"My Commute is Hell"

UCLA Students, Extreme Commutes, Impacts, Solutions

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citylab
UCLA

This report is the result of a constructive collaboration with a number of UCLA partners: Student Services, under the inspiring guidance of Vice Chancellor Monroe Gorden; Housing Services, where Sarah Dundish and Suzanne Seplow have been brilliant leaders; Transportation Services, particularly Abdallah Daboussi and David Karwaski, whose generosity and intelligence produced the commuter-housing survey; Madeline Brozen, Juan Matute, and Michael Manville for lending their expertise on survey design and execution; and as always, we thank our home department, Architecture and Urban Design and the School of Arts and Architecture.

This report is dedicated to the UCLA students with extreme commutes, a number of whom shared their valuable time on campus with us to add their personal stories to this study.

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A
PREFACE

369 responses to a recent cityLAB and UCLA Transportation Office conducted survey.

Of those,

43% commuted over 60 minutes to campus each way

Of those 160 Students:

61% drove a private car

42% had slept overnight on or near campus instead of returning home as a result of their commute

7% experienced homelessness since starting college

71% were interested in more affordable housing near campus

64% were interested in safe places to nap or sleep on campus

THE NEW CITY

If Los Angeles is the paradigmatic "New City," or the "City of the 21st Century," then we might say that the New City is one where, after a long history of convergence between malignant policy (auto-dominated, suburban sprawl, uneven distribution of resources, and exclusionary zoning) and design-decision making, there is a disappearing "public." We define the public as a shared space where diverse residents have a right to and a means of living their lives with dignity and safety. For evidence of this missing public we need not look further than the life of the student. The student in this case attends one of the most prestigious "public" universities and is beset by increasing rents, rising student debt, and ever-extending commute times. If a student has to choose between paying rent for a high-priced dorm or apartment in Westwood and eating a meal, then we can say with certainty that the student is excluded from a discernible public --the public has gone missing. As scholars, teachers, administrators, policymakers, and activists, we are working toward a future city that enhances our shared public lives. We must ask ourselves, where is the public in the new city and what role can a public university play? We can start by establishing places for an inclusive public within our own university, and by addressing the determining factors that left the public out. The city has changed, particularly Los Angeles, and the university can help overcome problems that the new city poses to its students.

This research rests on the premise that UCLA will better meet its housing goals when it recognizes that the needs of students who experience extreme commutes are intrinsic to the diversity of its contemporary student population and to the contemporary urban context which frames the campus. The study finds that this will require creative new solutions for campus accommodations.

RENT

Among the determining factors in the housing affordability crisis we currently face in Los Angeles is rising rents. Los Angeles is among the highest rent-burdened cities in the country.[1] As housing production fails to keep pace with increasing demand, costs rise and low to moderate income Angelenos are hit hardest. This is disproportionately impactful since 546,559 households, 40% of the total, are renter-occupied.[2] Residents are forced to sacrifice spending on other basic necessities like food, education, and healthcare. What does this mean for students, especially those who are low-income, who attend one of the nation's most prestigious, public universities? Students who come from low-income families comprised at least 20% of UCLA's admitted freshman class in 2017.[3] If campus housing is out-of-reach, students must navigate the Westwood market, where the average monthly rent is $3,474.[4] Otherwise, they must look for more affordable options further from campus.

DEBT

Employment opportunity is one of many sensible reasons to seek higher education. Most jobs that pay over $35,000 require a bachelor's degree or higher,[5] yet for many students, pursuing higher education for economic gain requires great economic sacrifice. The $1.5 trillion in outstanding student loan debt is now one of the largest consumer debt categories in the U.S.[6] At UCLA, the average cumulative loan debt among the undergraduate class of 2015 was $21,831,[7] while the average salary for full-time offers for graduates is less than $52,000.[8] When considering paying down student debt alongside monthly rent and other costs of living, extreme measures may be needed to make ends meet.

COMMUTE

In Los Angeles today, reduced cost of living often means worsening commute times. As Angelenos seek more affordable rents further from work centers, more people are likely to drive, adding to the city's already congested traffic. Los Angeles consistently ranks among the most congested cities globally[9] with the longest commutes. And driving long distances alone as part of one's daily commute has serious physical and mental health repercussions.[10] Public transit remains woefully inadequate despite massive investments in the region's metro rail system.[11] While the full benefits of these investments have yet to come to fruition, transit ridership figures remain tenuous and riders perceive public transit as unreliable, inconvenient, and unsafe.[12]

1 Freddie Mac, Rental Burden by Metro, 2019.
2 RENTCafé, Los Angeles CA Rental Market Trends.
3 Kendall, "UCLA Offers Admission to 13,700 Californians for Fall 2017," 2017.
4 RENTCafé, Los Angeles CA Rental Market Trends.
5 Carnevale et al., *Three Educational Pathways to Good Jobs*, 2018.
6 Thune & Warner. *Americans Are Drowning in $1.5 Trillion of Student Loan Debt*, 2019.
7 UC Institutional Research & Academic Planning, *Undergraduate Affordability*, 2017.
8 UCLA Career Center, *Employment Outcomes*, 2016.
9 INRIX, INRIX 2018 Global Traffic Scorecard, 2018.
10 Kellen, "Your Commute May Be Hazardous to Your Health," 2014.
11 Elkind, "Opinion: Metro Is Spending Billions of Your Tax Dollars to Build L.A. a World Class Transit System. Don't Let Them Blow It," 2017.
12 Nelson, "L.A. Is Hemorrhaging Bus Riders," 2019.

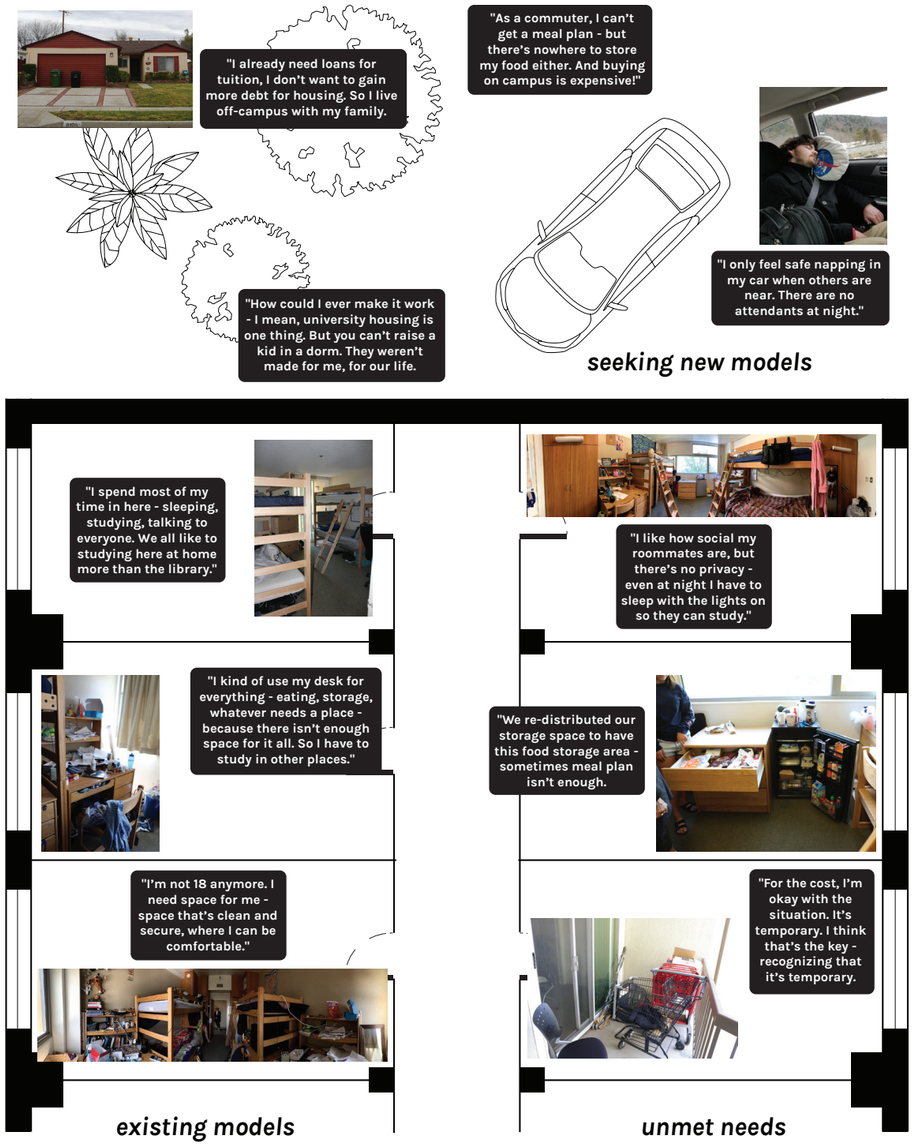
THE NEW STUDENT

Over the past fifty years, so-called 'nontraditional students' have steadily increased in numbers. According to The National Center for Education Statistics, a nontraditional student must meet at least one of seven criteria: "financial independence, responsibility for at least one dependent, did not graduate high school (or lacking a traditional high school diploma), delayed entry/enrollment in college, part-time status, and having full-time employment."[13] In addition, in 1976 15% of university students were students of color, and by 2000 that number had risen 28%, with the majority of that increase due to a rise in Hispanic student numbers (4% in 1976 to nearly 10% in 2000).[14] One of the most cited studies suggests that when the range of nontraditional characteristics are taken together, a full 73% of undergraduate students are nontraditional.[15] These students are changing the overall demographics of universities across the country and, therefore, posing new demands on higher education.[16] They have unique housing needs that stem from their cultural norms, their ethnic and gender identity, their age, their households and dependents, and other factors.

THE OLD CAMPUS

UCLA was founded a century ago, and has grown to become the most populous, most densely built campus in the UC system. UCLA's primary goal with regard to student housing is to continue the transformation from a commuter to a residential campus, thereby reducing car trips. To this end, a need for 4500 beds for undergraduates was identified in 2016. At least nine new residence halls are planned for the coming years; construction has begun on three, and two have been recently completed. Most of the buildings contain standard dorm rooms for 2 or 3 beds; some have apartment arrangements. Prior to these new dorms, the university had not constructed a new residence hall or updated any of their old dorm buildings in over forty years.[17] While the old dorm buildings with standardized layouts and furnishings may have suited the traditional student of forty years ago, producing "beds" and even apartments does not provide sufficient options for the increasingly diverse population of nontraditional students.

13 National Center for Education Statistics. *Demographic and Enrollment Characteristics of Nontraditional Undergraduates: 2011-12*, 2015.
14 Lamkin, *To Achieve the Dream, First Look at the Facts*, 2004.
15 U.S. Department of Education & National Center for Education Statistics, *Nontraditional Undergraduates*, 2002.
16 Hittepole, *Nontraditional Students: Supporting Changing Student Populations*, 2015.
17 Sharp, "UCLA Beginning Construction for 5,400 Student Beds," 2018.



01
APPROACH

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Over the past year, cityLAB's research efforts have focused on student housing insecurity at UCLA. Anecdotal evidence prompted an initial investigation into the issue on campus, where students sleeping overnight in libraries, departmental buildings, and in their cars has become more widely acknowledged by faculty, staff, and administrators. Our awareness of the issue was sparked by our own student researchers, several of whom reported sleeping overnight in the Architecture Department's Perloff Hall (where cityLAB is housed), too tired to make their surprisingly long drive home. Motivated by the highly varied narratives of these students, we conducted our first study of what is herein called "extreme commuting," a relatively hidden condition of student housing insecurity.

This research does not reveal the full complexities of housing insecurity. Rather, it makes visible an otherwise hidden burden experienced by a large number of students. Extreme commuting is one part of the larger affordable housing crisis affecting UCLA students. To make this connection first requires gathering foundational knowledge about extreme commuting at UCLA: Who are the students who face extreme commutes, and what are the causes and effects of extreme commuting? This first line of questioning into the nature and causes of extreme commuting allows us to then ask: What is the relationship between extreme commuting and housing needs? Only then can we begin to conceive of solutions that might accommodate students who experience academic life at this intersection.

OUR APPROACH

For the purposes of this report, we will use the term "extreme commute" to refer to both "extreme" and "long" commutes (90 and 60 minutes each way, respectively). Only within the Survey section will we differentiate between "extreme" commutes and "long" commutes . Our primary research objective is to learn more about UCLA graduate and undergraduate students who experience commutes over 60 minutes one-way, and, based on that foundational data, form preliminary policy and design solutions that might ameliorate the adverse effects of extreme commuting.

The research is framed by four primary questions:

1. Who are UCLA's extreme commuting students?

In order to identify which solutions are best tailored to this student population, more needs to be known about the population itself. We conducted quantitative and qualitative analyses to: a) learn more about who faces extreme commutes, and b) assess the scope of the problem, i.e. the range of adverse effects stemming from commutes over 60 minutes. Extreme commuters are not a homogenous group, but their characteristics (eg. income, age, race, part-time, dependents, etc) shed light on specific circumstances they face in daily life.

2. What are the conditions that lead to extreme commuting?

What factors weigh into students' residential location decisions? Is it by choice (I prefer to live closer to Downtown), by necessity (I cannot afford to live on/near campus), or on some other basis (where my family is best accommodated)? What housing opportunities exist for students with differing needs?

3. What are the effects of extreme commuting and how do students cope?

What are the impacts that extreme commuting has on students' academic and nonacademic lives? What measures are students taking to mitigate the impacts of extreme commuting?

4. What kinds of solutions might appeal to current students experiencing extreme commutes?

Can UCLA offer housing options that will attract extreme commuters to live on campus? Are there specific solutions for accommodations that will improve existing commute options and experiences? Are there solutions that are tied to affordability and diversifying housing options?

Long commutes can have physical, social, and psychological consequences for students.

Our preliminary research, conducted in the summer of 2018, made clear that a significant number of UCLA students experience 60+ minute commutes, and that long commutes can have physical, social, and psychological consequences for these students. We also suspected from this early work that, compared to their non-commuting (or nearby commuting) peers, extreme commuters were more likely to be nontraditional students: older, with dependents, low-income, first-generation, and so on. All other things being equal, the middle class 18-22 year old undergraduate is well-accommodated by standard residence halls whereas nontraditional students have few or no housing options on campus. A series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews showed that students often cope with long commutes by making sacrifices in other areas, such as their social and material lives. Students may decide to sleep in their cars rather than drive home, or spend less time engaging in extracurricular activities in order to beat the traffic. These same students are interested in creative ways to ameliorate the adverse effects of their commutes; whether through expanded housing options, temporary sleeping arrangements, or making the commute itself better by improving access to transit and expanding mobility options.

To pursue these initial suppositions, further research was undertaken with a goal to shape the 'big picture' of the issue on campus. To find more reliable and valid answers to the primary research questions above, we employed a mixed methods approach, using qualitative and qualitative tools for data collection and analysis. To better understand the extreme commuter (question 1), we conducted an online survey with a subset of UCLA's graduate and undergraduate population. The survey is useful for collecting descriptive, quantitative data that paints a big picture of the issue. Following the survey, face-to-face focus groups were held to learn more about the experiences of extreme commuters: the effect that extreme commuting has and the reasons why extreme commuting is a phenomenon in the first place. The focus groups were also a way to gather initial feedback on proposed policy and design solutions for sleeping overnight on campus.

Before diving into our research findings, the next section of this report highlights a review of existing scholarship on nontraditional students and student commuting. This scholarship helps frame our research approach and situates our analysis within the broader academic context.

EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP
THE 'NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT'

The term 'nontraditional student' has emerged over the past two decades as a category of analysis for studying the experiences of students whose socio-demographic characteristics differ from those who have traditionally participated in higher education. Students from so-called 'nontraditional' backgrounds face challenges that their 'traditional' peers are less likely to experience, and deserve attention in order to develop evidence-based policies and practices that support their wellbeing and achievement.[18]

Despite the growing body of scholarship on 'nontraditional' students, there remains no standardized definition of the term, as many definitions and approaches to understanding 'nontraditional' have been employed across multiple disciplines.[19] Critics of the term have claimed that its defining criteria is often outdated (e.g. some researchers have included sex as a possible characteristic for nontraditional students), and that many of the defining characteristics often overlap (e.g. economic status ties into multiple different characteristics).[20] Thus, the lack of specificity with regards to defining 'nontraditional' in various academic contexts renders it a less reliable and measurable category. Common characteristics used to define 'nontraditional' include age, disability, economic status, family situation (marriage, dependent children, etc.), returning students, deferred entrance, and commuter status.[21] Here we will focus on summarizing the most frequently used characteristics: economics, age, and life experience.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on 'nontraditional' students, there remains no standardized definition of the term. Here we will focus on summarizing the most frequently used characteristics: economics, age, and life experience.

ECONOMICS

Long-standing research suggests that economic status is a strong indicator of time to graduation. As of 2012, according to data collected by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Office of Policy Development and Research, while less than 50% of full-time students at most four-year institutions were graduating within the expected four years, "low-income and first-generation students continued to graduate at far lower rates than higher income students."

As mentioned in the introduction to this report, high housing costs adversely affect the economic livelihood of students. A 2015 HUD report found that over half of the average in-state costs for attending a four-year college in 2014-15 ($18,943) consisted of room-and-board ($9,804); and that housing expenses have increased steadily for the past 25 years. The HUD report suggested that the growing housing challenges of so many students has likely contributed to the decline in university completion in the US.[22]

AGE

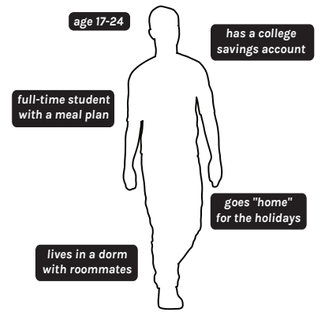
Age is commonly mentioned in literature as a determining factor of nontraditional status. Generally, a student would be described as nontraditional if they deferred their entry into university longer than a year (i.e. beginning undergraduate education after [17–19] years of age). Nontraditional students may also be described as such for age reasons for finishing their degrees late (sometimes called 'super seniors').[23] Age may also be an indicator of having competing responsibilities (such as children, marriages, care for other family members, jobs, etc), which may inform students' decisions to live off campus and commute to and from campus.[24]

Commuter students are more likely to struggle to connect to their collegiate experiences.

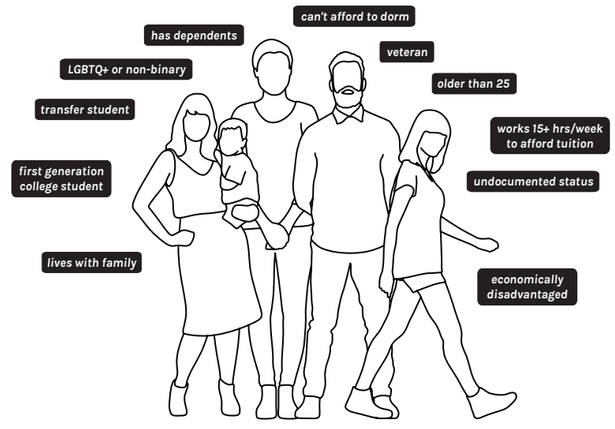
LIFE EXPERIENCE

According to the results of Chung et al.'s 2017 study of the differences in resilience between self-described traditional and non-traditional students, the resilience (defined as "the personal qualities that enable one to thrive in the face of adversity") of students that considered themselves nontraditional because of life aspects (eg. employment, age, being parents, etc) were higher than those of traditional students. However, the self-reported resilience of students that considered themselves nontraditional because of more social issues (eg. cultural or economic background) was not statistically significantly different than those of traditional students. The results of this study suggest that greater life-experience prior to starting undergraduate education can lead to higher resilience to stress, and therefore, to having a more successful academic experience overall. This research contradicts the aforementioned data collected by HUD, suggesting that low-income students are still less likely to graduate on-time (i.e. 4 years at a 4-year institution) than students with higher incomes. Chung's study did not delve into exactly which life experiences contribute to this increased resilience, and further research into the skills and knowledge brought to campuses by adult students was suggested.

The results of Chung's study also support the practice of allowing students to self-identify their own nontraditional status, therefore allowing the students to self-define the characteristics of the nontraditional student. If the students defined the characteristics of nontraditional students, the definitions would be less likely to be outdated than if researchers were setting the definitions.[25]



the "traditional" student



the rest of us

18 Chung, et al., *Who are Nontraditional Students?*, 2014.
19 Ibid.
20 Chung, et al., *Differences in Resilience between 'Traditional' and 'Non-Traditional' University Students*, 2017.
21 Hughes, *The Non-Traditional Student in Higher Education*, 1983; Chung, et al., 2014; and Grabowski, T*oday's Non-Traditional Student: Challenges to Academic Success and Degree Completion*, 2016.
22 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Barriers to Success: Housing Insecurity for U.S. College Students*, 2015.
23 Grabowski, 2016.
24 Burlison, 27-34.
25 Chung, et al., 2017.

	U.S.	C.A.	U.C System	UCLA
Married	15.1% married; 1.4% separated [1]			
Dependents	25.9% (4,816,226) undergrads in 2012, varies regionally [2]	Far West (AK, CA, HI, NV, OR, WA): 21.8% (718,858) [3]		
Job	40% undergrad, 76% grad work at least 30 hrs per week; [4] 85% of working college students worked < 20 hours per week in 2007 [5]			
Age (older than...)	18 yrs or younger: 9.3%, 19-23 yrs: 49.6, 24-29 yrs: 18.3%, 30-39 yrs: 13.4%, 40+ yrs: 9.3% [6]	19 yrs or younger: 26.84%; 20-24 yrs: 30.88%; 25-29 yrs: 13.9%; 30-24 yrs: 7.79%; 35+ yrs: 20.57% [7]		0-18: 1.4% (570); 18-19: 26.1% (10,950); 20-21: 29.9% (12,523); 22-24: 17.8% (7,456); 25-29: 15.2% (6,377); 30-34 6.2% [8]
Military Status	veterans: 4.3%, active duty: 1.3%, active national guard: 0.3%; [9] student vet stats: 85% aged 24-40 yrs, 47% have children, 47.3% are married, 62% first generation [10]	89,000 vets, active duty service members, and dependents enrolled each year; [11] 2010-22 over 44,000 vet enrolled [12]	2,400 enrolled 2017-18 [13]	20% enrolled 2017-18 [14]
Transfers	37.2% of undergrads [15]		26.58% (28,752) 2019-20 [16]	37.84% (5,202) 2019-20 [17]
Community College Transfers (CCCs)		CCC to UC: 16,095 (2015-16), 17,836 (2016-17); CCC to CSU: 58,272 (2015-16), 61,871 (2016-17); CCC to in-state private: 11,645 (2015-16), 9,238 (2016-17) [18]	76% (26,700) 2019-20 [19]	35.52% (4,883) 2019-20 [20]
Food Insecurity	36% report food insecurity [21]		42% report food insecurity [22]	
Housing Insecurity	36% report housing insecurity [23]	2 year institution: 60%; 4 year institution: 48% [24]		
Homelessness	17% experienced homelessness in the past year [25]	CCC students: 1 in 5; CA university students: 1 in 10 (19-20%) experienced homelessness in the past year; [26] 11% of students at 23 CSU campuses [27]	5% of students across UC campuses [28]	LAUSD: 17,000 experienced homelessness in the past year [29]
Disability	19.4% of undergrads [30]			
First Generation	33% of undergrads (2011-12) [31]	1/3 of undergraduates at CSU 2017-18 [32]	44% (30,856) admitted 2019; [33] 41% (90,969) enrolled 2018-19 [34]	33% (30,856) enrolled 2018-19 [35]
Traditional Student	60% (40% nontraditional) of students at 4 year colleges/ universities 25yrs or older in 2015; [36] 26% (74% nontraditional) of undergrad in 2011-12; [37] 27% (73% nontraditional) of undergrads in 1999-2000. [38]			

**For table citations, please see endnotes*

EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP
THE COMMUTER STUDENT

There is very limited academic study concerning the experiences and needs of commuting students. Of the studies that do exist, the results have been consistent: commuting students are more likely to struggle to connect to their collegiate experiences since they are also more likely to have other roles and responsibilities off campus than their noncommuter counterparts. Moreover, commuting students are more likely to be married (or be living with a partner), have children, or have an off-campus job. These responsibilities make it difficult to attend events on campus, or have time to simply hang out with friends. Students with extreme commutes are even less likely to have time to spend on campus beyond attending classes when factoring in the length of their commute, traffic, time needed to do homework, and sleep.[26]

Students with extreme commutes are even less likely to have time to spend on campus beyond attending classes.

Similarly to the category of nontraditional students, the category of commuter students is not homogeneous. For example, the needs of commuter students of color could be different from the needs of disabled commuter students. In the last two decades, more research has been conducted on these more specialized demographic groups, allowing institutions to further streamline their approaches to commuter students.[27]

Beyond struggling to connect to their campuses and cohorts, commuter students also face other challenges that their campus-residing counterparts do not. For example, some commuter students try to fit all of their necessary classes into as few days as possible so that they commute less often each week; the unexpected cancellation of classes and their rescheduling (often at completely different times) can thwart carefully constructed schedules for commuter students. Class extras such as tutoring, office hours, and in-person group meetings are hard to fit in.[28]

Despite the scarcity of U.S. focused academic literature on this subject, the available literature does support some of the findings from our initial study on students who experience extreme commutes at UCLA. However, this does not address the need for more literature on extreme commuting in the United States, and, specifically, in Southern California. This is cityLAB's starting point for beginning to address the lack knowledge of the experiences and needs of students at UCLA facing extreme commutes.

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26 Burlison, pg 27-34.
27 For more information on commuter students of color look at Kodama, 45-56; or Yearwood & Jones, *Understanding What Influences Successful Black Commuter Students' Engagement in College*, 2012; for more information on commuter students with disabilities look at Garland, 2015.
28 Spence, "Commuter Students: Managing Living off Campus," 2018.

02
SURVEY

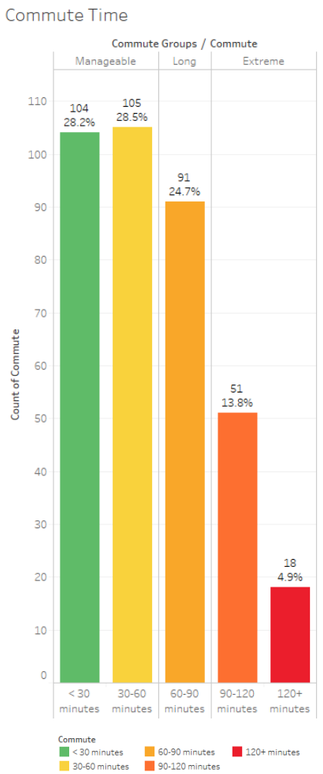
There is much more to student commutes than an origin and a destination.

AGENDA

Defining the number of students on campus with long and extreme commutes is a challenging task when considering the numerous variables shaping trips to campus. While the location of campus is static, students arrive to class from different places. Housing scenarios exercise an enormous influence here: the search for affordable rent, compatible roommates, acceptable lease terms, or merely a suitable environment is subject to endless contingencies. Long and extreme commutes can also be unexpected or temporary phenomena, borne when family demands dominate, partners relocate, work schedules change, bus routes disappear, or personal vehicles are repaired.

Understanding where students are living while attending class is an administrative challenge for the university. While leases and information about those living in university-owned housing might be accessible to housing and student services administrators, it is difficult to place where students are landing in the larger off-campus housing and rental market. Students' officially registered addresses may be a parent's or relative's home, perhaps a more stable address for important mail; or addresses may be outdated if circumstances have forced recent or frequent moves.

The residential neighborhoods close to the university reflect an expensive, competitive Westside Los Angeles real estate market, not what typically comes to mind for student apartments and accommodations. A cityLAB study in 2012 showed that Westwood's apartment rents were the highest in Los Angeles. Thus many students find themselves in unconventional arrangements, including off-campus apartments that resemble crowded dorm rooms accompanied by time-consuming trips to campus. There is much more to student commutes than an origin and a destination.



Defining Commuters

Beyond the university community, information on extensive commutes is captured by Federal Census data. The US Census Bureau has defined commutes by one-way time and distance in a number of ways:

- **Long Commuting:** Traveling 60 or more minutes to work.
- **Extreme Commuting:** Traveling 90 or more minutes to work.
- **Long-distance Commuting:** Traveling 50 or more miles to work.
- **Mega Commuting:** Traveling 90 or more minutes and 50 or more miles to work.[29]

In this section of the report, we borrow the terminology above to consider the trips students living off campus take to reach UCLA as their commute, and somewhat relatedly use the terms "long" and "extreme" to describe commute thresholds that occur at 60 minutes and 90 minutes. To allow for comparison, long commutes are defined as commutes taking 60 to 90 minutes, and extreme commutes 90 minutes or more. The term "manageable" is used to describe commutes of less than 60 minutes. As the US Census Bureau definitions make apparent, these are time-based distinctions that do not take actual distances traveled into account. *(In other sections of this report we use "extreme" for all commutes over 60 minutes.)*

While these technical definitions exist, newspapers and other public media have increasingly used the colloquial terms of "super commuters" and "super commuting." They most often describe those traveling 90 minutes or more and emphasize the time lost and mental and physical toll of one's daily travel. The stories have captured the public imagination and speak to a common sentiment that the threshold of an acceptable daily commute is approximately 60 minutes, one-way.[30]

In fact, according to the most recent US Census Bureau estimates, the average commute time for American workers is 26.9 minutes, the highest since 1980 when it first began collecting data on commutes.[31] In the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim Metropolitan Area — the sprawling region from which UCLA draws many of its students — the average is somewhat greater, at 30.8 minutes.[32] This means that long and extreme commutes to campus essentially double- and triple- typical travel times for students seeking higher education compared to others in the Los Angeles area. These students spend at least two or three hours a day traveling to campus. And instead of earning a paycheck on the other end of their commute, students are paying tuition in hope of securing their futures.

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29 'Long commutes' are defined by McKenzie, *Out-of-state and Long Commutes: 2011*, 2013. 'Extreme commuting,' 'long-distance commuting,' and 'meg commuting' are defined in Rapino & Fields, *Mega Commuting in the U.S.*, 2013. They also casually refer to all together as "long" commuting. These Census Bureau studies have not considered long commuting and extreme commuting together as this report does, which by their definitions would make long commutes inclusive of extreme commutes.

30 McPhate, "California Today: The Rise of the Super Commuter," 2017; Robertson, "More than 120,000 Bay Area Residents Spend at Least 3 Hours Commuting Every Day, Study Says," 2019.

31 Ingraham, "The Astonishing Human Potential Wasted on Commutes," 2016.

32 US Census Bureau, "2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table GCT0801: Mean Travel Time to Work of Workers 16 Years and Over Who Did Not Work At Home."

Prior UCLA Reports

UCLA's recognition of long and extreme student commuters is growing, yet the issue has been under-studied so far. UCLA Transportation issues an annual *UCLA State of the Commute* report which shares data collected from faculty, staff, and students on their means of transportation to campus. Yet with a focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions created by the university's community, their findings mainly track changes in modes of travel over time in order to encourage more sustainable modes of travel.

The latest report uses data from UCLA's *2018 South Coast Air Quality Management District Survey,* which covers employees, and the *2018 Student Transportation Survey,* administered each Spring quarter. The report does not typically reveal reported commute times, detailed survey data, or the impacts these commutes have on students' educational lives. Of note from the report is that while the drive-alone rate for student commuters is 23.5%, it is surpassed by the number of those taking public transportation, 26.2%.[33]

Working with cityLAB, UCLA Transportation shared their most recent Spring 2019 Student Transportation Survey (yet to be published in the *State of the Commute* report) which found 5.6% of commuting students have 90-minutes or more one-way commutes, or 76 out of 1,356 respondents.[34] When extrapolated to the total number of off-campus students attending in 2018-19, this amounts to an estimated 1,700 students with extreme commutes—enough to nearly fill the capacity of Parking Structure 3 if they all drove to campus alone.[35]

Methodology

This report builds upon cityLAB's work on campus housing insecurity and interest in supporting students with burdensome commutes. After preliminary research in Summer 2018, cityLAB attempted an early estimate of the number of extreme commutes with UCLA Transportation and initially found that over 18,000 students living off campus had registered addresses outside of a 90-minute commute shed. Many of these addresses could not conceivably be their school-year residence, with some located as far away as the San Francisco Bay Area.

Excluding addresses over 100 miles from campus—a significantly long range that still left open the potential for commutes from places such as Santa Barbara, Lancaster, Victorville, Redlands, or San Clemente—the number of students with extreme commutes was still estimated at nearly 5,000. Of those students, approximately 500 had obtained parking permits.

The Spring 2019 cityLAB survey sampled from undergraduate and graduate students who indicated their residence as off-campus housing (including off-campus university-owned apartments) and an address within Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura, or Kern Counties. This selection encompasses the Southern California Association of Governments regional planning jurisdiction (not including distant Imperial County) and Kern County which shares Los Angeles' northern border. In order to focus on commutes exceeding the Los Angeles average, an inner boundary to the sampling frame was also created by excluding students with addresses within a 30-minute commute shed, as calculated through Esri ArcGIS.

33 UCLA Transportation, *UCLA State of the Commute 2018*, 2019.

34 Daboussi, August 23, 2019; Daboussi, September 12, 2019. The percentage of students with extreme commutes in Spring 2018 was 6.92%, or 102 out of 1,474 respondents, and in Spring 2017 was 5.61%, or 50 out of 892 respondents. Long commutes (which includes extreme commutes) accounted for 14.16% of respondents in Spring 2019 (192/1,356), 16.28% in Spring 2018 (204/1,474), and 12.44% in Spring 2017 (111/892).

35 Daboussi, September 4, 2019. Parking Structure 3 has a combined capacity, North and South, of 1,896 parking spaces.

An additional parameter for the sampling frame was to exclude students selected to receive the annual Spring Student Survey conducted by UCLA Transportation, since both surveys were released the same week. Commute surveys are typically done in the Spring Quarter, when enrollments and commute patterns have stabilized. A random sample of approximately 30% of potential recipients from this pool were selected for the survey. For comparison, the UCLA Transportation survey is sent to a random sample of 20% of students with off-campus addresses.

The survey instrument was designed to collect data from students on their commute times, mode of travel, closest street intersection, amount of rent paid for housing, and basic demographic information. The survey also asked students to describe their commutes and level of interest in potential housing alternatives. To measure housing insecurity and homelessness, questions were adapted from questions outlined by the HOPE Center and Crutchfield and Maguire's work with the California State University system.[36] A total of 2,430 student commuters were ultimately emailed the online survey instrument early in May 2019, which closed at the end of the month.

While the participation rate was encouraging - 15% or 369 of the 2,430 survey candidates responded - an unexpected 28% of surveyed students (or 104 out of 369) reported commutes of 30 minutes or less despite the attempt to remove these students from the sampling frame. Their responses indicate that their addresses on file with the university are outdated, whether due to recent moves or their use of family members' homes. Students with long commutes accounted for 25% (or 91) of responses, and students with extreme commutes accounted for 19% (or 69) of responses. Together they made up 43% (or 160) of the total responses.[37]

These mixed survey responses reinforced the idea that many students are in fact living much closer to campus than their official university address indicates, demonstrating the challenge of measurement and outreach to students with long and extreme commutes. In audits of parking permit holders, a subgroup of our sample frame, UCLA Transportation has found lower rates of 10% to 15% of students with discrepant addresses.[38]
In the analysis that follows, cityLAB uses the survey responses of students with a manageable commute time of 60 minutes or less as a "soft" comparison and control group, while understanding that they may not be representative of the population of students on campus with a manageable commute due to the sampling frame. Students with long commutes of 60 to 90 minutes and students with extreme commutes of 90 or more minutes are used as "experimental" groups for comparison, while also understanding that if extrapolated to the population of commuting students, the present survey would overestimate the number of long and extreme commutes. cityLAB does so in order to provisionally understand how student status, housing, transportation, and methods of adjustment differ for students with challenging commutes and those able to live near and travel to campus more conveniently.

Students with long commutes accounted for 25% (or 91) of responses, and students with extreme commutes accounted for 19% (or 69) of responses. Together they made up 43% (or 160) of the total responses.

36 Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, and Kinsley, *Guide to Assessing Basic Needs Insecurity in Higher Education*, 2018; Crutchfield and Maguire, R*esearching Basic Needs in Higher Education*, 2017.

37 The combined percentage of long and extreme commuters is slightly less due to rounding when reported on their own.

38 Shoup, "The Politics and Economics of Parking on Campus," 2008.

ANALYSIS

Characterizing Commuter Students

We begin our analysis with a descriptive summary of the survey respondents. At UCLA, undergraduates form 69% of the overall campus population and graduates 31%.[39] Within the commuter population, graduate students make up a greater proportion, 41%, compared to undergraduate students of 59%.[40] Even more respondents to the commuter survey were graduate students, 45% compared to 55% undergraduate student respondents.

By gender, 54% of all students on campus identified as female and 45% as male. A greater proportion of survey respondents identified as female, 67%, and fewer as male, 33%. Survey respondents ranged across the lifespan, from the traditional college-going age range of 18-24, 54% of respondents, through 60 and more years old. The UCLA Office of Academic Planning and Budgeting only reports on average undergraduate age, which was 20.8 for the campus.[41] Undergraduates in the survey reported a higher average at 23 years old, and graduate student respondents averaged 30.5 years old.

In addition to these basic data points, the survey captured a number of status questions that can have important effects on student life and housing decisions. Twelve percent of respondents were married or living with a partner, and 6% had dependents in their household. Nearly a quarter of respondents, 24%, considered themselves financially independent, and 20% reduced their travel to campus to three days a week or less. Transfer students made up 16% of respondents and 13% of respondents reported full-time employment. A small number of respondents were undocumented students, single parents, and veterans, each composing 2% or less of the sample.

Degree Program (Career)	All	%
Undergraduate	203	55%
Graduate	166	45%
	369	**100%**

Sex	All	%
M	247	67%
F	121	33%
	368	**100%**

Age Group	All	%
18-24	199	54%
25-29	89	24%
30-39	55	15%
40-49	16	4%
50-59	8	2%
60+	1	0%
	368	**100%**

Status	All	%
Financially Independent	130	24%
On Campus 3 Days or Less	109	20%
Transfer Student	86	16%
Full-Time Employment	70	13%
Married/Living with Partner	68	12%
With Dependents	33	6%
Undocumented	10	2%
Single Parent	7	1%
Veteran	3	1%
Other	29	5%
	368	**100%**

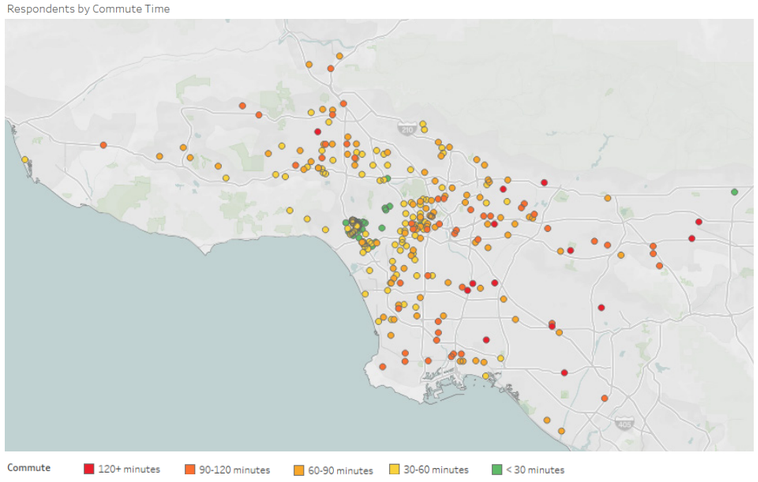
39 UCLA Office of Academic Planning and Budget, *Common Data Set Fall 2018*, 2019.
40 UCLA Transportation, *UCLA State of the Commute 2018*, 2019.
41 UCLA Office of Academic Planning and Budget, *Common Data Set Fall 2018*, 2019.

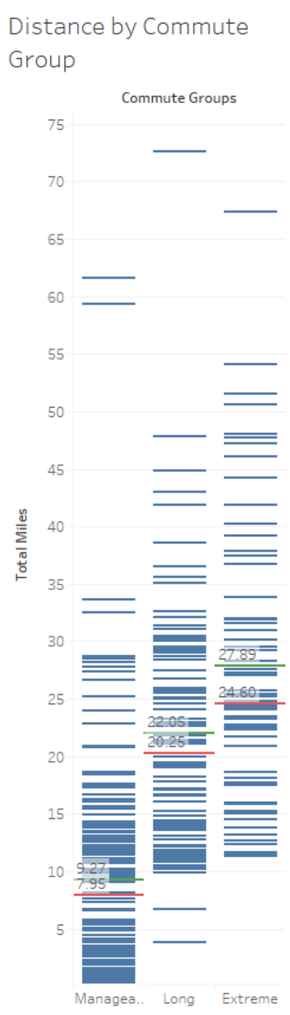
Commuter Student Housing

How long does it take for these students to travel to campus and how far are they traveling? What does their housing cost?

Over half of survey respondents, 57%, spent less than an hour each way to get to UCLA, despite the sampling frame based on registered addresses with the university. As described above, the survey instrument captured commutes by 30-minute increments and responses were organized into commute groups for comparison among "manageable" commutes of less than 60 minutes, "long" commutes of 60 to 90 minutes, and "extreme" commutes of 90 minutes or more.

Students' primary modes of travel were recorded and consistent with the intent of the sampling. A greater proportion of survey respondents drove alone than when compared to all commuter students as reported in the UCLA State of the Commute, 47% compared to 24%, and a smaller proportion walked for their commute, 21% compared to 33% of students. Distance traveled to campus was determined by geocoding the nearest street intersections reported by students and calculating driving distance to the center of campus at Westwood Plaza and Strathmore Place. Reported by commute group, manageable commutes averaged about 9 miles to campus, long commutes averaged 22 miles, and extreme commutes averaged nearly 28 miles, with an increasing divergence between average and median distances as commutes became longer.





42 Room and board is calculated by the university with double occupancy rooms and 19 meals a week. For comparison, room and board for resident full-time undergraduate students is estimated at $15,902. UCLA Office of Academic Planning and Budget, *Common Data Set Fall 2018,* 2019.

Nearly half of students surveyed with manageable commutes paid $501-$1,000 a month on rent, which formed the greatest proportion reported across commute groups. Together with those paying $1,001-$1,500 per month, they accounted for approximately 70% of those with manageable commutes. These reported rents are less than, but still comparable to, UCLA's estimated cost of room and board for commuting full-time undergraduates, which is $14,303 for the nine-month academic year.[42]

Students with long and extreme commutes reported the most affordable rents in the $0-$500 range and were the largest shares reported within those groups, respectively 36% and 37%. Yet some students with manageable commutes, approximately 12%, still found rents in that range close to campus. Long commutes also accounted for the greatest proportion of high rents with nearly 20% paying greater than $1,500 a month, as compared to 15% and 16% of students with manageable and extreme commutes. While manageable and extreme commutes bear out an inverse relationship between proximity to campus and rents, the dynamics for long commuters traveling between 60 and 90 minutes may be uncertain when considered along with housing insecurity.

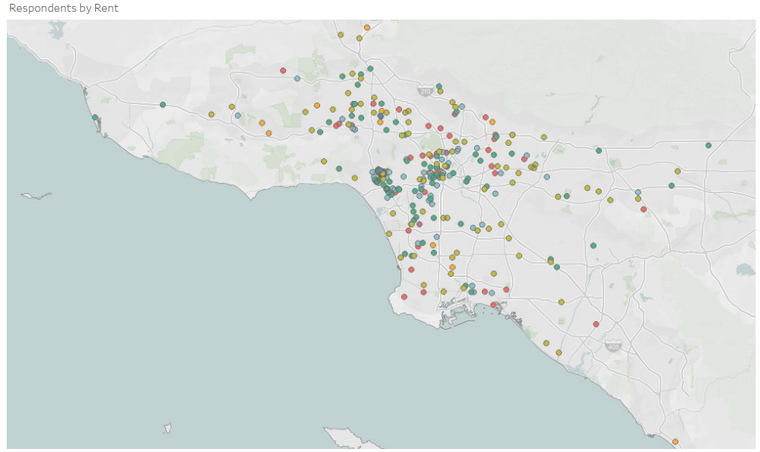
Commute Time	All	%
< 30 minutes	104	28%
30-60 minutes	105	28%
60-90 minutes	91	25%
90-120 minutes	51	14%
120+ minutes	18	5%
	369	**100%**

Commute Mode	All	%	STC 2018
Walk	79	21%	33%
Bicycle	2	1%	4%
Carpool	21	6%	8%
Public Transit	87	24%	26%
Drive Alone	174	47%	24%
Other	6	2%	6%
	369	**100%**	**100%**

Commute Group	All	%
Manageable (< 60 minutes)	209	57%
Average Distance	9.27	
Median Distance	7.95	
Long (60 - 90 minutes)	91	25%
Average Distance	22.05	
Median Distance	20.25	
Extreme (90 - 120+ minutes)	69	19%
Average Distance	27.89	
Median Distance	24.6	
Sum Average Distance	**16.91**	
Sum Median Distance	**14.16**	

Rent	All	%
$0 - $500	83	23%
$501 - $1,000	137	38%
$1,001 - $1,500	78	21%
$1,501 - $2,500	46	13%
$2,500+	14	4%
Other	7	2%
	365	**100%**
Null	4	

Respondents by Rent



Housing Insecurity and Homelessness

In the survey, 17 students (5% of all respondents) reported experiencing homelessness at anytime since attending UCLA. This finding is in line with a previous study by the University of California, which reported that 5% of students across all UC campuses, both undergraduates and graduates, had experienced homelessness.[43] Nine of these students, or over half, had extreme commutes, and ⅓ (6 students) lived within 60 minutes of campus.

Housing insecurity affected almost half of all surveyed students.

However, students' responses to questions about their housing circumstances and commute-related overnight stays near campus revealed that many more experienced housing insecurity and homelessness than previously acknowledged. This may be due to stigma around student poverty and periods of homelessness, but it may also be because housing insecurity for students is distinct from the kind of homelessness reported in the newspaper and held in the popular imagination.

Applying questions that are shared by other researchers investigating students' "basic needs," the definition of housing insecurity used here captures pressures such as rent increases, the inability to pay rent or utilities, moves, and overcrowded living situations. The expanded definition of homelessness shared with these researchers also captures a range unconventional living accommodations acknowledged by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Education, that includes couch surfing, campers, treatment centers, and other places that are not limited to sleeping outdoors.[44]

	Self-Reported Homelessness	Experienced HL within 30 Days	Experienced HL within 12 Months	Experienced Homelessness
All	5%	6%	8%	14%
Manageable	3%	5%	9%	13%
Long	2%	5%	9%	13%
Extreme	13%	12%	7%	17%

43 UC Office of the President, Global Food Initiative: Food and Housing Security at the University of California, 2017.

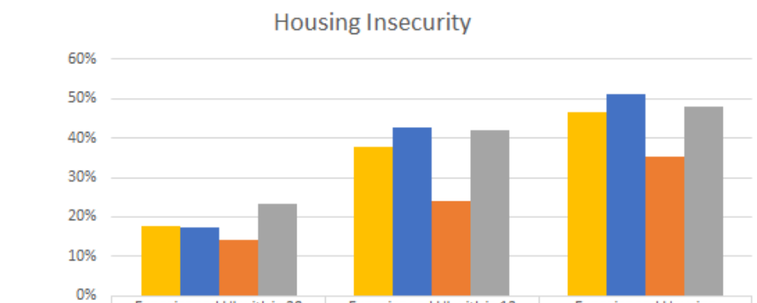
44 Goldrick-Rab, et al., *Guide to Assessing Basic Needs Insecurity in Higher Education*, 2018; Crutchfield and Maguire, *Researching Basic Needs in Higher Education*, 2017.

When these different ways of lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence are included, the number of students that experienced homelessness increased to 51, or 14% of survey respondents. Students with extreme commutes who had experienced homelessness increased from 13% to 17%, and those with manageable and long commutes increased greatly from 2% and 3% self-reporting to 13% in each group. Many of these cases were due to temporary stays with friends and family or couch surfing while searching for other housing.

Housing insecurity affected almost half of all surveyed students. Both those with manageable and extreme commutes experienced high levels of housing insecurity, while students with long commutes had relatively lower levels of housing insecurity. Rent increases in the past year caused housing insecurity for large proportions of students in all groups. While moving in with others due to financial problems was the other leading cause of housing insecurity for students with long and extreme commutes, students with manageable commutes more often reported overcrowded living conditions in their apartment or house.

These data suggest that the middle ground of long commutes (60 to 90 minutes) to campus may occur through decisions and circumstances that offer students a somewhat greater degree of control when compared to manageable and extreme commutes. While these commutes are not without their own impact on students, they report greater housing security compared to peers that may be exposing themselves to insecurity in order to remain near their classes or enduring extreme commutes because of the lack of other options.

17 students reported experiencing homelessness since attending UCLA. When these different ways of lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence are included, the number of students that experienced homelessness increased to 51, or 14% of survey respondents.



	Experienced HI within 30 Days	Experienced HI within 12 Months	Experienced Housing Insecurity
All	18%	38%	47%
Manageable	17%	43%	51%
Long	14%	24%	35%
Extreme	23%	42%	48%

Adapting to Commuting Scenarios

Students across all commute groups were most likely to attribute the duration of their commute to living far from campus and to living in an affordable area. Yet also interesting to note is that, while students with long commutes disproportionately cited a lack of convenient public transportation as contributing to their long trips, extreme commuters disproportionately cited their lack of a car. These feelings were supported by the data reported on their commuting behavior. Looking back at the different modes of transportation commuters actually took to campus, 67% of respondents with long commutes drove alone while 25% took public transportation. Fewer students with extreme commutes drove alone (52%), and a greater proportion took public transportation (41%).

Yet getting to campus is just half of the story for commuters. Students with long and extreme commutes often find themselves spending the night on or near campus, with over 40% in each group reporting doing so. This rate was twice as much as those with manageable commutes, who still experienced a significant proportion of overnight stays. Staying with friends remained the most prominent option for all groups, but those with manageable commutes were more likely to spend nights on campus in buildings other than dormitories. For students with long and extreme commutes, sleeping in a car was another solid option for 23% and 24% of respondents. These students were also more likely to have used short term rentals off campus in hotels, hostels, or Airbnbs.

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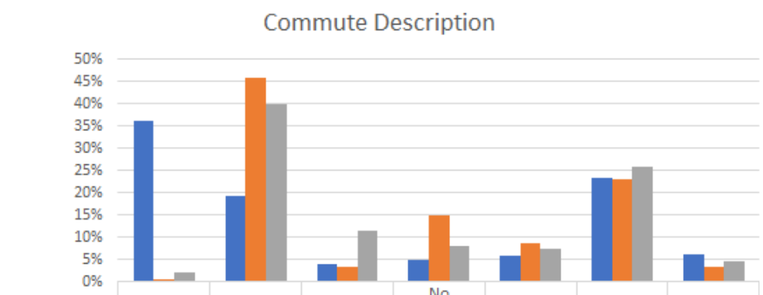
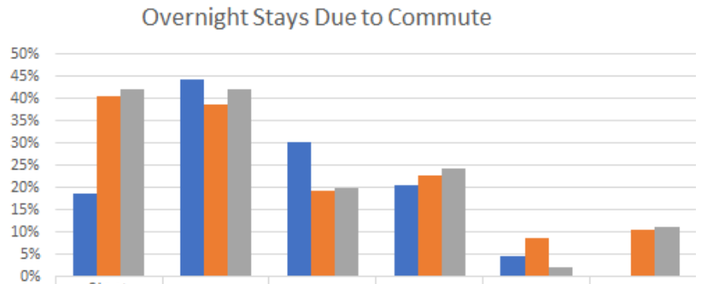
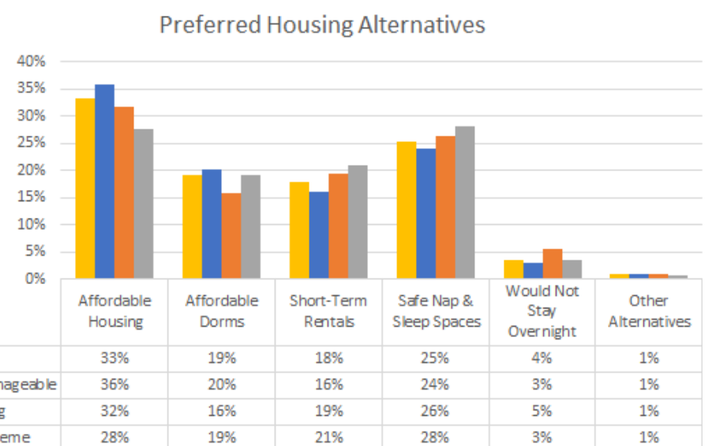


	Do Not Have a Long Commute	Live Far from Campus	No Access to a Car	No Convenient Public Transit	Due to Work Schedule	Live in an Affordable Area	Other Reason
Manageable	36%	19%	4%	5%	6%	23%	6%
Long	1%	46%	3%	15%	9%	23%	3%
Extreme	2%	40%	12%	8%	7%	26%	5%

Given that students are already managing their housing and commute circumstances with a range of tactics to the best of their ability, what kinds of housing alternatives and interventions in their opinion would appeal the most to their situation? The option that respondents supported the most was creating more affordable housing near campus. The more cost-effective solution of safe nap and sleep spaces followed in popularity, and students with extreme commutes were slightly more likely to support them. And perhaps reflecting decisions shaping their current housing situations, students with long commutes were less likely to support more affordable dorms on campus.



	Slept Overnight On/Near Campus...	...with a Friend	...on Campus other than Dorm	...in a Car	...in a Hotel or Hostel	...in Another Place
Manageable	19%	44%	30%	21%	5%	0%
Long	41%	39%	19%	23%	9%	11%
Extreme	42%	42%	20%	24%	2%	11%



	Affordable Housing	Affordable Dorms	Short-Term Rentals	Safe Nap & Sleep Spaces	Would Not Stay Overnight	Other Alternatives
All	33%	19%	18%	25%	4%	1%
Manageable	36%	20%	16%	24%	3%	1%
Long	32%	16%	19%	26%	5%	1%
Extreme	28%	19%	21%	28%	3%	1%

SUMMARY

369 responses to a recent cityLAB and UCLA Transportation Office conducted survey.

Of those,

43% (160 students) commuted over 60 minutes to campus each way

Of those 160 Students:

61% drove a private car

42% had slept overnight on or near campus instead of returning home as a result of their commute

7% experienced homelessness since starting college

71% were interested in more affordable housing near campus

64% were interested in safe places to nap or sleep on campus

The data gathered in this survey is the first to offer some detail about the relationship between commuting and housing for UCLA students. We were initially surprised to see that rents were not strongly inversely related to distance from campus, indicating that rent was only one factor in students' residential location. Another surprising finding was that the greatest housing security came with long commute times to campus, versus greater insecurity among manageable and extreme commuters. Students living in Long Beach or Inglewood, for example, found greater housing security than those living in Westwood Village or in Pacoima and Ventura. In terms of solutions that would ease the difficulties of their commutes, students wished for more affordable options near campus, and more flexible sleeping and napping options on campus. More data analytics can be performed, but limits with the sample suggest that a new, larger, and random sample will be informative.

Ultimately, long and extreme commuting must be addressed through a students-first approach. The numerous comments that cityLAB collected from survey respondents and their unique circumstances emphasize that UCLA students are complex, social beings first, and bring a web of connections from outside and within the university which informs their situation on campus. In the section that follows, we describe focus groups where students shared their experiences and thoughts on their travel to campus and what would help them.

In terms of solutions that would ease the difficulties of their commutes, students wished for more affordable options near campus, and more flexible sleeping and napping options on campus.

03
FOCUS GROUPS

AGENDA

In order to more deeply understand the impact of long-distance travel to the UCLA campus, cityLAB conducted three focus group meetings with extreme commuters. Participants were solicited through the online cityLAB/UCLA Transportation Survey from among those indicating willingness to join. Although we sought a balance of gender and level of study, most focus group participants were female graduate students.

In each of these 90-minute sessions, 3-5 students shared detailed information about their experiences. The primary goal was to gain a better understanding of the characteristics of students experiencing extreme commutes, the reasons they live far from campus, and the impacts their distant residence has on their academic and personal lives. We questioned what might motivate these students to live closer to campus or to take public transportation. Finally, we wanted to glean the kinds of service interventions that might help ameliorate the difficulties they incurred as a result of their housing and commute situation. We asked participants to reflect upon an array of options, and to discuss which of them seemed most appealing and why. Finally, we invited students to extend the conversation to factors we may not have considered in our approach.

We now have a better understanding of students who experience extreme commutes, the reasons they live far from campus, and the impacts their distant residence has on their academic and personal lives.

Overnight car-sleeping

Pod-share, Westwood

“Night Powell” at Powell Library, UCLA’s only building open 24-hours

FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Focus Group participants were asked to briefly describe their living conditions and their commute.

Students adjusted their schedules to avoid traffic by either leaving home earlier and campus later than they normally would, or by minimizing the days per week on which they took classes. Most drove a private vehicle to campus. Those who drove, as well as those who used public transportation, added up to one hour to their commute in order to make sure that they made it to class on time. The unpredictability of traffic and the public transportation system added physical and psychological stress to the students’ lives.

Students were asked to openly discuss their housing and commute situation.

As expected, students were living where rent was more affordable, but this was just one of several factors in their decision. In fact, it is wrong to think that each long-distance commuter made a “choice” about where to live. Many had children, families, partners, responsibilities, and social groups tied to their housing location. Several students explained how the UCLA housing options did not fit their lifestyle, either because the security, privacy or partnership they desired was not available within those offerings, or because the neighborhood in general did not accommodate their identity and needs.

Students were asked to describe the ways in which they coped with their commute.

They found various ways to study, relax, nap, sleep, eat, and pass the time outside of their class schedule, but no option was without difficulty, fear, shame, cost, or discomfort. Many had slept on campus or in their cars, but expressed feeling unsafe and vulnerable in these locations. Some students decided to opt out of particular programs that made their commutes even more difficult, including academic honors programs and social extracurriculars. They minimized their meals, found free food offerings, or paid more than they felt they could in order to stay nourished during their long days.

In order to better understand why participants drive to campus, we asked what would incentivize them to take public transit.

While some felt public transit was unsafe, others were living in areas of Los Angeles where taking public transit would require them to make multiple transfers, greatly increasing the frustration and time incurred along their commute. Driving was desirable to students because they had a way to transport their belongings, a place to nap or sleep if necessary, a faster and more reliable commute, and a way to make additional stops (at a job, at childcare, etc).

Students were asked to imagine freely what might improve their housing and commute situation.

Some said they would live closer to campus and therefore not drive, if there were affordable options that accommodated privacy, partners, and pets. Those looking for more flexible arrangements expressed a desire for temporary, private sleeping options that could be occupied for one hour to a couple of nights. They also wanted a place to store, prepare, and cook meals and a safe place to keep their belongings.

Scenarios were presented to the students for their collective reflection, including:

a. More affordable options closer to campus (co-op, high-density dorm, podshare); b. Designated parking lot with an overnight attendant; c. Dedicated commuter lounge; and d. Pop-up overnight sleeping accommodations. Students responded favorably to options which were flexible, offering both short and long term stay, as well as privacy and security. Regarding location on campus, students preferred sites that were central and convenient. They expressed a desire for exclusivity, protection, and restricted access to a similarly self-identifying community.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

DIFFICULTIES

Additional challenges related to time and space constraints, as well as Additional challenges related to time and space constraints, as well as safety, were associated with long commutes to campus . With already tight schedules, students with long commutes had less time for personal relationships and studying. They found themselves needing to adjust their schedules to avoid traffic, often making it so they were unable to attend or benefit from certain academic programs, study groups, office hours, team work, and after-class offerings. It is difficult to find places to use the restroom, to shower, and to store or cook their food. Some students felt unsafe traveling early in the morning or late at night, which was a requirement of their commute.

MOTIVATIONS

While affordability was a key factor, there were many others that contributed to students' housing and commute decisions. It became clear during our discussion that students with extreme commutes have deep social, cultural, and familial networks in their respective geographic settings. Southern California students have responsibilities where they grew up, contributing to familial households, parents, and siblings. Other students could not find an affordable place closer to campus, where it made sense to relocate their pets, families, and partners. Trade-offs which motivated students to stay where they were included: being close to family, social communities, and economic networks, and access to privacy and affordability.

The following profiles and drawings attempt to capture the students' experiences. The names of the participants have been changed to respect their privacy.

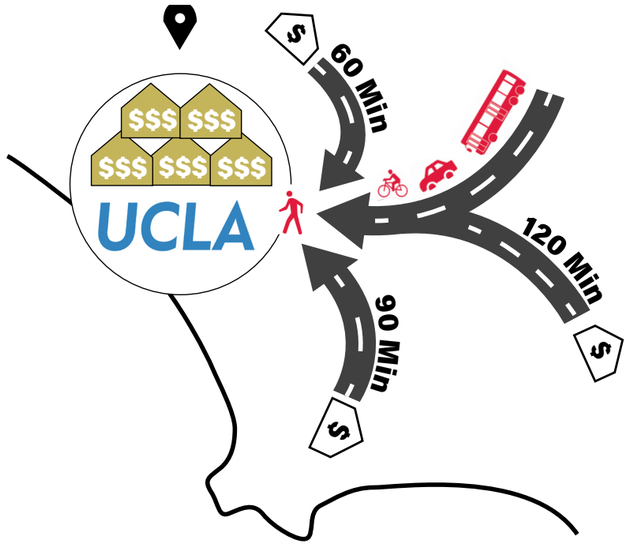
INTERSECTIONS:
EXTREME COMMUTING AND...

Extreme commutes impact all aspects of the lives of the students who undertake them. Focus group participants shed clear light on the ripple effects of their commutes, academically and beyond.

"I don't always eat as much as I should because I can't afford on campus meals, and I mentor undergrads who are only eating one meal a day because they can't afford it."

AMENITIES

One of the biggest concerns for our extreme commuting participants is access to facilities others have at or near home. With a ten-hour day on campus, between an 8am class and a 7pm class, for example, the students find limited places to store their food and belongings, or to shower, use the restroom, wait out traffic, or feel safe after dark.



"I had a really hard class and was studying all the time. I would see people sleep in Powell and thought, 'maybe I should do that instead of driving over at 5AM!' But, it seemed uncomfortable and unsafe."

REST

Especially around midterms and finals, students with extreme commutes face added difficulties. They often need to stay late, arrive early, or find places to stay overnight in order to maintain their academic performance during more demanding periods of the school year. Students found several places to sleep when required by their academic workload, but none were without conflict. Issues of comfort, community, cost, safety, privacy, and policy complicated the search for decent sleeping accommodations.

"I'm a Black student at a department and school without many Black students. I wanted to be in an area with more black and brown people. I got many racist remarks in Westwood, all the time..."

IDENTITY

Those students who agreed to participate in the Focus Groups were predominantly women, and people of color. Through discussion, it became clear that these identities are tied to particular commuter motivations or difficulties. For example, women are more likely to feel unsafe taking public transportation or walking to their cars after dark than men. A number of the female participants are tied geographically to networks involving their families, partners, and children. Some students of color express concerns about discrimination and safety in the predominantly white neighborhood of Westwood.

"It would take a lot more safety to get me on public transit. All the time, you hear stories about public transit [violence]."

CAR

A majority of focus group participants drive to campus by themselves. While many do so because it decreases their already lengthy commute, others use their vehicle for a myriad of reasons. Students use their car to transport heavy belongings, to store items while on campus, and to nap, sleep, or enjoy a modicum of privacy. Students feel public transportation is unsafe, unreliable, or unnecessarily cumbersome, especially if more than one transfer would be required. To save money, some students with extreme commutes park off campus which in turn renders them vulnerable early in the morning and late at night.

"I need space to be alone. So many people have big personalities, but I'm an introvert - it's hard to be around people, and it's exhausting,"

PRIVACY

Undergraduate and graduate students express different needs for privacy. Undergraduate students are more willing to embrace campus dormitory living (shared sleeping conditions and the associated sociability), but they frequently select commuter-housing options for increased affordability. Of course, some undergraduate students need more privacy than the traditional UCLA housing offerings. Alternatively, graduate students place a clear priority on privacy (preferably single rooms), which make densely-packed affordable campus housing offerings unacceptable.

"I'm less likely to go to CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services) because I'm already on campus for so long, which is not good for me as someone with depression and anxiety."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Create a commuter “hub": a safe, secure space to wait out traffic, to study, to reduce food costs by providing subsidized meals and/or space to store and prepare food from home, to sleep overnight, to nap, and to occupy during campus “off” hours. The hub should be located near showers and bathroom facilities. Amenities in these spaces should include:

- Lockers
- Refrigerator, microwave, a place to prepare food
- Flexible personal space for lounging and/or napping
- Options for individual, private overnight sleeping

Provide Separate Spaces that address the different needs of graduate and undergraduate students

- Grad students prefer to be close to their departments and have more privacy, as in a series of “micro-hubs” distributed across campus
- Undergraduate students prefer a larger, more centrally located commuter lounge/space, like at the John Wooden Center

Reduce Car Trips & Improve Safety

- Implement a program that designates space for overnight parking for commuters. This space should have an overnight attendant and be equipped with lighting. This reduces car trips when students stay on campus rather than returning home at night only to come back the next day
- Assure an equitable approach to the provision of transportation services and subsidy. This includes increasing year-long public transit subsidies for students who live far from campus, as well as prioritizing on-campus parking permits for students who face 60+ minute commutes

Develop communications program tailored to extreme commuters

- Create and distribute campus maps and signage showing available facilities for commuters like restrooms, microwaves, refrigerators, late-night secure spaces
- Establish a clearinghouse space where information on available resources can be found and distributed to students

Conduct Further Research

- Data: More data is needed about extreme commuters, in order to determine the magnitude of the problem and alternative accommodations and transit options that might serve their needs
- Program Specific Focus Groups: Another set of focus groups should differentiate between undergraduate and graduate students, as our research shows that these two student populations differ in terms of their circumstances and needs
- Solutions-Specific Focus Group: Once a set of solutions is identified for further consideration by the university, students should be asked for feedback to help refine solution types and ensure they are tailored to students’ needs

Students with extreme commutes need spaces and services which cater to their unique needs. Simultaneously, more study is needed to discern details of how the university can support these students.

04
PRECEDENTS

A number of universities are exploring different ways to accommodate their commuting students. To complement the traditional residence hall, solutions range from new, hotel-like, overnight facilities, to providing comfortable and safe places to sleep or eat in an existing building. This study examines the approaches of universities around the country and the world to see which might apply to UCLA. We divide our review of alternative accommodations into five categories: commuter hostel, commuter lounge, PodShare / WeLive, fragmented dorm, and overnight / 24-hour parking. These categories are broad, and commuting solutions may fit into multiple categories. Each form of alternative accommodation is illustrated so that solutions can be more easily imagined.

COMMUTER HOSTEL

The commuter hostel is generally a dorm-like room for nightly rental, providing a bed, bathroom, and shower for commuters. The commuter hostel is intended as an affordable hotel for students. Some provide parking and storage for an additional fee.

Ryerson University (Toronto, Onterio, Canada)
- Per night cost = student - $35 (single), $45 (double); faculty/staff - $60 [note: all costs are given for 2019]
- Book online
- Open September - April - closes for winter break, spring/summer
- Rooms - double-bed, pull-out sofa, bathroom, toiletries, towels, wifi
- No parking or luggage storage [45]

COMMUTER LOUNGE

Campus commuter lounges provide space where students can sit, study, refrigerate and heat food, print, and use school computers. Some schools provide storage lockers in (or in addition to) their commuter lounges. These spaces are also important as a safe space to study or rest until starting their trips back home. They tend to resemble hotel lobbies or dorm lounges, without customization to the particular needs of commuters such as privacy, napping, overnight options, food prep, outdoor areas, etc.

Liberty University (Lynchburg, VA, USA)
- Kitchen with coffee bar, microwave, fridge
- TVs, board games, printers, work stations, charging stations, lockers
- Collaborative meeting rooms [46]

UC Riverside (Riverside, CA, USA)
- Microwaves, chairs, charging stations [47]

Rutgers University (New Brunswick, NJ, USA)
Commuter Student Association Lounge (10AM-8PM M-R; 10AM-5PM F)
- Microwave, fridge, TV, computers with internet
- Comfortable chairs, tables and chairs

Douglass Commuter Lounge (7AM-1AM M-F; 10AM-1PM weekends)
- TV, tables and comfortable chairs
- Free commuter lockers, microwaves and kitchen [48]

45 Ryerson University, "Commuter Hostel."
46 Liberty University. "Commuter Lounge."
47 UC Riverside, "Commuter Resources."
48 Rutgers University, "Commuter Resources."

Co-living spaces provide a short term, often affordable option for students seeking temporary accommodations, due to their class schedule or housing insecurity.

PODSHARES AND WELIVE

Co-living spaces such as PodShares and WeLive have become popular in cities across the world. These rental accommodations vary widely, but tend to offer short-term stays, management on-site, minimal privacy, and shared social spaces (much like a traditional youth hostel for travelers). Most spaces are communal (kitchens, bathrooms, living rooms, workspaces, etc.), and each guest is assigned a bed in a large, open room or in dormitory-like bedrooms. The cost per night is kept down by this sharing of space and at the same time, shared residential space is marketed for its sociability. Co-living options allow for short stays which, along with their affordability, can make them popular with students. They offer convenience, since they are furnished and do not require start-up costs like utility billing or first- and last-month's rent. Some co-living spaces offer private rooms or even apartments for a higher rent.

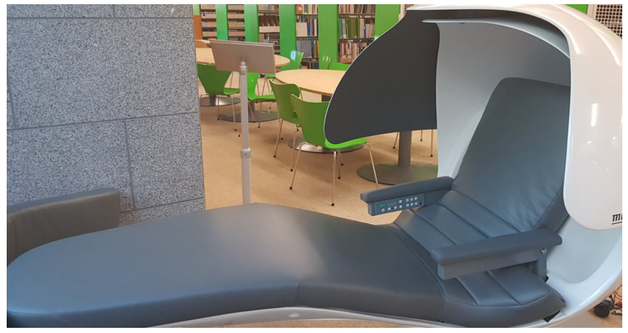
Georgetown University:
- Cost (apartment-type plans, for short term or longer term lease)
  - Single room - $1,503 - $2,549 /month
  - Three bedroom - $2,952 /month
  - Four bedroom - $3,393 /month
  - Grad students can sign 10-12 month leases
- Flat utility fee (water, cable, WiFi, electric) - $125-$240 /month
- Fully furnished
- Must be at least 21 years old [49]

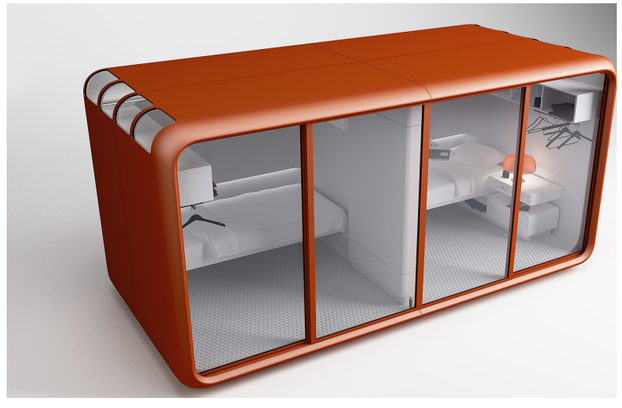
PodShares (Los Angeles)
- Available across LA
- Bed rental per night ($40-50)/week($280)/month ($1000)
- Free WiFi/internet
- Shared: lounge/TV area, kitchen, laundry room, recreation, bath, meeting spaces
- Individual area: screen (TV or computer), bed
- Provides baggage storage [50]

Sharing common areas lowers cost and increases sociability, while maintaining private sleep areas.

49 WeLive. "WeLive: 2221 S. Clark Street Arlington, VA 22202."
50 Tripadvisor. "PodShare: 1617 Cosmo St, Hollywood, LA."

Short-term solutions like nap pods, "Fragmented Dorm" strategies, and overnight, safe park-and-sleep options are ways to give immediate relief to students in need.





FRAGMENTED DORM

Some schools offer what might be called "fragmented dorms": a variety of commuter accommodations distributed across campus, rather than aggregated in a lounge or hostel. With greater consideration and an effective communication program, the fragmented dorm solution might effectively address the needs of extreme commuters. Presently, such distributed spaces for commuters are more likely to seem ad hoc, left-over, and uncoordinated.

Mount St. Mary's University (Los Angeles, CA, USA)
- Commuter meal plan, meal voucher, microwaves
- Computer labs, printing services, fax machines
- Free lockers
- Student lounge
- Career services (on- and off-campus jobs) [51]

SUNY Albany (Albany, NY, USA)
- Commuter lounge
- Locker rentals ($30 school year, $40 school year + summer)
- Commuter meal plan [52]

Maynooth University (Maynooth, County Kildare, Ireland)
- Sleeping pods in the library [53]

OVERNIGHT / 24-HOUR PARKING

In our study, many students with extreme commutes had slept in their cars overnight on campus. Some suggest that the university should provide at least one parking lot (preferably near a bathroom with a shower) where they could safely sleep in their cars overnight. To explore this option we looked at how other universities have handled overnight parking,[54] as well as active laws and programs in Los Angeles that support people who sleep in their cars.[55] While no college sees this as a desirable or long-term housing option, the growing number of housing-insecure students is pushing campuses to establish safe, overnight parking.

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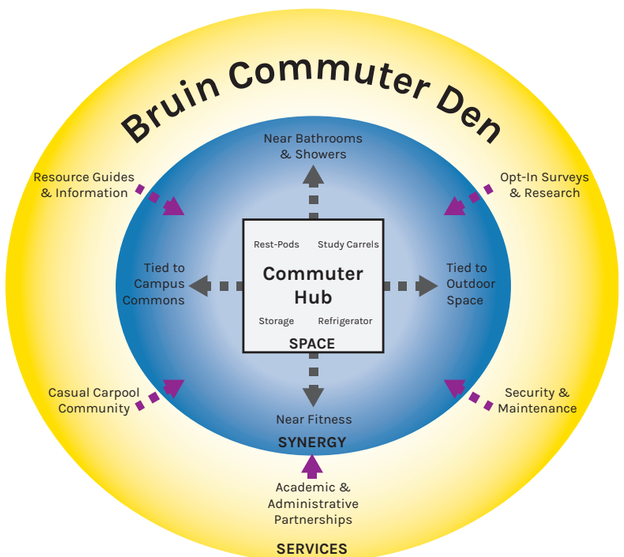
51 Mount Saint Mary's University, "Commuter Services."
52 SUNY Albany, "Resources for Commuter Students."
53 Maynooth University, "Maynooth University Introducing Sleeping Pods in Library."
54 University of Akron, "Overnight Parking;" University of Houston, "Permit Options."
55 For information on California AB 302 see Chen, "New Bill Would Let Homeless Community College Students Sleep in Cars Overnight" or California Legislative Information, "AB-302 Parking: homeless students (2019-2020)." For information on Safe Parking LA see Safe Parking LA.

We presented the range of alternative accommodations to focus group participants to determine if any were appealing to UCLA's extreme commuters. The participants voiced interest in the commuter hostel, but were concerned about the price, safety, and accessibility (how to access it, how to reserve space, and who would be able to access it). There was also interest in the idea of a commuter lounge, particularly among undergraduates. Some participants were skeptical of the commuter lounge since, as one participant put it, "we have lots of lounges all over campus already." The UCLA students commented that they would like a commuter lounge if it gave them access to things that the other lounges did not; such as inexpensive food, refrigerators, microwaves, or a safe space to take a nap. Interest in the sleeping pods was tempered by concerns over logistics (who will clean and maintain these) and privacy. The above precedents, along with comments from our focus group participants, were considered in our design of the following prototype.

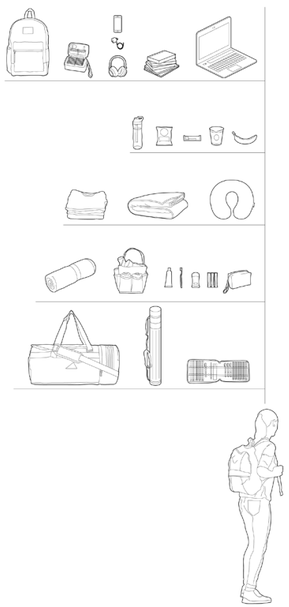
05
DESIGN

Many of the issues experienced by extreme commuting students at UCLA are spatial in nature. They need safe spaces on campus to nap; they need safe spaces to store their belongings; they need spaces to prepare food or purchase it cheaply. While school policies could have a large impact on the lives of commuting students (e.g. allowing students to sleep in their cars in campus parking lots; leaving lounges open 24 hours and allowing students to sleep in them, etc.), the core issues remain spatial, and necessitate spatial solutions. As mentioned previously, focus groups were presented potential design solutions in order to gather feedback. These comments were incorporated in the ongoing, iterative design process which produced the following design prototype, affectionately titled "Pocket Rockers." These playful rocking lounge chairs contain storage pockets and a pull-over hood for privacy and to reduce glare on day-time screens, among other features. While not a stand-alone solution, the Pocket Rocker attempts to capture the issues experiences by the focus group participants.

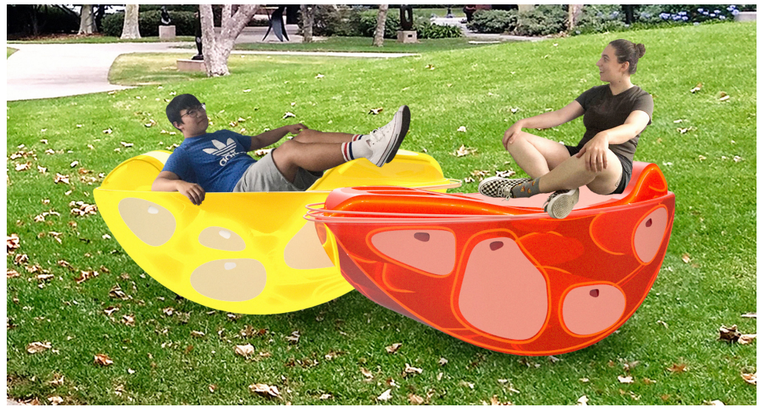
Spatial problems call for spatial solutions. In response to requests for commuter amenities, our team considers how key components could combine to form a portable, indoor-outdoor chair.

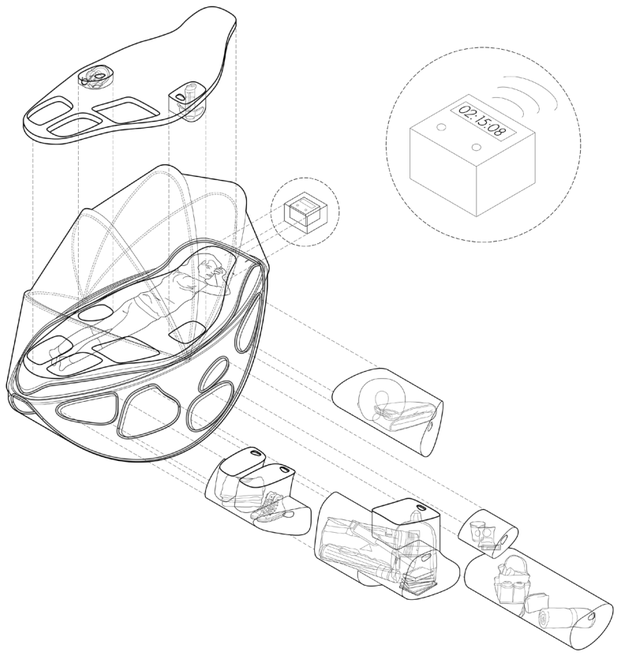


This diagram shows how a Commuter Hub could plug in to existing services and new facilities on campus to benefit extreme commuters. The Pocket Rockers (right) could serve as rest-pods in the Commuter Hub.



POCKET ROCKERS



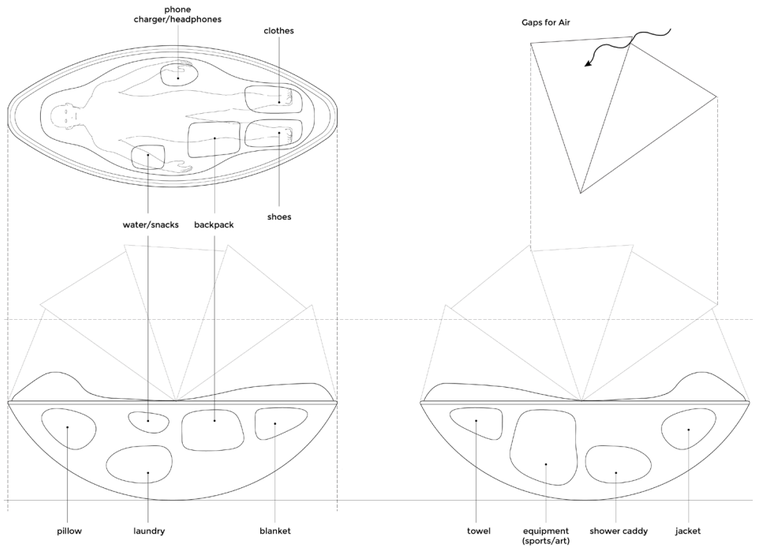


Inspired by existing ergonomic profiles, these all-in-one chairs can be configured for sitting, studying, lounging, and sleeping.

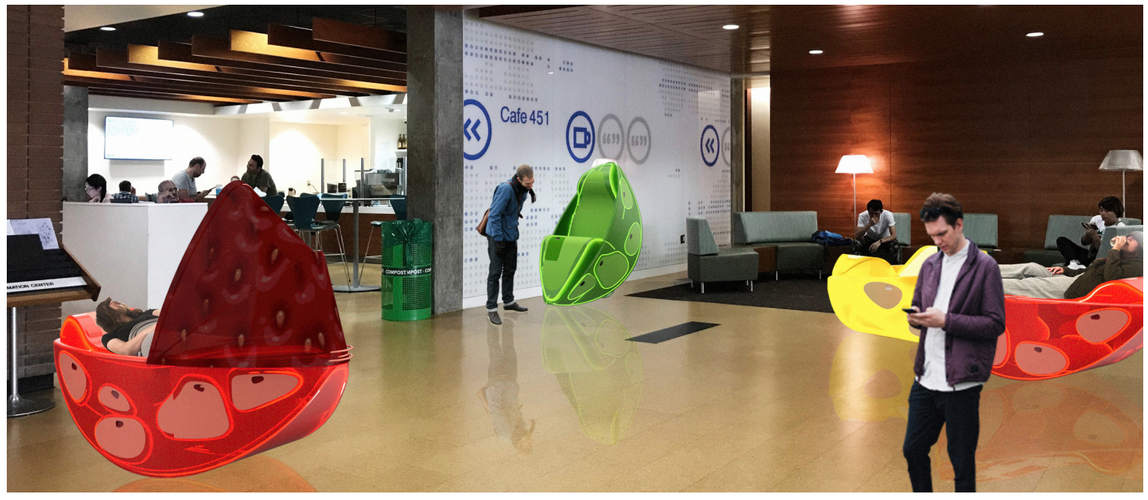
Recognizing that overly specific solutions can be both empowering and isolating, Pocket Rockers address the sleeping and storage needs of students with extreme commutes while also benefiting the campus at large. Inspired by existing ergonomic profiles and coated in welcoming, colorful patterns, these all-in-one chairs can be configured for sitting, studying, lounging, and sleeping, with a pull-over enclosure to provide more privacy as well as shade. Commuters benefit from the backpack-like body of the cushioned chair, which satisfies the need for space to store items common to everyday student life and necessary overnight campus stays. At the same time, non-commuters may just as enthusiastically embrace these new spaces for studying and socializing.

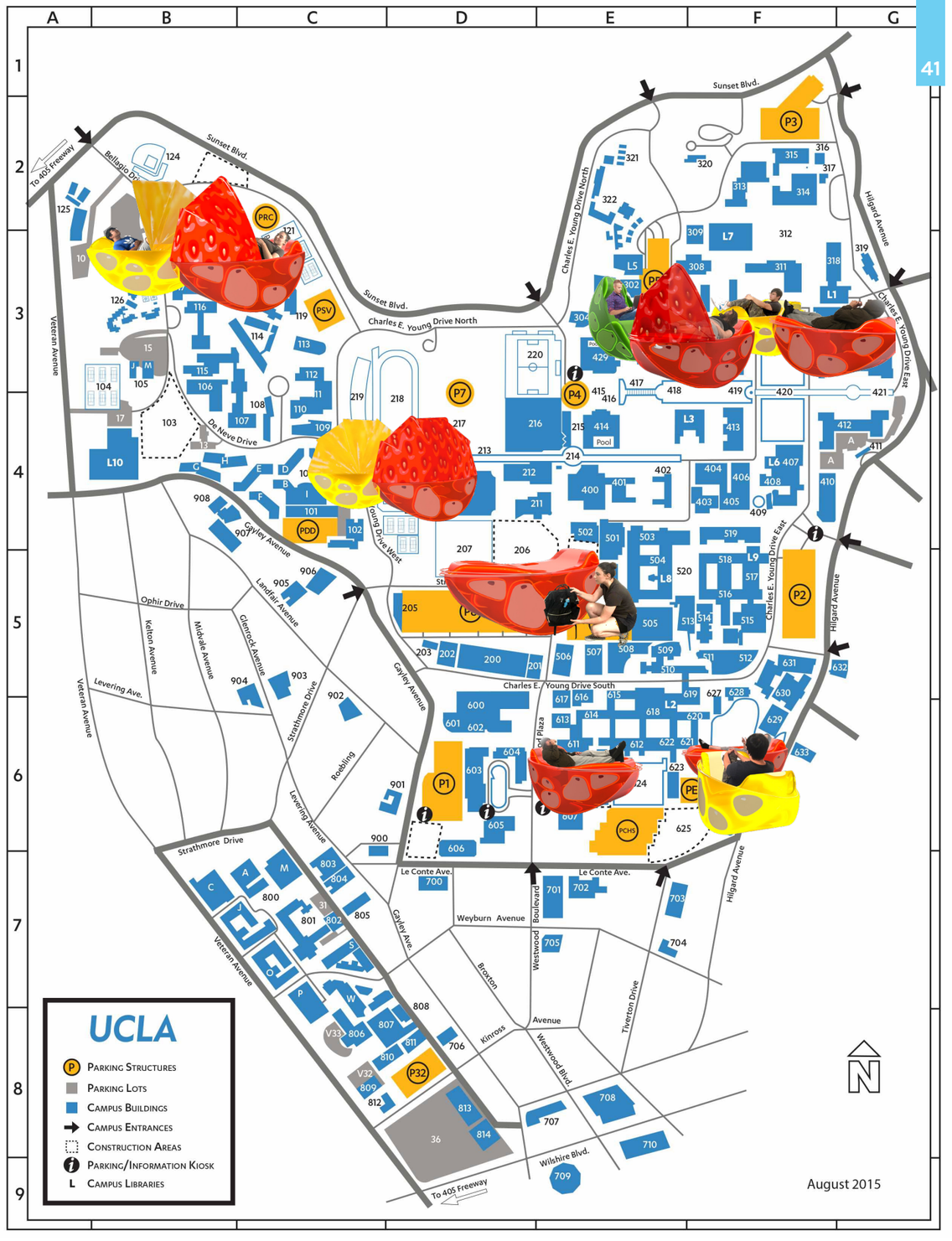
Design Provided by: Marta Nowak, UCLA Architecture and Urban Design faculty; Principal, AN.ONYMOUS with Anna Drewitz, and Tingji Guo

Pocket Rockers de-stigmatize on-campus sleeping, and can also serve as an opt-in survey tool.



Between the capacities for storage, reconfiguration, and broad appeal, the Pocket Rockers de-stigmatize on-campus sleeping. They also provide an opportunity to learn more about student commuters: integrated software senses pressure when students are occupying the furniture, allowing opt-in data collection on popular occupancy times and length of stay. In this way, the Pocket Rockers serve as both a survey tool and an inviting, inclusive stop-gap solution.





06
CONCLUSION

For a whole host of reasons, at UCLA it appears that students with extreme commutes (60 minutes or more) are increasing in number, yet there is no systematic information about them. We also know that commuter students are not well served by campus housing options. There are at least three factors that determine extreme commutes for UCLA students: the location of their residence, the location of the campus, and the transportation options available. UCLA's location is fixed as are the public transit routes, so residential location is the primary variable students can manipulate to affect their commute. In terms of residential location, we assumed that students "chose" to live further from campus in order to reduce housing costs, but no such direct relationship was found. It also became clear that residential location was not easily characterized as a choice, given all the demands and constraints faced especially by nontraditional students. We described this more complex portrait in the preceding pages.

The research reported here assembles a fuller understanding of students with extreme commutes, and serves as a basis for future study. Our quantitative and qualitative research was designed to answer four questions:

1. ***Who are the UCLA students who face extreme commutes?***
2. ***What are the conditions that lead to extreme commuting?***
3. ***What impacts does extreme commuting have on students?***
4. ***What kinds of solutions might appeal to current students experiencing extreme commutes?***

Our research is multifaceted, ranging from broad survey data to intimate conversations. The result is a robust portrait of UCLA's extreme commuters, describing not just their trips to campus but their whole lives as students. Only when the whole commuting student is better understood will UCLA be able to determine how best to meet their needs. Although we may begin by thinking about their needs based on their identity as commuters, we quickly realize that a host of intersectional characteristics describe these students. The more we learn about the whole lives of student commuters, the more impressive they become in terms of academic achievement and creative strategies for daily life.

We quickly realized that a range of intersectional characteristics describe these students.

Non-Traditional.
They are likely to be older, students of color, low-income, first generation, women, and working.

Student++.
They have complex lives in which being a student is just one part, and thus their residential location priorities are only partly related to campus proximity.

Cars.
They are commuting alone by car for reasons of flexibility, personal safety, and efficiency. Their cars are used also for storage (books, food, change of clothing) and occasionally sleeping.

Long Days.
As a result of car-commuting, they leave home early and stay late at school in order to avoid peak traffic. They also arrange their schedules to come to campus as infrequently as possible.

Food.
Long days at school mean that commuters may eat 2-3 meals on campus each day. For reasons of cost and food preferences, students bring food from home to store and prepare on campus.

Overnight.
At certain points during the school term (especially midterms and finals), commuter-students stay overnight on or near campus. They sleep at a friend's, in their cars, or in a campus building (not a dorm).

Detachment.
Work, study, and long commutes leave little time for campus life, which commuter-students identify as a problem.

UCLA CAMPUS RESPONSE

To summarize the implications of the above findings in a single statement: Extreme commuters need particular campus accommodations to address hurdles that negatively impact their daily lives and their academic performance.

UCLA can take a number of actions to address the ill-effects of extreme commuting experienced by UCLA students. These actions span from providing safe, intermittent sleeping accommodations, like Pocket Rockers, to food storage, to increased communications. We conclude with a set of actionable recommendations that the University can pursue to make campus life easier for its extreme commuting students, as well as a set of recommendations for further research that can refine our understanding of the relationship between extreme commuting and housing insecurity at UCLA.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Both short- and long-term solutions are needed to benefit UCLA's students with extreme commutes.

ACCOMMODATIONS: HOUSING, RESTING, AND CONNECTING

Provide short-term housing accommodations
- In addition to conventional dorm rooms assigned for an entire academic year, provide rooms for short-term, overnight stays. Commuters want low-cost short-term options similar to a hotel, pod-share, or hostel.
- Short-term accommodations should be dignified and without stigma associated with housing insecurity.

Create rest-spots for napping on campus
- Students with extreme commutes need safe, private rest-spots where they can nap during long days on campus and before late night trips back home.
- Rest-spots can be indoors or outside, should be available by digital reservation, and should offer privacy and security.

Create a commuter hub or lounge on campus
- The range of commuter needs can be accommodated in a single location that would include lockers, restrooms and showers (or proximity to them), food storage and preparation areas (refrigerator, microwave, etc), rest-spots that could be used for short naps or overnight stays, study areas, hang-out space, and communications/information dissemination.
- Micro-hubs, smaller in scale and with only some of the amenities mentioned above, might be particularly desirable to graduate students. The micro-hub would be associated with discipline or program, enabling student communities to form among extreme commuters.
- To offer greater engagement with campus life, commuter-student services programming can be made available.
- Staffing of the hub will provide security for napping/sleeping commuters, as well as personal connection to programs and services.

TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

Reduce car trips & improve safety
- Study the implementation of overnight parking for commuters. This space should have an overnight attendant and be equipped with lighting and campus safety fixtures. The designated parking area should be proximate to restrooms.
- Ensure an equitable approach to providing transportation services and subsidy. This includes increasing year-long public transit subsidies for students who live far from campus, as well as prioritizing on campus parking permits for students who face 60+ minute commutes.

Study vanpool and rideshare options and create incentives for concentrations of commuters in distant residential zones.

INFORMATION SERVICES

Provide designated resources and knowledge
- Create and distribute campus maps with coordinated signage showing available facilities for commuters like restrooms, microwaves, showers, refrigerators, and late-night secure spaces
- Establish a center or space where information on available resources can be held and distributed to students.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Quantitative
Conduct a second campus-wide survey, this time including information about academic performance and a comprehensive basic needs assessment that includes housing and food insecurity as well as transportation. A basic needs survey will provide an accurate, more detailed understanding of students facing extreme commutes and enhance our knowledge of the relationship between housing insecurity, academic issues, and transportation.

Qualitative
Our set of focus groups is the first of its kind conducted here at UCLA and provides a more human portrait of the experiences of students with extreme commutes. Further focus groups will provide important information if they are A) tailored to specific student subpopulations (e.g. graduates and undergraduates, ethnic groups with norms pertinent to housing, students with dependents); and B) assessments that ask students about preferred approaches to university-endorsed solutions (e.g. if “pop up pods” are preferable, and where on campus they would be ideally located).

It is the overall conclusion of this research that UCLA’s extreme commuters comprise a hidden population of housing-insecure students. They represent a cohort that is underserved and disadvantaged in multiple ways, which adds urgency to addressing their needs with alternative accommodations when compared to campus residence halls. Their creative coping strategies and remarkable stories are inspiring, but also demonstrative of the need for new solutions. The latter will be a combination of design and policy, both of which must be created so that students with extreme commutes are treated with dignity, compassion, and without stigma.

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TABLE ENDNOTES

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