

Municipal Affairs Research Paper

Students, University, and Municipal Affairs

Written By:

Arati Sharma, VP-Education
McMaster University, McMaster Student's Union

Kaitlyn Young, Municipal Affairs Commissioner
Queen's University, Alma Mater Society

Contribution From

Ryan Moran, MSU President
McMaster University, McMaster Student's Union

Julia Mitchell, VP-University Affairs
Queen's University, Alma Mater Society

Introduction

A holistic and academically successful educational experience is intrinsically tied to all forms of the student experience; disorder in one area of this experience has the potential to send rippling effects disrupting all other areas. Off-campus living and the relation between students and municipal affairs is a crucial sphere for student associations to weigh in on, if nothing more than for the reason that one's quality of living is paramount to one's contribution to all other areas of life

Undergraduate students are facing similar issues throughout the province regarding their living accommodations. Challenges between community groups and students have occurred in areas where dialogue between all stakeholders is minimal or absent. This paper seeks to provide stakeholders with information regarding municipal and community practices at various institutions in Ontario.

Overview of Current Limitations Affecting Municipal Affairs and Universities

Studentification

In many towns and cities in which Universities and colleges are located, the growth of higher education has led to increasing numbers of students in residential areas. As one critic notes, "this phenomenon, sometimes called 'studentification', has, in many places, led to profound cultural, social, physical and economic transformations."¹ Higher education institutions are unable to accommodate for the growing influx of students, and often do not even provide enough rooms for all first-year students to live on campus. Students have no choice but to move into surrounding residential areas, which contributes to a plethora of issues affecting the community.

Poor Relations with the Community

As students move into these areas, it creates an unwelcome environment for community residents who are already living there or those looking to move in. The increased concentration of individuals with high quality possessions (laptop computers, iPods, cameras, etc.) and low awareness of the necessity for security causes crime rates (particularly break-ins and theft) to increase in these areas. This combined with the different perspectives on acceptable behaviour and community obligations contributes to the unpopularity of student areas for families wishing to bring up children. Additionally, large concentrations of young people living in households with a high density can contribute to physical mess, increased pressure on public services (policing, cleansing, etc) and traffic problems.

Poor Housing Quality

The reduction in quality of housing is often a consequence of highly populated student housing areas surrounding universities. Due to the high turnover of students each year, little attention is paid to both the internal and external appearance of houses. As most houses are designed for lower density, they are frequently (and quickly) being renovated in order to accommodate more students. Consequently, this results in the inability for houses to be returned to their original state, rendering them unappealing to community members or families. Moreover, necessary renovations, maintenance and repairs are often neglected. The lack of investment on behalf of landlords leaves damage and issues to perpetuate year after year. Consequently, students are shown no incentive to contribute to the improvement of the quality of their house. The lack of respect the landlord shows for the house will inevitably influence the tenants to adopt the same frame of mind.

¹ Universities UK, *Studentification: a guide to opportunities, challenges and practice*. January 2006.

Poor housing quality not only detracts from the tenant experience, but it also has negative effects on the area of student housing as a whole. Gardens and well-groomed lawns are a rarity in student housing areas. In general, both students and community members experience and witness the effects of poor housing quality. With inspections seldom or uncompleted, these issues perpetuate housing quality and subsequently the issue worsens over time.

Absentee Landlords

The most common form of negligence comes from those landlords that are considered "absentee"; in other words, landlords are not living in the same city. Absentee landlords do not monitor, inspect or concern themselves with the quality of the house they are renting and rarely contact the tenants personally. Some absentee landlords employ property managers to assist in the management of their rentals. However, these managers are not supervised closely by the landlord and can evade their duties to the tenants quite easily. Students become frustrated when they cannot speak directly to whom they pay their bills. If a problem arises, it often takes more time to address it due to the geographic distance between tenant and landlord.

Noise Issues

The difference in lifestyle between students and working people with families has a large impact on relations between community members and students. The late night student culture often conflicts with the communities' members' schedules. Community members raise concern about noise between dwellings at all times, especially music at night. This is a direct result of parties and gatherings at student houses or late night street noise from students traveling to and from the downtown areas.

Students not feeling included and therefore not responsible to community

Additionally, the transient pattern of occupation by students engenders a lack of community integration and cohesion. Students are not welcomed into the community and therefore have less commitment to maintain the quality of the local environment. The tendency for community members to portray students as a sub-group of the community makes students feel marginalized and disrespected. This is not conducive to the development of respectful and conscious student residents. While there are many negative effects of studentification, the benefits of having increased populations of students are often overlooked. High student populations enhance the reputation of the city or town as an appealing destination. In addition, students contribute hundreds of volunteer hours and increase the range of goods, services and attractions available to the city or town's population. To say that students only contribute to the deterioration of the university community would be a factual error.

Landlord/Tenant Relations

The Residential Tenancies Act (RTA), 2006 is the act that governs the relationship between landlords and tenants in the province of Ontario. Among other things, this act sets the guidelines for rent, leases sub-tenancies and assignments and termination of leases. The RTA does not cover people who live in a house with their landlord or a member of the landlord's immediate family, post secondary institution residences and co-operative houses. Disputes involving the RTA go to the provincial Landlord Tenant Board. In addition to the RTA, the Ontario government puts out a rent increase guideline every year that legislates the percentage amount that rent can increase in a 12-month period. The rent increase guideline for 2008 is 1.4%.

Obviously, a primary concern for the student experience is rooted in issues pertaining to the legalities of student housing and standards of property management. Issues that students face, specifically relating to the standards of their accommodation are intrinsically tied to their "landlord." The spectrum of types of property managers varies widely, from being a tenant in the landlord's home, to living in a complex maintained by a property management company. As a result, the quality of accommodations can greatly diverge. For example, a trend in poorer quality accommodations and property management is considered to occur in situations where the landlord does not reside directly in the community, and particularly, well outside of the municipality.

This sort of scenario, especially from a property management perspective, then compounds issues of landlord responsibility, of following up with issues or concerns of the tenant, and maintaining the property and any stipulations made clear in the lease. Especially in the case of property maintenance and standards, a lack of landlord responsibility owed to these concerns then has the tendency to negatively reflect back on to the student tenants, and how they are received by surrounding resident homeowners and the community at large.

In some cases, landlord associations are proposed; this is done under the auspice that such an association would be operated by landlords who, through the association, uphold a higher standard of property management. Unfortunately this has also had varying results, as students of Queens University have voiced the opinion that an existing association of that sort in Kingston merely upholds mediocrity.

Landlords and property management groups can, through the provision of their accommodations and associated responsibilities, have a large effect on both the post-secondary experience of students, as well as how students are received within their municipalities.

Student Inclusion in Community Dialogues

At many PSE institutions students and their respective student associations are members of advisory committees on community relations, campus-town associations, attend community group meetings, or participate in various other programs where they can provide their voice. Frequently, this tends to be a provision for their own defence, or simply to be targets that have to explain and apologize for the poorer decisions of their peers on weekend nights.

The inclusion of the student voice in community dialogues is absolutely vital, but many community organizations create barriers to prevent students from becoming members. Especially in communities where there tends to be tension between resident homeowners and the student population, it is important for students to take an active role in the community. Students should be included in community dialogues because they *are* a part of the community, not because students as a group of people need their own voice. For students to respect their new community, they must be treated as members of it.

A single student may only live in a community for four years or little more. As a result, students as a group have, do, and will continue to live in communities that are associated with PSE institutions for as long as they are in operation. Thus, they must be engaged, not as a separate demographic, but as the neighbours and community members that they indeed are. One way this can be pursued is through membership on community associations, so students and other community renters can participate equally in dialogues alongside resident homeowner counterparts. Many community associations currently restrict membership solely to resident homeowners or make it very difficult for a student to become a member of the

association, such as the Ainslie Wood/Westdale Community Association of Residential homeowners (AWWCA). However, there are examples of more open community associations such as the Sydenham Ward Tenants and Ratepayers Association (SWTRA) of Kingston, Ontario. This association is open to anyone who is able to pay the small fee and lives within the bounds of the district.

McMaster University

McMaster's main community association, AWWCA,² was started in 1998 with the stated purpose being to "preserve, protect, and enhance the environment of the Ainslie Wood/Westdale community and the quality of life for all residents, as well as to organize and lobby on behalf of the interests of members of the association." However, there are some limitations on the membership of the organization, which largely restrict student inclusion. The most important of these restrictions is the exclusion of renters from the group. Members may only join the AWWCA if they own their house or are the relatives of the owner of the house. AWWCA does allow non-owners to join the organization as "Friends of AWWCA." These members pay the regular fee, receive the newsletter and emails, but do not have voting rights. The AWWCA however, meets with the MSU as a community partner. The McMaster Student's Union (MSU) has been lobbying the AWWCA to allow renters to become members, but the reaction of the group has been apprehensive.

Furthermore, the university administration organized a group called the President's Advisory Committee on Community Relations (PACCR). This group convenes regularly and has at its table members of the immediate community association, student representatives, university administration representatives, and the ward councillor.

In 2004 the Campus Town Association was started through a partnership of AWWCA, McMaster University, and the Westdale Business Improvement Area. The purpose of this group was to develop Hamilton into a positive example for other university towns across North America.³

University of Western Ontario

In London, there are two community organizations for the area where there is a high concentration of UWO student residents. The group representing the area immediately surrounding Western is the Broughdale Community Association. The downtown association is the Woodfield Community association. The USC has a fairly good relationship with these two groups. However, a group called the London Neighbourhood Coalition on Town and Gown Issues has adopted a more aggressive strategy in dealing with local students instead of the partnership approach of the other two community groups.

After London hosted the 2007 Town Gown Association of Ontario Conference in May a Town and Gown Committee was formed in order to continue the dialogue opportunity that the conference had provided. According to Scott Courtice, the USC's policy analyst "the city has approached [the USC] as a real and valued partner." The Town Gown Committee has been tasked by city council to work toward putting together a strategy for the near campus neighbourhood. Recently, a report was released by this committee that was a holistic strategy aimed at building better neighbourhoods.

² (www.awwca.ca)

³ AWWCA Homepage. www.awwca.ca. Accessed February 29th, 2008.

The relationship between the city administration and the USC is strong as the city staff have made sure to consult student leaders of various initiatives that have come out of the Town Gown Committee. Students and student representatives have also been appointed to other committees within the city. A copy of the report can be found at: <http://council.london.ca/Planning%20Committee%20Agendas/2008-02-25%20Agenda/1Item%2011.pdf>

Queen's University

Of the schools examined, Kingston has one of the only community association in which students are actively involved. The Sydenham Ward Tenant Ratepayers Association asks a member of the AMS to sit on its board and students are able to join the group as regular members. In fact, in late 2006 a relatively large number of students joined the association in order to vote for board members. This caused a substantial shift in the makeup of the board, which has led to a significantly improved relationship between SWTRA and the student community.

Student inclusion in the larger dialogues in the city is very good. The AMS has a representative on many of the major committees whose work will directly affect students. Recently the city started a new committee purposefully designed to work on initiatives to make students feel more welcome in the city of Kingston. The AMS Municipal Affairs Commissioner sits on the committee as vice chair.

Brock University

Brock University is situated between two municipalities: the city of St. Catherine's and the city of Thorold. The level of student engagement within the community is limited to committee structures. The Student Housing Liaison Committee was created to address issues relating to student housing and neighbourhood concerns. Membership on the committee is inclusive to a variety of stakeholders in the area, including the Niagara officials, Niagara Regional Police, residents, landlords and university and college students.

Laurier and Waterloo Universities

Both Waterloo and Laurier are fairly happy with the level of student inclusion in community dialogue in the City of Waterloo. The student unions and community groups work well together when necessary. Both have representatives on the city Town Gown Committee – Laurier sends three students while UW sends one representative. Recently, the mayor has also created a committee called the Mayor's Student Advisory committee, which has helped student-city relationships.

Municipal Bylaws and Community Policing

Town and gown communities are often faced with unique challenges to municipal bylaws due to the high amount of rent-paying community members. Many times, municipal bylaws are created in campus-town communities to deal with issues such as noise concerns, landlord/tenant responsibilities, licensing, and student conduct. Unfortunately, these bylaws are often a cause for contention. Oftentimes, they are only created and enforced on the student population and are formed without proper student consultation.

With recent changes in governance over rental unit licensing rights, municipalities have started to create bylaws to license student accommodations. The first and most contentious bylaw has been created and passed in the city of Oshawa.

In 2003, the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT) opened its doors at the college's Oshawa campus with approx 1000 students. Between 2005 and 2006, the student population increased by 300% to 3000, making it the fastest growing university in Ontario. It currently boasts 5000 students with 6500 expected by 2010. There are only 1364 beds in the residences at UOIT and these are shared with the students of both Durham College and Trent University at Oshawa.

With this influx of students, the city began the process of creating a license for rental properties. The bylaw fails in its ability to be conducive to students: the areas it affects are solely student streets and neighbourhoods. Also, the bylaw requires a yearly \$250 fee for landlords and a minimum four-bedroom rental property, which will subsequently increase the cost of living for students.

This bylaw was strongly opposed by all student groups due to the lack of student involvement in the process. Licensing is an effective tool to ensure the safety and quality of living accommodations, however it was felt by the opposition that raising the cost of living and decreasing the amount of students per rental property is not a solution to behaviour challenges. This discrimination of students has further divided the community into students and residents, rather than fostering a positive relationship between all members of the community.

Exclusionary licensing such as the Oshawa bylaw has further driven the market to purpose built housing. There are many private off-campus residences being built around Ontario, and are viewed as a positive solution to the "student problem". The emergence of purpose-built housing in the United Kingdom has had benefits and failings for positive community relations. These residences are viewed as safe, good quality options for students. On the other hand, there are many individuals who maintain that purpose built housing is furthering the "ghettoization" of the student community. Student groups call upon municipalities to understand that though students live in a community for approximately four years, they are still viable members of the community.

Municipal bylaws often follow common themes throughout town and gown communities, which include safety and housing quality, outdoor maintenance responsibilities, snow removal and student behaviour. The distinction between institutions is the method of enforcement and community policing procedures.

Queen's University, Laurier University, University of Waterloo and University of Windsor all have increased community policing during "peak" student activity. During the first week of classes, homecoming, and first week back during the winter term, community policing is accelerated.

There are many examples of poor municipal relationships with PSE institutions and their students, whether it is by police services or directly from city councils. Recent examples can include anything from police raids on student housing in Oshawa, to misconduct bylaws proposed in St. Catherine's.

As a result, practices need to be established to foster positive relationships between municipalities, PSE institutions and their students, more akin to those programs and committees described at the beginning of the previous section.

McMaster University

A project undertaken at McMaster, in association with the McMaster Students Union, was the provision of funding for special officers and police presence in the McMaster community, particularly on weekends. However, going beyond simply presence, this funding is a part of a programme that also includes these special duty officers in the community dialogue, both at the PACCR and CTA levels, as well as many others. The officers who coordinate this programme maintain good relationships with the McMaster Students Union, as well as the University, and work for the better of all parties involved.

Though this McMaster model may have its flaws and may also not be fit for every PSE/community environment, it highlights what sorts of practices can be pursued. Essentially open dialogues and partnerships where common understandings can be established for the benefit of all parties, whether it is the municipal government or the students.

University of Western Ontario

The city of London has run a special police project for the past five years called "Project Speak Easy" to tackle "student misconduct" in the community. This project involves an influx of policing within the community surrounding the University and Fanshawe College. This program has been under scrutiny from the University Students' Council at the University of Western Ontario due to the discriminatory targeting of students. The name of the program refers to the illegal serving of alcohol during periods of prohibition. The name and language surrounding the program has been offensive to student and student groups in the community.

This is the first year the USC and students have been consulted and involved in the dialogue surrounding the program. The USC has been working with the community and city to change the program into a constructive method of ensuring safety for all community members. The program has now been changed to 'Operation LEARN (Liquor Enforcement and Reduction of Noise). Though this is the first step to ensure community policing does not discriminate against the student population, it is a positive and constructive conversation involving all stakeholders.

Brock University

This year Brock University has faced many controversial issues surrounding municipal bylaws and community policing. Community groups in St. Catherine's have been a strong voice calling for more community policing and even enforcing Brock University's Student Code of Conduct off-campus.

There is a municipal bylaw that does not allow spitting and vomiting on the streets, which is acceptable by all stakeholders involved, however it is not being enforced equally throughout the community. According to student groups and the Brock University Students Union (BUSU), municipal bylaws must be enforced across the board.

Community members have also discussed issues of community policing. The Niagara region has a limited number of police officers, and student groups have alluded to community policing being a wasteful priority compared to other issues in the region.

Off Campus Housing Support Services

Queen's University

Queen's Apartment and Housing

Phone: (613) 613-533-2501

<http://www.queensu.ca/dsao/housing/ah1.htm>

Queen's Town-Gown Relations

Phone: (613) 533-6745

<https://housing.queensu.ca/towngown/>

AMS Municipal Affairs Commission

Phone: (613) 533-6000 ext. 75178

www.myams.org/mac

Queen's Apartment and Housing Service is a division of the university that administers the landlord contract program (a program to give landlords an exemption from certain clauses under the RTA), conducts a lottery to assign the limited spaces in Queen's owned off campus housing and operates a listing service for landlords to list their properties.⁴ Some information designed to help students in their housing search can be found on the website.

Queen's Town-Gown Relations acts as a resource for students who have questions about their housing concerns. The office also operates a mediation service between tenants and landlords.

The AMS has a branch devoted to improving town-gown relations called the Municipal Affairs Commission. This commission runs a number of different services for students including the Student Property Assessment Team (a group of students who are trained in property standards by city staff) and the Student Housing team which helps to educate students on their rights as tenants. Additionally, the AMS runs the Golden Cockroach Award and the Key to the Ghetto Award annually to help bring attention to the poor quality of student housing off campus. The Golden Cockroach is the award for what students deem to be the worst landlord in Queen's student housing. The Key to the Ghetto is the award for the best landlord. Another program run by the AMS is www.ghettohouses.ca which is a website that allows students to rate their experience in dealing with their landlords over the year.

The AMS also helps to facilitate the First Years Not In Residence (FYNIRS) program. This helps to facilitate the transition to university life for those students who do not live in residence during their first year. In addition to year-long support, the FYNIRS program is very active during orientation week to fill time when most students are participating in residence orientation.

Each January the University, in partnership with the AMS, runs 'Housing Speaks.' These are presentations made at 9 different locations around campus to inform students of their rights and responsibilities when searching for housing.

⁴ This information can be found at <http://notes.queensu.ca/ALSWeb.nsf>.

Waterloo University

Off Campus Housing Website

Phone: (519) 888-4667

<http://och.uwaterloo.ca/>

Ombudsperson

Phone: (519) 888-4567 ext. 32402

<http://www.ombudsperson.uwaterloo.ca/index.htm>

Off Campus Dons

Phone: (519) 888-4567 x35349

<http://www.ocd.uwaterloo.ca/>

The University of Waterloo operates an off campus housing website. This website offers listings of student houses that landlords have posted. There is also a section for students to list their summer sublets. The website also has tips for finding housing, financial planning, and advice on living in the greater community. Included in the tips for finding a house are documents such as an off-campus housing checklist, and information on leases.

A further section of this Off Campus Housing website is designed specifically as a resource for the university's many co-op students. It has resources for finding accommodation in other parts of the country and provides advice for students in order for them to stay in better contact with Waterloo while they are away.

On the landlord side, the university offers information to both prospective and current landlords. The prospective landlords section has information about the RTA as well as the lodging house bylaw specific to Waterloo. The website also speaks to the need for prospective landlords to have the time commitment and additional resources necessary to be a responsible landlord.

The University ombudsperson offers a mediation service to students and the community. While the office offers advice on a range of issues, in the municipal realm they are able to deal with off campus housing concerns. The website of the ombudsperson office also directs students to various resources including a CLEO publication entitled "what tenants need to know about the law."

The Feds offer an off campus dons program that is designed to help first year students who live off campus to become familiar with university life. The program operates primarily during orientation week but also runs events throughout the year. The Off Campus dons are upper year students who also live off campus.

Laurier University

Off Campus Housing Website

Phone: (519) 884-0170 ext. 3236

<http://offcampus.mylaurier.ca/home.htm;jsessionid=96E0AEE95813EEE4693D1DF6A48F53A5>

Laurier Off Campus University Students

Email: locus@wlu.ca

<http://www.locuswlu.com/>

LSU Municipal Relations Commission

Phone: (519) 884-0170 ext. 3150

<http://www.wlsu.com/ua/municipal/aboutus.htm>

The Laurier off campus housing website includes a number of listings for student accommodation, but also has useful information for prospective tenants. Featured prominently on the site is a frequently asked questions and answer section for both students and landlords. There is an 'ask a question' option where students can submit their unanswered questions. The site also has a roommate search section that allows students to look for potential roommates or sublets. A number of different resource links are featured on the website such as links to the lodging licensing bylaw, the landlord tenant board, legal resources and utilities information.

Laurier Off Campus University Students or LOCUS is described as a "virtual residence," [that offers] off-campus students all of the support and fun of residence life...without the building."⁵ This is a service similar to many of the other universities off campus don programs that are aimed at providing a stronger support network for off campus students.

The Laurier student government has a Municipal Relations commission that helps to better town-gown relations. They offer informational material on by-laws and tenant rights. The Municipal relations commissioner helps to advocate for students to the city administration through their role on the Town Gown Committee.

McMaster University

Off-Campus Resource Centre

Phone:(905)525- 9140ext. 24086

E-Mail: macoffcampus@mcmaster.ca

Web: <http://macoffcampus.mcmaster.ca/>

Student Community Support Network

Phone: (905) 525-9140 ex. 26575

E-Mail: scsn@msu.mcmaster.ca

Web: <http://www.msu.mcmaster.ca/community/>

Society of Off Campus Students

E-Mail: socs@mcmaster.ca

Web: <http://www.msu.mcmaster.ca/clubs/listings.php?clubid=181>

⁵ My Laurier Student Portal. <http://offcampus.mylaurier.ca/info/Loc.us.htm>. Accessed February 29th, 2008

McMaster University's Off-Campus Resource Centre (OCRC), located on the lower level of the McMaster University Student Centre (B112, ext. 24086), is the primary resource on campus to assist students in their housing search. The Off-Campus Resource Centre primarily services students and acts as a listing service for landlords in the Hamilton area. The office provides categorized listings of available rental units, as well as lease consultations, referrals to legal and government offices, free use of telephones for local calls to prospective landlords, and educational materials and seminars about living and renting in the Hamilton area including information on waste management, fire safety and food safety. They also provide mediation services for landlord/tenant issues. The OCRC publishes an extensive housing brochure entitled, "*Living Off-Campus Success Guide*."⁶

This package includes information on the legalities of tenant agreements/leases, links to local government and municipal offices including city Bylaws and overviews of the various types of housing opportunities available in the community. Moreover, the package details prospective budget requirements for students about to enter off-campus living and offers tips on how to meet/adjust to living with new people and considerations when faced with subletting issues.

The OCRC also runs the McMaster Student Rental Accommodation Review Program, which assists students in searching for off-campus accommodations. This is a voluntary program that landlords can apply to in order to have their property reviewed by a third party. Upon successful completion of the review, landlords will have their properties advertised as having been through the review.

The *Student Community Support Network* (SCSN) is service run by the McMaster Students Union, aimed at expanding and strengthening positive relationships between students and various members in the local community. They offer a Community Resource Assistant Program to provide students and residents with information about the school and the community. Community Resource Assistants (CRAs) are five students who live in the community and act as McMaster's ambassadors to the neighbourhood. Their job is to promote a positive image of students within the community, as well as act as *community advisors* for off-campus students.

The SCSN also provides a number of volunteer opportunities within the community, a community newsletter sent out three times per term, numerous events that they both run and assist in, as well as other services that help strengthen ties and bonds between the residents of Westdale and the McMaster community.

The McMaster Students Union also runs an online service for students called MacSHARE. The McMaster Student Housing And Rental Evaluation (Mac SHARE) website offers students the ability to review their off-campus living accommodation (whether it is an apartment, student-house, room in landlord's home, etc.) and then "share" that review with their fellow students.

Finally, SOCS (Society of Off Campus Students) is a McMaster club whose purpose is threefold. They provide off campus students with an information network geared towards helping students to succeed in their studies at McMaster. As well, they provide a social network for off campus students in order to help them meet new people and get involved in the McMaster community. In doing such, SOCS hosts a central location in which students can sign up for intramural sports teams and attend McMaster sporting events.

⁶ available at:
http://macoffcampus.mcmaster.ca/ocrc_static/downloads/LivingOffCampus2007.pdf

Future plans include a design to form the Off Campus Experience (OCE) which is a project formulated by members of the SCSN, OCRC and SOCS working together on a multi-faceted strategy. Essentially, all three services will remain independent of each other, however they will work closely to streamline the delivery of services to McMaster students living off campus.

University of Western Ontario

Western's Off-Campus Housing Service

Phone: 519-661-3550

E-mail: off-campus.housing@uwo.ca

Web: www.has.uwo.ca/housing/offcampus

<http://www.has.uwo.ca/housing/offcampus/index.htm>

Housing Mediation Service

Phone: 519-661-3787

E-mail: housing.mediation.service@uwo.ca

Web: <http://www.has.uwo.ca/housing/mediation/index.htm>

Western's Off-Campus Advisors

Phone: 519-661-3787

Email: oca@uwo.ca

Web: www.has.uwo.ca/housing/oca

Society of Off-Campus Students

Phone: 519-661-2111 x85502

E-Mail: socs@uwo.ca

Web: <http://www.socs.uwo.ca/index.html>

For students seeking accommodation in London, Western provides an Off-Campus Housing Service. This office maintains listings of housing available throughout the City of London. Western's Off-Campus Housing Service provides links to valuable information including city by-laws, fire code regulations and links to municipal government offices. As well, they provide templates for students to formulate roommate agreements, terminations of leases, subletting documents and checklists for signing a lease. Moreover, they provide accurate and up to date information on new developments in the area of housing, including the Residential Tenancies Act.

The Housing Mediation Service is a free confidential resource, which seeks to assist in the speedy resolution of problems, which may arise between students and landlords, students and London residents and/or students and students in the areas of housing and lifestyles. Through this service, Western employs 18 Off Campus Advisors (OCAs) who live within the community and act as a liaison between the university, off campus students and the community. They are paid \$1320 per 8 month term (\$165/month) and three of the 18 are classified as Team Leaders who are compensated several hundred dollars more per 8 month term.

Western's OCH Office also publishes an information package with all pertinent information regarding the legalities of renting and a compilation of the most frequently asked questions/concerns students have when renting for the first time.⁷

Finally, similar to McMaster University, Western has a Society of Off Campus Students (SOCS). Within SOCS, students are able to make connections with other first-year students, as well as upper-year students and build lasting friendships. There are three corners of The Society: the Dons, the Sophs and the First Year Students.

Off-Campus Dons are upper-years students from many faculties who are carefully selected and extensively trained. The Off-Campus Dons have been through the first-year experience and are therefore sensitive to the many changes and difficulties faced by first-year students. They contact an individual before he or she arrives at Western and maintains regular contact throughout the year.

The Off-Campus (OC) Soph team prepares all summer for an O-Week (Orientation Week). Throughout the academic year, OC Sophs support programming put on by SOCS. Sophs act as resources for OC first-year students. They are knowledgeable about the campus, classes and student life at Western.

The First Year Students group has the most diverse focus. The first-year student has the opportunity to be both participant and leader within the society. It is the feedback from this group that most guides the success of SOCS.

Brock University

Off-Campus Housing Office

Contact: Bradley Clarke

Phone: (905) 688-5550 ext. 4059

E-Mail: bclarke@brocku.ca

Web: <http://www.brocku.ca/och/index.php>

Off-Campus Housing Services

Phone: 905-688-5550, Ext. 3721

E-Mail: och@brocku.ca

Web: www.brocku.ca/och

Amongst the many links Brock provides via their website, is a directory of local utilitises, shopping centres, grocery stores. As well, it includes city services and health and safety authorities including water/sewage, garbage collection and Animal Control. From their homepage, Brock's Off Campus Housing Office (OCHO) provides listing space for landlords seeking tenants, as well as students looking for roomates and sublets. Brock's OCHO provides info sessions for residences prior to their move out in their first year, to highlight the information most relavent to a new renter. Furthermore, the OCHO operates a listing site for both prospective tenants looking for accomadations/roomates and for current landlords looking to advertise their vacancies.

⁷ Entitled: "*Renting in London: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities*", the info pack is available at http://www.has.uwo.ca/housing/offcampus/download_booklet.pdf.

Off-Campus Housing Services operates a Housing Mediation program. This free service offers tenants, landlords and residents a forum in which they can discuss their concerns and work towards resolution. The Mediation Service can be used effectively to help with such issues as unsatisfactory conditions in rentals, property appearance, Landlord/Tenant issues or housemate conflicts and other lifestyle issues. The service cannot be used to obtain legal advice, to advocate for one party against another or as an alternative to the police in emergency situations. The Off-Campus Housing Officer can also help to answer questions about the Residential Tenancies Act, leases, city by-laws or direct students to the appropriate resources. Pamphlets and other reference materials are also available free of charge.⁸

University of Windsor

University of Windsor Student Alliance

Phone: 519-253-3000 x 3600

E-Mail: uwsa@uwindsor.ca

Web: <http://www.uwsa.ca/housing/>

The University of Windsor has a less developed program for helping students with off campus housing and community issues. The University of Windsor web pages are difficult to navigate, with several of the housing pages currently under construction. However, there are some services provided by the University of Windsor Student Alliance (UWSA), which aids students in acquiring off campus housing and access to important information about living within the municipal region (statutes, Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal, Landlord and Tenant Board).

The main housing listings for the Windsor area comes from an external web site called "Places 4 Students" which operates listing services for a number of Colleges and Universities. On this site, students can see pictures of houses/rooms on the market and view the various facilities within the prospective properties.⁹

Within the International Students section as well as the Parent's section of the Windsor site, one can find links to a PDF publication called the '*Parent & Family Orientation Handbook 2007-2008: Tune Into Windsor*'.¹⁰ This document is similar to the publications provided by McMaster, Western and Brock. It is geared more towards providing parents and new students with information on the campus and general university transitioning strategies, whereas the other publications have a much stronger emphasis on student life and housing issues off campus.

Conclusion

⁸ The OCH service publishes a document entitled '*Student Success of Campus: A Guide to Living Off Campus at Brock University*'. Available for viewing or download at: <http://www.brocku.ca/och/doc/OCHShandbook.pdf>, the info pack is a valuable tool for students living off campus and mirrors the similar documents published by the off campus housing services at McMaster University and the University of Western Ontario.

⁹ (<http://www.places4students.com/places/school.asp?schoolID=13>).

¹⁰ available at:

[http://www.uwindsor.ca/units/edc/EDCdept/parents.nsf/831fc2c71873e46285256d6e006c367a/6ecc83b9b421a9e685257018006817e1/\\$FILE/Parent%20Handbook%20for%202007-%20FINAL%20April%2030%2007.pdf](http://www.uwindsor.ca/units/edc/EDCdept/parents.nsf/831fc2c71873e46285256d6e006c367a/6ecc83b9b421a9e685257018006817e1/$FILE/Parent%20Handbook%20for%202007-%20FINAL%20April%2030%2007.pdf)

In conclusion, this paper has attempted to research and identify the primary issues regarding off-campus living, and the relationship between students and municipal affairs. In recognition of the fact that a holistic and academically successful educational experience will be intrinsically tied to all forms of the student experience, this paper has begun this initial discussion of these issues.

Future direction for research and policy is quite possible and is likely to be quite beneficial for all universities faced with municipal affairs issues in their respective cities. A more holistic paper with policy positions will, however, require clear direction from a dedicated cohort of individuals who understand the intricacies of municipal affairs. On that note, the authors of this research attempt to leave the reader with a paper that conveys the need for future research and policy. A guiding principle of future research would need to balance the delicate interplay of a full and rewarding educational experience for a student while recognizing the needs and issues of municipalities. This future undertaking, while not yet conducted, could be highly beneficial to both OUSA and the university system.