

OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING AT UW-MADISON



Division of Enrollment Management, RAMP Seminar

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INTRODUCTION

Affordable housing is a significant challenge for many of our students, directly influencing both attrition and retention rates. As part of the Division of Enrollment Management (DEM), we should be concerned about the impact that inaccessible or overpriced housing has on our student body. Addressing this issue not only supports student well-being but also aligns with our goals of fostering a supportive and sustainable campus environment.

KEY QUESTION

How can the DEM help students understand the off-campus housing landscape in Madison?

APPROACH

Completed SWOT analysis to better understand challenges that students navigate while searching for affordable off-campus housing. Suggestions for how DEM can assist with student understanding of affordable housing in Madison is included in the opportunities.

RESOURCES

UW-Madison Off-Campus Housing Services
<https://www.housing.wisc.edu/undergraduate/off-campus/>

Student Housing Market and Affordability Analysis
<https://news.wisc.edu/content/uploads/2024/09/Madison-Report-082624.pdf>

Theory Madison
<https://www.mortenson.com/projects/theory-madison>

UConn Student Affordability Resources
<https://guides.lib.uconn.edu/c.php?g=1447486&p=10757889>

UW-Milwaukee Low Income and Temporary Housing Resources
<https://uwm.edu/off-campus-resources/low-income-and-temporary-housing/>

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

Robust Student Support Network: Students have access to a wide range of resources including the Off-Campus Housing Services office, Off-Campus Housing Marketplace portal, Tenant Resource Center, Office of Student Financial Aid (OSFA), and Basic Needs Student Support.

Strong Campus Partnerships: Off-Campus Housing Services collaborates extensively with various campus units and is responsive to requests for student and family presentations, offering both in-person and virtual formats.

Proactive Student Engagement: During peak rental season, Off-Campus Housing Services conducts daily drop-in sessions at high-traffic campus locations (e.g., recreation centers, dining halls, student unions), ensuring accessibility and visibility.

Early Outreach to On-Campus Residents: As part of University Housing, Off-Campus Housing Services maintains consistent communication with residence hall students through emails, newsletters, drop-ins, and meet-and-greet events.

OPPORTUNITIES

Development of a Housing Evaluation Tool: Create a student-centered rubric or rating system to assess housing options based on key factors such as location, affordability, amenities, and reputation—potentially in collaboration with the City of Madison.

Expand Resource Listings for Vulnerable Students: Enhance the Off-Campus Housing website by including more external resources tailored to low-income and housing-insecure students, drawing inspiration from institutions like UW-Milwaukee and University of Connecticut.

Monitor New Housing Developments: Track upcoming projects like Theory Madison, which will add 100 affordable student beds and 700 market-rate beds by Fall 2026, to better inform students and advocate for affordability.

WEAKNESSES

Limited Staffing Capacity: The office is operated by a single staff member, which constrains scalability despite the high quality and dedication of services provided.

Scarcity of Affordable Housing Near Campus: There is a limited supply of budget-friendly housing options within close proximity to the university.

Restrictions on Student-Only Occupancy: Some affordable housing programs restrict units from being fully occupied by full-time students, limiting accessibility.

THREATS

High Occupancy Rates: On-campus housing is operating at 115% capacity, while off-campus units near campus are at 98%, intensifying competition and limiting options.

Geographic Constraints: Madison's unique location on an isthmus and proximity to the Capitol and downtown restrict available land for new housing developments.

Challenging Leasing Timelines: The fall leasing season pressures first-year students to make quick decisions without adequate information, while transfer and graduate students face challenges due to admissions and leasing timeline mismatches.