

2014 Statement on Graduate Housing

Motivation and Mission of the Graduate Student Government

The Princeton Graduate Student Government is deeply invested in advocating for and **supporting a graduate student population that is strongly rooted in the Princeton community**. This involves a connection between the students, their campus, and the town. We believe that the Princeton University administration shares this mission with us. The ability to live close to campus significantly enhances every aspect of a Princeton graduate education and allows students to thrive within their academic and social communities.

We promote the goal that every graduate student affiliated with Princeton University, especially those who teach or perform research on campus, should have the opportunity to live on or near the University's grounds. **Princeton's private housing market does not meet this need.** Rents in surrounding communities are too expensive to be reasonably accommodated by an average graduate stipend (the median renter in Princeton earns more than double a typical graduate student stipend). In the next year, the average rental price for University apartments will also increase significantly due to the loss of the exceptionally affordable housing options offered by the Butler apartment complex. **In light of these increases, the University should consider either expanding graduate housing or augmenting graduate stipends to better reflect increases in the Princeton region's cost of living.** For a variety of reasons, such as the importance of residential cohesion to building graduate community, we believe expansion of graduate housing to be the best course of action.

Nature of the Shortage of Suitable Graduate Housing

The affordable, safe, and convenient housing options offered by the University are not replicated in the town of Princeton. Due to the desirability of University housing, the vast majority of graduate students, year after year, would prefer to live in University-provided graduate housing. Demand consistently exceeds availability. Past experience has demonstrated that the University is the only agent willing or able to provide housing that fully meets the needs of its graduate students.

Over the past decade, **the University has provided housing for up to 81% of regularly enrolled graduate students**. For the next four years, **this figure is projected to decline to 72-73%**. These figures do not include graduate students who remain enrolled at the University past the regular length of their program through Dissertation Completion Enrollment (DCE).

DCE status typically applies to students who remain enrolled beyond five years. If University housing statistics included DCE students - who remain fully and formally enrolled as full-time graduate students - they would show that **only about 65% of all enrolled graduate students will be housed in the future**.

Any graduate population growth during the period covered by the University's next Housing Master Plan will act to further decrease the proportion of graduate students the University is able to accommodate. As a result of this housing shortage and the manner in which the University assigns graduate housing priority, **virtually all graduate students must move off-campus during their course of study**. This reality, among other negative effects, often extends the time needed to complete a graduate degree.

Therefore, we propose that the next Housing Master Plan provide for a significant expansion of graduate housing. Particularly, this proposal calls for the construction of another housing development sufficient to extend University graduate housing capacity to 90% of regularly enrolled, or 80% of all enrolled, graduate students.

Wider Benefits of Expanded Graduate Housing

The principal interest of the GSG is ensuring that future graduate students have ready access to housing options that they can afford and that offer reasonable convenience in accessing the Princeton University campus. However, we also believe that expanding University-provided graduate housing will result in several significant benefits to the University at large.

- **Expanded graduate housing will enhance research.** Allowing graduate students to limit their commutes and reside as closely as possible to research resources (laboratories, libraries, offices) is crucial for **expediting degree completion** and facilitating the **world-class research** graduate students at Princeton pursue. Residential proximity to the University translates to increased academic productivity and may reduce the number of students reaching DCE status each year.

- **Expanded graduate housing will enhance teaching.** Graduate students who live in close proximity to the campus are able to sustain **greater involvement as teachers and mentors** in the wider University community. Such graduates are better able to accommodate the sometimes irregular schedules of their students, manage the often unpredictable demands characteristic of teaching and research, and contribute to various student groups and University programs that operate on the campus.
- **Expanded graduate housing will enhance graduate recruitment.** The safe, affordable, and convenient housing the University has consistently provided to graduate students makes a tremendous impact on Princeton's attractiveness to prospective students. Providing housing for the full program length will serve to augment this factor **and help ensure Princeton is successful in enrolling the most talented graduate students of tomorrow.**

Short-term and Temporary Measures

There are multiple short-term solutions that can help alleviate current housing pressure while more permanent remedies are planned and implemented.

- **Acquisition of block leases in nearby private apartment complexes.** Senior graduate students could be offered affordable off-campus rent with convenient public transportation options (both criteria that Princeton University could help accommodate). This would make the transition to off-campus housing significantly less disruptive – in personal, academic, and financial terms – than the current situation, where moving off-campus involves great expenditure of both time and money in securing both housing and an appropriate means of transportation.
- **Continued use of Butler Apartments or provision of comparable alternatives.** The Butler residential complex is currently the most affordable housing option, particularly for students with dependents, and remains desirable to graduate students despite its age. Continued use of Butler, or the provision of alternative housing in nearby and affordable University or private complexes, could be made available until a long-term plan is in place. One attractive option is the provision of shuttle service to affordable housing complexes in close proximity to the campus, such as Lakeview (formerly Millstone) apartments.
- **Continued development of programs to support graduate students with families or hardships.** The University currently offers childcare support funding and financial hardship assistance to graduate students who qualify. The University could continue to expand and augment these initiatives, ensuring that those graduate students affected most by cost of living increases are appropriately supported.

Conclusion

We wish to highlight the strengths of Princeton's commitment to graduate housing and show how we envision its future development. We believe that the graduate student body and the University administration share the same goals and **a vision of the University that includes graduate students as a vital and thriving component of Princeton's vibrant academic community.** We believe that sufficient graduate housing is central to achieving this end.

We believe the most important way Princeton can support its graduate students is by providing on-campus graduate housing for most students for their full academic program length. As a premier scholarly institution, Princeton must continue to commit to **maintaining student productivity, fighting the time-to-degree inflation** that has become rampant in academia, **and supporting the research and teaching mission of its graduate students** as well as possible. Housing graduate students nearby in affordable apartments provides faculty **involved and available research assistants**, undergraduates **accessible and accommodating preceptors and mentors**, and graduate students **the most immersive and productive academic experience possible.**

The concerns and potential solutions we raise represent the wishes our constituents have shared with us. We look forward to continuing our dialogue with the Princeton University administration in search of both short- and long-term solutions.

Approved by the Graduate Student Government Assembly – May 14th, 2014