Amidst the growing energy of Arizona State University's Tempe campus lies a silent struggle: the pressing issue of housing affordability for its students. As enrollment rates soar and available housing options dwindle, students are left grappling with steep rent prices, looming debt burdens, and compromised educational experiences. This crisis not only jeopardizes students' immediate well-being and education but also threatens their long-term prospects and the overall vibrancy of the university community and surrounding City of Tempe. In exploring the complexities of this housing dilemma, we seek to unravel the multifaceted challenges faced by students, examine the underlying factors driving the crisis, and propose actionable strategies to foster a more sustainable and equitable housing landscape for the ASU community and surrounding area. Over the past few years, housing has become less affordable in Arizona as the demand curve surpasses supply–more specifically around the ASU Tempe college campus. This leaves students with little options and nowhere to go. As ASU admits more students each year and continues to grow rapidly, the demand for housing is only going to increase exponentially. ASU barely has enough first year residential space to be able to house freshmen, leaving students in hotels until more space is available. With even more minimal upperclassmen housing options, it leaves students in a pickle, having to decide if they want to continue their studies at ASU and drown in debt or, transfer someplace cheaper.

Per HUD’s 2011-2014 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) data, 36.8 percent of Tempe households are considered cost- burdened which includes 46.2 percent of renter households– almost half of all renters. Cost-burdened means that a household is spending over 30% of its gross monthly income on housing costs, which for rentals includes monthly rent and utilities, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Tempe’s housing cost burden is second highest among the 8 jurisdictions examined in Arizona (Tempe Affordable Housing Strategy, 2019). This is especially a problem when it comes to student housing located around the Tempe ASU college campus. Majority of students work part-time, if they work at all. They are also ineligible to receive benefits if they are still claimed on their parents taxes, even if they aren't claimed on their parents taxes as dependent, resources are not provided to them about the different options they have or it can affect them negatively in the future (i.e. some jobs and tax documents ask if they received any sort of governmental assistance which can result in a bias and the general public having to pay higher tax rates to support welfare initiatives). It also creates a disparity on the national debt budget which has taken on almost 10% of the annual budget. According to ZipRecruiters average student salary metrics, the average part time salary a student makes in Tempe is a little under $16 an hour not including any tax deductions. If a student is going to school full-time and working part-time at about 20-30 hours a week, they are making $1280-$1920 a month before taxes. The cost of one bedroom in a 4 bed 4 bath shared apartment on the lower end is around $1400 not including utilities, living expenses, parking, etc. and on the higher end it can cost upwards to $1500-$1600 base rent before adding on other costs (utilities, living expenses, parking, tuition, fees, etc)-- that is sharing with 3 other roommates, one small room/bathroom. That means that for a 4b/4b apartment, the landlord/management company is making at least $5600 per month (on the low end) from one apartment in their complex. The price only rises as you get to 3b/3b, 2b/2b, 1b/1b, and studio apartments. This means that students working part time, cannot even afford base rent in a shared apartment (which are considered micro units) or basic needs of living, leaving them by definition of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, cost-burdened. If a student were to work full-time, they would make roughly $2560 before taxes, which is still barely enough to reach basic living expenses when attending school full-time. For example, the average cost of living for one month for one student is roughly $2300 which includes rent, food, utilities, car payments, and gas. Students cannot afford costs like that, even when they receive parental help. Most adults and families cannot afford those costs, let alone students. This creates another issue with students expanding into nearby neighbors in search of affordable housing, creating issues with long-time residents of Tempe (Hogan, 2023). There is more demand than supply for student housing, let alone affordable student housing. According to the article "Increasing *student population in Tempe creates conflict with long-time residents,* " by Phineas Hogan, “the rental vacancy rate in Tempe is 4.1%, nearly two percentage points lower than the state's average. The low metric means there is a low vacancy in the city, meaning fewer units to go around for potential renters. The increasing population of the city means there is a higher demand for these sparse units, creating higher prices”. Nearby apartments and landlords are able to use this to their advantage and price gouge the cost of rentals, because they know they can and they know people will pay for it because they have no other option. To live comfortably in Tempe, one should be making $4,926 per month or $59,112 per year– this is not feasible for college students (Average rent in Tempe, 2024). This leads to students having to take out loans that they cannot afford, on top of their educational loans/expenses and leads to an increased national debt. In fact, in order to get a job that will pay you that much, one typically needs to have higher education– so it is really counterproductive for students to be paying more for their rent than they are for their college education, which they are receiving to better their futures and ability to land a job to be able to afford to live.

To help counteract these dilemmas, more apartments are currently being built to help increase the housing supply for students. However, these developments take years to build, leaving students affected by it now, out of luck. According to the Arizona State University Business and Finance Communications 2023 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, “with the ASU Charter as the guiding principle, Arizona State University has become a national leader in enabling academic excellence and accessibility at scale while enhancing national standing in academic qualification and impact of college and schools in every field. ASU remains committed to ongoing institutional redesign to reach the next iteration of the public research university while simultaneously taking fundamental responsibility for the communities we serve”. While ASU enables academic excellence, it fails to enable housing/living accessibility to its students and ASU depends on its students and enrollment rates to fund its revenue. It also fails to acknowledge the bandwidth of the economic student housing crisis that plagues its community and how that in turn can affect educational outcomes, enrollment rates, and more. With the increased tuition rates and fees– which in some degree paths, fees surpass the cost of tuition, if better allocated and with student enrollment and achievement in heart, some of those expenses could go to funding more student living options. With ASU holding the #1 school in innovation title along with sustainable practices, they could also partner with neighboring off-campus apartments and housing options to develop more affordable options. For example, implementing the usage of solar panels to help offset the utility costs of apartments, amongst many other things. By allocating more resources and funding to supporting their students whether it be for on-campus or off-campus living, they are increasing their students' success rates while inadvertently helping with a national housing and debt crisis– that directly impacts their students and community. If ASU wants to keep expanding, it needs to be able to afford the trade-offs that come with it, such as a need to fund student housing options. By aiding in this crisis, ASU is also fulfilling its mission and ongoing efforts to enhance revenue diversification, as it is an important component of its financial planning model. In agreement to this economic issue, in ASU’s financial planning data, it is stated that “long-term financial stability of the ASU Public Enterprise is predicated on developing innovative pathways to expand accessibility to the institution, increasing matriculation of applicants and deploying necessary infrastructure to ensure the persistence of enrolled students, of first priority among Arizona residents for all categories”. In this statement, necessary infrastructure is not specified, so it is not concluded that they are including housing options for students. However, to ensure their goal on the persistence of enrolled students, it should be one of their utmost important considerations in combating this silent struggle.

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