BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Background
West Virginia University has four public-private partnerships (apartments and townhomes) that are intended to improve the student experience. In an attempt to increase the number of tenants in the four properties, WVU Housing is considering developing a marketing plan to target students’ parents. In order to gain insight into the role parents play in their student’s housing decisions, Housing wanted to speak with engaged parents of freshman students – those who self-identified as being “extremely” or “very involved” (emotionally and/or financially) in their student’s housing decisions.

Research Objectives
Housing was interested in speaking with parents in various geographic locations in a manner that would encourage their participation. Given that, parents were invited to participate in a two-day online bulletin board discussion; this approach allowed them to respond at their convenience throughout the two days.

The objectives were:
• To understand what is important to parents and the relationship they play and influence they have on their student’s housing decisions after freshman year
• To understand the extent of parents’ involvement in the decision-making process regarding their student’s housing
• To determine the student housing considerations that are most important to parents
• To identify the preferred form(s) of communication for parents regarding housing options
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Housing Transition
These parents are excited to see their child transition from living in a residence hall to living elsewhere. However, their excitement is tempered with concerns about the inherent risks of such a move. Their immediate worries include their student’s safety, being apart from the campus environment, dealing with possible predatory landlords, being responsible enough to attend class, managing their finances and learning to eat well.

Practical aspects, such as safety and location, top parents’ list of important considerations regarding their student’s housing choices. Regarding the former, parents want to feel comfortable knowing their child can get to and from classes and activities at all hours, without incident. Other items they associate with safety are proper lighting and a secure, well-maintained environment. The latter is important because parents feel their student will be more likely to attend classes and be more engaged in activities if they are relatively close to campus.

Regarding the cost of housing, most parents find it unacceptable to pay more than they did when their child lived in a residence hall – which many deemed expensive. Some parents suggested that a price point not to exceed $500-550/month, including utilities, is reasonable.

The Housing Search
Most students and their parents reluctantly begin their housing search for sophomore year early in their child’s first semester, a time many parents believe is much too early. They argue that their student has barely had to time settle into college life or make close friends, let alone be able to identify students with similar interests and lifestyles who would be good to live with and responsible.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Housing Resources
The internet, word-of-mouth and apartment guides are parents’ and students’ primary source of housing leads/information. It’s rare that companies solicit parents or students via email or brochures regarding student housing. While brochures alone do little to impress parents and are considered mailbox clutter, parents welcome receiving student housing information and would like to be able to compare costs, amenities and location, as well as reviews.

Awareness of University-Managed Housing
The fact that WVU offers University-managed apartments is well-known. Parents learned of it in a variety of ways: New Student Orientation, campus visits/tours, the Mountaineer Parents Club send-off, and signs on campus. A few received brochures along the way. Parents welcome the idea of learning more about University-managed housing but want to learn about the options via email or the Mountaineer Parents Club website (i.e., no mailed brochures).

Generally speaking, the term “University-managed” has positive connotations: safer, quiet, a monitored environment, a trusted “landlord,” well-maintained and convenient. However, some perceive University-managed apartments as expensive as well. Brochures that include “luxury” as a descriptive do little to dispel this belief. To reiterate, parents seek student housing that is convenient – not far from campus or transportation – in a safe environment, reasonably priced and well-maintained.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Benefits of University Housing
Parents believe University-managed housing provides an effective, transitionary living environment that offers the following benefits:

- Convenient to campus
- Ease of payment
- Monitored
- Well-maintained
- Safe/secure

In addition to offering these (mostly) unique benefits, parents also praise University-managed apartments for providing apartments that are fully furnished and have individual leases because both help eliminate some parental and student concerns and result in greater peace of mind.
RECOMMENDATIONS

• There is a strong argument for marketing student housing to parents. Parents crave student housing information, and it’s important for them to receive it early in their student’s freshman year.

• All events where student housing is discussed (campus tours, NSO, etc.) should deliver the same message regarding the optimum time parents and students should begin investigating student housing.

• Refrain from mailing brochures. Email the information/brochure and/or post it on the Mountaineer Parents Club website. Consider creating a special housing edition of the MPC e-newsletter.

• Messaging should be straightforward, fact-based and include pricing. It should also speak to those areas that would help alleviate parental worries regarding their student’s safety and ability to focus on academics (i.e., close to campus/classes and conducive atmosphere).

• When messaging parents, the unique selling proposition should focus on the University as a trusted source of student housing that is located in safe environments, is well-maintained and conveniently located. Parents should understand that University-managed housing provides the next phase of independence for their child. All speak to the higher benefit of peace of mind.

• Consider offering student positions within the University-managed properties so they might have the ability to work off their rent.

• Utilize positive student quotes and reviews in marketing material to reinforce the USP.

• Use an effective key word strategy to promote the properties on the internet.

• Ensure that the training for all employees of University-managed apartments is consistent.
### PARTICIPANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Others in College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Katie P.</td>
<td>Southern, N.H.</td>
<td>Older sister took a break from college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert M.</td>
<td>Newington, CT</td>
<td>Has a senior at UCONN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy S.</td>
<td>Deer Park, NY</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy L.</td>
<td>Langhorne, PA</td>
<td>Has a sophomore at another university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith S.</td>
<td>Findlay, OH</td>
<td>Son graduated from the University of Toledo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christy D.</td>
<td>Sherwood, AK</td>
<td>One son who graduated from Arkansas State and another son as well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy I.</td>
<td>Wiley Ford, WV</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia C.</td>
<td>WV</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela R.</td>
<td>Kalamazoo, MI</td>
<td>Two children attended two other colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidi H.</td>
<td>St. Louis, MO</td>
<td>One son attends Missouri State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison M.</td>
<td>Stafford, VA</td>
<td>One child attends college in N.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen E.</td>
<td>Annapolis, MD</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica N.</td>
<td>Mountainside, NJ</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda H.</td>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
<td>One child attends GMU</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Others in College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackie R.</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Son is a junior at WVU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camille S.</td>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheryl S.</td>
<td>Central OH</td>
<td>Daughter graduated from the University of Findlay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer R.</td>
<td>Charleston, WV</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris P.</td>
<td>Sylvania, OH</td>
<td>One daughter is a junior at a private college and a son is a senior at Cleveland State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina H.</td>
<td>Ivanhoe, VA</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy H.</td>
<td>Minster, OH</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela H.</td>
<td>Charleston, WV</td>
<td>One goes to WVU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth C.</td>
<td>Lewis County, WV</td>
<td>Son is a senior at Glenville St. College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ursula L.</td>
<td>North Central, WV</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna F.</td>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
<td>Two sons at Columbia University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen L.</td>
<td>Danville, PA</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dareya C.</td>
<td>Rockville, MD</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan B.</td>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
<td>One son at Boston University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DETAILED FINDINGS
STUDENT’S TRANSITION

Parents are both happy and anxious about their student moving out of a residence hall.

No concerns

- Can live alone
- Apartments are new
- Not located downtown
- Townhouse will afford privacy
- Access to campus w/o having to drive
- Like the comradery
- Has the flexibility to stay on campus when he needs to
- Comfortable with her roommates
- Having her own kitchen will allow her to take care of her dietary needs
- Dorms were cramped and small
- Will have more in common with his chosen roommates
- Half as expensive as the cost of him living in the dorms

Concerns

- Missing out on campus life by moving off campus
- Campus provides a better learning environment
- Will have to shop for groceries
- The quality of his meals
- Won’t be able to walk to classes
- Predatory landlords
- More challenging than living on campus
- He has to be more fiscally responsible
- Missing the bus/not finding parking may cause him to miss class
- Quality of rentals
- Accessibility to public transportation
- Paying for a year, rather than 10 months
- Maintaining good study habits with possible extra activities
- Safety
- Bad landlords
- Signing a legal contract

“I feel strongly that a minimum of 1 year in residence hall is important. The forced socialization caused by living in tight quarters and populated floors makes kids get out and talk. Once they have spent a year in the dorm and have made friends, I feel they are ready to go into another form of housing... As a parent I felt at ease knowing that he could always get a meal from the dorm food plan without having to shop for food. Now that he's got his feet wet with the college experience, he's better equipped to handle grocery shopping and an apartment.” – Susan B.

“I'm very torn. I think part of going to a large school is to live on a large vibrant campus. With that being said, my daughter will live in WVU-owned housing right off campus to still have access to all what the campus has to offer without having to drive.” - Jessica N.
IDEAL LIVING ENVIRONMENT

Parents identified many challenges their student faced/will face in finding an ideal living environment:

- Cost
- Unknown roommates
- Having privacy/study time
- Roommates who can be trusted
- Poor roommate matching system
- Picking the right mix of roommates
- Being in close proximity to campus
- An unpredictable commute to campus
- Finding the time to find a place to live
- Spending time wisely in a new environment
- Finding clean, safe, affordable environment
- The degree of “controlled” noise/disturbance
- Having to find roommates so early freshman year
HOUSING-RELATED ISSUES

In many respects, parents and their students will be in agreement about their student’s housing selection. Nonetheless, there are some housing-related issues the two are likely to struggle with:

- Eating well
- Staying on track with schoolwork
- Becoming more responsible/independent
- Paying closer attention to their safety
- Paying better attention to finances
- Being able to get to class on time

**Academics**

“It’s easier on campus when you have friends that have classes together – it’s a constant reminder for arriving on time, assignment due dates etc. This was VERY helpful especially the freshman year when they don’t really know anybody. Living off campus you are forced to ensure the above issues are taken care of on your own ... which may be a good thing or a bad thing depending on the qualities of your student.” – Linda H.

**Finances**

“Our agreement to move off campus is that we will pay her rent, but she needs to have a job to pay for her utilities, food and necessities, and entertainment. This has worked very well with our previous two students, making it not so stressful month to month financially, but giving them part of the responsibility. It will get difficult if she doesn’t find a job. I think she will have a better study environment because she has her own room. She has made good choices for roommates. She is working toward a career as a crime scene investigator and knows she has to have a clean record so I don’t worry about large parties or anything illegal going on.” – Pamela B.

**Meals**

“We've agreed on almost everything so far except how big of a meal plan she'll still need. She will have to get used to the "inconvenience" of cooking in her apartment vs. stopping to buy food. I definitely will get her a plan with meal swipes that can be used any time throughout the semester. She schedules 3 classes in a row, then has a break before another class. She also often goes straight to her job. She won't be able to get back to her apartment to eat at least a couple days per week.” - Camille
CONSIDERATIONS

Parents were asked what factors they personally considered important for their student to keep in mind when they looked for new housing. Location topped the list (20 mentions). Safety/security (15 mentions), cost (15 mentions), well-maintained/clean (9) and personal space (5 mentions) were also mentioned most often.

It’s important to note that parents do not want to be “sold” on housing options. They prefer to deal in facts. Parents also had more practical considerations than their children.

“I like the WVU housing site. I think it’s informative without trying to sell you.” – Jessica N.

“The apartment guide that shows the different apartments the school has is helpful for those who are not sure where they want to move yet. It shows the different options and where the apartments are.” – Amy S. “I like that one too. And it doesn’t try to sell you by "glorifying" the buildings. Mere facts. I liked that.” – Jessica N.

“I like the Apartment Guide. It doesn’t try to sell you to glorifying the buildings. It’s mere facts, and I liked that.” - Amy S.

“He wanted the "bells and whistles." I wanted clean, safe, affordable, convenient.” – Ursula

“She was focused on aesthetics first. For example, She likes to bake and wanted a pretty kitchen (preferably dark wood and an electric stove) with lots of space vs I wanted a clean and functional kitchen. She also thought that she wouldn't mind it being further away from campus.” – Camille
CONSIDERATIONS

The issue and importance of safety was brought up numerous times.

“I feel we will disagree about the location of where she lives next. I am more concerned about her safety than she is. She has presented me with what she has found and I forwarded some to her also. We both agree that she will need housemates that are respect each other. She has had a rough time with her roommate this year.” – Cheryl

“I think I have established what is most important to us and that’s her safety getting to / from classes and activities based on where they live, is it well lit, is it monitored with a guard during certain hours and doors locked at certain hours minimizing uninvited company or visitors. We will next year be in disagreement on the cost. I need to keep the cost close to the dorm cost a year to justify her living in off campus housing or in campus apartments.” – Donna F.

“Most in agreement with choice of location, cost, and roommates. The commute will be the most concern. She is in ROTC and has to be on campus before 5:30 AM several days a week. Safety is my concern.” – Gina H.
CONSIDERATIONS

Parents were asked to select from the following the 3-5 most important features in their student’s housing. Safety and distance from campus were mentioned far more often than the other features. Distance from transportation was a distant third. Individual leases ranks fourth. All-inclusive rounds out the top five most important features. On-sites services was named as well, but far less often.

- a. Recreational facilities (swimming pool, gaming rooms, etc.)
- b. On-site parking
- c. On-site services (laundry, grocery, etc.)
- d. On-site fitness center
- e. Distance from campus
- f. Distance from transportation (buses, PRT)
- g. Safe location/environment
- h. On-site resident events (e.g. pizza parties, etc.)
- i. Newness of the facility
- j. 24-hour maintenance
- k. All-inclusive rate (utilities included)
- m. Pet-friendly lease
- n. Established quiet hours
- o. Roommate matching service
- p. Individual leases for each student
- q. Fully furnished
- s. Private facilities (bedroom, bathroom)
- t. On-site restaurants, coffee shops/take out

“I don't want to worry anymore than I do. E. It's easier to not go to class on a bad-weather day when you remember how far away that you live! K. Easier to manage one bill/payment P. I do not want to be responsible for another child.” – Camille S.

“Safety is first because a lot of bad things can happen when college students are around! Next would be distance from campus. I'd like my son to be involved in campus activities. Plus, being close to campus makes it easier to attend class.” – Chris P.

“1 - safe location/environment - I want my son to be in a safe area; 2 - distance from campus - he needs to be close to his classes since he does not have a car on campus; 3 - distance from transportation - he needs to be close to public transportation since he will not have a car on campus” – Jennifer R.
UNIVERSITY-MANAGED HOUSING

Parents cited some additional benefits as well:

- Will not need to purchase furniture
- Will likely be monitored/quiet
- Rent is paid through their student account
- Good for getting their feet wet

Ease of Payment

“For us the advantages were that rent is through the housing unit. Also knowing that the School owned apartments would be well maintain and could see them online. Also that School owned are in close proximity to the campus, which makes it easy for getting to classes and the PRT.” – Amy S.

Transitional

“I like the idea of a University owned apartment. Students may have a level of independence such as no dorm rules, opportunity to cook for themselves, monthly rent bill while still having some structure. Many of the privately apartments/houses that we have seen have not been safe/clean/well insulated dwellings. My daughter will be living at UPLACE. I believe this type of housing is perfect for the next phase of independence.” – Pamela H.

Regulated

“We insisted that she move into a WVU-owned apartment because there are a lot more rules. There are not as many guidelines for behavior and quiet times at non-university-owned apartments. I talked with the manager of the complex myself, and I have also talked to students currently living there. My daughter has done the same as well. I personally want my daughter living somewhere with strict policies My concern is over how she learns to adjust to being more responsible financially (i.e., living more on a budget). How she will manage doing things more independently. We are going to force her to be more financially responsible this coming year, and have her stick more to a budget.” – Karen E.

Furnished

“My son decided to live in a University apartment, which makes me feel more comfortable. I feel like it's a step away from the dorm but not quite ready for an apartment, a nice in between fit. Plus, being fully furnished we don't have to buy any furniture!” – Heidi
TIMING OF SEARCH
Students appear to receive conflicting information as to when they should begin looking for housing for their sophomore year.

“My son and his friends couldn't find available rentals where they wanted to live. I explained to him that he didn't need to sign early because everything from WVU encouraged us to not sign early leases. This is probably the case for University apartments but not what he wanted. 2-3 different buildings had no available leases for the fall and he started looking in January/February 2017.” – Ursula L.

“The information from WVU stated that many options are available and to not commit too early for many reasons - all valid (location changes, roommate changes, not returning to school, unexpected situations). Even at the Orientation before school started, we were told that our kids will be under pressure to sign early leases for next year. We were assured this would not be necessary as off-campus living is in abundance. I'm paraphrasing here.” – Ursula L.

“I was actually shocked that we had to sign a lease for sophomore year when he hadn't even received his first semester of grades. I wish everyone would slow down and wait until closer to mid Spring semester to make housing plans - like I did back in the day - but clearly it's a different world. We strongly felt that in order for him to get into the building he chose, we needed to sign the lease in November 2016 to secure it.” – Susan B.

“We were told over and over on our tours that there weren't enough dorms to stay past freshman year so to start looking early for apartments so you have the best chance of getting what you want.” – Pamela B.
TIMING OF SEARCH

Most students began talking with their parents about housing options for their sophomore year as early as October, freshman year. Some did so as late as January and February. Some parents dislike the fact that students are encouraged to find a place even before they become familiar with the campus or even have a chance to develop friendships, etc.

“We began discussing housing options in late Oct./early Nov. of her freshman year to secure housing for sophomore year. Our process: she sent me pictures of houses she toured with pricing and leasing commitments, etc. I ruled out single rental homes due to non furnishings and questionable safety for a group of young ladies. At that time, I logged on to housing options myself and researched, made calls etc. She went to tour U club with her suite mates ... everybody liked them. We watched for notifications for lease agreements to be available and they secured their placement between Thanksgiving and early December.” – Donna F.

“She recently signed a lease at UPLACE. I do not like the pressure put onto the students to begin signing leases as early as October. As freshmen, they haven't even experienced midterms, have no idea what these new friends are really like, if they will actually be returning to a WVU, etc.” – Pamela H.

“At this point, my husband and I went looking at apartments for my daughter and her roommate back in October, during parent's weekend visit. Both had no real desire or time to really search for an apartment, nor did they really know what to look for in an apartment. Keeping cost reasonable, and giving them each their own space, convenient parking for her roommate that was reasonable in price, were factors which helped them make a decision on which apartment was best for them.” – Karen L.
TIMING OF SEARCH

Even though they don’t like their freshman student having to search for future housing so early, they are forced to do so at WVU. Given that, they want housing information sooner rather than later.

“The information needs to be sent during the late first semester or early semester. I think that WVU should so more to promote housing options and have on site staff be more engaging. We found that they pointed out more negatives than positives. Most information came from other students. Since I work in sales and customer service, I look for those things in the person to person aspect.” – Linda H.

“Timing is key although if you start mailing about next year’s housing in October (after two months of school) new parents are going to be shocked! I was actually shocked that we had to sign a lease for sophomore year when he hadn't even received his first semester of grades. I wish everyone would slow down and wait until closer to mid Spring semester to make housing plans - like I did back in the day - but clearly it's a different world. We strongly felt that in order for him to get into the building he chose, we needed to sign the lease in November 2016 to secure it.” – Susan B.

“It would need to come out EARLY, like with the freshman orientation. It would be nice to have a booklet, as least of the WVU-owned properties, that covers them all with photos, honest costs, floor plans, amenities, requirements, and maps - all in the same place. The list of other off campus options on the web page is good.” – Pamela B.

“Perhaps a meeting or gathering for students early in the first semester where the options are gone over? But early, very early. I would suggest handing out information to parents at freshman orientation, move in weekend and parents weekend. If WVU had those options at that time, I didn't notice but it would have been nice for someone to say ... hey, it's never too early to think about next year.” – Heidi H.
UNIVERSITY-MANAGED HOUSING

All but a few parents were aware that WVU offers University-managed student housing options. They learned about the housing options at Orientation, visits to WVU, during the send-off by Mountaineer Parents Club last summer, during tours, signs on campus, their student or a brochure they received in the mail.

Parents received inconsistent treatment from the University-managed apartments they visited.

“They were very friendly at UPark and Vandalia. They didn't seem to mind answering my questions (however trivial). UPark couldn't answer some specifics about dimensions but offered to allow me to view an apartment so that I could measure myself.” – Camille S.

“Initially, we were hesitant. However, after touring all the different types of housing available, we are much more comfortable because we were able to speak with residents, current and past. The staff was friendly and much more engaged at non-WVU properties. We found at the WVU properties we looked at, it was like pulling teeth to get info. They seemed eager to sell without really answering our questions.”

“I think that WVU should do more to promote housing options and have on site staff be more engaging. We found that they pointed out more negatives than positives. Most information came from other students. Since I work in sales and customer service, I look for those things in the person to person aspect.” – Linda H.
PERCEPTIONS OF “UNIVERSITY-MANAGED”

When asked what “university-managed” student housing means to them, in most cases, parents spoke favorably.

“Very good. I trust WVU.”
“Gets directly billed through her student account. Things that go on in University-owned apartments will not happen to the level as non-university managed ones.”
“Same quality of management and safe as in the dorms, but with more freedom for students.”
“Students have to think twice before committing serious infractions because there is more to lose if they get caught.”
“Probably more expensive than the dorms.”
“Likely more expensive and have more rules.”

Parents were asked to select three terms from those below that they most associate with “university managed.”

- Safe
- Sense of community
- Expensive
- Convenient/close proximity
- Concerned for student’s well-being
- Too closely monitored
- Responsive
- No drinking permitted

The overwhelming majority of parents associate the term with “safe” (24 mentions). The other top associations are “convenient/close proximity” (18 mentions) and “expensive” (13 mentions).
PERCEPTIONS OF “UNIVERSITY-MANAGED”

When asked what apartments/townhouses being “university-managed” mean to them, parents spoke favorable in most cases.

- “Single billing for school and housing.”
- “A known landlord.”
- “Prime locations.”
- “Very good. I trust WVU.”
- “Get directly billed through her student account. Things that go on in University-owned apartments will not happen to the level as non-university managed ones.”
- “Likely more expensive and has more rules.”
- “On or close to campus.”
- “Does not require renters insurance.”
- “Same quality of management and safe as in the dorms, but with more freedom for students.”
- “University is responsible for repairs.”
- “Well-managed and maintained and in prime locations.”
- “Students have to think twice before committing serious infractions because there is more to lose if they get caught.”
- “More supervised and secure housing.”
- “Straightforward rental agreements.”
- “Probably more expensive than the dorms.”
- “It would give peace of mind.”
- “Well-managed and maintained and in prime locations.”
PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY-MANAGED HOUSING

Unprompted, several parents argued that if their student moved into University-managed housing they would avoid dealing with dubious landlords.

“I felt the same way about predatory landlords and them taking advantage of students so my daughter is in WVU-owned apartment at University Park. I did not want to deal with pushy landlords. The housing office in the apartment complex presented all the different options for apartments, including what was included and what was not, in a very informative and not pushy way.” – Jessica N.

“My daughter ended up in UPark also ... for the exact same reason! A few of the landlords that she dealt with during the tours were aggressive and pushy. They all had horrible reviews on the internet. One was reported multiple times per year to the BBB. It seems like some are out to take advantage of "kids." My daughter is pretty independent but I didn't think she was ready for shady landlords yet.” – Camille

However, some parents recounted having had a less than stellar experience with the staff at a University-managed property.

“Initially, we were hesitant. However, after touring all the different types of housing available, we are much more comfortable because we were able to speak with residents, current and past. The staff was friendly and much more engaged at non-WVU properties. We found at the WVU properties we looked at, it was like pulling teeth to get info. They seemed eager to sell without really answering our questions.” – Linda H.
ADVANTAGES OF UNIVERSITY-MANAGED APARTMENTS

“(UPlace) Location, very attractive model apartment, we were informed that each apartment is redone between lease agreements. I felt that the rates for the rent was comparable, actually a great value when you think about the amenities. I am a fan of utilities included and the fact that the rent can be subtracted from financial aid is GREAT.” – Pamela H.

“We have heard that it is a good transition from the dorms to independent living. We heard this from other parents whose children have lived or currently live there. Also, my son has several friends that currently live there.” – Jennifer R.

“There was a lot of talk about not signing a lease without having an attorney look over the lease. To alleviate that "stress," university owned housing seemed like a good option. Being that we have lived in NYC, we have had our fair share of nightmare landlords and definitely not something we wanted to have to deal with again.” – Jessica N.

“A 12-month lease at Vandalia is cheaper than two semesters in Honors Hall. Some are higher in rent, but this one was very reasonable with specials offered. They are small apartments but right size for two, also clean and high end kitchens, stainless appliances, granite countertops.” – Karen L.

“I researched on the internet first, then when my husband and I visited for Parent's Weekend, we visited many apartments, including WVU apartments. My daughter and her current dorm roommate ended up choosing WVU Vandalia apartments. We were pleased with the amenities, all inclusive utilities, and the two, clean, furnished, and bedroom/two bath apartment not to mention how close it is to downtown campus. Rental price was comparable to dorm and apartment was newer and just the right size for the two of them. We also liked the security and that campus police monitor these apartments. Too many roommates can cause unneeded tension and too large of apartment for all to keep up after. They have too much school work to worry about these things. I also liked that their monthly rent can come out of their Star account. One less thing to worry about.” – Karen L.
ADVANTAGES OF UNIVERSITY-MANAGED APARTMENTS

Avoid the risk of having an unethical landlord.

There was a lot of talk about not signing a lease without having an attorney look over the lease. To alleviate that "stress," university owned housing seemed like a good option. Being that we have lived in NYC, we have had our fair share of nightmare landlords and definitely not something we wanted to have to deal with again.” – Jessica N.

Appropriate size for two students. Good price specials. Clean, high-end design.

A 12-month lease at Vandalia is cheaper than two semesters in Honors Hall. Some are higher in rent, but this one was very reasonable with specials offered. They are small apartments but right size for two, also clean and high end kitchens, stainless appliances, granite countertops.” – Karen L.


(UPlace) Location, very attractive model apartment, we were informed that each apartment is redone between lease agreements. I felt that the rates for the rent was comparable, actually a great value when you think about the amenities. I am a fan of utilities included and the fact that the rent can be subtracted from financial aid is GREAT.” – Pamela H.
ADVANTAGES OF UNIVERSITY-MANAGED HOUSING

Parents were asked the rank 3-5 items below that were most important to them regarding their student’s housing.

Safety was selected as the most important feature. Convenience, ease of payment, onsite WVU property manager and onsite WVU property maintenance are among those parents selected as most important.

☐ Roommate Matching service - Alleviates the stress of finding a roommate(s) with similar personalities/lifestyles
☐ Safety - Pedestrian walkways and parking lots are illuminated
☐ Ease of payment - Rent payments (which includes utilities) can made through your student’s Student Account or their Financial Aid
☐ Convenience – Campus resources are easy to access; easy to get to classes
☐ Onsite WVU Maintenance - All maintenance issues are handled by WVU staff; students are not charged by any third parties
☐ Onsite WVU Property Manager – It’s easier for students to easily and quickly get help with housing-related issues
☐ Ongoing property maintenance – The immediate area is regularly maintained to meet university-established standards
RESPONSIBLE FOR RENT

About half the parents will pay their student’s rent; nearly as many parents will share the responsibility with their student. About half a dozen students will also receive financial aid/scholarships that will be used to pay their rent.

Several parents complained that the residence halls are expensive, so off-campus living will likely be less costly.

“Almost everything is more affordable than a dorm room. We figured about $500 for rent w/utilities (more than actual lease) $300 for food = $800-900 a month total. We are still paying less than dorm room/board costs, which were + $1,100.” – Ursula L.

“We looked at what we paid for him to stay in the Towers and wanted to get close to that cost.” – Amy S.

“Many of the off-campus housing options are comparable in cost, so we settled on anything less than $550/month, including parking and utilities.” – Keith S.
THE COMPETITION

Parents spoke favorably about a couple of competitors:

The Domain

“My son is moving into The Domain. I talked with someone in depth (visiting was not an option since I am in Arkansas) and they made me feel really good about his decision. They even had a "Friendsgiving" for students who stayed there during the Thanksgiving break.” – Christy D.

UClub Sunnyside

“UClub Sunnyside really marketed the fact that they hired students. So she was very hopeful that she could work off some of her rent. I am sure they use this to play up affordability when the reality is that they can only hire a handful. She was ill when she needed to submit the video interview, so understandably didn't get hired. If there are student positions where they can work off a part of their rent (even 10-20%) that would have been very appealing to her and to me. She is a hard worker and cannot qualify for work-study on campus. I forgot to put this on the survey, but having student worker positions available would have made this more appealing to her, and UClub really pushed that a lot to her.” – Katie P.

UClub Sunnyside

“My husband and I both hoped our son would stay in the dorms another year because of the convenience and the meal plans. He has chosen to move in August to an apartment on campus in University Club Sunnyside with 3 other students. We travelled to Morgantown and toured the facility with him because we didn't feel he was ready to make this decision on his own. After touring the facility and seeing that it is still on campus, we agreed to let him try it.” – Jennifer R.

UClub Sunnyside

“My daughter will live in UClub next fall. Initially, when she proposed moving out of the traditional dorm style living I was apprehensive. Her group of friends were looking at rental houses near the University in the downtown location. The rents were high, unfurnished and I was concerned about outdated codes, fires, etc. She then proposed the U Club new apartments. I went to see them in person and I was very pleased with them. I am comfortable with her decision at U club Sunnyside. The path is well lit. The sidewalks are in good condition, it’s close to campus and they are new construction.” – Donna F.
FEATURES: PAYING VIA STUDENT ACCOUNT

The overwhelming majority believe the ability for their student to pay rent through their student account is an important feature. It appears to be more important when their child gets financial aid or a scholarship. Some say being able to do so eliminates unnecessary stress. However, those parents who are solely responsible for paying their student’s rent see no benefit.

“Much easier than dealing with a 3rd party that could be questionable.” Heidi H.

“Living out of state it makes it so much easier to just go online click a few buttons and rent is paid.” – Karen E.

“I think it would help them manage funds that they get through financial aid and not have to worry about it being spent on other things.” – Christy D.

“My son has several scholarships, so paying rent out of his student account would make it very easy.” – Tracy I.

“Although, I know with my help, my daughter would pay her rent on time, but she already has enough school stress that this feature helps in taking one more added stressor away.” – Karen L.
FEATURES: NO CAP ON UTILITIES

The fact that there is no cap on utilities and that utilities are included in the rent is well-liked. It helps parents/students budget better.

“Again living out of state paying for everything in the rent makes it so much easier. Don't want the bother of having to pay multiple different places, etc.” – Karen E.

“I like having a set amount to pay so that a budget could be more accurate.” – Cheryl S.

“At home, parents control the use and payment of the utilities and they have no idea how to monitor a thermostat. They go to the dorm and have unlimited air conditioning, cable and Wi-Fi without understanding the cost.” – Christy B.

Others argue that “no cap” encourages students to be wasteful, so they are not very supportive of the idea.

“I just wouldn't want my son to be wasteful because he's not responsible for that utility because in the end that will just drive the rent up.” – Cynthia C.

“I expect my son to be responsible and cognizant of his utility use. The inclusive/no-cap environment does not foster that level of responsibility.” – Tracy I
BROCHURE FOR UNIVERSITY MANAGED APARTMENTS

Based on the images of the brochure they were shown in the discussion board, most parents found it compelling enough to want to learn more about the apartments.

Several parents said they do not see pricing and noted that is a very important item to include. One also asked that it include a detailed map of where the apartments are located relative to parking, campuses, bus stops, the PRT and shopping.
BROCHURE FOR UNIVERSITY-MANAGED APARTMENTS

Parents named the following aspects when asked - based on the brochure - what they liked best and least about these apartments.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Appealing</th>
<th>Least Appealing</th>
<th>Missing Information</th>
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<td>Modern</td>
<td>Price (perceived as expensive)</td>
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<td>Newer</td>
<td>Carpeting (allergens)</td>
<td>Location relative to campuses</td>
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<td>Well-kept</td>
<td>Limited parking</td>
<td>No physical street addresses</td>
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<td>Practical layout</td>
<td>On-site gym</td>
<td>How do you determine who gets parking</td>
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“*Yes, they look well kept. This is basically the information we saw on the website ... what I did find was that they were not that descriptive on the location on campus aside from Evansdale or that they were 'walking distance' to downtown campus ... isn't EVERYTHING walking distance?* – Linda H.

“I think we would consider but just based on the pictures, I anticipate they would be well outside our budget.” – Tracy I.

The use of the word “luxury,” as well as the fact that it has luxury accommodations turned off a few parents.

“Don't really see the need to have luxury accommodations - nice, clean and well maintained is good enough They pay for a fitness center in their tuition already. Some parking? How is it determined who gets to park there?” - Pamela B.

“We might consider them, however when you read the word Luxury, expensive immediately comes to mind.” – Keith S.
Parents were also asked if they thought the page below would appeal to their student. While that was not clear, parents appreciated its straightforward approach.

“*I like it it’s direct and to the point without being a “sales pitch.”*” – Robert M.

“As a parent, I like the heading. Fewer living worries will hopefully lead to more successful stories in the classroom.” – Pamela H.

“It might be nice to add in another color a few other notable amenities nearby so students can conceptualize proximity to food, library, etc.” – Donna F.
COMMUNICATION

All but a few parents believe it would be helpful to receive information about University-managed properties directly from the University. They would be able to learn about more options that are available to their student, which would provide peace of mind.

“It would have given me more options to discuss with my daughter. I had to rely on her looking and while I am happy with her choice, it would have been nice to know about these options.” – Dareya C.

“Very helpful, we are out of state, so it is not easy to get there physically to inspect for myself. I do research a lot on the web and found WVU website that links each complex, some complexes although, were not up to date on info such as rent prices. As long as they continue to maintain apartments and amenities, they can be very competitive with non-campus apartments. These apartments also do not follow University closings, so my student is not made to leave when on spring break, etc. Rental agreements can also become yearlong leases after initial signing. This is nice for students who will be doing summer classes and internships, etc.” – Karen L.

“During campus tours they should spotlight those, such as tour the dorm room AND tour an apartment to get them thinking about it early. It should also be brought up at Orientation, possibly a brochure with lots of pictures. Waiting until now to talk about it is WAY too late as most students start looking into it before Thanksgiving.” – Pamela B.

“Very. That type of information would have reinforced the information that my son was telling me via text/phone calls and etc. As an out of state family, quite a distance away, it would allow peace of mind. While I realize that there are students from across the country attending WVU, oftentimes I feel like they forget that not all parents are in the 5 hour drive radius.” – Heidi H.
**PRICE VS. VALUE**

At times, the information parents have regarding the cost of University-managed apartments is not consistent.

“My daughter does not receive any financial aid and chose to live in a WVU apartment - they are clean, fully furnished and very up to date in stainless steel appliances and granite counter tops. She will have her own bedroom and her own bathroom. Many of her friends also chose to live in WVU apartments. I did not think $550 /month with utilities included was a bad price. She also had a special with no application fee or security deposit required.” – Karen L.

“I don't know which WVU apartment is only $550 a month. I don't know about financial aid part because we don't need it, nor do we receive. We are paying $1,400 a month for daughter’s apartment, which is WVU owned. I asked my daughter about it and she has not heard of any such thing regarding WVU apartments.” – Karen E.
Parents are split on whether price or value is more important when it comes to their student’s housing options. Ideally, they want their student to have a safe and clean living space that is reasonably priced. Parents appear unconcerned or certainly less concerned about amenities.

**Price**

“Price. Being an out of state student, WVU housing was much more expensive. I think our first option would be WVU apartments but it ended up that pricing and parking were a huge factor.” – Linda H.

“Price. I don’t think they need a place with top amenities/activities. Could we provide MORE distractions from school for students than are already present? They ALREADY pay for a pool and weight room/athletic complex in their tuition. They are in college – they can have all the amenities once they graduate.” – Pamela B.

**Value**

“Value and value is subjective. My son found an apartment that was less expensive but further from campus. He was shown the model unit and signed his lease. He was very surprised at move in that the apartment was filthy and smelled like cigarettes and the mattress and walls had dead bedbugs. He was #53 on line to give his key back and move out the same day. In this case cheaper was just that, cheap. He moved to a new apartment downtown that was more expensive but it was clean, safe and convenient.” – Jackie R.
COMMUNICATION

Parents and students used a wide variety of resources when they explored housing options. Chief among them was the internet, word-of-mouth and apartment guides.

- (9) Internet
- (7) Word of mouth
- (4) Apartment Guide
- (2) Housing fair
- (2) WVU housing website
- Apartment guide sites
- Advertising in apartment building
- Dubwlandlords.com
- Information provided at new student orientation
- Social media
- Campus housing office

“For a couple, I googled "reviews" for A, B or C. I also checked the Better Business Bureau. I wish I’d kept the list. The one company name is owned by one man. He had 8 different properties near the school (that are always filled) yet the reviews on him, specifically, were horrible.” - Camille

“Initially, we used the internet, chose some that we wanted to visit. We looked at the WVU housing website and then googled apartments in the area. Once we were down there touring, we found more. It ended up that the place we signed a lease with was one of the ones we just found along the way.” – Linda H.

“I didn't explore housing. He and his friends did all of it. They used word of mouth, internet searches, scheduled visits. I wanted him to look for a decent place that was very affordable and right in the heart of campus or very close. I don't think kids need all the amenities they now have. College apartments weren't like that went I went, but this is the new standard now.” – Ursula L.
Parents acknowledged that receiving the following housing-related information would be helpful:

- All housing options available
- Locations
- Costs
- Amenities
- How safe each area is
- A checklist for parents
- Information from the BBB
- Videos
- If rental insurance is required

They overwhelmingly prefer to receive this information via email (23 mentions), and many advocate that the email come from the Mountaineer Parents Club or be posted on the site.

“Email is good and also through the WVU Mountaineer Parents club website. They send out information all the time that is very helpful.” - Linda H.

“I think the website shows enough. Don't bombard me with more info :-) I can find it when I need it!” – Jessica N.

“I think an email with a link to housing options. Once on the link videos highlighting the housing option both inside view and outside surroundings. The WVU parent club would be nice to have uploaded there as a reference as well.” – Donna F.

Note: Parents were asked about receiving housing information, in general, not just about WVU-managed properties.
COMMUNICATION

Few parents recall they/their student receiving information from company regarding their student housing options. Those

“I was sent some brochure for University Apartments. I went online to check into it more. It looked nice. I think it had 3-4 different apt options on it. At the time it seemed pricey.” – Ursula L.

“My son received a letter from WVU saying he earned himself an additional $1,000 housing scholarship. It was either for Honors Program or good grades. It came in the mail in March I think. He had already committed to an apartment though. Perhaps better timing of that letter would have allowed us to consider? Not likely though - he wanted to live off campus.” – Susan B.

“She received brochures. I don't find those helpful simply because they aren't going to mention the negatives about their apartments.” – Camille

“My daughter received information on campus.” – Katie P.

“It was helpful to learn about prices, length of leases, floor plans, amenities.” – Pamela H.
COMMUNICATION

Just a couple of parents acknowledged receiving information regarding their student’s housing options. One parent received an email from UClub, though she doesn’t recall providing them with her email address. Some parents recall their student receiving information at their residence hall. One parent recounted how her son received a letter from WVU regarding a housing scholarship. The latter arrived much too late to have had any influence on his decision.

“I got on an email list somehow. I get emails from UClub. Although my son is not living there, I looked at what it has to offer and the cost.

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