

Berkeley Student Cooperative: Quality, low-cost housing to students with limited resources

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The Berkeley Student Cooperatives (BSC) meets a critical need: the mission is to provide a quality, low-cost cooperative housing to university students, thereby providing an educational opportunity for students who might not otherwise be able to afford a university education.

Tuition, room and board costs have risen over 37% at public institutions between 1999-2000 and 2009-2010, after adjusting for inflation¹. Rising room and board costs are a cause of much of that change: dorm space costs rose 80% and board 25% during that period². More college students are turning to loan programs at higher average amounts to pay for these rising costs. 46% of college students at public 4-year universities obtained loans in 2007-2008 compared to 38% in 1995-96³, a 20% increase. With rates less than half of the dorms, and some of the cheapest apartments near campus, the BSC remains popular among students with limited resources.

The BSC has long welcomed students from a diverse array of backgrounds, reaching back to its beginnings in 1933, and today provides a valuable service to over 1,200 students in the Berkeley community and beyond. This summary highlights BSC membership socio-demographics, assesses how the BSC is meeting its mission, and makes recommendations and suggestions for further research and exploration to improve the BSC.

The BSC Census 2012

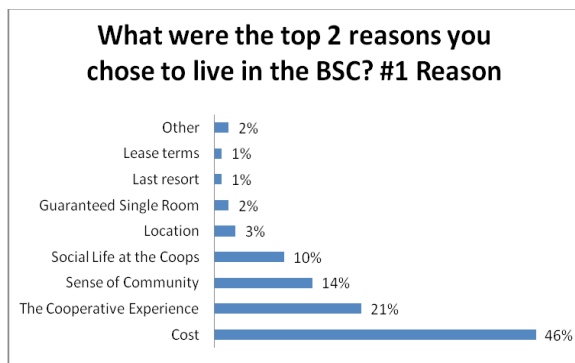
The Berkeley Student Cooperative recognizes the importance of data collection in its efforts to serve students in the Berkeley and surrounding communities. The Cabinet and Board of Directors commissioned an exploration of the socio-demographic differences between Rochdale and Fenwick members versus the room and board houses and hired a Program Management Intern in Spring 2012 to carry out this project.

As part of the project, the Project Management Intern, Catherine N. Barry, MA, designed and implemented the first socio-demographic survey of the organization, the BSC Census 2012 to better understand the dynamics of the organization. This census collected information not only on the socio-demographic composition of student members, such as race/ethnicity, parental income, and sexual orientation, but it also collected information about how members heard about the BSC and their top two reasons for choosing to live in the coops. This executive summary provides a snapshot of those results.

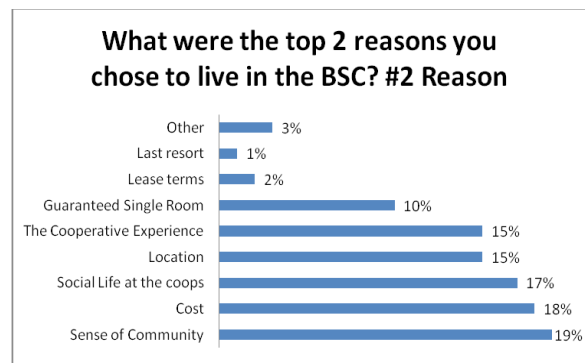
BSC Census 2012 Results

The top reason for living in the BSC is the affordable cost. 46% of members reported cost as their number one reason for living in the BSC, illustrating the demand for quality, low-cost housing in Berkeley and the pertinence of the BSC mission. 64% of members reported cost as their primary or secondary reason for living within the BSC.

Cooperative housing matters to members, too. The cooperative experience and the sense of community were top picks among members' top reasons for living in the BSC, demonstrating the demand and value of cooperative housing. 69% of members reported the cooperative experience and the sense of community as their primary or secondary reason for living within the BSC. 21% of members reported the cooperative experience and 14% reported the sense of community as their top reason, coming in second and third after cost.

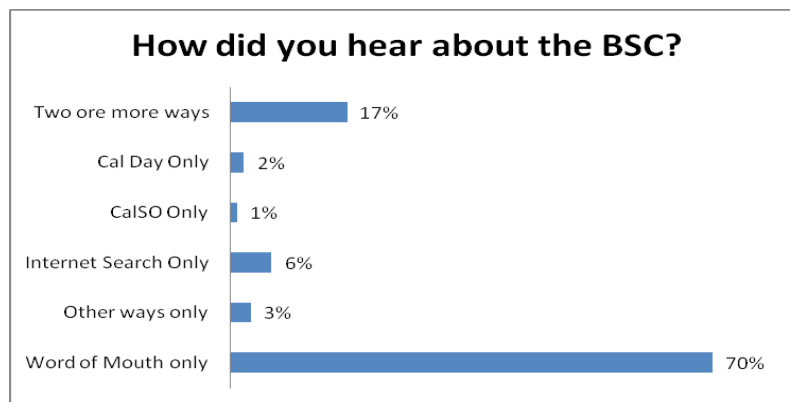


Source: BSC Census 2012



Source: BSC Census 2012

Most members heard about the BCS through word-of-mouth. 70% of BSC members heard about the BSC through word-of-mouth only; 6% only found out about the BSC through an internet search and 17% heard through two or more ways which almost always included word-of-mouth. This finding demonstrates the importance of member and alumni connections and the positive press that satisfied members provide for the BSC. However, this finding also suggests that the BSC has room to reach out the larger community to access individuals who may never hear of the BSC or who may hear about it, but who may hold misperceptions that deter them from living within the BSC.



Source: BSC Census 2012

Membership turnover is high. Over 43% of members moved into the BSC for the first time less than a year ago. In addition, over 32% of members lived in a BSC residence that was different than their current one. The highly dynamic nature of a constantly changing membership poses opportunities and challenges for any organization. The BSC may consider whether membership retention is an important goal.

BSC Mission and Membership

BSC Mission: To provide a quality, low-cost cooperative housing to university students, thereby providing an educational opportunity for students who might not otherwise be able to afford a university education.

This section addresses the following questions: Is the BSC meeting its mission? Does the BSC serve students who would not otherwise be able to afford a university education? Data come from member self-reports from the BSC Census 2012 unless otherwise noted.

Over 32% of members are Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) members⁶. To qualify for the program, an individual must meet three criteria: low income status (Pell grant eligible as verified by UCB financial aid); first generation college student (neither parent received a 4-year degree in the United States); and a California Resident, or Tribally registered Native American from any state. Note: individuals may be Pell grant eligible, but not current receive Pell grants because of other financial awards, scholarships, etc.

Definition: Student Life Advising Services, UC Berkeley <http://slas.berkeley.edu/what.html>

Over 37% of members receive Pell grants, 37% receive Cal grants, and 26% of members receive Pell grants and are first generation college students.

Over 44% of BSC members are currently taking out loans.

24% of members are financially independent, 81% of whom earn less than \$20,000 a year.

5% of BSC members receive no financial aid and have household income of less than \$20,000 a year. This is a high-needs group struggling to pay for school with few other resources to tap. Many of these students may be undocumented immigrant students who came to the US as children in the AB540 program who cannot access financial aid and have few opportunities to work.

Almost 40% of dependent BSC students come from families earning less than \$50,000 a year.

5% of members are verified participants at UC Berkeley's Disabled Students Program (DSP)⁶. Only 3% of UC Berkeley students participate in the DSP program⁷, showing how the BSC serves a disproportionately high percent of DSP students.

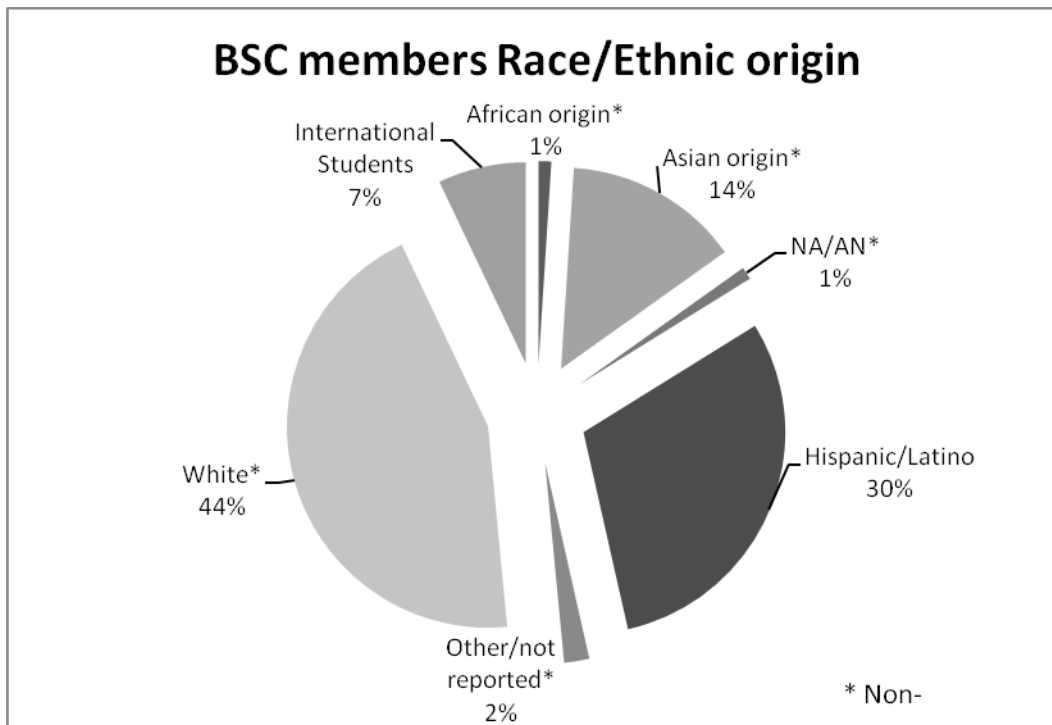
9% of BSC members are re-entry students, undergraduates aged 25 and older. Many of these students were unable to complete a degree within the more traditional ages of 18-22 because of financial, family, and other considerations and have returned, despite disadvantages, to complete their education.

The above statistics demonstrate that the BSC is meeting its mission, providing low-cost, quality housing to many students with financial need. The BSC provides an opportunity for many students who are the first in their families to attend college; who come from low-income families with little extra funds to pay for the high cost of their child’s tuition, room, and board; who are meeting cost demands by taking out loans; who must earn their degree with the extra challenge of a disability; and who are returning to school after a hiatus often caused by financial considerations.

BSC Member Demographics

The BSC currently serves 1,256 students⁶, 56% of whom are female and 44% of whom are male. Most are California residents (87%), but some are US residents from other states (6%) or international students (7%).

BSC students come from a diverse array of backgrounds:

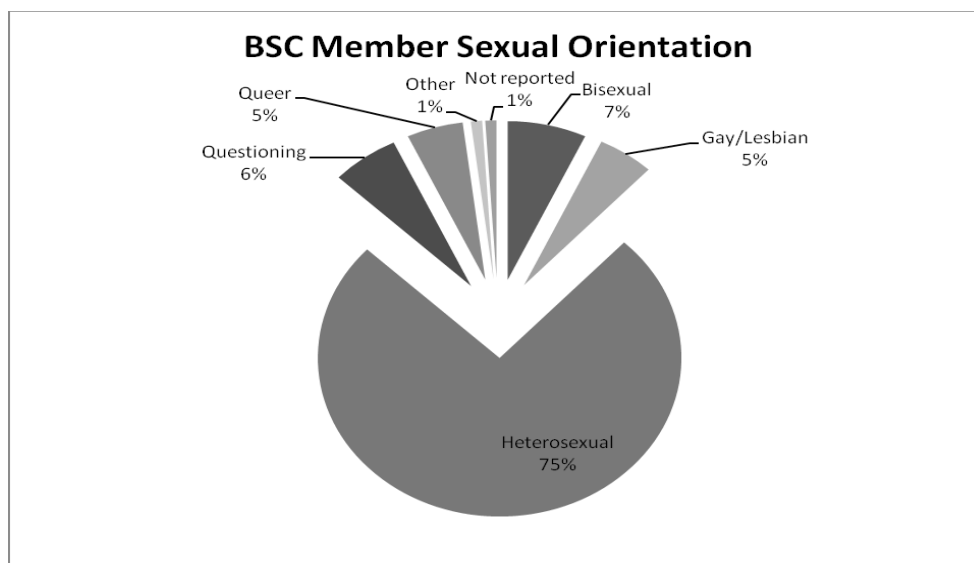


Source: BSC Census 2012

Race/ethnic status of BSC members 1% African origin, non-Hispanic; 14% Asian origin, non-Hispanic; 1% Native American or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic, 44% white, non-Hispanic;

30% Hispanic or Latino, 2% report 'other' or no racial/ethnic origins and 7% are international students⁴.

Notably, BSC members encompass a relatively large proportion of sexual minorities. Only 75% report heterosexual orientation, while 7% report bisexual; 5% report gay or lesbian; 6% report questioning; 5% report queer; 1% report other or more than one sexual orientation, and 1% do not report a sexual orientation. This demonstrates that the BSC welcomes sexual minorities, many of whom may face housing and other types of discrimination.



Source: BSC Census 2012

Recommendations:

The BSC meets critical needs by providing quality, low-cost housing to students with demonstrated financial barriers and needs, many of whom are members of racial/ethnic and sexual minorities. However, most members find out about the BSC through word of mouth, and Asian-origin students, who represent a large proportion of UC Berkeley students, are not well-represented within the BSC; African-origin students are slightly underrepresented as well.

The BSC should design and implement a marketing plan to reach out to potential members from a variety of backgrounds who may not be tapped into social networks connected to the BSC.

The BSC should implement policies that prioritize students who lack financial resources in the application process. The BSC currently implements a policy prioritizing EOP students; the BSC should prioritize Pell grant and Cal grant recipients and consider prioritizing independent students.

Further Directions:

The data presented here is part of a larger analysis of BSC member dynamics; please read the report comparing BSC UCB undergrad demographics with UCB undergrads on campus and

how UCB undergrads within the BSC differ by residence, and read the snapshot of BSC UCB graduate students and post-docs and how they compare to UCB graduate students.

Notes:

1: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/ch_3.asp

2: NCES: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_345.asp

3: NCES: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011218.pdf>

4: Though confusing, UC Berkeley reports does not report the race/ethnic membership of international students (see <http://opa.berkeley.edu/statistics/UndergraduateProfile.pdf>); this report follows suit, categorizing only U.S. students within race/ethnic groups. For example, the race/ethnicity of an international student from Vietnam or an international student from France will be listed as 'international student' rather than any other race category.

5: BSC Census 2012 relies on member's self-reported data.

6: Source: BSC Housing Department

7: Source: Dr. C. Chiba from the UCB Disabled Students Program, personal correspondence