



# Housing, Dining, and Space Impacts on the Undergraduate Residential Experience at Princeton University

Final analysis and report written and submitted by Huron Consulting Group.

June 14, 2024

# Executive Summary

Princeton partnered with Huron to assess the undergraduate residential experience with the goal of understanding how housing and dining impact the student experience utilizing a multi-phased, constituent-driven approach.

## Key Findings:

- Satisfaction ratings revealed that **more than 25% of students are not satisfied with housing and dining**. These results were reported by some of the populations that disproportionately represent the groups Princeton hopes to attract and support, including **racial minorities, upperclass students, and those with accessibility needs** (physical, allergens, cultural, or religious needs).
- While the residential college system provides community to first-year and sophomore students, **juniors reported the lowest levels of satisfaction when there are an increasing number of confusing options and services, and support systems are abruptly changed** entering one's third year at the University – the “**junior dip**.”
- Students reported their **primary source for housing and dining information** at Princeton was **through their personal networks** (students, alumni, family) resulting sometimes in **misinformation or misunderstanding**. This **lack of a sense of understanding about** options, services, and processes available to them **has impacted the choices students make** and has resulted in some students (e.g., first-generation, international) having little to no understanding of the choices.
- The **absence of a required meal plan for residential students** and an option to select **independent status**, unique among Princeton's peers, has led to some students feeling **isolated due to the inability to engage with others** during shared meals.
- **Alumni** who participated in the survey reported **similar responses to current students**, particularly as it relates to **overall satisfaction, connection to eating club/co-op, isolation when one selected the independent dining option, and challenges during their junior year**.
- Benchmarking highlighted that **Princeton is an outlier in the residential college system**. By providing upperclass students with more housing and dining options after their sophomore year, the consistent Princeton experience is broken leaving many students sense of community **significantly disrupted**.

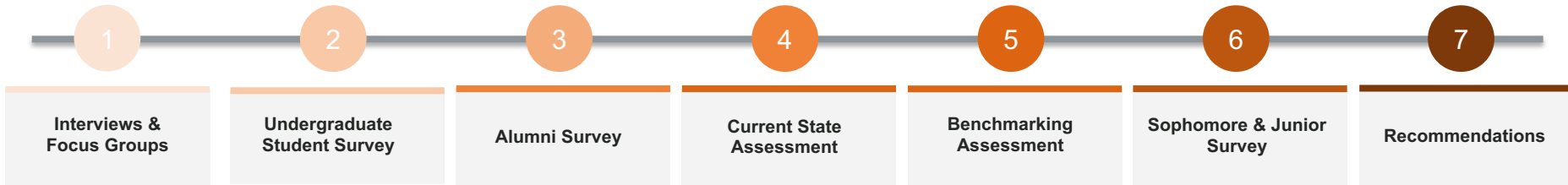
# Engagement Foundation

The University is amid a four-year enrollment expansion, making it important to assess the evolving needs of our community and the impact this growth may have on the undergraduate student experience.

In follow-up to the dining pilot completed last year, **University Services embarked on a process to take a holistic approach to understanding the impact of the full residential experience** (including housing, dining, and space) – as well as specific service offerings – on the overall undergraduate student experience and well-being.

**Huron endeavored to engage as many people as possible in this conversation** – of course with a primary focus on undergraduate students but also a wide array of campus stakeholders.

**Huron Consulting Group led this engagement, consisting of a constituent-driven approach using qualitative and quantitative data**, internal data, experiential assessments, interviews, focus groups, surveys, and Ivy+ benchmarking.



# Survey Activities

Huron executed three surveys to capture data and focus on the housing and dining experience through the lens of different stakeholder groups.



## Undergraduate Residential Experience Survey

**When:** December 2023

**Audience:** Current Students

**Participants:** 1,546

**Purpose:** Gather feedback to build a comprehensive understanding of the undergraduate housing and dining experience.



## Alumni Residential Experience Survey

**When:** January 2024

**Audience:** Alumni (2008-2023)

**Participants:** 2,220

**Purpose:** Engage alumni to enhance understanding of the undergraduate housing and dining experience over time.



## Sophomore & Junior Dining Experience Survey

**When:** February 2024

**Audience:** Current Soph. & Juniors

**Participants:** 332

**Purpose:** Understanding how various aspects of the dining selection process impacts the undergraduate student experience.

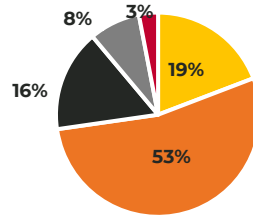
# Student Survey: Satisfaction Rating

Satisfaction ratings revealed that more than 25% of students are not satisfied – a population that disproportionately represents the groups Princeton hopes to attract and support.

## SUMMARY

How satisfied are you with your residential (housing and dining) experience at Princeton?

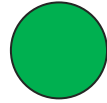
- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Very Dissatisfied



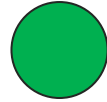
Overall, **over 70% of all students** are “Satisfied” with or “Extremely Satisfied” with their overall residential experience.

**Racial minorities, upperclass students,** and those with **accessibility needs** (physical, allergen, or cultural needs) tend to rate their experience as less satisfactory.

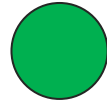
## KEY TAKEAWAYS



**Students in residential colleges** were more likely than students in off-campus or upperclass housing to be “Satisfied” or “Extremely Satisfied”.



Students who are a part of a **co-op or eating club** are more satisfied than those who identify as **Independent** or have selected a meal plan.



**First-years** and **sophomores** were more likely to answer “Satisfied” or “Extremely Satisfied” than juniors and seniors.



**Black/African American** students were most likely to answer “Dissatisfied” or “Extremely Dissatisfied”.

# Undergraduate Survey: Major Findings

Survey analysis revealed several key findings that show how demographics can impact the way students experience residential housing and dining programs.

## Upperclass Students

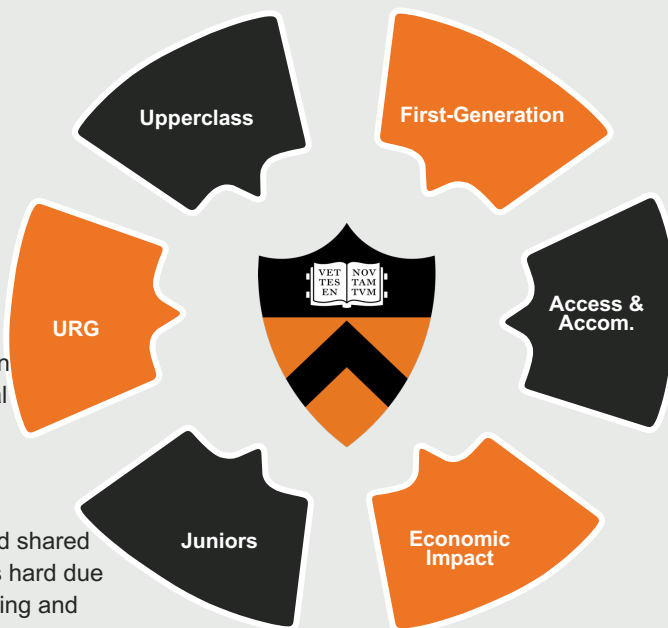
- Across many aspects of dining and housing, upperclass students tended to be more dissatisfied with housing and dining than first-year and sophomore students.

## Underrepresented Groups

- Underrepresented groups experience the residential journey at Princeton differently than those in the majority. Most notably, minority students expressed lower satisfaction ratings across many aspects of the residential experience.

## Junior Class

- Juniors had the lowest satisfaction scores and shared that their transition after sophomore year was hard due to the large selection of options for both housing and dining.



## First-Generation Status

- Though first-generation status is not specifically aligned to a minority group, their experience often aligns with members of underrepresented groups.

## Access & Accommodation

- Students with access and accommodation needs shared that they find it difficult to have their allergen and cultural/religious needs met. Compared to students without these needs, they are generally more dissatisfied across the residential experience.

## Socio-economic Impact

- Given Princeton's one price for all housing options, socio-economic status alone did not have a major influence on one's housing experience.

# Housing & Dining: Major Findings

Analysis of interview and survey data surfaced significant findings that highlight key elements influencing how students experience housing and dining.

## Clear & Consistent Communication

- The need for clear and consistent communication around housing and dining options is a common theme across constituent groups. There is a desire for increased quality and frequency of communications.

## Continuity in Community

- Most upperclass students do not reside or dine in residential colleges. Those who select independent status stated they experienced community disruption that impacted existing relationships by not easily being able to dine with friends, causing many to experience feelings of isolation.

## Variance in Offerings & Services

- The differences in the availability and quality of services within dining and housing was cited as a barrier to community building and sustaining a sense of belonging.



## Dedicated Spaces & Inclusive Facilities

- Students would like to have more intentionally designed and designated spaces across the University. Students also expressed a desire for more inclusive elements in the residential experience that reflects the rich diversity of Princeton.

## Locations & Policy Constraints

- Housing and dining hall locations as well as the perceived inflexibility of residential policies impacts the ability of students to navigate their residential experience easily along with building connections and community.

## Social Stratification & Selectivity

- Co-op and eating club selection processes impact the student experience, granting some individuals with social standing the ability to more easily navigate the residential experience while contributing to a sense of isolation and discomfort for others.

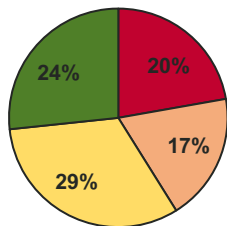
# Housing: Impact on Belonging & Inclusion

**Survey Question:** Does your current housing experience at the University improve your sense of 1) Belonging and 2) Inclusion?

## SUMMARY\*

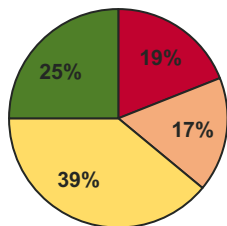
### Belonging

- Not at all
- A little
- Somewhat
- A lot



### Inclusion

- Not at all
- A little
- Somewhat
- A lot



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

● **First-years and sophomores** reported a **higher sense of belonging and inclusion in residential colleges** than upperclass student respondents.

● **63%** of respondents said that their housing experience **somewhat or significantly increased** their levels of belonging and inclusion.

● **Hispanic / Latino** participants reported the **lowest levels (55%) of satisfaction**.

● **Juniors** are the **most likely** to report that **housing does not improve** their sense of belonging and inclusion.

\*Note: Those who did not respond or responded "unsure" were excluded from the presented figures

# Housing Open Responses: Belonging & Inclusion

**Survey Question:** *In a few words, briefly describe what could be done in housing to create a better sense of belonging and inclusion for you?*



Opportunities for **enhancing physical spaces** include adding more community spaces for upperclass students within residence halls, incorporating furniture that encourages social interaction, and enhancing existing common spaces to make them more inviting and useful.



In their feedback, students express a desire for **more events fostering connections** among individuals with similar experiences and living spaces. They seek tailored events for the unique dynamics of their residential colleges and class, as well as events open to the broader student community to promote inclusion.



**Consideration for accommodations** is consistently emphasized. Students express a desire for more accessibility features in housing. In addition to physical accommodations, there is a discussion about the importance of housing features catering to students with gender or religious needs.

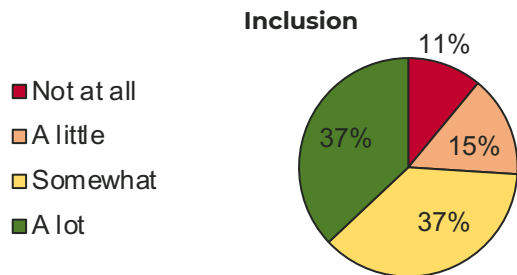
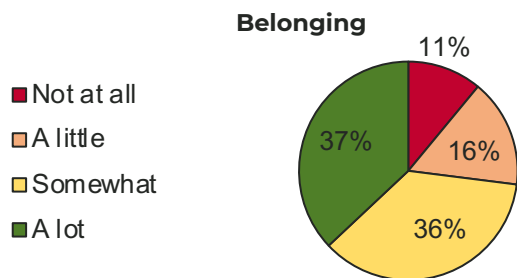


**University support** in the first two years enhances students' sense of belonging. However, there's recognition of a noticeable shift in the level of administrative support during the transition into upperclass years that results in increasing challenges in navigating dining and housing processes.

# Dining: Impact on Belonging & Inclusion

*Survey Question: Does your current dining experience at the University improve your sense of 1) Belonging and 2) Inclusion?*

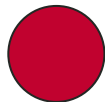
## SUMMARY\*



## KEY TAKEAWAYS



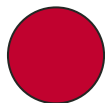
Over 70% of respondents said that their dining experience **somewhat or significantly increased both** their sense of belonging and inclusion.



Students who select to be **independent experience a lesser sense of inclusion and belonging** than those who participate in a co-op or eating club.



**Black / African American** participants reported the **lowest levels of satisfaction** in their dining experience. Regarding dining, **Black / African Americans** answered **55%** for belonging and **59%** for inclusion.



Those with **dining accommodation needs** reported more **negative experiences**, with only **60%** and **57%** of those with dining accommodation needs indicating that their dining experience increased their sense of belonging and inclusion (respectively).

\*Note: Those who did not respond or responded "unsure" were excluded from the presented figures

# Dining Open Responses: Belonging & Inclusion

**Survey Question:** *In a few words, briefly describe what could be done in dining to create a better sense of belonging and inclusion for you?*



Respondents frequently **requested culturally diverse food options**, expressing a desire for inclusive menu choices that authentically represent different cultures. They noted that the current options are perceived as lacking in diversity and inclusivity. This need was more pronounced in eating clubs.



**Community gathering spaces** play a crucial role in enabling students to connect in physical environments. Valued locations include communal kitchens and private dining rooms where students can meet new people and connect with existing friends.



**Eating with friends** is important to a large majority of students. Upperclass students in eating clubs shared that they found it difficult to eat with friends who are not members of their club. Starting in their junior year, this resulted in difficult shifts in their friend groups.



Students highlighted a perceived **lack of accommodation for those with varying lifestyles and religious needs**. They suggest that expanding food variety to be inclusive of students with dietary restrictions and religious mandates could enhance the overall sense of inclusion.

# Dining Selection: Student Journey

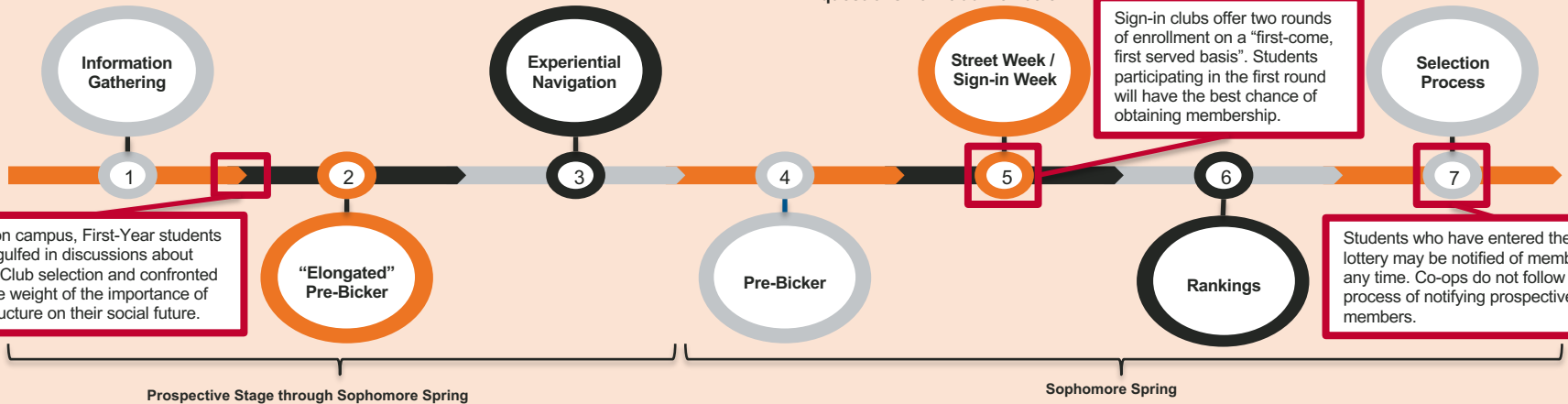
There are at least seven steps in the dining selection process, and students experience them differently depending on their level of understanding and identity.

**1** Students gather information as prospective students from **research or as beneficiaries of legacy**. For many students with a limited Princeton network, their **information gathering does not happen until they arrive on campus**.

**3** Before the pre-bicker progresses, **students often gain a sense of their belonging** within different eating clubs/co-ops from **attendance at activities and meals** hosted by these entities.

**5** Students **attend events at the clubs they selected**. For selective clubs, 3 days of events are held where activities **occur over 3 hours** and can include activities like **cookie design or answering several rounds of random questions** from club members.

**7** Friday morning of Street Week, **club decisions on memberships are announced** on the ICC website. Student can **see their selection and the selection of other students**.



Once on campus, First-Year students are engulfed in discussions about Eating Club selection and confronted with the weight of the importance of this structure on their social future.

Sign-in clubs offer two rounds of enrollment on a "first-come, first served basis". Students participating in the first round will have the best chance of obtaining membership.

Students who have entered the co-op lottery may be notified of membership at any time. Co-ops do not follow a uniform process of notifying prospective members.

**2** For some students, the **bicker process begins earlier than is documented**, especially for First-Year students who have **prior knowledge of the type of social connections they need to develop** (e.g., legacy students) or first-year student athletes that interact with upperclass eating club/co-op member teammates.

**4** Students can sign up for up to two selective clubs and any and all open clubs. Students make their selection **based on the personality associated with each club** or chance encounters that they've had with club members. Their understanding of this "personality" can also be visible during events they can attend prior to street-week.

**6** Rankings happen in two ways that impact placement: students ranking their preferences of clubs and clubs ranking their preferences for students. For selective clubs **rankings of students are said to be based on interactions and "fit"**. How a student ranks a club can also impact how the club perceives that student.

# Major Findings

Survey analysis **revealed similar findings** to the original survey regarding how the way students experience dining decision-making and the selection process impacts their overall satisfaction and wellbeing.

## Cost

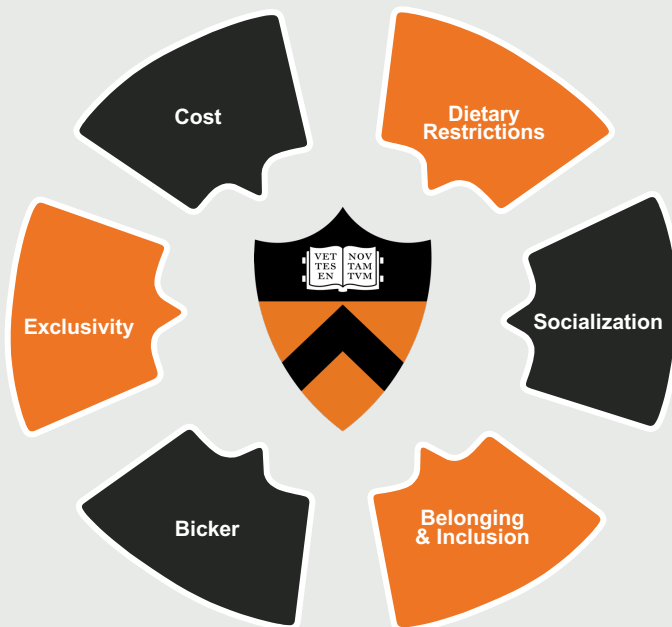
Students that rely heavily on financial aid see the dining programs as an extravagance and choose not to participate as a result.

## Exclusivity

All students, regardless of dining club membership, cited restricted opportunities for social interactions as a concern. This limiting of diversity in student interactions is a cause of stress for a wide array of students.

## Bicker

Students who are dissatisfied with the entire Bicker process feel it adds unnecessary stress, is inequitable, and is biased.



## Dietary Restrictions

Among students with the strongest convictions about dining options, those that have moderate to severe food allergies found restrictions a major concern.

## Socialization

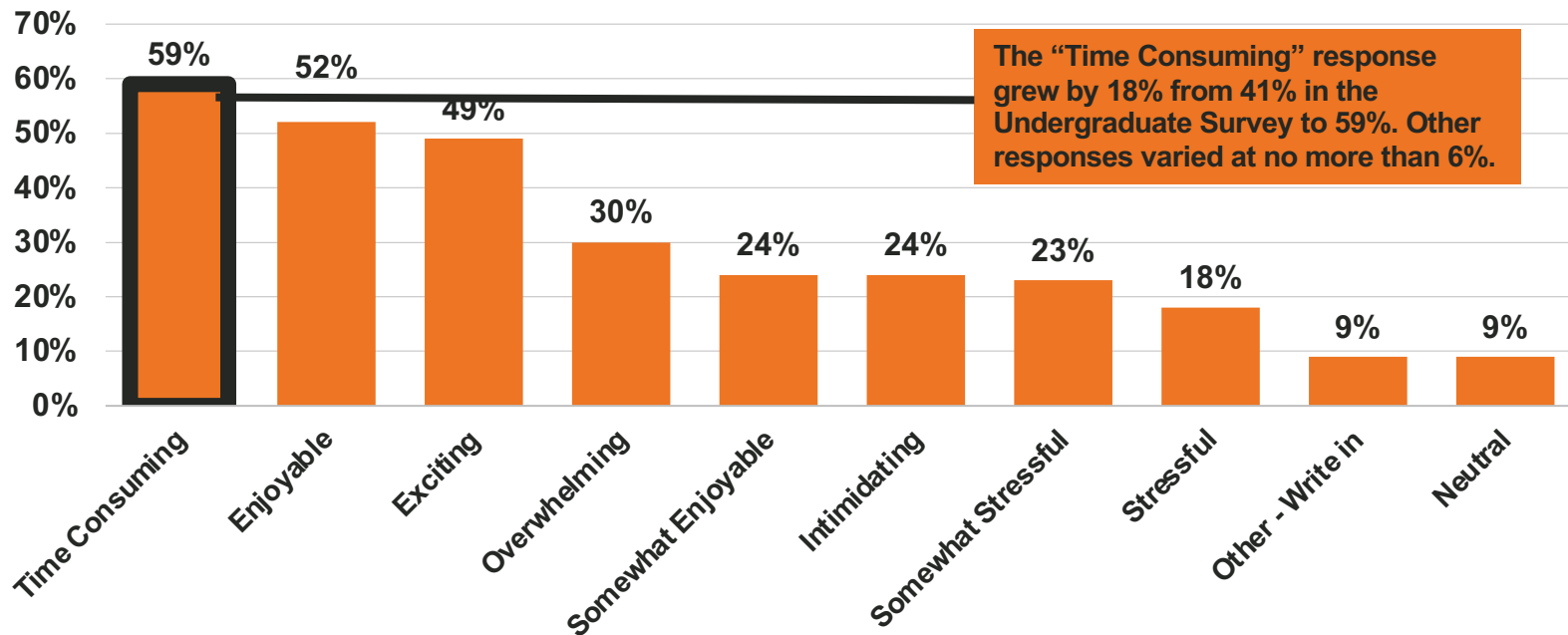
The most mentioned motivation behind selection of a dining option was socialization. The opportunity for socialization is desired by sophomores and juniors regardless of the meal plan option selected.

## Belonging & Inclusion

Open responses illuminated that many students' sense of belonging and inclusion is directly impacted by their dining selection.

# Bicker/Selection Process: Overall Experience

*Survey Question: Please select the terms that correspond with your overall experience with the bicker/selection process: [select all that apply].*



\*This question was a *select all that apply*, allowing respondents to choose more than one answer. Percentages will not add to 100%.

# Open Ended Response: Improvements

*Survey Question: What components of the dining selection experience would you like to see improved and why?*



## Meal Swap

Students would like a **“Meal Exchange”** option to allow crossover between co-ops, eating clubs, and the dining halls. Included in this is the option for guest meals, and inclusion of independent students.



## Socialization

Many students commented on the **exclusion of their friends** from certain dining options. They would like to see more guest options or cross-dining options to support more diverse socialization opportunities.



## Overcrowding

**Extended hours or expansion of dining spaces** were cited numerous times. Frustration is evident among students that feel they do not have enough time and space to eat during the day. **After hours, or a late meal option** is a prevalent suggestion for improvement.



## Cost Concerns

A suggestion among many students is to have a **partial eating club membership**. Allowing students with cost concerns to join for fewer meals per week, or by semester. This would allow students with financial motivations the opportunity to still socialize with different groups.

# Open-Ended Response: Dining Belonging & Inclusion

**Survey Question:** *In a few words, briefly describe what about your dining experience at Princeton impacts (positively or negatively) your sense of belonging and/or inclusion.*



**“2D has completely changed my life.** I have met so many incredible people - grads, undergrads, alumni alike – that I would have NEVER met otherwise. They've taught me how to cook food in such an authentic way, made me more in touch with what is going in my body, and be more conscious about how our eating choices affect the environment. **Can't imagine my Princeton experience to be what it is now without 2D.”**



**“Many of my friends are not on the meal plan. I wish the social scene didn't revolve around eating clubs.** Because I wasn't able to be in an eating club due to financial and practical restraints, I had to join the meal plan and I feel like it's hard to meet new friends on the meal plan.”



**“Being in an eating club provides me with a sense of belonging and acceptance** that cannot be replicated in any other way on this campus.”



**“I have found it hard as an underclassman to navigate the dining halls with a gluten allergy. I frequently had to leave a dining hall and go to a different one simply because there were not many options for me to eat.** I end up eating the same exact plate multiple times in a week. It is disheartening to see your peers enjoy a full, diverse array of food each day while you have to eat the same thing many times a week.”

# Alumni Survey: Major Findings

The alumni survey yielded comparable results to the undergraduate survey, highlighting how demographics can influence students' residential experiences during their time at the University.

## Upperclass Students

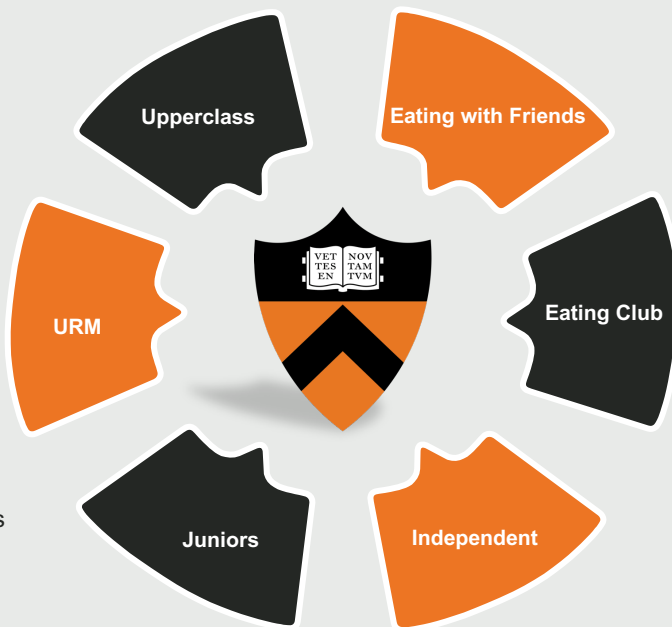
- Alumni responses echoed current upperclass students, including across many aspects of dining and housing, being more dissatisfied than in their first and sophomore years.

## Underrepresented Minorities

- Minority alumni respondents shared similar perspectives to current minority students, resulting in lower satisfaction ratings across the residential experience regardless of the minority population on campus.

## Junior Class

- Alumni responded similarly to current students about their junior year fulfillment being less satisfactory than their senior year.



## Challenge Eating with Friends

- Alumni in eating clubs shared that during their upperclass years, they struggled to dine with non-members, affecting friendships. Some alumni considered changing dining choices to maintain connections.

## Eating Club Participants

- Alumni who participated in an eating club had positive associations with both their housing and dining experience. However, some noted that their positive perspective of eating club membership altered after graduation to more negative feelings.

## Independent Status

- Alumni who identified as independent diners during their upperclass years requested that more support be given to students who choose this selection, sharing that it was difficult to build community once they changed their dining option to Independent.

# Open Responses – Insight on Community

**Survey Question:** *Please briefly describe what could have been done in housing and dining to create a better sense of well-being, belonging, and inclusion for you.*

## Systems of Exclusion



The exclusionary aspect of eating clubs and the bicker process were called out by club members and non-members for its negative impact on the student experience. Recommendations called for reforming the selection processes and supporting and expanding more inclusive alternatives.

## Common Spaces



Physical space recommendations focus on the importance of common spaces for building community. Alumni believed that more floor and dorm common rooms would improve the residential experience, especially in the upperclass residence halls.

## Room Draw



Alumni lamented the stress and confusion related to room draw. Room draw was identified as another process that can negatively impact student's ability to maintain friend groups.

## Support of Co-Op and Independent Dining

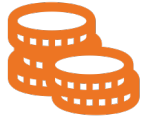


Alumni mentioned the importance of supporting and expanding co-op options and independent dining. This included University supported facilities, expanding kitchen access and reviewing policies to facilitate exchange across dining plans.

# Open Responses – Independent Selection

**Survey Question:** *Please briefly describe why you chose independent dining.*

## Cost Concerns



Cost sensitivity drove students to choose independent dining. Alumni expressed that dining plans and eating club dues represented heavy financial commitments.

## Autonomy



For many independent diners, that dining option provided a better sense of control over meal planning and the ability to influence the quality and variety of food to their preference.

## Concerns Related to Eating Clubs



Alumni chose independent dining as a proactive and reactive response to selective club culture. Some respondents cited negative social and mental health impacts of clubs while others mentioned that they chose independent dining because they were not accepted into a bicker club.

## Managing Dietary Restrictions

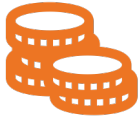


Respondents discussed that dining halls and eating clubs did not provide them with the ability to manage their dietary restrictions. Students with religious restrictions especially found it hard to depend on these structures.

# Open Responses – Change of Dining Selection

**Survey Question:** *What prompted you to change your selection between your Junior and Senior years?*

## Cost and Value Considerations



Among alumni respondents, eating club membership in the Senior year decreased by 115. Alumni respondents most often withdrew their membership from eating clubs in favor of less expensive options. Some former members expressed that they did not see the value for the price either socially or in the quality of food.

## Pandemic Policy



Many respondents cited the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their membership status. During this time, University regulations required clubs to cease operations, and students living on campus were required to have a meal plan.

## Convenience



Members of eating clubs discussed the importance of finding an option that offered more flexible hours and the inconvenience of its location in relation to housing.

## Social Factors



Eating club members discussed shifts in friend groups interactions and behavior as a driver of change. Members who changed their selection found it difficult to dine with friends on other plans, saw their friends change their dining selection, or made changes to be closer to friends (e.g., moving into Spelman).

# Open Responses – Residential Feedback

**Survey Question:** *Is there anything else you would like to add about your housing and dining experience?*



## Eating Club Affinity

Alumni eating club members expressed a **high degree of affinity** for their club, describing it as a defining element of the residential experience. The eating clubs were cited as motivators for alumni to return to campus.



## Upperclass Housing

The **maintenance, availability of amenities and imbalance of accommodations across upperclass housing** were elements of the residential experience that raised concerns. Alumni recommended adding air conditioning and improving the cleanliness of housing facilities.



## Empowering Choice

Discussions surfaced around the importance of **empowering students to make choices that influence the social landscape** and their personal outcomes in the residential experience. Policies that create mandates within the residential system are viewed as a type of coddling of students.










## Challenges of Independence

Students who experience independent dining detailed the **feeling of isolation** from other students. They point out a **lack of pathways to integrate their dining experience** with others and barriers to execute the activities that support independent dining, e.g., grocery shopping

# Benchmarking: Summary

Huron conducted a comprehensive benchmarking study of Ivy+ institutions' dining and housing operations. The following are key findings that highlight opportunities for change.

Housing & Dining Peers	Meal Plans	Housing & Dining Assessment
   	<p>All peer schools require a meal plan for all students living on campus.</p>	<p>Only Duke assesses satisfaction with housing and dining every semester.</p>
  	<p><b>Residential College System</b></p> <p>Several Ivy+ universities leverage their residential college programs in upperclass years whereas Princeton's emphasis is on First and Sophomore years.</p>	<p><b>Housing Selection Process</b></p> <p>Princeton's housing selection process is notably complex compared to many of its peers and takes significantly longer for students to complete the process.</p>

# Benchmarking: Trends in Housing

Benchmarking analysis with Princeton's selected peers uncovered the following trends related to residential housing.



## Housing Requirements

- Most peers have a first-year requirement, some have or are moving to a 3-year (or more) on-campus residency requirement.
- Vanderbilt requires 4 years of residency.



## Inventory Expansion

- Growth in student populations has outpaced facility expansion negatively impacting their residential model.
- Responses included re-purposing buildings, purchasing apartment style facilities, and new construction.



## Evolving Inclusivity

- Peers are evolving their residential model to be more inclusive, including renovating facilities to increase accessibility and removing selectivity in the application process.
- Selected peers are reviewing and amending policies, repositioning campus as the center of social life.



## Accommodation Requests

- Accommodation requests have increased significantly.
- Selected peers are seeing sharp increases in medical and religious requests in housing.
- Stanford cited an increase in medical requests over the last year.



## Newer Residential Models

- Newer residential college models do not assign students to residential colleges until after their first year.
- Residential college membership is a defining moment in the student journey with lasting implications for their sense of belonging.

# Benchmarking: Trends in Dining

Benchmarking analysis uncovered the following trends related to dining.



## Hours of Operations

- Many dining operations have expanded their hours.
- This has included adding a 4<sup>th</sup> meal option (e.g., Rice, Univ of Chicago) and expanding operating hours to include continuous service.



## Dietary Accommodations

- There are more requests related to allergen accommodations.
- Several peers have introduced allergen stations (e.g., Duke, Rice).
- Peers have expanded Kosher and Halal stations and international stations to offer foods that reflect cultural diversity.



## Required Meal Plans

- All selected peers in the benchmarking study have a required meal plan for on-campus residents.
- At least one peer stated that the meal plan requirement was critical to combatting food insecurity on campus for independent diners.



## Technology Adoption

- Dining operations are investing and deploying technologies to add efficiency to the dining experience.
- Technologies that incorporate AI can be used for forecasting, and student-facing technology can provide enhanced insight into dining hall capacity.



## Student Unions

- Peers have invested resources into building structures that integrate dining and student gathering space.
- These spaces support student engagement and include space for live entertainment, student-led events, lounges, retail dining, and gaming spaces.

# Emerging Opportunities for Consideration

Based on early analysis, emerging opportunities are listed below.

## POLICY/PROCEDURES



- Enhance communications
- Provide transparency of room selection/allocation process
- Coordinate timelines for the housing and dining selection process

## CURRENT FACILITIES



- Improve cleanliness
- Increase student ownership of spaces (kitchens, community spaces, etc.)

## FUTURE SPACES



- Provide more community spaces
- Consider types of housing based on student interest/need
- Associate upperclass housing with residential colleges

## POLICY/PROCEDURES



- Enhance communications
- Review independent status
- Assess timeline of the dining selection process
- Determine strength of meal plans (e.g., Campus Dining, co-op)

## FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES



- Campus Dining meal plan for all students who reside on campus, including upperclass students who live on campus (number of required meals could be different for students with other dining options)
- Propose tiered meal plan options

## UPPERCLASS OPTIONS



- Differentiated options for more flexibility/fluidity in the dining system (e.g., retail and dining points to use in town)
- Dedicated dining facility for juniors and seniors