251 were full, meaning that respondents finished the survey while 342 were partial, meaning that respondents left the survey before submitting (Figure 1). The survey link was sent to 35, 844 enrolled undergraduate students and with 1,593 total responses, the response rate for the survey was 4.44%. In order to ensure the reliability of our results, the data was cleaned up to remove partial responses prior to analysis.

7.2 Demographics
This survey did not ask about year or faculty demographics and instead chose factors that may influence the housing process. For example, respondents were asked if they were currently enrolled in an experiential learning program (74%) as students in co-op must be prepared to move every 4 months depending on job placement. Additionally, knowing that 35% of respondents identify as mature students4

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4 Defined as undergraduates who has been out of high school for at least 2-4 years.
is important as these students may look for more ‘family-oriented’ housing which is hard to find close to the university campus. Equally important, 11% of respondents identify as international students, many of whom may know very little about Ontario housing laws and thus may be intimidated by predatory housing companies.

When asked if students typically live on- or off-campus during a school term, the majority (67%) indicated they lived off-campus not with family. The next highest category with the most responses was on-campus University of Waterloo housing (22%) followed by off-campus with parents or other family (11%) (Figure 2). Of those who indicated they lived off-campus and not with family 65% answered ‘yes’ when asked if they lived in student specific housing; 22% answered ‘no’ and 13% were unsure or not applicable. Student specific housing refers to buildings and/or companies whose housing units are targeted towards post-secondary students and are typically only available for post-secondary students to rent. The fact that the majority of students indicated that they live in student specific housing aligns with the discussion in previous sections around the increase of purpose-built student accommodations in Waterloo.

Students were also asked which municipalities they most frequently lived in pre-COVID, the top three answers being City of Waterloo (84%), City of Kitchener (7%), and City of Toronto (3%). In addition, 85% of respondents rent their housing compared to 5% ownership.

To summarize, students typically live off-campus, not with their families in the City of Waterloo during school terms. Most respondents are also enrolled in an experiential learning program and live in purpose-built student specific housing. It is important to keep these demographics in mind when looking at the following sections of the report as they influence factors like commute times, what students look for in a lease, and other aspects affecting the student housing experience. The remaining sections in this report outline the results from the Housing Survey.

8. Student Satisfaction with Housing
8.1 Housing Quality

When discussing housing, it is important to understand how students feel about the current market available to them and if they feel their housing meets a livable standard. This includes considering both the extent and frequency of maintenance and quality issues students experience.

Students were asked to identify any maintenance and quality issues they had experienced in housing around the Waterloo region. The question was presented as a “select all that apply” where students were able highlight multiple issues. The most common answers students selected were ‘poor water quality’ (38%) and ‘lack of heating or ventilation systems’ (38.7%). Issues with ‘pests’ (31%), and ‘cracks and weathering of doors and/or windows’ (35%), were also experienced (Figure 3).
Almost 9% of students (107 responses) who answered this question provided descriptions of ‘other’ housing issues as well. Besides the ‘poor water quality’ option presented already, 30 students mentioned plumbing issues and 58 students outlined general maintenance concerns with their housing.

For example, one respondent explained that they “had a leaking shower right above the kitchen (next to a ceiling light) not get fixed for many months after being reported [and] also had window limiters installed not up to fire code to allow for exit in the event of a fire (at two separate houses).” Another respondent explained that they experienced “plumbing issues (sinks that repetitively back up, extremely loud broken pipes), issues with fire alarms (going off repetitively during the middle of the night only in our apartment.)” These examples both demonstrate not only inconveniences for these student tenants that have the potential to impact their daily life, but also issues that threaten the health of safety of these individuals. This is exacerbated by the fact that respondents also mentioned requests made to landlords were often not followed up with in a timely fashion. For example, another respondent explained that they “spent three months living in a unit with mold and water damage while my landlord held off fixing it. Once they started, I spend weeks with dust allergies affecting my ability to study as they removed part of the ceiling but did not immediately fix it.”

Students were also asked to identify the frequency by which they experienced housing issues (i.e., maintenance, problems with other tenants, or other strong concerns) per 4-month term. Most students (43%) only ran into issues 1-2 times per term, followed by 26% of respondents reporting 3-5 major issues. Both categories for 6-7 issues and 7+ issues per term received under 5% of responses each while 10% of students reported never having a major housing issue in a term. The remaining 10% of responses said the question was not applicable or preferred not to say.

In a subsequent question, 34% of respondents indicated that they have lived in housing requiring 2 or more major repairs (i.e., heat/AC maintenance, lock malfunctions, broken windows, defective plumbing or electrical wiring). This is significant because, as mentioned above, major repairs could not only result in inconveniences and additional daily stress but also important safety concerns. Building and property maintenance is overseen by the City of Waterloo and landlords could face municipal consequences if these maintenance issues are properly investigated. As students are less likely to file complaints with the city that would result in investigation, a recommendation promoting this enforcement of municipal bylaw is outlined later in this report.
8.2 Housing Affordability

Affordability is another concern that can impact students’ satisfaction with housing. Respondents to the survey were asked about their availability of funds after paying for housing and related costs (e.g., rent or mortgage, utilities, parking). The most common option chosen (34.7%) was “Enough funds to cover basic needs and unanticipated expenses (e.g., food, clothes, other bills, car maintenance, unanticipated overage or moving fees)”. This was followed closely by 31% of respondents indicating they had just enough funds to cover basic needs. These are the middle options, bracketed by ‘insufficient funds for basic needs’ and ‘more than enough funds including luxury items’, with 7% and 13% of the responses, respectively. In terms of the actual percentage of budget spent on housing, 35% of respondents indicated they spent 51%-80% of their monthly budget on housing expenses. A smaller proportion of respondents (16%) indicated they budgeted even more per month, 81%+, for housing expenses and 19% of respondents spend between 31%-50% of a monthly budget (Figure 4).

While this data shows that 65% of students do have enough funds to cover basic needs, a similar proportion of students (approximately 70%) mention paying over 30% of their monthly budget on housing expenses. Unfortunately, these questions do not reveal the decision-making process related to a monthly budget that each individual must navigate based on their circumstances. Regardless, this data is an interesting point of analysis and may imply that students are not saving enough each month and/or are lowballing basic needs expenses based on the high percentage of their monthly budget going towards housing costs. While students may have enough funds available, long term financial management may be compromised due to the cost of housing during the university period. This may be potential issue to consider for future research on the topic of housing and students.

Respondents also expressed concerns not only about the affordability of housing now, but also about how it continues to increase over time. For example, one respondent noted the following observation: “I lived in Waterloo as a student in off-campus housing (rentals typically found on Kijiji or through word-of-mouth from friends) from 2012-2016 and again from 2018-present. Housing availability and prices have significantly increased in the time between 2016 and 2018.” As a result of these experiences and other responses to this survey expressing a desire for rent assistance or a rent subsidy to address this issue of increasing costs, a recommendation promoting awareness of existing rental tax credits for students is outlined in the last section of this report.

The fact that students in Waterloo are facing several maintenance and quality issues combined with spending so much of their monthly budget on housing expenses is concerning. It would appear that increases to housing costs have not resulted in better living conditions for students and cost is often a trade-off for signing a lease with illegal clauses, a phenomenon explored later in this report. Regardless of the cost of housing, students deserve to live in situations that are safe and do not negatively impact their well-being.
9. Student Behaviour and Housing

Understanding student behaviour and awareness about housing in Waterloo is of particular value to this report as any recommendations made going forward must take these into account to enact meaningful changes. This includes consideration of the factors students value when looking for housing and signing a lease as well as students’ knowledge of housing bylaws and their rights as tenants.

9.1 Housing Search and Location

To understand general trends in student behaviour, respondents were asked how often they typically look for new housing per academic year. Most commonly, students only look for new housing once per year (23%), followed by 2 times (22%), 3-4 times (12%), and 5 or more times only receiving 2% of the responses. It is of note that this question was skipped by 41% of respondents while taking the survey, making the sample size for this question is considerably smaller than others.

Behaviours regarding commuting and distance to the university were also analyzed. Half of the respondents (50%) walked on foot to the University of Waterloo followed by 32% of respondents who typically took the bus or train. Students who commute by car made up 7% of respondents while biking was less popular at 2% of total responses.

Following up to that question, students were asked approximately how long their commute time was for one direction. Most students (57%) commuted for 5-15 minutes while 23% spent 16-30 minutes traveling one way (Figure 5). Only 4% of respondents typically spend over 31 minutes on their commute. This finding demonstrates that most students live relatively close to the university in order to walk to campus in a timely fashion. Students value living close, within walking distance, to the Waterloo campus.

Since students value living close to campus, their housing options are limited to a small area, like the Northdale neighbourhood. As one respondent explained, “… almost all the housing options within a 15-minute walking distance to the Waterloo campus are all owned by the same company (e.g. KW4Rent and Accomod8U are both under the same parent company), so if I don't agree to their terms, I have to pay more for other options or live farther away from campus. I didn't want to compromise commute time.”

Here, this respondent implies that there are trade-offs that exist when choosing housing options that are close to campus. The prioritization of locale and commuting time for students suggest that any recommendations for change must be targeted at properties and regulations in high student density neighbourhoods close to campus such as Northdale. As mentioned earlier, provincial legislation prevents inclusionary zoning, which would alleviate some problems relating to rising housing costs in Northdale. Thus, alternative desired activities that do not include re-zoning but do highlight avenues for more students to receive rental assistance are detailed later in the report.
9.2 Important Considerations During Housing Search

All students that lived off campus not with family were asked what they believe to be the most important factors considered when looking for housing. This question was presented in a “select all that apply” format to survey respondents.

‘Cost of rent’ was the most common option selected, as 72.5% of students chose this as one of their important factors. However, the location of housing was almost as important to students as it received 70% of the response to this question as well. Other notable factors were if the housing ‘included utilities’ (62.91%), the overall ‘cleanliness of the building/unit’ (61.55%) and number of roommates (51.64%) (Figure 6). Interestingly, the factor of the landlord’s ‘use of standardized lease/other lease related stressors’ had the lowest response at 15%. This implies that while students certainly do consider the use of a standardized lease, it is not as important as other factors like location or cost. As mentioned earlier in this report since commuting time to the university is so valued, students are often forced to compromise, such as over-looking the use of a standardized lease. Other options students mentioned as factors considered when looking for housing were if the building allows pets, if the building is furnished or not, availability of parking, and the number of bathrooms per unit compared to number of roommates.

The subsequent question in the survey asked students to indicate the most important factors considered when extending a lease agreement. This question was also posed in a “select all that apply” format and yielded similar results with cost receiving the largest percentage of responses (64%), followed by maintenance issues (51.5%) and roommates (51%) as the most important factors considered by students. The ‘ease of cancelling the lease’ and ‘subletting of your unit’ also greatly influence student decisions to renew leases, although to a lesser extent than the previous options.

Thus, when searching for new housing and renewing a lease, cost is by far the most determinative factor considered by students although roommates are highly influential for both decisions as well. This exemplifies just how strong those factors are and how much they influence the student housing market in the region.
9.3 Housing Rights

In order to advocate for changes moving forward, it is important to understand the current level of awareness students have in terms of housing bylaws, lease standards, and their overall rights as tenants. Students were first asked if their landlords in the Waterloo region had been using the Ontario standard lease, as required by the provincial government. Unfortunately, most respondents were unsure (25.9%) if their landlords had been using the standard lease, indicating a general unawareness of housing laws. Only 15% of students said all of their landlords use the standard lease, while 7% said none of their landlords had used it at all. The remaining 52% of respondents did not answer this question.

Students were then asked if they had accessed any housing or legal services or if they were even aware those resources existed for students. Most students (63%) had never accessed any housing/legal service and 31% of students were not aware of any such resources. Of those who did access a service, WUSA Off-Campus Housing was the most popular at 13%, followed by utilizing the WUSA Student Legal Protection Program (6%), and accessing external programs such as “Waterloo Region Community Legal Services, the Region of Waterloo Renters Toolkit” (5%). Students also mentioned utilizing online Facebook groups as well as the University of Waterloo Off-Campus Housing site when provided the option of ‘other’ in this question.

As a follow up, students were asked specifically if they had ever engaged in informal or formal processes regarding housing situations with a landlord or property management company. The most common response (55%), was “attempted discussion with a landlord or property management company to resolve an issue.” Consultation with a housing advocate or legal counsel was also used by 7% of respondents, while an adjudication hearing or mediation was accessed by 3%. The remaining respondents (35%) said the question was ‘not applicable’ or they ‘preferred not to say.’ These questions indicate that students are attempting to engage in discussion with their landlords about the housing issues they are experiencing but they may not be aware of the housing or legal services offered in the Waterloo Region to students. As a result, recommendations for improved promotion of housing services as well as the formal pathways to report a landlord are detailed later in this report. It is important for the large number of students who indicated they have attempted to discuss their housing situation to know their rights and where to find help so that they can close the often unequal power gap between themselves and their landlords.

Those who did indicate a landlord had used the standard lease were then asked if their landlord added additional items to the lease agreement. 70% of students said yes, a landlord had added additional items. Students were asked to elaborate on this by indicating if they had ever signed a lease which included any of the typical additional clauses (Figure 7) in a “select all that apply” format.

![Figure 7: Have you ever signed a lease which included any of the following clauses?](chart)
Clauses ‘banning pets’ and ‘charging more than the single replacement of a key or fob’ were the most common issues at 35.4% and 24.4%, respectively. Issues with clauses ‘asking for more than one month’s rent as a security deposit’ (21.6%) and ‘charging a damage deposit’ (23%) were also common responses. Additionally, a clause ‘regarding the maximum number or tenants or overnight guests’ was indicated by 21% of respondents. The response rate breakdown of many options receiving over a 10% response indicates students have experienced a wide variety of lease-additional clause combinations (e.g., one lease with many clauses, multiple leases with different clauses) during their time in off-campus housing.

As a direct follow up, students that selected at least one clause were asked if they were aware that including the above clauses in a lease is illegal. The majority of respondents (71%) said no, they were not aware the listed clauses were illegal, while 27% said yes, they were aware the clauses were illegal, and 2% indicated they preferred not to say. This demonstrates a gap between the number of housing or legal services that are available and could inform students about the Ontario standard lease or illegal clauses, and the actual awareness of these services at the student level. A “lack of awareness” is a continuing theme in this survey and is mentioned repeatedly by students when given a chance to write about their housing experiences later in this report.

In an effort to combat this gap in knowledge, students asked for WUSA to take action through different campaigns. Awareness ideas include asking for a central place where students could find examples of standard leases, lists of legal vs. illegal clauses, tenant rights, how to advocate for themselves, as well as additional resources like legal aid within the university and processes available to them on the municipal or provincial level. For example, one student explained that they felt WUSA should “provide information about housing rights to students as early as possible (e.g. during orientation, giving pamphlets or a presentation to students about what is and isn’t legal) so students don’t get taken advantage of. Around the time students start looking for housing (i.e. Winter and Spring terms), host information sessions on how to find housing, housing rights, what to avoid, etc. With more education, more students will resist illegal clauses and landlords and companies will be pressured to stop adding these clauses.”

Other responses include suggestions like “…any pressure that can be applied to major leasing companies (e.g. ICON, Sage, Accomod8U, Schembri) to cease with unlawful practices (such as illegal clauses etc.), would be helpful. As it is, since all housing companies have significant drawbacks, students are forced to pick the one that seems the least scummy to them.” Another respondent felt that WUSA should “Advocate for regular inspections by Municipal and Provincial government for landlords to ensure proper licenses are up to date, building codes/by-laws are not being violated, leases are standardized, heavier penalties are being issued to landlords who violate tenant laws with either heavier fines, or bans from being a landlord.” These responses, as well as many others with the same sentiment, have resulted in recommendations outlined at the end of this report which would support better enforcement of housing law, promotion of tenant rights, and increased visibility of pathways for students to report suspicious landlord behaviour.

9.4 Signing Leases

To understand student behaviour, specifically why some had chosen to sign a lease with additional clauses mentioned above, survey respondents were presented with the opportunity to explain their reasoning for signing such a lease in an open answer question. This question had a 13% response rate with 161 students submitting answers. The answers were analytically coded into 6 different categories of responses (Table 1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Relevant Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students didn’t know the clause was illegal</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students didn’t care about the clause’s legality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students felt they had “no choice” but to sign that lease</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student answer specifically mentions the “pet” clause</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students believe all landlords use illegal clauses</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Summary of respondents’ reasons for signing a lease with additional clauses

These categories are highly generalized as many responses touch upon concerns that could fit into multiple categories, but for the purposes of this analysis, the main theme of each response is used for organization.

As such, this question revealed a complex network of concerns students consider when signing a lease with illegal clauses. This has resulted in a few overarching themes of concern such as students’ decision to ‘not care’, feel they had ‘no choice’, or believe ‘all landlords use illegal clauses’ when signing a housing lease. These themes appear throughout responses regardless of category; two of which are centered around the idea that all student housing in Waterloo is managed by only a few companies, making it harder to escape illegal clauses as they own many buildings, as well as the highly competitive nature of the student housing market. For example, as the following student explained: “Every lease I have ever looked at from a unit near campus has had these clauses. Since housing near campus is very competitive (pre covid) if you were to try to tell the landlord they are illegal they would just move on to the line of people behind you who would sign the lease as is. The fact is that if you want to rent a place within 20 minutes of campus you will most definitely just have to accept these. It is well known in the student community that the landlords in the area scam students with these clauses but the landlords have so much power over us that there is nothing we can do.”

Other students signed leases at places “Because every one we looked at had some or all of those clauses, so we didn’t really feel like we had a choice. We just went with the company that had the least [illegal clauses].” Another student mentioned how “I needed a place to stay. They are also classified as condominiums (so they can enforce other rules) and most, if not all, student housing is owned by the same group of people so they can get away with it”

Besides responses demonstrating how students felt they had ‘no choice’, the cost of housing was a deciding factor for many students when signing a lease with an illegal clause. A large number of responses mention pricing, cost, or budget as a heavy influence on their housing search and ultimately their decision to sign a lease. For example, the following students explained how “I didn’t know about it at the time of signing the agreement but found out later it was illegal. At the time the place I wanted to rent was going to be perfect for the academic term if there wasn’t covid and other options were either out of price range or the range of which I wanted to live in...” Another respondent said they signed “because I needed housing and it was the most affordable option that was still within a 30-minute walk to campus. if I didn’t pay, someone else would and I would lose the housing”

Other students talked about the impact provincial politics had on their housing search: “… Additionally, when searching for a 12-month lease in Waterloo, it can be difficult to find a safe and legal accommodation that fits within my budget. After Doug Ford became MP, OSAP was reduced and did not provide enough funding to afford tuition, books, and rent, even with a part-time job. One bedroom in a five-bedroom suite is often $550-$800 per month, and often requires additional payment for Hydro and Internet.”
These experiences from students support results previously mentioned where students prioritize short commute times to campus and cost above all else. The themes outlined in this section, in addition to other issues informing the network of concerns students consider while looking for housing, appear throughout the rest of the survey. As a result, they are connected to many improvements students would like to see in the Waterloo regional housing market, which are documented later in the report.

9.5 Housing Discrimination

Students were asked about suspicions of discrimination they may have faced at the hand of landlords or property owners during any point in the tenancy process. A majority of students (64%) indicated that they did not suspect a landlord had discriminated against them, while 9% said they had suspected discrimination. The rest of the respondents were divided between 18% indicating they were unsure or preferred not to answer this question and 9% indicating the question was not applicable to them. While only a small percentage of students suspected having been discriminated against by a landlord, this should not be taken lightly. It is important that students are aware of their rights and the resources that are available to them if they are in placed in a discriminatory situation.

10. Housing Related Stressors

The final section of the Housing Survey related to stressors students may experience while navigating the market in Waterloo.

Students were asked a series of questions relating to potential homelessness and evictions they may have experienced due to the housing market. In a “select all that apply” question, the results show that while most students (58%) never experienced any transient or homelessness periods, other students had. Most commonly, students had to ‘couch surf with family/friends for more than 1 night while in between places’ or ‘stay with family or a partner when they would have preferred not to’, both options received 15% of the responses, while 6% of students also had to ‘live in a(n) hotel/motel/Airbnb for more than one night’ (Figure 8). All options for this question received a response, indicating that students experience a wide variety of transient or homelessness periods that should be of concern to Waterloo region housing stakeholders.

As mentioned above, 58% of students answering the previous question had never experienced a transient or homelessness period due to the housing market. Similarly, when asked if students had ever felt like they were at a risk of homelessness during their time as a UW student, 85% of respondents said no they never felt at risk. Unfortunately, 12% of respondents felt yes, they had been at risk of homelessness, while 3% preferred not to say. Even if the majority of student respondents have never experienced homelessness
or felt at risk of it, the possibility of becoming homeless due to the housing market is prevalent in the written responses received for various questions throughout this survey. For example, one student said “I didn’t want to be homeless. It was better to sign a lease with these stipulations [illegal clauses] than to not have housing or a worse condition for housing.” Many others explained they signed a lease with an illegal clause like this “Because I needed a place to stay. I've spent 4 consecutive months as a UW undergraduate student homeless and living in a park. Not all of us can simply turn away housing opportunities” and “Because every housing company includes them [illegal clauses in a lease] anyway. There is no way to avoid it unless we want to be homeless.”

Another respondent discussed how they “have heard and seen the housing crisis in Waterloo. The homeless population in Kitchener-Waterloo is astounding, and many homeless students sleep on campus and are afraid of getting caught by an authority figure that will kick them out or call the police on them.” To sum up student sentiment; “I didn’t want to be homeless and the sublet price was really good.”

These examples point to a collective thinking amongst students where they feel immense pressure to sign dubious leases or live in lower-quality housing to avoid joining the homeless student population they know exists in Waterloo. This section reveals a feeling of ‘no safety nets’, ‘no alternatives’, and ‘no other choices’ that convince students to settle for the suspicious but available housing in the region.

To expand on this, students were asked about their experiences with eviction notices. The vast majority of respondents (88%) had never been provided with an eviction notice by their landlord, while 3% had and 9% said the question was not applicable or preferred not to say. As this is a small sample size, few generalized conclusions can be drawn from the data collected, but what can be said is that students are not typically being evicted from housing once a lease has been signed. Thus, issues with transience or homelessness can be better connected to the housing search and availability of housing rather than evictions.

11. Additional Concerns from Students

11.1 Impact of COVID-19

A major factor for student housing in 2020 and into 2021 has been the impact of COVID-19. Students were asked how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their housing situation in a “select all that apply” question format. ‘I have moved in with family’ was the most common scenario experienced survey participants, receiving 35% of the response which accounts for 465 students. Other significant changes to student’s housing situation include ‘I have moved out but am still paying rent’ (17.5%), ‘I have remained in my unit but have had less money to afford non-shelter expenses’ (13%), and ‘I arranged a sublet’ at 12.5%. As this is a ‘select all’ question, there is area for some statistical overlap between students moving in with family and moving out but still paying rent as respondents could have indicated both statements applied.

Many students have also chosen to terminate their lease (10.6%) and others (11%) had roommates move out early. However, a great many respondents (26.8%) indicated their housing situation had been unchanged by COVID-19. This may be due to factors including: living off-campus with family pre-COVID, owning rather than renting housing, being an international student unable to get home, or any other number of reasons.

For example, one student explained how they “Decided to stay in my apartment rather than sublet and live at home, for risk of bringing home COVID from work and infecting my vulnerable parents.” Similarly, another response said “I have moved home but had to continue my lease while subletting for less than I have to pay per month because I could not terminate my lease.” Still others detailed how they “had to rent
an Airbnb as there was limited short-term housing. Due to COVID, I do not feel comfortable living with strangers, but finding single bedroom housing that is affordable was almost impossible.”

Issues with rent and desire to terminate leases even though the landlord did not agree were also prevalent in the written responses to this question. These experiences demonstrate that students were forced to pay rent on units they no longer wanted or could afford or on units they had already moved out of. This is a stark change to the regular workings of the Waterloo housing market where supply could not meet demand and competition to secure housing was fierce. Now that students have left the region due to COVID-19, those with leases are stuck even if their unit is sitting empty. As this is a major issue, recommendations to support student access to legal resources to aid in lease termination or landlord disputes are outlined at the end of this report.

11.2 Desired Housing Related Changes

All respondents were asked “What, if any, housing-related changes could WUSA or GSA make, that would make your experiences as a UW student more positive?” As an open-ended question, students submitted their suggestions for WUSA in the form of qualitative, written answers. A total of 352 answers were received at a 32% response rate for this question.

Responses were categorized into 9 different groups depending on the main concern of the response. Since some categories are more general than others (e.g., awareness campaigns) sub-groups were included to highlight the specifics of a given response as it relates to the more general category.

Answers were coded into 9 different categories (Table 2):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Relevant Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about cost of housing</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness Campaigns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tenant Rights</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lease legality</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lease termination assistance</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal assistance</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Push for break-up of housing monopolies</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work with local government</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subletting/Leasing system through UW</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UW (residences, suggestions, etc)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Residence maintenance</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review system of landlords</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Summary of housing-related changes respondents indicated WUSA and GSA could make

While this section serves to make students’ voices heard in regard to changes they would like to see made, it does not outline any formal recommendations for future WUSA activities and advocacy work. Formal recommendations are outlined in the final section of the report “Recommendations, Desired Activities and Conclusion”.
Students who answered this question were most concerned with 4 main areas for changes; cost of housing (17%), awareness campaigns (21%), advocacy (16%), and general UW residence issues (15%) (Figure 9). Overall, students want to have better access to secure, good quality, affordable housing in the Waterloo region. How students believe that goal can be achieved is through both targeted awareness and advocacy that address their housing concerns.

Advocacy encompasses students’ desire to address the cost of housing, housing availability, enforcement of housing bylaws, and standards of student living in the Waterloo Region. As shown in Table 2 above, subsections of advocacy include student calls for work with local government. These requests push for local government to increase their enforcement of housing standards and to follow through with lawful consequences if a company does not meet the legal standard (i.e., a landlord not using the Ontario standard lease, adding additional clauses, not keeping up with required maintenance). For example, one student explained that WUSA should “Find a way to work with the city of Waterloo to more strongly ‘regulate’ the housing companies around the University of Waterloo. They absolutely try to scam us out of our money through deposits and refusing to return them in some cases…”. Similarly, another response said “I think the most important thing WUSA can do is continue to advocate to the municipal and provincial governments on behalf of students. Housing corporations don’t act upon the demands of students or our organizations, they can only be forced to act by government policies.”

The other aspect of the advocacy piece relates to student perception of housing companies near the university. Many students perceive the Waterloo housing market to be a monopoly, where the majority of properties are owned by the same parent company even though they present themselves as being under different management by using various names and logos. Students have expressed many concerns about the monopolization of housing throughout the survey, especially when discussing predatory leasing and rental costs. When students try to “shop around” and compare prices and leasing, it is very difficult to escape standard prices and additional clauses set by a large property manager as they own multiple buildings in multiple locations. For example, Accommod8U owns 13 multi-story apartment buildings in Waterloo all within a 30-minute walk to campus, and majority of their units are 5 bedrooms (Accommod8U, 2021). To this point, students, when answering this question about changes that could be made, express a desire for the housing monopolies to be ‘broken-up’ or ‘better regulated’. This is explained by one respondent when they say that want WUSA to “Wrangle the predatory housing companies that have amassed a monopoly in waterloo. Maybe communicate with the local government. It’s ridiculous that they’re able to abuse the student body like this.”

High rental costs are attributed to this issue in responses stating “One of the primary issues is that housing companies have bought up all the land anywhere near the campus, and now they hold a near-monopoly, enabling them to charge extortionate rent prices and dictate illegal terms. I hope that there could be actual consequences and a major crackdown on the grossly illegal practices of >95% of KW Landlords…”
These examples shed light on the fact that, as mentioned earlier in the report, many students were not aware that it was illegal to add additional clauses to the Ontario Standard Lease that their landlords should have been using with them. To improve this for themselves and other students, respondents submitted ideas for housing fairs, tenant rights information sessions, and better advertised resources. Ideas include “Having more housing fairs/sessions for students to ask questions and exhaust off-campus housing concern. Provide a documents/review of F.A.Q for students, a place for simple explanation of all the specific housing terms and recommended questions/procedures.” These sessions would provide “More comprehensive and advertised help for students looking for off-campus housing. Guidance on their legal rights as tenants and a property management company’s and landlord’s rights. What a lease is supposed to look like and how to negotiate it. What is legal and illegal.” Overall, promotion of tenant rights is most important, as one student asks WUSA to “Make available housing-related services more known. I’m not sure if one already exists, but a website or something that details what a landlord is and is not allowed to do and what kind of action can be taken to deal with those issues.”

The University of Waterloo does maintain an off-campus housing website that includes many of the features that students want, there is a tenant rights and FAQ section as well as a listing/sublet service, but little to no students mention knowing anything about this site in the survey. This indicates there is a huge gap in communication between students who want to have more information and the university which hosts a comprehensive site that is not being used or promoted properly.

A common theme throughout the survey responses is how students did not know landlords were predatory until they moved into off-campus housing, or they did not feel like there were other options in the housing market. Students indicated that a UWWaterloo hosted site where students were able to submit reviews of landlords would allow other students to be better able to “shop around” during their housing search as they would be more informed about what landlords are really like. This idea is an extension of the tenant rights awareness as it involves awareness of current landlord practices and behaviours in the region so that students can create a more accurate picture of what a landlord might be like before they sign a lease. For example, some students explained that “Having a centralized UW website where students could rate their units/landlords/buildings would allow students to avoid poor living situations and keep landlords accountable…if a consolidated list of websites dedicated to finding houses/sublets does not exist, I think it would be very useful. Additionally, a list of lease clauses to look out for would be amazing. For example, while a 3-year lease is not illegal it makes renting month-to-month basically impossible during undergrad.” A potential review board could include “A list of housing companies or buildings that have been proven to be legitimate-safe/etc. and a list of housing companies/buildings that have been proven to be a scam/unsafe/using illegal practices/full of pests/etc.”

Other supporters of this idea explain why they believe it is important to “Consider creating a blacklist or student-contributing forum of housing companies that have historically demonstrated instances in which they included illegal clauses to rental agreements or performed illegal/lil actions against the students. For students getting into the KW housing market, it is often quite difficult for them to know what is a good or bad rental company.” As UWWaterloo already hosts an off-campus housing listings website meant for students to secure housing through, a recommendation to seriously consider the implementation of a secure, student-oriented, landlord review board is detailed in the desired activities section of this report.

These desired changes are driven by first-hand student experiences in the Waterloo housing market, it is incredibly important to listen to and take them into account when considering next steps. There are plenty of changes to be made that could improve quality of student living, but the most impactful changes will be rooted in the ideas and suggestions expressed by students.
11.3 Housing Concerns Revisited

The final question in the Housing Survey asked students to provide WUSA with any other information they wished to share about housing that they had not done so already. This question received 144 written responses at a 17% response rate.

Similar to the previous question regarding potential changes WUSA could make, 9 categories were created for the purpose of analysis depending on the main context of the submitted response.

The 9 categories of answers submitted include the following (Table 3):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Relevant Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landlord Issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Specific landlords are mentioned</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leasing Concerns (long leases, termination, etc.)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs of housing</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of housing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scammers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for WUSA</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UW Housing</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roommates</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Summary of respondents' answers to any additional housing concerns they wanted to share

Comparable to findings mentioned in the previous sections, most answers were concerned with the cost of housing and issues with landlords (maintenance, violation of tenant rights, leasing etc.). Students also took this opportunity to highlight specific housing companies they have encountered during their time in the Waterloo region, which includes the general belief that all students have a collective experience of being treated unfairly by these certain companies.

One student expressed this when they explained that “There is no getting out of renting student housing from large companies anymore and they’re driving the pricing way up. For example, the place I live in is owned by someone who used to only own the one property and now owns many more and has raised rent for new tenants by over $100 per month.” Another respondent wrote about their belief that “Overall, rent in Waterloo Region is exorbitant. I am a mature student who must rent. I make a decent living but as a single mother I cannot imagine ever being able to afford full-time post-secondary education and trying to live in this region as well. Having to live in shared accommodation with a dependent means that post-secondary education on a full-time basis would be unattainable for me in this region. The increase in the amount of rent makes it exceptionally difficult to live here.” Comparisons to other regions are also made while talking about pricing, one response mentions how “The rent cost is Waterloo is ridiculous compared to Kingston, London and Guelph housing prices. I have friends who rent really nice apartments for $500, and in Waterloo those same type of apartments at $700+ which is ridiculous.”

A co-op student, who must move every term depending on their job location, said “When I was looking for housing in the Hamilton/Burlington area, a lot of the housing targeted towards students (especially those under Hamilton’s student housing program) required that the student needed to be enrolled in one of the local universities/colleges. It would be good if UW could negotiate agreements with municipalities or universities in the cities where many students find co-ops to make it easier to look for housing. Not sure how feasible this is, but it would be even better if the university operated some student housing in other
cities, especially those where many students often find co-ops but housing is scarce, like Toronto, Ottawa, and cities in the GTA.”

Unfortunately, the general feeling about the Waterloo housing market is summed up by this response: “Everyone I’ve talked to has some horror stories regarding off-campus housing and all of the major housing companies are known to scam students. It’s not as easy as moving and finding a new apartment.”

12. Conclusion, Recommendations and Desired Activities

Overall, student experience with the Waterloo Region housing market has not been a positive one. Students have been frequently taken advantage of because of their lack of familiarity with housing laws and student status, among other reasons. There is ample opportunity to make needed improvements that will positively affect student experiences with housing, which is an absolutely necessary part of improving their relationship with post-secondary education.

12.1 Advocacy

Regulation of 3-year leases with Termination after 1-year Clauses

WUSA should advocate for better regulation of rental leases that auto renew for 3 years to the provincial government. Students responding to the housing survey detail how lease agreements set for 3 years with the option to terminate on a landlord set schedule after 1 full year, leave them feeling stuck or taken advantage of by landlords.

Due to the post-secondary student lifestyle and world events, signing a 3-year lease is not reasonable for students as many do not know where they will be living in 4 months (because of co-op placements), much less in 3 years. Landlords advertise their “3-year terms with minimum 12-month lease” to students knowing those unaware of their tenant rights can be easily taken advantage of in various ways (i.e., not refunding deposits, not allowing lawful termination, collecting termination penalties). Loose regulation surrounding these leases, which are common in large property companies in the Waterloo Region, allow for this kind of predatory property management to continue year after year.

As the City of Waterloo does not have purview over regulation of leases, WUSA is encouraged to advocate on the provincial level to clarify what landlords requiring 3-year leases can or cannot do, especially if a tenant wants to terminate their lease after 1 year.

Close Loopholes to Strengthen Landlord Dispute Process

To improve accountability and enforcement measures taken against landlords who violate the Residential Tenancies Act (2006), WUSA should advocate for regulative or legislative changes on this issue to the provincial government. Students currently feel there is no enforcement of Ontario law, particularly with regards to ensuring the Ontario standard lease is used and additional (illegal) clauses are not tacked on.

In a Waterloo Chronicle article published in late November 2019, “MPP Fife said changes to the Ontario Building Code and Residential Tenancies Act, which are within the province’s purview, are in some cases needed so cities have tools and mechanisms for better enforcement. She said there’s too often ‘imbalance’ when it comes to student-landlord relationships, not only in Waterloo, but other college and university towns across Ontario” (Jackson B., 2019). WUSA is encouraged to advocate for changes to said legislation especially considering the housing survey results.

As the current dispute process stands both provincially and in the City of Waterloo, a student cannot file a serious complaint about a landlord without already living in the landlord’s rental, making it extremely difficult for prospective tenants to report suspicious behavior before they move in and sign a lease or
rental agreement. The ability to report landlord violations to the appropriate authority (municipal, LTB, or Rental Housing Enforcement Unit (RHEU)) before a tenant has moved in is of great importance to student renters. This change would hopefully allow for better enforcement of laws that would preemptively improve housing quality before students move into certain buildings. Tenants would not have to live in the sub-standard units they are going through the dispute process about if they are able to report said units and achieve a resolution ahead of move in.

WUSA should advocate for this change and others to improve the reporting process for students and enforcement of housing laws on both the municipal and provincial levels. WUSA should leverage its connections with elected officials and other post-secondary groups to lobby for changes to be prioritized and introduced to various government bodies with the purview to make said developments.

12.2 Awareness

Promotion of Waterloo Rental Housing Support Portal

WUSA is recommended to promote the City of Waterloo rental housing support and online complaint portal. The City of Waterloo building and property standards bylaw outlines maintenance requirements landlords must keep under municipal rules. If a landlord is suspected of violating said bylaw, tenants can submit a complaint or request an inspection of their rental unit online through the city portal. The City will then review the online complaint and work to resolve it, if the landlord continues to not comply with the bylaw an appeal can be submitted to the city at the tenant’s expense ($170). Requests for inspection are reviewed and replied to within two business days per the City website, if the unit is found to break a property bylaw, an order for compliance will be issued to the property owner.

As mentioned earlier in this report, students are less likely to call for inspection or file a complaint with the city due to a number of factors. One of which, as evidenced by the results of the housing survey, is lack of awareness about enforcement avenues available to students. Survey respondents call on local government to hold housing companies accountable for poor standards of living but rarely mention knowing about or utilizing the city’s complaint or inspection services.

Promoting these local avenues through WUSA social media, emails, and other communication methods (in housing events, on housing websites, etc) will provide awareness for the tangible ways students can advocate for safe housing. There is a need for municipalities to take charge via enforcement (if landlords are slow to respond to student requests for cleanliness or bedbugs for example, or don’t respond at all) but the city needs to know about the issue first. Increasing awareness for municipal enforcement services may result in more students submitting complaints, thus allowing the city to enforce quality of housing bylaws and improve student off-campus housing experiences.

Promotion of Ontario Trillium Benefit

WUSA should advertise and raise awareness about student eligibility to receive the Ontario Trillium Benefit. This benefit is a housing tax credit paid in monthly installments to eligible individuals over 18 living in the province of Ontario, who have filed their yearly provincial tax returns. Students renting off-campus housing or even living in designated university residences are eligible to receive this benefit. As the biggest area of concern to students is the cost of housing, the promotion of this benefit will provide a resource to students who may be looking for rent assistance.

Students must file their ON-BEN application form alongside their provincial tax returns to be considered. The Government of Ontario maintains a webpage detailing exact eligibility requirements as well as a tax credit calculator tool. WUSA is encouraged to promote this information and post links to the government webpage during tax season to maximize visibility of this benefit. This is of particular importance to international students and first-time filers who are unaware of how Ontario taxes work.
WUSA Off-Campus Housing Events

It is recommended that WUSA, under their special event portfolio, host more events per year regarding off-campus housing. As students responding to the housing survey rarely mention resources or information provided by the University of Waterloo or WUSA and/or do not mention having any knowledge about said information at all, it is clear there is a gap in student’s knowledge about their rights as tenants and resources offered on campus.

While advocacy work is an important and crucial part of improving the housing market for students, it is a lack of knowledge about the market and the laws in place to protect tenants that allow students to be taken advantage of. As evidenced by the results of this housing survey, students are unaware of their rights as tenants, what the Ontario Standard lease looks like, and the legal resources available should they need them.

These events should take place on a regular basis and should be accessible to all students (i.e a combination of online webinars/livestreams and in person sessions). Due to the high turnover of students living in Waterloo each term because of coop placements, the regularity of these informative events is essential. They should be hosted every term or at the very least in February/March as this is when students typically begin looking at housing for the following fall term.

Additionally, the events should be promoted through WUSA social media and other communication avenues to ensure students are aware of their occurrence. Events may look like online webinars, in-person information sessions, booths around campus, WUSA placement at a university hosted housing fair, or other events where students can interact with off-campus housing advocates. WUSA events regarding Off-Campus Housing (OCH) should include information regarding the legal aspects of securing housing and tenant rights as protected by the provincial Residential Tenancies Act and other laws.

Some topics to include (events are not limited to this list):

(i) The Ontario Standard Lease (what is included, the right to request it’s use)
(ii) Examples of illegal or unenforceable clauses that are commonly added (see examples here)
(iii) Lease termination rights
(iv) Legal rent increases
(v) Q&A from students attending the information session

Additionally, as many Wilfrid Laurier University students also live in the same area and frequently with Waterloo students, it may be prudent for WUSA to consider communicating with the Wilfrid Laurier Students Union and their Student Rights Advisory Council to maximize event promotion and spread of important housing information.

This recommendation is essential to improving student experiences with off-campus housing. Unawareness and “not knowing” about the legal rights tenants have is a huge barrier to students being able to advocate for themselves in difficult housing situations. Unless students are aware something is not legal, there is little possibility of change in the housing market, particularly with landlords that take advantage of student’s lack of knowledge.

WUSA Off-Campus Housing Website

WUSA is encouraged to create an off-campus housing webpage available on their existing website to centralize information and resources available to students. This ties into the previous recommendation regarding WUSA special housing events as it could be used as a resource provided in those information sessions.
As a supplemental piece to events, a dedicated webpage would provide an alternative, comprehensive resource to students who cannot or do not attend live WUSA events. Currently, the WUSA website does not provide information regarding off-campus housing (tenant rights, what to look for in a lease, etc) nor does it include links to other websites where that information could be found. Other student unions like Laurier’s provide direct information regarding tenant rights and legal resources on their websites for easy student access. This central, easy to navigate resource would allow students to gain a broader understanding of the housing market in Waterloo in addition to what their rights are as renters in the region. An accessible website is of particular importance to international and out-of-province students who most likely are unaware of Ontario regulations and competitiveness in the Waterloo housing market.

A WUSA off-campus housing webpage should include:
(i) A sample Ontario Standard Lease (available to download and read)
(ii) Lists of illegal clauses commonly added to leases
(iii) The Ontario Rent Increase guideline
(iv) Landlord maintenance requirements by law
(v) Where to file a complaint against a landlord (City of Waterloo vs LTB vs RHEU)
(vi) Where to access legal assistance (WUSA legal Aid)
(vii) How students can advocate for themselves to landlords
(viii) Where to look for safe off-campus housing
(ix) Examples of questions to ask prospective landlords during a housing search
(x) Addressing common concerns about off-campus housing
(xi) Other resources regarding tenant rights

The University of Waterloo department of Campus Housing does maintain a webpage with some FAQs and information regarding tenant rights that may be of interest, but it is not comprehensive, nor it is widely known to students as a resource. A WUSA webpage has the ability to include more information and to be highly promoted by various WUSA communication channels. Once such a webpage has been created, it is recommended that WUSA promote it heavily. This will help ensure that students are aware that a comprehensive, easy to read guide to living off-campus is available to them.

Updating the UW Off-Campus Housing Website
As mentioned, the University of Waterloo department of Campus Housing maintains an off-campus housing website that contains some tenant rights information along with an “off-campus listings” service where local landlords post units available for students to rent in the upcoming terms. Students rarely mentioned this resource when responding to the housing survey and when it was mentioned, students expressed displeasure at the website’s current usability and quality of listings.

Therefore, it is recommended that WUSA and/or a student group work with UWWaterloo Campus Housing to improve the off-campus listings and classifieds websites. This includes updates to the layout of listings, visual appeal, amount of information provided on a listing, number and quality of photos available, as well as other technical changes to increase student usability.

Additionally, an updated UWWaterloo listings website should include a landlord/building review function where students are able to submit comments about local student rentals. This would allow students to share their housing experiences with others, providing resources to make a more informed off-campus housing decision in the future. By executing a review board, students interested in a housing listing would be able to see what other students have said about the building, landlord, or management before contacting an agent. Reviewing previous experiences, especially by other students, is an important information piece currently missing from other recommendations in this report. Implementing a student...
review board allows for more transparency and vetting of landlords in the KW region that may take advantage of students.

Currently, it is very hard to find credible, student written reviews of major Waterloo landlords through basic research (e.g., Google reviews, Yelp, Facebook). Large property managers who own multiple apartment buildings close to campus have a disproportionally low amount of reviews compared to the number of units rented out every year, and the reviews are generally not detailed. The lack of credible, written by students, reviews coupled with the insufficient number of reviews expected for large companies, inhibits student ability to adequately research potential off-campus housing. The implementation and subsequent promotion of an updated UWaterloo Off-campus listings and review board website available only to UWaterloo students through a university login would dramatically improve the amount and quality of information students have access to while navigating the Waterloo housing market.

12.3 Other
Advertisement of Housing Companies on Campus
To learn more about student perception regarding off-campus housing companies advertised on campus, it is recommended that WUSA include this issue as a research incentives program question. The Representative Survey Platform project is currently in motion to design a program where a set sample of Waterloo students will provide input on various research questions over the course of a year. Standardizing response data and allowing for an increased amount of smaller research interests to be addressed without a large-scale general survey.

Some students point out in the housing survey that landlords who do not treat their student tenants well are allowed to advertise themselves on campus, particularly in the Student Life Center. These students are concerned that the predatory or illegal behaviours exhibited by these landlords continue to affect tenants in part due to their proximity to students (e.g., their booths with a company representative on campus during strategic times). Survey respondents ask for this to stop and for Waterloo/WUSA to prohibit the advertisement of predatory housing companies on campus. As this issue was not addressed by all survey respondents, more information is needed to better determine general campus sentiment regarding this issue. The research incentives program will ask students if they have found on-campus housing advertisement helpful and convenient, if they are indifferent, or if they have concerns about this issue.
References


Jackson, Bill, “‘What are they going to say if I’m found dead?’: Waterloo students demand action on housing” November 16, 2019, https://www.waterloochronicle.ca/news-story/9704353--what-are-they-going-to-say-if-i-m-found-dead-waterloo-students-demand-action-on-housing/


“May 2-3 2019 - StudentDwell+ Symposium.” StudentDwellTO, 2019, studentdwellto.ca/May-2-3-2019-StudentDwell-Symposium.


“Ready to Rent: Housing Education: Homelessness Prevention.” RentSmart, 2019, rentsmarteducation.org/rentsmart-tenants/.


Data obtained from Waterloo’s Town and Gown Committee’s 2017 Report on Waterloo Student Accommodation (The Student Housing Working Group, 2017):

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Student Housing Demand</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Undergraduate Enrolment</td>
<td># Full-time UG students at UW and WLU Waterloo campuses as of Nov. 2016</td>
<td>36,264</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Total Graduate Enrolment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local Co-op Work Term Students</td>
<td># students working within driving distance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Non-tenant/Commuter Waterloo Students</td>
<td># students not renting in city, residing at home or traveling to campus</td>
<td>-10,291</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Potential Student Tenants</td>
<td># total Waterloo students less non-tenant/commuter students</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Total Potential Off-Campus Tenants</td>
<td># total potential student tenants less on-campus beds</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Student Housing Supply</th>
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<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On-Campus Beds</td>
<td># beds available on-campus in Waterloo as of Nov. 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Traditional Apartment Beds</td>
<td># beds in traditional apartments</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Rental Beds Available</td>
<td># on- and off-campus beds</td>
<td>33,438</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Off-Campus Beds</td>
<td># total rental beds available less on-campus beds</td>
<td>24,457</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. Appendix B: Survey Questions

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. You are currently a(n):
   a. Undergraduate student
   b. Graduate student

2. Are you currently enrolled in experiential learning (e.g., in a co-op program, internship, or practicum)?
   a. Yes
   b. No

3. Do you identify as a mature student? A mature student is typically defined as an undergraduate student who has been out of high school for at least 2-4 years. You can also see the exact definitions by faculty at this link. 
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to say

4. In what type of graduate program are you currently enrolled?
   a. Research-based master’s student
   b. Course-based master’s student
   c. Professional master’s program
   d. PhD student
   e. Other, please specify:

5. Are you an international student?
   a. Yes
   b. No

6. During a typical school term, do you usually live on- or off-campus?
   a. On-campus (University of Waterloo housing) -> redirect to only answer 10, 11, 14, 16, 21, 24, 36-38
   b. Off-campus with parents or other family -> redirect to only answer 7, 9-11, 14, 16, 18-21, 24, 29, 30, 36-38
   c. Off-campus, not with family

7. When studying in-person (i.e. not co-op, pre-COVID), which of the following municipalities do you most frequently live in?
   a. City of Waterloo
   b. City of Kitchener
   c. City of Cambridge
   d. City of Guelph
   e. City of Toronto
   f. City of Hamilton
   g. Other city in the GTA
   h. Township of Wellesley
   i. Township of Woolwich
   j. Township of North Dumfries
   k. Township of Wilmot
   l. Other, please specify
8. Are you residing in housing geared specifically to students (e.g., “student” cooperative housing or “student housing”)? → if answered be
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure
   d. Not applicable

9. Do you:
   a. Rent
   b. Own
   c. Live in a housing cooperative
   d. Other, please specify:
   e. Not applicable

STUDENT SATISFACTION

10. In your time as a UW student, have you experienced the following maintenance/quality issues with any residential units in or near the Waterloo region? (Select all that apply) →

   SUNDERGRAD
   a. Poor water quality
   b. Lack of heating or ventilation systems (e.g., broken heat, no vents in kitchen, lack of windows or mechanical ventilation)
   c. Mold or mildew
   d. Pests (e.g., cockroaches, vermin)
   e. Evidence of damaged or rotting building materials
   f. Cracks and weathering of doors and/or windows
   g. Other (please explain)
   h. Prefer not to say
   i. Not applicable (e.g., I have not experienced any of these issues)

11. In your time as a UW student, have you experienced the following maintenance/quality issues with any residential units? (Select all that apply) → GRAD

   a. Poor water quality
   b. Lack of heating or ventilation systems (e.g., broken heat, no vents in kitchen, lack of windows or mechanical ventilation)
   c. Mold or mildew
   d. Pests (e.g., cockroaches, vermin)
   e. Evidence of damaged or rotting building materials
   f. Cracks and weathering of doors and/or windows
   g. Other (please explain)
   h. Prefer not to say
   i. Not applicable (e.g., I have not experienced any of these issues)

12. After paying for your share of housing and related costs (including rent/mortgage, utilities, at home parking), do you have:
   a. Insufficient funds to cover basic needs (e.g., food, clothes, other bills)
   b. Enough funds to just cover basic needs (e.g., food, clothes, other bills)
   c. Enough funds to cover basic needs and unanticipated expenses (e.g., food, clothes, other bills, car maintenance, unanticipated overage or moving fees, etc.)
d. More than enough funds to cover basic needs, unanticipated expenses and luxury items (e.g. food, clothes, other bills, car maintenance, unanticipated overage or moving fees, designer goods, recreational travel, etc.)
e. Prefer not to say
f. Not applicable

13. How much of your monthly budget goes to housing expenses (including rent/mortgage, utilities, at home parking)?
   a. Up to 30%
   b. Between 31-50%
   c. 51-80%
   d. 81% or higher
e. Prefer not to say
f. Not applicable

14. How often do you have housing issues within a 4-month term? Issues may be related to maintenance, major problems with other tenants, etc.
   a. Never
   b. 1-2 times
   c. 3-5 times
   d. 6-7 times
e. More than 7 times
f. Prefer not to say
g. Not applicable

15. Have you ever suspected that a landlord or property owner discriminated against you, at any point in the tenancy process (including viewing or tenancy application) due to an aspect of your personal identity? Click here to review forms of discrimination identified by the United Nations.
   a. Yes
   b. No
c. Unsure
d. Prefer not to say
e. Not applicable

16. In your time as a UW student, have you resided in housing that: (Select all that apply)
   a. Required 2 or more major repairs (e.g., heat/AC maintenance, lock malfunctions, broken windows, defective plumbing or electrical wiring)
   b. Was overcrowded (e.g., 3+ individuals occupying each bedroom)
   c. None of the above
d. Prefer not to say

STUDENT BEHAVIOUR
17. How often do you typically look for new housing per academic year (Sept 1 to Aug 31)?
   a. 1 time
   b. 2 times
c. 3-4 times
d. Over 5 times
e. Prefer not to say
f. Not applicable
18. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020), what mode of transportation do you typically use to commute to the University of Waterloo?
   a. By foot
   b. By bike
   c. By bus or train
   d. By car
   e. Not applicable (e.g., Fall 2020 is my first term at the University of Waterloo)

19. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020), Approximately how long was your commute distance in one direction using the mode of transport indicated in question 18?
   a. Less than 5 minutes away
   b. 5-15 minutes away
   c. 16-30 minutes away
   d. 31-60 minutes away
   e. Over an hour away
   f. Not applicable (e.g., Fall 2020 is my first term at the University of Waterloo)

20. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, have you ever had to travel further to campus than what you indicated in the previous question?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure
   d. Not applicable

21. If you could choose, how far would you be willing to commute to campus if it meant staying in your current community over moving to Waterloo region?
   a. Less than 30 minutes
   b. 30-44 minutes
   c. 45-59 minutes
   d. 1-2 hours
   e. 3+ hours
   f. Prefer not to say
   g. Not applicable (e.g., I already lived in Waterloo region prior to starting at the University of Waterloo)

22. In 2018, the Provincial government made it mandatory for landlords to use a simplified standard lease agreement for all tenants. A sample version can be found on the Ontario government’s website to download. Have your landlord(s) been using the standardized lease for your housing since then?
   a. Yes, all of them
   b. Yes, some of them
   c. Yes, a few of them
   d. No, none of them
   e. Unsure
   f. Prefer not to say
   g. Not applicable

23. Did you landlord add additional terms to the standard lease agreement?  
   a. Yes  
   b. No  
   c. Prefer not to say
24. Which of the following housing/legal services have you accessed? (Check all that apply)
   a. WUSA Off-Campus Housing Service
   b. WUSA Student Legal Protection Program
   c. GSA Student Legal Protection Program
   d. External services (Waterloo Region Community Legal Services, the Region of Waterloo Renters Toolkit, etc.)
   e. None of the above
   f. I wasn’t aware of any of these services
   g. Prefer not to say
   h. Other, please specify:

25. While you have been a tenant, have you engaged in any of the following processes with a landlord or property management company? Select all that apply:
   a. Attempted discussion with a landlord or property management company to resolve an issue
   b. Consultation with housing advocate or legal council
   c. Mediation
   d. Adjudication (hearing)
   e. Prefer not to say
   f. Not applicable

26. Have you ever signed a lease which included any of the following clauses? Select all that apply:
   a. Banning pets
   b. Acceleration clause void (if you refused to pay or pay late rent, the landlord demanded all rent due over the entire future of the lease)
   c. Asking for more than one month’s rent as a security deposit
   d. Charging a damage deposit
   e. Charging more than the replacement cost of a key or key fob
   f. Sublet for a higher rent than the overall rent of the unit
   g. Including clauses regarding maximum number of tenants (excludes clauses relating to overcrowding) or overnight guests
   h. Requirement to permit automatic debiting or direct deposit
   i. No, I have never signed a lease with any of the above clauses
   j. Prefer not to say

27. Were you aware that including the above clauses in a lease is illegal? - if they’ve selected any of the clauses
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to say

28. Why did you agree to the terms that you identified in question 25? - if yes to q26, not mandatory

STRESSORS
29. Due to the housing market, have you ever had to: (Check all that apply)
   a. Couch surf or stay with family/friends for more than one night while in between places?
   b. Stay with family or partner when you would have preferred not to?
   c. Live in a hotel/motel/Airbnb for more than one night?
   d. Sleep in your vehicle?
30. Have you ever felt like you were at risk of homelessness during your time as a UW student?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to say

31. Has a landlord ever provided you with an eviction notice or asked you to vacate a unit?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to say
   d. Not applicable

32. In Ontario, to protect tenants from being evicted without cause, landlords may evict tenants for a limited number of reasons. One reason is because they have family members moving in. Landlords can evict tenants if they have a family member who will be moving into the accommodations occupied by the renter. Was this reason used in the eviction that you faced? If answered yes to question 30
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure
   d. Prefer not to say
   e. Not applicable

33. After you moved out, did you learn that your landlord’s family did move in? If selected “Yes” to question 31
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure
   d. Prefer not to say

34. What are the most important factors that you consider when looking for housing? Select all that apply.
   a. Cost of rent
   b. Included utilities (i.e. water, heat, internet)
   c. Included amenities (e.g. gym in building, common study rooms)
   d. Cleanliness of the building and/or unit
   e. Location (commute distance, safe neighbourhood, etc.)
   f. Reputation of housing company
   g. Use of standardized lease/other lease related stressors
   h. Number of roommates
   i. Space for family
   j. Other, please explain:
   k. Prefer not to say
   l. Not applicable
35. What are the most important factors that you consider when extending a lease agreement? Select all that apply.
   a. Cost of rent
   b. Maintenance issues (including timeliness of landlord responses)
   c. Roommates
   d. Neighbours
   e. Ease of cancelling the lease
   f. Subletting your unit
   g. Other, please specify:
   h. Prefer not to say
   i. Not applicable

36. How has COVID-19 impacted your housing situation, if at all? Select all that apply:
   a. Unchanged
   b. I have remained in my unit but have had less money to afford non-shelter expenses
   c. I have remained in my unit but have been unable to afford housing costs
   d. I have been evicted
   e. I have chosen to terminate my lease
   f. I have moved out but am still paying rent
   g. I was able to negotiate rental costs (e.g., reduced rent, revised payment schedules)
   h. I arranged a sublet
   i. I attempted to arrange a sublease but was unable to procure a subtenant
   j. My roommates moved out early
   k. I have moved in with family
   l. Prefer not to say
   m. Other, please specify:

FINAL THOUGHTS
37. What, if any, housing-related changes could WUSA or GSA make, that would make your experience as a UW student more positive?

38. If there is any other information that you would like to tell us about housing, but we have not asked about, please tell us now.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The science of climate change is irrefutable – increased concentrations of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions (“carbon”) in the atmosphere caused by burning fossil fuels continue to increase global temperatures to levels that elevate risks for humanity, the environment and all living creatures. As a science-based institution, the University of Waterloo acknowledges the grave realities of a warming planet. As an educational institution, the University of Waterloo also recognizes its responsibility to contribute to climate change mitigation to allow current and future generations of students to live in a safe environment. And as a fiduciary and responsible investor for endowment and pension funds, the University of Waterloo has a duty to mitigate the climate change risks in its investment portfolios.

In recent years, the University has taken important steps toward becoming a sustainable organization in many aspects of its operations, including but not limited to its implementation of the Environmental Sustainability Policy; the Shift: Neutral climate action plan; and the adoption of integrated Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) investment management. This report and recommendations on climate investing build on these foundations.

The Advisory Group is motivated to recommend action on climate change with respect to its investment portfolios for several reasons. First, climate instability poses systemic financial risks to the University. Changing economic outlooks require evolving investment strategies. As a forward-looking, long-term investor, the University needs to be cognizant that inaction on climate change threatens the financial stability of the University’s investments. Second, the University as public educational institution, has a responsibility to its past, present, and future students; pensioners; and donors to foster a sustainable and habitable world. The Advisory Group believes that an effective climate investment strategy must not only mitigate the risks of climate change, but also foster technological and economic innovation toward a climate-aligned transition. Climate change innovation and transition present opportunities for long-term investors such as the University. Finally, the Advisory Group recognizes the contributions of students, faculty, and staff in laying the foundation for the establishment of these recommendations. Over 2,000 individuals and 25 associations and groups have encouraged the University to take measurable action on climate investments. The message has been clear: the University is called to show leadership by aligning its investment practices with its teaching, research, and operational priorities to address climate change.

The Advisory Group therefore recommends that the University of Waterloo prioritize decarbonization actions that are founded on measurable science-based targets and are consistent with the long-term integrated ESG approach to achieve risk-adjusted investment return objectives. The University’s investment strategy, mindful of climate change risks, will over time need to avoid firms that are large carbon emitters and firms that are materially vulnerable to the consequences of climate change that are not adjusting their business models to the reality of climate change. At the same time, climate change also presents investment opportunities to support the necessary transition.
This report sets out investment policy recommendations to address both the financial risks and opportunities associated with climate change. We acknowledge that if these recommendations are adopted, further analysis and due diligence will be required to support execution and ongoing operations that are consistent with the recommendations. Moreover, as new research, tools, and techniques are developed, the University’s investment strategy will need to evolve to continue to lead in addressing climate change. The Administration will need to identify internal resources, third-party information providers, and any further advisory support required to implement the recommendations and respond to a rapidly changing environment. The Board of Governors and its Finance and Investment Committee will need to ensure that there is effective governance and allocation of accountability and responsibility to carry out its climate change investing policies once adopted.

In summary, the Advisory Group recommends the following:

- Waterloo’s Endowment and Pension Funds take a proactive approach with a long-term perspective to incorporate climate risk in their investing and management activities, in order to fulfil the risk-adjusted return objectives necessary to deliver on the purposes of those funds.
- The University pursue a gradual carbon exposure reduction strategy by phasing out investments exposed to significant climate change risks, investing instead in climate change innovation and transition.
- That any material direct investments in fossil fuel exploration and extraction companies be avoided. It is expected that with ESG integration and the phased carbon exposure reduction strategy, the University’s active equity managers will not hold any material positions in fossil fuel exploration and extraction companies by 2025.
- It is anticipated that the carbon intensity of passive funds will reduce, as capital markets fully account for climate and stranded asset risks. A review in 2026 will assess market developments and determine if further action is required with respect to passive equity investments to meet the 2030 carbon exposure reduction target of 50%.
BACKGROUND

In January 2020, the Finance and Investment Committee of the University of Waterloo’s Board of Governors established a Responsible Investing Advisory Group. (See Appendices A and B for a list of members and others who participated in the work of the RIAG, and the Terms of Reference for the group). This report and recommendations are the result of the Advisory Group’s research, analysis and deliberations.

Climate change from carbon emissions is proving to have serious consequences on life on this planet. As a result, there has been a global effort to curb emissions and it stands to reason that there will be increased action in this regard. These changes are expected to impact the financial outlook for businesses and by extension, the investors in those businesses. The investment community can also contribute to the effort of reducing carbon emissions by creating climate-friendly investment strategies. As a forward-looking institutional investor, the Advisory Group affirms the need for the University to account for the impact of climate change and emissions trends in stewarding its Endowment and Pension Funds’ investment portfolios, both in terms of assessing investment risk as well as in identifying potential investment opportunities.

The Advisory Group acknowledges the large number of the University Funds’ contributors and beneficiaries, including the more than 2000 students, faculty, staff, associations, and groups that have motivated and laid the foundation for these recommendations. Their message is clear: carbon emissions directly attributed to fossil fuel production and usage is the leading cause of anthropogenic climate change. Therefore, University investments should not support fossil fuel production financially. The recommendations of the Advisory Group would not be complete without directly acknowledging the fossil fuel industry as a major contributor of carbon emissions and climate instability. The systemic nature and deep interconnections of carbon emissions and economic activity, however, require that the University take a more holistic approach to the decarbonization of its portfolios, going beyond reducing fossil fuel industry exposure. The recommended measures also reflect the University’s approach as a long-term investor, with symmetry and coherence between funds. Therefore, the Advisory Group’s recommendations apply equally to the Endowment and to the Pension funds, recognizing that the Endowment fund may be able to achieve them more quickly.1

The University has concerned itself with responsible investing for some time, with several notable actions and successes to date. Following extensive deliberation in 2017 and 2018, the University established ESG as a lens for University investments, with enshrinement in the Statement of Investment Policy and Procedures (SIPP) for the Pension Plan, as well as in the Investment Guidelines for the Endowment Fund. The University committed to becoming a signatory to the UN PRI (Principles for Responsible Investment) in 2018 and achieved that goal in April 2020 after considerable groundwork was completed. The University has since also signed the Investing to Address Climate Change Charter with other Canadian universities with respect to the Endowment Fund. Between year-end 2016 (when the University embarked on its responsible investing journey) and year-end 2020, the University reduced active energy sector equity exposure by 69%, through implementation of the integrated ESG mandate, including new investment managers and general market shifts. We expect that the implementation of the

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1 Re-expendable funds, which are not invested on the same time horizon, are not subject to the same investment mandates as the Endowment and Pension Funds, so are not proposed to be subject to the carbon exposure reduction investment strategy at this time.
Advisory Group’s recommendations will accelerate the University’s shift away from carbon intensive investments.

Considerable research and analysis went into the development of this report and our recommendations, which included substantive reviews of the University’s Policy on Environmental Sustainability; Shift: Neutral – The University of Waterloo’s Roadmap to Carbon Neutrality plan; letters from faculty, staff, students, and associations; and an array of academic and investment literature. A common lexicon of terms was prepared. The members, expert advisors, and observers of the Advisory Group contributed insights from the substantive reviews, as well as their own expertise and experience in climate change science, accounting, finance, risk management, and investment when discussing possible solutions and building consensus on our recommendations.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The Advisory Group agreed on a common set of assumptions and key considerations as a basis for recommendations:

- Respect the primacy of the fiduciary duty to beneficiaries of the Endowment and Pension Funds, which underscores the importance of considering value over values when making investment decisions.
- Aim to maximize risk-adjusted returns while also addressing the financial implications of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) concerns.
- Address the concerns raised in the divestment letters of faculty, staff, and students and acknowledge the need to consider both fossil-fuel supply and demand perspectives.
- Place climate as a key priority within the University’s Integrated ESG investment strategy journey, recognizing that the global trajectory of climate change, and the public

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2 The University may identify additional priorities within its integrated ESG framework, but the work and expertise of the Advisory Group is limited to making recommendations with respect to climate risks and opportunities. The
and private commitments to significantly reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions over the coming years, pose a material financial risk to long-term, risk-adjusted investment returns for the University’s Endowment and Pension Funds.

- Tailor recommendations to reflect the size and nature of the University’s Funds, respecting their governance model and practice of investing through external managers, often in pooled funds, and with due consideration of information, analytics, and administrative requirements for successful implementation.

- Treat Endowment and Pension Funds similarly, as the financial rationale for addressing climate change risks argues for the whole of the Endowment and Pension Funds to be transitioned, not just a portion of the Endowment Fund (such as the student contributions, which was considered). This approach is consistent with the University’s preference for using common approaches and managers across Funds wherever possible and appropriate, in order to benefit from synergies and efficiencies in the management and administration of its investments.

- Stress the importance of dealing with climate risk across all sectors and asset classes, recognizing it is prudent to do so in phases in order to conduct due diligence; allow standards, reporting quality, and markets to develop and establish a track record; assess the effects of engagement with the funds’ managers; gain knowledge in the more complex investment areas as they pertain to climate change; and to learn from experience.

- Recognize the need for further data, research, and methodological development to properly assess climate risks, including physical and transition risks, in many sectors and asset classes, and at the total portfolio level. In particular, further research and development is required with respect to climate risk assessment, scenario analysis, and developing risk appetite at the total portfolio level.

- Acknowledge that climate change also presents opportunities for long-term investors. Pools of private capital within Canada, such as pension and endowment funds, will be an important source of capital to finance innovation and the necessary transitions to support a low carbon emissions economy and mitigate climate change risks.

- Recognize that the University, as a thought-leader and institution of research and higher learning, is financially supported by public funds and has an obligation to support Canada’s transition to a low carbon economy.

- Act as a responsible shareholder through engagement and proxy voting, as well as the buying and selling of investments.

- Highlight the importance of disclosure of the University’s Responsible Investing Policy; the integrated ESG approach; and the priority on investing to address climate change, which includes a carbon exposure reduction strategy, targets, and progress and performance against benchmarks relative to peer organisations where possible. This will serve the dual purpose of informing companies and investment managers of our intentions, while also being accountable to donors, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders of the Endowment and Pension Funds.

- Accept there will be a lag between the availability of carbon measures and investment performance information.

- Recognize the need to continuously learn from our experience and evolving best practices; monitor the very dynamic environment as it relates to available information,

Advisory Group did take note of social equity issues and other environmental issues, such as the loss of biodiversity that are linked to climate change, as are many of the UN Social Development Goals (SDG’s). This underlines the importance of continuing to pursue an integrated ESG strategy together with the carbon exposure reduction strategy set out in these recommendations.
measurement, reporting and climate solution innovations; and update the University’s practices, approaches, benchmarks, and targets accordingly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report sets out investment policy recommendations to address climate change. Further analysis and due diligence will be required to support execution and ongoing operations consistent with the recommendations once adopted. Given the complexity and rapid evolution of knowledge and market practices with respect to climate risks and opportunities, the Advisory Group believes the University should reserve the right (in good faith) to revisit the recommended investment strategy as information, methodologies for measurement, reporting, and targets evolve. To begin, the Advisory Group is recommending carbon reduction targets for 2030 and 2040, with updates on progress and a review of goals and commitments in 2023 and 2026. Annual reporting of performance and carbon exposure would start in Spring 2022 (reporting on 2021 data), and it is expected that the first iterations of reporting will evolve as data availability and reliability is determined.

Principles

1. As has been set out in UW’s Sustainability Policy and Shift: Neutral climate action plan and roadmap with respect to its research, teaching, and operational activities, a proactive approach to incorporate climate change risk and opportunities should be adopted for the University’s Endowment and Pension Funds, in order to meet the fiduciary duty to beneficiaries and address climate change. This is consistent with the University’s Responsible Investing Policy to integrate ESG factors in investment decisions – it is an elaboration and acceleration of a priority focus on climate change within the integrated ESG responsible investing framework.

2. Risk appetite and risk management for the Endowment and Pension Funds should give priority consideration to climate transition and stranded asset risks, in addition to other investment and ESG risks. Preference should be given to active managers that integrate ESG and reduce climate-related investment risks.

3. Climate change also presents investment opportunities (such as financing new, low carbon technology and transition projects with promising risk/return attributes) that the Endowment and Pension Funds should consider when determining asset class allocations and choosing active managers.

Fund Level Targets, Measurement, and Disclosure

4. It is recommended that the University pursue a gradual carbon exposure reduction strategy for its Endowment and Pension Funds by phasing out, on a continuous basis, investments exposed to significant climate change financial risks. To achieve this, the University should adopt two progressive carbon exposure reduction targets:
   a. Reduce the carbon footprint (Scope 1 & 2) of the Endowment and Pension Funds’ investments, by at least 50% by 2030 relative to year-end 2018 or 2019, depending on data availability.

3 Scope 1 covers direct emissions from owned or controlled sources. Scope 2 covers indirect emissions from the generation of purchased electricity, steam, heating, and cooling consumed by the reporting company. Scope 3 includes all other indirect emissions that occur in a company's value chain.
b. Set an aspirational goal of achieving a net-neutral carbon footprint for Endowment and Pension Fund investments by 2040, and not later than 2050.\(^4\)

5. It is not recommended to use carbon offsets at the portfolio level to achieve the 2030 carbon reduction target\(^5\), as the Advisory Group determined they are best considered as a last resort. The University should re-examine the appropriateness of offsets at the portfolio level in the future when the carbon exposure reduction strategy and targets are reviewed in five years.

6. Measure the carbon footprint annually starting first with equity (2021), then fixed income and real assets exposure (by 2023).

7. Adopt a scorecard approach for annual disclosure, providing total carbon emissions and weighted average carbon intensity (WACI) in addition to carbon footprint. Endeavour over time, as information and appropriate methodologies become available, to scale by total enterprise value rather than market value of equity. The annual disclosure report should also endeavour over time to attribute changes in carbon footprint to management actions, market developments, or currency movements, with an eye to the multi-year horizon of investment strategy and our carbon reduction targets.

8. Prepare an initial analysis of climate risk scenarios once sufficient portfolio information is available and in conjunction with regular asset/liability studies thereafter. Update disclosure scorecard metrics to include climate risk measures for the Funds’ portfolios, including a consideration of material physical and transition risks.

9. Disclose reduction in active equity exposure to fossil fuel exploration and extraction companies, and the broader energy sector annually, at least through 2025.

**Direct Investments**

10. The University will not make any material direct investments in fossil fuel exploration and extraction companies (N.B., presently the University does not make any direct investments except in a listed real estate and a listed infrastructure investment fund).

11. The University should consider allocating a portion of the Endowment Fund to return-seeking climate impact investments, such as low carbon technology innovations. Such investments may include climate thematic innovations among other objectives to ensure sufficient and appropriate diversification.

**Active Investments through Managers**

12. All active equity managers of the Endowment and Pension Funds to integrate ESG, align with the University’s carbon exposure reduction strategy, and provide carbon footprint reporting for Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions by the end of 2021. Request that they also conduct climate risk assessments, including a climate scenario analysis, by 2023. Similarly, active fixed income managers and real asset managers should do so by 2023 (carbon footprint) and 2025 (climate risk assessments).

13. It is expected that with a focus on climate risk and the integration of ESG, the University’s active equity managers will not hold any material positions in fossil fuel exploration and extraction companies by 2025.

14. Active managers may hold “transition” investments (equity, green bonds, or direct investments) to support climate change transitions in fossil fuel companies and other high

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\(^4\) Global companies, information services, and accounting standard setters are refining their methods to estimate and report on their carbon footprint year to year. Should such changes in methodology materially impact the carbon footprint estimates associated with the University Endowment and Pension holdings, it may be appropriate to restate the targets.

\(^5\) Carbon offset is an action or activity (such as the planting of trees or carbon sequestration) that compensates for the emission of carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases to the atmosphere.
carbon emitters provided that these companies have climate action and transition plans that are substantial, credible, and include verified science-based targets to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

15. Managers will be monitored and their investment decisions will be assessed to ensure they are aligned with the University’s Responsible Investing Policy (including the carbon exposure reduction strategy) and abide by their own ESG policies and commitments. If they are not aligned, they will be terminated after due process.

Passive Investments
16. It is recognized that there may be risk management and other benefits to allocating a portion of the Endowment and Pension Fund portfolios to low-cost, market-wide passive index fund investments. It is anticipated that over time, the carbon intensity of these funds will reduce as companies implement their carbon reduction and climate action plans, and capital markets fully price in climate transition and stranded asset risks. The University should monitor and disclose the fossil fuel exploration and extraction industry exposure, as well as the carbon footprint of these passive investments by 2025.

17. The 2026 update review should assess market developments and determine if further action is required with respect to passive equity investments to meet 2030 carbon exposure reduction targets. In anticipation of that review, development of ESG, low carbon, Fossil Free Index and exchange-traded funds should be monitored and assessed over the near term.

Engagement
18. Assessment of external managers’ ESG and climate risk management commitment will include monitoring of their engagement with companies directly and through collectives, and their proxy voting on climate issues.

19. The University should also consider joining forces with a collective engaging with industry on climate change in Canada and one that operates globally.

Responsible Investing Policy
20. It is recommended that the proposed investment principles, a risk appetite that includes climate risk and agreed carbon exposure reduction targets, views on climate change investment opportunities, disclosure commitments, and an engagement strategy be included in a comprehensive Responsible Investing Policy for the University and the Investment Guidelines and Statement of Investment Policy (SIPP) for the Endowment and Pension Funds.
Appendix A - Responsible Investing Advisory Group Participants

Members
Sheryl Kennedy, Finance & Investment Committee member (chair)
Jean Andrey, dean of environment
Jagdeep Bachher, Finance & Investment Committee member
Angela Carter, faculty representative
Truzaar Dordi, student representative
Petra Duff, student representative
Russell Hiscock, Finance & Investment Committee member
Dennis Huber, vice-president, administration and finance
Mike Grivicic, associate university secretary

Expert Advisors
Elizabeth Demers, faculty member - School of Accounting and Finance
Sarah Hadley, Director of Finance
Mat Thijssen, Director of Sustainability
Olaf Weber, faculty member - School of Environment, Enterprise and Development

The committee was able to invite faculty, staff, students, the Chair of the Board of Governors and/or other governors as guests to meetings to provide further insight, depth and perspective to discussions when/if needed. The committee welcomed involvement from the following individuals:
Zainab Ashraf, student
Guy Brodsky, student
Cindy Forbes, Chair of the Board of Governors
Lesley Johnston, student
Finance and Investment Committee’s Advisory Group on Responsible Investments

Terms of Reference
The University of Waterloo recognizes that climate change is widespread and accelerating, impacting the world in large-scale and minute ways that change how we live, work and look to the future. As such, the University is committed to further developing and following a long-term strategy towards a “net-zero carbon” future while providing short and mid-term interventions to mitigate the impact of climate change.

Context
In addition to many academic and research programs/activities taking place across all disciplines, the following are examples of a number of key activities and the context under which the group operates:

- In 2015, the President’s Advisory Committee on Environmental Sustainability was established to develop and monitor compliance with the University’s Policy on Environmental Sustainability and advance campus sustainability through the Environmental Sustainability Strategy, including the development of its first climate action plan.
- Shortly thereafter in 2016, the Responsible Investing Working Group was established which culminated in the 2018 Board approval of its recommendations to integrate Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) factors into the University’s investment processes.
- The integration of ESG into the University’s investment processes continues to evolve as ESG data quality improves and more corporations commit to transparent goals and reporting.
- Waterloo has become a signatory to the UN Principles for Responsible Investment as well as the Investing to Address Climate Change Charter for Canadian Universities.
- Waterloo is the host institution of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network Canadian chapter, and a founding member of the University Global Coalition, both mobilizing the SDGs.
- Through partnership with WWF Canada’s Living Planet on Campus program, Waterloo supports recognition of extracurricular student activities related to sustainability.
- Waterloo has fostered active local sustainability and climate change partnerships, including being a pledging partner of Sustainable Waterloo Region’s Regional Sustainability Initiative, a founding member of the Region of Waterloo’s TravelWise program, and through representation of multiple staff and faculty on sustainability-related municipal advisory committees and civil society governing bodies.
- Since 2009, Waterloo has been a signatory to the Council of Ontario Universities’ Going Greener pledge.
- Transparent third-party reporting on sustainability progress has been prioritized through membership in the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education and Silver rating in AASHE’s Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System.
- Climate change and sustainability are referenced throughout the University’s 2020-25 Strategic Plan, including sustainability as part of a signature commitment and taking meaningful action on climate change.
- Reorganization of the University’s Sustainability Office under the Office of the President and appointment of the Director of Sustainability will further support all action on climate and sustainability.
- The University is committed to transitioning to a low carbon economy in all facets of its activities and has committed to carbon neutrality in Shift Neutral.
It is, however, further recognized that climate change is a significant systemic risk that crosses all sectors and represents both investment risks and opportunities during the transition to a low-carbon economy and the University must continue to evolve its investment strategies towards net zero carbon targets. Peer institutions are beginning to take steps in this direction, and a growing number of private and public financial bodies are taking stronger action on identifying the risks and opportunities resultant from the necessary shift to a low-carbon future. Waterloo can and must explore this diligently. The evolution and transition to carbon neutral investments is intimately connected to the above actions and requires targeted and inclusive effort to understand and respond. As such, a focused Advisory Group to the Board of Governors’ Finance & Investment Committee will undertake this work.

The Advisory Group will consider and identify options that support the University’s transition to carbon neutrality within its investment portfolios while being cognizant that the objective of all University investment portfolios is to achieve appropriate risk-adjusted returns. In doing so, the advisory group will recommend short- and long-term options to the Finance & Investment Committee. The group will:

- be consultative and transparent to all members of the University of Waterloo community;
- have members who are committed to a collegial, objective, and solutions-minded approach to the work;
- draw upon resources from within and external to the university, including those identified below;
- consider the need for and invite guests or experts as required to fulfill its mandate;
- consult with the Pension Investment Committee and the Pension & Benefits Committee as required;
- consider whether third-party consultants might be engaged on a limited basis if appropriate;
- establish a common lexicon;
- identify short- and long-term options for the University to consider which will bolster and/or potentially accelerate its delivery of its commitments to responsible investment and carbon neutrality; and, as such
- will have a mandate to deliver a report to the Finance & Investment Committee and, subsequently, to the Board of Governors at its June 2021 meeting on these options and recommendations while providing regular updates to the Finance & Investment Committee and the Board of Governors as appropriate.

Suggested Membership:

- Chair: Sheryl Kennedy
- Three members of the University of Waterloo Board of Governors’ Finance & Investment Committee (TBD)
  - Jean Andrey, dean of environment
  - Dennis Huber, vice-president, administration and finance
  - Angela Carter, faculty representative
  - Truzaar Dordi, student representative
  - Petra Duff, student representative
- A secretary will be provided by the Secretariat

In addition:

- The committee may invite faculty, staff, students, the Chair of the Board of Governors and/or other governors as guests to meetings to provide further insight, depth and perspective to discussions when/if needed.

Resources:

- Mat Thijssen, Director of Sustainability
- Olaf Weber, faculty member
- Elizabeth Demers, School of Accounting and Finance
- Representative from Finance, as appropriate
- Other resources as required based on the mandate and activities of the Group

Meeting Schedule: Meetings will be scheduled every other week, February through May.
WUSA Committee Terms of Reference

Governance Committee

VISION STATEMENT
The Governance Committee aims to implement best practices at the Board of Directors and Students’ Council. WUSA’s governance should promote accountability and transparency, while ensuring compliance with applicable law, our Letters Patent, Bylaws, and any other applicable agreements.

GOVERNING AUTHORITY
The Committee shall report to the Board of Directors and Students’ Council. The following governing documents relate to this Committee’s mandate:

a. Letters Patent Object 2
b. Bylaw Articles 7.6(4)d, g; 8.7(5)g, among others
c. WUSA Long Range Plan 2020-2025, Objective 1(b) Letters Patent Objects 3 and 7

MEMBERSHIP

a. The President, who shall be Chair;
b. The Speaker of Students’ Council (or Deputy Speaker if the President is Speaker);
c. Two (2) voting members of Students’ Council;
d. The Chair of the Board;
e. Two (2) non-executive Directors;
f. The General Manager, or designate, as a non-voting resource member;
g. The Governance Manager, as a non-voting resource member;
h. The Secretary of the Corporation or designate, as a non-voting resource member; and,
i. Any other non-voting resource member, where approved by a majority vote of the committee.

POWERS & RESPONSIBILITIES
The Committee shall be responsible for:

a. Ensuring effective operations of the Board, Students’ Council, and their committees;
b. Maintaining a yearly calendar of regular governance activities, including transition and the Annual General Meeting
c. Periodical review of the organization’s governing documents, with the power to propose amendments;
d. Overseeing orientation and training of new members of the Board and Students’ Council;
e. Approving the Annual Plan based on adherence to the organization’s strategic objective, as identified in the Long Range Plans; and,
f. Communicating changes to the organization’s governance model to members and staff through the President
WUSA Fee Review Report

Executive Summary
Based on 2019 regulations introduced by the Ontario Government, WUSA was charged to create an optional fee model where fees that were judged to not be related to health and safety, buildings, or other essential services were made to be optional for students before their point of payment preceding every term. This legislation was struck down by the Ontario Superior Court of Justice; citing that since student associations are separate legal entities from universities and colleges, there is “no statutory authority authorizing Cabinet or the Minister to interfere in the internal affairs of these student associations.” In short, the legislation was undemocratic. A summary of the key points of the decision can be found in Appendix B.

A survey of other Ontario student unions shows that most of all other associations defaulted back to the compulsory model immediately. WUSA executives and council decided to continue the concept of optional fees to further study the feasibility of the model.

Budget and Appropriations Committee was tasked with understanding if the optional fees model was sustainable and efficient. This report outlines Budget and Appropriations Committee’s conclusion that the structure is not an efficient model and the committee recommends moving back to mandatory fees.

Background: WUSA Fee Changes
Part I: SWOT Analysis of the Current State of Fees
Strengths:
- Maximizes transparency as the membership fee is split up into 9 sections
- Students have the choice to opt-out of paying some fees and having access rescinded

Weaknesses:
- Departments supported by optional fees have difficulty in accurately estimating fee revenue and therefore budgeting accordingly becomes a challenging task.
- Listing all 9 fees on a student’s account, though done for transparency, provokes a sense of sticker shock instead of reassurance.
- Resources need to be spent to explain the optional nature of fees and what students will be losing.
- Most of the optional fees are impossible to regulate access for; and those that are, have additional administrative costs. (Additionally, we must assess whether WUSA is the type of organization to turn students away from use of our services based on their payment of a fee)
- Lists of paying members are no longer kept by the societies themselves and therefore they have lost some autonomy in knowing their membership fee revenue. This leads some of their services to suffer from the free rider problem.
- The way fees are assessed is not a perfect system and we have hundreds of students every term who ask for help with changes to align with what they were expecting to pay with respect to FT status vs PT.
• When we do finally get numbers of what students have paid, it is a rather incomplete report and requires IT to do further analysis to disseminate.
• To brace for the impact of opt outs, fees have increased. What used to total just over $63 in 2019, has risen to over $87 not including tax or the capital fee. The reason behind some of this increase were student-approved expansions of WUSA supports and services but not all of it.
• Because of the complexity of the SCI-introduced fee system, more accounting and IT resources need to be used in reconciling figures from Finance.

Opportunities:
• The Student Choice Initiative was repealed in November 2019 and we have had an opportunity to implement and improve a newer system for fee assessment.
• We had the opportunity to analyze the effectiveness and impact of an optional fee model on the organization and its ability to maintain expected service levels.
• This situation has led to an improved relationship with UW Finance, who assists WUSA with reporting numbers.
• WUSA IT has built a member management system to manage and enforce service offerings based on students’ fee payments. This system will be used in the future to facilitate student discounts.

Threats:
• Creates an inconsistent and ineffective support system in terms of the various departments of the organization. It makes it okay for some to call for the elimination of a service for their positions and the response becoming “you can opt out of the advocacy fee if you do not support it.” This reaction dilutes the strength of the organization in a sense that it no longer looks like a cohesive set of collaborative departments.
• Threat to community and student campus culture if some students opt out of fees which aim to support and develop that culture.
• The SCI Repeal is being challenged by the government and an appeal is in progress. We are already adhering to the system laid out in the regulation and therefore WUSA would maintain the current system if it is reinstated.
• The Covid-19 pandemic led to higher opt out levels as students felt less supported and were under further financial stress from the University’s mandatory fees. The inconsistency of opt-out rates due to frequent economic shocks in Canada result in an unreliable financial situation for the organization.

Part II: Changes in Response to Student Choice Initiative

Before Fall 2019 when the changes were imposed, the Feds membership fee was 63.46. During the first two terms of SCI being instituted, this amount stayed the same. To brace for impact, some of WUSA’s new projects and hiring were put on hold until there was enough data to form an understanding of what actual income from fees might look like. It was in preparation for the spring 2020 term that WUSA passed changes to adapt fee amounts to ensure the fiscal health of the organization. The capital program fund $15.00 compulsory fee was also introduced as this had been an initiative to introduce for
a few terms. These increases and added overheads compensated for greater opt out rates to cover those losses. The spring 2020 changes were submitted and approved before there was an estimation of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. During this spring 2020 term, WUSA did not charge the events optional fee or clubs optional fee to any students as those systems were not fully ready to be delivered online. Spring was a term of transition in preparation for the mostly online fall 2020 term.

The second round of fee changes focused on the community building services optional fee and health and safety compulsory fee but also slightly increased the other seven WUSA membership fees. The larger changes to these two highlighted fees came in response to a General Meeting motion which made Student-run Services coordinators part-time staff roles. The previously waived events and clubs funding fees were assessed as those services were ready for virtual delivery.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fee Category</th>
<th>F19/W20 Terms</th>
<th>S20 Term</th>
<th>F20/W21 Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>6.30*</td>
<td>6.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Building Services</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>4.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clubs Funding</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>3.23*</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uni Advocacy</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt Advocacy</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>7.68</td>
<td>8.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corp Act Compliance</td>
<td>20.16</td>
<td>24.05</td>
<td>24.58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Support</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>6.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Safety</td>
<td>17.72</td>
<td>19.92</td>
<td>24.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLC Facilities</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>4.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Program Fund</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (not including CPF)</td>
<td>63.46</td>
<td>78.33</td>
<td>87.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These fees were not assessed because the services were not fully transitioned to online.

Effects of Optional Fees

Explanation term-over-term.

We have two terms of usable data under normal circumstances: fall 2019 and winter 2020. While the pandemic started in the winter term, all fee amounts, and payments were settled when the shutdown began. During the fall 2019 term opt-out rates ranged from 18% to 25% with the highest opt-out rates coming from the two advocacy fees. Data also suggested that the number of students who checked the optional fees page was relatively low. We will see that this trend did not hold.

In winter 2020, refund rates shot up as students were more aware and had less distractions compared to the start of a new school year in September. Opt-out rates had a new range of 25% to 34%. Awareness of the optional fees page on Quest increased drastically; about 25% more students were marked as checking the page.

We do not have a reliable set of data for the spring 2020 term as many changes were made to adapt for Covid. WUSA did not have optional fees in spring 2019 so it is not helpful to do the year-over-year comparison.
When viewing figure i, we can see that fall 2020, the first stabilized term after virtual service adjustments were made, opt-out rates decreased slightly from the winter 2020 term but this is explained by a higher number of students who did not check the optional fees page than the winter. Opt-out rates ranged from 23% to 31%.

The most recent term we have data for, winter 2021 shows the most concerning opt-out numbers. One external shock that may have caused this was the Student Services-Athletics fee being charged in a mandatory capacity at a total of $101.68. This led to a lot of student backlash and drove more students to claw back as many fees as possible. Opt-out rates ranged from 43% to 47% and more than half of all enrolled students checked the optional fees page.
Projections would indicate that continuing with optional fees is not a sustainable practice as less students feel connected to campus and are finding it harder to justify paying fees for campus services. As WUSA and society fees are the only optional fees that they can get refunded, they will – even if the services they are disgruntled about paying for are mandatory university services.

Rough calculations for W21 term based on UW Finance’s early report:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fee</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Opted out #s</th>
<th>Paid #s</th>
<th>$ Not Collected</th>
<th>$ Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WUSA Advocacy - Government</td>
<td>8.17</td>
<td>10822</td>
<td>11139</td>
<td>88,415.74</td>
<td>91,005.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WUSA Advocacy - University</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>10483</td>
<td>11147</td>
<td>49,479.76</td>
<td>52,613.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>WUSA Clubs*</td>
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<td>10062</td>
<td>11151</td>
<td>36,223.20</td>
<td>40,143.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>WUSA Community-Building Serv*</td>
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<td>10968</td>
<td>11144</td>
<td>47,710.80</td>
<td>48,476.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WUSA Events*</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>10932</td>
<td>11139</td>
<td>72,807.12</td>
<td>74,185.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though winter 2021 has the highest rate of opt outs, we can still see that the median student is still paying the full amount of fees. The goal of this fee review is to ensure fees have the most efficient impact for the average student. If we can reduce the amount charged to students by making fees mandatory, we will see aggregate savings for students overall.

The student choice model leads to a moral hazard problem where more students opt out of fees but might still be able to take advantage of the benefits of those fees in terms of policies that affect all students and an overall benefit to campus culture. This moral hazard of optional fees creates a vicious circle of needing to increase fees, putting an even heavier weight on those who choose to pay them.

**Recommendations Going Forward**

Since the Student Choice Initiative was repealed, we can reinstate mandatory fees. We have shown that the fee impact on the average student could be lower compared to the current semi-optional model.

We will look at the 5 optional fees below to clarify if they make sense as optional and if there is an efficient way to enforce them.

- **WUSA Advocacy – Government:**
  - The only members we know are directly connected to this portfolio are the AVPs working on it; however, the benefits of the advocacy work with government relations are seen by a majority, if not all, students. This presents a free rider problem which is impossible to avoid.

- **WUSA Advocacy – University:**
  - Extremely similar explanation to government advocacy above: free riders can take advantage of fee-paying students.

- **WUSA Clubs:**
  - The only members we can verify against fee payment records are the 3 club signing authorities and 12 base members needed to make up the minimum 15 members of a
club. There is somewhat of a method to enforce fee-payment for the 3 authorities since we collect their contact information but we do not collect personal information from the other 12 members. With over 150 clubs, it would be extremely inefficient to check and contact every one of these over 2000 students running clubs, not to mention the tens of thousands more who attend and participate in club activities which are not intricately tracked. If any of these thousands of individuals do not pay, we would need to process payments for them which is also extremely time consuming.

- **WUSA Community-building Services:**
  - WUSA only collects contact information for the 2 service coordinators and some info for the 3-8 execs, depending on the service. There are sometimes 15-20 main volunteers who help run the service and an indefinite number of students who engage with service spaces, offerings, and events. It is not possible to police fee-payments for the thousands of students with access to these. Furthermore, it does not foster an inclusive and supportive environment for these services to turn away individuals who opted out but still expect assistance.

- **WUSA Events:**
  - This is the only area we have had some success in enforcing fee-payment before; however, the efficiency of this process is debatable. In fall 2019, during Welcome Week, WUSA full-time and part-time staff took shifts at all in-person events to check student Watcards against the database of paid students. Over one hundred students who had opted-out, opted back in (with a 20% admin fee added). The total funds collected from the admin fee did not come close to the total staff resources spent on the fee enforcement or the awareness campaign.
  - The management of this process has been less successful since the pandemic began since it is much more difficult to enforce at virtual events. The aim during the pandemic has been to maximize engagement and though we warn students that they will not be able to engage, it is not in the best interest of student culture to prevent almost half of students from engaging in events.

The above points show that there are good arguments as to why these do not make sense as optional fees and it is inefficient and often ineffective to monitor access to them. Keeping them optional when they are not possible to monitor with 100% accuracy may lead to students continuing to use the services while choosing not to pay for those services.

**New Buckets:**

Moving the 9 fees, 5 optional and 4 mandatory, into 3 understandable groups seems to be the best plan to ensure that we maximize affordability and transparency going forward. With no more optional “exclusive” fees, students would not need to pay the tax on the three fees that HST applied to and this would further reduce the financial burden.

There is a date set for the appeal to the Student Choice Initiative repeal decision on March 27, 2021. If the Ontario Government is successful in bringing the initiative back, Optional fees are to remain as they are, and the current fees will be increased by CPI as in the table below (SCI Model with CPI). If the mandatory model is passed, then fees for FY2022 are represented in the last column (Mandatory Model with CPI). CPI for 2020 was 0.7%.
New Fee Buckets:

- Bucket Fee 1: Student Life
- Bucket Fee 2: Academic Support and Advocacy
- Bucket Fee 3: Operations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New bucket ideas:</th>
<th>SCI Model</th>
<th>SCI Model Bucket Total</th>
<th>Mandatory Model*</th>
<th>SCI Model with CPI</th>
<th>Mandatory Model with CPI</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Life</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Community-Building Services</td>
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<td>Clubs Funding</td>
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<td>Health and Safety</td>
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<td>Events</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Academic Support &amp; Advocacy</td>
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<td>Academic Support</td>
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<td>University Advocacy</td>
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<td>Government Advocacy</td>
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<td>$89.56</td>
<td>$79.41</td>
<td>$90.18</td>
<td>$79.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Reductions were made to the portions that were previously optional.

Other FY2022 Fees:

Not included above, is the Orientation Fee, SRP and Capital Program Fund. Though it was not charged in Fall 2020, a CPI increase should be approved for the Orientation fee in the event that it is charged in Fall 2021 or to ensure that this fee is at the necessary amount whenever orientation is able to resume as normal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fee</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation Fee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Refugee Program</td>
<td>$5.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Program Fund</td>
<td>$15.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUMMARY OF PROPOSED FEE REVIEW

After the Student Choice Initiative was struck down in November 2019, the optional vs. compulsory structure brought in by SCI was maintained while other plans were made. These plans were to conduct an analysis of the university and student government regulatory environment and set out how to decide a fee’s optional/mandatory status. This evaluation was to be conducted but stalled due to the court decision and continued to be stalled awaiting the Ontario Government’s appeal. Now over 12 months later, no appeal has come and the Covid 19 Pandemic has changed many facets of campus life.

VPOF Velling’s SCI Repeal Memorandum (hereinafter, “the memorandum”) mentions the need to a re-evaluation of undergraduate ancillary fees which do not already fall under the SSAC Fees Protocol purview. VPOF Velling mentioned a “vacuum of procedural and regulatory framework for undergraduate ancillary fees,” and the November 2019 document was an attempt to decide next steps in a new environment.

PROPOSED REVIEW PROCESS

Student council must determine the status of fees as compulsory or optional. By precedent, the BAC acts as the central body responsible to organize the approach including:

- **Internal Review** – Society Executives, Student Senators, Service Coordinators, Members of Council and Board committees
- **External Review** – Imprint, Endowment Funds & Foundations, OUSA, SRP, StudentCare and other admin service vendors

These reviews will aim to understand the impacts of optional fees on Quest compared to previous structures. Did policing make sense and work for the affected optional fees? Affected internal and external parties may make recommendations within their jurisdiction.

The Committee will engage key university stakeholders about what was found in the above reviews and feedback and make recommendations on classification of fees, unbundling of buckets. These are the stakeholders that should be solicited for advice:

- President of the University
- VP Academic & Provost of the University
- Associate Provost, Students
- VP Administration and Finance
- AVP Government Relations
Finally, the committee should hold public consultations to engage directly with students. The memorandum recommended holding these at three different areas around campus to ensure equitable access for students. This should be adjusted in Covid times accordingly.

Budget and Appropriations Committee Next Steps for the Fee Review:

1. Structure a review schedule to make sure relevant stakeholder input can be collected and considered
2. Construct a report and recommendations to be reviewed by Executive committees of Board and Council before finalizing can take place
3. Present the final report to Student Council for consideration and acceptance

ORIGINAL AGENDA ITEM PRESENTED:

It is the intention of the executive committee, that this memorandum shall, when entered into the record at the December 1st, 2019 meeting of Council, constitute an item of business arising under Agenda Item 4.3. At time of introduction of this memorandum into the record, the following resolution be considered:

**Be it resolved that** the Students’ Council accepts the memorandum of the Executive Committee regarding the undergraduate ancillary fees review and public consultation considering the recent Court decision quashing the Student Choice Initiative, as presented;

**Be it further resolved that** Council directs the Budget and Appropriations Committee to take necessary actions and employ the necessary resources as may be required for the execution of this resolution;

**Be it further resolved that** the Budget and Appropriations Committee shall issue a final report to Council no later than the February regular meeting of Council.
Appendix B

Student Choice Initiative – Decision Summary


- the government had not explained why they deemed student association fees “non-essential.” Athletics, meanwhile — “which are much more expensive,” the decision noted — were deemed essential for students to fund
- of all the components of ancillary fees charged to college and university students, only one — student association fees — was deemed by Cabinet to be non-essential,”
- the decision noted that university and college student associations were private not-for-profit corporations, which Ontario does not fund or control, directly or indirectly. “The autonomy of universities, as private institutions, is fundamental to the academic freedom that is their hallmark.

Summary of Court Case: from this link to the decision

- Ontario Cabinet directed the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities to direct colleges and universities to “allow” students to opt-out of “fees related to student associations” and other “ancillary fees”.

Applicants argued:
- These directives were inconsistent with how colleges and universities are regulated in Ontario
- Directives were made in bad faith
- There was a failure to notify or consult student associations (lacked procedural fairness)

Ontario argued:
- It does not make sense that this “core policy choice” is reviewable by the courts as the government has power to make decisions about public spending

Court looked into:
- Case hinges on if the SCI directive fits into the current way the government typically makes policy w.r.t colleges and universities.

Was it legal?
- Colleges and universities are private institutions that are public-assisted but not inherently publicly funded.
- There is no statutory authority authorizing Cabinet or the Minister to interfere in the internal affairs of these student associations.
- These universities have internal self-governance
- Membership in student associations is mandatory (interesting point for online students)
- Membership fees are decided by internal democratic processes
- Colleges ARE public institutions but the student associations should be allowed to carry out their own normal activities since they are funded by student funds rather than government funds.
- Students associations are NFP Corporations and the government cannot infringe on their ability to get funding through their normal process.

Notes:
Waterloo students never voted in the Feds established democratic process to make fees optional. According to the court case, the policy of optional fees was unjustifiably forced onto the universities to force on the student association.

Other schools went back to their normal ways for the following reasons:
1. They wanted to stop bleeding money from defunding (many schools put their whole fee as optional instead of separating into essential and optional and thus opt-outs had a greater impact).
2. The student associations never had policies that went through their internal governance structures to have these fees be optional so they reverted back to normal operations.

Specific to WUSA situation:

Current methods of marking up fees to account for opt outs could be argued as “unfair to students” since no internal decision to keep opt outs was officially made; however, one could assume this was the whole intent behind S. Velling’s fee review.
WUSA Workforce Plan 2021

WUSA Workforce Plan

HIRING | WORKFORCE ANALYSIS | SPACE MANAGEMENT
PRASHANT KUMAR PATEL
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Summary

As WUSA prepares to service our members in a post-covid campus environment, we are faced with significant challenges ahead to help ensure our members get delivered the best available service and programs on their return to campus. With over 50% of our students stepping foot on our campus for the first time ever it is critical that we are ready to service our members.

WUSA will require keeping up with the demands of a campus with ongoing increased enrollment, new expectations from members and changing methods of delivering services and support. Our members will be expecting to engage with our programs and services through various web-based journeys and will be expecting modern, digital, and seamless experiences throughout their post-secondary career.

With the start of the new fiscal year, some critical business decisions are ahead of us to ensure WUSA continues deliver high quality service and support to our membership. Areas of focus include hiring for currently vacant positions, introducing new roles and understanding and planning for how our staff will operate within our office spaces and environment today and tomorrow. The proposed roadmap will help ensure our organizations projects and priorities will be well supported, our service levels are well maintained and our organization will be able to operate as effectively as possible with the return to campus.
Hiring Que

The hiring for many roles has been on pause, with an informal hiring freeze as priorities and projects have been continuously changing. As we have more certainty around a return to campus, it is important the hiring activities resume to ensure programs can continue to effectively operate.

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Workforce Analysis

Overview

Gaps in our workforce stem from a decade of growth in enrollment, development new programs and services, and the overall growth of the members serviced on a daily basis within our organization’s operations. Some key figures illustrating these growth areas include:

- $25M in revenue projected across all funds/companies in 2021 vs < $15M 2011
- Major shift in revenues going to services/programs vs commercial operations in past (Fed Hall, Bomber, recent temporary closures).
- 5 companies/funds in 2011 vs 12 companies in 2021 (slc, societies, imprint)
- Major shift to delivery of goods and services through digital channels
- Increasing our capacity by digitizing processes, systems, and services
- Continuing to service the changing needs of our diverse membership.

2011 - $6.5M Assets | 5 companies | $15M consolidated revenue ($3.3M commercial) | 25k members
2020 - $16.8M Assets | 13 companies | $25M consolidated revenue ($5M commercial) | 33k members

Consolidated revenues up 67% | Total companies/funds over 200% | Total members increased by 32%

2011 FTS Count – 25 | 2020 FTS Count – 33
Major Projects

Equity Efforts – WUSA’s long range plan calls for several areas to be actioned around efforts supporting equity and inclusion-based efforts on campus. From helping our marginalized students/groups to ensuring resources, education and advocacy, this is an area our organization has committed to as a major focus in the years to come.

New Spaces – from an additional 70k sq ft added to the student centre, to up and coming food and beverage outlets and social spaces, the SLC is going to get busier. More traffic generally translates to more activities within the student union that require various supports.

Ecommerce – from ticketing, ordering food to booking a room, our roadmap calls for a large, robust and modern system handling all our member scenarios to provide exceptional user experiences.

Membership/Loyalty – introduction of member management, robust handling of opt-ins, controls for attendance and participation for those that pay to play. Introducing loyalty program has been long overdue, our technology exists, we require personnel to assist with deployment.

Expanded Support – new roles in advocacy, hired personnel behind services etc... generally produce new projects which require technological and fiscal support.

Digital Transformations – stakeholder relation software, Clubs Admin Systems, Vote.Wusa.ca, improvements, digitizing expense submission, quicker reports and analysis and less friction is a common goals and projects we have in progress that we do not want to slow down on.
Road Ahead & Improvements

This plan helps ensure our operations can keep up and meet the needs of the organization for the next 12-24 months. Further review of projects and overall labour force will need to be routinely monitored to ensure resources are available.

New project management guidelines to be implemented in FY22 will help provide insight into resource allocation, future workforce demands and productivity business intelligence. All major projects in the upcoming fiscal year will require project charters outlining end to end resource needs, deliverables, timelines, and success measures.

WUSA will take the opportunity to also make some changes to the hiring schedule and process of the upcoming hiring efforts to modernize and strengthen our recruitment and onboarding. Some of the following initiatives and goals include:

- Redefine hiring panels ensuring diversity in makeup of skills, experiences, gender, race etc....
- Ensuring standardized hiring questions for all roles/hires to ensure hiring managers are looking for consistent values and beliefs within operations.
- Restructure end-end onboarding program, laying out a standard protocol all new hires require to follow. This can lead to similar strengthened experiences when onboarding part time staff or volunteers.
Proposed Roles

Administration/General Office

**Administrator Officer** [New Role]

**Scope** – Provide administrative support and project coordination for the General Manager and Senior Leadership team.

**Impact** - As our organizations project list is larger than ever, administrative support will help allow the senior leaders, particularly WUSA’s General Manager to remain as connected to these projects in some meaningful capacity. The role will take administrative duties off Senior Leaders to help allow greater bandwidth for managerial focus. This role will allow our team to continue to take on the new projects and challenges and provide the extra capacity, so we do not slow down.

Funding Source: General Office/WUSA member Fee

**Senior Accountant** [2 x Existing, Changing Role]

**Scope** – Provide senior accounting financial management and advisory on assigned funds.

**Impact** - in 2009, WUSA managed <5 funds. Today, we oversee 13 funds/companies and growing. With the introduction of our societies and recently publications, in addition to Engineering, it is important we provide robust accounting services to the funds we are accountable for. With the increase in complexities of our funding, reconciliations, and business systems we need to align our accounting teams skills and experience to ensure timely and accurate results. The number of transactions processed are growing daily, controls and compliance are critical, and meaningful and timely insight is important for $25M in annual revenues to know where we are going.

Funding Source: General Office/WUSA member Fee

Campus Engagement

**Equity Specialist** [New Role]

**Scope** – Provide equity insight, analysis and strategy of equity based efforts across WUSA.

**Impact** - As the organizations needs for more work towards equity-based initiatives across campus we require a subject matter expert around this important and sensitive matter. WUSA needs to be more proactive in our overall approach with respect to equity and inclusion efforts by beginning many projects and initiatives with an equity/inclusion lens first!

Funding Source: General Office/WUSA member Fee
Student Publications

Publications Manager [New Role, Existing Budget/Funding]
Scope – Provide publication support to help deliver successful student-run publications on campus.
Impact – As the long-range plan calls to continue to support efforts around student publications, it is important that we have a strong staff role to help deliver the vision of publication committees to come in the years to come. This role will help re-define the new campus newspaper, in addition to help support the growth and development of society run papers and journals.
Funding Source: Publications Fee/Imprint Fee

Building
Manager Desk Operations [New]
Scope – Help provide leadership to front line service execution of WUSA front desk & Turnkey.
Impact – With over 200,000 square feet of space, the SLC will be one of Canada’s largest student centres managed by a student union. With the additional expected traffic and services in this building, we hope this role can help modernize the front desk experience for our members. By providing leadership and guidance to the front desk operations, our building manager will be able to focus on leasehold improvements and bigger projects to help meet our common goals.
Funding Source – SLC Operations/WUSA Building Fee (through SSAC)

IT
Developer [New]
Scope - Help free up development efforts around vote.wusa, and day to day integrations to allow senior developer to focus on membership + ecommerce projects in the upcoming year.
Impact – Will enable senior developer to focus on building our e-commerce solutions that will be $3M+ annually over next five years with thousands of transactions daily. Years of development are required in this area as channels of delivery are changing every day, the only thing they all have in common is that a programmer is required to run a successful large operation ahead and keep up with user expectations of digital experiences.
Funding Source: General Office/WUSA member Fee

Business Systems Specialist [Existing, Splitting Role from within Accounting]
Scope – Lead all functional expansions and rollouts of business software (ERP, Loyalty, Membership, Ecommerce)
Impact- This role will lead the charge to speed up the front end/functional portions of all new business systems and software’s we rollout. From loyalty, membership, e-commerce and point of sale, as our services and operations continue to onboard these technologies, we need to ensure compliance with permissions, configurations, functionality, and financial accuracy.

Funding Source: General Office/WUSA member Fee
Commercial

Retail/Hospitality Assistant Managers (Co-op)

Scope – Provide managerial coverage on the retail/hospitality sales floors of WUSA commercial operations. (Note: Assistant Managers roles within kitchen operations will remain as technical skill is required for food management)

Impact – With the investments in streamlining technologies, and various overheads we are faced with and less “sales days” compared to private operations, it is important our staffing dollars are effectively spent. This new strategy reduces full time staffing burden on our business units and provides more floor coverage to provide supervisory duties across our outlets during our business hours. Upwards of 10+ co-op roles a semester when we are back operating.

Funding Source – Self-funding through sales revenues
Driving our Long-Range Plan

The following roles will not only help enable WUSA to provide more resources and support to our project list, but the additional bandwidth will also enable WUSA management to help bring deliver results to the deliverables outlined in our Long-Range Plan.

1. We will make it easier and more accessible for students to engage with WUSA and our constituency societies. To accomplish this, we will
   A) Create a member management system to improve our connection with students, and allow members to document their experiences within WUSA
      ➢ The addition of the Developer and Business Systems specialist will directly help result in allowing resources to progress major development efforts around this goal.
   B) Review and implement recommendations from equity and governance audits to ensure WUSA is a place where every student can safely engage
      ➢ The addition of the Equity Specialist will directly help result in allowing resources to progress major development efforts around this goal.

2. We will continue our commitment from our last strategic plan to build belonging and campus engagement. To accomplish this, we will:
   A) Identify and address barriers to democratic participation and employment for marginalized students and staff to ensure greater accessibility of full-time, part-time, and volunteer roles
      ➢ The addition of the Equity Specialist will directly help result in allowing resources to progress major development efforts around this goal.
   B) Continue to expand and improve our Clubs Administration System by adjusting to the ongoing and changing needs of student clubs
      ➢ The addition of the Developer and Business Systems specialist will directly help result in allowing resources to progress major development efforts around this goal.
   C) Continue to expand WUSA services and operations beyond the Student Life Centre to meet students where they are, whether online or on campus
      ➢ The addition of the Front Desk Manager will directly help result in allowing resources to progress major development efforts around this goal.
3. We will support the continued personal and professional growth of our students and staff by offering worthwhile roles and new opportunities. To accomplish this, we will:

C) Recognize our staff as a limited but valuable resource in serving students; uphold their health and wellbeing by committing to reasonable workloads, and offering support from leadership when needed

➢ The addition of many of the roles will directly help result in allowing resources to progress major development efforts around this goal as the project list of many senior roles can help be elevated returning reasonable workloads to our staff work week.

D) Commit to organization-wide anti-racism efforts and training to ensure equity relationships with staff and students and overall, within our culture

➢ The addition of the Equity Specialist will directly help result in allowing resources to progress major development efforts around this goal.

4. We will continue to serve students with efficiency through our commercial services and operation of the Student Life Centre. To accomplish this, we will:

A) Prioritize the Lounge Plan

➢ The addition of the Front Desk Manager will directly help result in allowing resources to progress major development efforts around this goal as the Student Life Centre Operations Manager can allocate time to help develop this space.

C) Build infrastructure that supports successful student papers on campus and online

➢ The addition of the Publications Manager will directly help result in allowing resources to progress major development efforts around this goal.

5. We will increase student supports. To accomplish this, we will:

B) Evaluate services and programs to best support the needs of the student population, emphasizing supports for racialized, marginalized, and international students

➢ The addition of the Equity Specialist will directly help result in allowing resources to progress major development efforts around this goal. The further development of membership and our business systems to help deliver services will provide insight and detailed reporting to help identify the groups that need support the most.
New Role Summary

- Front Desk Manager – will be coming from SSAC Fee that has already been approved in 2016 when SLC expansion was approved.
- Assistant Area Food Manager – will be coming from business revenues.
- Publications Manager to be paid by existing fee covered by Student Publications Fee

Assuming FTE of 65,000 students, the required net WUSA fee increase is $5.08.

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<tr>
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FTE 65000
Space & Return to Campus

Under Construction – To be completed Spring 2021

Principles

- What type of coverage/in person access is acceptable?
- How we value work/life and environment balance
- What deliverables need to be hit to remain WFH arrangements?

Roles Work Criteria

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Highlights & Analysis

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**Highlights & Analysis**

Total F/T Roles 4
PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO COUNCIL PROCEDURES 15 AND 16

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SPECIAL PROJECTS FUND

A. OVERVIEW
   A.1. Purpose
        This procedure outlines the administration of the Special Projects Fund by the Internal Funding Committee.
   A.2. Date of Approval and Review
        This procedure shall be reviewed every two years or when the scope of the fund changes, whichever is sooner.

B. ELIGIBILITY FOR FUNDING
   B.1. Any club, service or commission is eligible to apply to receive additional funds for special projects. Feds members not officially affiliated with a club, service or commission are also eligible to apply for funding to support these initiatives independently.
   B.2. Any applicant must consent to the public release of their organization or affiliation, and, if approved for funding the following: their application package, the amount of funding allocated, and any associated documentation arising from the decision of the Internal Funding Committee in the distribution of funds to the applicant.

C. ADMINISTRATION OF THE SPECIAL PROJECTS FUND
   C.1. The Special Projects Fund will be administered by the Internal Funding Committee.
   C.2. All members of the committee shall fully disclose the names of clubs, services, and commissions with which they have a direct association and shall advise the committee when the member’s direct association is altered. No members of the committee who have a direct association with a club, service or commission may vote on items relating to the club, service or commission with which they have an association.
   C.3. The committee is empowered to grant funding to eligible applicants within the following requirements:
       a. Projects must benefit the student community at-large.
       b. Projects must not violate the corporate objects of the Federation of Students.
       c. Projects must not violate University of Waterloo Policy 33.
       d. The projects, their applicant, and any awarded funding or conditions shall be made public on the list of projects funded.
4. Applicants should submit their application at least three weeks before the project date in order to ensure enough time for review.
   1. Applications that are submitted less than three weeks in advance are not guaranteed to be decided on before the event/project date.
   2. Applications that are submitted after the project ends will not be considered.

5. The committee can request applicants resubmit their funding request if the project does not meet the requirements in [Section C.3].

6. The committee is empowered to make its funding conditional, provided that:
   1. The conditions are set out in writing; and
   2. The conditions are agreed to by all parties involved.

7. All funds committed to an approved project will be distributed through a reimbursement system.

8. The committee can choose to hold a follow-up meeting with groups and individuals that have been funded to review funded projects.

9. The committee can rescind any or all of the previously granted funding, in the event that:
   1. The funding was not used for the purpose that it was granted.
   2. If any or all the conditions attached to the funding were not satisfied in the view of the committee.
   3. The project did not satisfy the requirements set out in Section C.3.
   4. Project organizers have not exercised due diligence in preventing violations of University of Waterloo Policy 33.

10. The committee shall consider the reasons for the project not meeting the requirements as set out in Section C.3.

11. The committee may not make a decision to rescind any previously granted funding in advance of the prescribed follow-up meeting.

12. Internal Funding Committee decisions must be given in writing to the funding applicants.

D. APPEALS

1. Any group or individual may appeal a committee decision to rescind any or all of the previously granted funding to Students’ Council.
2. Any group or individual that wishes to appeal a committee decision must submit a written appeal to the President of the Federation of Students. The President must present the appeal at the next scheduled council meeting.

3. The President is not compelled to support the appeal, only to present it.

4. In deciding on such an appeal, Students’ Council shall consider both Section C.3 and the decision-making process of the committee.

5. The decision of Students’ Council on an appeal is final and may not be appealed.

E. PUBLIC DISCLOSURE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1. The Federation of Students shall maintain a list of all projects funded to be made publicly available to the membership and be listed on the Federation of Students’ website. This list shall include the:
   1. Applicant, their organization, or their affiliation;
   2. Project’s name and purpose;
   3. Term in which funding was approved;
   4. Amount granted; and,
   5. Projected budget breakdown, and the written decision of the Internal Funding Committee.

2. The Internal Funding Committee shall not authorize the transfer of funds for any applicant who refuses to comply with the above public disclosure requirements.

Commented [MC4]: I have asked the Web team to set up a section for this going forward.

Commented [MC5R4]: VPOF directs Accounting to do this.
The Equity, Opportunity and Innovation Fund

A. OVERVIEW

I. Purpose
This procedure outlines the administration of the Equity, Opportunity, and Innovation Fund by the Internal Funding Committee.

II. Date of Approval and Review
This procedure shall be reviewed every two years or when the scope of the fund changes, whichever is sooner. The percentage apportionment of the different components can be adjusted, based on use, at this time as well.

B. ELIGIBILITY FOR FUNDING

1. The Equity, Opportunity and Innovation (EOI) fund will provide funding to student projects and initiatives that will further the personal development of UW students, improve the campus culture, or improve student life at the University of Waterloo.

2. The EOI fund is divided into the following three categories. The following percentages are recommendations at the discretion of the committee:
   a. Equity (20%): This component of the fund will be dedicated to projects that
   b. Opportunity (20%): This component of the fund will be dedicated to projects that
   c. Innovation (60%): The component of the fund will be used to remove the financial barriers associated with the development of new student-run initiatives, projects, and/or events. If the project is intended to operate long-term, these funds shall act as 'seed funding', allowing the organiser to establish proof of concept to secure a more permanent revenue source. Any project funded under this portion should provide a continuing benefit to campus. One-time events are not excluded from this category.

Commented [MC6]: Added
3. The EOI Fund is not primarily intended for club, service or society projects, although exceptions shall be considered, at the discretion of the committee.

4. Applications to the EOI Fund should be tailored to a specific category to reflect the distinctions between them.

5. Any applicant must consent to the public release of their project or initiative and, if approved for funding the following: their application package, the amount of funding allocated, and any associated documentation arising from the decision of the Internal Funding Committee in the distribution of funds to the applicant.

C. ADMINISTRATION OF THE FUND

1. The Internal Funding Committee shall administer the EOI fund.

2. The committee can request applicants resubmit their funding requests if the project does not meet the requirements set out in Section B.

3. The committee is empowered to make its funding conditional, provided that:
   a. The conditions are set out in writing; and
   b. The conditions are agreed to by all parties involved.

4. Consideration will not be given for projects that have already occurred.

5. All funds committed to an approved project shall be delivered in accordance with the university’s endowment fund guidelines.

6. The committee can choose to hold a follow-up meeting with groups and individuals that have been funded to review funded projects.

7. The committee can rescind any or all of the previously granted funding, in the event that:
   a. The funding was not used for the purpose that it was granted.
   b. If any or all of the conditions attached to the funding were not satisfied in the view of the committee.
   c. The project did not satisfy the requirements set out in Section B.
   d. Project organizers have not exercised due diligence in preventing violations of University of Waterloo policy.

8. Once the Committee has decided to support a project, the Committee Chair will work with the applicant to provide the necessary documentation to the University of Waterloo’s Finance Department.
9. The committee will ensure that the applicant is aware of relevant endowment fund guidelines.

10. The committee shall make public on a list of projects funded, the project or initiative funded and any awarded funding or conditions.

D. PUBLIC DISCLOSURE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1. The Federation of Students shall maintain a list of all projects or initiatives funded to be made publicly available to the membership and be listed on the Federation of Students website. This list shall include the:
   a. Applicant, their organization, or their affiliation;
   b. Project’s name and purpose;
   c. Term in which funding was approved;
   d. Amount granted; and,
   e. Projected budget breakdown, and the written decision of the Internal Funding Committee.

2. The Internal Funding Committee shall not authorize the transfer of funds for any applicant who refuses to comply with the above public disclosure requirements.