

May 2, 2026

HOUSING EQUITY AT UC BERKELEY

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
HABITABILITY, COST, AND TENANT
PROTECTIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Student housing shortages pose an increasingly urgent issue in the City of Berkeley due to rising costs, limited availability, and persistent habitability concerns. Housing shortages have remained a long-standing challenge across California, with 2023 median rent prices at 1.5 times greater than the national median. For students at the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley), financial pressure and limited housing supply raise on-campus housing fees, while similar competition off-campus contributes to high rental rates. In the 2023-2024 academic year, the typical cost of off-campus housing for UC Berkeley students was \$15,149, creating significant financial strain for many students.¹ This report details the affordability and habitability conditions experienced by UC Berkeley students in both on-campus and off-campus housing. The primary objective of this initiative is to document and analyze current student housing conditions through data collection and research, and does not intend to serve as direct policy recommendations.

To evaluate student housing experiences, this report utilized two primary research methods: (1) a preliminary housing survey and (2) a geographical data analysis. We conducted a housing cost and value survey targeting UC Berkeley students to collect both quantitative and qualitative data on rent prices, housing satisfaction, perceived rental value, and living conditions. Survey participants were asked questions related to affordability, maintenance quality, landlord responsiveness, safety, location, and common habitability concerns, including mold, heating issues, pests, and overall property condition. In addition to analyzing housing costs, the survey assessed whether students believed the quality and condition of their housing aligned with the amount of rent they were charged.

Additionally, we conducted a geographical data analysis to compare housing conditions and rental prices across different areas of Berkeley. This utilized respondent data and publicly available housing data to identify locations where the greatest affordability and habitability concerns for students existed. Together, these research methods allowed us to identify recurring patterns in student experiences and better understand the relationship between housing cost, housing quality, and student well-being in Berkeley. Key issues highlighted in preliminary survey findings include mold or mildew, inadequate heating, and landlord responsiveness, as well as discrepancies between housing affordability and perceived housing value based on property condition, quality, and location. Through the identification of the most common habitability and affordability concerns in Berkeley, these survey results can support the development of targeted policy solutions to improve student living conditions.

¹ Kevin Cook et al. "Room and Board Are Making College Less Affordable," Public Policy Institute of California, accessed May 12, 2026, <https://www.ppic.org/blog/room-and-board-are-making-college-less-affordable/>.

DEFINE THE PROBLEM

Both the City of Berkeley and the University of California, Berkeley have faced criticism from various constituencies regarding the cost and quality of housing. UC Berkeley guarantees on-campus housing for first-year students and has on-campus capacity for only 30% of the student body, the lowest percentage of beds relative to the student body among all campuses in the University of California system.²

Beyond the lack of on-campus housing for students is the issue of the rising costs of both on-campus and off-campus housing. Many UC Berkeley students who live on campus criticize the disproportionate relationship between the prices they pay for housing and the quality of the living conditions they receive. Per semester, room rates for a standard room in on-campus residence halls range from \$12,370 for a quadruple dorm to \$19,645 for a single-room dorm (not including a \$6,885 mandatory meal plan for all students living on campus).³ Within on-campus housing, students have voiced concerns about a lack of heat and hot water, accessibility of safety tools like AEDs and Narcan, and outdated fire safety materials, all of which students feel are misaligned with the high price of residence.⁴ The limited supply of on-campus housing has led to intense competition for off-campus rentals and driven up housing costs across the rest of the city. Students each year lament the scramble for housing and the much-dreaded apartment hunt, as the market alternative to on-campus housing faces issues such as unaffordability, limited housing options, and quality concerns in high-priced housing. In a 2021 Berkeley Housing Survey, 47% of respondents indicated that high rental costs were one of the three most critical housing issues or challenges Berkeley faces. At the same time, 22% of respondents named the lack of housing options as a problem, while 55% identified the high cost of home ownership. Write-in responses to the survey included the following: “the scarcity of housing inventory, which leads to higher prices for land and homes”; the construction of new rental units that are not affordable to much of the community and rather appeal to the wealthy in the student population; and the lack of affordable housing explicitly for Berkeley residents and families, as well as for those with less than a \$50k household income.⁵ Beyond the student population, 75% of Berkeley's low-income neighborhoods are already experiencing gentrification or are at severe risk of gentrification, according to the Urban Displacement Project.⁶

²“Housing Initiative | Office of the Chancellor,” accessed May 12, 2026, <https://chancellor.berkeley.edu/housing-initiative>.

³“Rates,” *Housing*, n.d., accessed May 12, 2026, <https://housing.berkeley.edu/rates-contracts-policies/rates/>.

⁴“Students Are Demanding Better Living Conditions in the Residence Halls,” SafeBears, Inc., March 15, 2024, <https://www.safebears.org/updates/students-demanding-better-living-conditions-in-res-halls>.

⁵“December 2021 Berkeley Housing Element—Survey Results,” 2021, https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-03/2021-12-20_BerkeleyHousingElement_SurveyResults.pdf.

⁶*SF Bay Area – Gentrification and Displacement – Urban Displacement*, n.d., accessed May 12, 2026, <https://www.urbandisplacement.org/maps/sf-bay-area-gentrification-and-displacement/>.

Student housing crises are a product of the broader housing affordability crisis, an especially prevalent issue in the Bay Area, as high demand and limited availability drive up the cost of rent. According to online housing service Zillow's estimates, the average rental rate in Berkeley is \$2,917,⁷ which is approximately 8% higher than California's \$2,695 average and 46% higher than the national average. Alongside increased in-state tuition rates, the hidden costs of housing pose additional financial burdens on the families of college students, with a survey from the Public Policy Institute of California indicating that 69% of parent respondents are concerned about being able to afford the cost of their children earning a bachelor's degree.⁸ According to the 2020 Bay Area Census, the City of Berkeley has over 53,000 units, with a 91% occupancy rate, demonstrating high demand in the region. Approximately 50% of units are registered as renter-occupied, indicating strong competition in the rental market. As students comprise a large share of the City of Berkeley population, student housing affordability in Berkeley poses a significant and growing problem for students from low- and middle-income families.

City intervention is required due to the displacement of local community members, significant financial difficulties, and equity concerns for students. Students in need of affordable housing face difficulties because housing markets restrict their access to habitable housing due to high demand and limited supply, and because private markets operate for profit. Students with limited financial means must compete for housing in a market with restricted homes, which drives up rental costs and makes housing less affordable. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, high-income students often can afford rising housing costs, but low-income and first-generation students without family financial support face significant difficulties finding permanent housing.⁹

The housing shortage additionally affects the broader Berkeley community. The rising student demand for off-campus housing increases rents across the city and creates greater demand for existing housing, accelerating gentrification in surrounding neighborhoods. The Urban Displacement Project shows 62% of low-income neighborhoods in Berkeley face current and future displacement threats.¹⁰ The housing crisis creates social problems that extend beyond individual market transactions, as it impacts educational opportunities, community stability, and neighborhood equity.

⁷ "Average Rental Price in Berkeley, CA | \$2,895," accessed May 12, 2026, <https://www.zillow.com/rental-manager/market-trends/berkeley-ca/>.

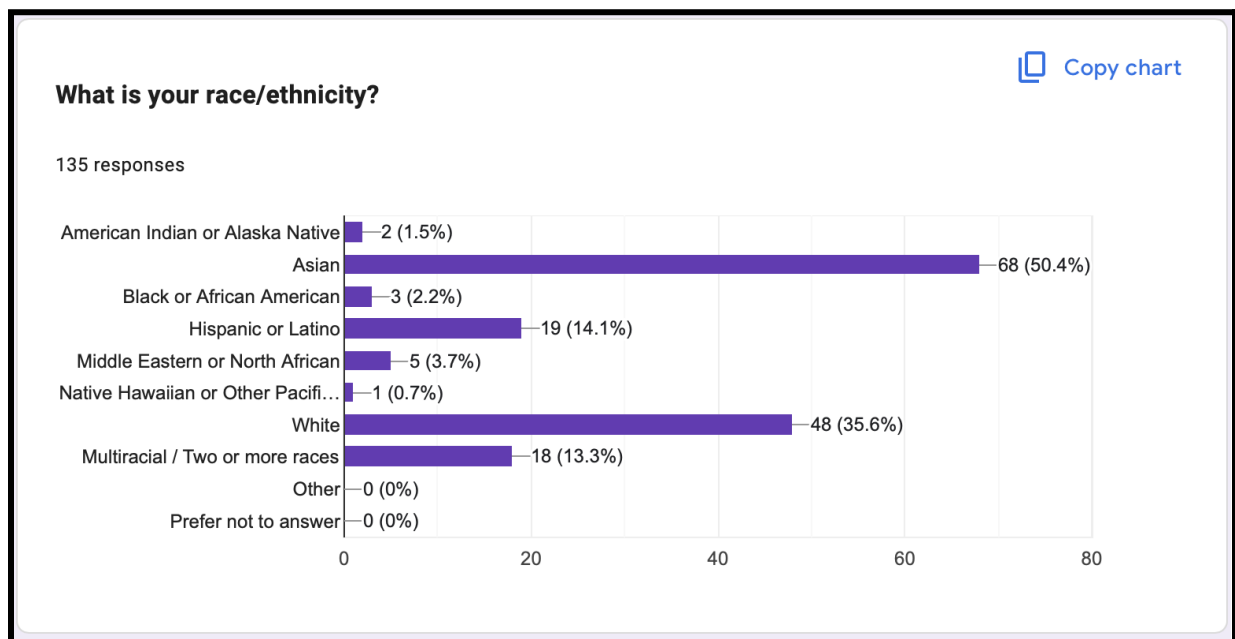
⁸ Mark Baldassare et al. "PPIC Statewide Survey: Californians and Education," Public Policy Institute of California, accessed May 12, 2026, <https://www.ppic.org/publication/ppic-statewide-survey-californians-and-education-april-2026/>.

⁹ *Barriers to Success: Housing Insecurity for U.S. College Students*, n.d.

¹⁰ Kathleen Maclay, "Urban Displacement Project Expands, Updates Its Northern California Maps," *Berkeley News*, November 16, 2017, <https://news.berkeley.edu/2017/11/16/urban-displacement-project-expands-updates-its-northern-california-maps/>.

The primary objective of this initiative is to gather and analyze data on the affordability and habitability of both on-campus and off-campus housing available to UC Berkeley students in District 7. To create targeted policy solutions to address student housing concerns, it is necessary to first identify and measure local housing issues. This initiative will inform policy decision-makers on relevant housing issues through a comprehensive data analysis project. Data will primarily be obtained through two methods: (1) a housing cost and value survey to identify local housing costs, (2) a geographical comparison of housing data to identify areas of greatest concern.

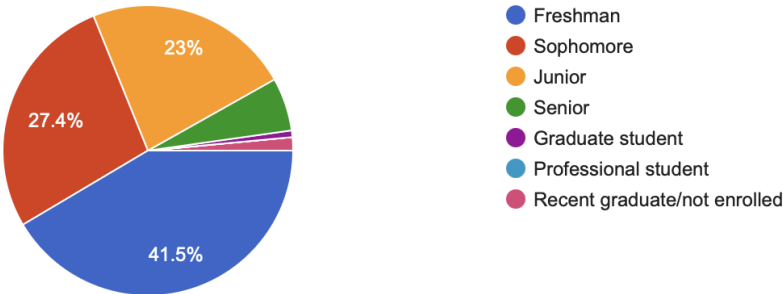
SURVEY FINDINGS



What is your student status?

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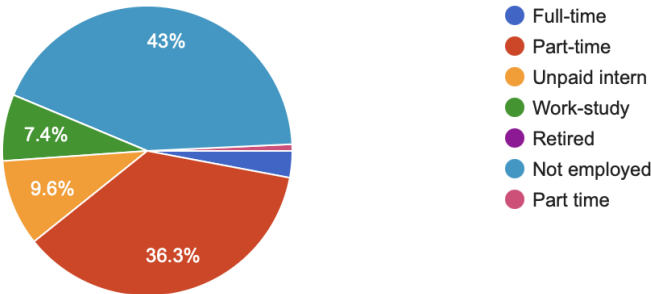
135 responses



What is your employment status?

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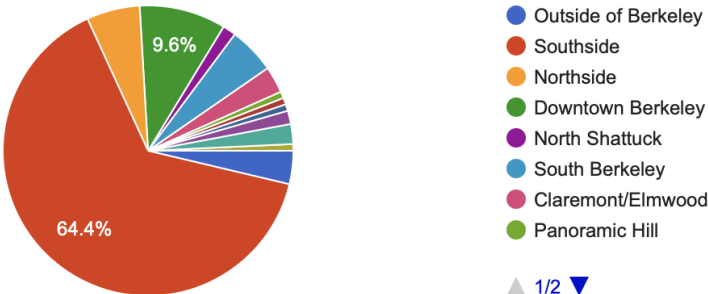
135 responses



What neighborhood/city do you live in?

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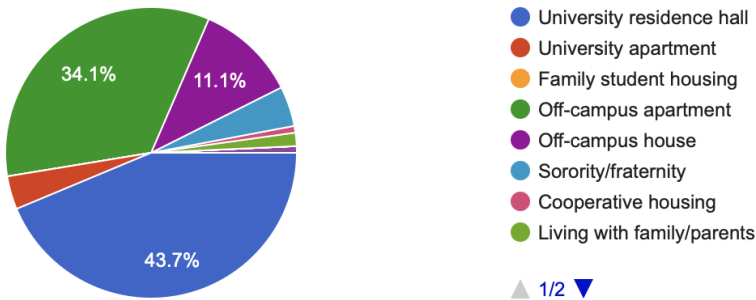
135 responses



Do you live in on-campus or off-campus housing?

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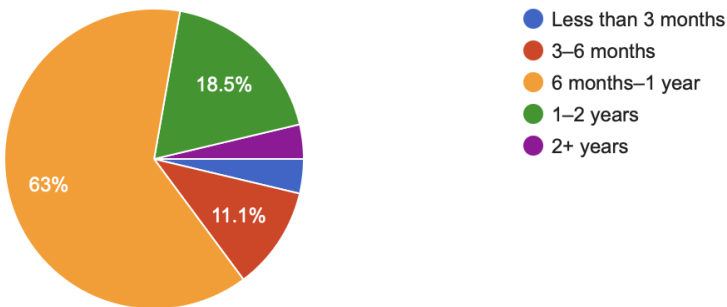
135 responses



What is the length of your tenancy at your current residence?

 Copy chart

135 responses

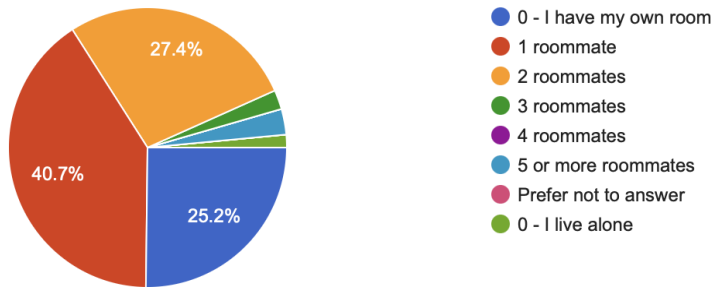


How many roommates do you currently live with?

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People who sleep in the same room as you

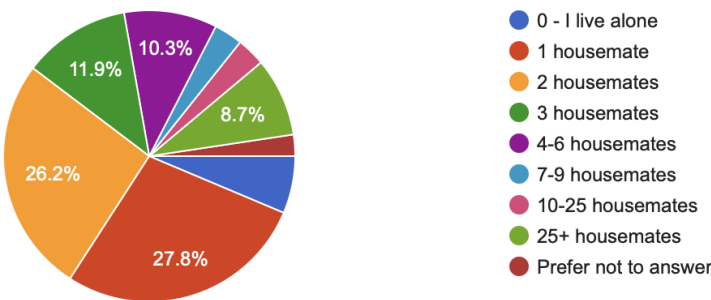
135 responses



How many housemates do you currently live with?

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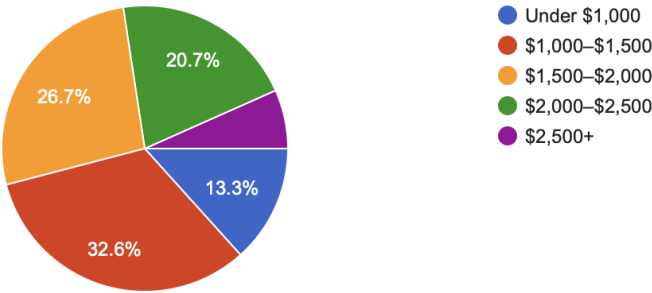
126 responses



What do you pay monthly for rent and utilities (your individual share)?

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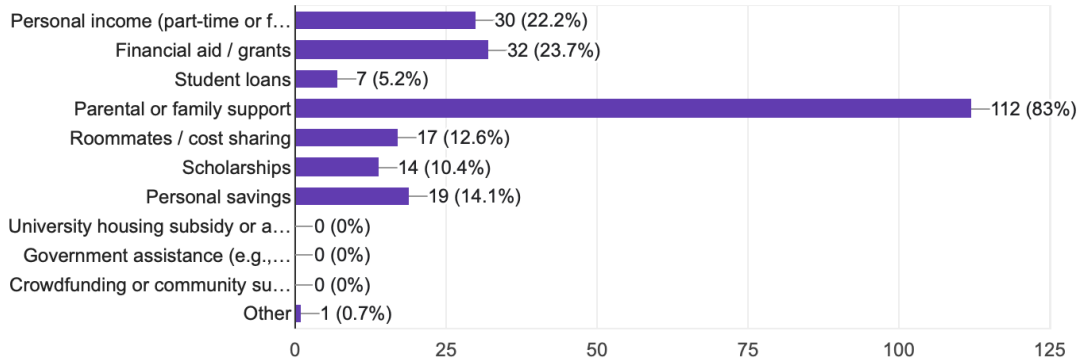
135 responses



How do you pay for your housing?

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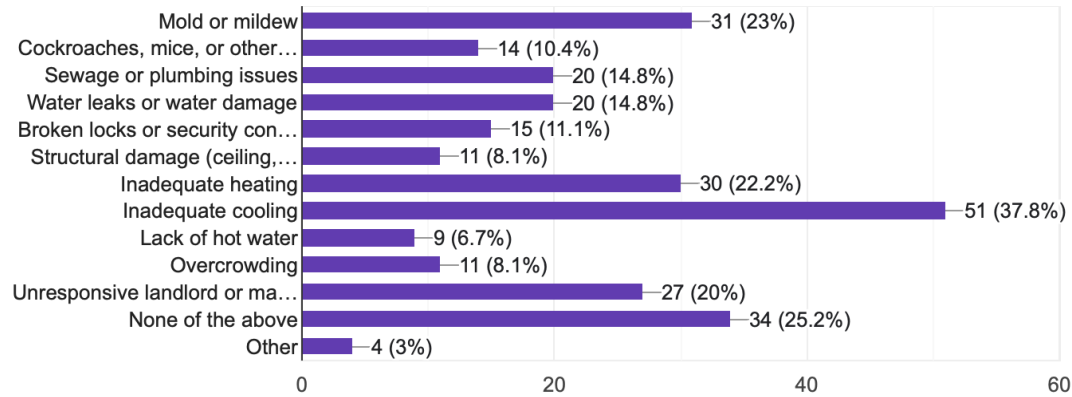
135 responses



Do you experience any of these habitability issues in your home?

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135 responses



Before signing your lease, how informed were you about your apartment's living conditions?

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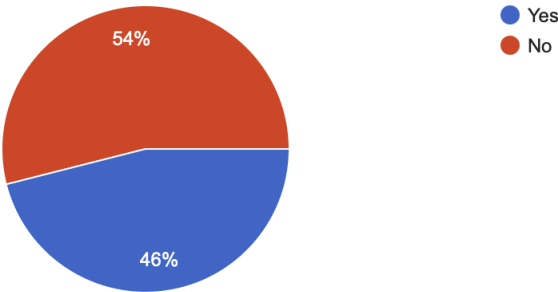
135 responses



Did you tour your unit before signing the lease?

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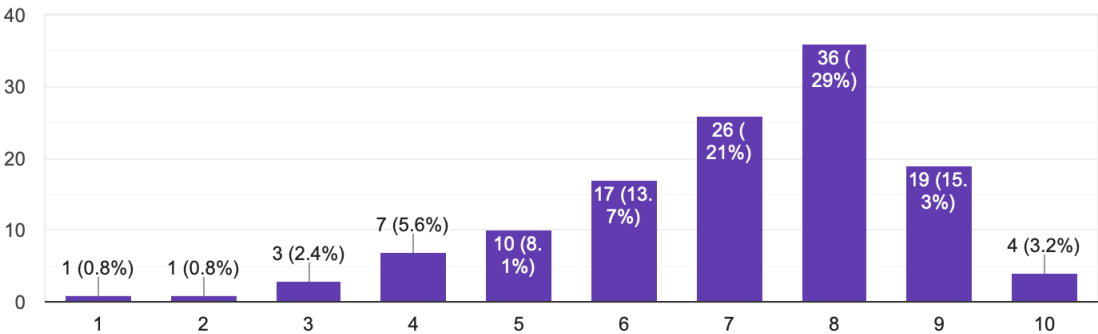
126 responses



On a scale of 1–10, how would you rate the overall condition of your home?

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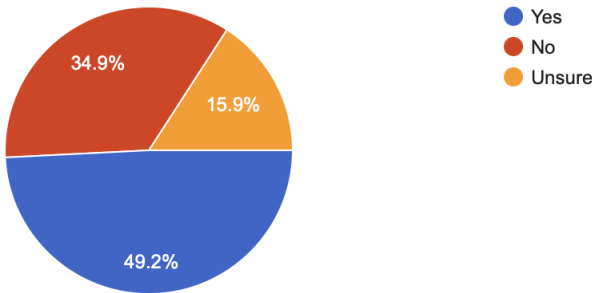
124 responses



Do you believe the amount you pay in rent is worth the housing you receive, given your home's conditions and location?

 [Copy chart](#)

126 responses



In your own words, please describe your current living conditions and any concerns you have.

135 responses

Very small kitchen, broken dryer, poor caulking, leaks in kitchen sink

It's a standard dorm room

Its a house w a lot of roommates and its very community vibes.

No concerns it's very nice

Good for the price

It's alright but not as good as it could be

I like Clark Kerr and my dorm is nicer than most. My room has had a bunch of pest issues which is frustrating.

The building is not earthquake safe and it's pretty run down in general

Are there any aspects of your living conditions that you are satisfied with?

67 responses

the bathroom kitchen and water

Rent + no roommates

nice to have a single bedroom

Yes

Trash valet, good responsiveness, i like the unit and amenities.

I like the maintenance structure, it's easy to submit a maintenance request

Room size and amenities

Size of space

I appreciate the modern features, including the communal bathrooms, ceiling fans, structure of rooms,

SURVEY ANALYSIS

Demographics of Respondents

This section analyzes the demographic and status profile of 135 survey respondents and what this reveals about the housing experiences captured in the data. The demographic sample represented in this survey reflects a relatively large and varied group of students, gathered through outreach methods such as tabling and email distribution to reach students across different backgrounds and class standings.

In terms of race and ethnicity, the respondent pool is heavily skewed toward Asian students, who comprise 50.4% (68 respondents), followed by White students at 35.6% (48 respondents). Other groups are represented at substantially lower rates, with Hispanic or Latino students at 14.1% (19 respondents), Multiracial students at 13.3% (18 respondents), and Black or African American students at only 2.2% (3 respondents). While these results generally align with the demographic distribution of the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley), they also highlight the underrepresentation of Hispanic and Black communities relative to UC Berkeley demographics. As a result, the survey may not fully capture inequities in housing that disproportionately affect these groups, particularly in relation to access, affordability, or housing quality.

The class standing of students further shapes the dataset. The majority of respondents are underclassmen, with freshmen (56 students) and sophomores (37 students) comprising most of the responses, followed by juniors (31 students) and a relatively small number of seniors (8 students). This skewed distribution is significant as housing experiences typically shift over the course of a college career. The UC Berkeley two-year housing guarantee for incoming first-year students means underclassmen make up the majority of residents in university housing,¹¹ with 96% of first-year students choosing to live in campus housing for their first year.¹² Upperclassmen are more likely to transition to off-campus housing and engage directly with the private rental market. Therefore, the survey findings may somewhat overrepresent on-campus or transitional housing experiences relative to longer-term off-campus housing.

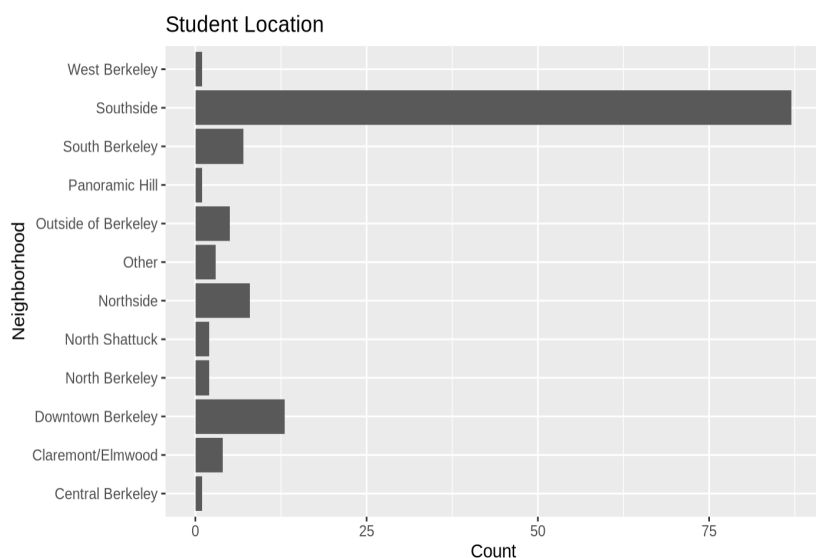
Employment status provides additional insight into how students are financially positioned in relation to housing. A significant portion of respondents report being unemployed (58 students), while many others work part-time (49 students); only a very small number

¹¹ “Housing Guarantee,” *Housing*, n.d., accessed May 12, 2026, <https://housing.berkeley.edu/apply/how-to-apply-for-undergraduate-housing/housing-guarantee/>.

¹² “Finding Housing | Berkeley International Office,” accessed May 12, 2026, <https://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/living/housing>.

reported full-time employment. This suggests that the majority of students are not financially independent and likely rely on external support systems. This is further supported by the broader survey findings, showing that parental or family monetary contribution is the primary means of paying for housing. Overall, these patterns indicate that housing affordability is not solely determined by rent levels, but also by access to family resources or financial aid.

Student Neighborhoods, Housing Types, and Length of Tenancy

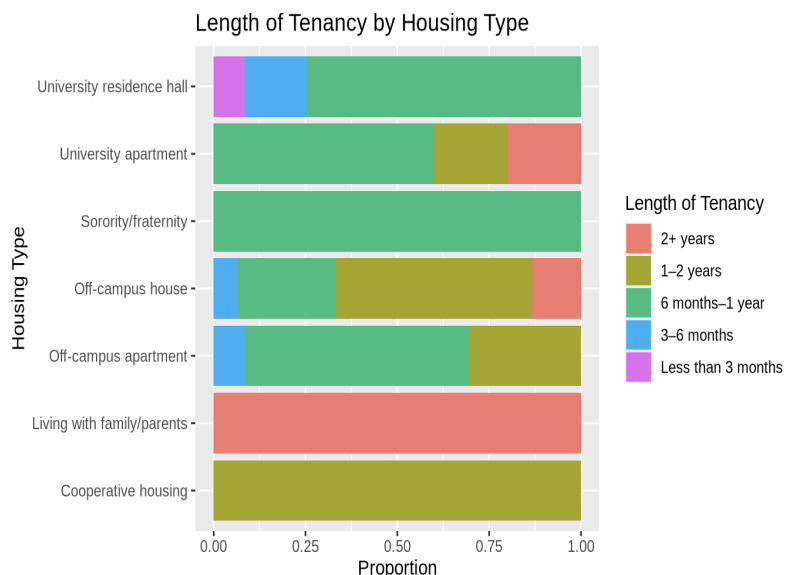


Survey data reveals that the student population is unevenly distributed across Berkeley neighborhoods. Per the survey, over 64% of respondents reported living in Southside, making it by far the most represented neighborhood in the sample.

Downtown Berkeley was the second most common response, at 9.6%, followed by Northside at 5.9%, and South Berkeley at 5.2%.

Neighborhoods located closer to campus have generally appeared to host higher student populations due to

their accessibility and convenience. However, the high Southside representation may reflect sampling bias. First-year students comprised 41.5% of respondents, and because underclassmen campus housing units are largely concentrated in Southside, this overrepresentation of first years likely inflates Southside residency responses in the dataset. In contrast, relatively few respondents live in West Berkeley, Central Berkeley, or Panoramic Hill, potentially underrepresenting frequent housing issues and challenges prevalent in those areas.



A majority of respondents (63%) reported living in their current residence for 6 months to 1 year, while 18.5% of respondents indicated 1 to 2 years, and 11.1% of respondents indicated only 3 to 6 months. Under 8% of respondents indicated either 2+ years or less than 3 months at their current residence. This suggests that most student housing arrangements are relatively

short-term due to academic semester systems.

Length of tenancy varies considerably by housing type, but only moderately by neighborhood. Among respondents living with family, 100% reported a tenancy length of 2+ years, suggesting that students who reside with family typically do so on a long-term basis. 20% of respondents in university apartments and 13% of those in an off-campus apartment indicated tenancies of 2+ years. This may suggest greater housing stability among these groups. In terms of neighborhoods, students who indicated longer tenancies are more likely to reside in neighborhoods farther from campus. Among respondents residing outside of Berkeley, 40% indicated a tenancy of 2+ years, followed by 33% in the “Other” category and 25% in Claremont or Elmwood. This is notable given that only 3.7% of all respondents indicated a tenancy length of 2+ years overall.



These differences may partially reflect respondent demographics. For example, students living with family tend to have longer tenancies and reside more frequently outside of Berkeley, indicating a link between housing arrangements and geographic location.

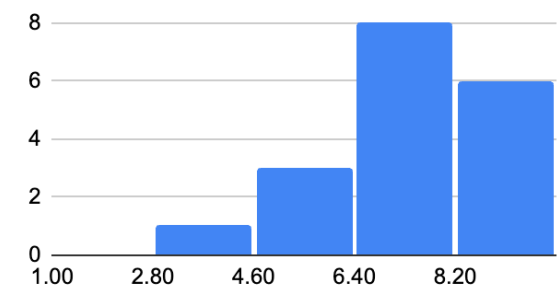
Commonly Reported Habitability Issues by Housing Type & Neighborhood

Habitability issues were a major concern across survey respondents. In the survey, only approximately 25% of respondents reported no habitability issues in their homes. Frequently cited concerns include a lack of air conditioning or heating, mold or mildew, plumbing issues, broken appliances, and generally poor maintenance conditions. Respondents also reported aesthetic and structural concerns, including peeling paint and units perceived as not appearing earthquake-safe. Landlord responsiveness is a recurring concern, with 20% of respondents mentioning delayed or inadequate responses to maintenance concerns. Respondents also reported concerns about management’s lack of attention to security issues, including non-functioning

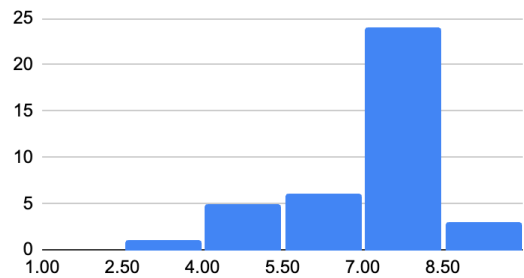
locks or doors, unfinished repairs, and reports of unhoused individuals entering residential buildings. The single most common complaint was inadequate cooling, followed by inadequate heating and mold/mildew. 15% of complaints concerned issues such as sewage, plumbing issues, and water damage reports. Less frequently reported issues included pests such as rodents and cockroaches, lack of hot water, broken locks, structural damage, and overcrowding, all representing under 11% of total responses.

Overall, the condition rating did not vary significantly between rent tiers. Those who reported paying less than \$1,000 listed a mean condition rating of 7.56. Those who reported paying \$1,000 to \$1,500 listed a mean condition rating of 7.025. Those who reported paying \$1,500 to \$2,000 listed a mean condition rating of 6.64. Those who reported paying \$2,000 to \$2,500 listed a mean condition rating of 7.04. Those who reported paying over \$2,500 listed a mean condition rating of 7.63. While the mean response rating shows essentially no difference, the range shows a larger difference between the rent tiers. While the mean didn't fluctuate significantly, the range of individual respondents did. No respondents who paid over \$2,500 ranked their living conditions under 5, while those who paid \$2,000 to \$2,500 had a minimum of 2, \$1,500 to \$2,000 had a minimum of 1, \$1,000 to \$1,500 had a minimum of 3, and those who paid under \$1,000 had a minimum of 4. Here is a visual breakdown of condition ratings 1-10 based on monthly rent paid. The figure below illustrates the left tail of the bell curve for \$2,500 monthly payments is much shorter than that of the other groups.

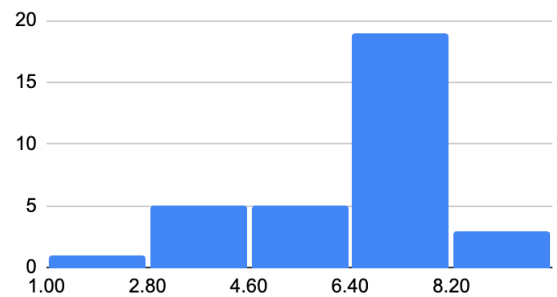
\$1,000 or less



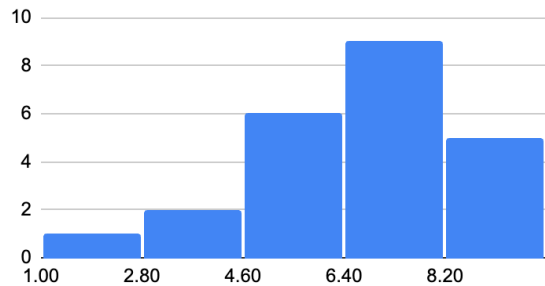
\$1,000-1,500 Monthly Pay



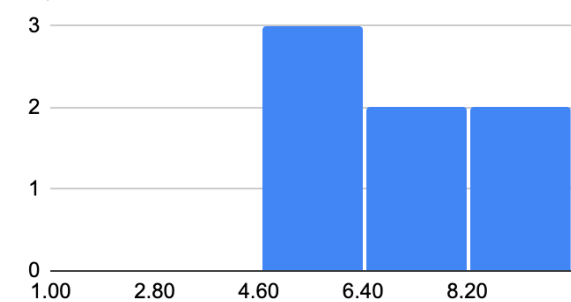
\$1,500-2,000



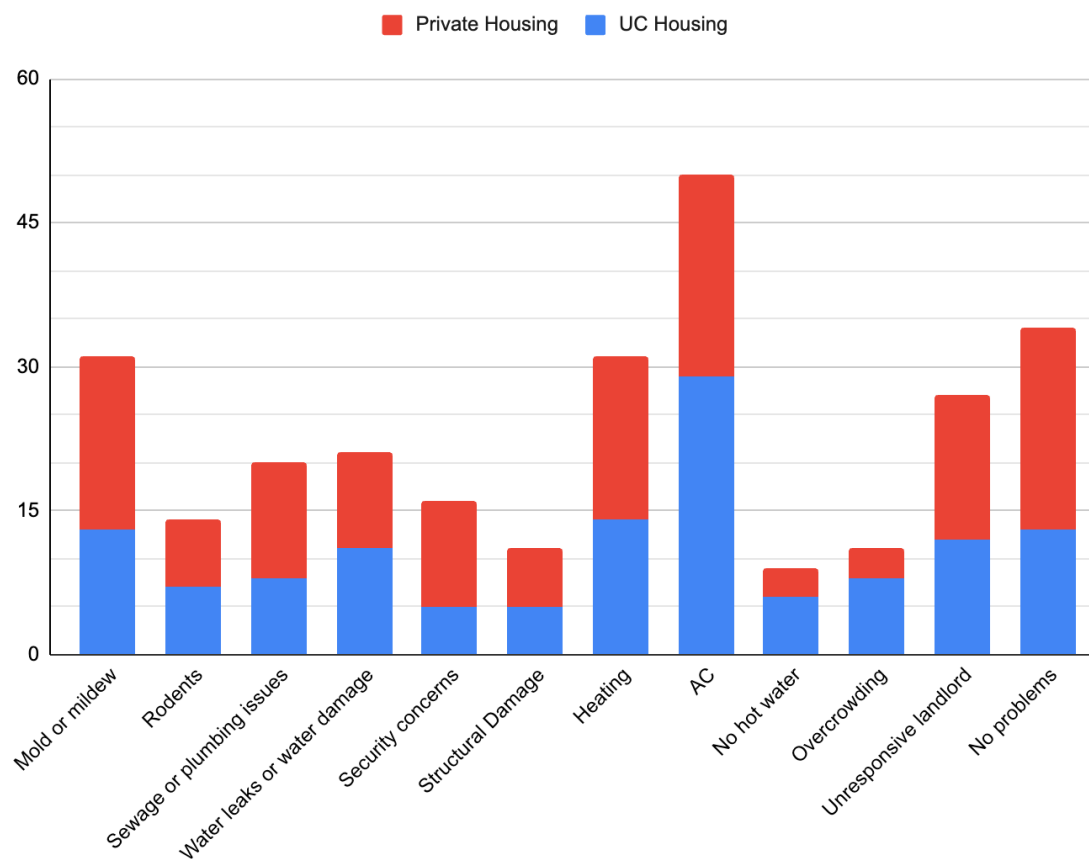
\$2,000-2,500



\$2,500+



UC Housing and Private Housing



The above graph shows habitability issues reported by respondents, cross-referenced by whether the respondents lived in off-campus or on-campus housing.

Rent, Roommates & Paying for Housing

The most common method students used to finance their housing was parental or family support, which appeared in the majority of responses. The most frequently reported combination of payment sources was family support paired with financial aid or grants, followed by parental support combined with roommate cost-sharing. This suggests that students typically rely on multiple sources of funding to afford housing in Berkeley.

Correlated patterns emerge between financing sources and rent tiers, with a strong overlap between respondents who indicated parental or family support and respondents paying \$2000+ in monthly rent. In contrast, students with financial aid support were more commonly

represented in lower rent tiers, in off-campus apartments ranging from under \$1000 to \$1500 and dorms in the \$1500 to \$2000 price range. Students with financial aid are also more likely to reside in Southside, live in shared apartments, have roommates, and report part-time income. Financial aid rarely appeared as a standalone source of housing payment, with students typically relying on a combination of parental support or personal income. Respondents who reported relying heavily on personal income or roommate cost-sharing to fund housing often had rent under \$1,500, shared bedrooms and apartments, and higher reports of habitability issues. While no clear relationship emerged between neighborhood and financing source overall, Southside respondents indicated the widest varieties of housing financing, whereas respondents in downtown Berkeley frequently reported higher rent alongside strong parental financial support.

Crowding also varied by rent tier. Lower-cost housing was generally associated with higher occupancy levels, respondents paying \$1000 to \$1500 were most likely to report multiple roommates or higher numbers of housemates. However, students paying between \$2000 and \$2500+ still reported crowded living conditions (though to a lesser extent), particularly in dormitories and shared apartments in Southside, where high rent costs are typically distributed across multiple occupants.

Perceived Value & Satisfaction Derived from Housing

Student responses suggest moderate overall satisfaction with housing, despite the widespread habitability concerns identified elsewhere in the survey, as indicated by the mixed responses to the survey question “Do you believe the amount you pay in rent is worth the housing you receive, given your home's conditions and location?” 46% of respondents reported that the amount they pay in rent is worth their living conditions, while 32% reported no. The remaining 22% of respondents answered that they were unsure or did not provide a response. These findings suggest that while many students report dissatisfaction with specific housing conditions, perceived housing value is influenced by factors beyond housing quality alone, including location, proximity to campus, neighborhood convenience, and access to amenities. In response to the question, “Are there any aspects of your living conditions that you are satisfied with?” approximately 50% of respondents declined to answer (68 respondents), while other answers frequently cited attributes such as convenient location, proximity to campus, size of apartment, and access to amenities, even when reporting concerns related to maintenance or affordability.

Berkeley Census Tracts: Percent Population of 18 - 24 Year Olds

¹³“S0101: Percent—Total ... in 2024 - Census Bureau Map,” accessed May 12, 2026, https://data.census.gov/map/050XX00US06001/ACSST5Y2024/S0101/S0101_C02_023E?layer=VT_2024_050_00PY_D1&loc=37.6803,-122.0253,z8.0825.

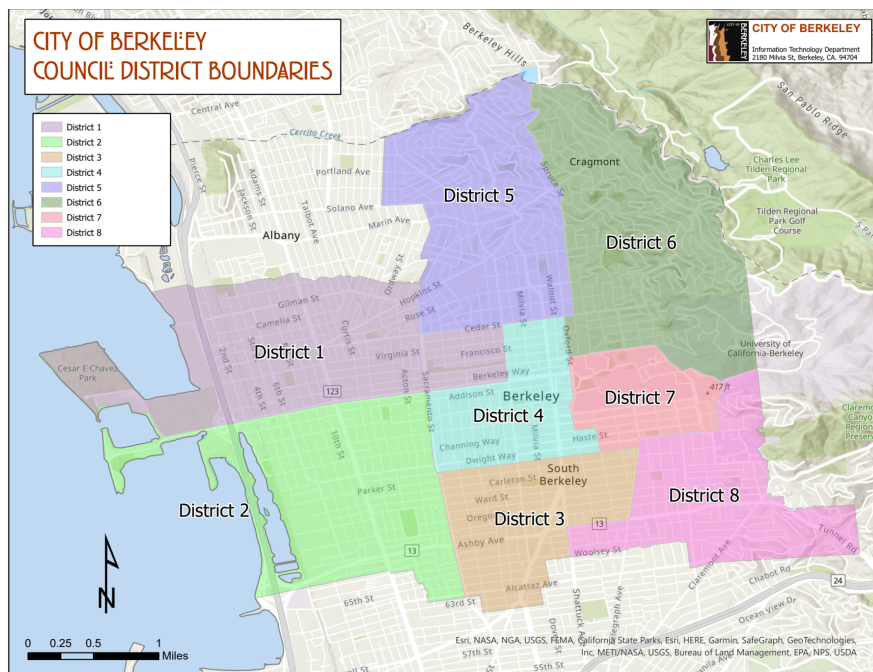
19

4237	33.3%
4224	26.6%

* Census tracts with over 25% 18-24-year-olds

** Census data does not officially record student population; one can reasonably infer that tracts with high percentages of 18-24 year olds have high student resident populations

Visual aid:¹⁵



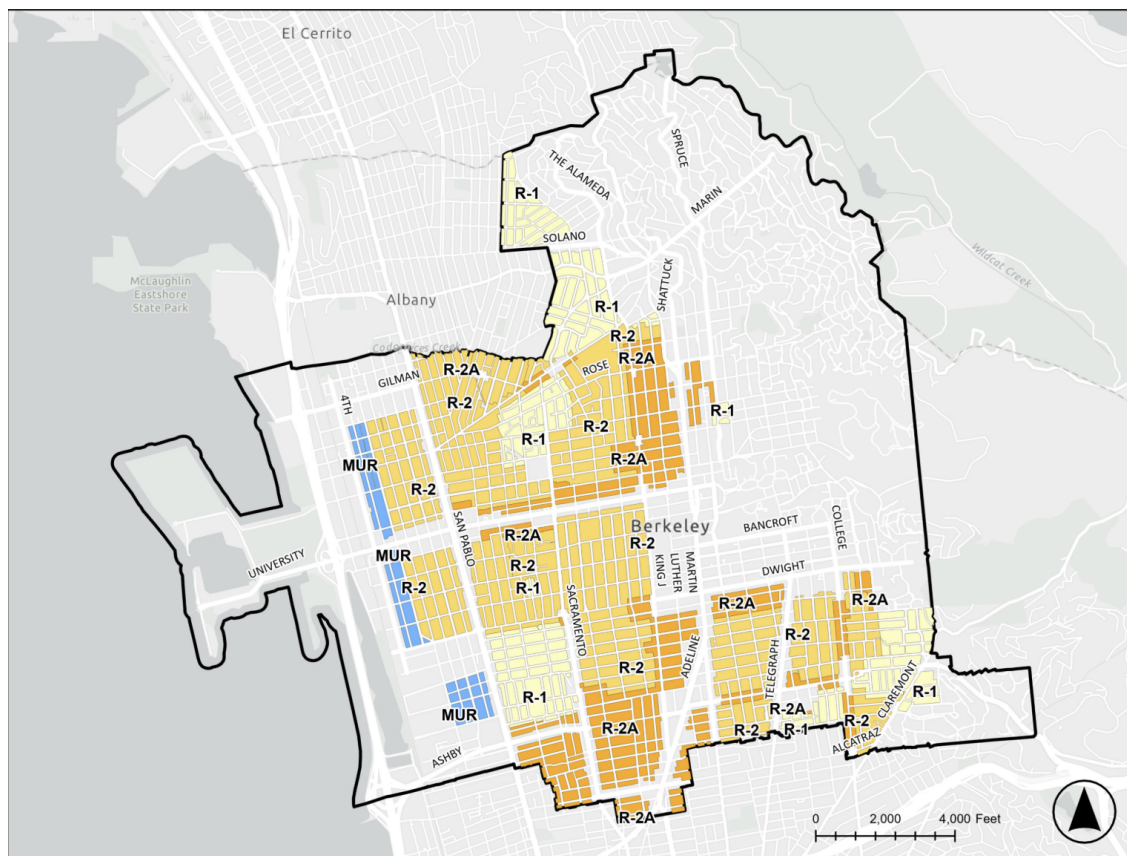
Percent Growth in Population by District: 2010-2020 ¹⁶	
District	Percent Growth
7	18%
2	16%
1	14%
4	12%

¹⁵ “Council District Boundaries,” City of Berkeley, accessed May 9, 2026, berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Berkeley-City-Council-Districts.pdf

¹⁶ “Existing Districts | 2020 Census Population (Legacy File),” City of Berkeley and Redistricting Partners, accessed May 9, 2026, berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/IRC%20Redistricting%20Summary%20Data%20Analysis%20of%20Unofficial%20Legacy%20Data%20for%20Berkeley%20Census%20Count.pdf

3	9%
8	6%
5	5%
6	6%

Visual Aid: Zoning map of Berkeley*¹⁷



*Middle housing is permitted in zones labeled R-1, R-2, R-2A, MU-R

In the fall of 2025, middle housing was expanded to the majority of residential areas in the City of Berkeley. This zoning allows for the development of multi-family or multi-unit housing, such as duplexes and triplexes

The price and quality of student housing are affected by various geographical factors, including population growth, density, land use patterns, and housing zones. Geographically driven demand plays a significant role in determining rental affordability, particularly for housing units in proximity to transportation networks, commercial infrastructure, and

¹⁷“Middle Housing Zoning | City of Berkeley,” accessed May 12, 2026, <https://berkeleyca.gov/construction-development/land-use-development/middle-housing-zoning>.

universities, which have higher prices due to increased demand and limited supply. Demand-driven pricing becomes problematic when housing costs grow beyond what is financially feasible for residents or when lower-income individuals are displaced to areas with weaker infrastructure and fewer resources. These pressures are especially acute for renters, who are more vulnerable to fluctuations in the housing market driven by supply shortages, demand surges, and inconsistent housing policy measures.¹⁸ The Pew Research Center found that in every U.S. state, a higher percentage of renters were cost-burdened than homeowners.¹⁹

Demand-driven pricing is particularly consequential for Berkeley, where student demand is concentrated around the university campus. College towns often face sharply unequal housing demand and development patterns, where the most desirable, in-demand units near the university face intensified competition. This can lead to a phenomenon known as *studentification*, in which high-end apartment buildings catered towards wealthier students are developed in more in-demand areas (near campus), driving out low-income students.²⁰ Geographical inequalities may also be exacerbated by the inflexible nature of college town housing markets. University-affiliated employees often benefit from high job security and long-term investment, which can drive a lack of support for new housing developments that could potentially impose neighborhood density or additional costs.²¹ This can lead to resistance and restrictions on new development projects, worsening housing shortages, and further inflating prices in already high-demand areas for students.

Rental Cost by Proximity to Campus

Rental costs near UC Berkeley appear to reflect strong proximity preferences, especially in student-heavy areas such as Southside and the blocks immediately surrounding campus. City and campus materials both suggest that students place a high value on location: in the City of Berkeley's 2022 Southside student housing survey, proximity to campus ranked as the most important housing consideration, and roughly one-quarter of respondents indicated they would be willing to pay more to live near campus.²² That preference is reflected in current rental

¹⁸ "The Rental Housing Crisis Is a Supply Problem That Needs Supply Solutions," *Center for American Progress*, August 22, 2022,

<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-rental-housing-crisis-is-a-supply-problem-that-needs-supply-solutions/>

¹⁹ Drew DeSilver, "A Look at the State of Affordable Housing in the U.S.," Homeownership & Renting, *Pew Research Center*, October 25, 2024,

<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/10/25/a-look-at-the-state-of-affordable-housing-in-the-us/>.

²⁰ Nick Revington, "Post-Studentification? Promises and Pitfalls of a near-Campus Urban Intensification Strategy," *Urban Studies* 59, no. 7 (2022): 1424–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980211021358>.

²¹ Samarin, M., & Sharma, M. (2023). A typology of U.S. metropolises by rent burden and its major drivers. *GeoJournal*, 1–20. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-023-10898-3> Mikhail Samarin and Madhuri Sharma, "A Typology of U.S. Metropolises by Rent Burden and Its Major Drivers," *GeoJournal* 88, no. 5 (2023): 4887–906, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-023-10898-3>.

²² City of Berkeley, 2022 Southside Area UC Berkeley Student Housing Survey Summary (Berkeley, CA: City of Berkeley Land Use Planning, December 19, 2022), 1, noting that proximity to campus was the most important

listings. UC Berkeley's Off-Campus Housing website shows high asking prices in neighborhoods closest to campus, including Southside-oriented listings such as FOUND Study Southside Berkeley at \$860 to \$2,495 per bedroom, Parker at \$2,785 to \$5,130, and other nearby properties well above what many students can realistically afford.²³ Broader housing market data also confirms the disproportionately large scale of Berkeley rental prices: Zillow reports that as of April 8, 2026, the average rent for all bedroom counts and property types in Berkeley was \$2,895, with an average one-bedroom at \$2,295 and an average two-bedroom at \$3,195.²⁴ Taken together, this suggests that students are often paying not simply for housing quality, but for geographic access to classrooms, libraries, transit, and campus life.

At the same time, the relationship between rent and proximity is not always fully captured by listing data alone. Survey responses may reveal a gap between advertised rents and what students actually pay, particularly when costs are split among roommates or influenced by informal subletting arrangements. Rent control may also affect this pattern. In Berkeley, many older multi-unit properties are covered by local rent stabilization rules, while newer buildings are generally exempt, which can produce sharp differences between long-term tenants in older units and students renting in recently built apartments marketed specifically toward them.²⁵ This is especially important near campus, where newly developed student-oriented housing often requires premium rents without necessarily offering proportional improvements in quality.

Habitability Differences by Neighborhood

Habitability concerns remain a significant issue according to survey responses. Only 25.2% of respondents (n=29) reported no habitability issues in their homes. The most frequently reported concerns include a lack of air conditioning (39%) or heating (20.9%), mold problems (23.5%), plumbing issues (28.7%), and the general appearance of disrepair (8.7%). 20% of inhabitants mentioned landlord response time as a recurring issue. Additionally, 12.2% raised complaints regarding inadequate management of security concerns, including non-functioning locks and doors, unhoused individuals wandering through buildings, and unfinished repairs. Finally, 7.8% of respondents cited crowded living conditions due to the number of roommates and housemates in tight living spaces. Those wanting to learn more about habitability issues can consult a 2022-2023 mail survey of residents living in rent-stabilized units conducted by the

housing consideration for many students, and 6, showing "proximity to campus" as the top-ranked locational priority.

²³ UC Berkeley Housing, "Off-Campus Housing Search," accessed April 9, 2026, <https://housing.berkeley.edu/resources/off-campus-housing/>.

²⁴ "Average Rental Price in Berkeley, CA | \$2,895," accessed May 12, 2026, <https://www.zillow.com/rental-manager/market-trends/berkeley-ca/>.

²⁵ "Is Your Unit Covered by Rent Control? | Berkeley Rent Board," accessed May 12, 2026, <https://rentboard.berkeleyca.gov/rights-responsibilities/rent-control-101/your-unit-covered-rent-control>.

California State University, Fullerton. The city of Berkeley also has tips listed on their website regarding tenant and owner rights and requirements.

Value and Price Comparison of Off-Campus and On-Campus Housing

A moderate portion of respondents, at 49.5%, reported that their perceived value of their housing aligned with their rent. However, 35.4% of respondents indicated that the amount they pay is not consistent with the quality of their housing. Students paying over \$2,000 per month frequently reported only moderate or low ratings; open-ended responses from this group included comments such as, “You pay for more than what you get,” and “No one should ever pay this much rent,” reflecting frustration with premium rent prices for average units. Lower rent tiers, from \$1,000 to \$1,500, produced more mixed results. Although many reported habitability concerns, many respondents still expressed satisfaction. For example, one respondent reported heating and cooling issues yet still described their unit as “good for the price.” Another commented that their unit was “not nice at all,” but still reported a level of satisfaction of 6 out of 10 because the unit was “spacious and not too expensive.” Residents paying under \$1,000 for their units often reported the strongest satisfaction relative to cost. Comments for this price range include “no concerns, it’s very nice” and “safe, my own room, modern apt,” suggesting that satisfaction levels for lower-cost units are met at basic expectations of safety and comfort.

Perceptions of the value of rent prices varied considerably by neighborhood. Downtown Berkeley hosted the highest average condition rating at 8.17, with 75% of residents (n=12) reporting that their housing was worth the rent. Claremont/Elmwood reported the second-highest average condition rating at 7.75, with 75% of residents (n=4) similarly reporting that it is worth the rent. In contrast, Northside residents reported a wide gap between perceived quality and value. The average condition rating for a Northside housing unit was 7.00, yet only 28% of respondents indicated that their housing was worth the rent. This suggests that students perceive Northside rent as disproportionately high relative to the quality of units. South Berkeley reported a lower average condition rating at 6.20 but a comparatively higher satisfaction percentage at 60% of respondents, indicating that students may be satisfied with lower average quality of units in exchange for lower rent prices. Southside performed the worst across both measures, with both the lowest condition rating (6.00) and the lowest satisfaction percentage at 25%.

Southside housing emerged as a hotspot in this study. Residents in Southside dormitories frequently reported issues with mold, heat, plumbing, and overcrowding, while those living in off-campus apartments cited trash accumulation, pests, security concerns, and delayed maintenance responses. Despite these concerns, Southside remains among the most expensive and in demand student housing markets, suggesting that students are paying for proximity to campus as opposed to quality of housing.

On-campus housing is one of the least efficient markets examined in this study, hosting the highest prices relative to perceived quality and the most consistent dissatisfaction. In contrast, Claremont/Elmwood and certain areas of Northside appear comparatively more efficient, with stronger perceived value relative to rental price.

Purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) has become increasingly common in university and college housing markets, expanding alongside rising enrollment at public universities.²⁶ At UC Berkeley, undergraduate enrollment totaled 27,496 in 2015, compared to 33,122 in 2025, representing a 20% increase over 10 years.²⁷ As university enrollment has risen, the quantity of housing has struggled to increase alongside it. Since 2005, UC Berkeley has added approximately 14,000 students but only 1,600 new beds. This can lead to PBSA stepping in to fill the gap, as “outsourcing student housing to the private sector,” as one researcher described it, has become commonplace.²⁸ Recent PBSA projects near the Berkeley campus include luxury apartment complex, Stonefire, in Downtown Berkeley, which boasts rental prices that range from \$2,500 to \$4,000 for one-bedroom units, a cost that is often prohibitive for students.

Policy Landscape and Addressing Gaps in Tenancy Legal Protection

As on-campus student housing is in short supply and cost-prohibitive, the majority of students look for off-campus housing in the City of Berkeley. Renting to college students often requires non-traditional lease structures, as student tenants prefer fixed-term leases tied to the academic or semester system, require flexibility for mid-lease roommate changes, and are often dependent on guarantors due to a lack of credit or rental histories. Many landlords follow traditional leasing calendars and rent on 12-month contracts, leaving students financially responsible for their units for extended time periods outside of their occupancy. To financially support this, students turn to subletting or leasing out their apartments during summer months.²⁹ While some landlords encourage subletting, others explicitly prohibit it within their lease agreements, occasionally leading to students absorbing the cost of unnecessary rent or seeking informal or unauthorized subleasing arrangements.

The Berkeley City Council has measures in place to protect tenants through the Tenant Protection Ordinance, which prohibits illegal evictions, coercive conduct, and intimidating

²⁶ Shanshan Jiang-Brittan, *Crisis by Design: Student Housing and the Hidden Cost of Higher Education* by Shanshan Jiang-Brittan, CSHE 1.25 (July 2025), July 14, 2025, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/220157sj>.

²⁷ “UC Historical Fall Enrollment, 1869 to Present | University of California,” January 8, 2026, <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/historical-enrollment>.

²⁸ Jiang-Brittan, *Crisis by Design*.

²⁹ “Renting to College Students: Landlord Resource Center - Berkeley Property Owners Association,” accessed May 12, 2026, <https://www.bpoa.org/renting-to-college-students-landlord-resource-center>.

behavior, but lacks protections aimed specifically at the student population.³⁰ As student renters have high-turnover rates, landlords often see them as “transitional” and fail to maintain the same vigorous standards of maintenance and upkeep as they would for long-term renters. Students often overcrowd units, exceeding municipal regulations for the number of unrelated individuals in a single-family housing unit to save on rent costs, and even convert non-designated living spaces into bedrooms to accommodate more people within a unit.³¹

On a university level, UC Berkeley provides legal resources for students, including the ASUC Renters Legal Assistance and the Student Legal Services offices, which provide counseling, referrals, sample letters, and attorneys for consultation.³² The Basic Needs Center’s housing security programs provide emergency case management support for students with urgent housing issues, but cannot aid with systemic or anticipated gaps in housing.³³ More informal resources include blog posts that estimate the timeline for finding off-campus housing and roommates.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this report is to document and analyze the current housing conditions and habitability concerns experienced by the UC Berkeley student population. This report draws on data collection and academic research to evaluate the housing conditions of current students; it is not intended to serve as direct policy recommendations. The key findings of this memo can be grouped into affordability, habitability, geographic patterns, legal and policy gaps, and the split between on-campus and off-campus housing.

Our findings demonstrate that the typical cost of off-campus housing for UC Berkeley students was \$15,149 in the 2023-2024 academic year, and Berkeley’s average rent of \$2,917 is 46% above the national average. Additionally, only 25% of our survey respondents indicated no habitability issues within their housing. The most common habitability issues were inadequate cooling (39%), plumbing issues (28.7%), and mold (23.5%). These habitability issues were spread across all rent tiers, demonstrating no variation in payment or in the reliability of living conditions. UC Berkeley can house only 30% of its student population, the lowest proportion of housing availability in the entire UC system. On-campus housing was identified as the most consistent source of student dissatisfaction, with the highest prices relative to perceived quality. Among off-campus housing, it was determined that the Berkeley Tenant Protection Ordinance

³⁰ “Tenant Protection Ordinance | Berkeley Rent Board,” accessed May 12, 2026, <https://rentboard.berkeleyca.gov/laws-regulations/city-berkeley-ordinances-affecting-rental-properties/tenant-protection-ordinance>.

³¹ Max Gomez, “Campus Crisis: Overcrowding in College Housing,” *Abundant Housing LA*, September 4, 2020, <https://abundanthousingla.org/overcrowding-college-crisis/>.

³² “Local Tenant Resources,” Berkeley Rent Board, City of Berkeley, accessed May 9, 2026, rentboard.berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/Tenant%20Local%20Resource%20List.pdf.

³³ “Housing | Basic Needs,” accessed May 12, 2026, <https://basicneeds.berkeley.edu/get-support/housing>.

lacks protections specifically for student renters. Landlords frequently treat student tenants as transitional and are not accommodating of student leasing needs.

While this report was aimed at documenting rather than prescribing, there are significant housing patterns that require immediate attention in the UC Berkeley student community. Based on this memo, the most pressing issues are the common habitability concerns, the disconnect between tenant protections and the specific needs of student renters, the structural gap between the UC Berkeley student population and the available housing, and finally, the geographic inequality in housing affordability across Berkeley's neighborhoods. The key stakeholders these findings address are the Berkeley City Council, the UC Berkeley administration, and the Berkeley Rent Stabilization Board. While there are helpful frameworks such as the Tenant Protection Ordinance and UC Berkeley's student legal resources, this report identifies prevalent gaps that inform future policy discussions. Continued engagement with the student population will be essential to ensuring that future policy solutions address the specific issues of housing inequality in Berkeley.

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