

3ci Housing Survey – Results

Summary Document by Brittany Stares, 3ci RA

Executive Summary

Between September 2016 and January 2017, the Carleton Centre for Community Innovation (3ci) conducted a survey of Carleton University students to gain insight on the nature, availability and affordability of student housing in Ottawa.

Key Findings:

- **Students are living in a range of housing types**, including family homes, rented houses, private apartments/condos, Carleton student residences and private student residences
- **Nearly 30% of students report that it takes over 30 minutes by public transit for them to get to Carleton University**
- **Nearly one-fifth of students report that their current housing situation falls below their needs**
- **Students are bypassing Carleton student residence in their housing search.** Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73.8%) indicated they had not applied for Carleton student housing for the current academic year. For those who applied to Carleton student residence but chose to live elsewhere, the primary reason cited was “residence fees were too expensive.”
- **For students who pay rent, average rent price was \$612.28¹ per month on an individual basis.** Only in some cases did this include utilities.
- **Over half (51%) of students are receiving family assistance to pay rent**
- **Family assistance (33%) and student loans (26.5%) constitute the top two means by which students are primarily paying rent**
- **Comments illustrated that students are struggling to afford rents and find housing that meets their needs. Multiple respondents expressed a need for a greater supply of affordable student housing.**

Discussion:

The findings of this survey provide important insights on the state of housing availability and affordability for Carleton students.

The survey found that Carleton students pay, on average, \$612.28 per month in rent (which may or may not include utilities). This is **below the average rental price** for a furnished single room in a house/apartment in Ottawa (\$650²) and well below the average rent price for one-bedroom private apartments in Ottawa (\$972/month³). However, it is higher than the average cost of a

¹ Some limitations exist in assessing average rent price. See full results report for details.

² University of Ottawa Housing Office: (<https://www.uottawa.ca/housing/off-campus-housing>)

³ CMHC Ottawa-Gatineau CMA Rental Market Report (Fall 2015)

furnished single room in a house/apartment in Gatineau (\$440⁴). That nearly 90% of respondents had roommates suggests that students are attempting to reduce their cost of rent by sharing this expense amongst multiple people.

The survey also indicates that **students are currently relying on unsustainable sources to pay for housing**. When asked what their *primary* means of paying rent was, 33% of respondents selected family assistance, 26.5% indicated student loans, and 14.7% indicated personal savings. Less than a quarter (21.4%) indicated that they were predominantly paying for rent through employment. While this is not unexpected given the nature of post-secondary education, it does suggest that students are vulnerable to housing insecurity, particularly once loans, family support and/or personal savings are exhausted and if gainful employment cannot be quickly found thereafter. At the same time, rent constitutes a relatively high portion of students' monthly expenses, with 42.4% of respondents indicating their rent represented 50-70% of their monthly expenses, 34.6% indicating it represented 71-90% of their monthly expenses, and nearly 8% reporting it represented more than 90% of their monthly expenses.

Survey findings also suggest **there is a sizeable portion of the student population for whom Carleton student residence and private student residences are unaffordable or undesirably expensive**. Monthly rents at both Carleton student residence and private student residences in Ottawa are considerably higher than what students – according to our survey – are paying on average. For instance, the cost of a single room at Envie is \$1450/month⁵ and \$1200/month and up at 1Eleven⁶, which do not include meal plans. Even shared bedrooms cost more than the average rent paid by survey respondents (starting at \$650/month at Envie and \$675/month at 1Eleven). While Carleton student residence has only limited offerings for upper-year and graduate students, nearly three-quarters of respondents indicated they did not apply for Carleton residence at all. For those that applied to Carleton residence for the 2016-2017 academic year but chose to live elsewhere, the primary reason cited for this was “residence fees were too expensive” (51% of applicable respondents). Multiple comments provided by respondents indicated that Carleton student residences were prohibitively expensive. This result is quite relevant, as **the number of private student residences in Ottawa is currently growing; however, these generally cater only to one portion of the renting student population**, as, like Envie and 1Eleven, they are typically priced above average market rent⁷. The recent spike in these developments could misleadingly suggest to university administrators that an ample, accessible supply of housing exists for its student population when this may or may not be the case. **This survey demonstrates further research is merited on the need for and availability of affordable (at or below market rate) student housing for Carleton students**. The survey also suggests there is **a potential market for affordable student housing projects in Ottawa**.

⁴ University of Ottawa Housing Office: (<https://www.uottawa.ca/housing/off-campus-housing>)

⁵ <http://enviestudent.com/rooms-and-rates/>

⁶ <http://1eleven.ca/room-prices> (accessed February 2017)

⁷ CMHC Ottawa-Gatineau CMA Rental Market Report (Fall 2015)

3CI Student Housing Survey – Complete Methodology and Results

Introduction:

Between September 2016 and January 2017, the Carleton Centre for Community Innovation (3ci) conducted a survey of Carleton University students to gain insight on the nature, availability and affordability of student housing in Ottawa.

Methodology:

The survey was designed by researchers at the Carleton Centre for Community Innovation and derived from a similar survey conducted at Concordia University for the Concordia Student Union. The survey was constructed using SurveyMonkey and comprised of 23 multiple choice and short answer questions. Questions focused on: type of housing; proximity to Carleton; if respondent had applied to Carleton student residence; satisfaction with current housing situation; and for renters: how much was paid monthly in rent; what utilities were included in rent, if any; number of roommates; and how respondents were paying rent. A short demographic section was included on whether respondents were studying full-time or part-time; whether they were international students; and if they were undergraduate, graduate, post-graduate or special students. In the final question, students were given space to provide any additional comments.

The survey was voluntary; respondents could skip any question and leave the survey at any point. No names, addresses or student identification numbers of participants were collected, though respondents were given the option of providing an email address for a chance to win a prize. This information was separated during analysis of survey results. The list of supplied emails was accessible only to 3ci researchers and will be deleted upon completion of the prize draw. Emails collected during in-person tabling in the University Centre were added to the list and the paper copies shredded. In cases where a specific email address appeared multiple times on the email list, which occurred in some cases due to the long timeframe of the survey and use of an incentive, only the most current response form was included in the final survey results; corresponding duplicate responses were deleted without review. Individual response forms were generally not analyzed, except in early cases where respondents indicated in comments that they were unable to enter full answers for question 21. In these cases, response forms were manually altered by the researcher to reflect respondents' preferences.

The survey was made available through a SurveyMonkey weblink and distributed through the Carleton Undergraduate Students Association (CUSA), via newsletter and social media between October 2016 and January 2017. Hard copies of the survey were also completed during a period of tabling in the University Centre in November 2016, and the results manually entered by a researcher. The Graduate Students Association (GSA) was also invited to distribute the weblink through their newsletter.

The prize draw took place in February 2017 using a random number generator (Random.org) corresponding with a list of provided emails in an Excel file. Emails that had been submitted multiple times were only entered once in the draw (duplicate submission forms had been

previously deleted). Only respondents who completed the survey by the prize draw deadline were included in the draw, though survey responses continued to be accepted after this date. Emails could no longer be linked to individual response forms, including individual comments, by the time the draw took place.

Limits on data:

There are some important limitations on this data. Data was self-reported and not verifiable. While efforts were made to delete duplicate submissions based on recurring emails, some respondents likely entered multiple times with different emails, given the use of an incentive for completing the survey.

Questions on amount of rent paid were also susceptible to misinterpretation and inaccuracy, as some respondents listed total Carleton residence rates, which typically include a meal plan as well as accommodation. Except in a few instances where written comments were added, it was not possible for researchers to definitively identify where this occurred, and as a result, these answers were not excluded from assessing average rent price, despite the fact they somewhat distort findings. As noted in more detail below, however, the number of responses to questions on monthly rent paid that aligned with full Carleton residence fees appeared to be a relatively small amount of the total responses, suggesting that any distortion on reported average rent is minimal. It is also likely that despite our question on monthly rent prices indicating the amount paid on an individual basis, some respondents provided the total rent due, even if they had roommates with whom they shared the cost.

Results

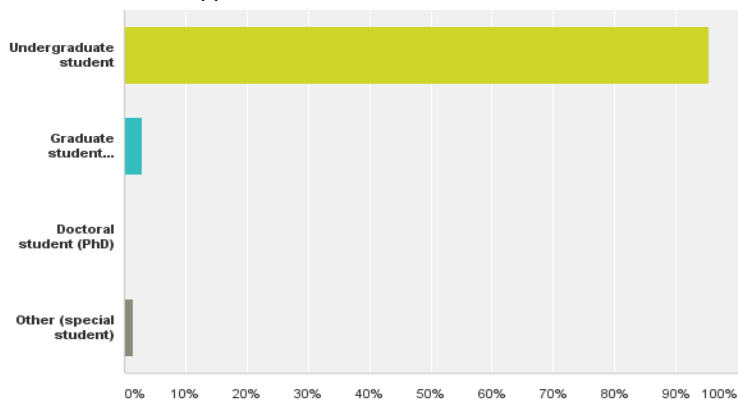
The survey received a total of 598 responses. Where respondents entered more than once with the same email address, only the most recent response form was used in analysis of results; duplicate entries were deleted. A total of 586 responses were included in final survey analysis. Response rates varied for different questions, as some respondents skipped certain questions.

Respondents:

Survey respondents were Carleton students, primarily undergraduate (95.3%). The majority of respondents were also full-time students (94%). The majority of respondents had moved to Ottawa to study at Carleton from another city, province or country (80.7%, or 473 respondents). Nearly 10% of respondents were international students.

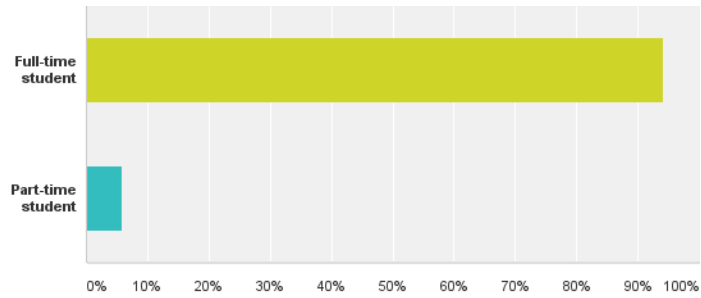
Q1: Are you currently a(n):

Answered: 586 Skipped: 0



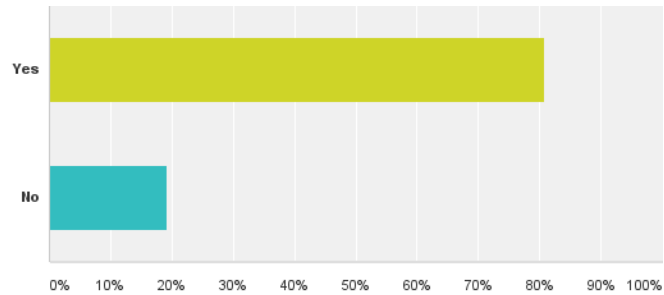
Q2: Are you currently a:

Answered: 584 Skipped: 2



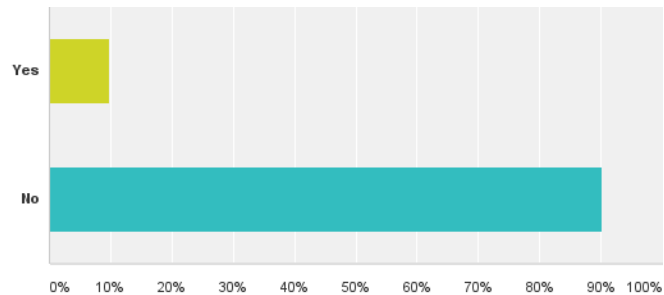
Q3: Did you move to the Ottawa area from another city, province or country to study at Carleton?

Answered: 586 Skipped: 0



Q4: Are you an international student?

Answered: 585 Skipped: 1



Housing Type, Preference and Proximity to Carleton

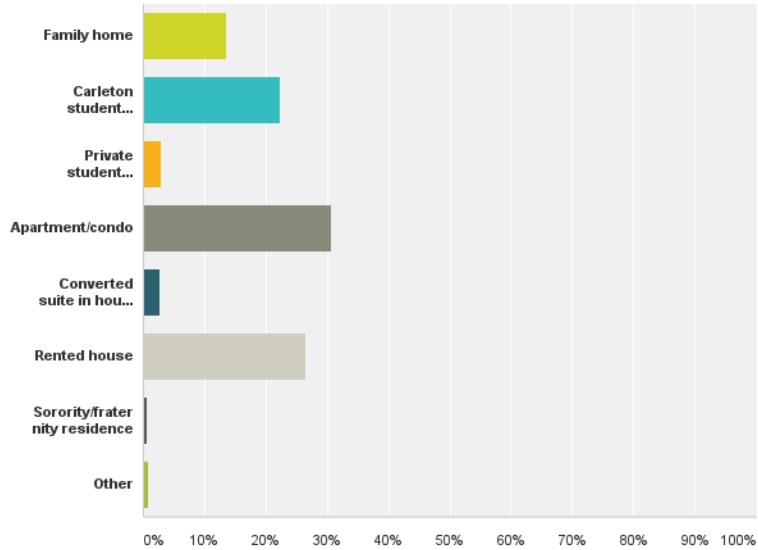
The survey indicates that Carleton students are living in several different types of housing, including family homes, university student residences, private student residences (i.e. Envie), private apartments/condos, and rented homes. The most popular housing forms were apartments/condos (30.7%) and rented houses (26.5%). Over 96% of respondents did not own the property in which they currently live. Nearly a quarter (24.3%) indicated that their current housing situation did not represent their first choice for the academic year. Most respondents expressed satisfaction with where they are currently living, with 63% reporting that their present living situation meets their needs; however, a significant portion (just under 20%) reported that their current living situation falls below their needs.

The survey included questions on Carleton University student housing. Approximately three-quarters (73.8%) of respondents indicated they had not applied for Carleton University student

housing for the current academic year. For those who applied to Carleton student residence but chose to live elsewhere, the primary reason cited was “residence fees were too expensive.”

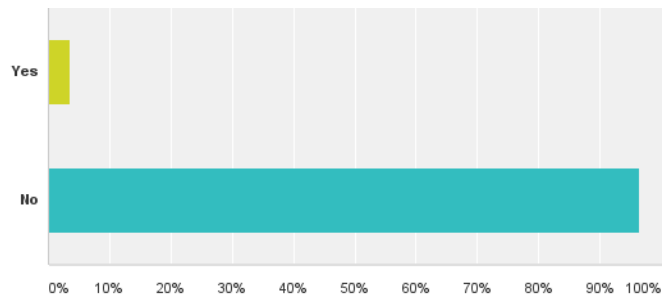
Q5: Which best describes where you are currently living?

Answered: 566 Skipped: 20



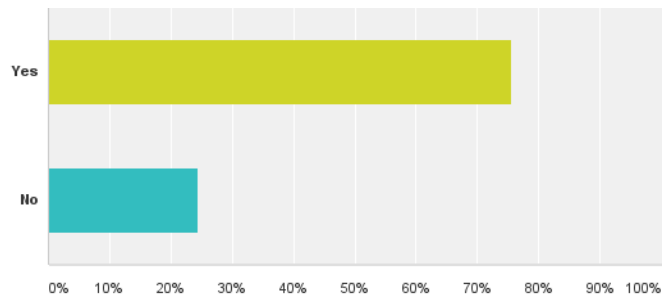
Q6: Do you own the property you are currently living in?

Answered: 565 Skipped: 21



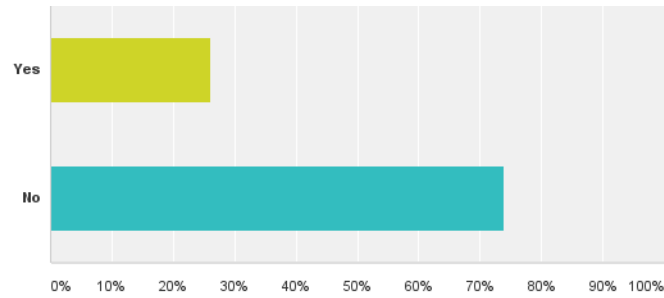
Q7: Was your current location your first choice for accommodation this school year?

Answered: 567 Skipped: 19



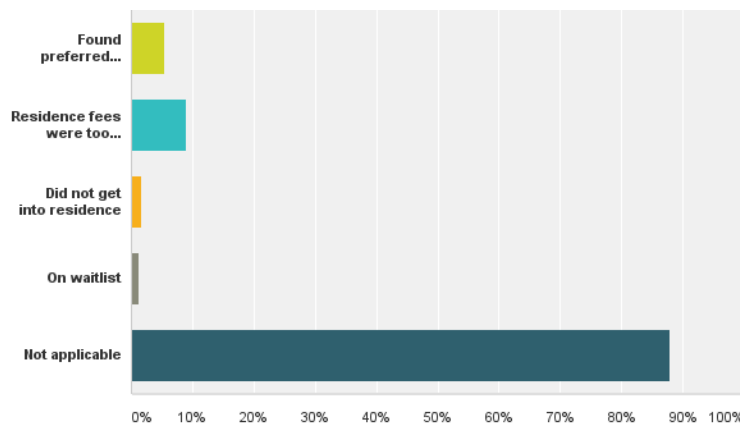
Q8: Did you apply for Carleton University student residence?

Answered: 565 Skipped: 21



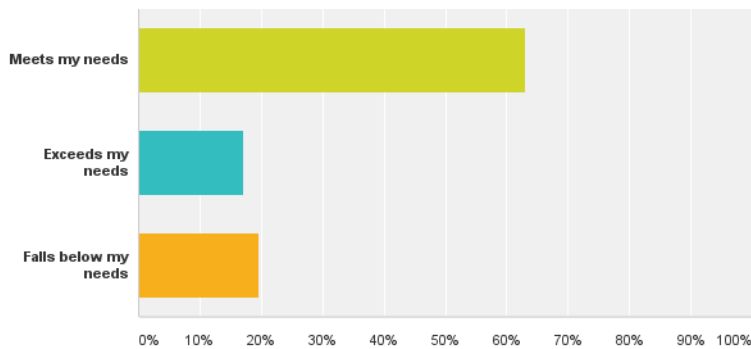
Q9: If you applied to Carleton student residence for fall 2016 but are currently living elsewhere, why are you not living in residence? (check all that apply):

Answered: 507 Skipped: 79



Q10: Does your current housing situation meet, exceed or fall below your needs?

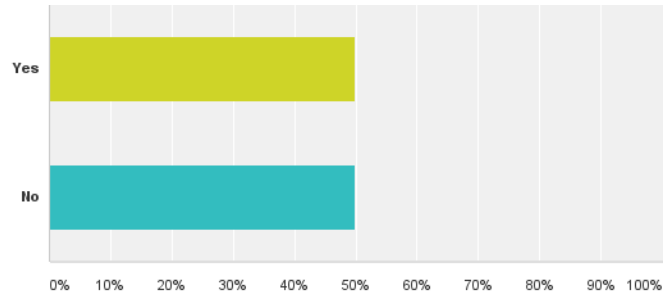
Answered: 564 Skipped: 22



The results indicated that Carleton students are living in all parts of the Ottawa area, as well as in Gatineau. The proximity of where students live to Carleton University and their accessibility to Carleton by public transit varied widely. Respondents were split exactly 50-50 on whether or not they could walk (within 25 minutes) to Carleton. Over 60% of respondents indicated that they only needed to take one bus or train to get to Carleton. Nearly half of respondents (49.9%) indicated that they could reach Carleton by public transit within 20 minutes on their average commute. However, a sizeable portion of respondents (28.7%) indicated that it takes over 30 minutes by public transit to get to Carleton from where they live.

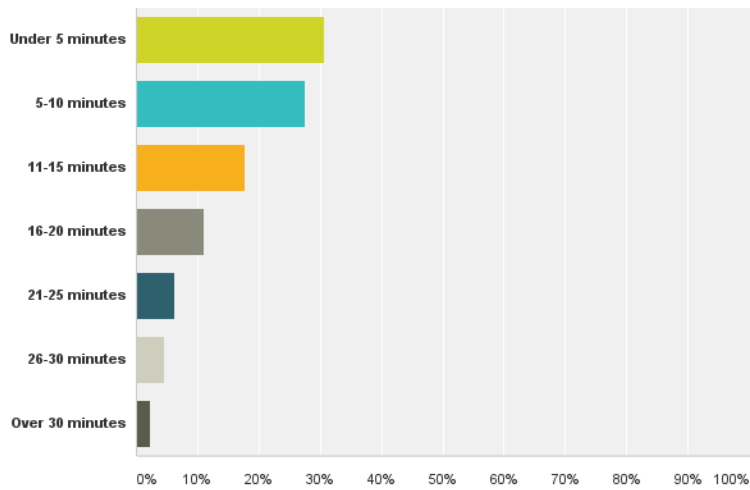
Q11: Are you within walking distance (25 minutes) of Carleton University?

Answered: 560 Skipped: 26



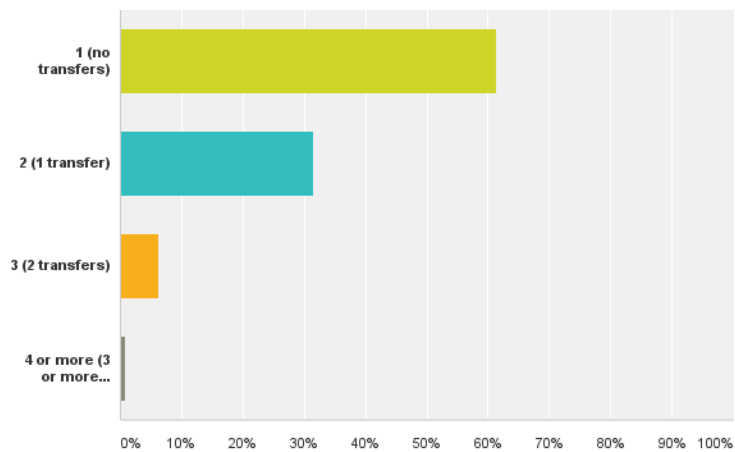
Q12: If driving to Carleton, approximately how long would your average commute take?

Answered: 509 Skipped: 77



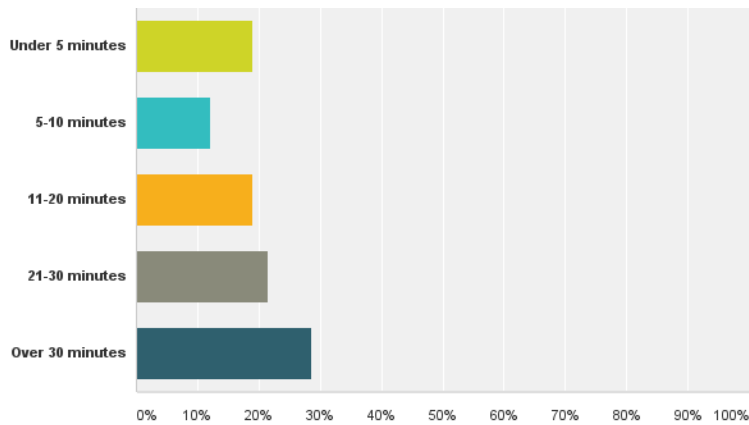
Q13: If taking transit, how many buses/trains does it take you to get to Carleton?

Answered: 513 Skipped: 73



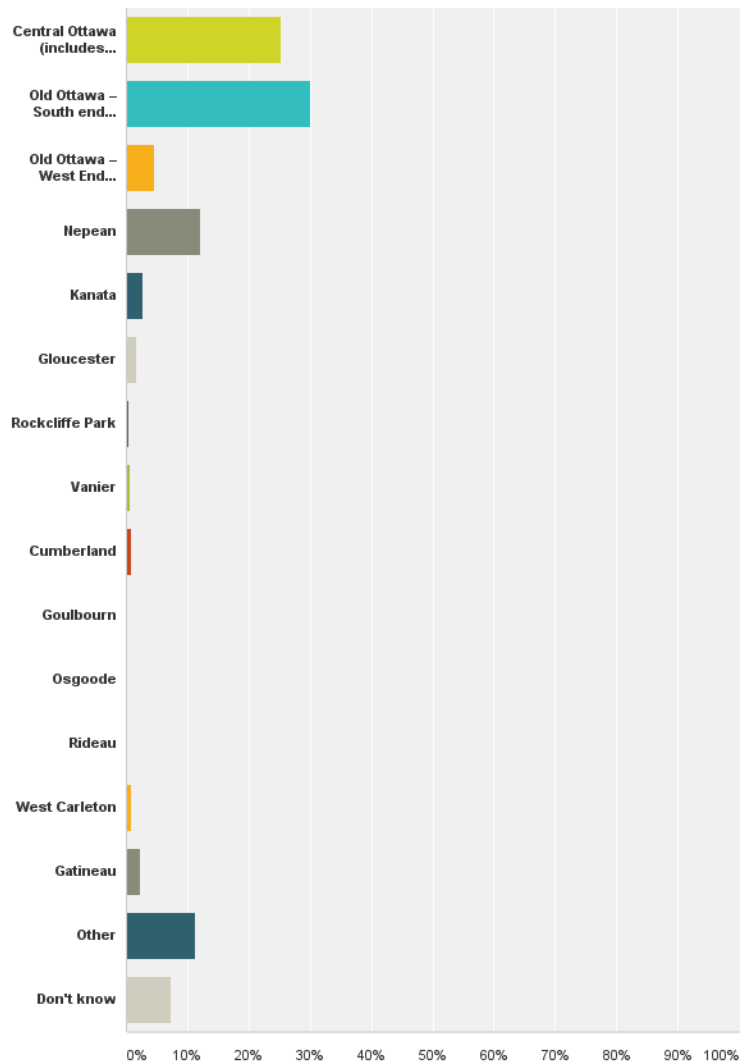
Q14: If taking public transit to Carleton University, approximately how long would your average commute be?

Answered: 513 Skipped: 73



Q15: Where are you currently living geographically?

Answered: 540 Skipped: 46

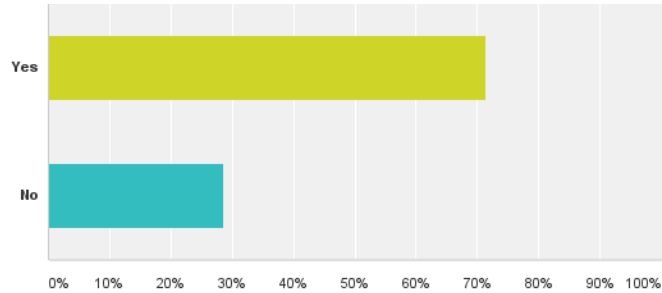


Renters

71% of respondents reported that they pay rent. Of the 348 respondents who provided information on how much rent they paid on an individual basis per month, the average amount was found to be \$612.28⁸ (no figure available).

Q16: Do you pay rent?

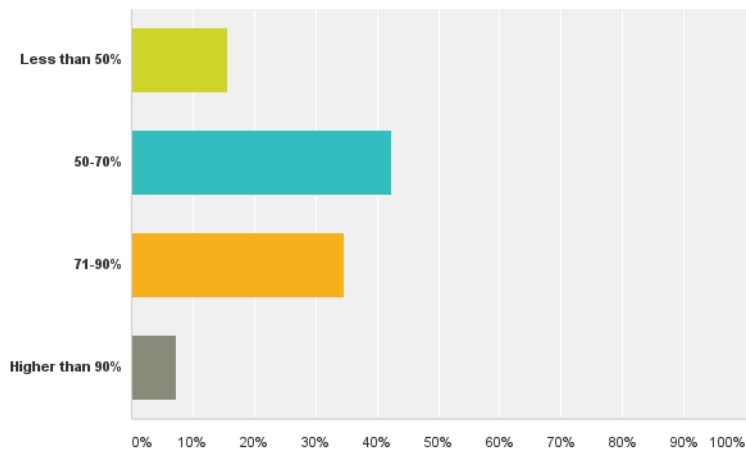
Answered: 555 Skipped: 31



Students indicated that rent constituted a relatively high portion of their monthly expenses, with 42.4% indicating their rent represented 50-70% of their monthly expenses and 34.6% indicating it represented 71-90% of their monthly expenses. Just under 8% of students reported that more than 90% of their monthly expenses went towards rent. Answers ranged widely on whether or not rent included utilities, although nearly one-fifth of respondents indicated that their rent did not include any of the following: heating, hydro/electric, water, Internet or cable.

Q18: Approximately what percentage (%) of your monthly expenses is your rent?

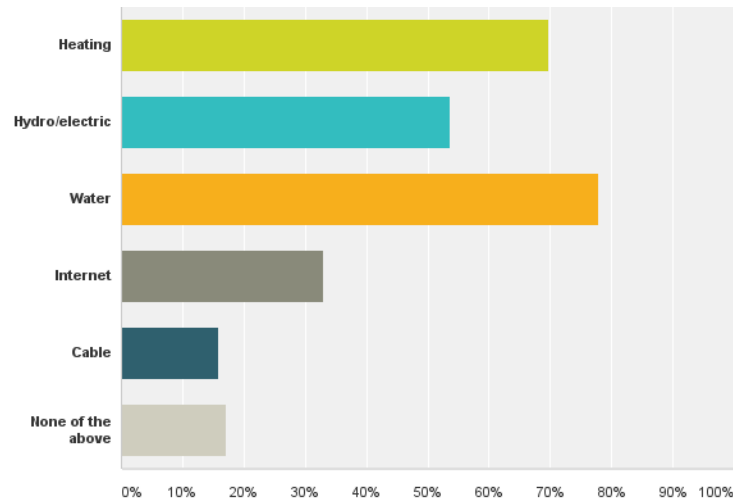
Answered: 384 Skipped: 202



⁸ After outliers and non-numerical responses were excluded. In some cases, students wrote in “Carleton residence fees” in place of an amount. In these instances, the researcher entered a numerical amount based on traditional Carleton residence fees per month. Carleton Centre for Community Innovation acknowledges that this methodology is imperfect as Carleton residence fees vary depending on room type and meal plan (which respondents only sometimes specified), and that meal plans are included in most of these fees. However, these write-ins occurred in less than ten instances out of over three hundred responses. We also acknowledge generally that including residence rent prices (which include meal plans) with rent prices that do not include food prices in assessing average rent price distorts the accuracy of our findings. While attempted to avoid this in constructing survey questions, it was evident from responses we were not successful. However, the total number of responses that appear to align with Carleton residence fees account for less than 6% of responses to this question. We are therefore confident that any distortion to actual average price is sufficiently limited for our findings to remain meaningful.

Q19: Does your rent include the following? (check all that apply)

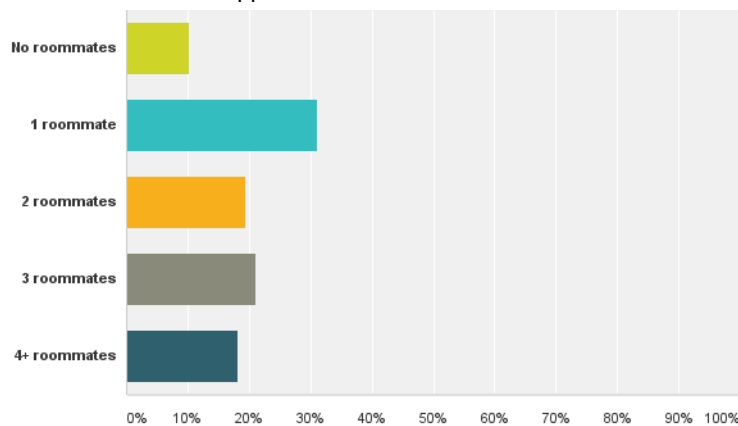
Answered: 384 Skipped: 202



The majority of students surveyed had one or more roommates. Nearly one-third (31%) had just one roommate. 19.5% had two roommates, 21% had three roommates, and 18.2% had more than three roommates. Only 10.3% of respondents reported that they lived alone.

Q20: Do you have roommates?

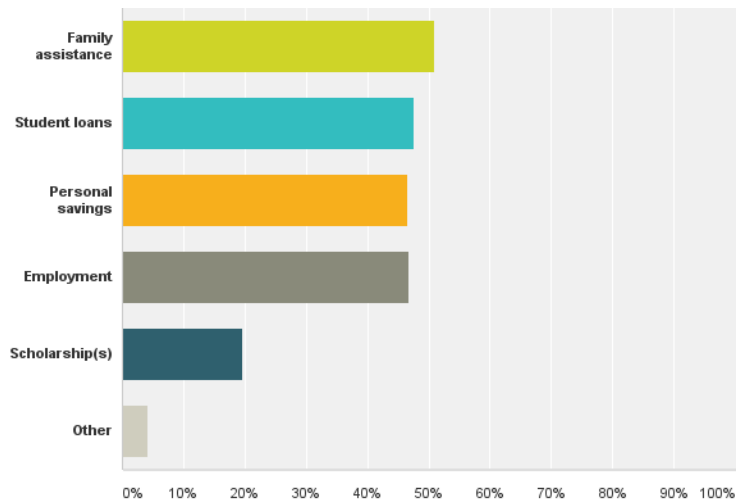
Answered: 390 Skipped: 196



Respondents indicated that they were paying rent in a number of ways, including employment, student loans, personal saving, family assistance and scholarships. Over half (51%) of respondents indicated that they were receiving family assistance in paying rent. When asked what the primary means of paying rent was, 33% of respondents selected family assistance, 26.5% indicated student loans, 21.4% indicated employment, and 14.7% indicated personal savings. Less than 2% indicated scholarships and 2.6% of respondents selected “Other.”

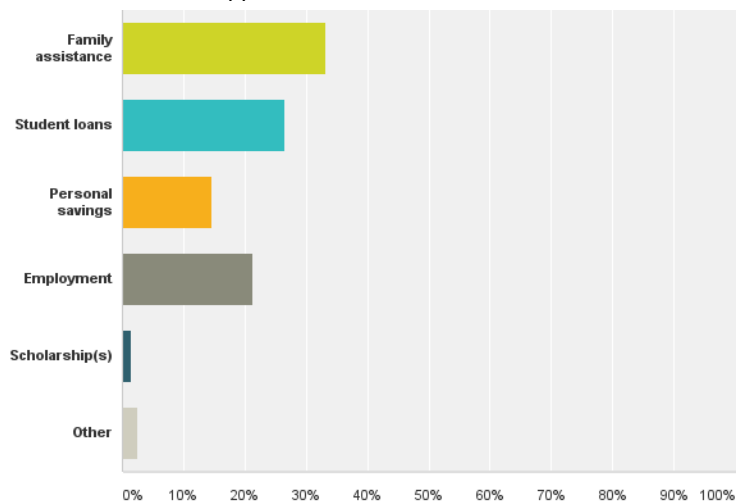
Q21: How are you currently paying rent? (Check all that apply)

Answered: 361 Skipped: 225



Q22: Of this list, which best describes how you are primarily paying rent?

Answered: 388 Skipped: 198



Comments

Thirty-one respondents provided comments (optional). Nearly three-quarters of these (74.19%) conveyed respondent despair or frustration in finding, paying for and/or enjoying current housing. Comments included:

“Looking for apartments for two people in particular has proven to be difficult - especially something that is close to campus, affordable, and not a tiny basement suite.”

“I share a 1 bedroom apartment with my roommate. It's expensive by myself.”

“Too high rent and as compared to commutation time”

“Difficult to pay rent every month.”

“If you didn't save your entire life your gonna [sic] have a bad time.”

Multiple respondents indicated that Carleton residence was too expensive or otherwise inaccessible for them:

“Carleton residence fees are way too high.”

“Couldn't have afforded res even if wanted to. It is too expensive.”

“Residence fees too expensive”

“I would love to live in residence again but my girlfriend is going to be done school and we are planning on living together with removes residence as an option”

Multiple respondents also explicitly identified a need for more affordable student housing options:

“I currently do not get along with any of my roommates and really need an affordable place of my own. I don't want to move back on to residence, and really wish that Carleton had more off campus student housing available in close proximity.”

“Affordable individual housing would be ideal in Ottawa south. Having space to be alone would be great instead of these 6 person tiny houses.”