

anagha & winston **2020** POLICY WHAT IT TAKES. **2020** PAPER

Written by: Anagha & Winston 2020 Policy Team

Inclusion & Equity: Student Voices in Housing

Summary

At its best, Student Government should uplift the voices of all students and advocate for these concerns within the UT administration. We will create a **student-led affordable housing commission** within the Fennes administration to counteract the high cost of living in Austin and ensure that all students can afford to attend UT.

Background

Rent prices in Austin have risen 93% since 2010, the highest increase of any other major US city¹. Student housing prices have not been exempt from this trend. Despite constant construction, West Campus rent remains unaffordable with newer developments often charging upwards of \$1000/room. In addition, this past October, the Austin City Council voted in favor of moving forward with the “Domain on Riverside” project, effectively allowing for the gentrification of the East Riverside neighborhood². When development begins, five apartment buildings in East Riverside are set to be demolished, displacing the 3,000 UT students who rely on this

¹<https://www.kvue.com/article/money/economy/boomtown-2040/austin-rent-increase-highest-in-us-report-says/269-508318c0-e380-4b02-9bb1-7b579b99f20b>

² <https://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2019-10-25/after-much-shouting-riverside-deal-gets-done/>

neighborhood for affordable housing³⁴. UT has made significant strides towards financial accessibility with the recent promise to expand financial aid and fully cover tuition for families with an annual income under \$65k⁵. However, this is meaningless if students cannot afford to live in Austin. As UT looks towards the future with accessibility in mind, affordable student housing must be a top priority.

Recommendation

We will establish an affordable housing commission with the Fenves administration to bring student concerns over this issue to the highest levels. UT recently purchased the 2400 building in West Campus, and we propose to prioritize affordability at this complex⁶. Additionally, UT should continue to work towards revitalization of the Creekside dormitory, as this could add up to 900 new housing spaces on campus and therefore increase affordability, especially for first-year students⁷. Another priority should be to amend the Lyft/UT Night Ride program, which provides students with an allotted credit towards late-night ride shares from the main campus to their housing⁸. Some students who live close to campus do not use these credits, while other students living in Riverside or North Campus rely heavily on these credits. Students who do not use the program should be able to donate or transfer their credits to other students who need transportation access. Because housing affordability is such a large problem to tackle, this

³ www.kut.org/post/ut-austin-students-have-been-fighting-affordable-housing-city-hall-where-university

⁴ www.statesman.com/news/20190612/5-east-riverside-apartment-complexes-may-give-way-to-new-development

⁵ <https://www.texastribune.org/2019/07/09/ut-system-spends-160-million-financial-aid-ut-austin-students/>

⁶ <https://housing.utexas.edu/halls/2400-nueces-apartment-complex>

⁷ news.utexas.edu/2019/09/18/fenves-looks-to-the-future-of-uts-impact-in-state-of-the-university-address/

⁸ <https://parking.utexas.edu/night>

student-led committee is necessary to provide student input on all aspects of the issue and to ensure that administration understands the severity of student concern surrounding housing.

Feasibility

If Student Government prioritizes this issue, forming a student-led commission to meet consistently with the administration should not be difficult. In the 2019 State of the University Address, the Fennes Administration acknowledged the issue of affordable housing in Austin and pledged to tackle it, so we anticipate a willingness to work with students on the issue⁹. We would seek out students living in a variety of housing situations to advise and work with the administration towards solving this complicated challenge.

⁹ <https://president.utexas.edu/messages-speeches-2019/2019-state-university-address>

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Inclusion & Equity: Safe Physical Spaces

Summary

Physical spaces on campus are in clear need of a makeover, and that begins by making them more representative of the multitude of identities and ethnic backgrounds present here at UT. We propose three things: to create a **culturally-centered study space**, to advocate for a **statue representing a prominent Asian-American figure**, and to **rename buildings that are named after racist historical figures**.

Background

The University of Texas has taken several steps to create inclusive spaces for different marginalized groups, through the creation of the [Multicultural Engagement Center](#), the [Malcolm X Lounge](#), the [Gender and Sexuality Center](#), etc. But although UT has taken steps to create safe spaces for people of color, we still have a long way to go. For example, one of the major spaces for Asian-Americans on campus, the UT Center for Asian American Studies, was recently moved from the Burdine Hall to Belmont Hall, making the space virtually inaccessible to students who live off campus.¹ **All** marginalized groups on campus deserve a safe space where they can study, relax, and thrive.

¹ <https://www.facs/2456248341317384/>

Policy Recommendations

As two Asian-American UT students who are all too familiar with the lack of representation on campus, Anagha and Winston will advocate for the creation of a dedicated **culturally-centered study space** on campus for students with underrepresented identities. The Sinclair Suite in the Union represents an ideal option for this space, as it is closer to West Campus than other existing options.

Asian-Americans are also poorly represented when it comes to their presence in UT landmarks. UT currently more prominently features its white alumni over its alumni of color; and Asian UT alumni are particularly underrepresented in this respect. Featuring Asian UT alumni across campus can help give Asian students a sense of belonging. Anagha and Winston want to ensure that Asian students feel like they are a part of UT, which is why, as President and Vice President, they will advocate for the creation of a **statue of a prominent Asian-American historical figure**. Our campaign especially wants to honor **Kalpana Chawla**, the first woman of Indian descent to go to space, who tragically died during the Space Shuttle *Columbia* disaster in 2003.² Chawla received her Masters' in Aerospace Engineering at the University of Texas at Arlington.

Lastly, Anagha and Winston recognize that, if we want to make physical spaces on campus more welcoming towards marginalized and underrepresented communities, we must **rename buildings on campus** that are currently named after historically racist figures. This especially includes the Robert L. Moore (RLM) building and T.S. Painter Hall. Robert L. Moore was a mathematics professor at UT who was infamous for creating a hostile environment for his black students, and for being an outspoken segregationist.³ T.S. Painter Hall is named for former University president T.S. Painter, who defended UT's segregationist admissions

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalpana_Chawla

³ <https://thedailytexan.com/2017/12/05/robert-lee-moore-hall-is-due-for-a-name-change>

practices in the historic *Sweatt v. Painter* ruling.⁴ If UT wants to move forward in creating an inclusive and equitable environment for its minority populations, it must rename these monuments to racist figures.

Anagha and Winston have direct experience creating inclusive environments for students who may not feel welcome in traditionally-white spaces. As VP of Diversity of Inclusion in the University Panhellenic Council Executive Board and founder of Sisters of Color, Anagha helped to create a safe environment for women of color in sororities, while also moving the needle in creating diverse recruitment practices. As a Camp Texas counselor and Guide, Winston has had first-hand experience with the exclusive environment that UT can create for incoming students, and has worked hard to ensure that incoming students feel welcome at this university, no matter their background.

Feasibility

The re-utilization of campus spaces has been done in the past by the Student Government at no cost or very low cost. During her tenure as Student Body Vice President from 2018-2019, Vice President Mehraz Rahman led an effort to repurpose unused spaces in the Union as “reflection spaces,” which are currently used by students to meditate and/or pray.⁵ Student Government can work with University Unions to advocate for the repurposing of spaces and rooms, especially if there is a demonstrated need for these spaces.

As for the statue, cost can definitely be a concern, as Student Government alone cannot pay for the cost of creating a new statue. However, the need for Asian-American representation in campus landmarks is important, and previous lobbying campaigns by Student Government

⁴ <https://thedailytexan.com/2019/05/05/ut-still-struggles-with-representation>

⁵ <https://thedailytexan.com/2018/08/28/reflection-spaces-to-registration-bars-what-to-expect-from-ut-student-government-this>

have led to the creation of the Martin Luther King Jr. Statue and the Cesar Chavez statue.⁶ We anticipate that this policy will have a lot of administrative buy-in, as UT's admissions office has expressed interest in making campus tours more "inclusive and historically accurate" in accordance with UT's Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan.⁷

Students have consistently been rallying around renaming campus spaces. In 2019, Student Government launched a campaign called "Malcolm Over Moore," intended to raise awareness about the history of RLM. Natural Sciences Council has also been vocal about renaming spaces like Painter and RLM. We believe that the full support of the Executive Alliance in Student Government can help draw greater attention to the issue and force the administration to take action, much like how the widespread backlash over Confederate statues on campus ultimately led to their removal in 2017.^{8,9}

⁶ https://diversity.utexas.edu/statues/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Task-Force-Report-FINAL-08_09_15.pdf

⁷ <https://thedailytexan.com/2019/04/10/admissions-still-working-to-make-campus-tours-more-historically-accurate-inclusive>

⁸ <https://www.kxan.com/news/ut-student-government-launches-online-survey-on-campus-confederate-statues/>

⁹ <https://www.texastribune.org/2017/08/20/ut-austin-removing-confederate-statues-middle-night/>