



STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION  
OF MACEWAN UNIVERSITY

# Housing Survey Report

**SAMU Data Research Findings Report**

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# 1. Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings from the **2025 Fall Student Housing Survey**, which was conducted to gather accurate, up-to-date information on housing costs, conditions and barriers that students face. The survey was administered from **10/27/2025** to **11/20/2025** and received a total of **507** responses.

## Key findings from this research indicate that:

- **Key Finding 1:** Students are trading time for financial security. Many students living with families report commute times of 60, 90 and even 120 minutes via public transit.
- **Key Finding 2:** Substandard Living Conditions for Off-Campus Students
- **Key Finding 3:** Residence Students Wi-Fi and Heat Issues, with better Wi-Fi being the most common write-in requests. Followed by complaints on the building being too hot, with no temperature control in individual units.

**This report will provide a detailed analysis of the survey data for the SAMU Executive Committee.**

## 2. Introduction & Methodology

### 2.1. Research Objectives

The primary objective of this survey was to gather accurate, up-to-date information on housing costs, conditions and barriers that students face. The responses will be the foundation of SAMU's advocacy for better housing policies, improved housing support, and greater affordability.

### 2.2. Methodology

- **Target Population:** The survey targeted all students at MacEwan University. With some focus on students living in residence.
- **Survey Period:** The survey was open from **10/27/2025** to **11/20/2025**.
- **Distribution Method:** The survey was distributed via email, promo squad distributing QR codes, SAMU website, and tabling in the residence main lobby.
- **Response Rate:** A total of **507** students responded to the survey, resulting in a response rate of 2.93% (Based on 17,327 Student Population\*)
- **Margin of Error:** With a Student Population of 17,327, this sample size of 507 yields a margin of error of ( $\pm 4.3\%$ ) providing a medium-high degree of statistical confidence in our findings.

## 2.3 Technical Methodology & Tech Stack

To ensure the integrity, reproducibility, and depth of this analysis, raw survey data was processed using a custom programmatic pipeline built in **Python 3.13**. Unlike standard spreadsheet analysis, this approach allowed advanced statistical correlation, interactive visualization, and Natural Language Processing (NLP) of open-ended responses.

### 1. Data Processing & Statistical Analysis (pandas, numpy)

- **Data Cleaning:** Raw SurveyMonkey exports were ingested and sanitized to remove incomplete entries and format metadata.
- **Transformation:** Categorical responses (e.g., "Living with Family" vs. "Renters") were programmatically grouped to allow direct statistical comparison.
- **Statistical Logic:** Commute times and housing costs were analyzed using comparative aggregation (Mean/Median) and correlation matrices to identify the relationship between housing costs and financial stress levels.

### 2. Advanced Visualization (plotly)

- Data was visualized using **Plotly**, allowing for the creation of multi-dimensional charts.
- Specific Visualizations:
  - Violin Plots
  - Trendline Scatter Plots
  - Bar Charts
- Plotly was also chosen for the interactivity it provides if this report is posted to a live web-application.

### 3. Qualitative Analysis (nlTK)

- **Natural Language Processing (NLP):** The NLTK (Natural Language Toolkit) library was used to tokenize text and identify high-frequency keywords in open-ended responses. This also allowed for:
  - Automated sentiment analysis of student complaints
  - Thematic categorization of hundreds of open-ended responses into actionable buckets (e.g., "Affordability", "Safety," "Infrastructure").
  - Extraction of "Red Flag" comments indicating safety risks or severe financial distress.

\* Population is based on the 2025-2026 Election Eligible Voters count (Oct 17, 2025)  
<https://samu.ca/election/samuelection/>

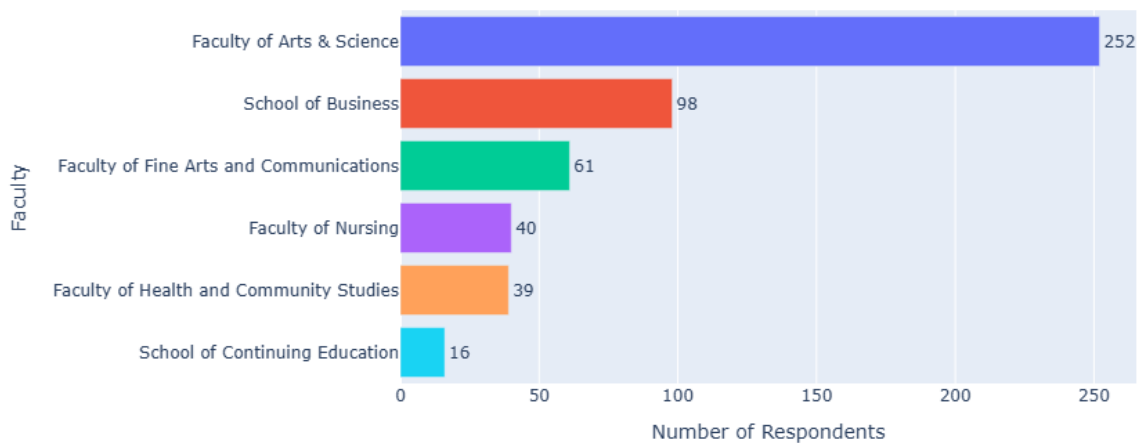
### 3. Respondent Demographics

The following section provides a demographic overview of the survey respondents. This information helps to contextualize the findings presented in this report.

#### A. Faculty Representation

The respondent pool is heavily anchored by the Faculty of Arts & Science (49.7%), followed by the School of Business (19.3%).

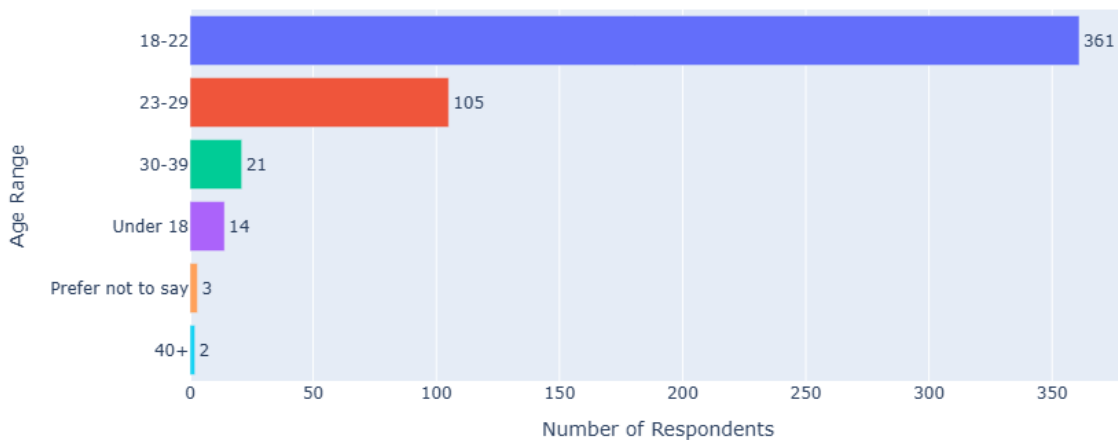
Distribution of Respondents by Faculty



#### B. Age Range

Most respondents (71%) fall into the 18–22 age bracket.

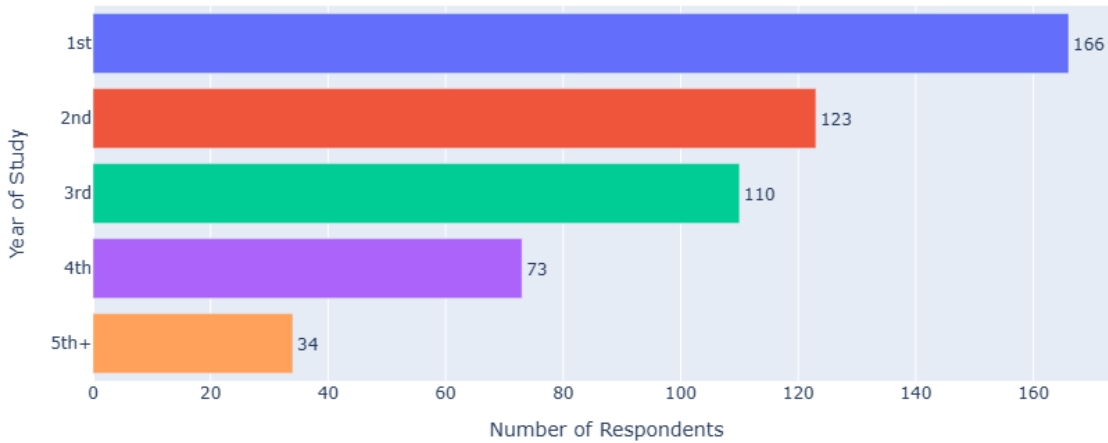
Distribution of Respondents by Age Range



### C. Year of Study

The survey achieved a balanced spread across academic years. While 1st-year students (33%) make up the largest single group, 67% of respondents are in their 2nd year or higher.

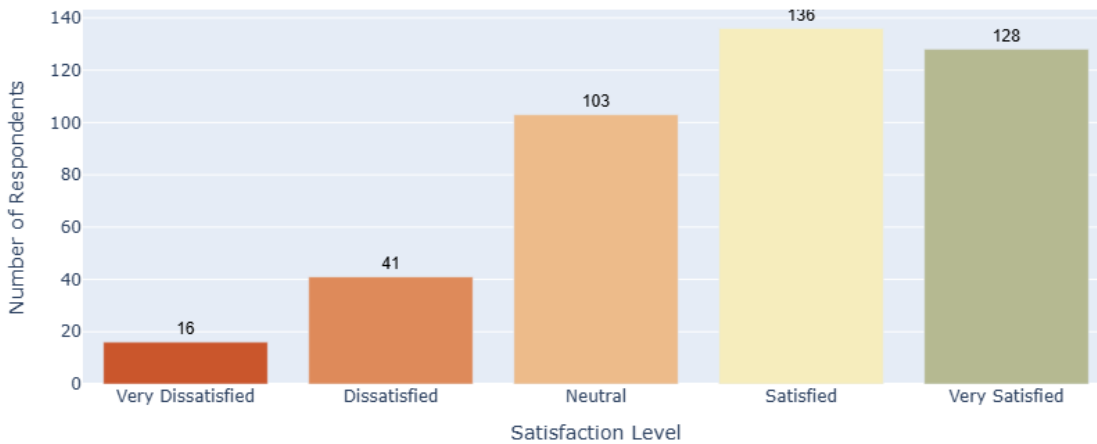
Distribution of Respondents by Year of Study



### D. General Satisfaction

This bar chart gives a high-level view of students' general satisfaction with their current housing situation.

Satisfaction with Current Housing Situation



## 4. Key Findings

This section details the main findings from the survey, organized by key themes or research questions.

### Theme 1: The Commuter Trade-Off (Time vs. Money)

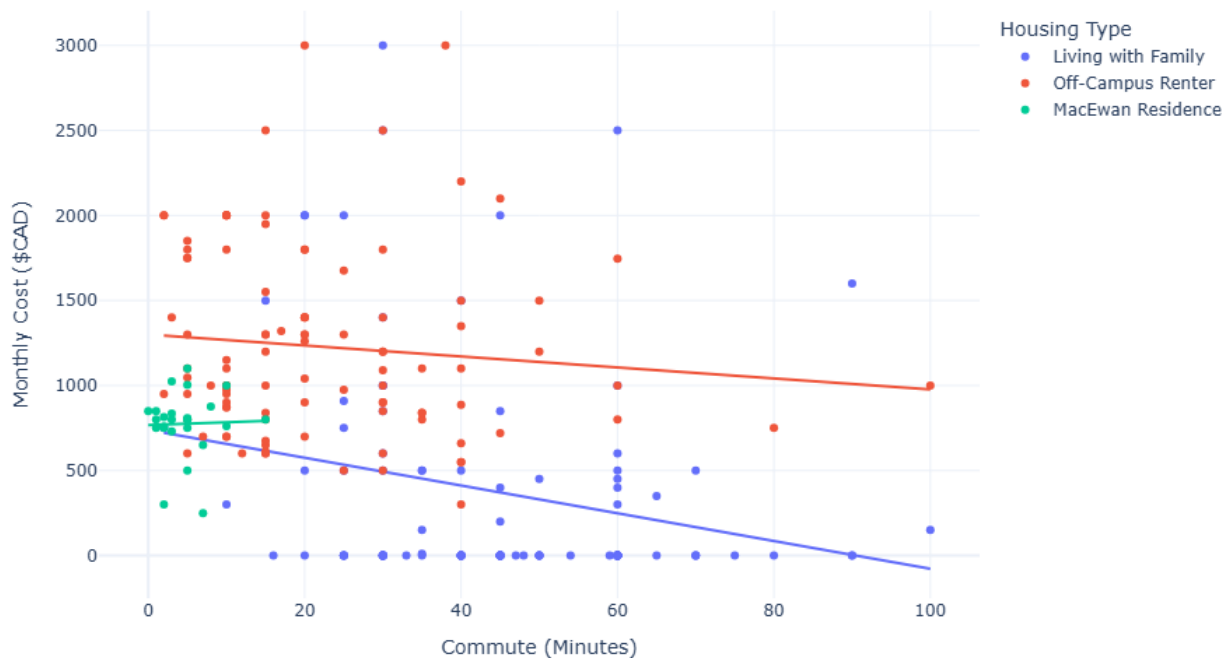
While living with family offers financial relief for many, it comes at a significant cost in time. Which is a very important resource for academic success and work-life balance.

#### Finding 1.1: Students are forced to choose between financial solvency and time poverty.

There is an inverse relationship between housing costs and commute duration. Students living with family save money but "pay" in hours lost to transportation, whereas renters "buy" back their time at a price.

- Students living with family have a median commute of roughly **45 minutes** (one way), with upper quartiles reaching **60–100 minutes**. In contrast, Off-Campus Renters and Residence students typically commute **less than 20 minutes**.
- The time savings cost renters a median of ~\$1100 CAD per month, whereas most students living with family pay \$0 - \$500.

#### The Trade-Off: Commute Time vs. Monthly Housing Costs

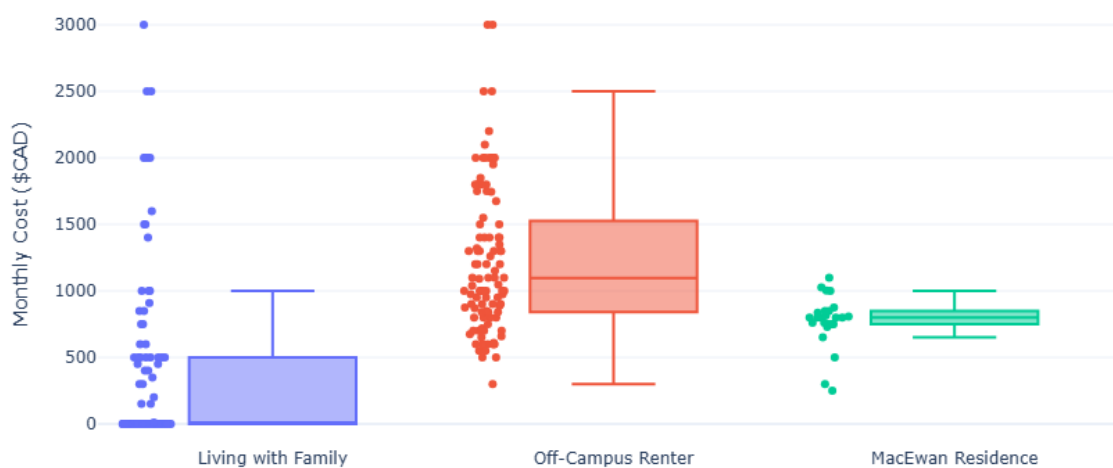


## Finding 1.2: The "Free Rent" assumption is incorrect for many commuters.

Contrary to the assumption that living at home is free, a significant portion of commuters face a "double burden" of paying rent to family while still enduring long transit times.

- The data reveals a wide distribution in costs for students living with family, with a notable cluster paying between **\$500 and \$1000 per month**.
- Some students living with family are paying market rates (Over \$1,300) yet still commuting **over an hour**, placing them in the highest tier of disadvantage.

**Financial Impact:** Monthly Housing Costs by Group



## Qualitative Insights:

Students expressed frustration with the unreliability of Edmonton's transit and the exhaustion of long days. One student noted, "*The transit time it takes to get to university [is a major negative experience].*" Another highlighted the difficulty of balancing this with work: "*Extremely high rent prices as a full-time student. Can't work and study at the same time.*"

## Theme 2: The Off-Campus Crisis (Safety & Quality)

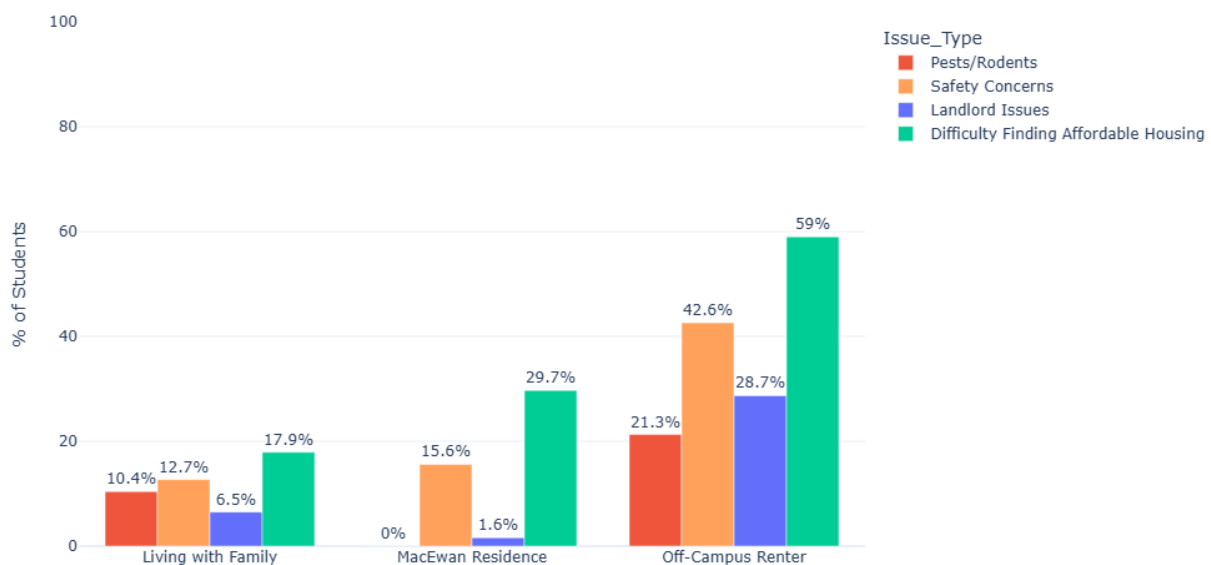
Students who enter the private rental market to be closer to campus are disproportionately exposed to unsafe environments and substandard living conditions compared to others.

### Finding 2: Moving off campus significantly increases exposure to safety risks

There is a massive "Safety Gap" between student-managed housing and private rentals. Renters are 3.3 times more likely to report feeling unsafe than those living with family.

- **42.6%** of Off-Campus Renters reported "Concerns about safety in my neighborhood"
- Comparatively, only **12.7%** of students living with family and **15.6%** of Residence students reported similar safety concerns.
- **21.3%** of Off-Campus Renters reported issues with pests (cockroaches, bedbugs, mice), compared to **0%** reported in MacEwan Residence.
- **28.7%** of Renters reported disputes with unresponsive landlords, compared to **6.5%** of Students living with family.

**The Reality of Off-Campus Living:** Prevalence of Key Issues



### Qualitative Insights:

Open-ended responses regarding off-campus housing were alarming. Multiple students explicitly mentioned pests, with one stating: "I have had cockroaches, bedbugs, and asbestos," and another noting, "Mice taken over garage... squirrel in the attic." Safety was also a recurring theme, with reports of "unwanted people getting into the building" and feeling unsafe walking alone.

### Theme 3: The Residence Experience (Good but Disconnected)

MacEwan Residence is succeeding in providing a safe and pest-free environment, but it is failing to meet student expectations regarding digital infrastructure and value for money.

#### Note on Data Limitations:

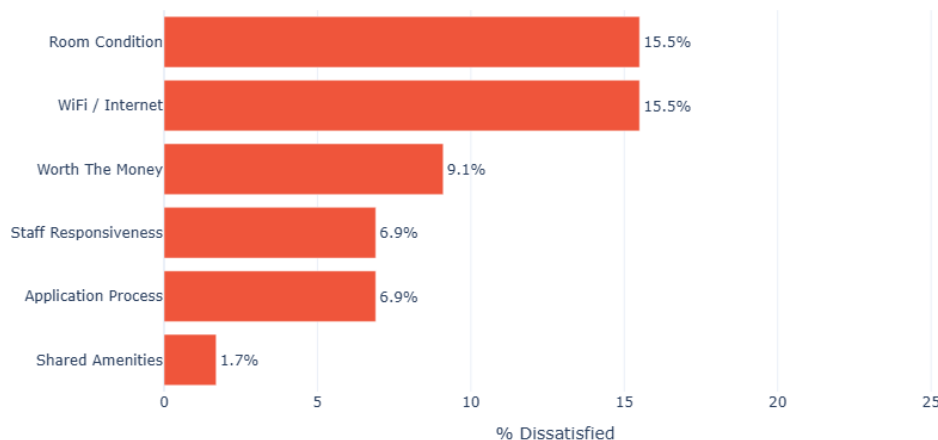
Analysis for this theme is based on a subset of **58 respondents** who identified as currently living in MacEwan Residence. While this provides valuable directional insight, the smaller sample size means that a shift of just 2–3 students can impact the percentages by roughly 5%. These findings should be viewed as "**strong signals**" rather than definitive population-wide statistics for MacEwan Residence.

### Finding 3: Wi-Fi connectivity and physical room condition are the top complaints

Despite being a newer facility compared to many off-campus rentals, dissatisfaction with the physical and digital infrastructure is high.

- **15.5%** of Residence students rated "Room Condition" as Poor or Very Poor, suggesting wear and tear is becoming a pain point.
- These dissatisfaction rates are significantly higher than "Shared Amenities" (**1.7%**), indicating students like the common spaces but struggle in their private rooms.

**Pain Points:** Percentage of Residence Students Rating Aspects as 'Poor' or 'Very Poor'



#### Qualitative Insights:

Students were very specific about their dissatisfaction with Residence infrastructure. The most common requests were for "Better wifi that's easily accessible" and temperature regulation, with one student pleading: "Have better temperature regulations for higher levels in the building, I'm sweating."

## Theme 4: Financial Stress & Well-Being

Housing is the primary driver of anxiety for a large portion of the student body, with specific faculties experiencing this stress more acutely than others.

### Finding 4.1: High housing costs are a direct predictor of frequent financial stress.

A violin plot analysis confirms a moderate correlation between Monthly Housing Cost and Financial Stress which calculated is **0.419**.

- The distribution of stress for Off-Campus Renters is top-heavy, meaning that majority of renters feel stressed "**Often**" or "**Always**"
- Students living with family show a much wider distribution, with a larger portion reporting "**Rarely**" or "**Never**" feeling stressed about housing costs.

**The Cost of Living:** Financial Stress Levels by Housing Situation

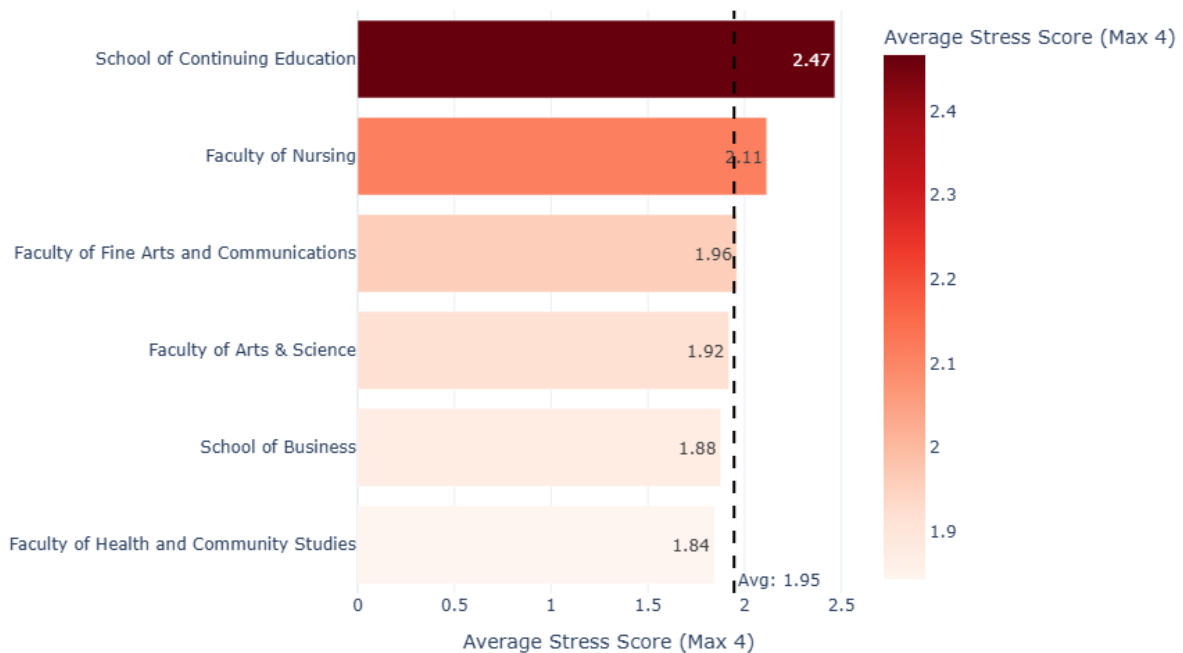


## Finding 4.2: Nursing and Continuing Education students are the most vulnerable.

Housing stress is not distributed equally across the university; certain faculties report higher average stress levels, likely due to program demands (practicums) or demographic differences (mature students).

- School of Continuing Education: Highest average stress score (**2.47 out of 4**).
- Faculty of Nursing: Second highest stress score (**2.11 out of 4**).
- School of Business: Reported one of the lower average stress scores (**1.88 out of 4**).

**Vulnerable Groups:** Average Housing Financial Stress by Faculty



### Qualitative Insights:

The link between finances and mental health was stark in the comments. One student described the situation as a barrier to leaving abusive situations: "*My roommates would scream at me... but I can't find a job so moving out isn't even a question.*" Others bluntly stated the trade-off they face: "*Just cost. I can't afford to leave.*"

## 5. Discussion

The results of this survey paint a picture of a student body navigating a housing market that offers few "good" choices. The overarching narrative is one of **forced compromise**: students are trading time for money, safety for affordability, or value for proximity. In the broader context of student wellness, these findings suggest that housing instability is not merely a financial issue but a significant academic barrier that affects faculties and demographics unevenly.

### Interpretation of Key Findings:

The "so what" of our data lies in the concept of **inequity of access**.

- **"Time Poverty"**: The stark trade-off between commute times and housing costs suggests that students from lower-income backgrounds are systematically disadvantaged. While their peers in residence or rental housing gain back 5-10 hours per week, students living with family are effectively working a part-time job in transit. This "time deficit" directly competes with study hours, extracurricular involvement and most importantly sleep.
- **Safety as a Luxury**: The data reveals that safety is currently a luxury in the Edmonton student housing market. The fact that moving off campus increases the likelihood of safety concerns by over 3x indicates that the "affordable" rental stock available to students is largely located in vulnerable or unmaintained neighborhoods.

### Limitations

While based on a sample size of 507 from a population of 17,327, these findings carry a margin of error of  $\pm 4.3\%$  at a 95% confidence level. Specific subsets of the data present limitations:

- **Residence Sample Size**: The analysis of the "Residence Experience" is based on 58 respondents. While this provides strong directional signals, small shifts in response (e.g., 2–3 students) can disproportionately sway percentages. These findings should be treated as indicators rather than definitive population statistics.
- **Self-Selection Bias**: As with all voluntary surveys, there is a potential for self-selection bias. Students who are currently experiencing housing distress or conflict may have been more motivated to complete the survey than those who are content, potentially inflating the dissatisfaction metrics.
- **Variable Rent Reporting**: Several respondents left the "Total Housing Cost" field blank. While we adjusted our analysis methods to maximize the sample size for commute times, the financial analysis excludes these non-respondents, potentially underrepresenting those with complex or informal financial arrangements.

## 6. Conclusion

The 2025 Fall Student Housing Survey reveals that MacEwan University students are navigating a highly constrained housing market characterized by forced compromises. The data indicates that students are consistently forced to trade essential resources, like time, financial security and physical safety, to secure housing. The overarching conclusion is that housing instability and inequity act as significant barriers to academic success and student well-being.

### 1. Commuter "Time Poverty" & Financial Burden

- **Time vs. Money Trade-Off:** Renters pay a premium (~\$1,100/month) for commutes under 20 minutes. Conversely, students living with family save money but suffer severe "time poverty," losing 45 to 100+ minutes each way on public transit.
- **The "Free Rent" Myth:** Living at home is often not free; many students face a "double burden" of paying \$500-1000+ in rent to family while still losing crucial hours to long commutes.

### 2. Off-Campus Safety & Quality Crisis

- **Safety Risks:** Entering the private rental market heavily exposes students to unsafe environments. Renters are 3.3 times more likely to feel unsafe than those living with family.
- **Substandard Conditions:** 42.6% of renters report neighborhood safety concerns, 28.7% deal with unresponsive landlords, and 21.3% report severe pest issues (e.g., bedbugs, cockroaches, mice).
- **Affordability vs. Safety:** "Affordable" student rentals are largely confined to vulnerable neighborhoods, forcing students to trade personal safety for lower rent.

### 3. Residence Infrastructure Gaps

- **Safe but Aging:** MacEwan Residence successfully provides a safe, pest-free environment (0% reported pests) but falls short on physical and digital infrastructure.
- **Primary Pain Points:** While common spaces are highly rated, 15.5% of students rate their private room conditions as poor/very poor due to wear and tear. The top complaints are unreliable Wi-Fi and lack of individual temperature control (specifically chronic overheating).

#### 4. Uneven Financial Stress & Mental Well-being

- **Cost Drives Anxiety:** There is a strong correlation (0.419) between housing costs and financial stress. Most off-campus renters feel stressed "Often" or "Always," and high costs trap some students in toxic or abusive living situations.
- **Uneven Faculty Impact:** Housing stress disproportionately affects specific programs. The School of Continuing Education (2.47/4 stress score) and Faculty of Nursing (2.11/4) report the highest anxiety levels, worsened by demographics (mature students) and program demands (unpaid practicums).

Ultimately, student housing is a primary driver of inequity. Lower-income students and those in demanding programs systematically bear the brunt of long commutes, unsafe conditions, and high financial anxiety, all of which directly hinder their academic success and mental health