



# A PLACE TO CALL HOME

EXAMINING THE HOUSING NEEDS AND CHOICES OF OHIO STATE STUDENTS



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
THE METHOD PAST TO PRESENT	6
WHY FOCUS GROUPS	8
WHERE STUDENTS LIVE	10
THE DYNAMICS OF CAMPUS HOUSING	16
WORDS MATTER	17
THE SOCIAL NETWORK	18
HOUSING POOL	19
COST OF LIVING	20
LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION	21
CAMPUS SAFETY	22
ACCESS TO AMNETIES	26
STUDENT SURVEY	30
RECOMMENDATIONS	34

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# INTRODUCTION

This written report, as well as a presentation, poster, and survey questionnaire was prepared by a City and Regional Planning studio class and presented to the Ohio State University's Office of Student Life, Facility Management and Logistics. This report details the findings of a series of focus groups with undergraduate students from the Ohio State University. These focus groups were conducted with the aim of understanding more about the housing choices and needs of OSU undergraduate students.

The goals of this qualitative study are to:

- 1) determine why OSU students live where they live
- 2) identify the changes that might need to take place to encourage students to live close to campus
- 3) improve the housing conditions of OSU students.

Analyzing data from the focus groups, we identified common themes that were important to students when making their off-campus housing choices. This report details these themes and, based on these results, offers recommendations for how this housing can be improved.

These recommendations, as well as a survey questionnaire, are presented to the Ohio State University's Office of Student Life to use as they continue to seek ways to improve the experiences of students both on and off-campus.

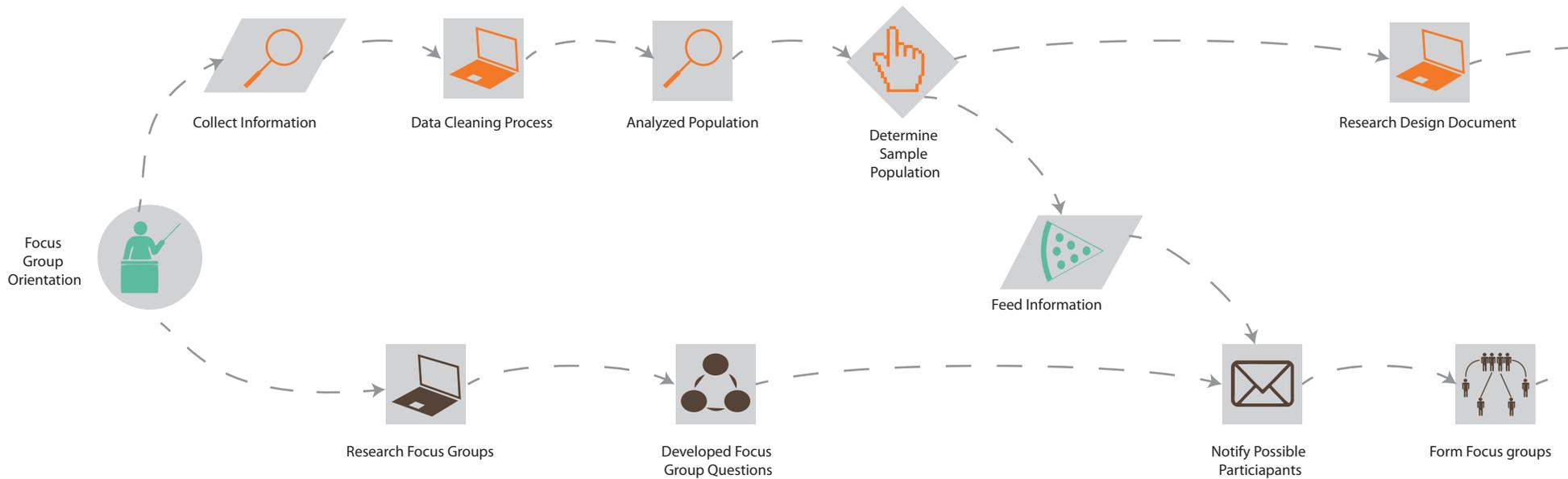


**“DORM LIFE... IS NOT SOMETHING I WOULD WANT TO GO BACK TO, BUT IT WAS A GOOD TIME FOR THE SOCIAL ASPECT”**

# THE METHOD PAST TO PRESENT

With a time constraint of ten weeks, our studio set out to create a survey questionnaire and focus group study for the Office of Student Life. Orientation on conducting focus groups gave us the skills necessary to conduct and extract qualitative data from focus group sessions. We transcribed the data into clear and precise transcripts of quotes and opinions from focus group participants.

The graphics team took this information and transformed it into high quality informational graphics that display the qualitative data in a dynamic way. A final presentation was given at the end of the ten weeks to the Office of Student Life, where our research outcomes and recommendations were communicated.



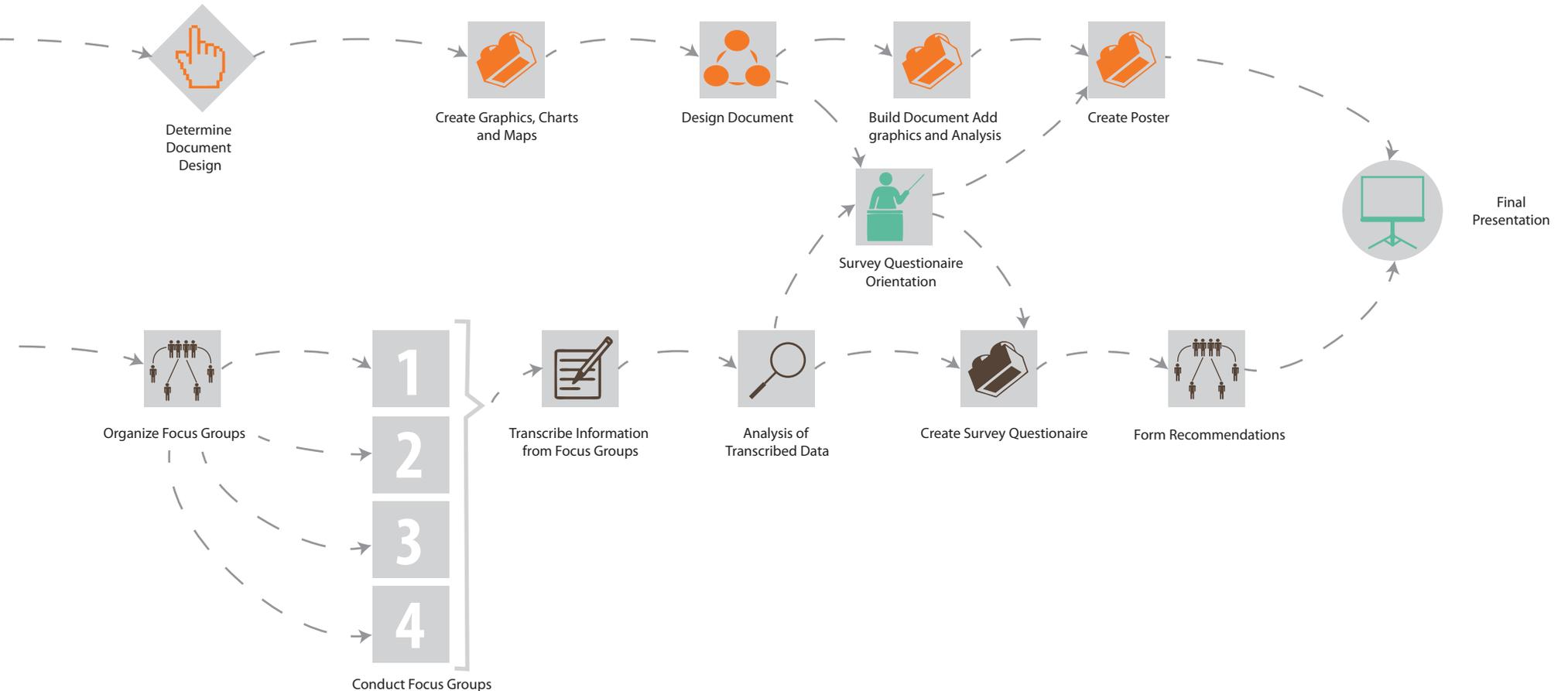
WEEK 1

WEEK 2

WEEK 3

WEEK 4

WEEK 5



**WEEK 6**

**WEEK 7**

**WEEK 8**

**WEEK 9**

**WEEK 10**

# WHY FOCUS GROUPS

Why Focus Groups? According to Schuh & Upcraft (2001), focus groups are best used when the purpose of the assessment is to: “learn about the perceptions, beliefs, or opinions of the students or other who use campus facilities, services or programs” (pg. 42). Focus groups are very exploratory both in the types of responses that will be received and the way that information will be used. There are advantages and disadvantages to this method of data collection. For the purpose of this study however, we felt this was the best way to go.



## Advantages:

- Participants can feed off each other
- Participants may support or disagree with each other, generating more data
- Researchers can access perceptions, attitudes, and experiences more than with a survey (depth of information)
- Focus groups could help with exploratory initiatives, one could use student experiences to guide new thinking
- Students could describe culture or various aspects of their decision making processes (i.e. why a student chooses to live off-campus instead of on-campus)



## Disadvantages:

- Time and effort of the researchers
- Making sense of the qualitative data
- Sometimes numbers are “cleaner” or “clearer”
- People may be shy
- Difficult group dynamics
- The environment may have an impact on the responses

## LIMITATIONS OF OUR RESEARCH

We had difficulties obtaining a random sample of students for our focus groups for two reasons. First, there were some inaccuracies in the data. Some of the student addresses had not been updated, and students were inaccurately classified in terms of class rank. Second, we had problems contacting students for focus groups because of technical difficulties with our email account. Initially IT Services at Ohio State set up an email account for our class to contact participants. From this email we sent out over 1,200 emails to two different random samples of students. We then found out, after no responses, that this email account was not set up to receive email responses. We then decided to create a gmail account and re-sent an email to the first sample. Upon trying to send it to the second sample we were flagged by Google as spammers. It was then that we decided to recruit students that we knew. Therefore, most of our focus group participants were not randomly selected. This created a biased sample.

 What are some of the **positive aspects** of living off campus? What are some of the **negative aspects** of living off campus?

 Are there any **improvements** you would like to see in your housing condition?

 Are you satisfied with your **landlord**?

 How did your **experience** with on-campus housing **affect** your choice of off-campus housing?

 How did you **find** you the place you are living in now? Tell me a little more about the **process** of finding a place to live off campus.

 What **amenities** influenced your decision to live where you live now? This includes amenities inside your home as well as in your **neighborhood**.

 What is your **perception** of the **University District**? Do you like it? Do you think there are things that could be done to improve the area?

 Do you feel **safe** and **secure** where you live? What sort of safety requirements did you have when choosing where to live?

 How much of an **impact** does your **major** have on where you chose to live?

 Did **friendships** you made on campus **influence** your housing choices?

 Are there any **safety improvements** that you feel could be made?

# WHAT DID WE ASK STUDENTS?

Staff at OSU's Center for the Study of Student Life provided us with a training session on how to facilitate a focus group. After participating in this training, we worked to develop a series of questions we would ask participants.

First we had to decide what the overarching questions were we wanted to answer by conducting the focus groups.

We decided we were trying to find out:

- (1) why students live where they live, and;
- (2) what would it take to get students to live closer to campus.

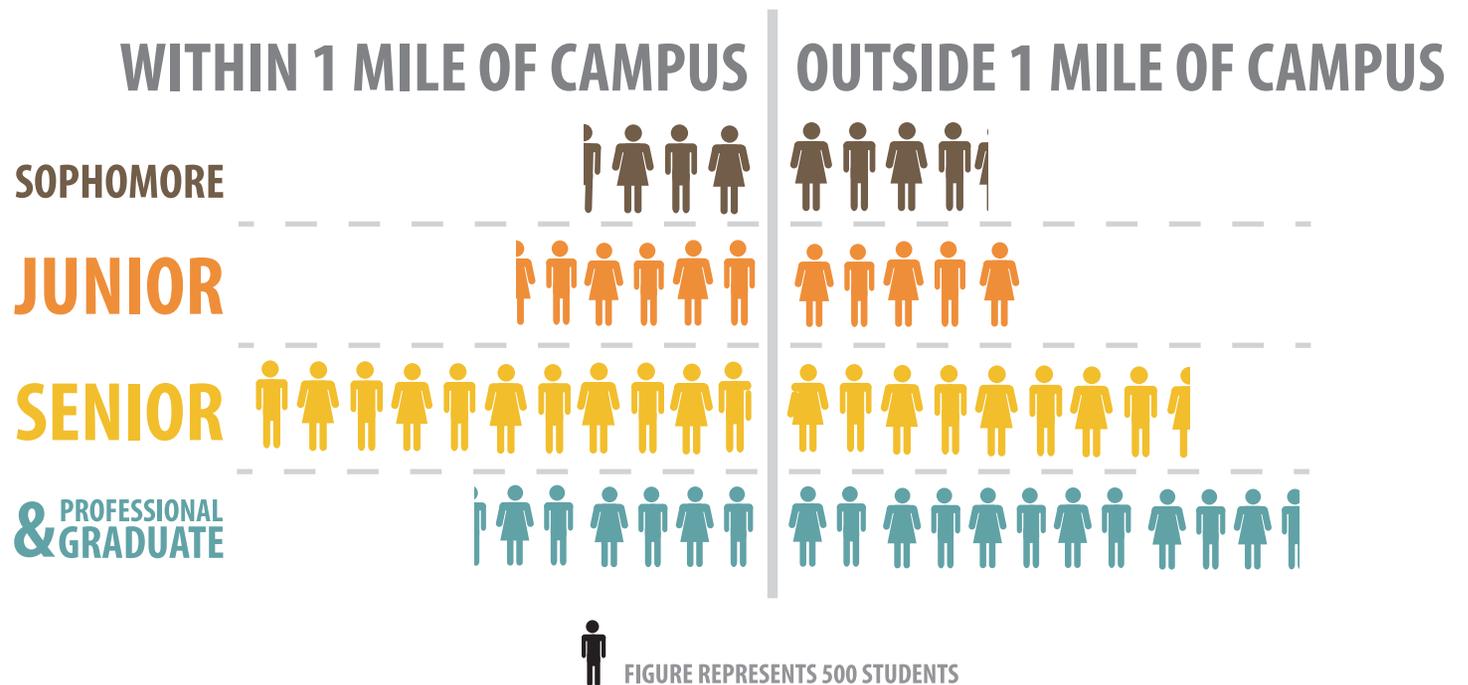
From here we worked to create the actual focus group questions.

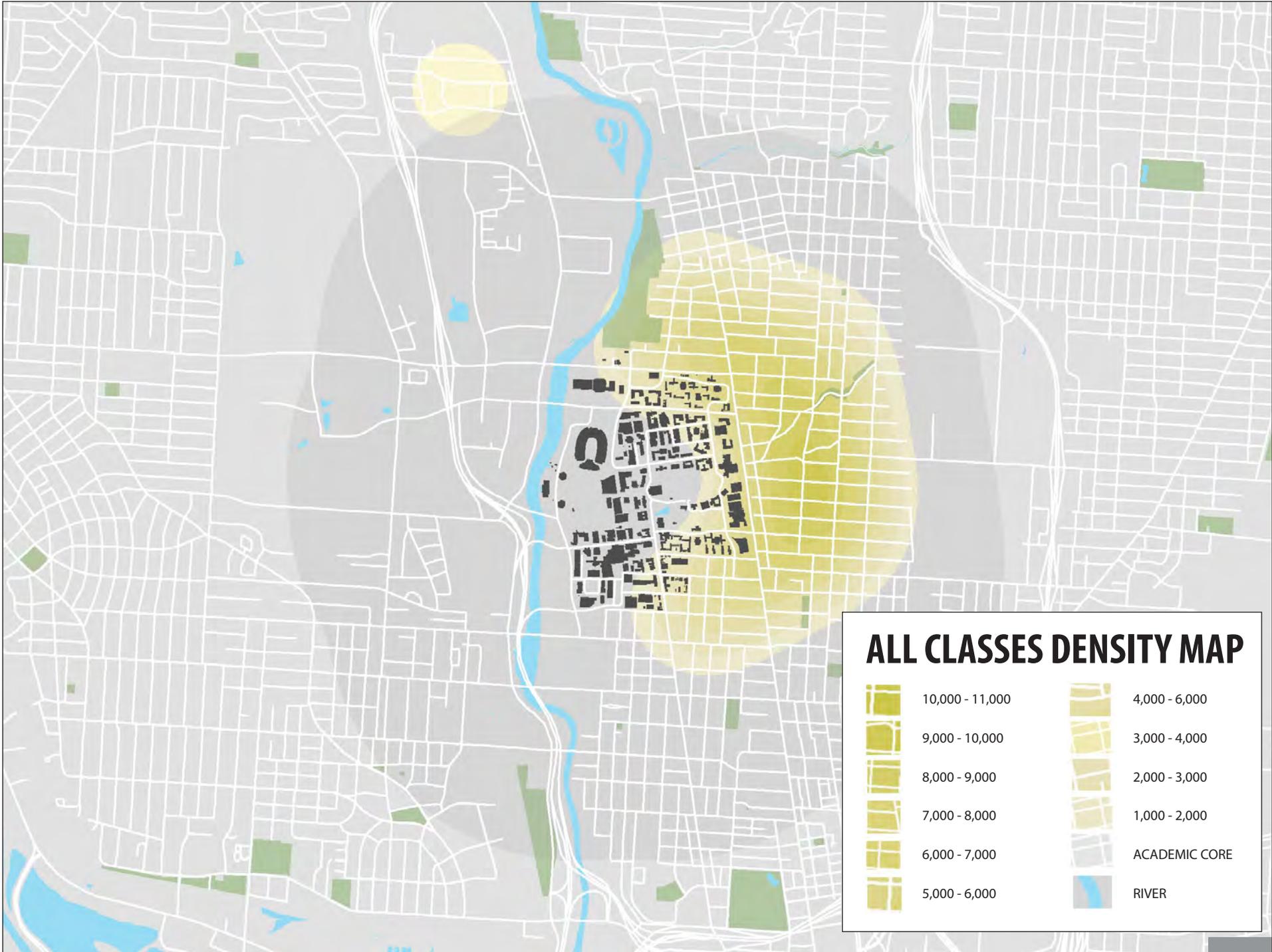
# WHERE STUDENTS LIVE AND BUILDING FOCUS GROUPS

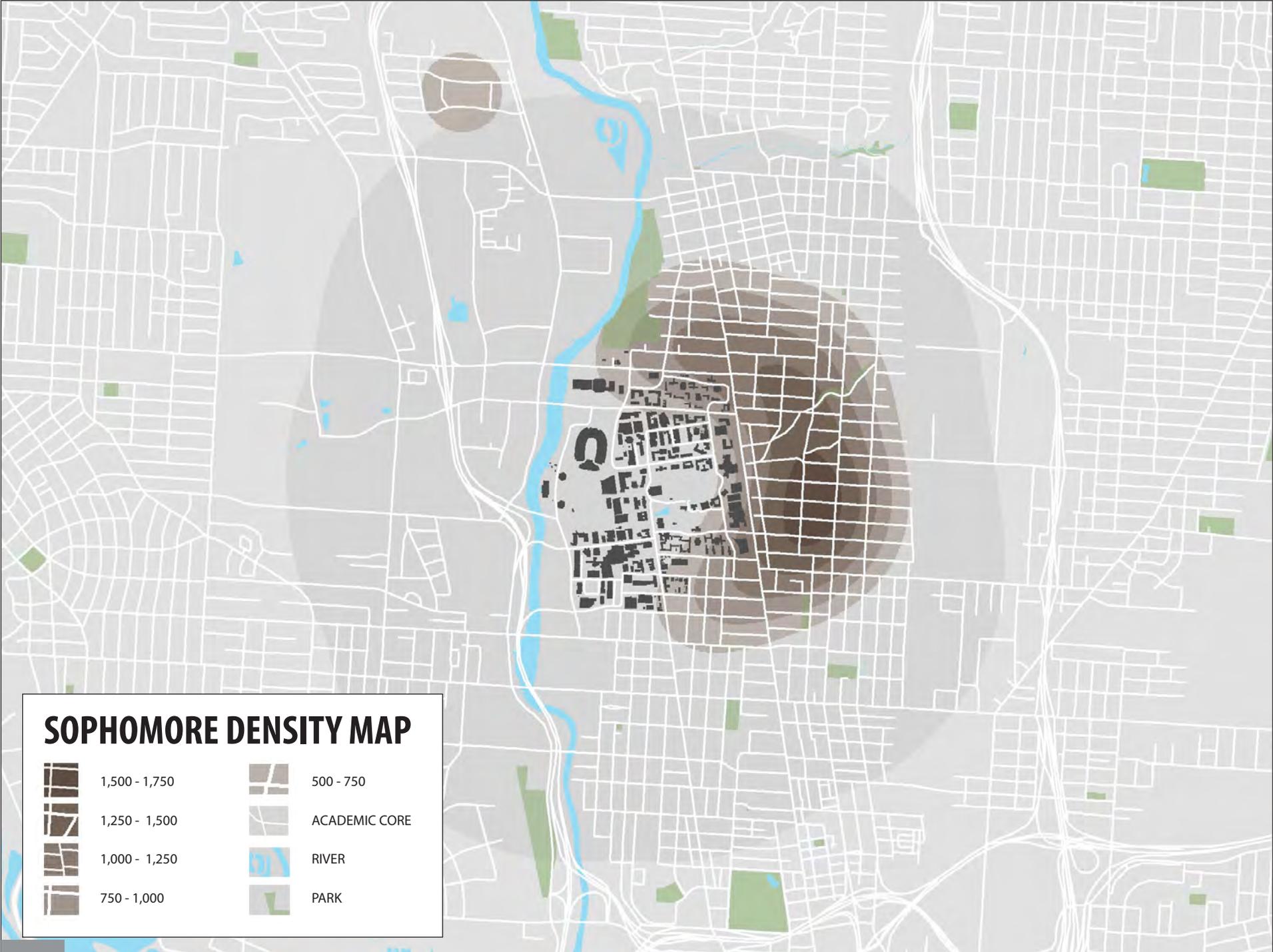
We obtained and utilized data from OSU's Center for the Study of Student Life to create the following five GIS density maps, broken down by class, comprising of: all-class, sophomore, junior, senior, and graduate/professional. The density maps gradient from light to dark to indicate the most dense areas of student living.

Each of the maps contains a 1-mile buffer around the campus core to show the density of student residence close to campus. The maps report kernel density per square mile.

We used this data to draw a random sample of students within and outside one mile of the campus.

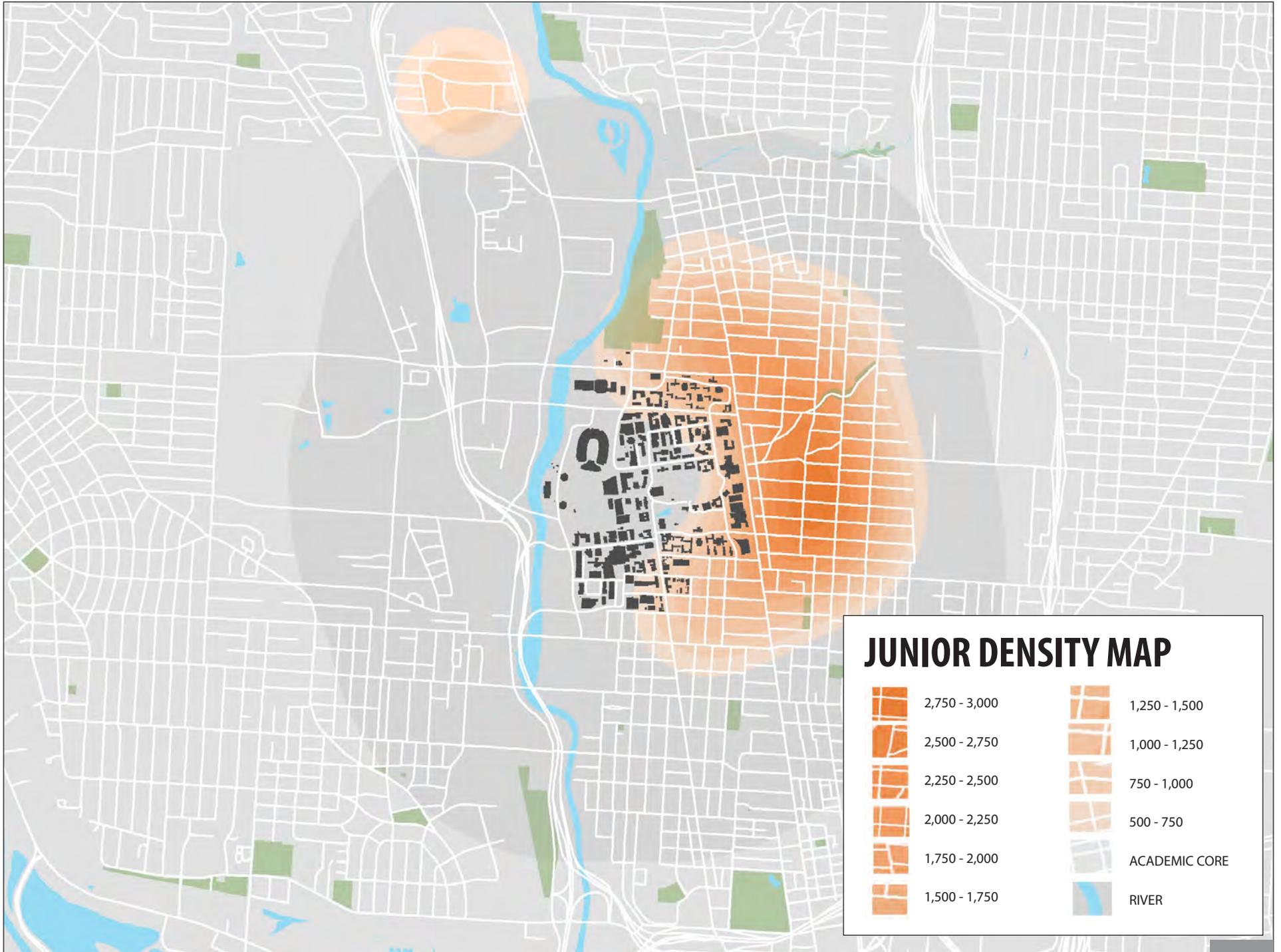


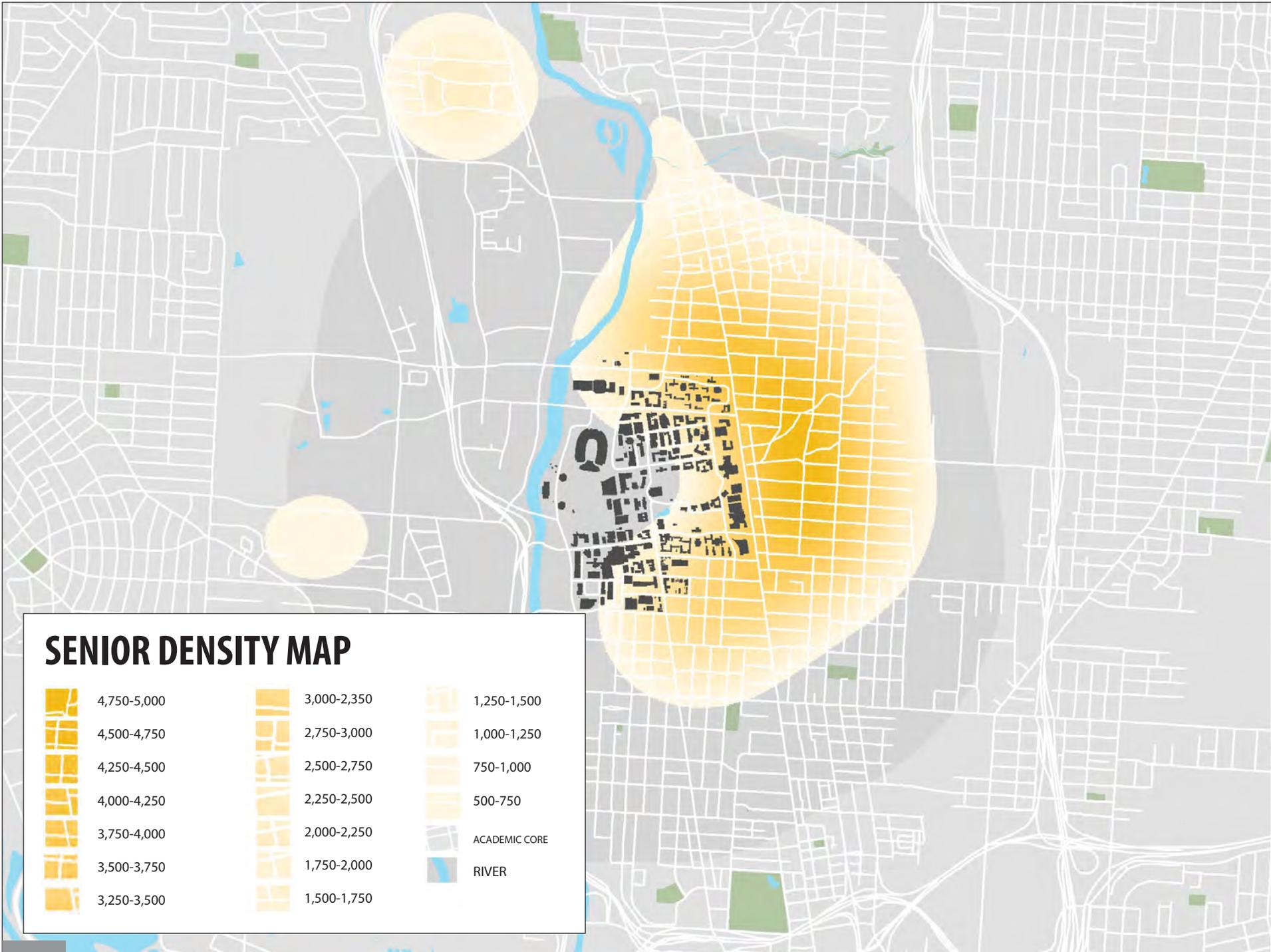


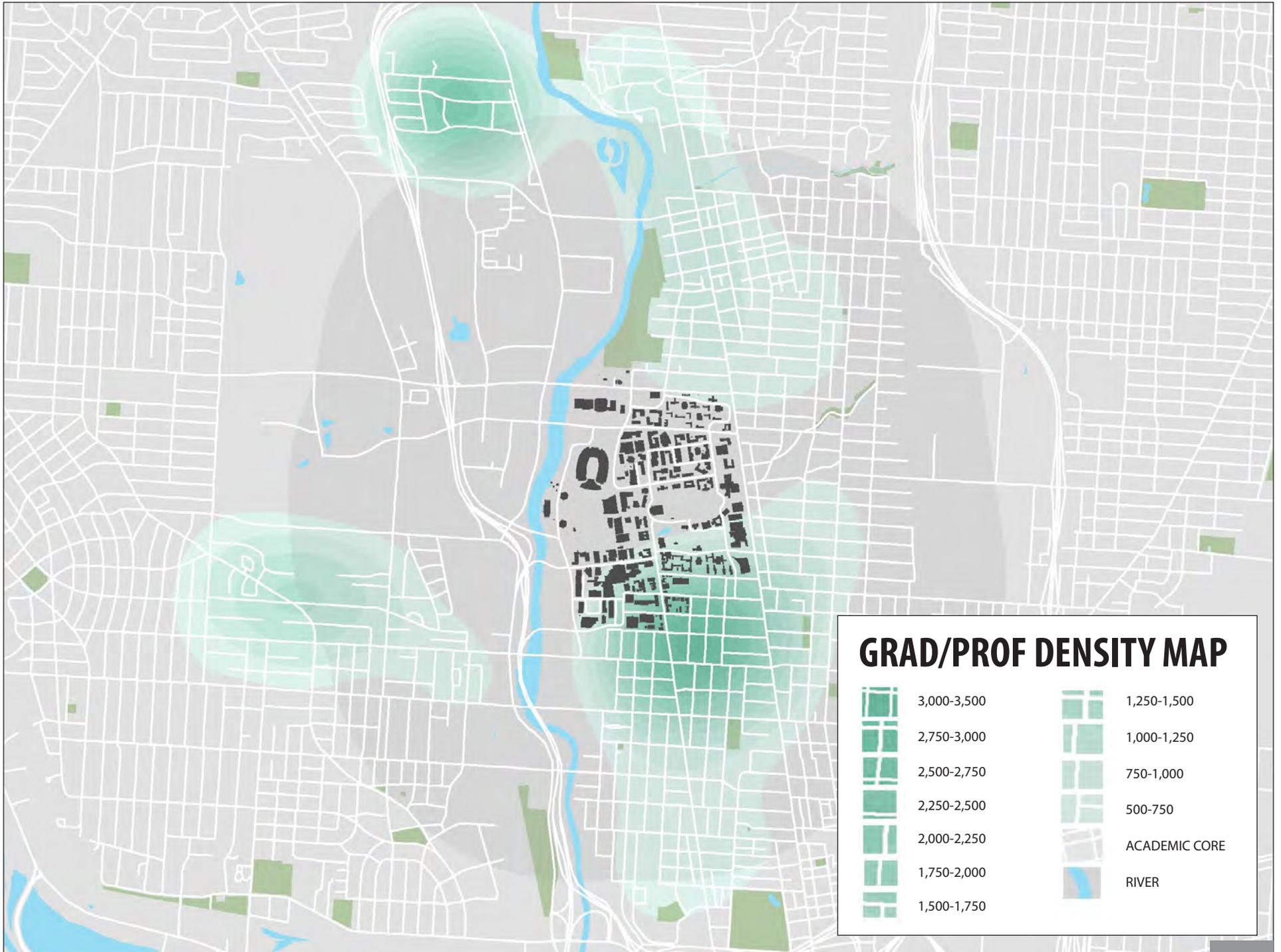


### SOPHOMORE DENSITY MAP

	1,500 - 1,750		500 - 750
	1,250 - 1,500		ACADEMIC CORE
	1,000 - 1,250		RIVER
	750 - 1,000		PARK

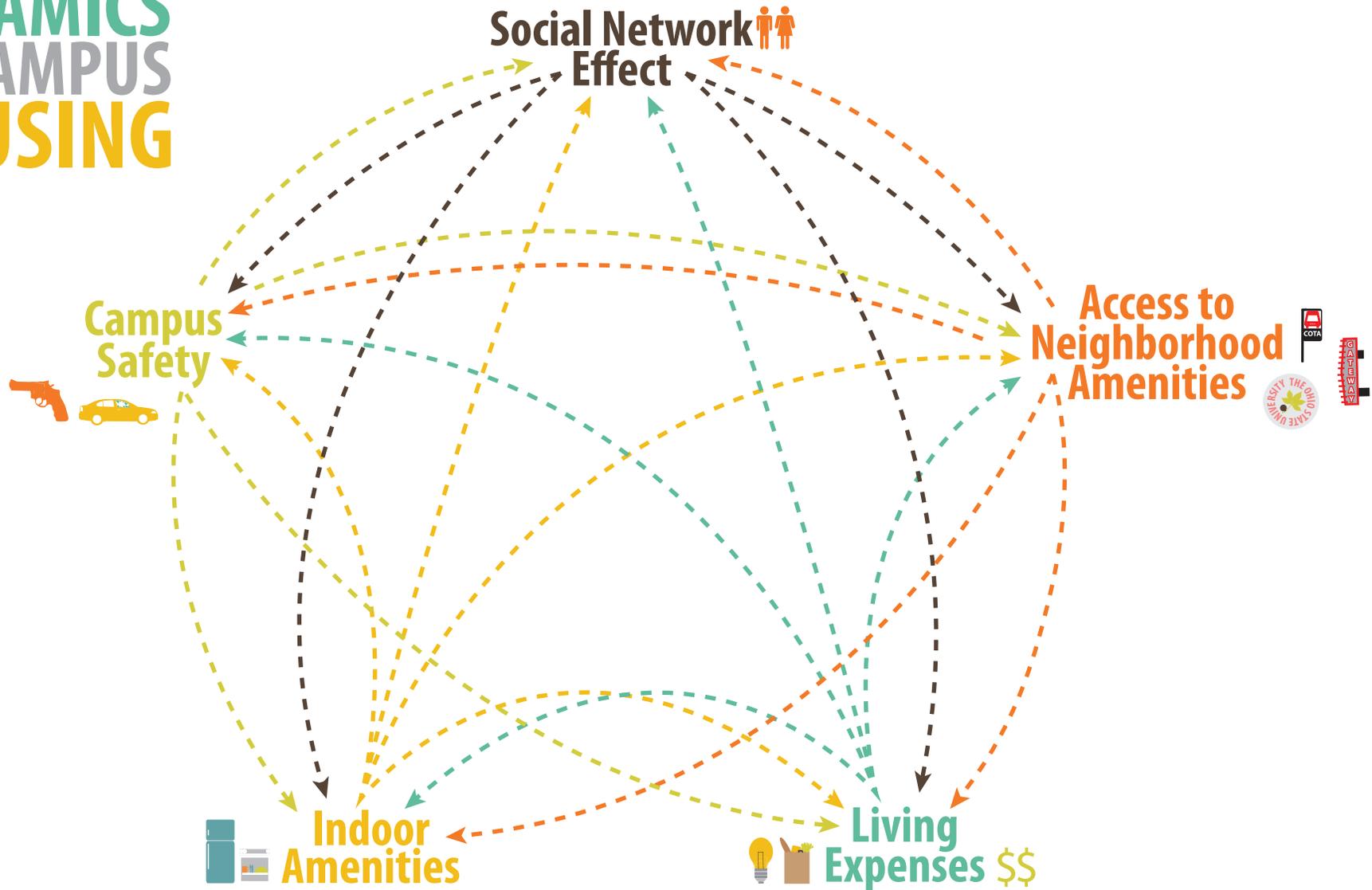




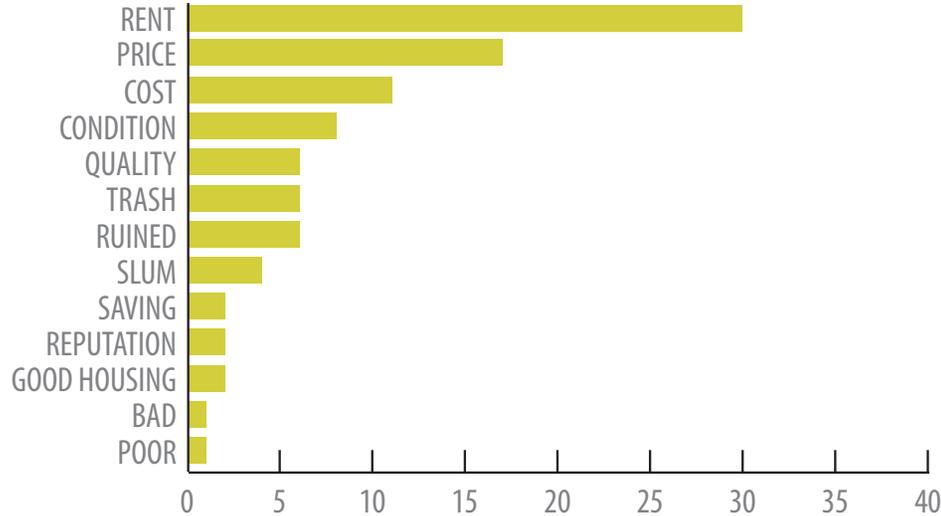


# THE DYNAMICS OF CAMPUS HOUSING

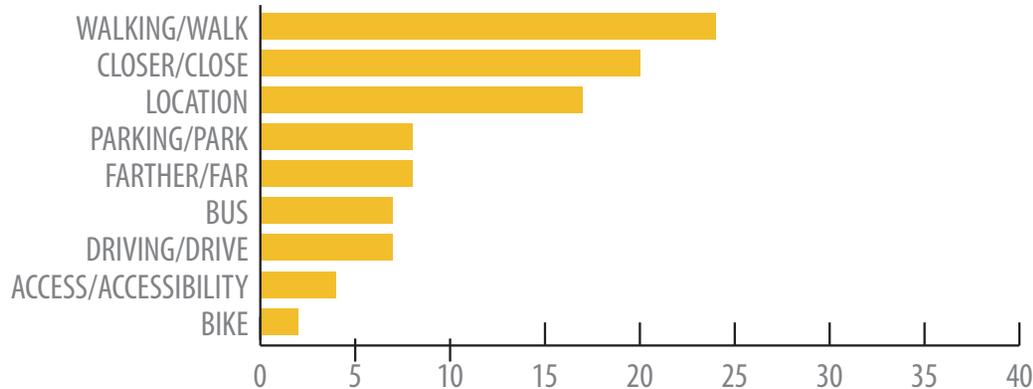
Through our focus groups we identified five key themes: The Social Network Effect of Campus Housing, Access to Neighborhood Amenities, Living Expenses, Indoor Amenities, and Campus Safety. Our focus groups recognized that all five of these themes are closely intertwined when choosing where to live. For instance, living expense vary depending on access to neighborhood amenities or the social network effect such as how many roommates a student has will impact the amount he or she pays in rent.



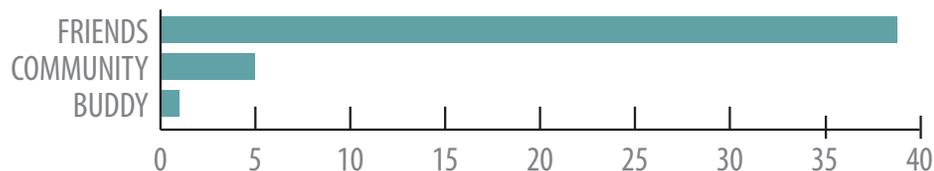
## RENTS & CONDITIONS



## ACCESSIBILITY



## SOCIAL NETWORK



# WORDS MATTER

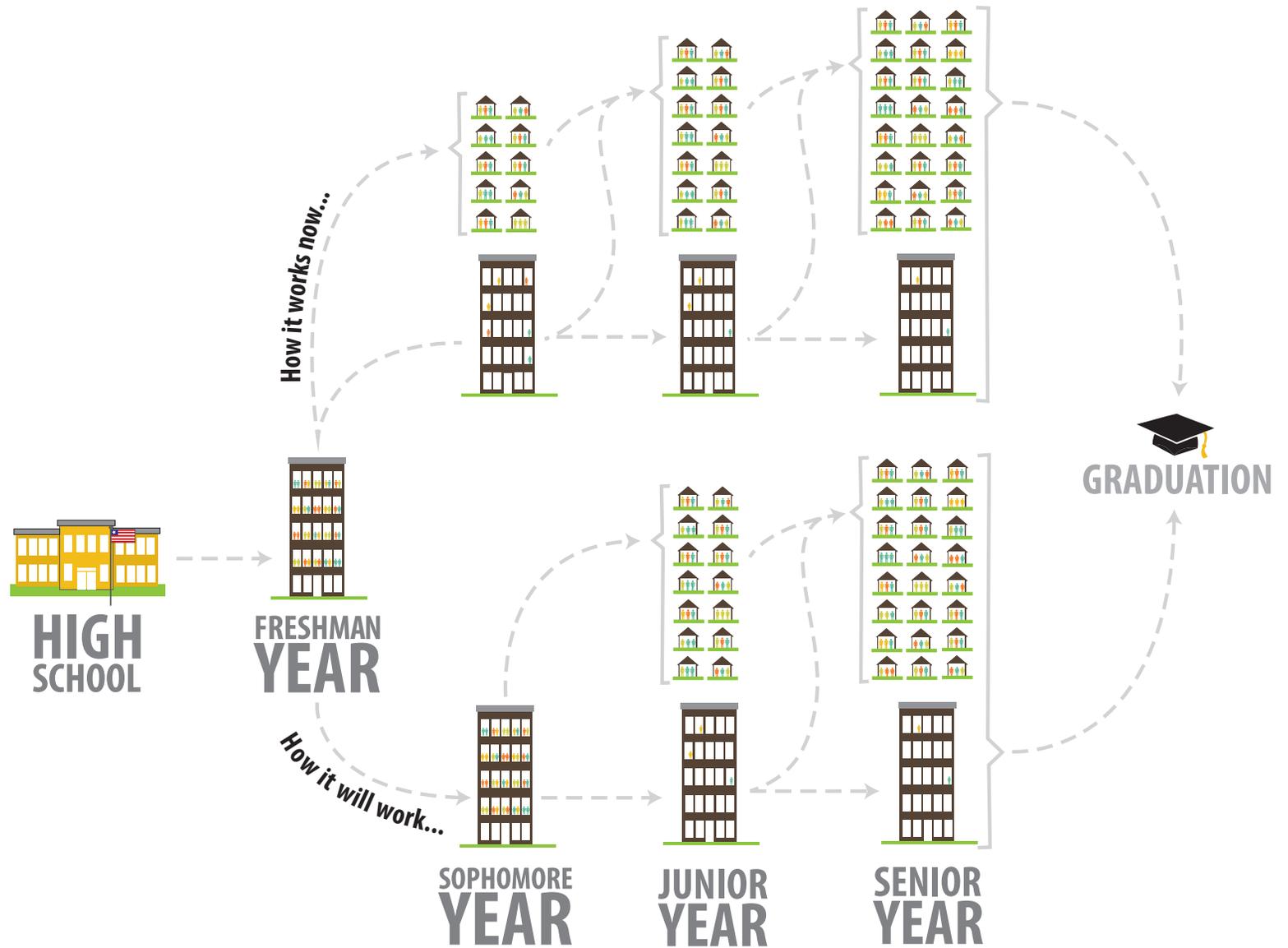
## ANALYSIS OF WHAT WAS SAID IN FOCUS GROUPS

In order to solidify our findings from the focus groups, we produced a word count to determine and identify the most important themes. Once placing all of the focus group transcripts into a single document, we executed a word search for various phrases and terms.

The word count served as a quantitative indicator for the most prevalent topics that students wished to discuss. This final count served as the basis for further investigation into our themes, and helped prioritize the issues that are important to students.

# THE SOCIAL NETWORK EFFECT OF STUDENT LIVING

Currently just freshmen live on campus their first year. Existing relationships, as shown here, define how people look for roommates in the future - this is why the social networks that exist between students are so important.



# HOUSING POOL



## THE PROCESS OF FINDING ROOMMATES

Friends play an important role in campus housing choice. Students often live with friends they made during freshmen year. Friends are important because: they become your roommates; they enhance your social support structure; they help inform you about the safest and best neighborhoods to live in



"I would say that friendships are hugely important to where I live."



"The people I'm living with now were like, my best friends from freshmen year."



"I live with two guys I went to high school with and their roommates from freshman year."



"The circle of my friends were already in the area so we knew it was safe. We all sort of look out for one another; and I went to high school with a couple of them, so it's nice."



"Not being surrounded by a lot of people can be a negative, it's easier to meet people in the dorms than it is in an apartment."



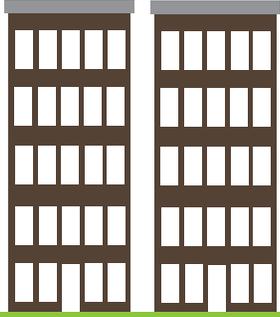
"I'm still friends with the guys I lived with sophomore year and still hang out with them every other day."



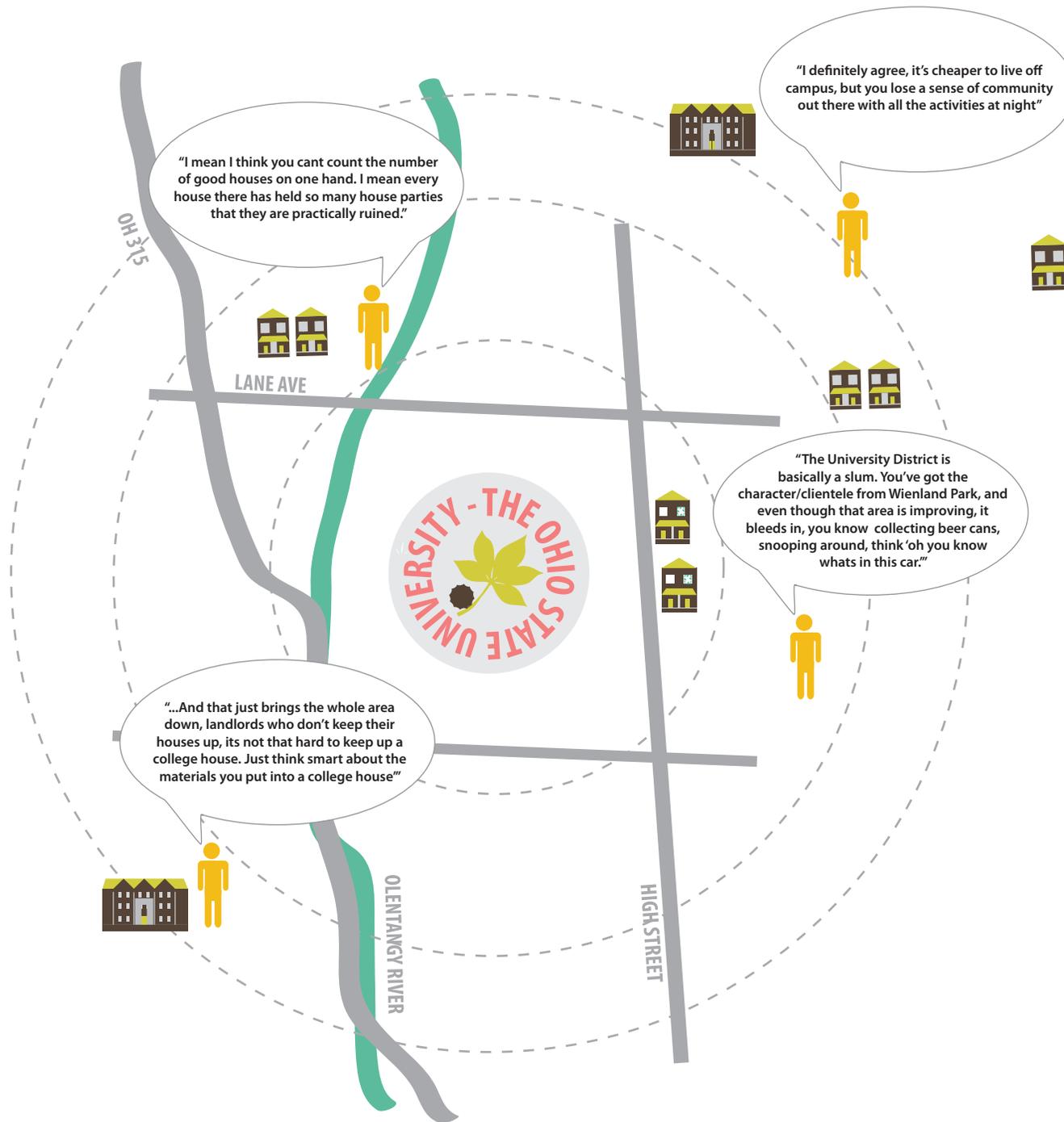
# COST OF LIVING

The University District, like any neighborhood, has available housing that varies both in rent prices and quality of housing. It was often stated that in choosing where to live off campus (and decrease the cost of living compared with the dorms), it came to price.

Focus group participants often stated that housing in the University District is poor quality, many houses ruined because of parties. Most students stated that rent is typically varied around \$400-500 per person per month. Students mentioned that rent was higher and housing quality more inferior as you got closer to campus.

	DORM	OFF CAMPUS (WITHIN ONE MILE OF CAMPUS)	OFF CAMPUS (10 MILES FROM CAMPUS)
			
RENT	\$755.25	\$400	\$400
FOOD	\$462.50	\$203.25	\$203.25
PARKING	\$15.60	\$5.80	\$15.60
HOUSE APP.	\$0	\$6.25	\$6.25
UTILITIES	\$0	\$150	\$150
CABLE	\$0	\$20	\$20
INTERNET	\$0	\$15	\$15
CAR	\$60	\$85	\$126.58
<b>MONTHLY TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,277.75</b>	<b>\$885.50</b>	<b>\$936.68</b>

# LOCATION LOCATION LOCATION (SERIOUSLY)



From the analysis of focus group transcripts, students were concerned about the the problem of trash in the University District.

Students revealed that pricing within the University District was much higher than neighborhoods further away, where students stated that their rent was lower and living conditions were better.

# CAMPUS SAFETY AT THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

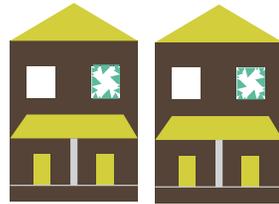
The info graphic displays types of crime within the academic corridor from April 9th to May 9th 2012. This data was compiled into 3 types of crimes:

- Property (breaking and entering),
- Personal (assault, battery, theft)
- Auto Related (theft of vehicle, theft of auto parts).

The source of the information was from [www.crimereports.com](http://www.crimereports.com).

## CRIME AROUND CAMPUS APRIL 8 - MAY 8 2012

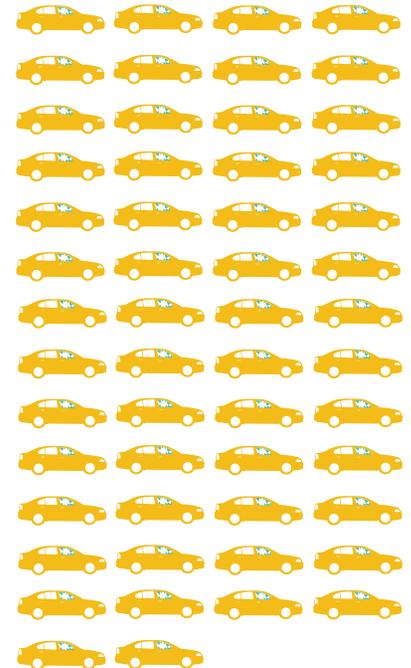
**21** PROPERTY CRIMES

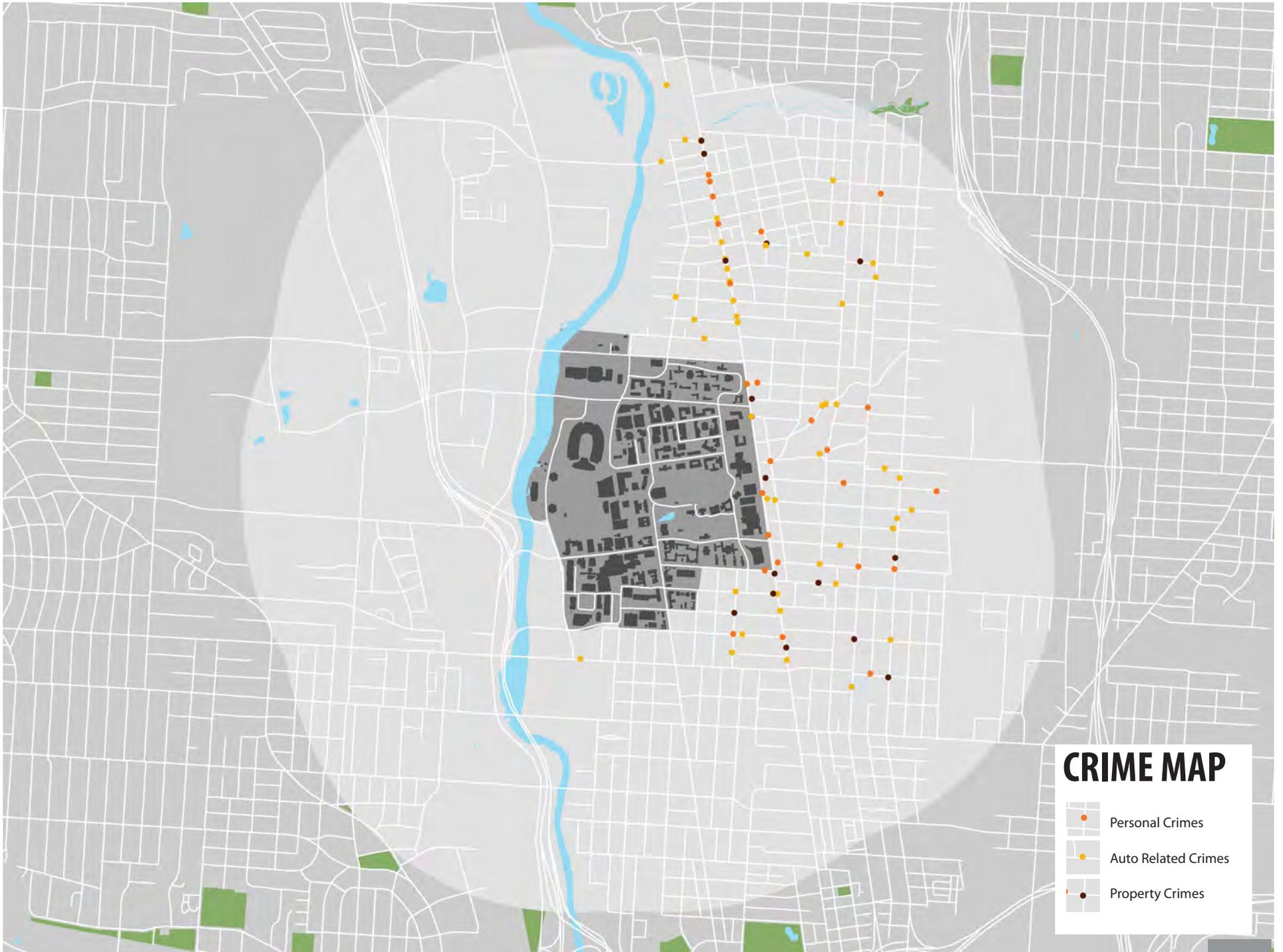


**32** PERSONAL CRIMES



**55** AUTO RELATED CRIMES





### CRIME MAP

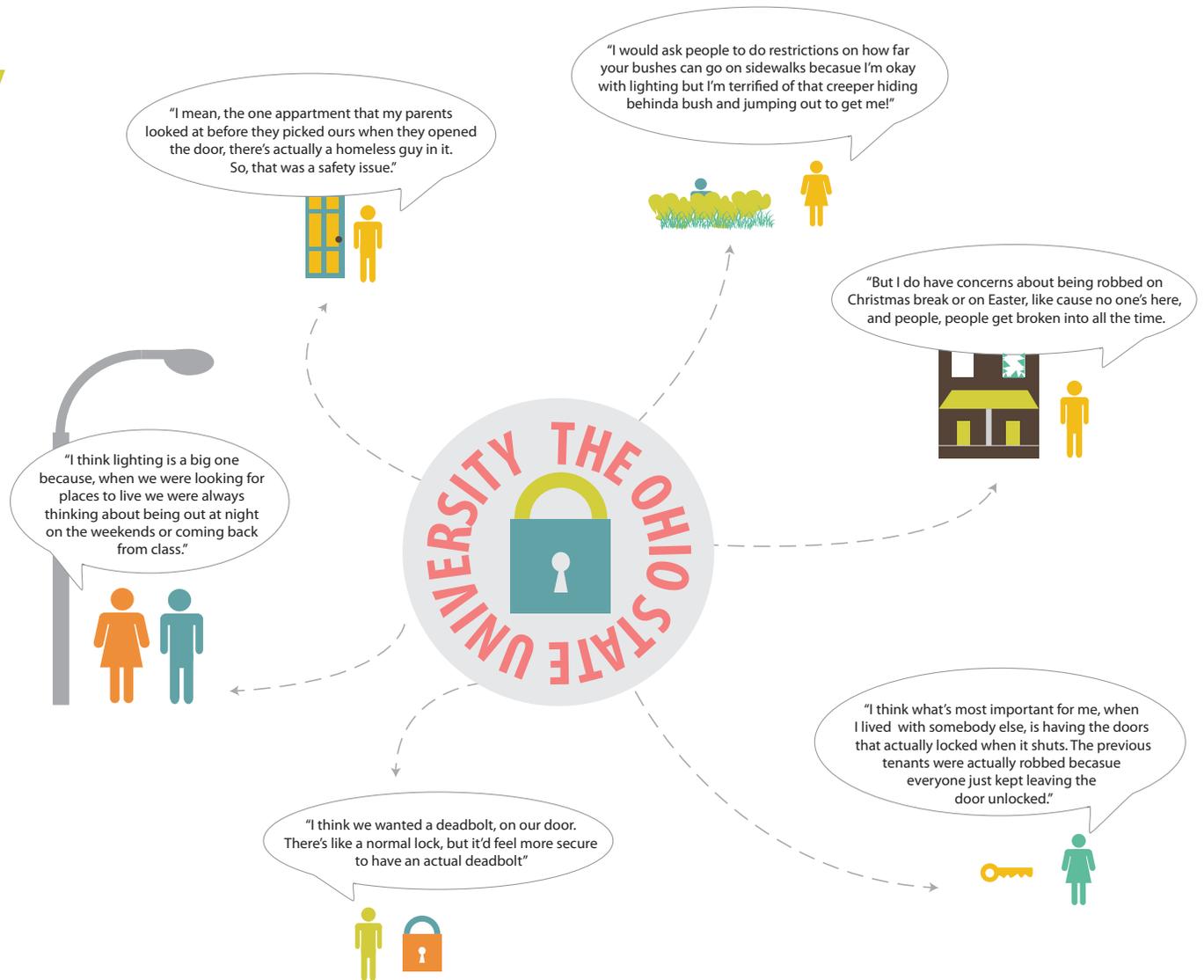
- Personal Crimes
- Auto Related Crimes
- Property Crimes

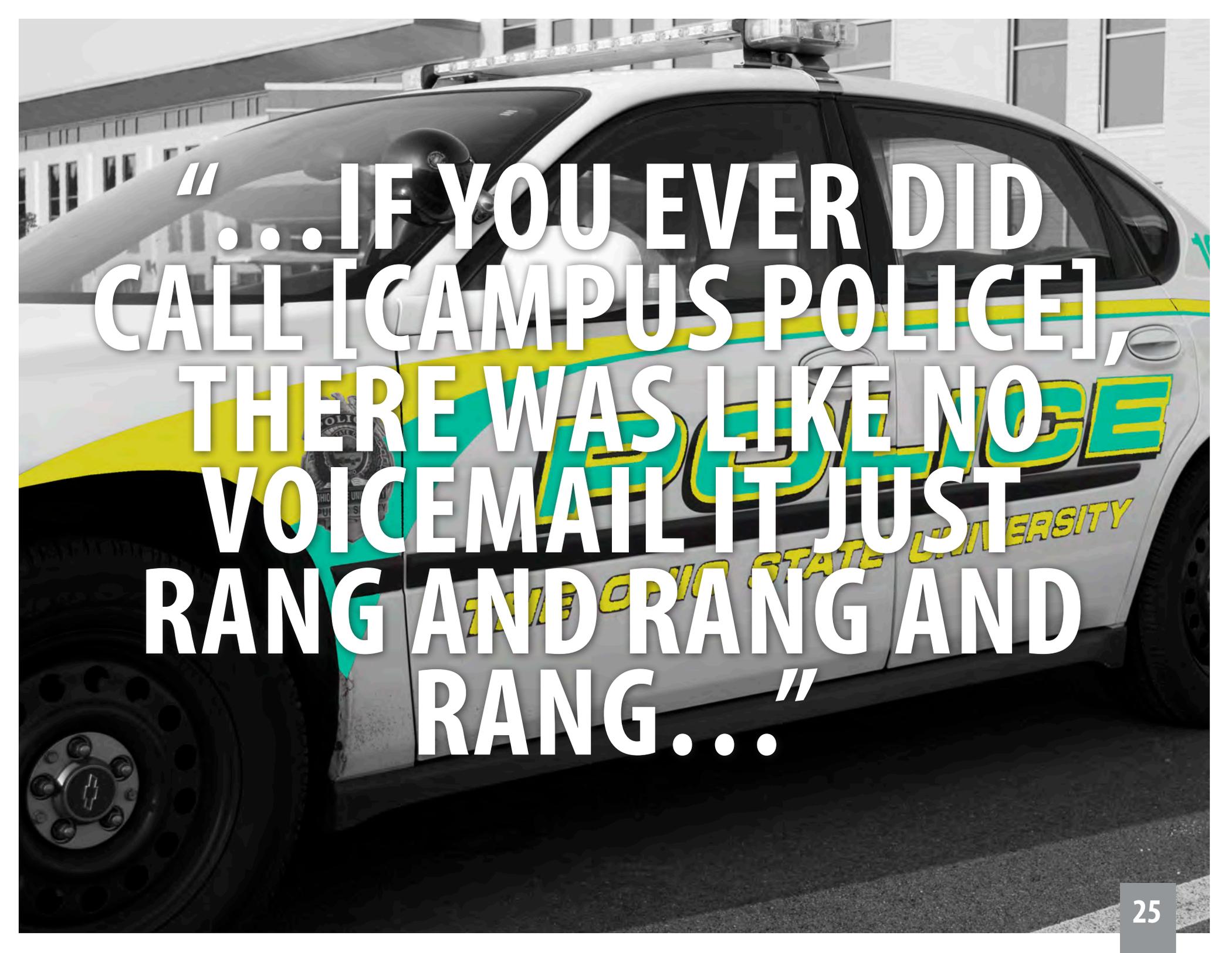
# STUDENTS ON CAMPUS SAFETY

Safety was a concern for some students but not others. One student, for instance, stated that he never pays much attention to safety. However, some of the female students were concerned about safety. For many students, north campus is safer than south campus.

A few important issues were raised by focus group participants. They found that lighting in the University District was of poor quality. The City of Columbus could enhance security by installing street lights in alleyways and side streets. The University can work on improving the student safety through formulating a solution to unanswered calls, which appears to be an issue within student safety services.

A suggestion for increasing efficiency is to create a phone app or an online scheduling site. For housing safety, landlords can increase security through installing hardened doors, automatic locks, and proper lighting around the perimeter of the house.





**“...IF YOU EVER DID  
CALL [CAMPUS POLICE],  
THERE WAS LIKE NO  
VOICEMAIL IT JUST  
RANG AND RANG AND  
RANG...”**



A photograph of a row of multi-story houses with a quote overlaid. The houses are light-colored with dark roofs and porches. A white pickup truck and two dark cars are parked on the street in front of the houses. The quote is in large, white, bold, sans-serif font with a slight drop shadow.

**“IT’S KIND OF A BIG  
DEAL, IMPORTANT  
TO ME, TO BE ABLE  
TO HAVE PLACES TO  
GO THAT YOU CAN  
WALK TO.”**

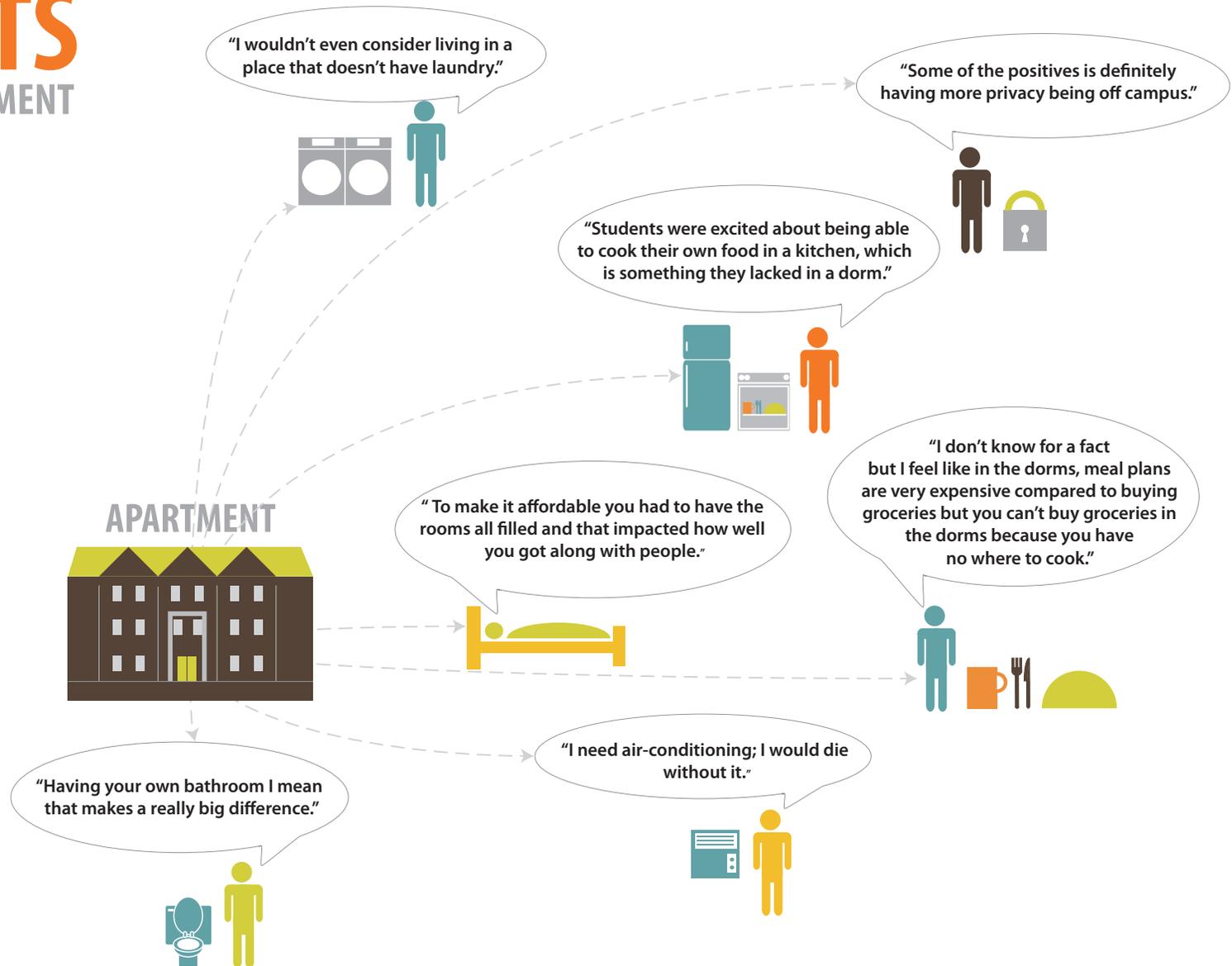
# INDOOR AMENITIES

# WHAT

# STUDENTS

## LOOK FOR IN AN APARTMENT

When it comes to living off campus, students stressed certain amenities that they would like to have inside their homes: a kitchen, a private bathroom, multiple bedrooms, and laundry. After living in a dorm, students stated that it is very important to be able to have their own kitchen to cook meals. Some students stated that they would not rent a place with laundry facilities. Parking was also important for students.



A yellow recycling bin is shown from a top-down perspective, filled with various pieces of trash. The bin is overflowing with discarded items, including several aluminum beer cans, some of which are clearly labeled 'Yuengling Traditional Lager'. There are also several newspapers and magazines, with some text like 'M...ARDS' and 'The...' visible. The bin is set on a dark, gravelly surface. The text 'I WANT TO COOK MY OWN FOOD AND NOT LIVE IN A DORM ANYMORE' is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif font across the center of the bin's contents. At the bottom of the bin, the 'RUMPKER RECYCLING' logo and the website 'www.rumplerrecycling.com' are visible.

**"I WANT TO COOK  
MY OWN FOOD AND  
NOT LIVE IN A DORM  
ANYMORE"**

# SURVEY TO BE GIVEN TO STUDENTS

Questions 2 and 3 help determine the size of students' houses, and allow other questions in the survey to be categorized into various sized households.

This question helps us learn what connections are most important for students when it comes to finding roommates.

This question gives us an understanding of how students feel about paying the right amount in rent.

This question helps us understand how students feel about the quality of their housing.

1 How important were your friendships when it came to deciding where to live?

- Very Important
- Important
- Somewhat Important
- Not Important
- N/A

2 Do you have roommates?

- Yes
- No

3 If yes, how many roommates do you currently have?

4 How did you FIRST meet your roommates?

- I met them in high school
- I met them through another friend
- I met them in class
- I met them at work
- I met them through a student organization
- Other
- 

How do you rate your rent?

- 5
- Higher than it should be
  - Just right
  - Lower than it should be
  -

How do you rate your quality of housing?

- 6
- Excellent
  - Good
  - Fair
  - Poor
  -

**7** Rate how important these amenities are to you:

	1	2	3	4	5
Laundry	<input type="radio"/>				
Kitchen	<input type="radio"/>				
Parking	<input type="radio"/>				
Privacy	<input type="radio"/>				
Pets	<input type="radio"/>				

*This question helps us in understanding what amenities students look for when house hunting.*

**8**

Do you feel safe where you live now?

- Yes
- No

*This question helps us understand what perceptions students have of the university district in regards to safety.*

If no, what factors make you feel unsafe? Tick any that apply

- I have been a victim or witness of a crime
  - I live in an area with poor lighting
  - I live in an area with little police presence
- Please add other factors that might apply \_\_\_\_\_

**9**

Rate the influence that these amenities had on where you live now?

	1	2	3	4	5
Campus	<input type="radio"/>				
College	<input type="radio"/>				
Grocery Store	<input type="radio"/>				
Social Life	<input type="radio"/>				
Public Transportation	<input type="radio"/>				
Parking	<input type="radio"/>				

*This helps us understand what people like to be close to when choosing somewhere to live.*

**10** How do you get to and from campus on a typical day?

- Walk
- Bike
- CABS
- COTA
- Drive
- Other

*This question helps us understand how close to campus people live (walking=close to campus).*

**11** Do you live close to campus?

- Yes
- No

*This question was asked in order to figure out people's perception of whether or not they feel they live close to campus and what constitutes the "campus district" in their minds.*

*This question was asked in order to help prioritize what students feel to be the most important issue off-campus so that we know what the university can focus on if it wants to encourage OSU students, faculty and staff to move closer to the campus area.*

**12** Rank the importance from 1 to 5 in choosing where you live now, 1 being most important and 5 being least important.

	1	2	3	4	5
Accessibility	<input type="radio"/>				
Safety	<input type="radio"/>				
Friends	<input type="radio"/>				
Cost of Living	<input type="radio"/>				
Amenities	<input type="radio"/>				

Other (Please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

*This question is simply to find out what class rank each individual taking the survey is so that we can analyze the results based on age and class grouping.*

**13** Please indicate your class rank.

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate
- Professional

*This question was asked to see how well the survey taker knows the campus and whether or not he or she had an OSU on-campus living experience.*

**14** Did you transfer to OSU?

- Yes
- No

*This question was asked so we can classify results based on gender.*

**15** Please indicate your gender.

- Male
- Female

*This was asked so we can insert the data and create a GIS map of our results.*

**16** What is your current address?

\_\_\_\_\_

**17** What type of housing do you currently reside in?

- Single family house
- Duplex
- Apartment Building
- Townhouse

**18** How many bedrooms (as defined by your landlord) are in your current place of residence?

---

**19** What are you paying to live in your current residence per person per month?

\$ 

---

**20** Do you have any additional comments relating to your housing choices?

*This question helps to identify which type of housing students live in.*

*This question is a preface to #19 which asks, how much each individual is paying so we can determine holistically how much the average rent per household is.*

*The results to this question will give us an idea of the average price people pay for rent. We can then use this answer to link to people's perceptions of what is expensive/inexpensive.*

*This question allows survey takers to express any concerns that were not addressed in the survey.*

# WHAT WE RECOMMEND

The City and Regional Planning 510 studio has outlined recommendations for the Office of Student Life and The Ohio State University. These recommendations focus on student living and are based off of focus groups that we have conducted.

We have highlighted the most important student concerns, including safety, student choices, and preferences based on living.



## IMPROVING OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING

### GOAL:

Improve off-campus housing quality, lower costs, and increase neighborhood safety; ultimately facilitating a better relationship between property owners, students, and The Ohio State University.

### ISSUE:

Student off-campus housing is often of poor quality and expensive, this is especially true with housing close to campus. As a result, some students choose to reside outside of the University District in pursuit of better housing quality with more reasonable rent.

### RECOMMENDATION:

- The University should better educate students about their rights as tenants;
- The University should only promote off-campus housing that maintains high-quality standards and does not have any code violations;
- The University should pursue purchasing off-campus housing and reduce the share owned by private companies.



# SOPHOMORE HOUSING IMPROVEMENTS ON CAMPUS

## GOAL:

The Ohio State University will provide an accommodating and comfortable environment and acceptable programming to support sophomores living on campus for an additional year.

## ISSUE:

Students have expressed a need for privacy in their living quarters while maintaining a communal space and the ability to cook for themselves. Students would prefer more freedom in choosing where and whom they live with both on and off campus.

## RECOMMENDATION:

- OSU should create apartment style on-campus living arrangements for sophomores;
- Provide a kitchen with standard amenities in dorms;
- Allow students to opt out of their meal plan;
- Allow students to select their roommates.



# IMPLEMENT A SPECIAL IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

## GOAL:

Enhance the aesthetic and safety qualities within the University District.

## ISSUE:

Transient student populations neglect the outside areas of their house, evident by litter, lack of snow removal, and dilapidated sidewalks that remain unreported. SIDs are mechanisms that permit stakeholders in an area to provide funding for development or revitalization. Property owners pay assessments on their property values, providing a funding source to create enhanced services for the district.

SID-supported services do not replace existing city services, but supplement them in ways that strengthen the viability of the area by working with local government. The University District could use a SID to enhance the aesthetic and safety qualities of the neighborhood via litter removal, landscaping, code enforcement, and snow removal.

Furthermore, the SID could employ OSU students to be involved in these tasks. Clearly SIDs are capable of providing greater services, but these aspects seem to be larger issues. Minimizing the scope of the SID service provider will also minimize cost burden on property owners, which is usually passed on to the renter.

## RECOMMENDATION:

- Establish a partnership between the University and University District property owners to develop a Special Improvement District (SID).



# MAKE CAMPUS A SAFER ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS

## GOAL:

To improve the safety awareness of all Ohio State University students off and on campus.

## ISSUE:

Students are not aware of risks and dangers of off-campus living.

## RECOMMENDATION:

- Implement a student awareness program to educate them about best practices for staying safe including common sense and knowing your surroundings.
- Improve lighting
- Maintain clear sidewalks
- Implementing a student self-defense class

**KNOWLTON SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE**  
CITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING  
CRP 510 - TWO YEAR TRANSFORMATIONAL STUDIO  
SPRING QUARTER 2012