



**GRADUATE STUDENT HOUSING WORKING GROUP: ANNUAL UPDATE
2021–2022**

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Introduction

In response to recommendations from the [Graduate Student Housing Working Group’s Report to the Chancellor \(August 2018\)](#), Housing & Residential Services (HRS) has continued its work to improve MIT’s graduate student residential experience. The Graduate Housing Working Group (GHWG), formed in accordance with the 2018 Report recommendation, continues to bring together stakeholders from across campus to ensure that the Institute is well-positioned to evaluate and respond effectively to the housing needs of MIT’s graduate student community.

The aim of the GHWG is to analyze and report on major forces impacting the supply and availability of graduate student housing in the Greater Cambridge area while also assessing demand for different types of on-campus housing options. In addition, the GHWG provides advice and insights about long term and strategic housing priorities, including major on-campus graduate housing building projects such as the recently-opened Graduate Tower at Site 4 and the future West Campus graduate residence which is slated to open in Fall 2024. Progress on these areas are highlighted in this annual report.

GHWG AREAS OF FOCUS (AY 2021–2022)



The GHWG focus for Fall 2021 is on the most pressing current work streams (with the following order not necessarily reflecting priority):

1. Examine ways to optimize occupancy and to identify and address the root causes of vacancies in the graduate housing system.
2. Receive regular progress updates on the West Campus Graduate Housing project, and inform response to community impacts.
3. Provide feedback on the housing rate setting process and stipend setting process.
4. Develop Graduate Student Support and Housing Principles.
5. Evaluate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the local housing market, and the impact of that on graduate students.

GHWG MEMBERSHIP (AY 2021–2022)

Faculty and Administrators

Ian Waitz, *Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate and Graduate Education*
Suzy Nelson, *Vice Chancellor and Dean for Student Life*
Jon Alvarez, *Director of Campus Planning*
Thomas Kochan, *Chair, Committee on Campus Planning*
Katharina Ribbeck, *Graduate Head of House Convener*
Krystyn Van Vliet, *Associate Provost*
Nuria Jane Chimeno, *Associate Head of House, Sidney-Pacific*

Graduate Student Council (GSC) Officer Liaison

AJ Miller, *GSC President*

Graduate Students (GSC Representatives)

Jonathan Behrens, *Housing and Community Affairs (HCA) Chair*
Nick Allen, *HCA - Advocacy*
Denise Tellbach, *HCA - Advocacy*
Vincent Zu, *GSC Treasurer*
Sebastian Sandoval-Olascoaga, *GSC representative, PhD student*
Soad Mana

Conveners

David Friedrich, *Senior Associate Dean for Housing & Residential Services*
Jonathan Behrens, *HCA Chair*

Staff to the Working Group

Peter Cummings, *Executive Director for DSL Administration and Finance*
Rich Hilton, *Associate Dean and Director of Operations and Residential Services*

The **August 2018 Graduate Student Housing Working Group key recommendations** were:

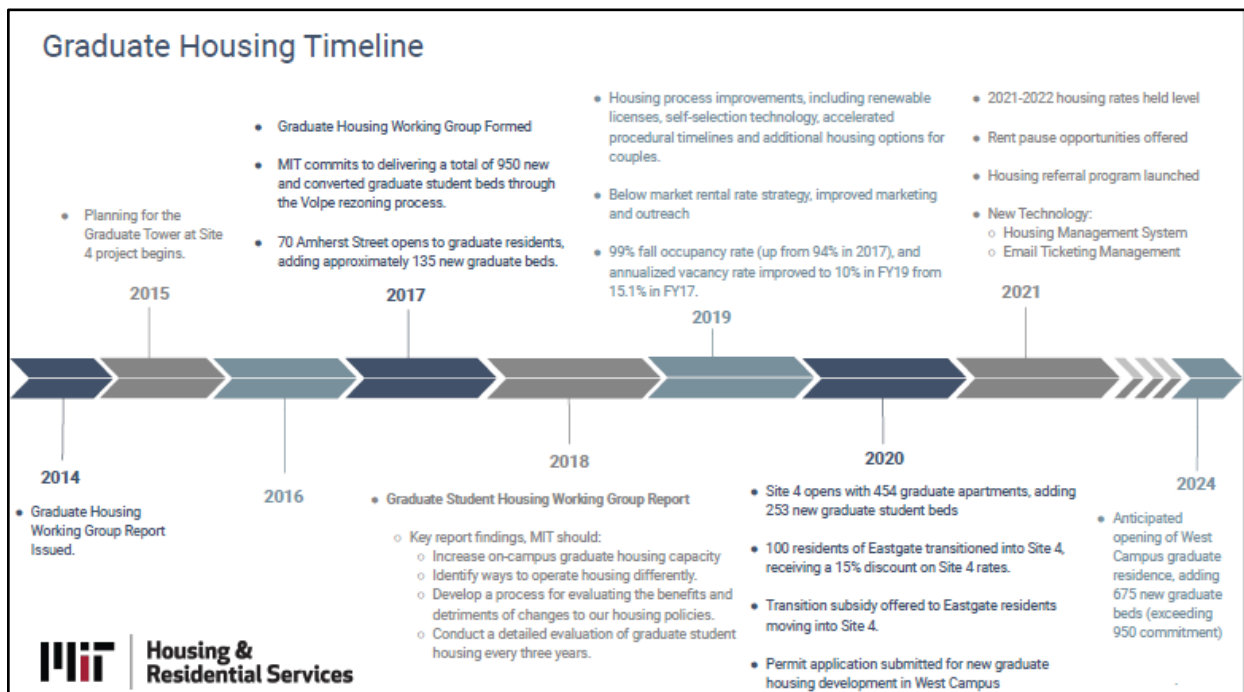
1. MIT should increase on-campus graduate housing capacity with an optimal mix of unit types aligning with the evolving needs of students and families over time. The Institute should assess the feasibility of doing so in a way that breaks even financially at 30 years with comprehensive stewardship.
2. The Institute should identify ways to operate our housing differently. Currently our revenue falls short of what is required for comprehensive stewardship. This leads to lower quality housing and creates an impediment to adding more housing.



3. The Institute should develop a process for evaluating the benefits and detriments of changes to our housing policies.
4. A detailed evaluation of graduate student housing should be conducted by a similar working group every three years, with a report to Academic Council and the MIT Faculty. This should also include a short yearly update to assess progress relative to the last detailed evaluation.

This report fulfills the annual reporting expectation in recommendation 4 and addresses progress by the GHWG on recommendations 2 and 3.

Graduate Housing Timeline (2014-Present)



Graduate Student Support and Housing Principles

The following principles were developed in collaboration with the Division of Student Life (DSL), the Office of the Vice Chancellor (OVC), and the GSC, and those relating to housing were discussed and accepted by the GHWG in December 2021.¹

1. Be transparent about [benefits and expenses](#) associated with graduate study.

¹ NOTE: As a result of the new graduate student union, which formed after the GHWG discussed these principles, MIT must now engage with the union on negotiating stipends of bargaining unit members and therefore, policies and practices related to stipends are likely to change.



2. Adjust stipends annually to compensate for cost-of-living changes (including housing and transportation), ensuring that we meet minimum living wage plus a small buffer for a single graduate student in shared graduate housing; analyzed in collaboration with the GSC.
3. Continue to invest in dedicated programs to better support those who have additional expenses (e.g., grants for students with dependent children, short- and long-term hardship, dependent spouses who are unable to work).
4. Annually review health plans, relying on recommendations from the GSC and the Student and Affiliate Health Insurance Advisory Committee.
5. Offer variety, choice, and affordability in graduate housing. Maximize graduate student occupancy in graduate housing relying on recommendations of the GHWG.
6. Set housing rates below the area market in coordination with the stipend-setting process and in consideration of comprehensive stewardship and the Cambridge Housing Authority payment standard.
7. While maintaining equity and fair housing practices, position housing to serve students with the least access to off-campus housing markets, particularly international students, families, and students with disabilities.
8. Consider student rent levels as a constraint when undertaking graduate housing financing, site selection, and design standards.
9. Create a food secure campus by creating and/or marketing low-cost groceries near campus, and by providing urgent grants and meal swipes for students in need.

Graduate Housing Development

West Campus Graduate Housing Development

[Announced in December 2019](#), the West Campus Graduate Housing Development began site work in January 2022, with site enabling, demolition, and the start of foundation work and pile driving. The GHWG received continuous updates on the project. HRS and the West Campus Graduate Housing Development project team were acutely aware of the impact construction would have on the residential communities close to the development site. Throughout IAP and the spring semester, HRS and the project team worked to develop mitigation strategies based on feedback from abutting residents.

In addition to conducting regular outreach to abutters and providing contact information and opportunities for feedback, the project team took the following steps:

- Delaying early-morning pile driving start times throughout the spring semester;
- Halting construction noise during the final exam period;
- Offering on-campus relocations where available; and
- Ensuring dust and pest control standards on all construction sites.

[The West Campus graduate residence](#) will add approximately 676 additional beds to the MIT graduate housing system. This represents 176 more beds than MIT committed to add in 2017 and resulted in a total of 426 graduate beds being added to the system over the past five years.

The residence will feature 350 apartments, with a mix of studios, one-bedroom, two-bedroom, and four-bedroom units for graduate students, including those with families. The residence will be in close



proximity to Fort Washington Park and the City of Cambridge’s Grand Junction multi-use pathway, which is under development. It will also feature a central plaza for community use.

MIT is partnering with [American Campus Communities \(ACC\)](#), an experienced third-party developer on this project, and it was shared with the GHWG in December 2021 that the Institute will finance the project, maintain ownership, and engage ACC as the developer to build the residence and manage operations. This allows MIT to build and operate the project cost effectively.

Enhancements to Graduate Housing

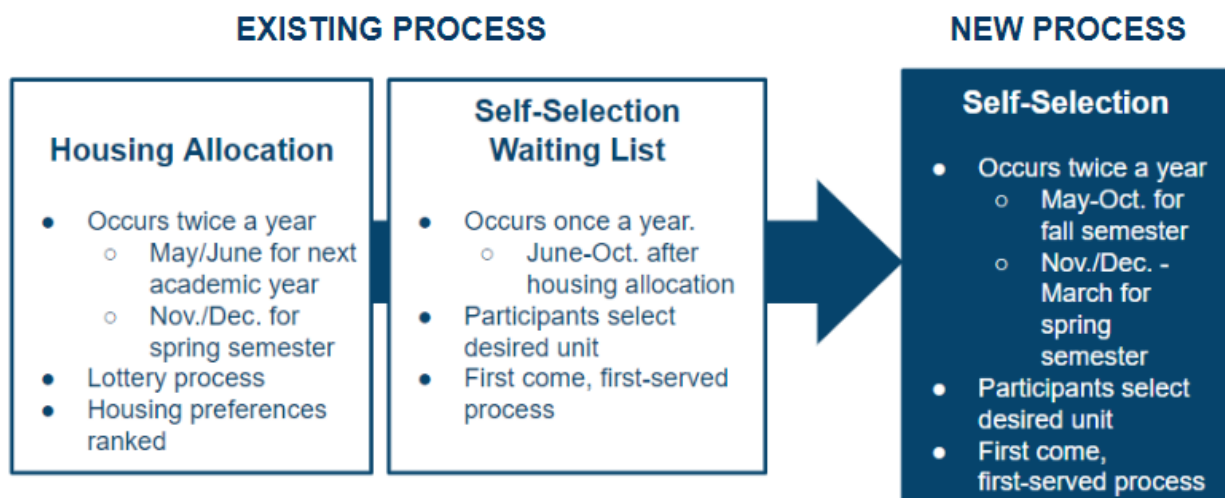
Processes and Technology

As part of an ongoing effort to improve MIT’s residential system, Housing & Residential Services (HRS) has been working with house teams and student leaders to enhance graduate housing processes and technology. Since 2019, these efforts have included:

- Introducing renewable licenses;
- Shifting license agreement periods (from August 15 to July 31);
- Creating self-selection technology allowing students to view and select available units in real time;
- Accelerating procedural timelines to reduce the amount of time it takes for students to request and receive campus housing; and
- Offering additional housing options for couples.

During the 2021–2022 academic year, HRS began a transition to a new housing software, StarRez. StarRez is a user-friendly housing management platform that integrates housing assignment information across a variety of residential systems. StarRez will better enable HRS to meet the needs of MIT residents by enhancing the overall user experience by improving engagement, communication, data collection, and convenience.

As part of the transition to working with StarRez, HRS converted the two separate processes of Graduate Housing Allocation and the Self-Selection Waiting List to a new Graduate Housing Self-Selection process.





StarRez began deployment in early 2022, with graduate student leaders assisting with beta testing. HRS piloted the new system during the Spring 2022 housing selection process in January. HRS continued regular assessments of system performance in April, with updates to meet programmatic needs. The system fully launched for the 2022–2023 Graduate Housing Selection process in May 2022.

License Agreements Adjustments

GHWG identified nonrenewable license agreements as a barrier to full occupancy in graduate housing. Greater flexibility for renewals can align the students' tenure in graduate housing with academic program lengths and increase graduate housing occupancy, which is crucial to recovering from the pandemic's impact on housing. Expanding license renewals improves housing stability for students while addressing current vacancy challenges. At the same time, designated houses are committed to ensuring a consistent flow of new students as described below.

To increase housing availability while recognizing differences in residential community needs, HRS, Heads of House, House Execs, and the GHWG developed the the following license renewal options:

- First-year Only (The Warehouse): One-year housing license with priority selection for a second year of housing in another graduate residence.
- Steady First-Year Contingent (Ashdown and Sidney-Pacific): One-year housing license with an option for a second year of housing. Renewal of housing license beyond the second year is an option if occupancy goals within the residence are unmet.
 - Houses will hold Fall Occupancy Review meetings following the October 15 occupancy report to determine needs for an in-house lottery.
 - If the residence is at full occupancy in the fall, there will be a lottery for residents to remain in their residence beyond two years.
 - Together, HRS, Heads of House, and House Execs will work on a process for how a lottery will be implemented if it is needed.
- Automatic License Renewal (70 Amherst, Edgerton, Site 4, Tang, and Westgate): Housing license can be renewed automatically for the duration of the student's degree program at MIT.

Referral Credit Housing Incentive

HRS developed an incentive program for Fall 2021 that offers current residents the opportunity to refer new residents and receive a financial benefit if the new residents move into housing. The referrer receives a \$250 rental credit for each successful referral. The referral also receives \$250. The program worked well and was offered again for 2022–2023. HRS will evaluate the program each year and determine on a year-to-year basis whether or not it will be offered.

Program terms: "Referrers" must have already signed a 2022-2023 graduate housing license agreement at the time of the referral for both the referrer and the referral to be eligible for the rental credits. "Referrals" must sign a 2022-2023 license agreement, occupy their housing assignment, and adhere to all conditions of their housing license agreement for a minimum of three months for both the referrer and the referral to be eligible for the rental credits. Rental credit amounts cannot be adjusted or prorated, and there is no maximum rental credit award for referrers.



Year	# of Referrers	# of Referrals	Total # of Participants
2021–2022	110	255	365
2022–2023	136	285	421

Graduate Student Experience with Housing

Graduate Housing Rates

The approach to rate-setting is informed by the GHWG and current housing market conditions in Boston and Cambridge. The Institute has continued its implementation of a process that is aware of the area market in order to consistently keep rates below the market while also ensuring that MIT can operate a quality and financially sustainable housing system. As is the case with any housing system, rate increases are necessary to cover annual increases in operational costs—including livable wages for the hundreds of staff members who help keep our 24/7 housing operation running. The goal is to provide a range of housing options—single rooms, efficiencies, one-bedroom, and multi-bedroom units—so students can make choices that best fit their circumstances.

MIT continues to make differentiated adjustments to unit types in order to more consistently meet below market targets across all unit types. Adjustments are being made over the long term to moderate increases and endeavor to mitigate any significant changes that may occur in the area market.

While pandemic effects on the rental market were significant in 2020 with a sharp, short-term decline in area rates, it fully rebounded in 2021. MIT’s decision to hold rates flat for 2021-2022 achieved the goal of maintaining pre-Covid, below-market targets overall for 2021-2022. Rates for 2022-2023 were increased by a weighted average of 3%.

FY23 Graduate Housing Rate Increases

Announced March 2022

	Weighted Average % Increase	Weighted Average Rent	% Increase range	\$ Increase range
FY21	3.7%	\$1,574	3% to 5.5%	\$28 to \$65 / mo.
FY22	0%	\$1,574	N/A	N/A
FY23	3%	\$1,620	1.5% to 5%	\$16 to \$83 / mo.

MIT understands that housing costs make up the largest single portion of graduate students’ budgets, whether they live on or off campus. DSL and OVC continue to work closely together to respond to the



needs of graduate students as they navigate their MIT experience. MIT provides students with a [variety of additional financial resources](#) such as short- and long-term funding, and grants for graduate students with children [which were increased](#) during the 2021–2022 academic year.

Graduate Student Support: Priorities and Progress

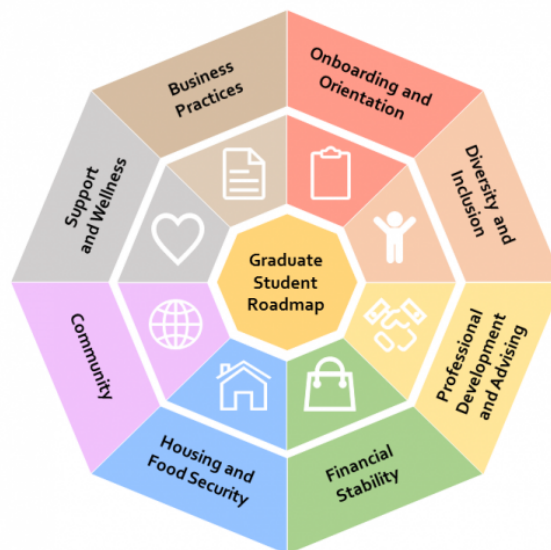
Graduate Student Roadmap

To help meet the charge of improving the quality of graduate student life and learning at MIT, the Office of the Vice Chancellor has been listening and responding to the ideas and concerns of MIT’s graduate students, and has started to build stronger connections between members of OVC, DSL, and GSC.

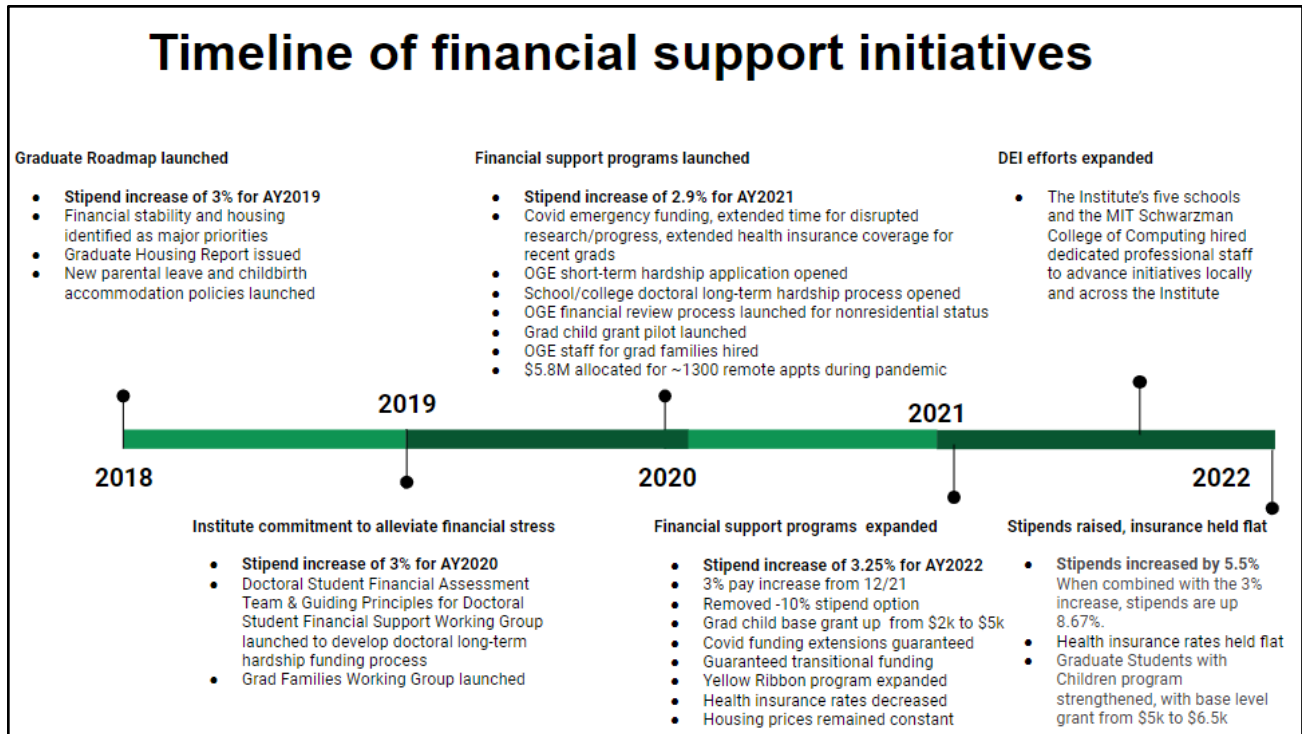
Based upon meetings with graduate students in small and large groups, OVC has identified shared goals:

- strengthening the support network for graduate students and their families;
- expanding housing options (on-campus and off); and
- enhancing diversity and inclusion, advising, and professional development programs and services.

To achieve these goals, OVC and DSL have launched a series of initiatives, known collectively as the Graduate Student Roadmap, as part of a strategic effort to improve the graduate student experience at MIT.



The above graphic details the focus areas of the Graduate Student Roadmap. As these initiatives are brought to fruition, we are committed to leveraging transparency, community ideas, and resources from across campus to make, track, and report on enhancements in these critical areas. Progress reports can be found at <https://ovc.mit.edu/graduate-student-roadmap/>.



Collaborative Stipend Setting Process

Since 2008, the Graduate Stipends Committee (made up of students, faculty, and staff) has analyzed a wide range of factors related to graduate stipends, including cost of living, cost to grants, competitiveness, and community equity issues. The process, which is unique among MIT's peer institutions, includes the following steps:

- a. Committee analyzes Cost of Living (CoL) Survey and peer benchmarks; identifies needs in January/February; and develops recommendations
- b. Committee presents findings to the Dean's Group in March
- c. Provost seeks input from the Dean's Group in March
- d. Announcement on stipend rates and health insurance costs in April for next academic year

2022 Graduate Housing and Stipend Rate Increases

In March 2022, MIT [announced](#) that graduate student stipends would increase by 5.5%, the largest stipend increase in more than a decade. When combined with the special, one-time [3% stipend increase MIT provided in December 2021](#), graduate student stipends are 8.67% higher than they were at the start of the 2021-2022 academic year. Above this floor, departments are given discretion to provide higher stipends, and more than half of MIT graduate students are paid above the standard rate.

Additionally, for the second consecutive year, MIT advanced the GSC Stipends Committee's recommendation to strengthen the need-blind Grant for Graduate Students with Children program, increasing the universal, base level grant from \$5,000 per year to \$6,500 per year. As a result, the award levels will move from \$5,000, \$6,000, and \$7,000 for one, two, and three or more dependent children to \$6,500, \$7,500, and \$8,500, respectively. These grants are designed to cover the higher costs of raising children within the budget constraint of graduate families, including their higher minimum housing costs.



MIT leaders also noted the need to mitigate the initial financial pressures some students face when moving to the Cambridge area. Students facing short- or long-term financial hardship can access [previously established funds](#) for these purposes.

NOTE: As a result of the new MIT Graduate Student Union (GSU), which formed in May 2022 after the GHWG’s deliberations on these topics during 2021-2022, MIT and the GSU will now negotiate in the stipends of bargaining unit members.

Appendix: Graduate Housing Occupancy Data

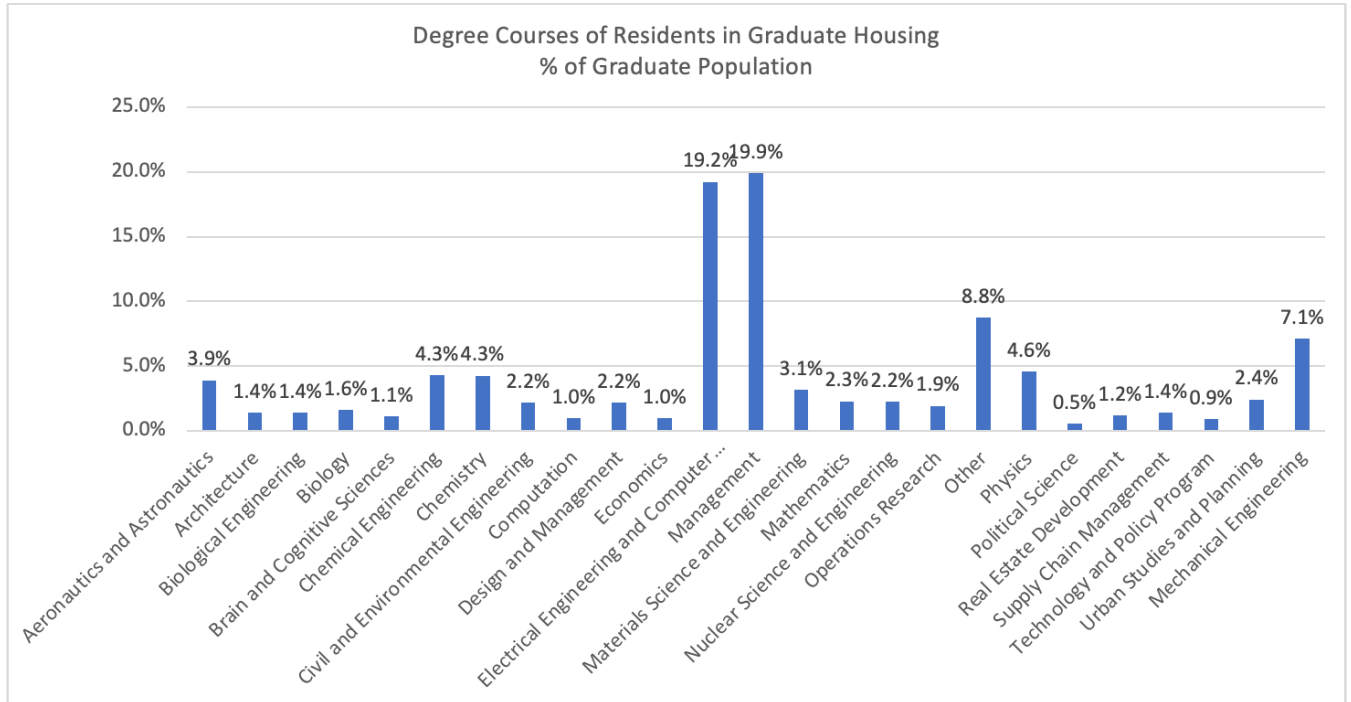
Year (October 15)	Graduate Housing Capacity	Total Occupancy	Graduate Students	UG Students	Non-Students (Post Docs/Visitors)
2022	2,705	2,507 93%	2,239 89%	54 2%	214 9%
2021	2,705	2,152 80%	1,987 92%	103 5%	62 3%
2020	2,705	1,333 49%	1,300 98%	7 < 1%	26 1%
2019	2,453	2,428 99%	2,312 95%	71 3%	45 2%
2018	2,453	2,390 97%	2,190 92%	67 3%	133 5%
2017	2,453	2,310 94%	2,114 92%	98 4%	98 4%

Source: DSL HRS Housing Management System (StarRez) as of October 15, 2022

Fall 2022 Graduate Assignments (as of October 15, 2022)	
Type	Count
Graduate Student Renewal	1,130
Graduate Student Self-Selection	1,109
Visiting Scholar/Post-Doc Renewal	65
Visiting Scholar/Post-Doc Self-Selection	149
Undergraduates in Graduate Housing	54
Total Occupancy	2,507
% of Occupancy Design (AY22-23)	93%



Fall 2022 Course Distribution in Graduate Housing (as of October 15, 2022)



Fall 2022 Academic Program Types in Graduate Housing (as of October 15, 2022)

