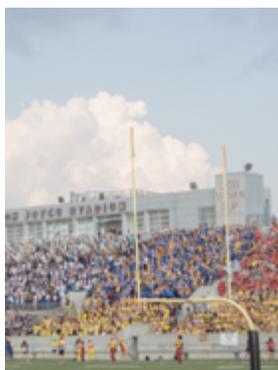


HABITATS

STUDENTS IN THEIR
MUNICIPALITIES
2019





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introduction

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) is proud to release the most recent edition of *Habitats: Students in their Municipalities*. Each year, students from OUSA's member institutions highlight the successes and challenges they face in their municipalities through a series of case studies on municipal-level topics and issues affecting undergraduate students across the province.

This year, students from six of OUSA's eight member institutions submitted case studies with themes ranging from improving the ability of students to advocate municipally and providing work-integrated learning opportunities, to addressing housing issues and unsanctioned street gatherings, as well as highlighting the importance of cultural development.

Ontario's post-secondary institutions are integral parts of their respective municipalities, and collaboration and coordination between universities and their local municipalities is an important aspect of facilitating a mutually beneficial relationship. A healthy, productive environment born out of collaboration and coordination allows both students and municipalities to thrive by fostering an environment of trust, growth, respect, and community.

To this end, *Habitats* offers policymakers, politicians, students, and administrators access to student perspectives on the issues and topics that are relevant to them and their communities. It is our hope that sharing these perspectives with stakeholders will contribute to building meaningful and lasting partnerships between students and their municipal communities.

about ousa

OUSA represents the interests of approximately 150,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight institutions across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable, and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.

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SUDBURY

Laurentian University

LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY IS SITUATED ON THE TRADITIONAL TERRITORY OF THE ATIKAMEKSHENG ANISHINAABE AND COVERED BY THE ROBINSON-HURON TREATY.

Sudbury: From Mining Town to Cultural Capital

KATLYN KOTILA



Officially nicknamed “The Nickel Capital of the World” for the large number of nickel mines it is home to, the City of Greater Sudbury began as a small mining town. However, despite its humble beginnings, Sudbury is currently home to over 161,000 people.¹ As is the case with most mining towns, the beginning of Sudbury’s development was characterized by cycles that aligned with fluctuations in world demand for nickel. This led the city to focus on advancing mining and technology initiatives, leaving few resources for developing education, entertainment, arts, and culture. However, since its amalgamation in 2001, and over the last ten years in particular, Sudbury has grown out of its traditional “small mining town” archetype and has become a microcosm for cultural development in Northern Ontario. The culture both on campus and within a municipality can play an integral role in supporting growth in students’ understanding of the world and overall experience in post-secondary education. Since post-secondary education in Sudbury is fairly new in comparison to many of its provincial counterparts, Sudbury has had to work hard to begin fostering an environment in which students can feel a sense of community.

Sudbury has blossomed into a northern cultural capital with positive effects. A diverse cultural sector breathes life into the entire community through a range of programs and events showcasing the talent of local artists who draw inspiration from the land and the rich multicultural heritage of the area.² This is true for Sudbury, where the success and expansion of arts and culture over the last decade has resulted in an overall strengthening of the community. Our city is home to a growing base of arts- and culture-focused businesses, as well as unique cultural and music festivals.



In 2017, over \$553,274 was invested in local arts and culture through the Greater Sudbury Arts & Culture Grant Program,³ and over 170 events were held at municipal locations. Specifically, Sudbury, which has the third largest Francophone population in Canada outside of Québec, has sought to strengthen this culture through the establishment of a number of Franco-Ontarian cultural institutions such as: a Franco-Ontarian theatre that mounts original productions in French; the first Franco-Ontarian publishing company; and the first annual festival of emerging francophone music.⁴ The city also announced that it would be supporting the development of Place des Arts, the first multidisciplinary arts centre in Northeastern Ontario.⁵ This multipurpose cultural centre will be a contemporary arts and culture facility that serves not only Francophones, but also the entire community. In addition to supporting Francophone arts and culture, Sudbury is also home to multiple English-language repertory theatres, art galleries, museums, a symphony orchestra, as well as annual bilingual festivals and other activities, including the Northern Lights Festival Boréal, Cinefest Sudbury, the Blueberry Festival, and Up Here Fest. Additionally, residents have the opportunity to drive by the Bridge of Nations on a daily basis, witnessing flags from more than 90 countries around the world. This is one more way that the city inspires a sense of local, national,



and international community. These examples illustrate how cultural development has become a cornerstone for the city.

This shift towards cultural development has coincided with a positive trend in resident satisfaction. In 2015, Statistics Canada released data revealing that approximately 45% of Sudbury residents rated their life satisfaction as either a nine or ten out of ten.⁶ The findings also revealed key contributors to Sudbury residents' happiness ratio: an enjoyment of the great outdoors; an appreciation for arts and music, and strong support for local bands; strong support for bilingualism; and an affinity to other residents and their down-to-earth personalities. Sudbury's cultural transformation has generated vibrant growth in cultural activity which has dramatically impacted student life within the community. At Laurentian University, this development has resulted in a 50% growth in their overall student population over the past decade.⁷

Student life is an essential part of the university experience and is important in ensuring the overall success of students. When a city provides ample opportunities to pursue creativity and embrace culture, it allows students to feel a sense of belonging to the communities they are studying in, regardless of where they may originate from. Sudbury's larger investment and contribution to arts and culture has thus had the effect of nurturing a community that students can see themselves in.

According to a survey by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, over half of students reported that they felt that municipalities are not actively engaging with students. Further, approximately two-thirds of students reported that they do not intend to remain in the community where they were studying following graduation.⁸ When considering where to reside after graduation, many students consider arts and culture, affordability, nightlife, employment opportunities, diversity, tolerance and inclusion, ease of transportation, and friendliness of said communities.⁹ Thus, if cities and towns wish to retain the talent and economic potential of students and recent graduates, they need to explore how to more actively engage and meet the needs of their student populations and foster an environment that encourages students to embrace their creativity and culture.

One way to achieve this is for education institutions and municipal governments to form partnerships. Positive student life initiatives should be made a priority not just within institutions, but also within the community. When I hear people reflect on their post-secondary education period as the best years of their life, it typically has less to do with their in-class learning, and more to do with opportunities to socialize and belong to a community. If municipalities can be successful in supporting events and initiatives that welcome students into their communities and make them feel included, then there is a higher chance that more students will want to attend school in the

region and continue to reside there post-graduation. Education is more than what is learned in the classroom and student life goes beyond the confines of campus walls. If a municipality wants to see an increase in student retention, then a focus needs to be put on student life and investing in proper arts and culture initiatives to boost the overall quality of life within the community.

While Sudbury still has a long journey ahead towards further developing its culture and overall student experiences within the community, it serves as an example of what adequately investing in arts and culture can do to further evolve a community.

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HAMILTON

McMaster University

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY IS SITUATED ON THE TRADITIONAL TERRITORY OF THE HAUDENOSAUNEE AND ANISHINAABE. THIS LAND IS COVERED BY TREATY 3 OF THE UPPER CANADA TREATIES, AND WITHIN THE LANDS PROTECTED BY THE "DISH WITH ONE SPOON" WAMPUM AGREEMENT.



Engaging Students in Municipal Elections: Experiences from Hamilton

SHEMAR HACKETT



Last fall, cities across the province held municipal elections, giving students the opportunity to re-elect an incumbent or usher in a new candidate to represent their ward. While municipal elections play a vital role in addressing numerous student-centred issues, such as access to reliable transit, safe rental housing, and off-campus student safety, student engagement in municipal elections has historically been quite low. Local governments often attribute low student engagement to a lack of interest, although this is not always the case. When compared to provincial and federal levels of government, municipalities differ as they are non-partisan (in Ontario). As there are no political parties involved, municipal elections require a significant amount of research to be done on individual candidates, unlike other levels of governments that have parties with longstanding goals and values which helps to make the decision process easier for voters. There are also a multitude of other barriers that contribute to lower student engagement in municipal elections, which we were made aware of through the McMaster Students Union's (MSU) MacVotes election campaign. Below we outline some of the most common challenges we encountered, along with recommendations to dismantle these barriers and maximize the number of students who vote on election day.

VOTING BOOTHS

Throughout the election cycle, MSU volunteers set up tables in our student centre in an effort to provide students with information on local candidates and where they could vote. A majority of the students we interacted with asked if a polling station or voting booth was available on campus where they would be able to quickly vote between classes. Unfortunately, no voting booths were available on our campus, and the closest polling station was at a nearby church. As part of our initiative, MSU volunteers offered to walk students to local off-campus polling stations. However, many students either did not have the time or were not familiar with the area which prevented them from going to an off-campus location. A recent survey conducted by MSU found that many students never venture beyond their campus to explore the City of Hamilton.¹ The difficulties with accessing off-campus polling stations were exacerbated by the timing of the election, which happened during our peak midterm assessment period in the middle of October. Not only is this a stressful and time-consuming period for students, but it can also be difficult for faculty members and staff, who came up to me while tabling and expressed their desire for a polling station on campus so they could vote throughout the day.

To address this barrier, municipalities should create satellite polls on university campuses. A satellite poll gives voters the opportunity to vote for candidates in their home riding, rather than voting for candidates in the ward their university is located. When speaking to students in October, many students expressed the fact that they were not informed of the local issues in Hamilton, which is understandable as many have only lived in the city for a few years during their undergraduate degree. A satellite poll gives students who were raised in Hamilton the opportunity to vote but also gives commuter students, who typically have a shorter time throughout the day to vote,

the opportunity to do so on campus with ease. As many students are knowledgeable about the challenges their home city faces, a satellite poll on campus would decrease the students' concerns about not feeling well-informed on local issues and work to increase the overall number of students voting in an election. Administering a polling station on campus that integrates voting into students' routines would help to increase voting accessibility for students, as well as for faculty and staff.

INCREASED COLLABORATION

The first step towards increasing student turnout for elections is a stronger relationship between municipalities and student unions. In Hamilton, the MSU and the City ran separate campaigns pushing students to vote. The motivating force that led MSU to run our own campaign was the lack of promotion directed at getting students out to vote from the City during the election cycle. There is value in student-led engagement to increase voter turnout, as Elections Canada has found that student organizations can help to encourage student voters.² However, although the MSU has the responsibility to keep students informed and engaged, municipalities should also do their part to ensure that the thousands of students attending universities and colleges in their cities are informed about voting. When running our MacVotes campaign, we found tabling within our student centre to be an effective way to disseminate information. However, while we were able to provide a useful resource for students, having city officials table and engage in outreach initiatives would signal to students that municipalities care about our voices. This is important because students spend upwards of four years in a city while completing their degree, many students stay during the summer and following graduation to work or complete an additional degree or certificate.

For an example of a **work-integrated learning opportunity** that connects students to municipalities, see *Laurier's C3 Innovation Labs* on page 25.

In addition to increasing engagement with students during elections, the city should also hire student staff to strategically plan and promote elections. Students can be hired for logistical planning and promotion, fostering the development of transferable skills and providing work experience. In a 2016 survey collected by Abacus Data, only 13% of students who responded felt there were enough work-integrated learning opportunities (WIL) available to them.³ Creating more WIL opportunities not only provides students with work opportunities during elections but would also increase student engagement with municipal elections as a whole.

RANKED BALLOTS

After speaking with students throughout the election, we found that an additional barrier to voting was the number of candidates voters were asked to choose from. For example, our ward had 13 candidates running for City Councillor and 15 candidates running for Mayor. One student I spoke with on election day told me one reason they were not going to vote was because they were undecided between three candidates and were concerned about making the wrong decision. This is a concern that many students across the province are likely facing where they have a significant number of candidates to choose from and limited time to make decisions on top of school, work, and exams.

One solution to this barrier could be implementing a ranked ballot system, where voters rank candidates in order of preference for a particular office.⁴ In 2018, municipalities across the province were given the option to adopt this approach,⁵ and London was the first city in Canada to do so, reporting that they experienced no issues.⁶ As it stands, Hamilton's municipal elections use a first-past-the-post system, in which voters can only choose one candidate and the individual who receives the most votes is elected.⁷ It can be quite time-consuming for students to research each candidate and some students may not feel sufficiently versed in municipal politics to select one candidate to represent them for a number of years as they complete their degree. A ranked ballot system would alleviate this stress while continuing to ensure that any candidate elected wins by a majority. Municipalities across the province can learn from London by adopting a ranked ballot system to ease the decision-making process for students which would further incentivize them to vote come election day.

Students make up a large portion of the population within a municipality but frequently feel left out when it comes to municipal engagement and voting in particular. The responsibility to keep students informed and engaged in municipal elections should not fall solely on student unions – local governments should be prioritizing engagement of all residents equally. Throughout my years advocating to local stakeholders, I have learned that municipalities view students as a distinct group, separate from other residents. This perspective has the effect of ignoring students and pushing them away from integrating themselves into the larger community. The recommendations introduced above encourage municipalities to consider the unique needs of students while also considering them as part of the broader community. They should be adopted as tangible steps towards an accessible and stress-free voting process for all students.

endnotes

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Implementation of Rental Housing Licensing in the City of Hamilton: A Student Perspective

STEPHANIE BERTOLO

Students should have access to safe, liveable, and non-hazardous rental housing during their post-secondary education. However, for students living away from home, a rental housing horror story can be seen as a right of passage. Most of the time, they are stories we can laugh over with friends. In my rental home this year, our hot water was shut off because the landlord forgot to pay the bills, real estate agents came to assess the home without any of us being informed our house might be sold, the ceiling started leaking, the kitchen sink broke, mice ran across our counter tops, and somehow the dirty dishes were never-ending. But then there are times when the stories are no longer about minor nuisances but extreme dangers to students' safety. For some students, their heat did not turn on in the dead of winter. Their belongings were stolen because the locks were so easy to break. Their landlords threatened to evict them on illegal grounds or stole their money. Students' safety is put in jeopardy on a regular basis by landlords who are absentee and do not adequately care for their property or the tenants who live in them.

Similar to most universities in Ontario, McMaster does not have enough on-campus residences to house students of all years. McMaster is also one of the only universities that cannot guarantee residences to all first-year students, so approximately half of students have to find accommodations elsewhere. In 2018, the McMaster Students Union collected data about students' experiences living in Hamilton through the *Your City Survey*. Over half of students who responded lived in rental units in near-campus neighbourhoods.¹ The average cost of rent was reported at approximately \$500/month and, typically, students had five roommates in their homes.² Due to a lack of apartment buildings or purpose-built student housing in the area, students typically lived in single dwelling houses that had been converted to be rented by the room with shared kitchens and bathrooms. The majority of students felt safe where they lived, but about 15% said that they did not.³ Common reasons for not feeling safe included break-ins, pests, roommates, dysfunctional safety systems, and landlords.⁴ These issues are often symptoms of a landlord neglecting a property and ignoring their responsibilities to their tenants.

It is not reasonable to expect students, or any tenant, to know if their rental unit is up to all the fire, safety and building codes, required by law. Most of these codes are very complex and require inspections by professionals. Students looking for a rental near the McMaster campus often do not have more than a half hour to view the property. Then, they are often pressured to make a decision or risk losing the opportunity to rent the house. Instead, landlords should be held accountable for adhering to municipal and provincial laws to ensure that students who are paying to live in landlords' properties are able to maintain a quality of life.



Rental housing licensing is one way to address these concerns. In order to rent units, landlords would have to obtain a license from the city for a small fee; their units would need to be inspected to ensure it meets all of the necessary safety and building codes.⁵ Just as restaurants need to be inspected and licensed to serve food, it is reasonable to expect the same for rental units to ensure their safety before being rented. This has been implemented in a number of cities, including London, Waterloo, Windsor, Peterborough, and North Bay, all which have large student populations.

However, while licensing can increase the safety of rentals, it can also be used to unfairly target student populations. The Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC) notes that student status can be a proxy for age, marital status, and/or receipt of public assistance, which means that if by-laws disadvantage students because of their status it will be considered discriminatory.⁶ This was the case in North Bay, where students felt discriminated against by rental housing licensing.⁷ The OHRC found that the by-law did discriminate against non-traditional families and recommended this portion of the by-law be revised.⁸ As well, they recommended the City educate the public that the by-law does not strictly apply to students.⁹ So long as the by-law serves planning or safety purposes and is applied to the entire municipality, it will not be considered discriminatory.¹⁰

The City of Hamilton has been looking to adopt a rental housing licensing by-law and pilot program since as early as 2012.¹¹ At that time it failed due to both housing advocates and landlords being against the project; housing advocates feared it would cause evictions, creating a greater housing crisis, while landlords did not want to bear the cost of the licensing fee.¹² With few stakeholders believing the licensing would address concerns, City Council decided to invest in increased enforcement of property standards and to establish a rental housing sub-committee.¹³ This committee would be made up of interested stakeholders with the mandate of “assist[ing] with the implementation of an approach to enforcement and legalization of appropriate rental housing”.¹⁴ Any recommendations from the sub-committee would go to the City of Hamilton’s Planning Committee for consideration and then, if approved, would go to City Council.

In 2018, the sub-committee recommended the City of Hamilton adopt a mandatory licensing by-law for rental business operators to implement through a rental housing licensing pilot project.¹⁵ The pilot would be implemented in Wards 1 and 8 – both areas with a large population of McMaster and Mohawk students – for two years, and would also include an education component for landlords as well as consideration of financial off-sets for tenants impacted by a rental increase due to the licensing.¹⁶ The results of the pilot would be used to assist future decision-making related to a city-wide rental housing licensing by-law.¹⁷ However, it was impossible for the sub-committee members to come to a consensus on this pilot. The members of the sub-committee represented different stakeholders, who often had fundamentally different interests. Those who represented landlords were opposed to any form of licensing, arguing that the costs would place increased pressure on landlords, resulting in higher rent prices and a reduction of units.¹⁸ Those who represented tenants, such as the MSU, believed the regulations would provide increased protections and reduce the amount of unsafe housing in the City of Hamilton. When considering these groups, it is important to note that landlords protecting their profits is one of their largest motivations while protecting the most vulnerable is a motivator for tenant rights groups. Enforcement of regulations and licensing fees jeopardize landlords’ profits, but with the intention of increasing safety for tenants. While landlords are still opposed to the pilot, it was able to pass by a majority vote on the sub-committee.

The sub-committee’s recommendation then went to the Planning Committee. At this meeting, landlords filled council chambers and eighteen individuals delegated against the pilot.¹⁹ Many of them argued

that it was the landlords who were unfairly targeted, and that tenants were the ones to blame for poor rental conditions. Only two delegations were in favour – one was the McMaster Students Union, and the other was from the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), an advocacy group for low- to middle-income tenants.²⁰ Despite the large group in opposition, the Planning Committee, and subsequently City Council, passed the recommendation for staff to bring forward a draft Licensing By-law to implement through a rental licensing pilot project in Wards 1 and 8.²¹ Councillors agreed that action needed to be taken on the unsafe units, predominately rented to students, while being mindful of the arguments that this might increase costs of rent.

City Staff will report back on the draft pilot project in the summer of 2019, when it will then have to be approved by council. Students and tenant rights advocacy groups, such as ACORN, will have to continue advocating to ensure its implementation. As the pilot is implemented, it is important for council and advocacy groups to note if rental prices are increasing at a faster rate, if a dramatic number of units are being removed from the market, and if, in fact, units are safer for tenants. While an increase in rent and reduction of units may occur, supporters of tenant rights will have to weigh this against the increased safety of units. For instance, if rent increases by \$10 a month but the unit meets all regulations, some may argue this is a worthy trade-off to prevent needless accidents that could cause injury or death. Additionally, students must hold the municipality accountable to expanding the by-law to all areas of the City. If it remains only in the two wards where most students live, it may be considered discriminatory by the OHRC. The increased safety the by-law provides should be afforded to all tenants, regardless of status.

After many years of advocacy, having City Council agree to a rental licensing pilot project is a major step towards safer housing for post-secondary students and all tenants in the City of Hamilton. Poor rental conditions must not be considered the norm for students. While more still needs to be done, it is through the will to try that we will make even greater strides forward.



endnotes

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WATERLOO

Wilfrid Laurier University
University of Waterloo

UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO & WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY ARE SITUATED ON THE HALDIMAND TRACT, WHICH ENCOMPASSES PART OF THE TRADITIONAL TERRITORY OF THE ATTAWANDARON, THE ANISHINAABE, AND THE HAUDENOSAUNEE.



Analysis of Barriers for Student Advocacy in Waterloo

BENJAMIN EASTON

From May 2018 to April 2019, I worked for the Federation of Students (Feds) at the University of Waterloo as Municipal Affairs Commissioner. Much of this role involved acting as a student representative to Waterloo City Council Committees, including our municipal Town and Gown Committee. In this role I was able to see some of the barriers to student advocacy at a municipal level.

My experience is that there are more opportunities for student advocacy than there is time for students to commit themselves to these opportunities. For example, the Town and Gown Committee is composed of a steering committee, multi-agency group, and frequently formed sub-committees to investigate topics such as student talent retention, community cohesion, student wellness, and student housing.¹ In addition, several advisory committees to city council include a student resources member in their membership who is not necessarily a representative from any of Waterloo's student associations. While each of these groups provide opportunities for student advocacy, there exist barriers which can prevent our perspectives from being heard.

Notably, Feds is not the only party with an interest in providing consistent representation to the City of Waterloo. In my experience, the City is seeking student input to bring legitimacy to its decisions affecting student populations. I was often invited explicitly to share the student perspective on topics like student retention or unsanctioned street gatherings, such as those that happen on St. Patrick's Day. Students are in a unique position to provide insights that the City needs to make effective decisions. This is especially true considering there are nearly 60,000 students – 37,000 undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Waterloo² and over 19,000 undergraduate and graduate students at Wilfrid Laurier University³ – in addition to an expanding student population at Conestoga College's Waterloo Campus,⁴ all in a city with a total population of 137,000.⁵ This large proportion of students is indicative of the importance of higher education to Waterloo's economy and civic culture—which is why the City wants to hear student voices. Not only do students make up a significant proportion of the City of Waterloo's population, but undergraduate students represent a unique type of citizen.



ANALYSIS OF BARRIERS

While students can bring an important voice to municipal issues, there are some factors which can impede effective student advocacy. The most obvious barrier to student advocacy is our academic obligations. Lecture attendance is imperative to academic success, and students do not have the power to reschedule a lecture. When scheduling conflicts arise, particularly between lectures and municipal committee meetings, there is a clear barrier to student voices being heard at this level. By contrast, university administrators and city officials have attendance at such meetings as a requirement of their job, meaning that there will often be a disproportionate balance between student and non-student representation.

Another barrier specific to the University of Waterloo's student body arises with respect to our co-op program. Nearly two-thirds of students at the University of Waterloo are enrolled in a co-op program where they alternate work and study semesters.⁶ During work semesters, students may reside in other municipalities which makes municipal advocacy difficult.

Another factor impacting the effectiveness of student advocacy is the high turnover within student associations. Many positions, like the Municipal Affairs Commissioner, are one-year contracts that are filled by a new student every year. This high turnover severely impacts the institutional memory of student unions, which in turn affects the ability to engage in advocacy projects with timelines longer than any given student leader will work in their position. This can have negative consequences on the advocacy potential of these students.

One result of these barriers is that student representation is carried out by a limited group of people who may not be able to adequately represent all students. This is something that I grappled with personally, as during my time working for Feds I often doubted my ability to reasonably represent such a diverse population of students.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATIONS

What can be done about these issues? Based on my experience, I have some recommendations for breaking down these barriers to advocacy to ensure effective and consistent student representation at the municipal level.

One suggestion is to enable remote participation. This is something we have implemented with Feds Students' Council and its committees where we use video conferencing services to allow students to participate when they are away from Waterloo for co-op jobs or even study breaks like reading week or the period between semesters. This could easily be adopted in a similar manner at the municipal level.

Another way to address these barriers is to enable students to engage in municipal advocacy through work-integrated learning opportunities. Offering work-integrated learning opportunities like those provided through CityStudio programs could help attract a greater diversity of student advocates. CityStudio initiatives vary from city to city, but in general they enable interaction between municipal professionals and members of university communities to find

To learn more about **CityStudio** in the Waterloo region, check out: <https://www.wlu.ca/academics/faculties/faculty-of-arts/c3-innovation-labs/city-studio.html>

innovative solutions to urban problems. Since work-integrated learning opportunities allow students to earn academic credit for their work, there is less of an issue when it comes to scheduling conflicts that force students to choose between lectures and committee meetings.⁷ On top of this, students gain professional experience that they otherwise might not have access to.

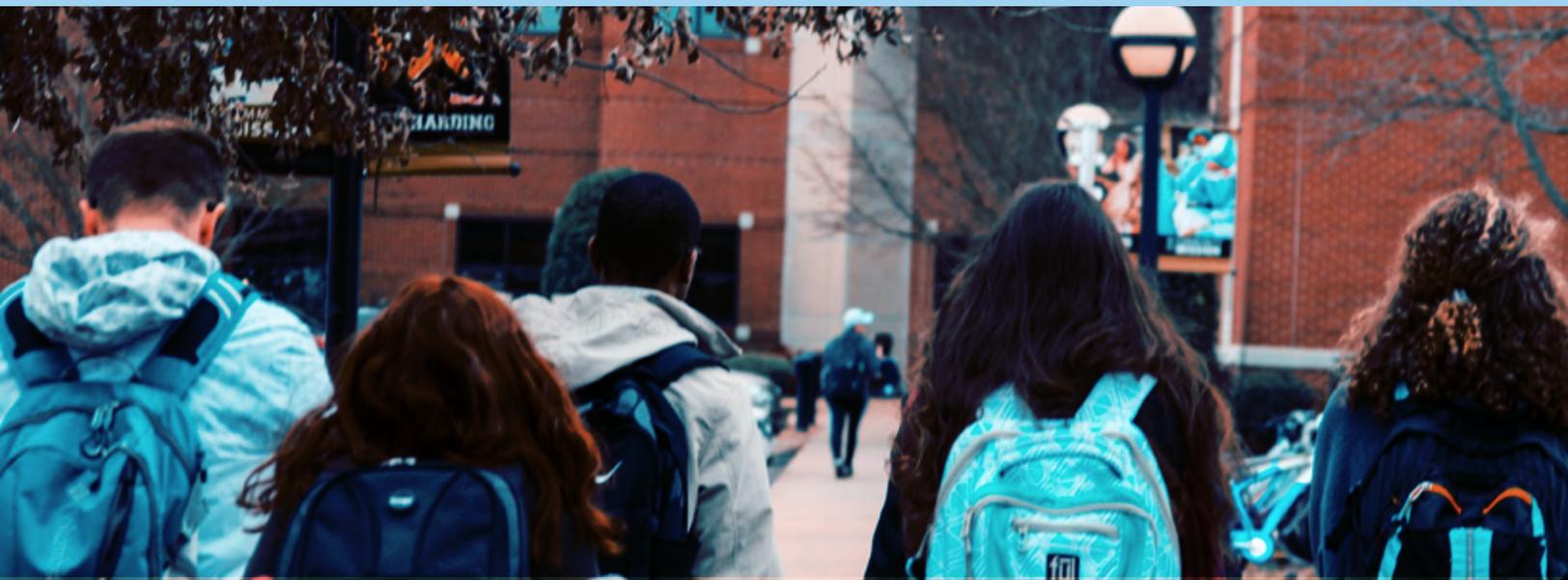
Finally, robust transitioning of student representatives should be a top priority. Oftentimes, transition is dependent on individual efforts and is not integrated into their roles. If the outgoing student leader is particularly organized and keen, then the transition might be relatively successful, although this may not always be the case. Ideally, this variability in calibre of transition would be reduced by making transitions systematic. Implementing such a transition period could involve hiring student representatives before their successor leaves, so that their terms in office overlap. This would provide the incoming student advocate a chance to shadow the outgoing, to be brought up to speed on relevant committee work, and to meet and create relationships with stakeholders. Robust student transitioning also provides the chance to work on advocacy projects with a longer timespan than the individual student representative. A weak institutional memory is a problem for any student association, and mitigating that issue will only serve to empower student advocates to best serve undergraduates in their municipalities.

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Laurier's C3 Innovation Labs: How Experiential Learning Fosters Civic Development for Students and Municipalities

SHAWN CRUZ & SHANNON KELLY



Experiential learning is an increasingly common practice at Ontario's post-secondary institutions. Growing forms of experiential learning that have been utilized as pedagogical tools include community service learning (CSL) and community-based learning (CBL). CSL is widely defined as learning that occurs when students are sent into the community as part of a course in order to provide some type of service, such as helping out at a local food bank.¹ CBL invites community partners into the classroom to present problems, questions, or areas of interest for students to research and propose solutions to.² Each of these approaches to community-engaged learning allows students to gain hands-on learning experiences while also providing communities and organizations with unique student insight and assistance, fostering positive campus-community relationships.³

Studies conducted on CSL and CBL in post-secondary education emphasize the value these models bring to students, their institutions, and the community.⁴ One notable benefit is the development of citizenship and strengthening of students' connection to their communities.⁵ Early studies on this type of experiential learning highlight how "service participants become even more strongly committed to the notion that, as individuals, they have the ability to change society."⁶ However, experiential learning, including CSL opportunities, has not always received enough attention. For example, a 1996 survey conducted in the United States found that only 2.5 percent of college faculty included community service as a requirement in their courses, and only 2.2 percent of faculty had community service as an optional component.⁷ However, post-secondary institutions have recently begun to acknowledge the benefits of this approach to learning for both students and their communities. They recognize how employers are looking for the key skills that students develop through experiential learning, including "communications skills, problem-solving skills, analytical abilities and leadership."⁸ By creating additional programs and developing ones that consist solely of experiential learning placements, post-secondary institutions can give their graduates the tools to be leaders in the workforce.

Wilfrid Laurier University has become a leader in offering experiential learning opportunities to its students, both in and outside of the classroom, and can serve as a model for other schools and municipalities. Laurier's experiential learning program is a particularly strong example of how CSL and CBL can be implemented in mutually beneficial ways for both students and their municipalities by targeting local citizen development. Currently, Laurier offers several experiential learning courses across multiple disciplines, including psychology, languages, religion and culture, as well as human rights and human diversity.



These projects are organized through Laurier's C3 Innovation Labs (C3IL), offering students an opportunity to undertake experiential learning at three different levels: campus, city, and community. C3IL focuses on areas of urban sustainability, social entrepreneurship, and community engagement, not only teaching students how to be successful in the workforce, but also teaching them to be conscious of their contributions to society. In order to emphasize this commitment to experiential learning, Laurier students can complete "options" to enhance their degree. Degree options include concentrations in Social Entrepreneurship and Community Engagement, as well as the opportunity to complete the Capstone Urban Sustainability Project for credit. The Community Engagement and Social Entrepreneurship options in particular are two strong examples of CSL that benefit both students and their communities.

The Community Engagement option centres around a partnership with The Working Centre - a community-based non-profit organization that works to connect individuals with the tools and resources "to create their own work".⁹ This option provides students with hands-on opportunities to be involved with Working Centre initiatives in downtown Kitchener that focus on social inclusion, local democracy, and community enterprise.¹⁰ The Community Engagement option not only provides students with the opportunity to take what they have learned in university and apply it to real-world situations, but it also allows them to further develop interdisciplinary thinking as well as marketable and transferable skills.¹¹ Through this partnership, students are challenged to "create solutions for critical challenges faced in urban settings",¹² which not only helps the community to address local issues, but also fosters a sense of being able to contribute to social change among students.

For an example of how **work-integrated learning opportunities** can increase municipal engagement, see *Analysis of Barriers for Student Advocacy* on page 21.

Social entrepreneurship has a variety of definitions, but it is best described as a project started "for the social good, and the container – be it a business, co-op, not-for-profit or charity – is secondary."¹³ Universities across Canada, including Laurier, have put greater investment into programs that give students the tools to enact social change. The Social Entrepreneurship option offered to Laurier students is another strong example of one approach to



CSL that can serve as a model for schools across the province looking to enhance their experiential learning programs. The Social Entrepreneurship option, which is grounded in the liberal arts, is the first of its kind in Canada and helps students build a strong foundation to become social entrepreneurs.¹⁴

Within this option, students can take CityStudio, which is based on a model developed in Vancouver.¹⁵ CityStudio allows students to work with municipal professionals in the City of Waterloo to create solutions to local challenges. First announced in 2016, CityStudio has been heralded as an innovative program, offering extraordinary new work-integrated learning opportunities in the City. Its mandate is to provide a “fresh set of eyes”¹⁶ to assist the City of Waterloo in fulfilling its strategic plan - particularly in areas of public engagement, economic development, and sustainability. Through this initiative, students have the opportunity to work directly with Cities of Waterloo and Kitchener staff on a variety of different projects. The topics that CityStudio students work on can range from the creation of a bicycle parking masterplan to assessing and improving local civic engagement in municipal elections.

In addition to being beneficial for students by enhancing their ability to apply their knowledge and skills in real world situations, much of the work done with CityStudio can also assist with Waterloo’s Town & Gown Association, particularly given its joint purpose of enhancing student experience and fostering community cohesion. CityStudio, and the Social Entrepreneurship option as a whole, provides an opportunity for City of Waterloo administration to tap into the unique perspective of students beyond those of select student leaders participating in Town & Gown associations. As such, initiatives like CityStudio allow for a greater number of students to have an impact on specific City projects.

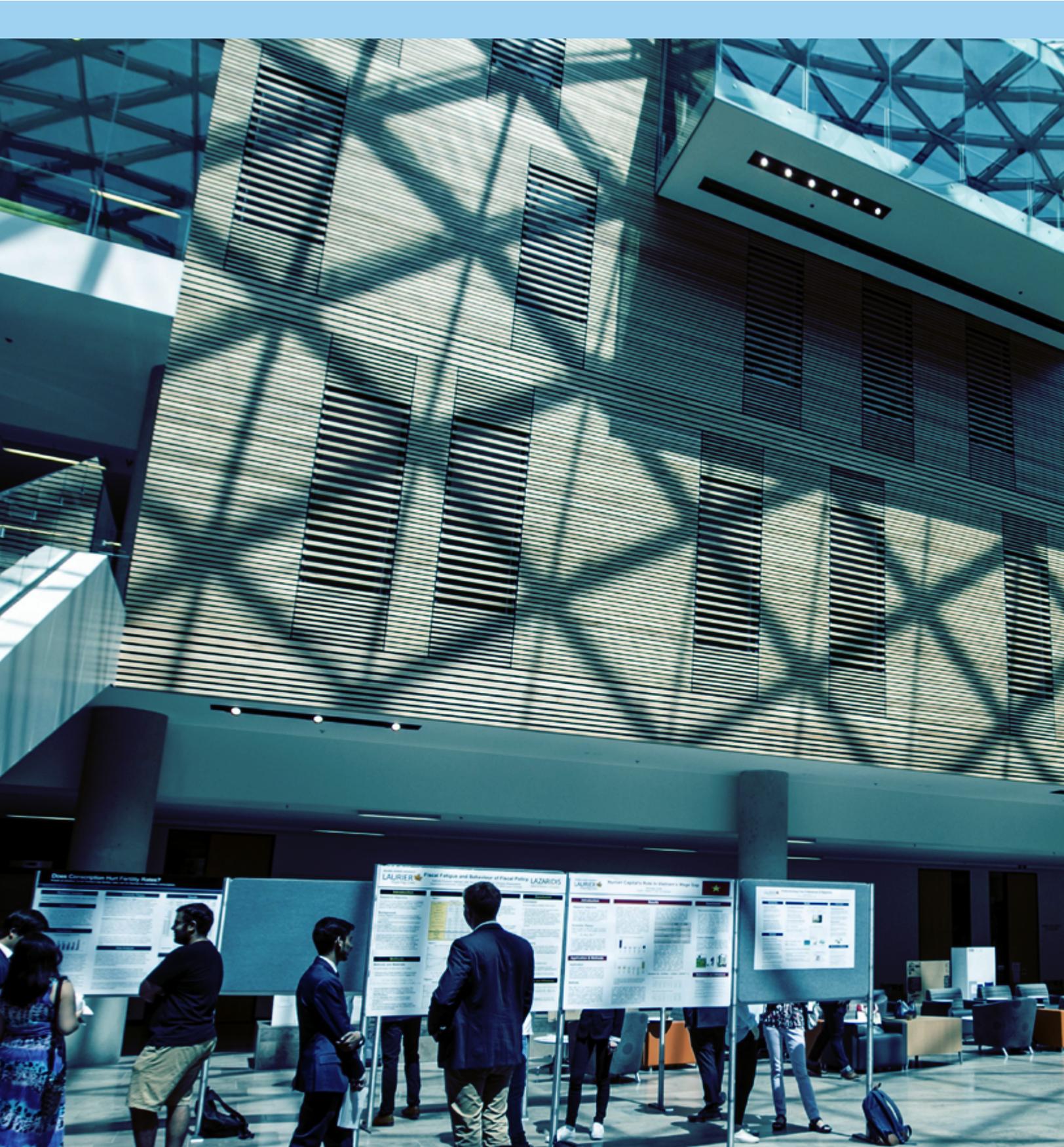
The Social Entrepreneurship option culminates in a final class, Capstone in Social Entrepreneurship, where students launch their own social venture. The ventures address a wide range of societal issues and can range from the development of night markets to connect students with non-students and local businesses to the creation of accessible waste receptacles for persons with limited vision or teaching healthy and affordable meal planning for those experiencing food insecurity.¹⁷

The Social Entrepreneurship option is an opportunity for students to tap into the expertise of key municipal officials and develop marketable skills for future employment in their field. The practical nature of the courses can drastically improve students’ employability by providing the years of experience that employers are looking for in employees.¹⁸

Students who have participated in the Social Entrepreneurship option have praised its approach to experiential learning. One project centred around identifying priority areas for change in Waterloo’s Albert McCormick Community Centre, a space that houses recreation and library facilities. One participant in the study said the courses “reinforced the prioritization of empathy in problem-solving and innovation, and the responsibility [she had] for the people [she had worked] with.”¹⁹ Experiential learning initiatives like C3IL lead students to consider the social impact of their ventures, instead of simply worrying about the logistics and finances. CBL and affiliated programs have the critical role of “[nourishing] creative engagement in order to address the complex challenges faced by our society.”²⁰

Experiential learning is a beneficial approach to teaching and learning that not only helps students to be able to apply the skills and knowledge they are learning in the classroom to real-world issues, but also supports municipalities by helping to address local concerns. Beyond the benefits to municipalities, students themselves benefit from unique work experiences in which they develop skills necessary for

their future employment. A greater breadth of CSL experiences will allow graduates to be stewards of their community and forces of positive change in the workplace. Post-secondary institutions are therefore encouraged to continue the development of experiential learning programs, and to offer these opportunities in existing faculties. The Community Engagement and Social Entrepreneurship options in Laurier's C3IL offers strong examples of how experiential education can be implemented to help students to engage with their communities and tackle municipal issues.



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NIAGARA REGION

Brock University

BROCK UNIVERSITY IS SITUATED ON THE TRADITIONAL TERRITORY OF THE ANISHINAABE AND HAUDENOSAUNEE. THIS LAND IS COVERED BY TREATY 3 OF THE UPPER CANADA TREATIES.



Purpose-built Student Housing: A Better Approach to Brock Student Housing

Simran Kaur & Thomas Lillo

Deciding where to live as a student is a significant decision that requires the consideration of multiple factors. Some factors have a greater influence on a student’s decision than others, such as price, proximity to campus and other students, access to transportation, and nearby amenities. The neighbourhoods surrounding university campuses often meet these basic needs, making them attractive locations for students and contributing to the studentification – “the process by which specific neighbourhoods become dominated by student residential occupation” – of these areas.¹ This is a phenomenon that we have experienced in the Niagara Region with the growth of the student population at Brock University over the last two decades. This article examines the spatial distribution of Brock students in these neighbourhoods and issues that have arisen as a result of the concentration of students in these areas. It also discusses efforts taken by the communities surrounding Brock University and the potential for a better approach to student housing in the Niagara Region.

MEASURE	1999-2000	2018-2019	% CHANGE
Residence Beds	1,620	2,475	52%
Undergraduate Population	10,346	17,014	64%
Parking Spaces	3,436	4,651 (2019)	35%
International Student Population	647	1,386	114%

Source: Brock University Fact Sheet³

Enrolment at Brock University over the past two decades has increased noticeably, with a 62% increase in the undergraduate population since 1999. During this period, our international student population has increased by 114%, and in 2018 alone our university saw a six percent increase in first year enrolment.²

However, Brock University’s residential capacity has only increased by 52%, despite a 62% increase in our undergraduate population. This growth in the student population and lack of on-campus accommodations means that an increasingly larger number of students, including many incoming students, need to find housing accommodations off-campus. While Brock University does not keep up-to-date address information on students, it is commonly known that most students are clustered in residential areas surrounding the campus. These areas include the neighbourhoods along Glenridge and Glendale, below the escarpment, downtown St. Catharines, and West Thorold. Each of these areas are highlighted in Figure 1.

While this growth in the student population has been good for our university, the effects have not been as positive for the surrounding neighbourhoods with higher concentrations of students. In “St. Paddy’s Politics: Problems, Players and Solutions in Community-Student Relations”, former Brock University students Mickey Calder and Melanie Davis discussed some of the larger issues that locals have raised regarding student residents, including street parties, property damage, and noise complaints.⁴ In this article they also discussed how the City of Thorold and its residents responded by removing a bus

route that ran through a well-known student area in order to discourage more students from moving in as well as passing by-laws intended to discourage street partying.

A review of the literature confirms a few assumptions we already had about student housing — namely: that students are usually concentrated together in low-density residential areas around a university; that owners of single-family dwellings in these neighbourhoods usually convert them into rental properties to take advantage of the growing student rental market; and that these large concentrations of students are considered to have negative impacts on the neighbourhoods they live in. In fact, a majority of the academic literature on student housing is concerned with investigating the consequences of student housing in residential neighbourhoods and how to mitigate its impact.

This is particularly true for our community, as the low-density residential neighbourhoods surrounding Brock University have become the primary source of rental housing for students in the absence of better options. Many of the issues that are associated with the increased student populations in the residential areas of St. Catharines and Thorold, such as street parties and the depreciation of housing quality, can be mitigated by smarter urban planning practices that provide students with affordable housing options that meet their needs, drawing them out of low-density residential neighbourhoods. However, the municipalities of St. Catharines and Thorold have approached the issue reactively, rather than proactively, as they do not have any formal strategy for tackling the challenge of providing students with feasible housing options in their official plans. Instead, they have recognized the issue and tried to do things to help respond to issues as they arise.

One reason for the lack of proactive planning is that, until recently, there has been limited municipal control or oversight of the conversion of residential housing into student rentals. In 2017, the City of Thorold passed a bylaw requiring all rental units to be licensed and to meet legislated safety standards. Under this bylaw, those seeking to rent their properties are required to obtain a license, pay a \$500 application fee, and provide an efficient parking plan, a property management plan, and a completed self-certification checklist.⁵ St. Catharines drafted a very similar by-law, consulting with the City of Thorold to ensure they were consistent, but due to overwhelming opposition from landlords and residents it was never passed by council.⁶ Bylaws such as this one have the potential to ensure higher quality student rental housing by making it far less attractive for homeowners thinking of converting their property into student rentals. This, in turn, makes housing for students in residential neighbourhoods more expensive and less available, ultimately increasing the viability of purpose-built student housing.

POTENTIAL FOR A BETTER HOUSING PLAN

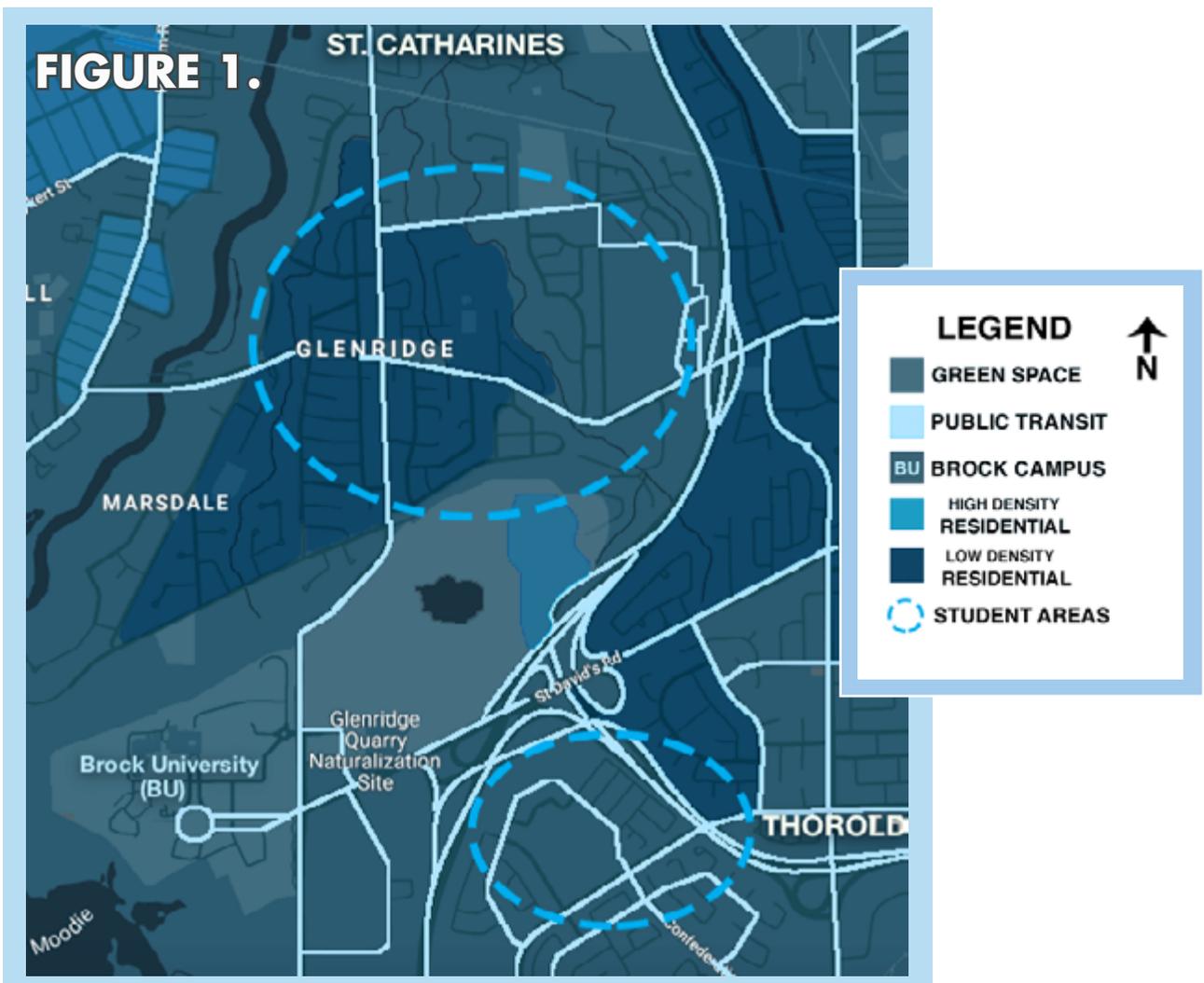
The communities that have the fewest issues between non-student and student residents are those that plan ahead and proactively create communities where residents can co-exist. Research and examples from other university towns suggest that the optimal way to house students is in higher-density purpose-built student housing, with easy access to amenities and campus, and with some distance between student housing and residential areas. While only three percent of Canadian students live in purpose-built student housing, this model is growing more beneficial in university cities that see rapid growth. Developments in the City of Waterloo, especially those situated near both the University of Waterloo

The article “St. Paddy’s Politics: Problems, Players and Solutions in Community-Student Relations” was featured in our 2018 Habitats, check it out on our site.

and Wilfrid Laurier University, highlight the need for centralized student housing in modern facilities.⁷

However, despite this knowledge and the high demand, there are a limited number of purpose-built student housing options available around the Brock campus. Two recent developments, Regent Student Living and The Foundry Lofts, provide students with everything they need in terms of housing and are therefore the primary options available. However, as there are few other options available to students, the cost is much higher than residential rental spaces. For example, the cost of renting a room in either of these developments can range from \$600 to \$685, compared to the \$300 to \$500 cost of a room in a single-family dwelling.⁸

The lack of high-density zoning surrounding Brock University has led students to seek accommodations in low-density areas in order to be close to campus. However, given Brock's rapid increase in student population, the region and municipalities must take a proactive approach to avoid tension between residents and students. It is therefore recommended that the municipality re-zone the areas surrounding the campus and incentivize builders to invest in purpose-built student housing. The investment opportunity can be seen in comparison to spikes in these developments seen in the US and the UK, where developers are revitalizing the off-campus housing model to reflect the modern needs of students. Creating centralized areas for students to reside limits the negative impacts previously seen with off-campus student housing in residential neighbourhoods, which can strengthen community relations with residents and government in the municipality and region.





endnotes

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LONDON

Western University

WESTERN UNIVERSITY IS SITUATED ON THE TRADITIONAL TERRITORY OF THE ATTAWANDARON, THE ANISHINAABE, THE HAUDENOSAUNEE, AND THE LENAPE. THIS LAND IS COVERED BY THE LONDON TOWNSHIP TREATY 6 OF THE UPPER CANADA TREATIES.

The Rise of **Unsanctioned Street Parties** at Ontario Universities

MITCHELL PRATT



5000. 7000. 10,000. 11,000. 20,000.¹ These numbers illustrate the growth of Western University's most notorious unsanctioned street party – held on Broughdale Avenue – beginning with my grade 12 year in 2013, through to my term as University Student Council (USC) president in 2019. Large-scale gatherings at post-secondary institutions such as unsanctioned street parties are a phenomenon across North America, and Western is no exception. While tensions created by student partying are certainly not a new theme at any college or university, the current size and scale of unsanctioned street parties is unprecedented, raising unique challenges and concerns. As both a student on the ground and a student leader attempting to manage the situation, I offer a useful perspective to address three key questions: why unsanctioned street parties occur; how they create problems; and what we can do to mitigate these problems moving forward.

WHY UNSANTIONED STREET PARTIES?

Universities with a centralized student population living in residences and housing that are in close proximity to campus, such as the University of Western, Queen's University, and Wilfrid Laurier University, have high student densities. Prevalent among student bodies at such universities is a "work hard, play hard" mentality, where alcohol use is common. According to the National College Health Assessment Spring 2016 survey, drawn from a convenience sample of 43,780 students at 41 post-secondary institutions across Canada, 69.3% of students reported using alcohol within the 30 days preceding the survey.² Based on these numbers, Western, which is home to 30,000 undergraduate students,³ the majority of whom spend their first year in residence and subsequent years in housing surrounding the fringes of campus, has around 21,000 students who consume alcohol. While the fact that students are drinking is not a surprise, it is worth exploring why enormous street parties like the ones on Broughdale avenue are happening.

One important factor is when these events are held. The average Friday or Saturday night does not attract the same assembly of tens of thousands of students. Rather, these events are often rooted in tradition or holiday. For example, Western and Queen's historically experience unsanctioned street gatherings during homecoming. Laurier and Waterloo often struggle with unsanctioned street gatherings around St. Patrick's Day festivities. Whether it be Broughdale (Western) and Aberdeen (Queen's) for homecoming, or Ezra (Waterloo/Laurier) for St. Patrick's Day, the common thread is that students are coming together to partake in a festivity that is much larger than themselves. It is an affordable way to have fun that individual students perceive as low risk due to the individual seldom associating their participation in these events with the risks caused by the collective gathering. Why go to a bar and pay for cover and drinks when you can join a street party for free and celebrate with thousands of your peers?

Another factor is the underlying element of dissent that comes with the simple act of being present at these parties. While we are certainly a long way from the impassioned motivations of students at Berkeley in the 1960s, paternalistic messaging by university administrations, police forces, and community members have increased momentum for these types of events among students. The nature of these events as "unsanctioned" – being created and populated by students and young adults – presents a brief opportunity to reject the expectations and pressures of the modern university environment. The best example of this can be seen in the creation of Western's "Foco" movement. The Foco movement was born out of the university's decision to move Western's homecoming date from the last weekend of September to mid-October in an attempt to minimize the Broughdale street party. This decision was not well-received by the student population, who continued to gather on the last weekend in September in spite of the homecoming date change. Even though the majority of the students who

attended Western at the time of the decision and started the Foco movement have graduated, the street party persists. In fact, it continues to gain momentum, reaching a critical point last year when a reported 21,000 people flooded Broughdale and the surrounding neighbourhood. Even though the original motivation for the event (dissent) is largely lost on incoming students, the tradition of gathering on Broughdale on the last Saturday of September continues.

Regardless of the original motivations behind these events, the majority of students attend to engage in what they perceive to be harmless fun. However, we have reached a point where this mentality presents some very real problems for both students and their local communities.

HOW THESE PARTIES PRESENT CHALLENGES

An individual student in a group of their friends and peers on the street may not see the risk posed by attending one of these events. However, during my term as USC President, the risks that arise when students gather for such large-scale parties became clear to me. The likelihood of a fatal injury to a student or young person on the street only increases as more people choose to attend. Due to the sheer density of the crowd at unsanctioned street gatherings, EMS services have difficulty reaching anyone in distress. Whether it is a potential overdose or an individual falling from a roof, this is a reality that students need to understand if they are present at these events. In addition to the physical risks that students face, there is also the issue of nuisance and the significant burden placed on the local community, given that property damage, urination, and disorderliness are all rampant during these events.

As the size of these gatherings increase, additional threats are introduced to student and community safety. As unique, large-scale events, unsanctioned street gatherings have begun to attract individuals from outside the university community. At Western's Broughdale party for example, high school students, individuals from the local college, students from other universities, and other community members can be found to attend. Campus and community police officers have also confirmed to myself and other stakeholders that there is an increased presence of known criminals at such gatherings, including gang members and sex offenders. Like EMS services, local police services face additional challenges with crowds of this size. Last year it was estimated to cost the London Police Services around \$100,000,⁴ and Waterloo Police Services have had costs of nearly \$700,000 for their efforts to manage the street party on Ezra avenue. Not only do these events place additional burdens and costs on EMS and police services, they also take up a significant amount of their attention which can distract from other responsibilities.

The challenges and costs associated with unsanctioned street gatherings also present many difficulties when it comes to understanding and managing them, which I have seen firsthand. Post-secondary administrations on their own are not typically equipped to respond to or mitigate these issues when they first arise and start gaining momentum. From my own experience, I have seen how the jurisdictional debate over whose responsibility it is to manage Broughdale has stoked tensions between stakeholders. While the university, city, and local police forces struggle to understand and solve this issue and address complaints from the community, the politicization of unsanctioned street gatherings has impeded open communication between these vital actors.

It is crucial to recognize that no one actor can manage unsanctioned street parties; it requires a coordinated effort between cities, police forces, university administration, and student leadership to implement safer practices.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO SOLVE THESE ISSUES?

The momentum created by annual unsanctioned street parties has only increased the size of these events and solidified their cultural status on many university campuses. The increased growth of these events means that there must be steps taken towards meaningful solutions before there are fatal consequences. Central to this is understanding both push and pull factors regarding unsanctioned street parties. Push factors are strategies undertaken by stakeholders to encourage students and young people to get off the street. Pull factors include steps taken to provide additional attractions to the student body to not attend the street party in the first place. The duality of this strategy could prove to be effective in addressing both the community safety concerns, and the student desire for a cultural outlet to have fun.

Both push and pull strategies rely heavily on cross-stakeholder collaboration. To reiterate, there is no single stakeholder that can solve this issue alone. Individual actions must be in alignment with a wider strategic plan. A crucial element of this is time. In my role as USC President, I often stressed the need for student and community safety to not be a one-month conversation, but a full year undertaking. It is crucial for all stakeholders to come to the table well ahead of their local unsanctioned street party.

While it is important to highlight that each unsanctioned street party at each university comes with its own cultural implications that need to be addressed, there are some push and pull factors that are applicable across institutions. From a student perspective, the presence of punitive measures is always a deterrent; however, these measures need to be communicated to students by the university administration. Targeted messaging from individual stakeholders is also an essential piece of the solution. Shifting university messaging from the personal to the situational could be a step in the right direction. University administrations need to be careful walking the line between paternalistic and educational messaging. Educational messaging targeted at students could help them understand why the situation they are choosing to take part in could pose serious risks, while a personal approach could be seen as a villainization of individual students who partake in these events. As the case is with Western's Foco example, this could prove to exacerbate the issue.

Universities have also moved towards adapting their student codes to address the most serious incidents at these events.⁵ However, this may not prove to be very effective at tackling the root cause of these events. If students want to have fun in a celebration rooted in tradition that is much larger





than themselves, why not provide that option for them? The student leadership in partnership with administrations should focus on pull factors when addressing these issues as well. This past year, Western and the USC planned and executed the largest university concert in Canada, selling 11,000 tickets to our students. While the event, PurpleFest, certainly did not solve the issue in its first year, it was a successful example of stakeholder collaboration towards a culture shift on the day of the Broughdale unsanctioned street party that went beyond managing the situation.

Unsanctioned street parties have proven to be a very difficult issue to manage for university communities and those who live within or near them. If cities, police forces, university administrations, student leadership, and other actors come together to produce joint strategies to preserve student and community safety, there is a much better chance at solving these problems than with each of these stakeholders acting on their own. The stark reality, however, is that there appears to be no quick fix to issues surrounding unsanctioned street gatherings, and it will require ongoing and strategic efforts before we see tangible change, both for the students and the broader community.

endnotes

- 1 Heather Rivers, “Western University expands punishment powers to off-campus parties,” *The London Free Press*, April 26, 2019, <https://lfpres.com/news/local-news/western-university-approves-expanding-punishment-powers-to-off-campus-parties>.
- 2 American College Health Association, *National College Health Assessment II: Canadian Reference Group, Executive Summary* (American College Health Association, Spring 2016).
- 3 “Facts & Figures 2017-2018,” Western University, accessed May 23, 2019, <https://www.uwo.ca/about/whoweare/facts.html>.
- 4 Judy Basmaji, “Ontario universities hold meeting on illegal street parties,” *The Gazette*, February 16, 2019, https://westerngazette.ca/news/ontario-universities-hold-meeting-on-illegal-street-parties/article_de042782-317a-11e9-87ad-733b8docf9eo.html.
- 5 Liz Monteiro, “City, universities should also foot the bill for Ezra Avenue street parties, police board member says,” *The Record*, April 17, 2019, <https://www.therecord.com/news-story/9290232-city-universities-should-also-foot-the-bill-for-ezra-avenue-street-parties-police-board-member-says/>.