

## Open Letter to the University of Texas at Austin (UT),

In solidarity with a growing number of graduate students, we are writing as a group of self-organized student leaders to express the magnitude of the economic crisis we are facing. Our objective is to share relevant information with UT administrators, faculty, staff, and students, which will allow us to begin to address the dire financial circumstances in which many of us find ourselves.

To get a better sense of how this economic situation is affecting us, we have circulated and conducted surveys about the cost of living and financial needs among graduate student workers throughout fall semester 2022. **Thus far, we have collected survey results from twenty-eight (28) departments across six (6) colleges at UT**, which graduate workers have responded to anonymously and voluntarily. Some adapted their surveys to assess additional or department-specific needs, so some reports will look slightly different from the others. Together, those who have responded to these surveys **represent 818 graduate students and counting**.

One of the primary causes of the financial difficulties we are experiencing is the increase in the cost of living in Austin. Recent studies have shown that Austin has seen the most significant increase in rent rates in the entire country, with an average increase of 21% just in the last year.<sup>1</sup> As of August, Austin's median monthly rent cost was \$2,930, which is an 86% year-on-year increase from 2021 and just \$91 lower than the average rent in New York City (\$3,021), the city with the highest median rent cost in the country.<sup>2</sup> These metrics ranked Austin No. 1 as the city with the largest rent increase in the country, and No. 5 among cities with the fastest-growing rent costs over the last year.

Furthermore, annual inflation was 9.1% in 2022<sup>3</sup>, the highest in forty years, and wages in many departments have not increased or increased at rates lower than the rate of inflation, resulting in the devaluation of graduate student workers' purchasing power. The cost of living in Travis County for an adult is **\$38,171** annually (before taxes)<sup>4</sup>, an amount many graduate workers do not even come close to earning. If we assume, for example, an annual salary of \$21,629 (a wage many Assistant Instructors [AIs] at UT earn), these instructors are currently paid 40.44% below the cost of living for an adult in Austin. At the same rate of inflation, and adding a 3% yearly readjustment, the projected salary for this same position would be 56.8% below the cost of living by 2025.

TABLE 1: Annual projection of inflation, readjustment

| Year                                | 2021  | 2022  | 2023  | 2024  | 2025  |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Salary after taxes +3% readjustment | 2,200 | 2,260 | 2,327 | 2,397 | 2,469 |

<sup>1</sup><https://www.kvue.com/article/money/economy/boomtown-2040/austin-average-rent-cost-doubles/269-9193f53d-f4e5-44e3-86c1-7a863e4481ae>

<sup>2</sup><https://spectrumlocalnews.com/tx/south-texas-el-paso/news/2022/10/03/rental-company-dwellsy-says-austin-is-now-the-5th-most-expensive-large-u-s-city#:~:text=According%20to%20Dwellsy%2C%20a%20rental,2022%20was%20%242%2C930%20per%20month>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2022/consumer-prices-up-9-1-percent-over-the-year-ended-june-2022-largest-increase-in-40-years.htm>

<sup>4</sup><https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/48453>

|   |       |       |       |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Real value of the salary with 9.1% inflation</b> | 2,200 | 2,071 | 1,955 | 1,846 | 1,746 |
| <b>Purchasing power</b>                             | 100   | 94.1  | 88.8  | 83.9  | 79.3  |
| <b>Total devaluation</b>                            | 0     | 5.8   | 11.1  | 16    | 20.7  |

The depreciation of graduate workers' salaries contrasts dramatically with UT's institutional wealth, which, according to a Bloomberg analysis, now competes with Harvard to be the wealthiest university in the country in terms of endowment size.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, as of November 30, 2021, there was about \$11.4 billion in the state's Economic Stabilization Fund (ESF; commonly referred to as the "Rainy Day Fund"),<sup>6</sup> which Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts Glenn Hegar has projected will grow to \$13.6 billion in Fiscal Year 2023.<sup>7</sup> As one of the state's premier public institutions, UT should advocate for use of rainy day funds to preserve and improve university jobs, wages, and benefits.

Furthermore, UT is not competitive with other peer institutions. In 2018, UT launched the Graduate Education Task Force<sup>8</sup>, which culminated in an increased "targeted minimum" of \$19,000 for Teaching Assistants (TAs) and AIs for a nine-month appointment.<sup>9</sup> For example:

- At Pennsylvania State University, the 2021-22 minimum stipend level was \$21,375<sup>10</sup>, with most students appointed at higher levels on a formalized payscale.<sup>11</sup> Graduate workers also received a 3% increase for 2022-23.
- At the University of Colorado - Boulder, standard salaries for **2018-19** ranged from \$21,451 for a Teaching Assistant to \$24,793 for an Assistant Instructor.<sup>12</sup> After their own Graduate Task Force on Stipends and Benefits, their administration decided to cover mandatory fees and provided an additional 3% increase that took effect in January of 2022.<sup>13</sup>
- At the University of Michigan - Ann Arbor, the minimum stipend rate is \$24,055.<sup>14</sup>

Note that these rates constitute *minimums* (including a minimum rate from *four years ago* that still surpassed the recently increased UT minimum by \$2,451-\$5,793 depending on appointment category), and they were followed by 3% yearly readjustments for *all* appointments. Moreover, graduate student workers at UT have a much higher cost of living than many by virtue of living in Austin. Therefore, next

<sup>5</sup><https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2022-harvard-university-of-texas-richest-college-oil-endowments/#xj4y7vzk>

<sup>6</sup><https://comptroller.texas.gov/about/media-center/news/20211130-texas-comptroller-glenn-hegar-announces-transfer-of-29-billion-to-state-highway-and-rainy-day-funds-1638213764784>

<sup>7</sup><https://thetexan.news/27-billion-treasury-balance-projected-by-texas-comptroller-for-2023-13-6-billion-projected-for-rainy-day-fund/>

<sup>8</sup><https://provost.utexas.edu/initiatives/graduate-education-task-force/>

<sup>9</sup><https://t.e2ma.net/message/rxnn6e/f8rsphb>

<sup>10</sup><https://www.psu.edu/news/administration/story/graduate-assistantship-stipends-increase-3-fall-2022/>

<sup>11</sup><https://guru.psu.edu/resources/rates-and-schedules/stipends-for-graduate-assistants?range=20222023&submit=Submit#B>

<sup>12</sup><https://www.colorado.edu/graduateschool/graduate-task-force-stipends-benefits/graduate-school-task-force-stipends-benefits-faqs>

<sup>13</sup><https://www.colorado.edu/today/2021/11/05/cu-boulder-cover-fees-increase-stipends-graduate-students-appointment>

<sup>14</sup>[https://hr.umich.edu/sites/default/files/2022-2023\\_gsa\\_salary\\_memo.pdf](https://hr.umich.edu/sites/default/files/2022-2023_gsa_salary_memo.pdf)

to these peer institutions, UT offers among the least competitive salaries, which harms UT's ability to recruit the best graduate students for its world-renowned research programs.

We will continuously publish survey results here as they come in. The results from the participating departments (see below) indicate that most graduate student workers have experienced rent increases, in many cases excessive increases of \$200+ or even \$300+ (per month). Most are cost-burdened (i.e. they spend more than 30% of their income on rent, a rule determined by the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development) and many are severely cost-burdened (spending much more than 30% of their income on rent). Graduate student workers also report high costs for childcare, food, medical expenses, utilities, vehicles, pets, and more; difficulties with work-related visa restrictions, among other costs specific to the international student experience; using their own savings or incurring more debt to get by; lack of consistent or guaranteed summer funding, or insufficient summer funding for the cost of living; the timing of stipend payments, especially in the fall (i.e., not receiving a paycheck until October); paying double rent in the last twelve (12) months due to travel to home countries, field work, or research; reduced academic performance due to the need to seek further employment outside of UT; and considerable stress about their finances (with many reporting being 'very' or 'extremely' stressed on a 5-point scale).

Perhaps most significantly for UT, financial stress has led a significant percentage of graduate student workers to consider leaving their programs due to lack of affordability and to seek better wages. Losing graduate student workers' contributions to the university, whether in the form of research or teaching, is a tremendous blow to the University of Texas at Austin's prestige and reputation, as well as its capacity to provide undergraduate and graduate students with the premier education it promises.

In recognition of the severity of these financial struggles and their impact on graduate student workers' livelihoods and well-being, we implore UT administrators to meet the demands in this [letter](#) to Provost Sharon Wood. This would require allocating the necessary funding to make progress towards paying graduate students a living wage, followed up with annual cost-of-living adjustments, providing satisfactory healthcare coverage, and freezing the cost of current University-owned graduate student housing. We also implore faculty, staff, and students to communicate their support for increasing the wages and healthcare coverage of graduate students and graduate student workers to UT administrators.

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## College of Liberal Arts:

### **American Studies (13 responses / 24 students; 54% response rate):**

In American Studies, graduate student workers' rent varies significantly based on location, number of roommates, and the condition of the property. Graduate student respondents report spending between 650 dollars and 3000 dollars per month on rent alone, as well as between 300 and 1000 dollars per month on groceries. Medical expenses also varied wildly, with the highest reported monthly expense being 800 dollars per month.

Respondents, on average, pay:

- \$1,404.5 in rent
- \$199.23 in utilities (electricity, water, garbage, internet, etc.)
- \$289.23 in groceries
- \$189.62 in medical expenses

**Average Monthly Expenses:** \$2,082.58

According to these survey results, the *average* rent for an AMS student is equivalent to 88.55% of monthly income (pre-tax) assuming a salary of \$20,000; the average reported total monthly expenses of \$2,082.58 are nearly 1.25x the monthly stipend (pre-tax) assuming the same salary. This means that the *average* AMS student is severely cost-burdened (i.e., they spend more than 30% of their income on rent, a rule determined by the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development), even without including the exorbitant costs of utilities, groceries, and medical expenses. Students report that if they are happy with the *quality* of their housing, it is farther from campus and too expensive; if they are paying lower rent it is because of a precipitous decline in quality. This disadvantages the 23 percent of students without a car who need to live near campus, especially given that graduate student respondents report commutes ranging from 20 minutes to two hours per day.

This does not include the cost of having a vehicle (gas, insurance, loan payment, maintenance/repair) nor additional personal expenses (dining out, entertainment, hobbies, etc.) Among the 76.9% that report owning a car, respondents spend, on average, \$313.89 per month. The average for additional personal expenses is another \$296. Additionally, respondents owe, on average, \$43,153.85 in student loan debt; 23.1% report having taken out additional student loans during graduate school. To make ends meet, 66% of graduate student respondents report working an additional part- or full-time job.

Students also reported that: "CLEARLY i need more money," "I am on fellowship (~\$34k), but am expecting a precipitous drop in income next academic year when I become a TA (~20k)," and "It might be worth noting that this survey doesn't account for the less 'ethical' labor we do on the side but can't talk about because a girl's gotta eat. (Also, activism in our communities.)"

Given the financial challenges the average AMS student reports facing, it makes sense that **61.54% of respondents report having considered leaving their graduate program to pursue other careers, particularly in relation to wages and affordability.**

View Analytics:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1CwAwcAVYY55pTNPebadvTIuKQlGmICNYV6bgFttAEws/viewanalytics>

### **Classics (22 responses / 33 students; 66.67% response rate)**

In Classics, 91% respondents receive an annual salary between \$18,000 and \$24,000, with the largest portion (45.5%) earning between \$20,000 and \$22,000. A virtually identical 90.9% receive their salary from work they do for the university as either a TA or AI. For 86.4% of respondents, this is their only source of income. For 9.1% of respondents, this is also income to care for dependents.

**76.2% of Classics student respondents saw their rent increase from last year to this year.** These rent increases ranged from \$1-250 (per month), with 27.6% reporting an increase of \$100 or more. **86.4% of respondents report being cost-burdened** (i.e. they spend more than 30% of their income on rent, a rule determined by the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development), even before including the cost of utilities. Critically, **54.5% report being severely rent-burdened**: 31.8% report spending 51-60% of their monthly income on rent, 13.6% report spending 61-70%, and 9.1% report spending 71-80%. Additionally, **47.6% of Classics student respondents report having paid double rent in the last 12 months due to travel to their home or for research.**

Respondents, on average, pay \$335 per month for groceries and \$114 per month for medical expenses, accounting for another 26.9% of their monthly income (pre-tax) assuming they earn an annual salary of \$20,000. More than a third (36.36%) report being left with \$100 or less at the end of every month; at least two (2) Classics students report being short at the end of every month, with one specifying being -\$250.

Other financial issues reported by Classics students include:

- difficulty securing summer funding, which is often insufficient (especially for archaeology), uncertain, and highly variable;
- resorting to savings or even borrowing to get through the summer;
- moving expenses required to avoid significant increases in rent;
- large and rising utility bills in Austin;
- gas prices;
- unexpected health costs related to a disability;
- paying a lot extra to keep dependents on insurance while on fellowship;
- impossibility of acquiring other jobs due to visa restrictions;
- little time to devote to other jobs which pay better hourly;
- paying debt;
- supporting family or only being able to support themselves because of a partner;
- pet care, which is necessary for mental health and wellbeing.

Given the financial challenges that many Classics students report facing, it makes sense that 91% report their financial stress from 3-5 on a scale of 5; **27.3% report being highly stressed (4)**, and the largest portion, **45.5%, report being extremely stressed (5)**.

[View Analytics:](#)

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/17hvLk6jNSqp4Fr3NvKPAJ0Ugf3oIJTgI59yWpKrGXwE/viewanalytics>

**English (53 responses / 112 students; 47.32% response rate):**

In English, 79.2% of respondents report receiving their salary due to appointments as TAs or AIs, with another 11.3% receiving an internal fellowship. 54.7% of respondents report having no additional source of income. Among respondents, 18.9% of students in English are international students. For 13.21% of respondents, this is also income to care for dependents.

**73.1% of English student respondents saw their rent increase from last year to this year.** These rent increases ranged from \$1-300+ (per month). Among these, 89.5% saw a significant increase, with 18.4% reporting an increase of \$51-100, 39.5% reporting an increase of \$101-200, 21.1% reporting an increase of \$201-300, and 10.5% reporting an increase of more than \$300. **92.3% of respondents report being cost-burdened by their rent and utility bills** (i.e. they spend more than 30% of their income on rent, a rule determined by the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development). Critically, **84.6% report being severely rent-burdened**: 3.8% report spending 35-39% of their monthly income on rent, 32.7% report spending 40-50%, and **another 48.1% report spending 50% or more**. Additionally, **11.3%** of English student respondents report having paid double rent in the last 12 months. Respondents, on average, spend \$386.50 per month on food and \$75 per month on medical expenses, accounting for another 19.78-21.3% of their monthly income (pre-tax) assuming they earn an annual salary between \$19,500 and \$21,000.

Other financial issues reported by English students include:

- lack of summer funding, or insufficient summer funding for the cost of living;
- inability to work more than 20 hours per week or work off-campus due to visa restrictions;
- health treatment;
- timing of stipend payments, especially in the fall (i.e., no paycheck until October);
- accruing more student debt;
- needing to take out new credit cards every year to cover the costs of unfunded summers;
- difficulty finding supplementary on-campus jobs (due to time-consuming and competitive application processes);
- paying “risk assessment” fees on housing applications (for international students);
- childcare expenses;
- high travel costs for research and returning home.

Given the financial challenges that many English students report facing, it makes sense that 88.7% report their financial stress ranging from 3-5 on a scale of 5; **35.8% report being highly stressed (4)** and **32.1% report being extremely stressed (5)**.

With these levels of financial stress, it makes sense that **47.2% of respondents report having considered leaving their graduate program to pursue other careers, particularly in relation to wages and affordability**.

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**French and Italian (14 responses / 28 students; 50% response rate)**



In French and Italian, 78.6% respondents report receiving their salary due to appointments as either AIs (64.3%) or TAs (14.3%), with the remainder receiving an internal fellowship (none reported receiving an external scholarship). Among respondents, 57% are international students, which may partially explain why 64% report having no off-campus jobs. For 14.29% of respondents, this is also income to care for dependents.

**100% of French and Italian student respondents saw their rent increase from last year to this year.** These rent increases ranged from \$1-300+ (per month). More than three quarters saw a significant increase, with 38.5% reporting an increase of \$51-100, 31% reporting an increase of \$101-200, and 7.7% reporting an increase of \$201-300. **100% of respondents report being cost-burdened** (i.e. they spend more than 30% of their income on rent, a rule determined by the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development), with no respondent reporting spending less than 35% on rent and utilities. Critically, **72% report being severely burdened by rent and utilities**: 29% report spending 45-49% of their monthly income on rent and utilities and another 43% report spending 50% or more. Additionally, **29% of French and Italian student respondents report having paid double rent in the last 12 months due to travel to their home or for research.** In the case of international students, for whom travel to their home countries may be at least an annual occurrence, none reported spending less than \$1,000 per year, and 33% reported spending between \$2,500 and \$3,000 per year to fly; this effectively reduces their salary to cover the costs of living in Austin. Respondents, on average, spend \$380 per month on food and \$100 per month on medical expenses, accounting for another 28.8% of their monthly income (pre-tax) assuming they earn an annual salary of \$20,000.

Other financial issues reported by French and Italian students include:

- lack of guaranteed summer funding;
- only receiving the first stipend in October for work begun in August;
- increased copays and insurance refusing to pay for certain medications amidst high prices;
- the burden of student loans;
- the impossibility of acquiring other jobs due to visa restrictions;
- international students are ineligible for most scholarships at UT (or they are country-specific);
- needing to send money back home;
- forced to consider non-academic work in the summer that does not contribute to their career;
- and gas.

Given the financial challenges that many French and Italian students report facing, it makes sense that 100% report their financial stress from 3-5 on a scale of 5; **31% report being highly stressed (4)**, and the largest portion, **38%, report being extremely stressed (5)**.

With these levels of financial stress, it makes sense that **64% of respondents report having considered leaving their graduate program to pursue other careers, particularly in relation to wages and affordability.**

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<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/10Sh5Xc51dWbdb1QvHCYgVGtxpuyRlpkZrRbs4ikzOTs/viewanalytics>

**Geography and the Environment (22 responses / 35 students; 62.86% response rate)**

In Geography and the Environment, 63.7% of respondents report receiving their salary due to appointments as either GRAs (18.2%) or TAs (45.5%), with another 31.8% receiving an internal



fellowship. Among respondents, 36.4% are international students, which may partially explain why 72.7% report having no off-campus jobs; thus, for many, this is their only source of income. For 13.6% of respondents, this is also income to care for dependents.

**77.3% of Geography and the Environment student respondents saw their rent increase from last year to this year.** These rent increases ranged from \$1-300+ (per month). Among these, 63.6% saw a significant increase, with 17.6% reporting an increase of \$51-100, 23.5% reporting an increase of \$101-200, 11.8% reporting an increase of \$201-250, and 11.8% reporting an increase of more than \$300. **90.9% of respondents report being cost-burdened** (i.e. they spend more than 30% of their income on rent, a rule determined by the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development), even before including the cost of utilities. Critically, **86.4% report being severely rent-burdened:** 13.6% report spending 35-39% of their monthly income on rent, 27.3% report spending 40-50%, and another 45.5% report spending 50% or more. Additionally, **50% of Geography and the Environment student respondents report having paid double rent in the last 12 months due to travel to their home or for research.** Respondents, on average, spend \$375 per month on food and \$195 per month on medical expenses, accounting for another 34.25% of their monthly income (pre-tax) assuming they earn an annual salary of \$20,000.

Other financial issues reported by Geography and the Environment students include:

- lack of summer funding, and insecure funding year to year (i.e. appointments not guaranteed);
- impossibility of acquiring other jobs due to visa restrictions;
- inability to take on extra work due to disability;
- childcare costing up to \$1,000 per month;
- sending money back home or to family and friends;
- not having a support system;
- being forced to take on extra jobs;
- hardly having time to complete schoolwork and research;
- paying for UT health insurance, frequent changes in health insurance, constant re-enrollment;
- health treatments and medical bills;
- car upkeep;
- living 20 minutes away from campus and rent still costing more than monthly income;
- would consider staying for the PhD, but cannot spend 4-7 more years without a living wage.

Given the financial challenges that many Geography and the Environment students report facing, it makes sense that 95.5% report their financial stress from 3-5 on a scale of 5; the largest portion, **36.4%, report being highly stressed (4)**, and **31.8%, report being extremely stressed (5)**.

With these levels of financial stress, it makes sense that **86.4% of respondents report having considered leaving their graduate program to pursue other careers, particularly in relation to wages and affordability.**

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**Germanic Studies (5 responses / 10 students; 50% response rate):**

In Germanic Studies, 60% of respondents report receiving their salary due to appointments as AIs, with another 20% receiving an internal fellowship. Among respondents, 60% are international students, which

may partially explain why 80% report having no off-campus jobs; thus, for many, this is their only source of income. For 20% of respondents, this is also income to care for dependents.

**80% of Germanic Studies student respondents saw their rent increase from last year to this year.**

These rent increases ranged from \$1-250 (per month). Among these, 75% saw a significant increase, with 25% reporting an increase of \$51-100 and 50% reporting an increase of \$201-250. **100% of respondents report being cost-burdened** (i.e. they spend more than 30% of their income on rent, a rule determined by the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development), even before including the cost of utilities. Critically, **80% report being severely rent-burdened**: 60% report spending 35-39% of their monthly income on rent and another 20% report spending 50% or more. Additionally, **20% of Germanic Studies student respondents report having paid double rent in the last 12 months due to travel to their home or for research**. Respondents, on average, spend \$315 per month on food and \$298 per month on medical expenses, accounting for another 36.78% of their monthly income (pre-tax) assuming they earn an annual salary of \$20,000.

Other financial issues reported by Germanic Studies students include:

- lack of summer funding;
- inability to work more than 20 hours per week due to visa restrictions;
- being forced to take on extra jobs during important steps of the PhD (e.g. qualifying paper);
- changes between appointments and plans that result in loss of health insurance coverage;
- would need to drop out for financial and mental health reasons if not for familial support;
- difficulty finding housing in Austin and near impossibility of living alone;
- the cost of living rising faster than compensation;
- and academic stress compounded by financial stress.

Given the financial challenges that many Germanic Studies students report facing, it makes sense that 100% report their financial stress from 4-5 on a scale of 5; **60% report being highly stressed (4)** and **40% report being extremely stressed (5)**.

With these levels of financial stress, it makes sense that **100% of respondents report having considered leaving their graduate program to pursue other careers, particularly in relation to wages and affordability**.

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**History (37 responses / 73 students; 50.68% response rate):**

In History, 58.7% of respondents report receiving their primary income due to appointments as AIs, GRA/GAs, and TAs, with another 31.4% receiving internal fellowships; 2.9% of respondents receive their primary income from a non-academic student job at UT. **24.3% of respondents report that they**

**currently retain at least one (1) part-time job**, working anywhere from 10-30 additional hours per week; **45.9% report having held an additional part-time job while in the graduate program**. For 16.2% of respondents, this is also income to care for dependents.

**74.3% of the respondents reported that their rent has increased from last year to this year**. These rent increases ranged from \$26 to \$750. **The average rent increase experienced by respondents was \$208.82**. Respondents report paying anywhere from \$547.50 to \$2,200 per month for rent, before utilities. **The average monthly rent is \$1,173.15, with 56.8% of respondents paying more than \$1,000 per month**. Among the 16.2% and 2.7% of respondents who reported being dissatisfied and very dissatisfied with their housing situation, respectively, eleven (11) respondents pointed to **increased cost of rent in Austin as the main reason for their dissatisfaction**, followed by maintenance and structural issues with their housing, and bug problems.

Respondents, on average, spend an additional **\$168.85 on utilities, \$374.35 on food, and \$135.27 on medical expenses** monthly. Among the 62.2% who report having a car, respondents pay, on average, **\$280.58 per month on gas, insurance, loan payments, and maintenance/repair**. One respondent reports selling their car to save money. Among the 16.2% who report having dependents, respondents report spending anywhere from **\$400-600 per month to care for dependents**; two report paying on average **\$200-500 per month specifically for childcare**. When asked, **66.7% reported that they were extremely dissatisfied with the availability and affordability of childcare**; the remaining 33.3% report being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Lastly, respondents, on average, owe \$28,191.90 in student loans.

Other financial issues reported by History students include:

- paying more than half one's check for rent,
- moving further out of Austin to afford rent but then facing the costs of gas and parking;
- wanting to see the university push harder for affordable housing in the city;
- having no expendable income, so any unforeseen cost can be a setback;
- rising cost of health insurance, especially for international students with visa restrictions;
- student loan payments;
- pet costs; and
- wanting to pursue this career but it does not make financial sense, only subsisting.

Given the financial challenges that many History students report facing, it makes sense that **62.2% of respondents report having considered leaving their graduate program to pursue other careers, particularly in relation to wages and affordability**.

View analytics and comments:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1KctkuEVfZNelcnsjsTtAOD8gvH1-KJyYclw\\_buUDIVe/viewanalytics](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1KctkuEVfZNelcnsjsTtAOD8gvH1-KJyYclw_buUDIVe/viewanalytics)

**Latin American Studies (19 responses / 30 students; 63.33% response rate):**

In Latin American Studies, 52.6% of respondents report receiving their salary due to appointments as GRAs or TAs, with another 36.8% receiving an internal fellowship. Among respondents, 47.4% are international students, which may partially explain why 89.47% report having no off-campus jobs; thus, for many, this is their only source of income. For 26.32% of respondents, this is also income to care for dependents.

**68.4% of Latin American Studies student respondents saw their rent increase from last year to this year.** These rent increases ranged from \$1-300+ (per month). Among these, 84.6% saw a significant increase, with 38.5% reporting an increase of \$51-100, 23.1% reporting an increase of \$101-200, 15.4% reporting an increase of \$201-300, and 7.7% reporting an increase of more than \$300. **100% of respondents report being cost-burdened** (i.e. they spend more than 30% of their income on rent, a rule determined by the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development), even before including the cost of utilities. Critically, **94.4% report being severely rent-burdened:** 11.1% report spending 35-39% of their monthly income on rent, 44.4% report spending 40-50%, and another 38.9% report spending 50% or more. Additionally, **38.9% of Latin American Studies student respondents report having paid double rent in the last 12 months due to travel to their home or for research.** Respondents, on average, spend \$457.89 per month on food and \$278.94 per month on medical expenses, accounting for another 44.2% of their monthly income (pre-tax) assuming they earn an annual salary of \$20,000.

Other financial issues reported by Latin American Studies students include:

- lack of summer funding, or insufficient summer funding for the cost of a plane ticket, double rent, bills, and food;
- inability to work more than 20 hours per week or work off-campus due to visa restrictions;
- the costs of childcare and of getting health insurance for dependent children;
- sending money to home country or to family and friends;
- car repair expenses;
- health treatment;
- timing of stipend payments, especially in the fall (i.e., no paycheck until October);
- and worry caused by hearing about other graduate students' difficulties.

Given the financial challenges that many Latin American Studies students report facing, it makes sense that 100% report their financial stress from 3-5 on a scale of 5; **15.79% report being highly stressed (4)** and **52.6% report being extremely stressed (5).**

With these levels of financial stress, it makes sense that **42.1% of respondents report having considered leaving their graduate program to pursue other careers, particularly in relation to wages and affordability.**

View Analytics:

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### **Linguistics (32 responses / 38 students, 84.21% response rate)**

In Linguistics, 72.7% of respondents report receiving their salary due to appointments as GRAs, TAs, or AIs. Another 18.2% receive some other UT-internal fellowships. Among respondents, 42.4% are international students, which may partially explain why 65.63% report having no off-campus jobs; thus, for many, this is their only source of income. For 11.5% of respondents, this is also income to care for dependents.

**72.7% of Linguistics student respondents saw their rent increase from last year to this year.** These rent increases ranged from \$1-300+ dollars (potential categories: \$1-50, \$51-100, \$101-200, \$201-300, \$300+), with 18.5% (n=5) reporting an increase of more than \$300.

**84.85% (n= 28) of respondents report being cost-burdened** (i.e., they spend more than 30% of their income on rent and utilities, a rule determined by the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development). Critically, **78.78% report being severely rent burdened:** 15.2% (n=5) report spending 35-39% of their monthly income on rent + utilities, 12.1% (n=4) report spending 40-44%, another 15.2% (n= 5) report spending 45-49%, and **36.4% (n=12) report spending 50% or more of their monthly income on rent and utilities.** Additionally, **27.3% (n=9) of Linguistics student respondents report having to pay double rent in the last 12 months.**

Respondents, on average, spend \$363.66 on food each month. Food expenses range from \$60 to \$700/month; the **mode spending on food is \$500**. The results for medical expenses are even more striking. The mean spending is \$159.5 on medical expenses per month, with a range from \$0 to \$550. The median monthly medical expenses are \$175/month, but the mode is \$200, and **23.3% (n=8) respondents reporting spending \$200/month on medical expenses.**

Because services at UHS are free for students on student health insurance plans (all graduate student employees), these medical expenses come primarily from medications and specialist visits, which are often more expensive on the AcademicBlue plan than they are on the UT Select plan. Several students (n=5) report additional financial hardships associated with medical care, including specialist visits, acute injuries, medical debt, and chronic illness/disability. Anecdotally, students report substantial medical expenses for: compound medications not covered by insurance, hearing aids, neuromodulator injections, neuro- psychological testing, MRIs, steroid injections, transportation to distant medical providers, and psychiatric medications.

The median 12-month stipend for a student in Linguistics is \$24,750; medical and food expenses therefore account for an additional 25.4% of the average monthly income (pre-tax, calculated over a 12-month span). However, as the spread of expenses makes clear, many students spend more than these averages, and some students in the department make only the College of Liberal Arts mandated \$20,000/year.

Other financial issues reported by Linguistics students include:

- sending money home to family (n=4);
- caring for family members or pets;
- lack of summer funding (n=9);
- not being able to work jobs outside of UT due to visa restrictions (n=3);
- not being able to visit family (n=5, both domestic and international students);
- not being able to purchase research equipment or paying for research costs out of pocket;
- costs associated with research leave and/or change in employment status,
- demonstrating sufficient income (2.5 or 3x rent) for a rental application to be approved;
- rising rent forcing frequent moves and difficulties coordinating with subletters;
- divorce;
- childcare (one respondent reports a cost of \$900/month for a single child);
- vehicle maintenance;
- pressure from advisors to take lower paying jobs and limit part-time employment.

Given the financial challenges that many Linguistics students report facing, it makes sense that 84.8% report their financial stress from 3-5 on a scale of 5: **18.2% (n=6) report being extremely stressed (5), and 42.4% (n=14) report being highly stressed (4).**

With these levels of financial stress, it makes sense that **30.3% (n=10) of Linguistics student respondents have considered leaving their graduate program to pursue other careers, particularly due to their wages and housing affordability.**

View Analytics:

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#### **Mexican American and Latina/o Studies (9 responses / 13 students; 69.2% response rate):**

In Mexican American and Latina/o Studies, 66.67% of respondents report receiving their salary due to appointments as AIs, GRAs, or TAs, with the remaining 33.33% receiving an internal fellowship. Among respondents, 77.78% report having no off-campus jobs; thus, for many, this is their only source of income.

**88.89% of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies student respondents saw their rent increase from last year to this year.** These rent increases ranged from \$1-300+ (per month). Among these, 87.5% saw a significant increase, with 25% reporting an increase of \$101-200, 62.5% reporting an increase of \$201-300, and 12.5% reporting an increase of more than \$300. **88.89% of respondents report being cost-burdened** (i.e. they spend more than 30% of their income on rent, a rule determined by the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development), even before including the cost of utilities. Critically, the same **88.89% report being severely rent-burdened**: 11.11% report spending 35-39% of their monthly income on rent, 33.33% report spending 45-50%, and the other 44.44% report spending 50% or more. Additionally, **11.11% of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies student respondents report having paid double rent in the last 12 months due to travel to their home or for research.** Respondents, on average, spend \$277.78 per month on food and \$126.67 per month on medical expenses (with at least one respondent reporting not spending any because they do not have room in their budget to do so), accounting for another 24.27% of their monthly income (pre-tax) assuming they earn an annual salary of \$20,000.

Other financial issues reported by Mexican American and Latina/o Studies students include:

- medical bills and/or debt;
- not having health insurance in the summer;
- paying for parking on campus;
- wanting to live closer to campus but being unable to because it is too expensive;
- credit card debt from moving to Austin which continues to accrue each month;
- paying off school loans;
- needing to send money to family or help pay for family emergencies;
- only being able to afford graduate school/living in Austin because of support from a partner;
- and pet costs;

Given the financial challenges that many Mexican American and Latina/o Studies students report facing, it makes sense that 100% report their financial stress from 3-5 on a scale of 5; **33.33% report being highly stressed (4) and 33.33% report being extremely stressed (5).**

With these levels of financial stress, it makes sense that **66.67% of respondents report having considered leaving their graduate program to pursue other careers, particularly in relation to wages and affordability.**

View Analytics:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Wkc2gdHgmijkWb7qmP4k0RXifhRmjhgPZDgO3CTcM9k/edit#gid=666889428>

**Psychology (42 responses / 100 students; 42% response rate):**

Respondents, on average, pay:

- \$1,133.18 in rent
- \$203.38 in utilities (electricity, water, garbage, internet, etc.)
- \$359.90 in groceries
- \$85.61 in medical expenses



### **Average Monthly Expenses: \$1,782.07**

According to these survey results, the *average* rent for a Psychology student is equivalent to 48.56% of monthly income (pre-tax) assuming a salary of \$28,000. This means that the *average* Psychology student is cost-burdened (i.e., they spend more than 30% of their income on rent, a rule determined by the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development), even without including the exorbitant costs of utilities, groceries, and medical expenses. One respondent indicated that inflation in the price of groceries has made it increasingly difficult to afford to eat. Another respondent indicated that medical expenses were private but that it was a considerable portion of their salary.

This number also does not include the cost of having a vehicle (gas, insurance, loan payment, maintenance/repair) nor additional personal expenses (dining out, entertainment, hobbies, etc.) Among the 71.4% that report owning a car, respondents spend, on average, \$258.17 per month. The average for additional personal expenses is another \$266.19. For those students, then, average monthly expenses of \$2,306.43 leave them with less than two percent of their monthly income (pre-tax) assuming a salary of \$28,000. Additionally, respondents owe, on average, \$17,547.62 in student loan debt.

Other financial issues reported by Spanish & Portuguese Studies students include:

- current (COLA) stipends are unacceptably unlivable for a Top Ten school, even as students are discouraged from finding outside work;
- financial stress makes it hard to focus and value one's work;
- inequitable across colleges, even when working at the same lab doing the same job;
- rent increases with few better options besides moving farther away, which requires reliance on fewer parking options, poor public transportation, longer commute;
- continuous moves to avoid high rents;
- inaccessible, low-quality graduate student housing;
- cost of parking on campus;
- deficits every month, living off of savings, and/or needing to take on additional loans; and
- the financial setback of making so little money for six years in one's twenties.

Given the financial challenges the average Psychology student reports facing, it makes sense that **38.1% of respondents report having considered leaving their graduate program to pursue other careers, particularly in relation to wages and affordability**. One respondent explicitly stated that they personally know a lot of people who have left graduate school or decided not to apply solely because of the financial burden.

[View Analytics:](#)

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1DuoXnY\\_WctjNSux7IzZfQMKjl3WMjI8OQb5Elvc0YM/viewanalytics](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1DuoXnY_WctjNSux7IzZfQMKjl3WMjI8OQb5Elvc0YM/viewanalytics)

### **Spanish & Portuguese Studies (40 responses / 59 students; 67.8% response rate):**

In Spanish & Portuguese Studies, 87.5% of respondents report receiving their salary due to appointments as GRAs, TAs, or AIs, with the remainder receiving an internal fellowship. Among respondents, 42.5% are international students, which may partially explain why 52.5% report having no off-campus jobs; thus, for many, this is their only source of income. For 17.5% of respondents, this is also income to care for dependents.

**82.5% of Spanish & Portuguese Studies student respondents saw their rent increase from last year to this year.** These rent increases ranged from \$1-300+ (per month). Among these, 90.9% saw a significant increase, with 24.2% reporting an increase of \$51-100, 18.2% reporting an increase of \$101-200, 21.3% reporting an increase of \$201-300, and 27.3% reporting an increase of more than \$300. **92.5% of respondents report being cost-burdened** (i.e. they spend more than 30% of their income on rent, a rule determined by the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development), even before including the cost of utilities. Critically, **82.5% report being severely rent-burdened:** 15% report spending 35-39% of their monthly income on rent, 25% report spending 40-50%, and another 42.5% report spending 50% or more. Additionally, **65% of Spanish & Portuguese Studies student respondents report having paid double rent in the last 12 months due to travel to their home or for research.** Respondents, on average, spend \$502.75 per month on food and \$153.53 per month on medical expenses, accounting for another 39.38% of their monthly income (pre-tax) assuming they earn an annual salary of \$20,000.

Other financial issues reported by Spanish & Portuguese Studies students include:

- lack of summer funding, or insufficient summer funding for the cost of a plane ticket, double rent, bills, and food;
- going into debt to survive and remain in the program;
- dipping into savings every year to get by;
- inability to work more than 20 hours per week or work off-campus due to visa restrictions;
- needing to send money to home country, family, or friends;
- the rising cost of living in Austin (including rent, utilities, food, etc.);
- subscriptions for tools required for work;
- and decreased quality of work due to the stress of making tough decisions between paying for different necessities such as food, healthcare, or a subscription to an application for a project.

Given the financial challenges that many Latin American Studies students report facing, it makes sense that 100% report their financial stress from 3-5 on a scale of 5; **32.5% report being highly stressed (4)** and **60% report being extremely stressed (5).**

With these levels of financial stress, it makes sense that **67.5% of respondents report having considered leaving their graduate program to pursue other careers, particularly in relation to wages and affordability.**

[View Analytics:](#)

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1VcRRqQzJH2GhaqmwQj0vnKAwSYS7wpll-rkVG0Abi9o/viewanalytics>

**Sociology (53 responses / 73 students; 72% response rate):**

As Sociology graduate students in the Department of Sociology (College of Liberal Arts), we conducted a survey in November 2023 on the living conditions of doctoral students in the department. These are the preliminary results:

**Current income and constraints:** In the Department of Sociology, 83% of the respondents are funded through appointments as GRAs, TAs or AIs, and only 23% receive some internal or external fellowships/grants. 30% of respondents are international students, meaning stipends are their only income, as visa restrictions only allow them to work 20 hours per week. For 18% of the respondents, stipends are also an income to care for dependents. It is important to note that the majority of respondents (74%) rely exclusively on their stipends as GRAs/TAs/AIs.

44% of the students must resort to part-time jobs outside their primary source of income as TAs/RAs/IAs. Most of these part-time jobs (68.2%) are unrelated to sociological/social science research and negatively affect the time that graduate students can devote to their research.

As mentioned above, getting a second/formal job is not possible for international students because of their visa status. However, the financial situation of international students has led them to consider putting their visa status at risk in order to get a side job. The following answer from one of the respondents illustrates this situation: *"as an international student, I can't work outside of campus. I also can't work more than 20 hours. I am even considering working unofficially if I want to maintain living here."*

**Variation and Uncertainty:** The variation among stipends also raises concerns about the intra-departmental discrepancy with regard to funding. The data from the survey suggests that there is a difference of \$27,700 between the highest and the lowest annual income.

68% of the respondents experience financial uncertainty during the summer, as summer funding is only guaranteed during the first and second years. The survey also reveals that 67% of the respondents have received financial assistance from their family, friends, or community since starting their doctoral studies. Most of those who have received financial assistance depend on parents/in-laws or their romantic partner.

**Rent:** 49% of Sociology student respondents saw their rent increase in the last year, with 41.5% (n=22) reporting an increase of more than \$100. Additionally, 81.6% of the respondents mentioned being unable to afford housing and make ends meet without roommates or a romantic partner with whom to share monthly expenses. As one of the respondents noted, *"there is absolutely no way I would be able to make ends meet on our stipends alone + outside work without my partner and this includes living in unsafe conditions."* On average, 60.4% of respondents spend over 50% of their income in housing-related costs, such as rent, utilities, mortgage, and homeowner association costs.

**Other financial issues** reported by Sociology graduate students include:

- Lack of summer funding/constant ambiguity of short-term financial situation.
- Not being able to purchase research equipment or paying for research costs out of pocket.
- Costs associated with research leave and/or change in employment status.
- Rising rent forcing frequent moves and difficulties coordinating with subletters.
- Expensive childcare.
- Sending money home to family.

- Raising costs of health insurance copays (one respondent mentioned paying \$14,000 in out-of-pocket healthcare costs last year)

Additionally, **international students** in the Sociology department must deal with several situations specific to their immigration status:

- Impossibility to apply for jobs outside campus due to visa restrictions.
- Impossibility to work more than 20 hours per week.
- Not being able to visit their family in their home countries.
- Lower net income: because of additional taxes, international students receive 14% less than their U.S. peers.
- Impossibility to apply to most external fellowships/scholarships/grants.
- The costs of moving to the U.S. are higher for international students.

**Stress and Program Reconsideration:** Given the financial challenges that many Sociology students report facing, it is not surprising that **86.8%** of the respondents manifest feeling "stressed" (39.6%) and "very stressed" (47.2%) with their financial situation. With such high levels of stress, it makes sense that **80.4%** have considered leaving the program and pursuing other career options, particularly due to their low wages and lack of material stability. This situation is eloquently captured in the following responses:

*R1: housing, monthly stipend and summer being unfunded past year 2 all put together creates an environment for pushout, burnout and failure and despite these structural challenges it is the faculty that make things happen for us...*

*R2: I have no financial safety net. My partner is in severe debt due to losing their job last year, everything including groceries has become significantly more expensive. Simple groceries to keep up with my health needs have become unaffordable so I often supplement with more carbs to stay full.*

*R3: I really didn't think it would be this hard to make ends meet but its getting quite stressful to live in Austin. And as long as the lowest payed TA groups salaries are not adjusted this problem will pursue. I am having a hard time to understand TAs as the biggest source of faculty, as the interface of faculty to the undergrads are paid this low. Sorry I wrote so long but I hope all of these can be heard by faculty, chair and COLA.*

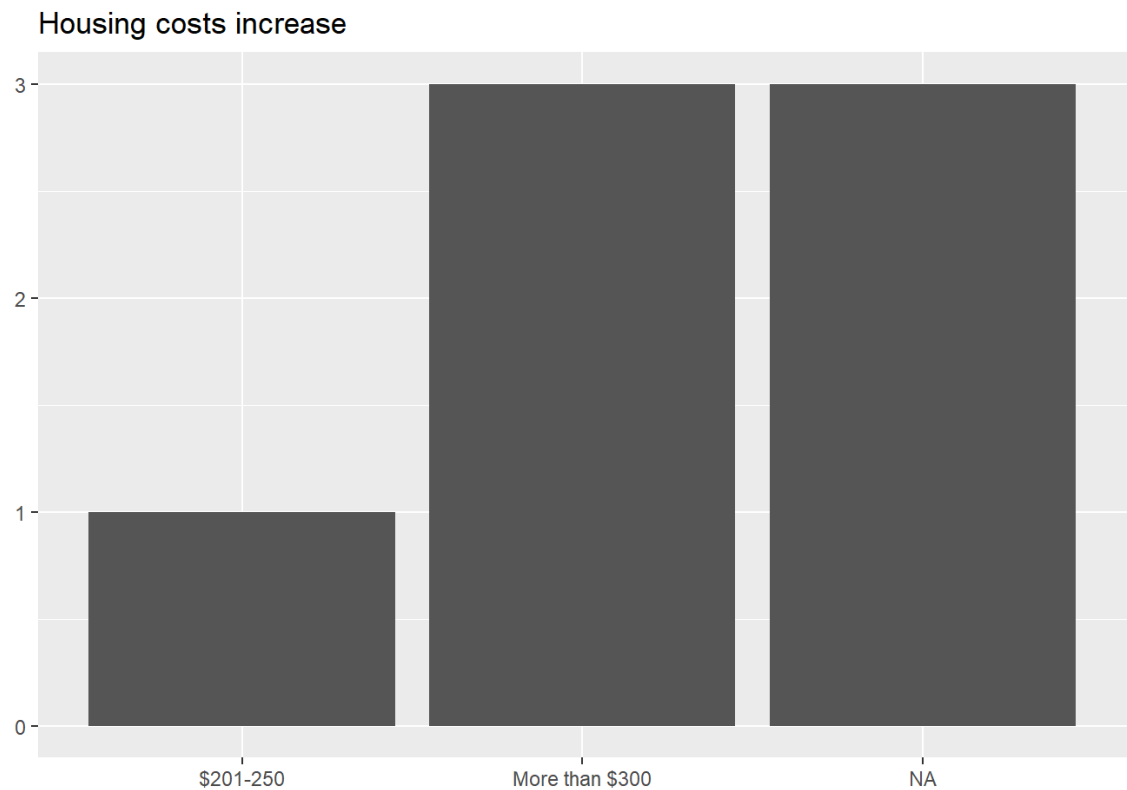
### **College of Communication:**

**Advertising (7 responses / ~33 students; 21.21% response rate):**

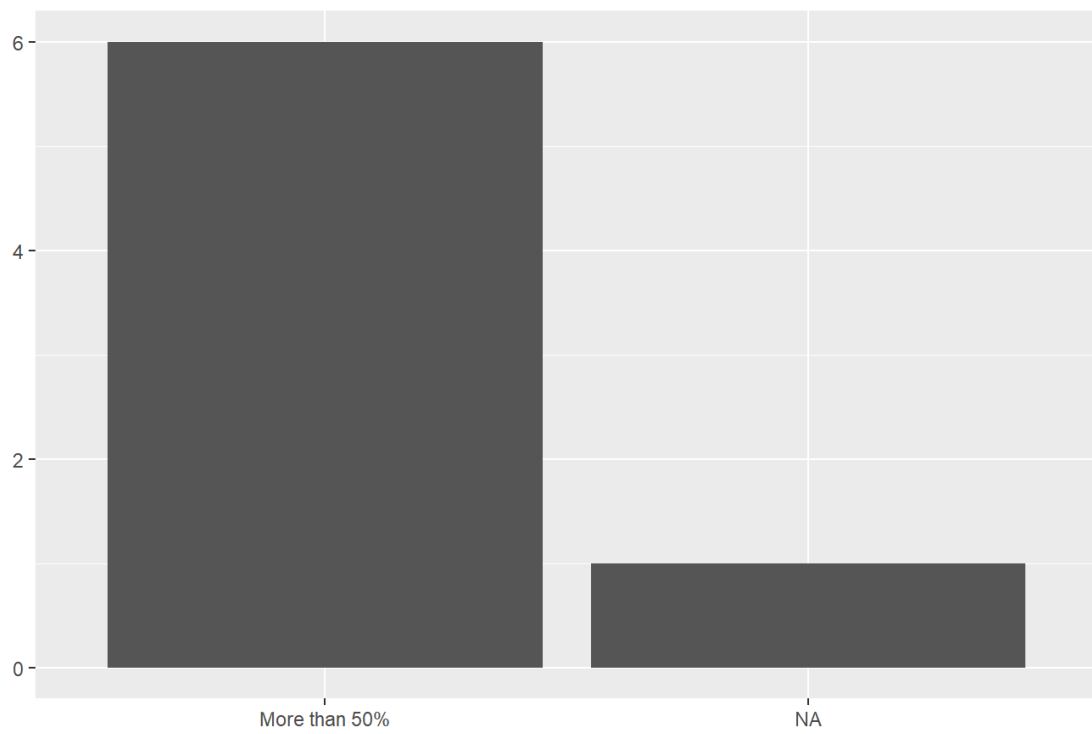
In Advertising, all respondents report receiving their salary due to appointments as GRAs or TAs, with only one of them receiving an external scholarship. Among respondents, 58% are international students; thus, for many, this is their only source of income.

**71% of Advertising student respondents saw their rent increase from last year to this year.** These rent increases ranged from \$1-300+. One respondent saw an increase between \$201-250, and three of them had an increase of more than \$300. Graduate students are extremely concerned about rising housing costs, **with the majority using more than 50% of their salary to pay rent.**

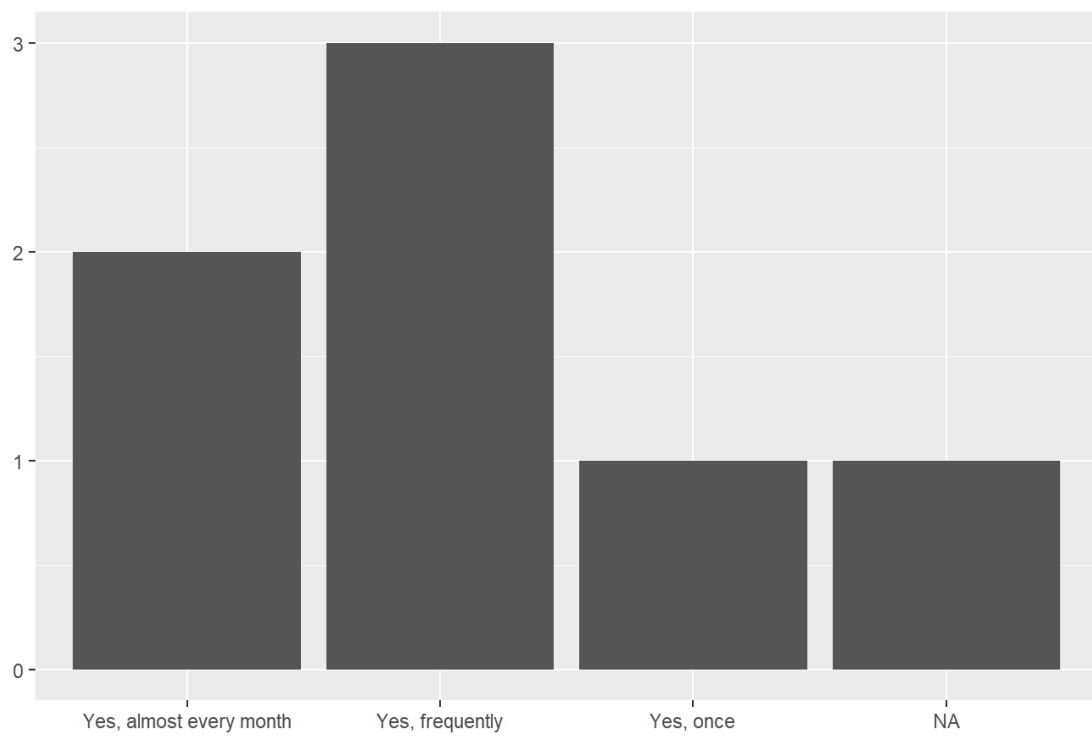
**All Advertising student respondents report using their personal savings to complement their pay.** On average, students spend \$290 on groceries and \$45 on medical expenses. The majority reported changing how they shop for groceries (57%) and how they enjoy their weekends (71%) to make ends meet.



Percentage of salary that goes to pay housing costs



Use of personal savings



**Students reported the following problems:** *“International students can only get 20hr/week, so it's difficult to make a living”; “While the department has made slight increments to the GRA and TA stipend, it is extremely insufficient in meeting inflation and the rising monthly rent. In fact, our monthly stipend is insufficient in meeting the minimum income for SMART housing for several apartment complexes”; "I had to get a second job while trying to complete school"; "Constant cost increases with no increasing salary and limited number of hours I can work at school".*

Given the financial challenges Advertising students report facing, it makes sense that **71% of respondents reported having considered leaving the graduate program to pursue other career options, particularly in relation to wages and affordability.**



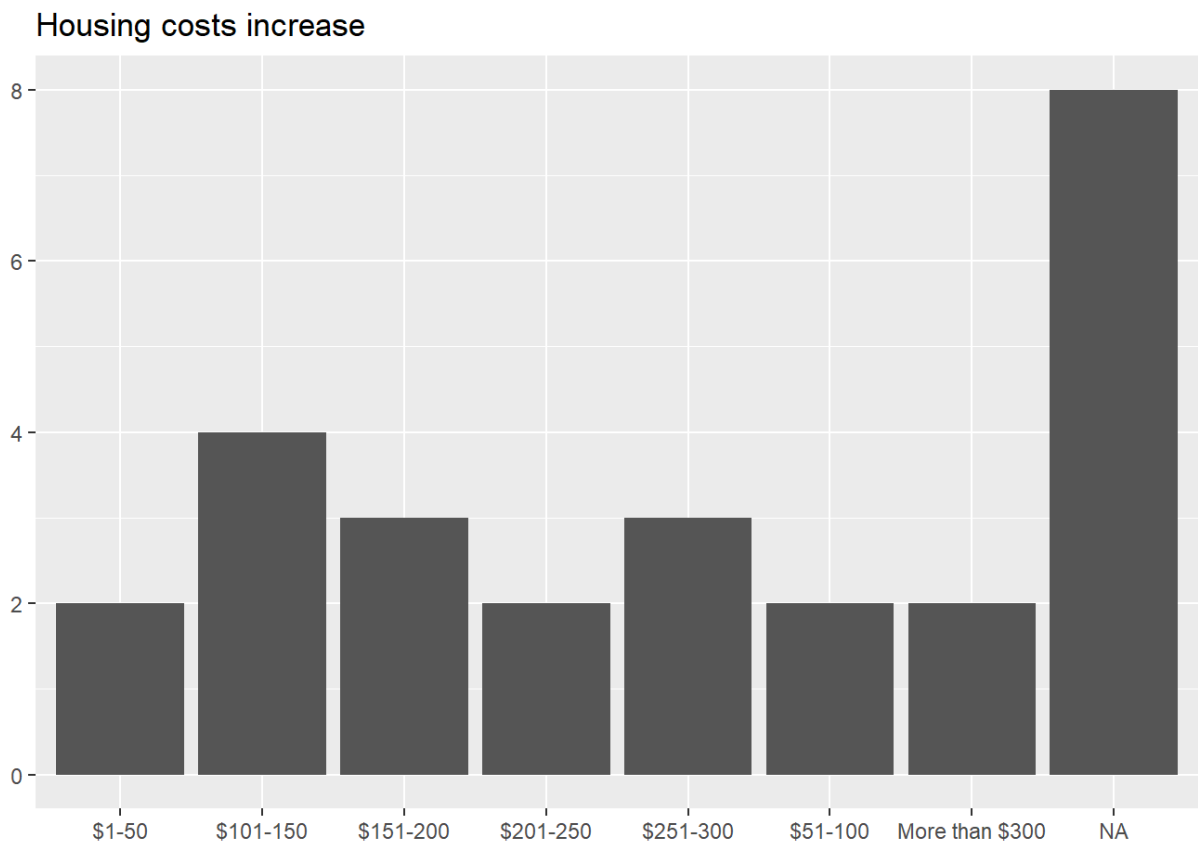
**Journalism and Media (26 responses / 64 students; 40.63% response rate):**

In Journalism and Media, our cost of living survey revealed that graduate students are dissatisfied with how much they are being paid, particularly GRAs. It also revealed that these students are extremely concerned about rising housing costs, **with the majority using more than 50% of their salary to pay rent**. Importantly, graduate students reported that pay concerns are having an impact on their mental health.

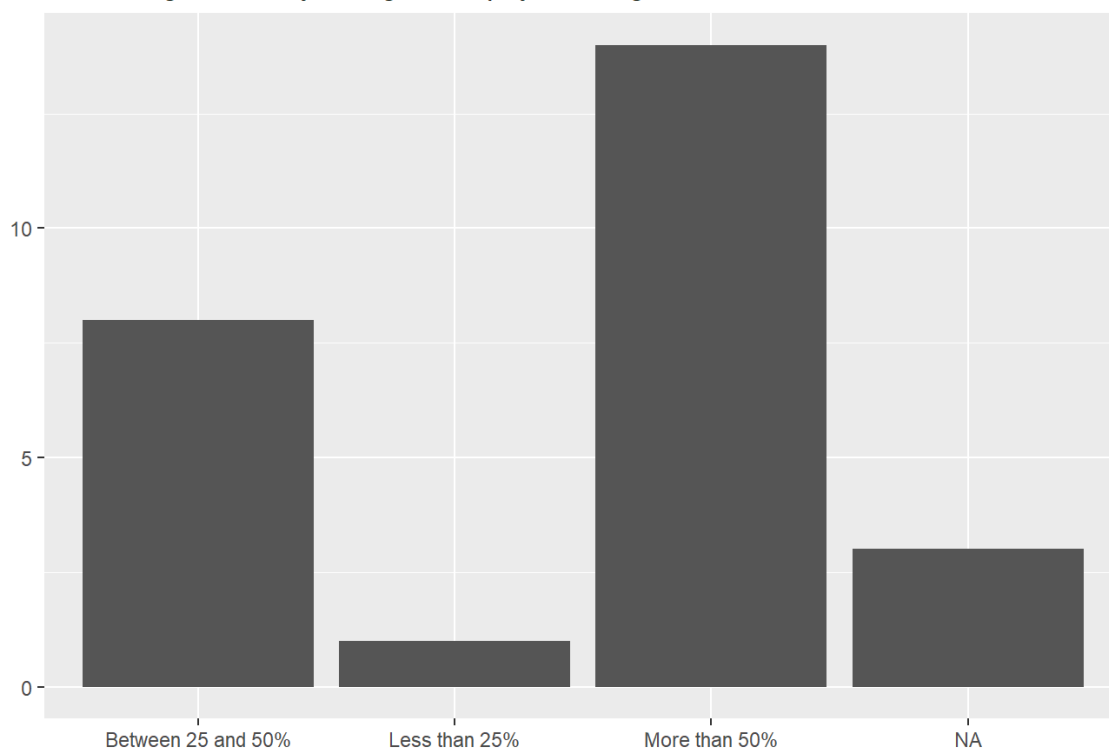
All respondents report receiving their salary due to appointments as GRAs or TAs, with five of them receiving an external scholarship. Among respondents, 58% are international students; thus, for many, this is their only source of income.

**81% of JM student respondents saw their rent increase from last year to this year.** These rent increases ranged from \$1-300+. Approximately 30% of the students saw an increase between \$1-150, 30% had an increase between \$150-300, and 10% had an increase above \$300.

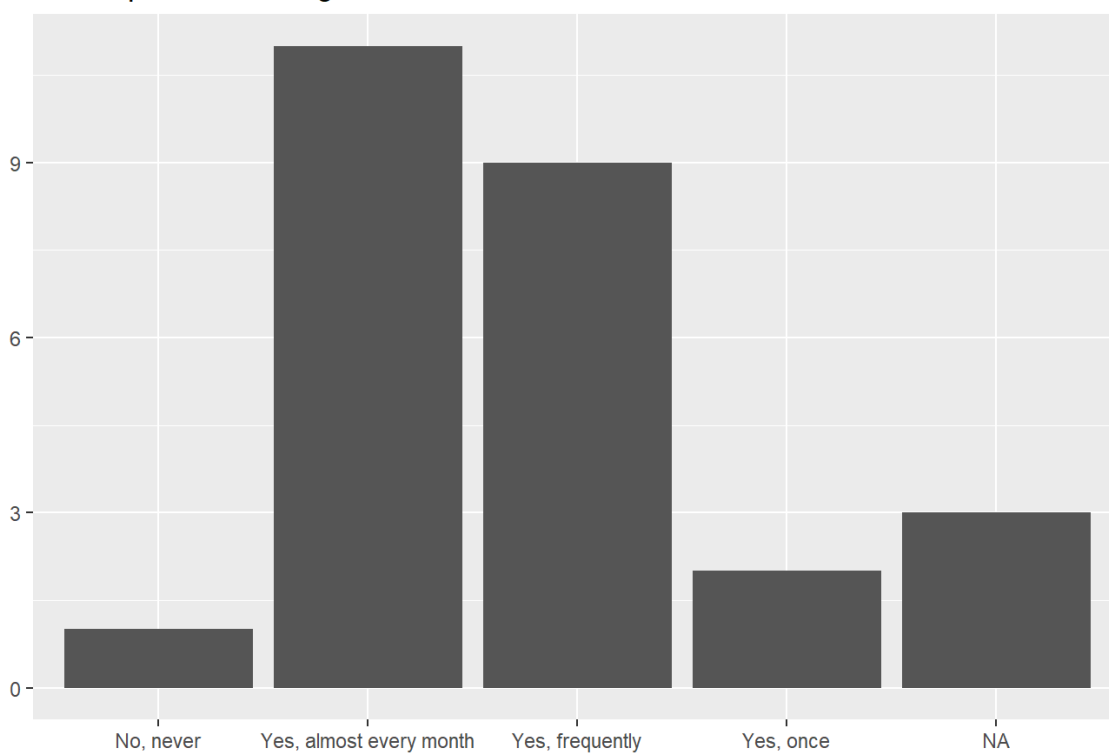
**Most JM students use their personal savings to complement their pay.** On average, JM students spend \$445 on groceries and \$90 on medical expenses. The majority reported changing how they shop for groceries (62%) and how they enjoy their weekends (70%) to make ends meet.



Percentage of salary that goes to pay housing costs



Use of personal savings



**Students reported the following problems:** *“I wasn't able to find any funding over the summer, and this took a serious toll on my mental health and my savings account”; “food items are overpriced on campus and generally in the city. and due to grad school workload, it is difficult to pursue more economical dining options”; “financial concerns have negatively impacted my mental health, my social life, and my relationships. I often isolate myself from my social group because I cannot spend money”; “after I paid for everything, including rent and utilities, I don't have much left to save money”; “Considering I moved with a family, I know it would be harder [...]. However I am concerned if I will be able to make it”; “I think there is not enough financial support for international students who have just moved to the US. We had to wait a long time before getting our first payment”*

Given the financial challenges JM students report facing, it makes sense that **80% of respondents reported having considered leaving the graduate program to pursue other career options, particularly in relation to wages and affordability.**

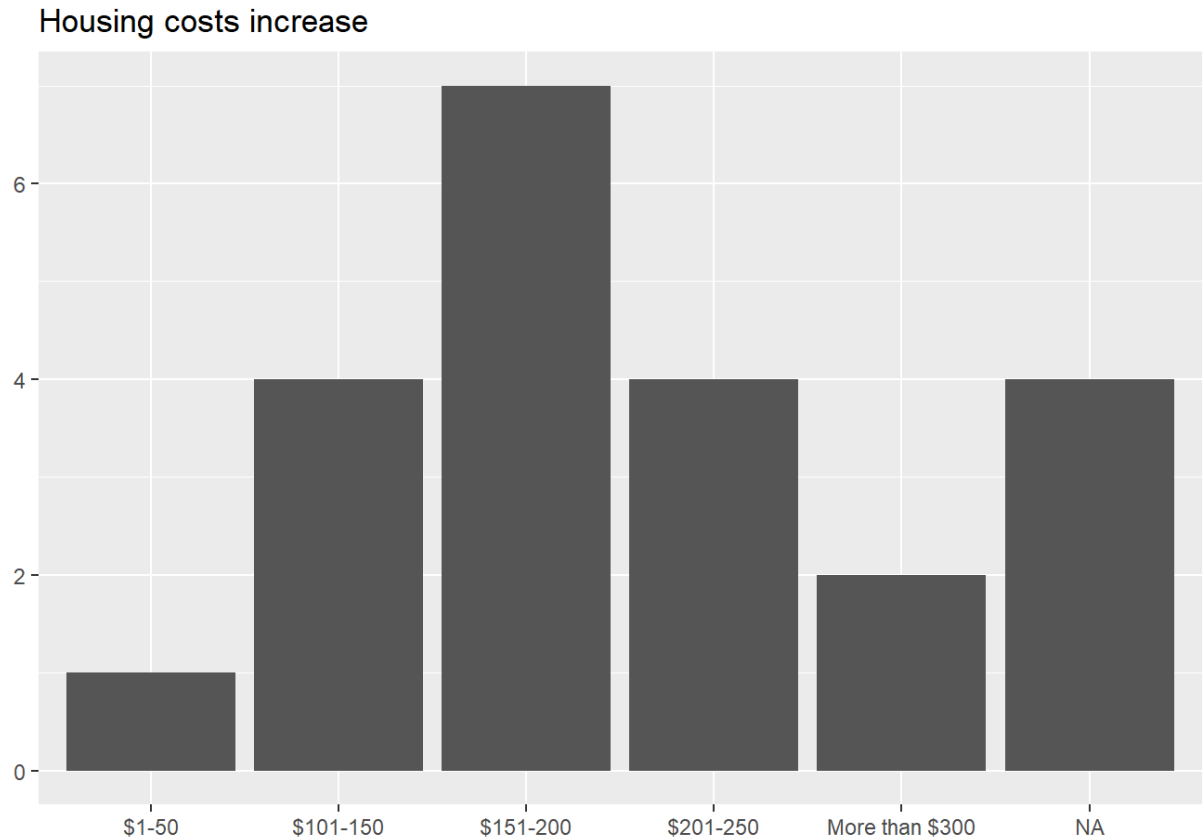
**Radio, Television and Film (22 responses / 115 students; 19.13% response rate):**

In RTF, our cost of living survey revealed that graduate students are very dissatisfied with how much they are being paid, particularly GRAs. It also revealed that these students are extremely concerned about rising housing costs, **with the majority using more than 50% of their salary to pay rent**. Importantly, graduate students reported that pay concerns are having an impact on their mental health.

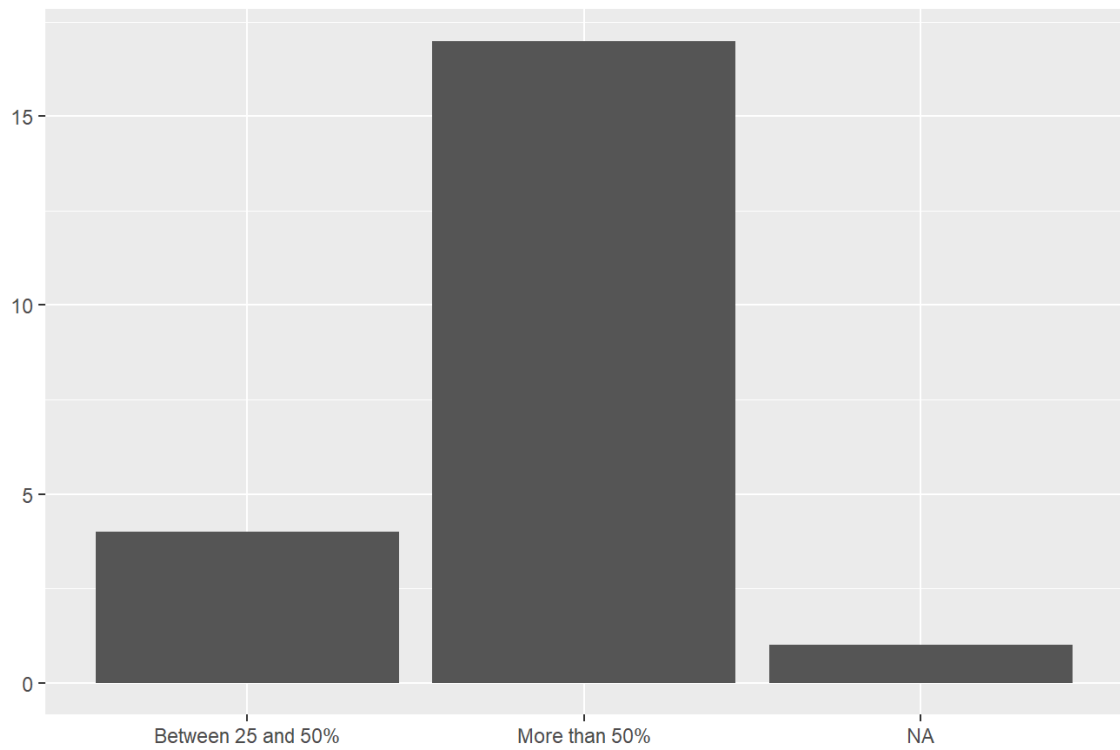
72% of the respondents report receiving their salary due to appointments as GRAs or TAs, with only one of them receiving an external scholarship. Among respondents, 14% are international students; thus, for some, this is their only source of income.

**81% of RTF student respondents saw their rent increase from last year to this year.** These rent increases ranged from \$1-300+. Approximately 25% of the students saw an increase between \$1-150, 50% had an increase between \$150-300, and 10% had an increase above \$300.

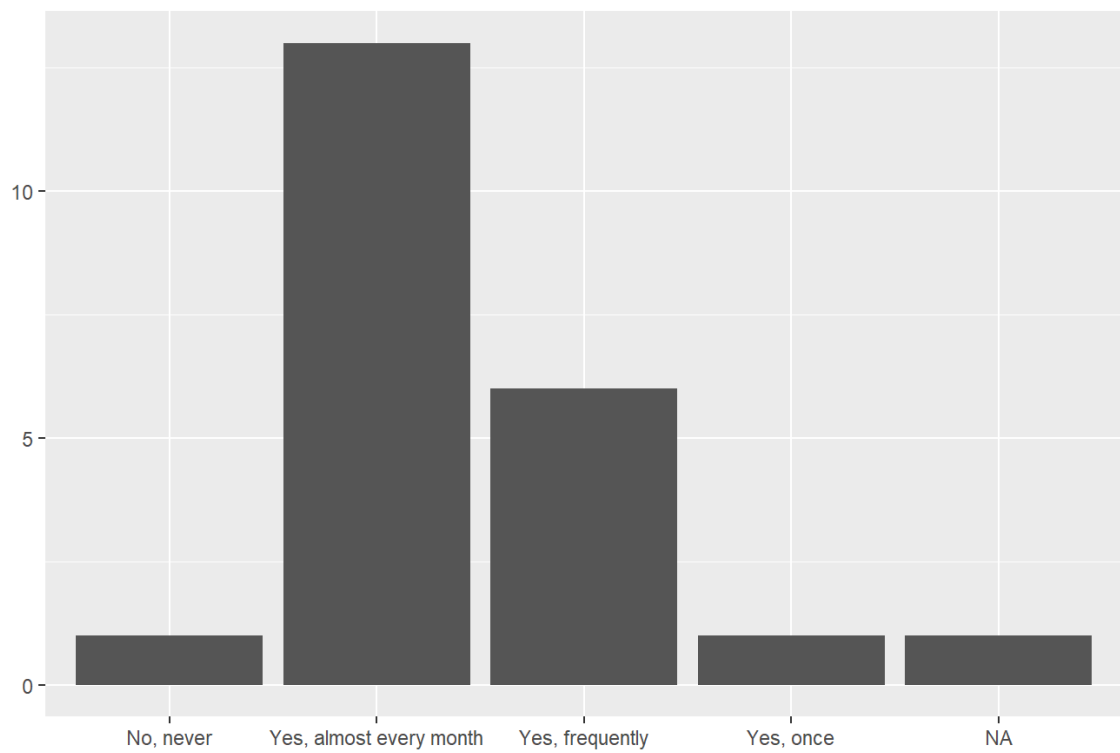
**95% of RTF students use their personal savings to complement their pay.** On average, students spend \$330 on groceries and \$100 on medical expenses. The majority reported changing how they shop for groceries (81%) and how they enjoy their weekends (77%) to make ends meet.



Percentage of salary that goes to pay housing costs



Use of personal savings



**Students reported the following problems:** *"It is difficult to find motivation to work when we are so horribly underpaid"; "Because of the lack of funding for MA students, I am depleting my savings account to pay for school and taking out loans"; "I am grateful that I have the opportunity to study [...]. However, we are not paid enough by the department to cover our costs of living. I live with my partner and we are able to cover our expenses. Many times, my parents help us economically. We try to avoid using our savings to cover our expenses. But lately, the rising costs of rent, groceries, utilities, and gasoline have taken a toll on our finances. It is difficult to plan for the future when we have little financial stability"; "I get paid too little for how hard I work! I seriously don't even want to do grad school sometimes because of it!"; "I am grateful for the support I receive, but I'm not going to stay in academia because, considering the 24/7 nature of the job combined with the low pay, I don't think it's a sustainable career option for me".*

Given the financial challenges RTF students report facing, it makes sense that **77% of respondents report having considered leaving the graduate program to pursue other career options, particularly in relation to wages and affordability.**

## **College of Engineering:**

### **Civil, Architectural, and Environmental Engineering (195 responses / 373 students; 52.2% response rate)**

Respondents, on average, pay:

- \$1,026 in rent
- \$152 in utilities
- \$428 in groceries
- \$54 on activities that support their mental health and well-being
- \$53 on medical expenses

**Average Monthly Expenses: \$1,713**

According to these survey results, the *average* rent for a CAEE student is equivalent to 42% of the Cockrell School of Engineering minimum monthly salary (pre-tax). This means that the *average* CAEE student is cost-burdened (i.e., they spend more than 30% of their income on rent, a rule determined by the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development), even before including the cost of utilities. The *average* CAEE student's total monthly expenses are \$1,713, or more than 70% of the minimum monthly stipend (pre-tax). Additionally, respondents owe, on average, \$9,260 in student loan debt. Considering that these results represent the *average*, one must remember that a significant percentage of CAEE students reported even *higher* costs.

Four (4) students explicitly mentioned that they cannot afford to spend any money or time on activities that support their mental health and well-being given their current salary and working conditions; two (2) students explicitly mentioned that they cannot afford to spend any money or time on medical services given their current salary and working conditions.

Given the financial challenges the average CAEE student reports facing, it makes sense that **42.5% of respondents report that they have, on some level, considered leaving the program or not pursuing a PhD due to wages.**

View Analytics:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/18i9l-obKl-KdYgB\\_IAs6bTvV5RtDs1Enjd1lVjMHUIU/viewanalytics](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/18i9l-obKl-KdYgB_IAs6bTvV5RtDs1Enjd1lVjMHUIU/viewanalytics)

## **College of Natural Sciences:**



**Human Development and Family Sciences (27 responses / 31 students; 87.1% response rate):**

The following is a report on the results of an HDFS graduate student-led cost-of-living survey and highlights key issues of concern.

HDFS graduate student TA and RAships pay, **on average, a monthly stipend of approximately \$2500**. Most students report earning income through their department TA/RA appointments. Several students report having additional jobs, and international students indicate that due to their visa status they are unable to pursue additional work even if their stipend is inadequate to cover the cost of living.

Within the HDFS graduate program, most students report that they are currently renting their personal housing (78%) and most live by themselves (48.1%). 70.4% of students report that their housing expenses (rent/mortgage) cost between \$1000-\$1500, and 25% report housing expenses between \$1501-\$2000. Based on such results **all students are spending between 40-80% of their stipend on rent/mortgage alone. This means that all HDFS students are cost-burdened** (i.e., they spend more than 30% of their income on rent, a rule determined by the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development), even before including the cost of utilities. Furthermore, the cost of housing in Austin has forced many HDFS graduate student workers to make difficult choices between location, safety, and comfort.

“Rent hike is a real issue. There are people out there donating plasma just to make ends meet.”

“The university housing is old, but cheap. There is a lot of rust on the appliances and metal in the apartment. Some of the tile floors have asbestos. The floor is cracking due to the floor coming up from different plants and trees growing underground.”

“The living experience is good but the rent is too expensive and it has increased 25% this year.”

“I love my house but I had to live in Leander to afford it. So my commute is insanely long.”

“I love my apartment. It’s close to campus. My stipend alone does not allow me to live here, I have to have other sources of income as well.”

“In order to afford housing, we have to choose between being close to school but in an unsafe area, or far from school without public transportation.”

Moreover, housing is not the only expense for HDFS graduate student workers. A majority (**52%**) **report spending more than \$200 per month on utilities** (e.g., cable, electric, garbage, internet, recycling, water). **Groceries are another significant monthly expense:** 33.3% report spending \$200+, 33.3% report spending \$300+, and 30% report spending more than \$400. Additionally, **60% of students report monthly medical expenses averaging \$100 or more**. HDFS graduate students also report living far from campus, with **less than 19% reporting living within 15 minutes**. This forces students into choosing between lengthy commutes or owning a vehicle. Among the **62% who report having a vehicle, expenses range from \$100-500+/month**. Finally, it is important to note that this survey cannot capture all possible expenses or speak to each individual’s unique living situation.

View Analytics:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1FaNQqrlzLSWsOdiAShLgi2twakXU8h9P375XMngyNgM/viewanalytics>

**Physics (76 responses / 150 students; 51% response rate):**

During the 2022 Spring semester the Graduate Welfare Committee of the Physics Department administered a cost of living survey amongst the graduate student body. With a response rate of over 50%, students were asked to provide monthly costs for rent, utilities, food, transportation, care for dependents, as well as personal and medical expenses. A summary of the results are presented below.

| Expenses     | Mean $\pm$ Std. Dev. |
|--------------|----------------------|
| Rent         | \$1,057 $\pm$ 344    |
| Utilities    | \$186 $\pm$ 328      |
| Food         | \$359 $\pm$ 151      |
| Total Costs* | \$2,115 $\pm$ 760    |

Table 1: Summary of the average monthly expenses. \*Total costs include transportation, care for dependents, personal, and medical costs.

It is important to consider that this survey was administered at a time before students renewed leases for housing, meaning that increases in housing costs for the new academic year were not measured.

For the 21-22 academic year the graduate student stipend for TA's and RA's within our department was \$29,376, or \$2,448 a month. After taxes students take home pay is \$26,576, or about \$2,215 a month.

Students' average monthly costs from the survey were 96% of the take home pay with 37% of students reporting an average cost above the take home pay. It is important to note that the survey does not account for any additional expenses that fall outside of the scope of the categories listed above. With nearly all take home pay being used for essential expenses, several respondents expressed concern that they were unable to maintain an emergency fund.

As part of the survey, students were asked whether they have considered leaving the graduate program to pursue other career options, particularly in relation to wages and affordability. **A striking 52% of respondents indicated that they have considered leaving the department or would consider leaving if the cost of living continues to increase.**

A more detailed report can be found [here](#).

A Compensation and Cost of Living survey was conducted at the end of the 2022 Fall semester.<sup>[15]</sup> Completed surveys were received from 91 individuals, representing 26% of enrolled SoA graduate students.<sup>[16]</sup>

| <b>Degree</b>                                      | <b>Enrolled</b> | <b>Final</b> | <b>%</b>   |
|--|-----------------|--------------|------------|
| MSHP (Historic Preservation)                       | 6               | 4            | 67%        |
| PhD in Architectural History                       | 11              | 6            | 54%        |
| PhD in Architectural Sustainability                | 1               | 1            | 100%       |
| PhD in Community and Regional Planning             | 23              | 9            | 39%        |
| MSCRP+MPAff  | 9               | 3            | 33%        |
| MSCRP (Community and Regional Planning)            | 65              | 21           | 32%        |
| MSUD (Urban Design)                                | 20              | 6            | 30%        |
| MSUD+MSCRP   | 7               | 2            | 29%        |
| MID I (Interior Design, First-Professional)        | 28              | 6            | 21%        |
| M Arch (Architecture, First-Professional)          | 114             | 24           | 21%        |
| MLA I (Landscape Architecture, First-Professional) | 44              | 9            | 20%        |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>348</b>      | <b>91</b>    | <b>26%</b> |

In some of the analysis, data has been combined for degree programs to help maintain anonymity:

| <b>Degree</b>  | <b>N</b> |
|--|----------|
| PhD in Architectural History or Architectural Sustainability | 7        |
| PhD in Community and Regional Planning                       | 9        |
| MSCRP+MPAff and MSCRP (Community and Regional Planning)      | 24       |
| MSUD (Urban Design) and MSUD+MSCRP                           | 8        |

<sup>15</sup> The survey was developed over several weeks with feedback and support from Graduate students, faculty, and School of Architecture administration. We greatly appreciate their help with this effort.

<sup>16</sup> None of the students in the MAAD (Advanced Architectural Design), MID II (Interior Design, Post-Professional), MLA II (Landscape Architecture, Post-Professional), MSAS (Architectural Studies), MSSD (Sustainable Design), or MSSD+MSCRP program responded to the survey.

|   |    |
|---|----|
| M Arch (Architecture, First-Professional)   | 24 |
| MSHP (Historic Preservation), MID I (Interior Design, First-Professional), and MLA I (Landscape Architecture, First-Professional) | 19 |

## Compensation

The majority of the SoA graduate students who responded to the survey work for the University of Texas in some capacity. Of the respondents, 33% are Teaching Assistants, 35% are Graduate Research Assistants, and 9% have another job with the University. 30% of these enrolled graduate students working for the University have a job or appointment outside of the School of Architecture. The average hourly wage within the School of Architecture is \$19.00 an hour with a standard deviation of +/- \$6.69. This variation is high relative to the average hourly wage so, as expected, there is also significant variation by the sub-populations including an average \$1.49 higher hourly rate for non-international students ([see Compensation Cross Tabulation](#)).

The median monthly income for an SoA graduate student is \$1,818. For the 32% of students with outside employment the average monthly income is only 75% of what students employed by the University earn.

|                         | All        | International | Non-International |
|-------------------------|------------|---------------|-------------------|
| <b>UT Employed</b>      | \$1,974.61 | \$2,073.92    | \$1,932.05        |
| <b>Outside Employed</b> | \$1,378.07 | \$2,605.17    | \$1,241.72        |

A majority of students pay instate tuition (64%) with most of the remaining students receiving a non-resident tuition exemption (43%). 57% of students receive a tuition reduction benefit. There is a disparity between international and non-international students, with only 48% of international students receiving tuition support. Among the graduate students employed by the University, only 67% receive support for health insurance.

## Costs

Median out of pocket tuition and fees are \$3,762 with a predictably wide variation ( $\pm$  \$2,971). Other average expenses include:

| Expenses  | Mean $\pm$ Std. Dev.   |
|-----------|------------------------|
| Rent      | \$1,152 ( $\pm$ \$605) |
| Utilities | \$126 ( $\pm$ \$89)    |
| Food      | \$419 ( $\pm$ \$240)   |

|  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| Medical (premium and out of pocket)                | \$186 (±\$481)            |
| Transportation (rideshare, gas, insurance, etc.)   | \$218 (±\$170)            |
| Cell Phone   | \$42 (±\$41)              |
| Other (entertainment, clothing, incidentals, etc.) | \$326 (±\$333)            |
| <b>Total Costs*</b>                                | <b>\$2,305 (±\$1,067)</b> |

### Financial Hardship

92% of the responding graduate students reported feeling financial stress at least some of the time during the fall semester.

That semester, the average SoA graduate student ran a \$500/month deficit, not including tuition and fees. Including those costs, the average SoA graduate student has a financial deficit of more than \$11,600 per academic year. For graduate student employees the average annual deficit is \$8,670 and for non-student workers it is more than \$21,000 a year.

#### Average Monthly Deficit/Surplus by Program

| SoA Program                               | Employment      | All      | International | Non-International |
|---|-----------------|----------|---------------|-------------------|
| PhD in Architecture                       | UT Employee     | -\$114   | -\$26         | -\$232            |
| PhD in CRP                                | UT Employee     | \$377    | \$455         | \$182             |
|   | Not UT Employee | -\$659   | -\$843        | -\$475            |
| MSCRP+MPAff and MSCRP                     | UT Employee     | -\$308   | \$138         | -\$409            |
|   | Not UT Employee | -\$681   | N/A           | -\$681            |
| MSUD and MSUD+MSCRP                       | UT Employee     | \$797    | \$797         | N/A               |
|   | Not UT Employee | \$630    | N/A           | \$630             |
| M Arch (Architecture, First-Professional) | UT Employee     | -\$748   | -\$1,021      | -\$709            |
|   | Not UT Employee | -\$1,529 | N/A           | -\$1,529          |
| MSHP, MID I, and MLA I                    | UT Employee     | -\$349   | -\$2,508      | -\$169            |
|   | Not UT Employee | -\$1,843 | N/A           | -\$1,843          |

20% of SoA graduate students are supporting a child, partner, or elder and more than a third care for pets. As part of the survey, students were asked whether they have considered leaving the graduate program

because of financial concerns. Responses to this question vary by program and between students with and without dependents.

| <b>SoA Programs</b>   | <b>This semester, have you considered leaving your program for financial reasons?</b> |  |
|---|---|--|
| PhD in Architectural History or Architectural Sustainability  | 57%   |  |
| PhD in Community and Regional Planning  | 22%   |  |
| MSCRP+MPAff and MSCRP (Community and Regional Planning)   | 42%   |  |
| MSUD (Urban Design) and MSUD+MSCRP  | 0%  |  |
| M Arch (Architecture, First-Professional)   | 25%   |  |
| MSHP (Historic Preservation), MID I (Interior Design, First-Professional), and MLA I (Landscape Architecture, First-Professional) | 42%   |  |
| <b>Dependents</b>   |   |  |
| Graduate students with human dependents   | 39%   |  |
| Graduate students with non-human dependents   | 35%   |  |
| Graduate students without dependents  | 31%   |  |

### Compensation Cross Tabulation

|   | All     | Int     | Non-int | int:non |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| All UT Jobs   | \$19.52 | \$18.48 | \$19.97 | 92.53%  |
| SOA hourly  | \$19.00 | \$19.44 | \$18.81 | 103.34% |
| Other Academic hourly   | \$22.00 | \$19.08 | \$22.59 | 84.46%  |
| <b>PhD in Architectural History or Architectural Sustainability</b> | \$25.70 | \$21.09 | \$30.30 | 69.59%  |
| TA  | \$28.56 | \$19.68 | \$37.45 | 52.53%  |
| GRA   | \$16.00 | No Data | \$16.00 |         |
| Other   | \$23.92 | \$23.92 | No Data |         |
| Outside   | \$16.00 | No Data | \$16.00 |         |
| <b>PhD in Community and Regional Planning</b>                       | \$21.16 | \$20.61 | \$22.55 | 91.39%  |
| TA  | \$15.19 | \$15.19 | No Data |         |
| GRA   | \$22.16 | \$21.96 | \$22.55 | 97.39%  |
| Other   | No Data | No Data | No Data |         |
| Outside   | \$15.19 | \$15.19 | No Data |         |
| <b>MSCRP+MPAff and MSCRP (Community and Regional Planning)</b>      | \$22.18 | \$20.58 | \$22.44 | 91.69%  |
| TA  | \$15.93 | No Data | No Data |         |
| GRA   | \$23.29 | \$21.96 | \$22.55 | 97.39%  |
| Other   | \$30.03 | No Data | No Data |         |
| Outside   | \$22.31 | \$15.19 | No Data |         |
| <b>MSUD (Urban Design) and MSUD+MSCRP</b>                           | \$15.97 | \$15.97 | No Data |         |
| TA  | \$12.87 | \$12.87 | No Data |         |



|  |         |         |         |         |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| GRA  | \$18.26 | \$18.26 | No Data |         |
| Other  | No Data | No Data | No Data |         |
| Outside  | \$12.87 | \$12.87 | No Data |         |
| <b>M Arch (Architecture,<br/>First-Professional)</b>   | \$16.32 | \$13.08 | \$16.78 | 77.92%  |
| TA   | \$16.35 | No Data | \$16.35 |         |
| GRA  | \$22.05 | No Data | \$22.05 |         |
| Other  | \$14.80 | \$13.08 | \$16.53 | 79.12%  |
| Outside  | \$14.30 | No Data | \$14.30 |         |
| <b>MSHP (Historic Preservation), MID I<br/>(Interior Design, First-Professional),<br/>and MLA I (Landscape Architecture,<br/>First-Professional)</b> | \$17.35 | \$22.05 | \$16.96 | 129.98% |
| TA   | \$15.15 | No Data | \$15.15 |         |
| GRA  | \$18.48 | No Data | \$18.48 |         |
| Other  | \$22.05 | 22.05   | No Data |         |
| Outside  | \$17.48 | No Data | \$17.48 |         |

**College of Education:**

### STEM Education (13 responses):

In STEM Education, 84% of respondents are funded through appointments as GRAs, AIs or/and TAs, with 30.8% of them receiving an internal or external fellowship. For 69.2% of respondents finding employment at university is stressful and uncertain. 53.9% students reported satisfaction with their employment status in range 1-3 on a scale of 5. While 92.3% respondents reported that the funding situation in the department is or may be negatively affecting their research output. International students comprise 30.8% of the respondents.

More than 50% of the respondents earn less than \$22,000 annually. This equates to earning less \$22 per hour and is not sufficient to fulfill even the bare minimum estimated expenditure on housing, food, health and taxes (\$1000, \$200, \$200, \$400). Not surprisingly, 75% of respondents reported that they are NOT able to live comfortably with their current income. To fulfill their financial needs around 63% of respondents have to depend on additional off-campus employment for up to 12 (44%) or even 13-20 (33%) hours per week. The impact of these additional jobs on research and education is described by one respondent as follows: *"The additional job I have to work on the side definitely takes time away from being able to focus on research/being a student, but I have no other choice."* Another respondent states, *"I have a partner that is also employed, and his financial contribution is what keeps me comfortably housed and fed. If I were to live on my wages alone, I do not think my living situation would be as stable."* Evidently, graduate studies in STEM Education are not equitably accessible to independent men and women who have no other financial support besides university funding.

**72.7% of STEM Education student respondents saw their rent increase from last year to this year.** These rent increases ranged from \$50-200+ (per month). **91.7% of respondents** spend more than 30% of their income on rent and utilities. This expenditure is more than 50% for 33% of respondents. With the funding they receive, 58.4% respondents report their satisfaction with their housing situation in the range 2-3 on a scale of 5. Respondents, on average, spend \$373 per month on food and \$134 per month on medical expenses, accounting for another 27% of their monthly income (pre-tax) assuming they earn an annual salary of \$22,000.

Other financial issues reported by STEM Education students include:

- having to spend around an hour for oneway travel to campus because housing near UT Austin is very expensive;
- No funding guarantee for the duration of the PhD program
- inability to work more than 20 hours per week or work off-campus due to visa restrictions;
- difficulty in affording child care;
- timing of stipend payments;

With these levels of financial stress, it makes sense that **61.5% of respondents report having considered leaving their graduate program to pursue other careers, particularly in relation to wages and affordability.** As captured in a response, *"I lost hope and encouragement to be a good professor in the future and I am looking for non academic jobs."*

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1kbnzw64sAp1cloiT1yq2Ic9HyQja6Vma0s9JbnPSINg/viewanalytics>