

STUDENT-CENTERED AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN CALIFORNIA

PERSPECTIVES OF
CALIFORNIA STUDENT LEADERS

January 2024



BACKGROUND

Given the crisis of housing affordability for college students in California, the Student Senate of the California Community Colleges (SSCCC), California State Student Association (CSSA) and University of California Student Association (UCSA) have joined together to build a student-centered affordable housing agenda. The Center for Equitable Higher Education at California State University Long Beach worked with the student associations to examine California's efforts to create more affordable student housing and understand the priorities of student leaders.

METHODS



Facilitated discussions with student leaders from SSCCC, CSSA and UCSA



Survey of student leaders from SSCCC (48), UCSA (46) and CSSA (43)



Interviews with 19 California higher education and housing policy experts



A literature review on affordable student housing in California

THE CENTER FOR EQUITABLE HIGHER EDUCATION

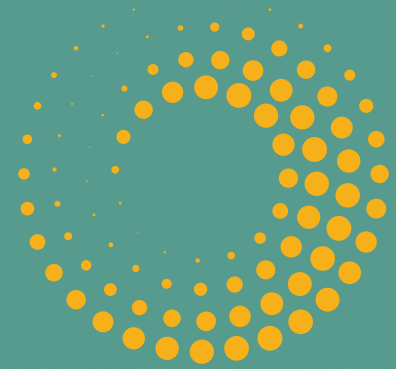
The Center for Equitable Higher Education at California State University, Long Beach (CEHE) ensures that California higher education systems prioritize student basic needs and implement equitable and effective programs so that students thrive and graduate. CEHE works to:

- Amplify the voices of students and practitioners as the experts of their experience;
- Build evidence on student basic needs in partnership with students, faculty, practitioners and other leaders in the field; and
- Support practitioners, policy makers and other leaders as they work to meet student basic needs.



<http://www.csulb.edu/cehe>

DETERMINING THE NEED FOR AFFORDABLE STUDENT HOUSING



ISSUE

Decisions about investment in building new affordable student housing by the State of California and the California State University (CSU), California Community Colleges (CCC) and University of California (UC) systems are, in part, based on what is understood about student need for low cost housing options.



STUDENT PRIORITIES

- Student leaders want to ensure that calculations of the need for affordable student housing are transparent, accurate and inclusive of all students who are homeless, housing insecure or require low cost housing options.
- Student leaders want to be included from the beginning in efforts to gather data about student need for affordable housing.
- Overwhelmingly, student leaders feel that using campus supported housing waitlists as a measure of “need for student affordable housing” is not accurate as many students who are not able to afford campus supported housing do not apply for housing and are missed.
- Student leaders want all students to be asked about their need for affordable housing during enrollment in order to avoid stigmatizing low-income students.

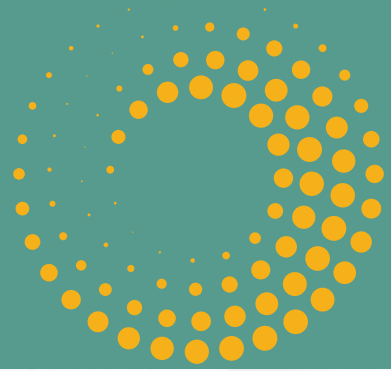


STUDENT VOICES

“It’s really difficult to find any housing in Ventura County. It’s super expensive. I actually make too much for CalFresh, and I have to go without, and have to go to grocery stores for super high processed foods. I don’t have readily available access to groceries. I have to live paycheck to paycheck. I usually get about \$2,000 which goes to rent, utilities, and that extra is for gas. I really have less than \$50 to use for about 3 to 4 weeks at a time.” (SSCCC Student Leader)

“There are literally students who have to decline their admission because they’ve been on the waitlist way too long and they have to wait an entire year to go to another CSU. Now they’re graduating late and so I would argue that’s not very good for the GI-25.” (CSSA Student Leader)

ACCESS TO CAMPUS-SUPPORTED AFFORDABLE HOUSING



ISSUE

According to a 2023 survey conducted by the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) housing is now the largest cost incurred by college students enrolled in the California public higher education system. The CSAC study showed that 53% of students across all California higher education systems are housing insecure.



STUDENT PRIORITIES

- More than 80% of student leaders believe low-income students who cannot otherwise afford housing should be the first priority for placement in on-campus housing.
- A majority of student leaders think that students should be required to maintain fewer units (6-9) to live in campus supported housing than the 12 units that are required in programs such as the Higher Education Student Housing Grant Program (HESHG).
- Overwhelmingly, student leaders feel that on-campus affordable housing options are a priority. SSSCC student leaders want dorm style affordable housing while CSSA and UCSA students want more access to affordable on-campus apartments.
- Student leaders want on-campus affordable housing for students with dependents

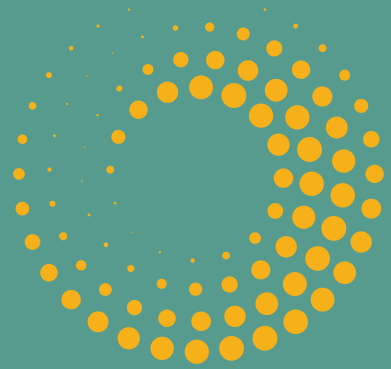


STUDENT VOICES

“We need to be prioritizing students that are low-income...especially low-income students, when they don't get campus housing, they're then left with their very, very predatory landlord that exists around most, if not all, universities. They're often the ones that don't have the resources to help fight this.” (UCSA Student Leader)

“I think one thing that's not taken into consideration enough is student parents...when you think of a student, you're not typically thinking of young parents, but that is the reality for many students.” (CSSA Student Leader)

DEFINING “AFFORDABILITY”



ISSUE

There is no universally accepted definition of “affordable” student housing and how to calculate “affordable” rent students are charged. It is common practice to define “affordable” as simply “below market rate.” The California’s HESHG program is using the calculation 30% of 50% of the Area Median Income for “affordable” housing rent.



STUDENT PRIORITIES

- Over 75% of student leaders feel that the 30% of 50% of the Area Median Income calculation results in rents that are not truly affordable for students.
- Over 80% of student leaders feel that wages should be considered income and the vast majority felt that student loans should not be considered income.
- A majority of student leaders prefer rents to be personalized to a student based on their income instead of charging students a uniform “affordable” rent.
- A majority of SSSCC student leaders prefer rents to be affordable without the use of additional financial aid.



STUDENT VOICES

“I totally believe that the rent should be based on individual needs, because you can never look at person and know what their life is like. I have a single mother. While she works, it’s still very hard for us to pay for college, and I know that more people have it way harder than I do and so to keep everyone to the same standard would be completely unfair.” (SSCC Student Leader)

“I don't think that loans should be taken into consideration because it's the money that they already don't have, so if they don't have the money and are being offered the loans, how are they ever going to be able to pay them back? I think that should also be taken into consideration as well.” (CSSA Student Leader)

