

Before the lease and after the keys: Students' anticipation and afterthoughts about housing

ABSTRACT

Moving to a new city for university is a life-changing event for students. One of the main decisions while moving is choosing a place to live. It's a difficult decision because various factors are involved such as budget, roommates, traveling, amenities, etc. A lot of times, students regret their housing decisions after they move into their said housing. We want to understand the reasons behind these housing decisions regretted by university students. We approach this process by understanding their expectations and requirements while choosing the housing and any major changes in them after they move in. We carried out qualitative analysis by taking interviews followed by a thematic analysis. We found out that students' priorities changed before and after moving in and could have done a better job finding housing.

INTRODUCTION

Relocating to an unfamiliar place is a significant decision that demands thorough consideration and strategic planning. Every year, 5 million students worldwide leave high school and their homes for the first time for further education. Some of these students may also be moving to a new country to pursue an international education [2]. The student housing literature is characterized by a wide range of research (Araujo and Murray 2010; Charbonneau, Johnson, et. al.). However, very little research has been carried out to examine students' housing needs and preferences. (La Roche, Flanigan et. el.). Khozaei, Hassan, Kodmany, and Aarab emphasize that "we still lack the knowledge regarding the student's real needs and requirements and further studies on student housing may direct more focus on student housing preferences" [1]. Another significant aspect not being looked upon is the sentiments of students after moving into their chosen housing.[5]

A series of published research papers and articles threw light upon the factors that affect student housing choices and their decision-making process. The two main influences on consumer decision-making are (1) the individual (personal) and (2) the societal aspects. The consumer has individual (personal) aspects that differ for each person, such as perception, beliefs and attitudes, values, learning, self-concept, and personality. All interactions between consumers and the external environment, family, socioeconomic class, and culture are examples of social factors that influence decision-making [3]. This paper explores how these factors are prioritized by students and how they are subject to change with respect to real-world experiences.

Being students who recently went through the process, we observed various cases of students being discontent and unsatisfied with their housing provisions. While talking to various students around the campus of Rochester Institute of Technology and the University of Rochester, we came across the con-

cerns and difficulties of students post-move and their problems with their housing decisions. There were unsaid concerns that the students were not comfortable with sharing in a public setting which motivated us to delve deeper into the factors causing these regrets and draw a comparison of students' mindsets before and after moving in.

METHODOLOGY

Research Question: What causes university students to regret their housing decision?

Participants

For this study, we started by screening participants through a WhatsApp broadcast poll to find students who had concerns with their housing. 9 participants were chosen with ages ranging from 21 to 32 with a mean age of 25. 5 participants were male, and the remaining 4 were female. 6 of the participants were from the Rochester Institute of Technology and 2 from the University of Rochester.

Data Collection

We used a qualitative method in the form of 30-40-minute-long user interviews. The interviews were conducted in a closed environment i.e. at each participant's house. A semi-structured interview guide was created for reference which consisted of (1) Background questions such as their age, and location, (2) Main questions such as their housing arrangements, factors considered while choosing the housing, concerns about the current living situations, reasons behind those concerns, and, (3) Closing questions like their future approach towards living and choosing another housing. Within these questions, an activity was presented to the participants to list down and prioritize the factors they considered for choosing their housing before they moved in and later rearrange them according to how the factors changed after they had moved in. The interviews were recorded for future data analysis using smartphones with students' consent.

Data Analysis

On finishing the interviews, the qualitative audio data was transcribed into text and was output into Miro Board. We performed coding on each interview text to figure out the common themes among the participants' answers for thematic analysis.

RESULTS

After talking to 9 participants, we came across some distinct as well as common factors that affected the housing decisions made by them. The student demographics are as such; Participant 1 (Female, 22 years), Participant 2 (Male 23 years), Participant 3 (Male 26 years), Participant 4 (Female, 32 years), Participant 5 (Female, 22 years), Participant

6 (Male, 23 years), Participant 7 (Female, 23 years), Participant 8 (Male, 31 years), Participant 9 (Male, 22 years).

Among all participants, we discovered five main housing accommodations with their characteristics;

Housing A: closest to campus, high rent, modern architecture, top-notch amenities.

Housing B: close to campus, relatively high rent, spacious architecture, various amenities.

Housing C: far from campus, relatively low rent, old architecture, no amenities.

Housing D: farthest from campus, lowest rent, relatively spacious architecture, various amenities.

Housing E: on campus, highest rent, modern architecture, all amenities.

Housing F: off-campus individual house, moderate rent, old row house, all amenities.

Lease

In certain housing locations like Housing C in Rochester, USA, they require renters to either have a guarantor or a USA resident who can vouch for them financially. Unfortunately, this process can be quite lengthy and complicated. Participants 3, 4, 5, 6, and 9, didn't have any family members in the USA. This lack of a local connection made them ineligible for these housing options. Now, for those participants who did have family members in the USA, i.e. 1, 2, 7, and 8 considered these housing arrangements. However, only Participant 1 decided to go for Housing C. The others preferred not to burden their family members and explored different housing alternatives.

Rent and Amenities

With increased rent comes better amenities and vice versa. Amenities encompass a range of perks like fully furnished houses, complimentary laundry facilities, access to a gym, a gaming room, a sauna, a swimming pool, lounge access, and even a quiet reading room. Participants 5 and 8 had their hearts set on amenities, which guided their housing choices towards Housing A and E. They were willing to pay a higher rent for the added comfort and convenience these amenities offered. Conversely, participants 3, 6, and 9 were all about sticking to their budget. They opted for Housing C and D which was more budget-friendly, even if it meant sacrificing some amenities. However, they were still open to paying extra for specific services like furniture, laundry, and gym access if needed. The rest of the participants 1, 2, 4, and 7, took a more neutral approach. They didn't have a strong preference for either rent or amenities and were open to a variety of options. Referring to *Table 1* and *Table 2*, it can be inferred that 7 out of 9 participants had altered their priorities after moving in, indicating a change of perspective.

Location and Travel

There's a variety of housing options around the university, and they all offer different modes of transportation. Some nearby places like Housing A and B have university shuttles,

and private shuttles, making it convenient for students. Meanwhile, those living farther from the university like Housing C and D usually rely on a combination of public transportation and university shuttles, or they opt for cabs. Initially, participants 1, 3, 6, 7, and 9 chose housing farther from the university because the rent was lower, and they didn't mind the longer commute. On the other hand, participants 2, 4, 5, and 8 were determined to cut down on their travel time, so they opted for housing close to the university. However, participant 5 had varying opinions after moving in (refer *Table 1* and *Table 2*). She conveyed her willingness to compromise on travel time for other underlying factors.

Architecture

Out of the 9 participants, 3 of them had a strong preference for living in a warm, inviting place that felt like home so they chose Housing D which was further away from the campus. On the other hand, the remaining 6 participants did not pay attention to the aesthetics of the housing they chose. However, things took a turn for one of them after he moved in. This experience altered their perspective, prompting them to consider the architecture of the housing more carefully the next time they were to move into a new place. Participant 5 had varying opinions post moving in (refer *Table 1* and *Table 2*). She mentioned how she did not bother about the place she stayed in since other factors presented to be more concerning.

Safety, Community and Peer Influence

Each participant indirectly highlighted the significance of living in a place where they felt secure which meant having a community of fellow students or families in the vicinity. Therefore, this factor naturally led to the next consideration which is peer influence. Interestingly, the choices of their peers had an impact on their decisions. This meant that individual priorities and needs took a backseat, as participants were influenced by the housing choices of those around them. Post-move-in (refer *Table 1* and *Table 2*), participant 3 realized how a lack of peers from the same university was a concern for him, to the extent that he wanted to move out.

Roommates

This was a rather interesting finding for us as some of the participants had much to say about their bonding with their roommates. All the participants except for participant 7, had roommates on the lower end of their priority list because they were unaware of the impact of roommate dynamics. However, after moving in, participants 1, 6 and 7 realized the major consequences of non-compatible roommates on mental health as well as study time. This not only impacted housing decisions but also played a pivotal role in shaping the overall college experience.

Of all the above-mentioned factors, mental health was not part of any participant's priorities list before moving in. However, we noticed a pattern in how they later started considering it as one. The relationship between mental health and housing is significant and multifaceted. Participants 2 and 9 expressed how their roommates, neighborhood, amenities, and architecture had a direct impact on their mental health to the point where they had to rethink their decisions.

Participants	Rent,Amenities	Location, Travel	Architecture	Safety, Community, Peer influence	Roommates
P1 (F,22)	3	4	5	2	3
P2 (M,23)	2	1	5	3	4
P3 (M,26)	1	3	2	4	5
P4 (F,32)	3	2	4	1	5
P5 (F,22)	4	1	2	5	3
P6 (M,23)	1	4	5	2	3
P7 (F,23)	3	2	5	4	1
P8 (M,26)	4	1	2	3	5
P9 (M,22)	1	2	5	4	3

Table 1. Priorities of students BEFORE moving in. (The priority list is in decreasing order, with 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest)

Participants	Rent, Amenities	Location, Travel	Architecture	Safety, Community, Peer influence	Roommates
P1 (F,22)	2	4	5	3	1
P2 (M,23)	2	1	5	4	3
P3 (M,26)	3	2	4	1	5
P4 (F,32)	2	1	5	3	4
P5 (F,22)	3	4	5	1	2
P6 (M,23)	2	3	5	4	1
P7 (F,23)	5	2	5	4	1
P8 (M,26)	1	3	2	4	5
P9 (M,22)	1	2	5	3	4

Table 2. Priorities of students AFTER moving in. (The priority list is in decreasing order, with 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest)

DISCUSSION

The results discussed earlier shed light on the factors individuals took into account when selecting their housing, as well as how their feelings evolved once they had settled in. This information is directly tied to our research question, which revolves around uncovering the reasons behind the regrets people may have about their housing decisions. We picked 4 most insightful interviews and discussed their expectations vs. experiences.

Participant 2; Housing A

Before: While looking for housing options, P2 was influenced by his friends and went with what most of them picked, Housing A. According to P2, Housing A was nearest to the university, and travel was his first priority, which was a major contributor to his decision to pick A. His second priority was social life and friends which he assumed would be easy at A owing to the vast amount of amenities available. P2 came from a middle-class family and truly valued money. Despite A being the most expensive housing, P2 thought he would manage his finances well.

After: Just after moving in, P2's first reaction to seeing his house was "sad". He described the walls and interiors of his house as "plain, boring and jail"; a major reason for his initial regret. Over time, he also realized how difficult it was for him to manage the heavy rent he had to pay. To make it worse, he struggled to make friends at Housing A in spite of the amenities as most students preferred staying in their rooms and did not socialise. He also realized how having people from the

same cultural background helps in a feeling of belonging. Another important aspect of P2's interview was his repetitive emphasis on how the architecture and orientation of the house affected his feelings toward it. Housing A seemed like a "jail cell", while the cheaper, old architecture and further away option - Housing C, gave him a more homely feeling owing to its orientation, spaciousness, and neighborhood.

Participant 3; Housing D

Before: P3's priorities for housing were limited to low rent and an apartment. He did not want a house as he thought it would be high maintenance and would be a problem if he did not get along with whoever his roommates would be. "I don't want to wait until my roommates decide to clean the house for me to bring it up." P3 studies at the University of Rochester which is 10 minutes away from his housing, this was a major factor in choosing where he lives. "I have a shuttle stop in front of my house that takes me to campus in 10 minutes." His apartment is a part of a very homely community, with a lot of families and away from the city. There are also a lot of options for transport around him. He did not mind the process of choosing roommates as he knew he would be busy with his coursework and would be able to adjust the remaining time.

After: After 2 months of living in his apartment, P3 found a shift in his priorities. He realized that living off campus meant he had no social life as his community had very limited students from his college and no to zero socializing. "None of my friends live near me." He also found a problem with the location of his apartment, although close to campus it was

quite far from grocery stores, malls, and marketplaces. "I didn't know that I'd have to take different buses just to get milk and eggs." This became apparent when he had an experience where he went to the store on a Saturday night and needed to wait an hour for the next bus home as local buses have an hour gap between each pickup. "The frequency of the buses is very weird." He soon found it frustrating to live in the apartment and wanted to move out as soon as possible for better access to social life and stores for groceries and home goods.

Participant 4; Housing F

Before: P4 is one of our eldest interviewees, she had a lot of experience with moving and shifting houses, so for her the first priority was safety and community. "I've lived in places where I haven't felt safe so it's a priority for me." She wanted to live in a place that had some sort of safety standards and a place where there was already an established community so she wouldn't feel isolated from the world. The location of the University was also a priority as she knew she wouldn't want to spend more on traveling or depend on unreliable transport. "I don't want to spend money on Uber and buses to get to University because I have to go there almost every day." She also wanted a place where there were enough amenities available so she could live comfortably with access to everything she needed around her. All this came from someone who had experience in another country and years of experience as an employee.

After: P4 soon realized that being a student is quite different from being a working individual. Living close to college meant she lived far from everything else. Even for group projects or a friend's birthday, traveling had become expensive. "I didn't consider that I would need to go meet my friends for team projects and I would have to Uber everywhere." She also regretted that she didn't think about the time she had to use the amenities that her housing provided, as a full-time student, she had ended up not using any of the amenities and would now if given the chance, live in a place that was a little farther from university but closer to her friends and other students, without all the amenities her current housing provides. "I don't need more than half the amenities that my house provides me."

Participant 6; Housing D

Before: P6 prioritized rent over any other factors as he wanted to utilize his finances for hobbies and save the remaining amount he earned from his on-campus job. He said, "I come from a metro city so I am used to traveling for a longer period of time" so he did not mind living far to pay less rent. He knew some people going to the Rochester Institute of Technology before moving which made his decision easier because he wanted to live within a community and that's how he chose his roommates as well.

After: When P6 first moved in, he felt extremely overwhelmed because his priority of saving up rent made him choose Housing D (as indicated in the results) which had no furniture so he thought he would need to work a lot on buying and setting up his place. So a place with more amenities went up in his

priority list. Moreover, he found out that various information about his roommates was misleading, and said that "There's constant bickering going on in the house and it affects my study time as well as mental health". So roommates became his first priority while everything else moved back in his list. He wished to move out as soon as possible but as he said, "I just moved in and I can't move out" because the lease agreement did not allow him to do so and if he broke the lease he would have to pay the penalty for the same.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to examine the factors affecting the housing decisions of students and how they change once they move in. After conducting qualitative research and user interviews and analyzing the data, we came to the conclusion that the major reason behind housing regrets is the lack of information. We figured that this is based on the in-comprehensive information about housing options as well as roommates. Insufficient research on housing, impulsive decision-making, and inadequate communication with chosen roommates done on the students' behalf eventually lead them to a state of regret. This study reasons out the contrast between students' initial thought processes and the actual outcomes they experience in the real world. Consequently, it leaves room for future work in this domain that bridges this gap.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Our current research methods involved 30-minute user interviews which could have been biased by situations. A diary study is a research method used to collect qualitative data on users' behaviors, experiences, activities, challenges, etc., over a period of time that is self-reported by the users. [4] Additionally, our suggestion is to provide a comprehensive website for university students that facilitates both apartment and roommate searches. The main goal for this is to simplify the process by providing a single platform, eliminating the need for students to visit multiple websites where students can effectively search for accommodation and at the same time find suitable roommates according to their preferences and compatibility indicators.

References

- ADAMA, J. U., AGHIMIEN, D. O., AND FABUNMI, C. O. Students' housing in private universities in nigeria: Influencing factors and effect on academic performance. *International Journal of Built Environment and Sustainability* 5, 1 (Jan. 2018).
- IKE, N., BALDWIN, C., AND LATHOURAS, A. Tertiary students' housing priorities: Finding home away from home. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 29, 1 (Summer 2020), 55–69. Copyright - Copyright Institute for Urban Studies Summer 2020; Last updated - 2023-05-23; Subject: sTermNotLitGenreText - Australia; United States–US.
- ISMAIL, H., AND SHAZWAN, M. S. Housing decision: the choice between location, house and neighbourhood among malaysian generations, 2019. Copyright - © 2019. This work is licensed under

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> (the “License”). Notwithstanding the ProQuest Terms and conditions, you may use this content in accordance with the terms of the License; Last updated - 2023-04-12.

SALAZAR, K. Diary studies: Understanding long-term user behavior and experiences. *nngroup* (2016).

SCOTT HARPER, M. M., AND LEACH., M. Security and privacy concerns of pet tech users. In *In Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on the Internet of Things (IoT '22)*. Association for Computing Machinery (New York, NY, USA, 2022), IoT '22, ACM, p. 155–162.