

TEMPLATE: Cost of Living and Basic Needs Departmental Survey

*** DO NOT EDIT THIS DOCUMENT. Copy this document to your own Google Drive using the instructions below. ***

ESTIMATED LENGTH: 5-7 minutes

The Graduate Assembly housing advocacy working group created this survey template for departmental student groups and Graduate Student Affairs Officers (GSAOs) to determine the cost of living for students in their department. Drawing from previous departmental surveys and the advice of students and staffers, this survey assesses housing costs and characteristics as well as the effects of cost of living on housing and food security. Results from this survey should be used to guide your department's policies with regards to financial and administrative support. We encourage you to conduct this survey on an annual basis and to report your findings to both the Graduate Assembly and the Graduate Division. This survey is only a template: please adjust this survey as necessary for your program. For example, students in your department may only spend part of their academic year in the Bay Area or may require additional questions regarding summer income and spending.

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IMPORTANT: You must create your own COPY of the survey. To copy the survey: select "Make a Copy" from the menu in the top right corner (three-dot symbol). You should edit the survey to suit the characteristics and needs of your department/program. You may want to consider speaking with department stakeholders to build support for your efforts. Finally, select "Send" to deliver the survey to your department. You can collect email addresses of respondents by going to the settings (gear symbol) and checking "Collect email address," but please notify your respondents if you collect identifying information.

The following departmental policies were cited as helpful by delegates to the Graduate Assembly. We encourage you to brainstorm additional ways to support students (and staff) and to provide these suggestions to the Graduate Assembly, Graduate Division, and any other relevant bodies.

1. Provide incoming students with a guide to finding housing near Berkeley, which can be found here: <http://ga.berkeley.edu/resources/1986-2/>
2. Provide incoming students with a list of older students looking for new roommates.
3. Solicit student volunteers to host incoming students while they search for housing.
4. Encourage students to find rooms and roommates on the graduate student housing Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1020938924650411/?ref=bookmarks>
4. Provide and publicize a temporary option (e.g. hotel room) for students who face emergency loss of housing due to eviction, rent increase, or other predicaments.
5. Survey students on their housing costs/situation
6. Based on survey results, consider corrective changes in funding such as an increase in stipend or a relocation bonus for incoming students

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To make survey analysis easier as well, we've suggested ways to analyze each question and combinations of questions. For example, you'll probably want to know if students are paying more for rent over time, which means you'll need to compare lease date with total rent. Don't be limited by what we suggest! You will have specific questions about your students that merit consideration. Just be sure to consider how students will answer the question and if the answers will or won't be useful.

Q1: (Program) Make sure respondents are from your department.

Q2: (Year) Year of study should be used, in conjunction with other questions, identify trends that will affect newer students more than current students.

Q3: (Income) Costs should be made relative to this stated monthly income.

Q4: (Source) You may want to separate students into separate categories based on funding sources and to note which funding sources require that students take on extra work.

* Required

1. What is your department or program? *

e.g. Department of Plant & Microbial Biology

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2. What is your year of study? **Mark only one oval.*

- 1st year
- 2nd year
- 3rd year
- 4th year
- 5th year
- 6th year
- 7th year and on
- Post-doctoral researcher
- Other:

3. What is your average monthly gross income during the academic year? (\$) *

EXAMPLE = 1500.00

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4. What is your source of income during the academic year? **Check all that apply.*

- Student loans or other federal student aid
- Departmental or university fellowship(s)
- External fellowship(s)
- Graduate Student Instructor (GSI) stipend
- Graduate Student Researcher (GSR) stipend
- Reader
- Tutor
- Off-campus employment

Cost of Living

The following questions address the costs of housing, transportation, and food, how it compares to student income, and how these costs can change through time.

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Q1: (Length) Plot length of time versus housing costs to see if they are correlated.

Q2: (Lease) Plot date of lease agreement with housing cost to see if they are correlated. Housing is most likely becoming more expensive for new renters.

Q3: (Other) Just extra information

Q4: (Search) If housing searches are very long, providing students with temporary housing during searches may improve well-being, productivity, and success in finding adequate housing. Many graduate students experience homelessness while first moving to the area because they can't find housing.

Q5-Q6: (Size+number) Divide the number of rooms by the number of people in the household to determine if there is crowding. Crowding is type of housing insecurity as it can induce conflict, disrupt sleep, and increase stress.

Q7-Q8: (Room sharing) In question 7, score yes=1 and no=0. Subtract Q7 from Q8. If the value is greater than 0, it may be considered a crowding in response to costs as the room is shared with someone other than a partner.

Q9-Q10: (Rent+utilities) Divide Q9 by income to determine the proportion of income spent on rent. You may choose to subtract Q10 from Q9 to only examine rent costs. However, many people do not receive separate bills for rent and utilities. Over 30-40% is considered high costs in proportion to income - a type of housing insecurity.

Q11: (ZIP) Note where your students are able to find housing. You may choose to compare costs and safety with ZIP code. Compare ZIP code in different years to see if students live farther away.

Q12-Q14: (Commute) Note the length, type, and cost of commute. Plot length of commute to housing costs. A correlation suggests that students are exercising choice: e.g. living closer but paying more and living farther away to pay less. A lack of correlation suggests that students are experiencing a rent ceiling: they'll live anywhere to find cheaper housing.

Q15: (Food) Plot proportion of income spend on housing+transportation versus proportion of income spent on food. Very low spending on food suggests possible food insecurity. Very high spending on food suggests an area where budget management classes could improve financial stability.

5. How long have you lived in your current residence?

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 1 year
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 or more years

6. When was your current lease agreement signed or most recently renewed? *

Approximate month, day and year of the latest change in rent. If you live in a unit where the current lease agreement preexisted your presence, please answer with the date you moved in.

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Example: December 15, 2012

7. If you are not a renter, please briefly describe your housing situation and associated costs here:

E.g. homeowner with \$1000/month mortgage, homeless with \$400/month living costs, etc.

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8. How long were you actively looking for housing before acquiring your current housing?

Mark only one oval.

- 1 week
- 2-4 weeks
- 1-3 months
- 3-12 months
- >1 year

9. What best describes the size of your housing? *

Mark only one oval.

- 1 bedroom or studio
- 2 bedrooms
- 3 bedrooms
- 4 bedrooms
- 5+ bedrooms

10. How many people do you share your housing with? *

Total number of other persons in the same residence. (May be the same as above).

Mark only one oval.

- 0 (no housemates)
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

11. Do you share your room with a significant other/partner?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

12. How many people do you share your room with? *

Total number of other persons in the same bedroom, including significant others.

Mark only one oval.

- 0 (no roommates)
- 1
- 2
- 3 or more

13. How much do you personally pay for rent each month, including essential utilities (electricity, water, waste and gas)? (\$) *

The cost of rent plus utilities or, if utilities are included in rent, the total rent price. EXAMPLE = 1000.00

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14. How much do you personally pay for essential utilities alone each month? (\$)

Skip this question if the cost of utilities are included in the rent price. EXAMPLE = 0.00

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15. What is your ZIP code?

Used for determining distance from work and neighborhood characteristics. EXAMPLE = 94703

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16. How long does it take for you to commute to work/campus? (minutes)

Approximate time in minutes. EXAMPLE = 20.0

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17. What is your main mode of transportation to work/campus?

Mark only one oval.

Walking

Biking

Busing

BART

Driving

Other:

18. Approximately what is your average monthly cost of commuting to and from work/campus? (\$)

EXAMPLE = 50.00

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19. Approximately how much do you spend each month on food? (\$)

Include groceries, dining out, and other meals. EXAMPLE = 100.00

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Basic Needs Security

Basic needs security refers to a person's access to secure housing and food resources. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has defined housing insecurity as "high housing costs in

proportion to income, poor housing quality, unstable neighborhoods, overcrowding, or homelessness," and the USDA has defined food insecurity as "a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food." Basic needs insecurity is a spectrum that many students may experience; in more severe cases, basic needs insecurity can lead to negative effects on student well-being and productivity.

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You might not think these questions are important, but about 25% of graduate students at Cal experience moderate or high food insecurity, so we suggest seeing if it's true for your department, too. The questions below are adapted from DHHS and USDA language to assess basic needs insecurity. Some indicators of housing insecurity were assessed above: specifically, spending more than 30% of income on housing and sharing a bedroom due to high housing costs are both indicators of housing insecurity.

- Q1: (Quality) 1 and 2 indicates housing insecurity. Compare with housing costs (hopefully correlated).
- Q2: (Stability) 1 and 2 indicates housing insecurity. Compare with ZIP code.
- Q3: (Safety) Not a housing insecurity metric. If students feel unsafe, ask them why.
- Q4-Q5: (Homelessness) This asks about homelessness without using the words "homelessness," Homelessness is defined as "the lack of a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (DHHS) such as couch surfing, sleeping in hotels, or sleeping in cars.

Q6: (Chance) A measure of student confidence and mobility. Housing insecurity has been shown to pressure people to stay in abusive relationships and unhealthy conditions. If your students are housing insecure and feel they have no other options, consider lobbying for emergency/temporary housing options on campus.

- Q7: (Skipping) 1 and 2 indicates food insecurity.
- Q8: (Hunger) "Yes" indicates food insecurity.

Q9+Q10: Pay special attention to these questions. While you may feel unable to provide appropriate financial or support resources for your students, you have the power to inform the university of their experiences and lobby for changes. Your analysis of these responses may well lead to important new policies at the university level. Further, your department should be aware of whether or not students' basic needs are adequately met. Being a successful student requires support, and if students fall behind the faculty should acknowledge how basic needs insecurity may be a factor.

20. How would you describe your housing quality?

Housing quality refers to amenities such as plumbing and kitchens as well as general upkeep (paint, lighting, etc.). (DHHS)
Mark only one oval.

1	2	3	4	5		
Poor quality housing	<input type="radio"/>	Excellent quality housing				

21. How would you describe your neighborhood stability?

Characteristics that contribute to unstable neighborhoods include poverty, crime, lack of job opportunities, noise, traffic, litter, poor or very limited city services, and undesirable neighbors. (DHHS)
Mark only one oval.

1	2	3	4	5		
Unstable neighborhood	<input type="radio"/>	Stable neighborhood				

22. How often do you feel threatened by others during your commute to and from work/campus?*Mark only one oval.*

- Almost always
- Several times a week
- Once or twice a week
- Less than once a week
- Less than once a month
- Never

23. How confident are you that, if you tried, you could acquire a better living situation?*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not confident	<input type="radio"/>	Confident				

24. Have you ever lacked a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence while a student at UC Berkeley?

Couch surfing, sleeping in hotels, sleeping in cars, sleeping in parks, etc.

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, I experienced this situation when I first moved to UC Berkeley.
- Yes, I experienced this situation after being at UC Berkeley for some time.
- Yes, I am currently experiencing this situation.
- No

25. If you answered "yes" to the above question, for how many weeks did you lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence?

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26. In the last 12 months, how often did you cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?*Mark only one oval.*

- Almost every month
- Some months but not every month
- Only 1 or 2 months
- Never

27. In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

28. What factors contribute to any lack of adequate/affordable housing or food you may be experiencing?

Additionally, if you lack a a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, please indicate for how long this has been an issue.

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29. Other than/in addition to increased financial support, what would help you deal with the causes and effects of inadequate/unaffordable housing or food that you may be experiencing?

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Feedback

30. Please share any comments or questions regarding your food and housing situation, cost of living, or well-being.

To address the concerns of all students, we are particularly interested in unique circumstances that have influenced your situation. Due to the self-identifying nature of the information, we did not ask students to self-report their race, class, gender, age, or parental status. However, we understand that these factors can influence students' experiences in important ways, so we would like to provide the opportunity and encouragement to comment here.

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31. May we contact you regarding your responses? *

Your email is linked to your responses, but we will not contact you regarding your answers without your permission.

Mark only one oval.

Yes
 No

32. If you answered "yes" to the above, please state your email address:

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