



204 Frist Campus Center  
Princeton, New Jersey 08544  
w <http://gsg.princeton.edu>  
E [gsg@princeton.edu](mailto:gsg@princeton.edu)

December 1, 2012

Princeton University has long provided exceptional housing assistance to its graduate students. However, 2012 marks the beginning of a several-year stretch of a more limited supply of graduate housing. To research the needs and concerns of graduate students in this housing shortage, the Princeton University Graduate Student Government (GSG) developed the Graduate Student Housing Survey in May. The data from this survey provide the basis of the recommendations we offer here.

A total of 654 graduate students completed the housing survey. All years were represented, with first- and second-year students accounting for about half of respondents; the majority of respondents lived in University housing for the 2011-2012 term. The attached appendix includes a full breakdown of the survey data.

Based on data in the appendix and on confidential responses provided to the GSG, we identify three opportunities for improvement in graduate student housing:

1. Expanding existing resources to help students find off-campus housing;
2. Supplementing the inventory of off-campus housing, possibly through block-leasing and shuttle service; and
3. Improving communication between the housing office and students, with frequent and personalized e-mails before and during the housing draw.

We look forward to working with the administration to further assess student needs and help develop solutions.

## **Off-Campus Housing Website and Resources**

The GSG survey asked students living or moving off-campus which services they used to search for housing, listing the Off-Campus Housing Website, TigerTrade, Craigslist, professional realtor/services, friends/contacts, social media, and newspaper ads. Students were also asked to rate the usefulness of the services they used on a sliding scale. For those students currently living off-campus, the Off-Campus Housing Website (58%), Craigslist (54%), and friends/contacts (48%) were most popular, with both Craigslist and friends/contacts rated as significantly more useful than the Off-Campus Housing Website (see Appendix for details). Students moving off-campus had similar responses, with most using friends/contacts (80%), Off-Campus Housing Website (75%), Craigslist (75%), and Tiger Trade (60%). Once again, Craigslist and

friends/contacts were rated as significantly more useful than the Off-Campus Housing Website.

While the Off-Campus Website is an important and heavily-used resource for graduate students seeking—and finding—off-campus housing, it has room for improvement. The website could integrate data from sites like Padmapper.com, which indexes apartment listings from Craigslist, Apartments.com, Rent.com, and others, places them on a map, and provides automatic e-mail notification of new listings matching search criteria. By using Padmapper’s listings and search tools to supplement its own, the Off-Campus Housing Website could providing immediate e-mail notifications of all options that match a student’s needs in geography, unit type, and price.

The GSG survey found friends and contacts to be especially helpful in finding housing, and saw strong enthusiasm for University-sponsored off-campus housing roommate resources. Over half of the respondents seeking Fall 2012 housing expressed interest in a roommate list post/forum. With a centralized, University-supported platform, students could connect with their peers seeking housing and roommates. Subforum topics within this platform could include requests or searches for roommates, sublets, open apartments, or carpool groups. By living off-campus and commuting together, graduate students can ease the strain on University parking spaces. The end benefit to students is an established, centralized location where they can organize their own solutions to housing and transportation, supplementing the existing services offered by the Off-Campus Housing Office.

## **Off-Campus Housing Options**

In recent years, Princeton has provided an extraordinary amount of housing for graduate students, allowing nearly two-thirds of the graduate student population to live within walking distance of campus. Princeton’s TigerTransit shuttle service also provides reliable transportation to campus and to nearby shopping centers. The present graduate housing options are extremely convenient and affordable and we continue to be grateful for such a well-maintained service. However, as anecdotes indicate, and our recent housing survey supports, it is extremely difficult for a student to replicate these services off-campus, even at a significantly higher price. Graduate student survey respondents living off-campus currently pay an average monthly rent of \$900, and 43% of them regularly drive to campus. As the University expands, these numbers will rise. Thirty-seven percent of respondents indicated that their off-campus rent is increasing this year, by an average of just over \$100.

Princeton University housing provides a wonderful sense of community and peace of mind. Our survey respondents indicated that its convenience to campus is even more important than its price—for someone who needs to tend their experiments well into the night, nearby housing is extremely valuable. More than one-third of survey respondents do not have a car, a luxury on-campus that becomes a necessity off-campus. The increasing number of cars will stretch both graduate student budgets, with total ownership costs of at least \$3000/year, and Princeton University parking

spaces. This is also a problem with post-doctoral researchers and other staff, who enter the same housing market and park in the same University lots.

We urge the University to consider the problem of graduate student and staff housing and parking together. We believe that, with a relatively small investment of money and effort, Princeton can help recreate a sense of community in off-campus neighborhoods, by (1) providing convenient transportation to campus; and (2) negotiating apartment rates and providing guaranteed rental approval for graduate students and staff. More than five-sixths of our survey respondents indicated that they would consider living in a nearby township if Princeton were to provide an affordable and convenient shuttle option.

## **Communication with the Housing Office**

In the GSG's capacity as the liaison between the graduate student body and the University administration, students voice concerns or displeasures through our organization. Among the most frequent complaint from students is the lack of communication from the University housing office; with the Spring 2012 housing situation, this gap in communication has taken on new meaning for some students. As revealed through the closed- and open-ended responses to the housing survey, students were surprised by the results of the housing draw, feeling underinformed throughout. Students were often unaware that fewer housing units would be available, did not know that their room draw applications were incomplete, or waited for an e-mail giving their room draw results.

Many students were also frustrated by a lack of responsiveness by the housing office to their requests and questions. Over one-third of survey respondents who reached out to the housing office waited more than a week for a response. Proactive, personalized e-mails about students' status could have greatly reduced the load of questions and made it easier to keep up. We also note that the housing office was operating without a director, and that under James Poole, it has been far more responsive.

Based on the survey results, the GSG recommends the housing office adopt a communication strategy with a dual focus. First, the housing office should proactively send personalized e-mails to students before and during the housing draw. These e-mails would provide information on the supply of housing, a student's likelihood of success based on previous draws, and his or her current status. With a lower volume of individual student questions, the housing office could commit to answering each inquiry within three days.

## **Conclusions**

Princeton University has long provided an exceptional level of housing support, compensating for a very limited off-campus housing market. The replacement of both Hibben-Magie and Butler Tract with the new Lakeside development will continue to provide excellent housing, but to a smaller fraction of the graduate student body.

More students will need to find their own housing; they will live farther from campus and most will drive to their labs and classrooms. We look forward to working with the housing office and University administration to provide these students with more tools to find housing, more places to live and ways to get to campus, and prompt, detailed communication from the housing office.

Sincerely,

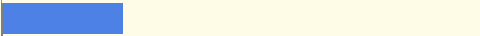

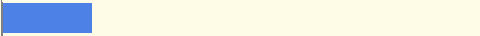

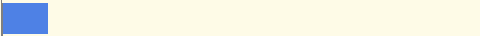

The GSG Executive Committee

# APPENDIX

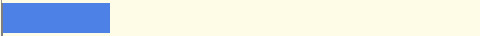

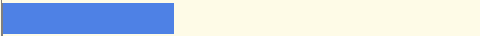

## GSG 2012 Housing Survey Report

### Demographics

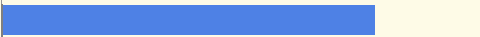

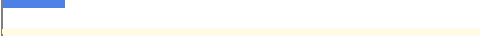
#### For the 2011-2012 term, what was your year of study?

Answer		Response	%
G1		165	25%
G2		150	23%
G3		123	19%
G4		120	18%
G5		62	9%
G6+/DCE		34	5%
		654	

#### What is your general area of study?

Answer		Response	%
Engineering		147	22%
Humanities		137	21%
Natural Sciences		235	36%
Social Sciences		135	21%

#### For the 2011-2012 term, what was your housing situation?

Answer		Response	%
University housing		510	78%
Off campus housing in the Princeton area		85	13%
Off campus housing outside of Princeton		59	9%

## Respondents Living On Campus for the 2011-2012 Term

### In which university housing lot did you live for the 2011-2012 term?

Answer	Response	%
Graduate College	105	21%
Hibben/Magie Apartments	77	15%
Lawrence Apartments	136	27%
Butler Tract	149	30%
Stanworth Apartments	26	5%
RGS	10	2%
I don't know yet	2	0%

### Where do you plan on living next year?

Answer	Response	%
University housing	274	54%
Off campus in the Princeton area	82	16%
Off campus housing outside of Princeton	70	14%
Don't know	56	11%
I will be graduating	23	5%

### In which university housing lot will you be living for the 2012-2013 term?

Answer	Response	%
Graduate College	23	9%
Lawrence Apartments	104	40%
Butler Tract	83	32%
Stanworth Apartments	37	14%
RGS	12	5%

### How many roommates:

Question	0	1	2	3+	Mean
do you currently have?	86	159	8	6	1.75
would you ideally have?	106	136	8	9	1.69

### What is(are) your primary mode(s) of transportation to campus?

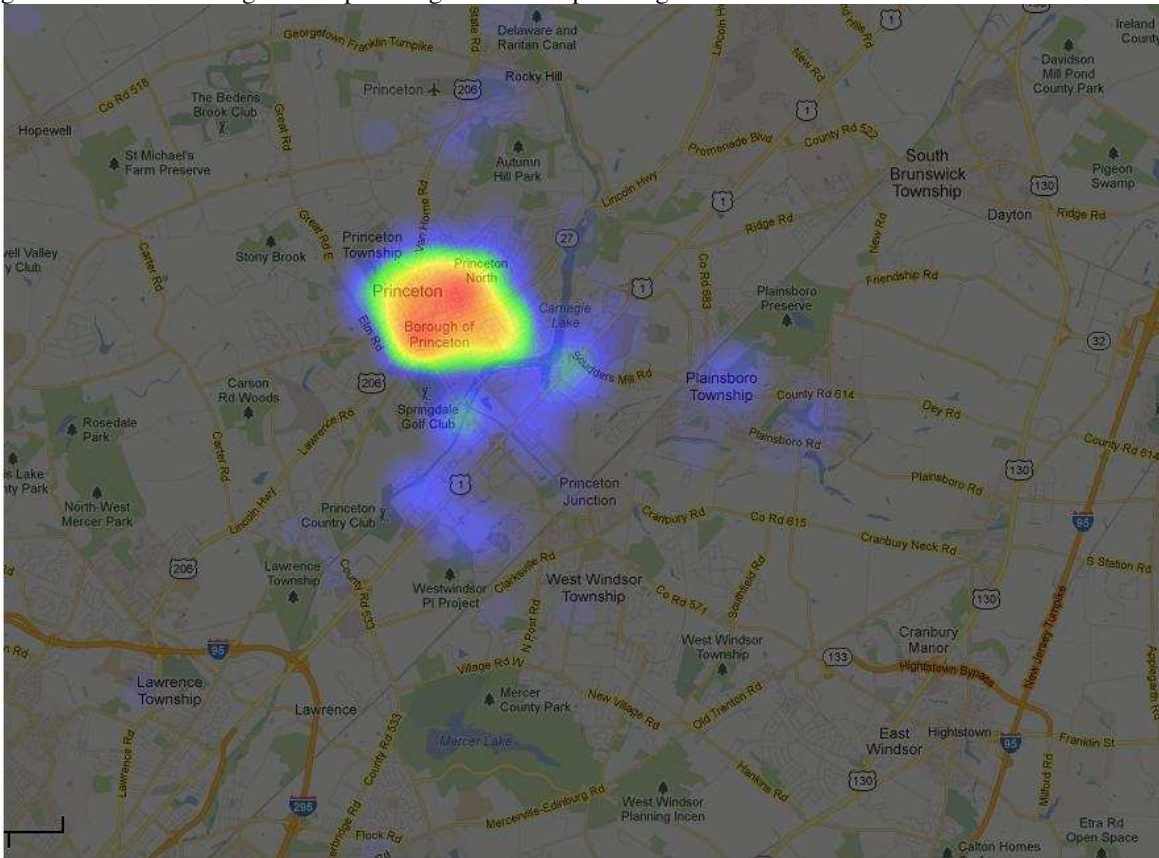
Answer	Response	%
Walking	161	62%
Bicycling	109	42%
Driving	35	14%
Tiger Transit/Shuttles	140	54%

### Please rank order your priorities for choosing to live on campus.

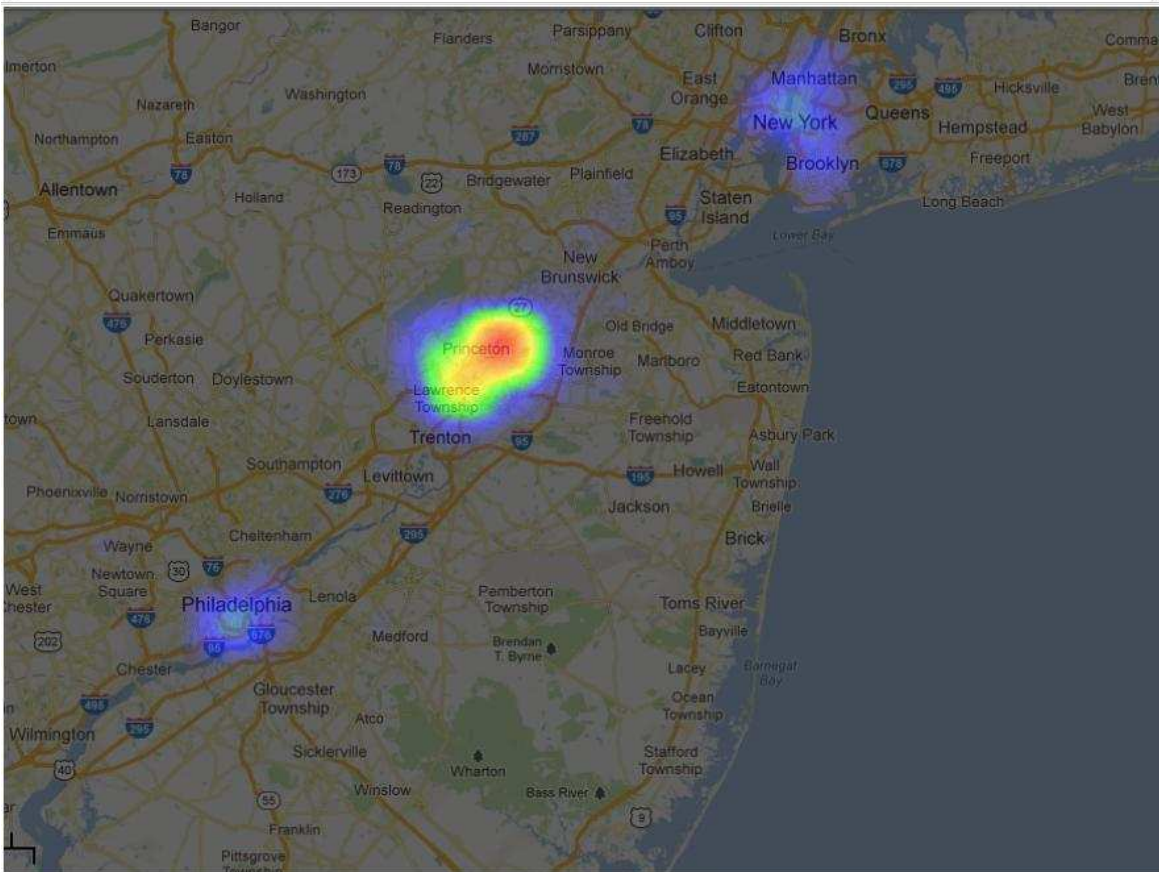
Answer	1	2	3	4	5
Price	95	90	40	30	4
Proximity to campus	99	92	49	17	2
Ease of finding housing	35	48	96	66	14
Amenities available	23	24	66	136	10
Other	7	5	8	10	229

## Respondents Living Off Campus for the 2011-2012 Term

Heat map of graduate students living off campus. Brighter areas represent greater concentrations.



0 18



0 19

**If you know how much do you expect to pay in rent per bedroom per month this coming year?**

Answer	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Rent, per bedroom per month, in dollars.	895.81	330.55

**Where do you plan on living next year?**

Answer	Response	%
The same off campus residence	82	61%
A new off campus residence roughly the same distance from the University	9	7%
An off campus residence closer to the University	15	11%
An off campus residence farther away from the University	13	10%
University housing	16	12%

**Approximately how much did you pay in rent for your apartment per bedroom per month this past year?**

Answer	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Rent, per bedroom per month, in dollars.	903.21	328.53

**If you know, is your rent is changing roughly between the 2011-2012 and the 2012-2013 terms?**

Answer	Response	%
Not changing	43	31%
Yes, increasing	52	37%
Yes, decreasing	11	8%
Do not know	33	24%

**By how much is your rent increasing per bedroom per month?**

Answer	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Rent increase, per bedroom per month, in dollars.	106.86	132.29

**How many bedrooms are there in your residence?**

Answer	Response	%
1	109	39%
2	98	35%
3	42	15%
4	21	8%
5+	10	4%

**How many people other than yourself are currently living in your residence?**

Answer	Response	%
0	59	21%
1	124	44%
2	56	20%
3	25	9%
4	5	2%
5+	11	4%



**Of those also living with you, how many are a(n):**

Question	0	1	2	3	4	5+
Spouse or partner	107	110	0	0	0	0
Child	202	12	3	0	0	0
Other family member	215	1	0	1	0	0
Roommate	116	45	30	14	7	5

**What is(are) your primary mode(s) of transportation to campus?**

Answer	Response	%
Walking	122	44%
Bicycling	90	33%
Driving	118	43%
Tiger Transit/Shuttles	62	23%
Other	25	9%
I do not come to campus	10	4%

**What if any resources did you use when trying to find a place to live?**

Answer	Response	%
Off-Campus Housing website	157	58%
TigerTrade	94	34%
Craig's List	147	54%
Professional service/realtor	68	25%
Friends/contacts	131	48%
Social media	15	5%
Newspaper	25	9%
None	7	3%
Other	49	18%

**How useful were these resources?**

Question	Not at all useful	Somewhat Useful	Very useful	Responses	Mean
Off-Campus Housing website	36	75	27	138	1.93
TigerTrade	24	41	15	80	1.89
Craig's List	19	51	57	127	2.30
Professional service/realtor	5	33	18	56	2.23
Friends/contacts	8	60	51	119	2.36
Social media	4	5	2	11	1.82
Newspaper	0	0	0	0	0.00
None	2	1	4	7	2.29
Other	1	24	19	44	2.41

## Respondents Newly Needing Off Campus Housing for the 2012-2013 Term

### What if any resources have you used to try to find housing?

Answer	Response	%
Off-Campus Housing website	41	75%
TigerTrade	33	60%
Craig's List	41	75%
Professional service/realtor	8	15%
Friends/contacts	44	80%
Social media	8	15%
None	5	9%
Other	5	9%

### How useful were these resources?

Question	Not at all useful	Somewhat Useful	Very useful	Responses	Mean
Off-Campus Housing website	15	24	2	41	1.68
TigerTrade	10	20	3	33	1.79
Craig's List	6	32	3	41	1.93
Professional service/realtor	5	3	0	8	1.38
Friends/contacts	5	32	6	43	2.02
Social media	4	4	0	8	1.50
Other	1	4	0	5	1.80

### What are the primary reasons you have not yet found housing?

Answer	Response	%
Price	41	80%
Distance	35	69%
Location	26	51%
Transportation	25	49%
Pets	7	14%
Number of rooms	4	8%
Roommates	10	20%
Nothing available	23	45%
Have not looked	5	10%
Other	4	8%

### Please rank order your priorities when trying to find a place to live.

Answer	1	2	3	4	5
Price	22	26	5	0	0
Distance/location	26	22	4	1	0
Roommates	1	4	32	13	3
Pet friendliness	4	0	4	20	25
Other	0	1	8	19	25

**If the University was to offer an off-campus housing roommate resource for other graduate students which of the following (if any) would you be interested in using?**

Answer	Response	%
Matching survey	19	36%
Off campus roommate mixer	10	19%
List posting/forum	29	55%
None	20	38%

**Current Housing Situation and Feedback**

**How informed were you of this year's changes to the University housing situation?**

Question	Not at all informed	Somewhat informed	Completely informed	Mean		
How informed?	71	112	263	109	47	2.92

**Have you contacted the Housing Department this year concerning housing issues?**

Answer	Response	%
Yes	253	42%
No	354	58%

**How did you contact the Housing Department?**

Answer	Response	%
Phone	116	46%
Email	186	74%
In person	139	55%
Letter	9	4%

**How many days did it take to speak with someone concerning your issue?**

Question	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7+	I never heard back
Days	60	61	20	11	8	4	3	21	64

**Do you have a car?**

Answer	Response	%
Yes	378	63%
No	224	37%

**Would you consider living in a nearby township (such as Lawrenceville or Plainsboro) if the university provided block leasing and shuttle service?**

Answer	Response	%
Yes	222	37%
No	84	14%
Depends highly on price/distance/etc.	297	49%