

Dean Whitaker
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
675 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston University
Boston, MA 02215

26 February, 2001

Dear Dean Whitaker,

On behalf of the GSO we are pleased to present you the following report on the status of graduate housing at Boston University. Included here is a summary of resources available at comparable universities in the Boston area. This information was gathered from the universities' web pages and from telephone interviews with their housing offices. This section is followed by a sampling of testimonials from Boston University students regarding their difficulties in finding housing. These responses were elicited by an email query sent to the GSO info list and to housing newsgroups (bu.housing and ne.housing).

As you know, the housing market in the Boston area is very tight. For incoming students, finding a place to live is one of the greatest challenges they will face in their first year at Boston University. It is not possible for students to secure housing without physically coming to Boston, and last year many new graduate students had no choice but to wait until the end of August to begin their housing search. Those who were unable to find affordable housing were forced to leave BU. With this in mind, we present to you the following list of the most pressing concerns regarding housing:

- Finding an apartment without having to travel to Boston. For International students and U.S. students coming from long distances, a special trip to Boston to locate housing is a financial burden.
- The financial burden of paying first and last month's rent, security deposit, and a realtor's fee.
- The lack of affordable University graduate housing.
- The lack of University housing available to graduate students that meets sanitary and safety standards. In the testimonials many students reported housing that had vermin or lacked electrical wiring suitable for the computer needs of graduate work.
- The need for more cooperative and friendly housing staff. Some of the testimonials report encounters with University staff in the housing offices who were unhelpful.

As you can see Harvard, MIT, and Northeastern all provide a modicum number of housing units to graduate students. Moreover, it is possible for students to obtain these units without visiting the campus -- a great advantage to students coming from far away.

We appreciate your shared concern in this matter and look forward to working with you to enhance BU's graduate community in ways that will continue to attract top students from around the world .

Sincerely,

Trina L. Arpin
Archaeology, GSO Representative

Laura Middlebrooks
Modern Foreign Languages & Literature,
GSO Representative

Fact Sheet

Boston University

www.bu.edu/housing/

- No graduate on campus dormitory style-housing for the upcoming academic year. Students are referred to Office of Off-Campus Services or Rental Property Office.

Harvard University, Graduate School of the Arts and Sciences

617-495-5060

www.gsas.harvard.edu/student/housing/

- All first year students are guaranteed a room. All others are assigned on a space available basis. All full-time, registered Harvard graduate students are eligible to apply for a room in the GSAS residence halls. Spouses or partners who are not students are not eligible to live in the residence halls.
- Four Co-ed GSAS residence halls
- All floors have a modern kitchen, dining area/lounge, and a bathroom. Laundry, computer, and exercises facilities are available in each residence.
- Fees range from \$3,510 to \$5,630.
- Graduate student apartments are also available.

MIT

617-253-5148

web.mit.edu/afs/athena.mit.edu/org/r/rlslp/grad/index.html

- Currently 75% of first-year graduate students who request housing receive it.
- Two graduate residence halls, two graduate apartment-style buildings, two family housing apartment buildings, and live-in positions available within the undergraduate living groups.
- With the opening of a new graduate dorm in 2002 MIT will be able to house 50% of enrolled graduates (web.mit.edu/buildings/grad-dorm/index.html).
- All housing is within a ten minute walking or biking distance of most classrooms and libraries. Info on Single Graduate assignments.
- Officially admitted or currently registered full-time graduate students are permitted to apply. Non-student affiliates and special students may be assigned to campus housing when applications for full-time students have been depleted.
- Cost is \$400/mo.

Northeastern University

617-373-2814

www.housing.neu.edu/gradlaw.html

- Currently, the University houses 184 graduate students.
- University owned and leased apartments are available. The amount of space available varies from year to year. University owned residences are within four blocks of the center of campus; leased apartments are in the Fenway neighborhood. All come with basic furnishings.
- All full-time students enrolled in graduate or law programs are eligible. Space is available on a first come first serve basis.
- Prices range from \$1380/person/quarter to \$2520/person/quarter.

Testimonials

The identities of the contributors and their departments have been kept anonymous.

1.

Date: Fri, 27 Oct 2000 16:13:49 -0700 (PDT)

From: X

To: laurasm@bu.edu

Subject: grad housing

I moved here in August from California to start grad school at BU. In all honesty, I think that the housing services here at BU leave a lot to be desired. I called the off-campus housing office several times for advice on how to obtain housing, and each time all they would tell me is go to their website. The website typically consisted of 20 listings at any given time and were usually out of date by quite awhile (I found this out when I called several of the listings and found out that they had been taken weeks ago).

I then proceeded to seek help from the University-owned housing office. It was extremely frustrating to be told that I could only rent a university owned apartment if I showed up to sign the lease in person, especially since I was trying to avoid making a costly trip from California just to find a place to live. In the end I had to fly out in July to rent a room in an apartment and then flew out again to move out here.

I strongly feel that BU needs a better system for helping out students that are coming here from long distances (especially international students). Sometimes it is just not financially feasible to fly out before the school year starts in order to find a place to live. Perhaps BU should consider leasing university owned apartments to students without actually requiring them to appear in person to sign the lease.

Thanks for the opportunity to let me share this.

2.

From laurasm@acstmp.bu.edu Fri Oct 27 20:00:00 2000 -0400

Date: Fri, 27 Oct 2000 19:59:00 -0400 (EDT)

From: X

My biggest problem looking for housing was thinking that BU owned housing might be affordable. As it turns out, their apartments are much more expensive than anything I can afford on the salary they pay me. I have a one bedroom for much less than their efficiencies! I would suggest new students to look into RAing in the BU dorms. It's free and close to campus. I have friends who did that and really enjoyed it. It may also be easier in your first year if you do field work in subsequent years, for example.

Hope that helps a little,

X

3.

From laurasm@acstmp.bu.edu Sun Oct 29 16:33:53 2000 -0500
Subject: house hunting? Date: Sun, 29 Oct 2000 16:50:18 -0500

the hunting's the easy part...what can be more hellish than 1400/month rent once you find it?

4.

From laurasm@acstmp.bu.edu Mon Oct 30 12:14:55 2000 -0500
Mon, 30 Oct 2000 12:13:23 -0500
Date: Mon, 30 Oct 2000 12:13:23 -0500 (EST)
From: Laura Middlebrooks <laurasm@bu.edu>
To: Laura Middlebrooks <laurasm@acs.bu.edu>

Dear Laura:

Finding a place to live is not a problem. The real danger is to find decent living conditions. We had to get rid of the mice that haunted our apartment. My advice (as stupid as it sounds) is to plug in any non-structural holes and crevices in your moving place, before the move, specially people who are, like me, not used to creepers like that. We finally got rid of them, and it didn't matter any industrial poisoned bags left by any exterminator. We found four of them opened, and the mouse still roaming around (maybe they took the inside for dessert). Mice are health hazards, even though I know people that like them! The landlords keep justice and the law on their side just by sending the exterminator. I had students, also, that assured me that the BU quarters are a safe heaven for those creepers too. So, BU should be the first one on the list.

Signed,
Anonymous

5.

From laurasm@acstmp.bu.edu Mon Oct 30 11:37:36 2000 -0500
Date: Mon, 30 Oct 2000 11:37:22 -0500

Hi,

My name is X and I'm a Grad. Student. Please bear with me while I tell you about my living experience in Boston. Some of it is a big complaint as I vent my frustration about some of the things that have happened. But I think if you read it you may be able to benefit future students.

I've been at BU for 6 years (I got an MA before my current program, also at BU). My general sense is first, housing is expensive. Second, if you want to get an apartment through a broker (which is mostly the only way to do it), they show you the trash first and then they show you something O.K. so you take it thinking it is your only option. My first year I lived over on Park Drive (nice but expensive for one person, fine for two) but I guess since the Sears building is re-opening, maybe the rents have gone up. The next year I lived in Brighton, I have to say, overall, Brighton is the best place to live if you are a graduate student. My third year I lived on Glenville Ave. off Harvard street, it was disgusting because

its full of undergrads that party and drink most of the time (people are pigs and there were cockroaches and mice in the building). It was very expensive (\$550 per month and it wasn't very big). My fourth year I moved to a rent controlled apartment on Beacon Street near Coolidge corner (but in order to afford it I had to live with three other people and share one bathroom only). Overall it wasn't bad.

My sixth year was hell, and I'm hoping here maybe I can get you guys to do something about this. My sixth year I moved into a grad. Student building owned by BU on 14 Buswell Street. That building is a mess!!!!

First, there was a wait list. Then, the apartments are small and the electricity is out of date (try turning on a computer and a microwave at the same time and the power goes out altogether), then, there are people living there that don't look much like grad. students (I heard rumors that people live there under other people's leases). The worst though, was the fact that it was infested with cockroaches. Yes, INFESTED. We were clean. The cockroaches crawled on the walls in the hallways, in the elevators, etc. The problem is that maintenance thinks that making you move your kitchen so they can come and spray ten times will fix the problem but it won't. The problem then (last February) was beyond spraying. If you can see bugs (several) crawling on the walls during the day, it means that inside the walls is already too crowded for them.

Imagine how many cockroaches of all shapes and sizes were living there. Would you like to live under those conditions? We had a pest control device, we had combats, still we moved out when finally a cockroach crawled up my leg and we found several under our bed (we never had food in our bedroom and we didn't have pets or anything that would attract them there). they had just sprayed but for a whole month we had seen more than 7 or 8 bugs a day (during the day). THIS IS, I repeat, A BU BUILDING!!!! People do not seem to complain, maybe because they don't want to be "discovered" if the apartment isn't legally theirs. There are whole families with several adults and children living in one small apartment at times. People's attitudes did not help. We used to park our bikes outside and found rice and other food on them because the people that lived above the bike racks were throwing food out the window. when we moved we still had to pay some rent. If I were you I'd look into this. I mean, I think the way people live in that building is not human. A grad student has enough pressure to deal with so that you shouldn't have to have more than your share of headaches about your living area.

So as a grad. student you either pay a lot of money, or live far from school, or you have to live in the crappy buildings that BU offers (I've heard horror stories about the other BU buildings).

Suggestions to newcomers, look for buildings in Brookline and Brighton. Share, but not with too many people because it gets dirty and chaotic. You will have to pay one half or one full months rent but this is better than the kinds of things I've had to deal with before. Don't ever rent from BU (it is cheap but with serious consequences).

Sorry for the wining and complaining but I hope this is somewhat helpful.

Sincerely,

X

6.

Date: Wed, 1 Nov 2000 11:44:09 -0500 (EST)

To: Laura Middlebrooks <laurasm@bu.edu>

Subject: house-hunting

Dear Laura:

I have an anecdote about finding housing in Boston. I don't know if it will help you, but since it I was left so shocked by the whole thing I'm going to tell you about it.

Last summer I was looking for an apartment and I thought I'd look at some that BU has for graduate students. I knew there was a long waiting list and you have to do things way in advance but I went anyway. Happily there was one room available (and I say room because, given my limited resources, this was all I could afford). Well, the listing said that it was a minimum of \$450 and that I would have to share the kitchen and bathroom with two other people. This didn't seem too bad so I asked to see the room.

The building was in Beacon Street, very close to the D line stop in Fenway, and very close to the University, but, horror! The room was tiny, with just enough space for a "twin" bed, a small desk, a small fridge and a small kitchen, with a cabinet for plates and things. It was super depressing, dirty and old. In fact, on each floor there were five rooms and you had to share the bathroom because what was considered the "kitchen" was what was found in each room. And since there was no running water in the rooms, you had to go to the bathroom to get it if you wanted to cook.

The rent was \$575, plus a \$50 "Broker's Fee." You had to pay the first and last month's rent, and all the utilities were included except the telephone.

You can understand why I didn't want to rent such a hole – even the real estate agent who showed it to me said that he wouldn't want to live there either.

I've heard that the studios and one or two-bedroom apartments available to graduate students are pretty nice. That may be so, but then why are the individual rooms so terrible? You can't even say that they're affordable, they're just as expensive as in other places, only that you don't have to pay one month's security deposit. I live in Brighton now and I pay less (\$530) and it really is so much better, even though I had to pay a deposit.

I think it's unfair that BU, having so much money, treats graduate students like this, especially since the majority live on their stipends and scholarships – and that goes double for the international students.

I don't know if my story helps you any, but it really did surprise me to see what I did.

Thanks for reading this.

X

7.

From laurasm@acstmp.bu.edu Date: Wed, 1 Nov 2000 21:46:25 -0600

OK, where to begin... First of all, my biggest complaint... I cannot believe that an educational institution like BU does NOT have graduate housing. This is the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard of. Shouldn't the school cater to all their students? I feel that there is a real sort of discrimination between undergrads and grad. students. Just because grad. students are older and independent from their parents doesn't mean that they don't need assistance with housing - especially those of us who are unfamiliar with Boston and who have moved cross country just to go to school there. It's pathetic.

Well, one thing I learned throughout the hellish experience is that I waited too long. However, I waited because I wasn't sure if I wanted to go to BU - I was deciding between several schools and made a decision at the last minute. One of the reasons it was last minute is because when I did visit the school and department last April, neither the grad. school nor the grad. advisor in the X dept. were very accommodating. I called both offices about a week prior to my visit. When I got to the grad. school it was closed and no one was around to help me and when I arrived at the dept., the grad. Advisor was not there - although he did make an appointment with me - he just blew me off. Now, I have an NSF grant that pays for my schooling and my living costs. But, more importantly, the school and the department get a generous stipend also - so basically, I felt that they should be kissing my ass, or at least make time to meet with me since I would be bringing money in for them - this is what made me really mad. Needless to say, I was very unimpressed with the school that day and very disillusioned. In the end, I realized that I needed to make my decision based on other factors, but I do think I could have made my decision sooner had the school and dept. made themselves available to me. Thus, I do feel that BU is partially to blame for my waiting so long which ultimately affected my housing situation.

I made my decision to attend BU in early August and began my housing search immediately. I called both housing offices and both were tremendously UNhelpful (and rude). When I asked about housing they just laughed in my face. What I thought was going to be helpful was the off-campus housing site. At first, I was pretty picky, but then when I realized how little was available, I just started calling every number - both the apartment listing and roommates wanted. For nearly four weeks I tried and found nothing. I soon realized that most apartments were gone within hours of them being posted. I also turned to Boston apartment sites on the web - no luck. And after talking to several realtors, I realized that I would have to be paying mega-bucks to live somewhere. Those rent prices are just plain ridiculous and truly unaffordable for any student. I thought that once I arrived in Boston I would have more luck as I could search for postings on bulletin boards and the like.

Wrong. I searched and searched and searched and then I really started to freak out. So, I knew I had to find a place to stay in the mean time, but finding a temp. place was just as hard as finding an apartment. All hotels, from transient to luxurious, were booked. I went to the hostel and women's hostel only to find that there wasn't any room and that there was a waiting list. I went to get placed on the waiting list and found out that first availability was mid-November. I was literally homeless in a city I didn't know. Now, I'm a big girl, but this was really scary, especially because I didn't know anyone. I was saved for 4 days because of my decision as an undergrad. to join a sorority. When one is in a sorority, there is an underlying rule that says if you are ever in a city that has a chapter house and you need a place to stay than you can stay there if you need to. So, I called the national headquarters of Alpha Phi and was told that BU did not have a house, but MIT did. I called them up and told them I was an alum. And that I needed a place to stay for a few days until I found housing - and they said fine.

While I finally had a place to lay my head, it was still very uncomfortable because I was surrounded by strangers in a strange place. Not to mention that they had too many people living in the house, so I had to sleep on a very uncomfortable couch in the main living room which happened to be adjacent to the main door. With 50 girls living in a house, people are coming and going at all hours. I got little sleep those 4 days. By the end of those 4 days, I was tired, had completely ignored my school work because I was busy looking for a place to live, and had pretty much overstayed my welcome at the house. So, I turned to living in the department (all of my luggage was stacked near the door), sleeping on the department couch, and showering at the gym.

My main priority this whole time was finding a place to live and I found myself not doing my assignments or skipping classes to go look at places only to find nothing in the end. I spent much of my time on the phone (also in the dept. - you can ask X about this one, everytime I was in there I was on the phone) calling realtors or people who had put up new postings. By the end of the first week, I was a mess. I didn't know what to do so I went to the grad. advisor to tell him about my situation. He was unhelpful and just told me to keep trying. After speaking to a few people I decided that for my sanity I would give myself a deadline of another week to find something. I talked to a few of my professors and told them if I didn't find something that I would have to go back to Chicago. They were incredibly understanding and helpful, so much so that they agreed to figure something out so that I could do work from Chicago and maintain my program. So I kept looking and I ended up sending a mass e-mail to everyone in the department asking them for information about a place to live or if I could just sleep on a couch or a floor until I found something. Out of all of those people in that department two people offered a floor for a few days. So, I stayed at someone's place in North Quincy while I searched, but the week soon came to an end and I still found nothing.

So, I am now in Chicago working independently and corresponding with my professors on a regular basis. I have specific reading assignments and papers to write and by the semesters end I will have made two trips to Boston to meet with them in person. While this is at least keeping me on track, I know that I am a complete disadvantage in comparison to my peers. I cannot attend class and thus I can't participate in discussions, I can't participate in departmental gatherings, and I know that I am going to be behind in comparison to those who started the program at the same time I did, and while I know my peers are working hard and that I would have been as well had I been in Boston, I feel that I'm working overtime just to keep up (and I know that no one is going to know what I've had to do). Plus, I feel like a complete idiot and I fear that I will have ended up looking bad to people (specifically professors) in the department.

This has all been very ugly, but I do feel fortunate and thankful that my professors have been willing to help me out and going out of their way to keep me on track. I sent out another mass e-mail about a month ago asking people about sublets for the Spring semester and luckily I have found something. But interestingly, I am now helping a friend of mine who will be going to BU as a grad. student next semester - she is encountering the same housing nightmares as I have. Will it ever end?

Hope this has been helpful. Let me know if you need any other information.

8.

From laurasm@acstmp.bu.edu Thu Nov 2 14:12:50 2000 -0500

Nov 2000 19:11:31 GMT

Subject: Response

Hi, my name is X. Yeah, finding housing anywhere near BU is essentially impossible for graduate students. So much of the housing is tied up by Real Estate companies, that want first, last, security, and a fee- which is too much money for most people to come up with. My advice would be to start looking early, and to plan on living somewhere in the suburbs or outlying areas- Cambridge, Brighton, Allston, and Somerville are just too damn expensive.

9.

From laurasm@acstmp.bu.edu Wed Nov 29 19:56:02 2000 -0500

Date: Wed, 29 Nov 2000 19:55:19 -0500

Subject: BU housing

I am grad BU student doing phd I can't afford anything here, I have told my boss after 6 years of doing my phd that I have to leave because my lease is up and they are raising BU housing from 1275 for ugly one bedroom 100 bucks! I have one month left to finish and can't find anything here that is even close to affordable...my advice for new students don't come to Boston and go to BU you will never be able to afford it...unless mommy and daddy are rich...

X