



# Imprint

Your Stories, Your Voice

February 2025  
Volume 2 Issue 7

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# How do clubs feel about WUSA's new cheque request system?

Thea East, Staff Writer

On May 1, 2024, WUSA implemented a new online cheque filing system for all UW clubs which aimed to improve issues experienced with the old system, such as timeliness of reimbursement, workloads for club treasurers and the overall ease of submitting the request.

The planning and development for this new system began back in fall 2023 and has aimed to completely transform the experience of submitting a cheque request from a time-consuming outdated process to a streamlined, one-stop, online experience. An initial feedback survey was sent out to club executives to find out what their grievances with the old system were. This feedback helped to re-imagine what this new system was going to look like. Arya Razmjoo, the Vice-President (VP) of WUSA, explained how important he knows clubs are to students at UW, and how this was one of the motivating factors behind launching this project.

"We're investing more in clubs and societies than ever before now. In fact, I firmly believe it needs to be one of our biggest priorities because it's such a student-facing thing. It's the clubs for us. So, we're very much pushing to get those investments in so we can grow that department, run more amazing events for you folks, give more money to clubs, offer more resources to them, and make your lives as easy and as efficient as we possibly can," Razmjoo said.

The old system involved a club treasurer or VP of finance handling and submitting all cheque requests that came through the club. A PDF of the cheque request form would have to be manually filled out for each request made in the club and would take five to 10 minutes per request if the claimant in the club had provided all the needed information. After submitting the request,

**"We are continuing to refine and improve the cheque request process, which was launched less than a year ago, and has been in place for only two full terms. Our long-term goal is to make cheque reimbursements faster and easier for students."**

- WUSA's response to criticism of new cheque system

the average time it would take to be reimbursed would be around four to six weeks. The club's treasurer would be responsible for updating the claimants on the status of their requests.

The new system has replaced manual, paper submissions with online forms which now allow students to submit these requests on their phones or laptops. The new form includes an auto-filled template to help cut down on the time it takes to complete the request. Additionally, a tracker is available on the WUSA site to ensure students are kept up to date with the progress of their cheque requests.

While the main motivation behind this complete renova-

tion of the old system is to help clubs and ensure a better experience for students, Razmjoo explained how this change also helps with the administrative, back-end of the process. Digitalizing the process not only cuts down on the time it takes for students but also for the WUSA accountants who have to fulfill the requests. This way, WUSA is now in a position to meet its goal of fulfilling requests in one to two weeks. Due to the hiring freeze currently still in effect at UW, this will help to cut down on the work for WUSA as they cannot rely on hiring new employees at this time.

The new system was also developed in-house to avoid extra expenses going to a third-party contractor involved in its creation and implementation. The money that was saved is planned to be reinvested into other student-facing initiatives. Creating the website in-house did slow the creation process but Razmjoo hopes that in doing it this way, WUSA will be able to continue to build off of it in the future and better the students' and clubs' experience in the coming semesters and years.

Now the new system has been available to clubs for nine months, the general feedback has been mostly positive. On the feedback WUSA has received, they released a statement saying, "Generally, our Clubs Team has heard from students that they prefer the new system, as it is more streamlined, accessible, and easier to use."

Enoch Tin, a third-year student and treasurer of the Fashion for Change club, discussed how positive his experience has been with the new system. He explained how his workload has been significantly decreased in this department as the new system is designed so that anyone in the club can submit their own cheque requests. Treasurers would often have to act as the middleman in the old system which Tin described as inefficient and unnecessary.

Tin explained how the auto-filled template was helpful to the club's claimants who had less knowledge of the system and what information was needed.

"It diverts the responsibility of collecting information from the treasurer to the claimant...people can fill it in, they will be clearly instructed what to provide... So, from my perspective, I only have to review them, which most of the time is correct."

While much of the feedback has been all positive there have been some criticism of the new system. Tanraj Dulai, a third-year student and president of the UW Model UN club, explained how his experience did not live up to the expectations given by WUSA. His main criticism stemmed from the time it would take for reimbursement. While some clubs seemed to be benefitting from the shorter wait time for the requests to be processed, it

seems not every club has found the new system to be any faster than the old.

Dulai said that having to wait up to a month to be reimbursed makes it difficult for clubs to plan events in the future as they are unsure of when they will have the funds to do so. He also discussed how if the wrong information is submitted, or there is a document that is missing, they will not be informed promptly.

"It kind of takes a long time for them to get back to me. Sometimes it takes multiple weeks or a month, and simply the receipts don't last that long," Dulai said.

Dulai also mentioned how the new system seems more impersonal than the old one. He explained how going in person to speak with someone at WUSA made his request or issue feel less like a number on a website and more personal. Dulai described how he felt going in person provided a greater sense of urgency for WUSA to attend to the issue than an online request.

Further criticism was brought up during the WUSA election period in Samir Sharma's campaign for director. He explained that in his own experience being the treasurer of the Computer Science Club, and in talking to other clubs, he has also found that reimbursement can still take as long as four weeks.

Sharma explained how he thinks that there needs to be better communication between WUSA and the clubs in regard to the timeline of being reimbursed and also the process of submitting the cheque requests.

"They should be communicating more, and maybe they should be sending follow-ups and timelines and estimates... I personally like the idea of emails," Sharma said. "I feel like we should be getting higher quality service for the fees we pay compared to other Ontario universities."

He feels WUSA staff may be part of the issue when it comes to the time it takes for clubs to receive reimbursement.

"The way WUSA is currently operating with clubs, from what I'm aware, they have one full-time and one staff to handle all the clubs, over 100 of them... The amount of time it takes to file stuff with them is enormously long. You can wait weeks if not months to get stuff back to you in public communication," Sharma explained.

When asked if WUSA had a response to any current criticism of the new system they released a statement saying "We are continuing to refine and improve the cheque request process, which was launched less than a year ago, and has been in place for only two full terms. Our long-term goal is to make cheque reimbursements faster and easier for students. Although the new system may seem impersonal, these steps were necessary to implement to improve efficiency."

# UW's financial deficit: where the university stands in 2025

Andie Kaiser, Senior Editor

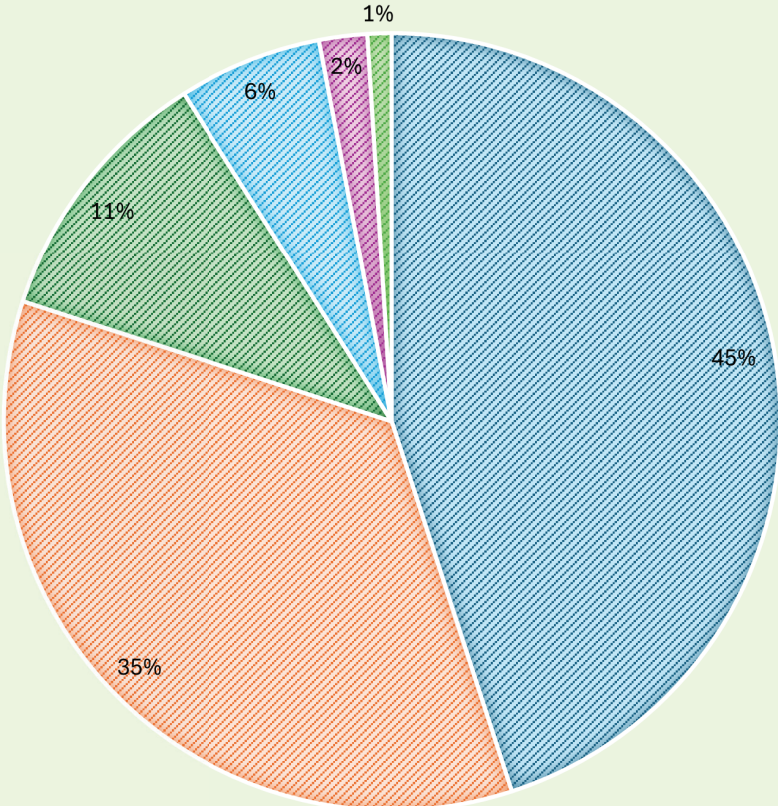
In UW president Vivek Goel's message at the end of last year, it was announced that unit-level spending was permanently reduced by \$42 million. The remaining \$33 million of the \$75 million deficit will be covered by funds which had initially been set aside for longer-term initiatives, and therefore future deficits pose a significant threat to the university's financial sustainability. This means that maintenance projects — such as replacing heating/cooling systems and repairing leaking roofs — will not

be able to move forward. Additionally, the university has stated that limited funding will force a number of planned IT projects to be delayed (one of these projects would replace UW's student information system before the underlying technology is decommissioned).

UW's funding comes from several sources, with the two biggest ones being tuition and grants from the government. Combined they make up 80 per cent of the 2023-2024 budget (the latest budget publicly available); tuition makes up

## UW REVENUES 2023-2024

- Academic fees (tuition)
- Grants and contracts (including operating grants)
- Sales, services, and other revenue
- Investment income
- Amortization of deferred capital
- Donations



45 per cent of the budget and grants make up 35 per cent of the budget. Tuition for domestic students has been frozen since 2019 and this freeze is to continue until 2027. The total increase in tuition revenue at UW from 2020 to 2024 was 14 per cent with 12 per cent of that coming in 2021. Operating grants have also seen minimal increases, also coming in at 14 per cent with the majority of that coming in 2024. Inflation in that same time period increased by 16.5 per cent. The Ontario government provided a one time \$1.2 billion financial aid package to help colleges and universities to “stabilize” their finances, accounting for the large increase that year. This came shortly after a government commissioned blue-ribbon panel was released.

Noting that several Ontario universities faced financial difficulties, Ontario’s blue-ribbon panel released a report outlining recommendations for ensuring financial stability within the postsecondary sector. These recommendations included a one time 10 per cent increase in per-student funding as well as a 5 per cent tuition increase. The report also noted that government operating grants for universities had gone down by \$164 in nominal value between 2008 and 2021. It also noted that per-student funding in Ontario was

**“I have been meeting with specific members of parliament and government and I can tell you it’s just not a priority for them to be increasing these fundings”**

**— Arya Ramzjoo, Vice President of WUSA and OUSA**

57 per cent compared to the rest of Canada.

After last year’s announcement that they will face a \$75 million deficit for the 2024-25 operating budget, UW has continued to share information about their current financial situation. With the 2025-2026 fiscal year beginning this coming May, leaders at the university are continuing to look at a range of strategies to reduce spending.

The latest update on these strategies came on Jan. 27,

as UW once again made an announcement to community members about their financial situation. Included in this announcement was the link to a new website dedicated to providing budget information and answers to frequently asked questions. According to UW, the “Waterloo Budget Plan” website will aim to share “background on our financial situation, details on the measures we are taking and resources [the community] can refer to.”

With the implementation of Ontario’s tuition freeze and the caps on international student enrollment made at the federal level, budget deficits are not an issue unique to UW. Just down the road, Wilfrid Laurier University is projecting a deficit of \$7.35 million for their 2024-25 budget. Looking at universities with enrolment numbers closer to UW’s, the projected deficit for Queen’s University is \$35.7 million, and \$12.7 million for the University of Guelph (which would mark the institution’s fifth consecutive year of budget deficits). Much like UW, these universities are re-evaluating their financial plans for the next several years and taking steps to reduce spending across several key areas.

“The challenge is, the government commissions [the blue-ribbon report] and then just chooses not to use it at all. I have been meeting with [specific] members of parliament and government and I can tell you it’s just not a priority, clearly, for them to be increasing these fundings,” said Arya Ramzjoo, current vice president of the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA) and the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA). “Even their own experts tell them there needs to be a considerable increase, but we’re not going to see it, because this simply isn’t [this government’s] priority, [it] doesn’t care.”

Initially announced in December, one of UW’s strategies concerns a new partnership with Nous Group, an international consultancy firm that has worked with institutions both in Canada and around the world. According to the university, this partnership began prior to the winter break and was undertaken as a means of developing “evidence-based recommendations to make changes benchmarked against other similar institutions.” In January, more information was released about this partnership, which the university says is at the “heart” of their three-year budgeting plan. The first step in this consultancy process will involve functional reviews of communications and marketing, IT and finance at UW. After that, similar reviews will be undertaken in other areas. The process is also set to include discussions with university stakeholders. On their budgeting website, the university outlined three

stages included in the project with Nous Group:

## **Stage 1: Initial Planning and Research (December 2024)**

## **Stage 2: Discovery and Exploration (January – February 2025)**

## **Stage 3: Recommendations and Final Report (February – March 2025)**

In addition to the hiring freeze that officially began in November, UW reported that over 70 staff have chosen to retire as a result of a “voluntary retirement offer.” This voluntary offer was made to employees over the age of 65 who have been with the university for at least 10 years. This is significant, considering around 80 per cent of the university’s operating budget goes towards employee benefits and salaries (and salary costs are expected to rise with inflation). At the end of last year, the university’s Board of Governors also approved changes to employee benefits, which they say “could save around \$500,000 annually without reducing benefits.”

One of the foremost concerns, from both a budgeting and student experience perspective, is that of academic programs and student services. In their December update, the university stated that “three quarters of our operating budget is spent on these core activities, so it stands to reason that we must make sure that we are considering how we deliver these core activities.” This question is also addressed on the budgeting website, which states that while maintaining quality of education is a priority, “this does not mean that everything will stay the same as it is now — in fact, the decisions we make may mean some services and activities will stop.”

Also at the top of students’ minds is the overall cost of living — with housing and food costs continuing to rise, the university’s efforts to address their own financial concerns has the potential to put even more stress on students. Addressing this question on the budgeting website, the uni-

versity stated that their future plans do involve an increase in housing fees for students. As for the financial support offered to students, UW said that they don’t plan on making “significant changes” to centrally-funded scholarship budgets, but that reprioritization has occurred in some other areas such as graduate scholarships.

Even with these shorter-term budgeting plans in mind, UW’s financial future is an uncertain one. Asked about what options UW has moving forward, Razmjoo said, “They either have to reduce — focus on specialized programs, programs that make money [and that] ensure that they can have revenue streams, and cut, reduce size of operations. Or frankly, they go out of business.” He added that it’s also the time for both universities and the public to unite and focus on lobbying for better funding. “The question has always been about operating grants, how we can increase [them]. We have a flaw in our system, but we are overly reliant on tuition,” he said. “Unless the government changes something, the only path for universities is to just reduce operations, which hurts people, hurts students and hurts the education sector. We’re no longer competitive with American universities if we continue to go down this path.”

In the meantime, universities might be forced to look for other ways of making a profit, such as certain student-facing services. “We’ve seen it in things like food services which universities now view as a revenue-driving business instead of one that’s supposed to service students,” Razmjoo said. While significant increases in things like housing or levy fees aren’t currently a part of UW’s plan, this might have to change. “The benefit for [students] is that for those levy fees to go up, there needs to be a negotiation between both the university, its board, but also the student societies and so on. So the university cannot all of a sudden just increase their fees out of nowhere, there needs to be justification.” That being said, however, Razmjoo conceded that ultimately “if the board of [the] university sets their mind on something, it’ll happen one way or another.”

UW has said that further updates to the budgeting model will be made “in the very near future.” Additionally, the university is encouraging community members with questions or comments to reach out by email to [budget@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:budget@uwaterloo.ca) — as of December, UW reported that over 150 suggestions had been shared with leaders.



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# What goes into hosting the national U Sports women's ice hockey championship?

Justin Gec, Staff Writer

**W**ith UW hosting the U Sports Women's National Hockey Championship set to take place March 20-23 in Elmira, you may be wondering what exactly goes into planning such a large-scale national event.

A group of nine students were hand-picked by upper management and staff within the UW athletics department to be student leads for various committees created on an as-needed basis as a result of UW hosting this tournament. All student leads are in their upper years of recreation and leisure studies or recreation and sports business studies. They collectively agreed that this is a great opportunity to expand their skill set as well as gain valuable experience managing and leading.

So, what are the committees, and what are they in charge of? There are four different committees and each is composed of two to three student leads: team services, marketing and sponsorship, sport development, and volunteer management.

Team services are being spearheaded by Isaac Watsa, Connor McKellar, and Cole Sheppard. The three are all students in the recreation and sports business program, with

Watsa and McKellar being fourth-year students and Sheppard a third-year student. The main priority of this committee is to ensure that all teams involved have a positive tournament experience.

"The main priority of our committee is to ensure that once the athletes arrive, all they have to worry about is performing and succeeding on the ice. Nothing should matter to them besides playing hockey," Watsa said. This can include ensuring accommodations are up to U Sports travel standards, and that the athletes are well aware of available amenities throughout the tournament.

"This also includes the officiating staff, which are considered to be a team within themselves, similar to the athletes in attendance," McKellar added. "We want to ensure that their focus is purely on their task of officiating."

Most of their work will take place when the tournament officially begins. Before that, McKellar shared that all they can do "is plan accordingly as far as purchasing materials and planning logistics." With eight of the nation's top wom-

en's hockey teams and a team of officials in attendance, the team services committee will indeed have their hands full. However, they shared with confidence that they would be able to achieve their goal of providing a positive experience for the participating athletes and officiating staff.

The marketing and sponsorship committee is being led by two fourth-year recreation and sports business students: Amber Simons and Miles Lowry. Simons shared that a large majority of their work takes place before the tournament starts, including landing sponsorships, meeting ticket sale targets, as well as reaching out to sponsors who have been involved with UW athletics in the past, and building new relationships with community members.

"A large goal of our marketing committee is to ensure we are marketing to the right people," Simons said. "We want to ensure that we are getting the youth involved, specifically local hockey leagues and teams. To do this we have taken various approaches including coupon codes for tickets, and other promotional campaigns." To exemplify this, on Jan. 23, the UW men's hockey team played Wilfrid Laurier University in its annual "school day game," in which over 400 youth invited by UW athletics were in attendance from four different elementary schools across the region.

This seemed to be a great turnout, and if the marketing committee can carry on with this momentum, it seems as if they can achieve at least one of their marketing goals for the

March tournament: hosting a national tournament with a large turnout from youth within the Waterloo Region community.

Staying on the topic of involving the community, specifically the youth, the committee of sport development is led by fifth-year recreation and leisure studies student Sarah Dunbar and third-year recreation and sports business management student Diane Choi. This committee is unique within itself as it seems to be attempting to fill the long-standing gap of lack of representation within athletics, not only as far as women's sports at the next level, but also doing their part to ensure that sport is "inclusive for all." This includes equipment drives, hockey clinics for members of the Indigenous community, meet and greets with U Sports athletes, etc.

Dunbar and Choi shared that the motto of their committee or the motto for the overall nationals event as a whole is "see them be them." "The idea of playing women's sports at the next level has not been pushed as much for female youth as it is for males, we want to ensure that people are made well aware of women's hockey not only at the U Sports level but beyond on a professional level is a realistically attainable goal for young girls playing the sport that they love."

Dunbar and Choi said that the "see them be them" movement is not solely limited to athletics. "We want to make it clear to all that within women's sports there are many opportunities, whether it is officiating, managing, or playing, we



just want to open the community’s eyes to the beauty of women’s sports at the university level and beyond.” The majority of the work within this committee Dunbar and Choi shared “can be overwhelming at times.” This comment alludes to a large number of people to reach out to and the various available avenues, but they shared that “[their] overall goal is to make an impact and spread the awareness of all the opportunities available to them within women’s sport.” So far, it seems as if they are doing just that!

The fourth and final committee is the volunteer management committee led by fourth-year recreation and sports business students Logan Landriault and Noah DeSario. With a tournament as large as this with hundreds of players, support staff, and coaches, not to mention the hundreds of fans that will be in attendance on the tournament days, having a plethora of volunteers is essential to ensure it runs smoothly and that everyone involved has a positive experience.

Landriault shared that “[they] are starting from ground zero” and that it is the responsibility of him and his committee to create a “master schedule” that includes all volunteers and their assigned tasks within those roles. “Within the role of volunteering, there are many different opportunities/tasks that need to be fulfilled, we want to ensure that people are assigned to tasks that fit their experience or also their goals within volunteering,” Landriault said. This comment was made alluding to the idea that many students or individuals of all ages can use this national tournament as an opportunity to gain experience in event management.

When asked about the ideal number of volunteers they are shooting for, Landriault shared that “there isn’t a magic number” as they just want to ensure opportunities are present for all who are interested, regardless of their level of experience and whether or not they are from UW.

With an event as large as this, having a strong base of volunteers is essential, so if you are looking to get involved and



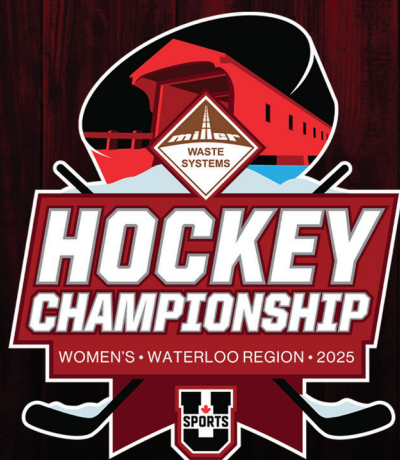
**Back row:** Connor McKellar, Issac Watsa, Cole Sheppard, Noah Desario  
**Front row:** Sarah Dunbar, Diane Choi, Logan Landriault, Amber Simons

### *The Committee*

support UW athletics, visit the UW athletics website and fill out the volunteer form!

In wrapping up the conversation, the question was posed to the student committee members: what does a successful tournament look like? Unsurprisingly, their answers were largely based on their committees, but can largely be categorized into three broad categories: more exposure to women’s sports at the next level, a positive experience for all in attendance, and a strong turnout from students, alumni, and community members.

Through our interview with the committee members, it was clear to see that these students have a very strong dynamic and work exceptionally well as a team. It is people like this, working behind the scenes, that make athletic events on a national level like this possible here at UW.

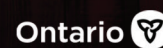


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# Redefining love this February: Finding meaningful relationships

Carla Stocco, Staff Writer

Valentine's Day. Does it make you smile, remembering your latest kiss with your significant other? Or does it make you cringe, recalling the messy breakup with a former flame? With love in the air and grocery store aisles seemingly lined with every kind of heart-shaped chocolate, emotions are bound to arise. But Valentine's Day isn't just about a dozen red roses, the sweetest poetry or a million romantic photos — love and relationships are intricate. Developing an understanding of how to sustain and develop meaningful relationships is key to our well-being. To uncover how today's young people are approaching close relationships, I chatted with students and Denise Marigold, associate professor and chair of social development studies at UW, to gain insight into the psychology of relationships and how UW students can form meaningful connections.

## Dating Apps and Finding Love Digitally

Bumble, Tinder, Hinge are all popular names you've likely heard when it comes to finding a romantic match online. Gen Z, which includes the current generation of 18-27 year olds, have been the first generation to "to have internet connectivity from birth." In Canada, around 36 per cent of Canadians report having used or currently engage in online dating. Interestingly, 20 per cent of long-term relationships in Canada began online. Yet, despite being well-versed in the realm of tech, young people have shown interest in returning to more traditional ways of forming relationships. In Toronto, many singles are ditching apps in favour of in-person dating events. Toronto locals Felisha Liu and Ben Davies oversee an internationally recognized company called Thursday, which hosts weekly in-person socials for singles. The company has branded itself "the biggest IRL dating app in the world." Whether the disenchantment with dating apps among Canadians is a sign of a potential downfall in online dating or displays a longing for authentic, in-person interactions, it seems that young people are developing new ways of seeking meaningful connection. Robby Szolgyemy, a fourth-year student in peace and conflict studies, admits to giving Tinder a try his freshman year, citing how the COVID-19 restrictions at the time made meeting new people challenging. Today and post-pandemic, Szolgyemy believes the popularity of dating apps among those in their twenties has decreased. Asked about the benefits of dating app usage, Szolgyemy asserts: "the benefits

are that you know that you find each other attractive to some extent, so there is less likelihood of an unbalanced relationship." Regarding the possibility of building a meaningful relationship via such apps, Szolgyemy believes "it is hard to look at the soul of [another] person when all you initially [notice] is their looks. Meaningful relationships stem from the inside, not the outside." Asked whether he would encourage a friend or young people at large to consider dating apps, Szolgyemy discourages it, expressing, "It would be a shame for someone to spend their days swiping and texting instead of going out and doing something meaningful to them, and potentially finding a partner in the process." Ayo Onaifo, a fifth year student majoring in psychology and legal studies, believes that, "relationships should be built on intentionality, communication, and faith, regardless of their origin story or platform." Onaifo also encourages students not to "overlook the significance of friendships or the slow-burn, friends-to-lovers dynamic — these connections can naturally develop into something deeper and lead to stronger, more lasting relationships."

## Barriers to Meaningful Relationships

Asked to list barriers that come to mind when developing close relationships, Marigold highlights the need to invest time, particularly face-to-face time. She emphasizes how social media lacks the ability to authentically replicate real-life interactions. Yet, if we have a "long-established friendship or romantic relationship with someone [and then are] relying on texting for a while, you can have a better sense of whether

[your friend/partner] is being sarcastic or upset.” She underscores, “To build a relationship [through texting], you only have this tiny bit of information that’s not the whole picture.” Being smart about our use of technology in the early stages of a relationship is key.

## The Five Love Languages

The hashtag #lovelanguages has over 500 million views on social media sites such as TikTok. Whether you’ve heard of it via TikTok or spotted the book while browsing your local library or bookstore, there’s no denying that Gary Chapman’s book series, *The 5 Love Languages* has become well-known when it comes to relationship self-help. With a quick quiz to find out your love language and a seemingly easy fix to transform how we connect with others, Chapman’s book popularized the concept of every person having a preferred means of giving and receiving love and affection — their love language. The book lists them as words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts, quality time, and physical touch. Research into whether the concept of love languages holds truth suggests that love is moreso similar to a nutritionally balanced diet. Rather than being solely reliant on one nutrient or love language, we require a steady intake of a variety of nutrients or love languages to thrive. When it comes to developing or maintaining close relationships, rather than assuming we should supply our partner mainly with their key love language, it’s worth considering how different situations may call for displays of quality time versus gifts, for example. Interestingly, just like nutritional deficiencies such as anemia mean a person requires more iron than average, individuals with chronic relationship insecurity or attachment avoidance benefit especially when their partner expresses appreciation. In sum, rather than conclude that one’s primary love language is how one should always approach displays of affection, recognizing the need to offer love in a variety of manners is key to sustaining a relationship that is fulfilling and provides us with what we need.



Hilary Gauld, One for the Wall Photography

Whether you spend your time singing love songs, daydreaming of the one you could sing them to, or spend your days focusing on self-improvement and self-love, proud of your own growth, there are so many paths that can lead us to finding love and connectedness. With an understanding of the challenges of becoming closer to an existing or future partner and self-reflection, perhaps you’ve become inspired to learn more about yourself and relationships to give yourself the best shot at developing a relationship that fulfills you. Marigold encourages students to recognize how “social behaviour is part of our daily lives and [take note that] satisfaction with our relationships contributes more to our overall well-being than any other domain of life.”

## Quick Tips for Meaningful Connection

Marigold shared three quick points to keep in mind when looking to develop or maintain positive relationships:

### 1. Allow yourself to be vulnerable

Marigold emphasizes the need to “allow [oneself] to be vulnerable in being known and knowing others,” which she cites as key to building intimacy. For those who struggle with insecurity or low self-esteem, letting oneself be seen means “taking [the] risk of putting yourself out there and hoping [to be accepted].” It is only through vulnerability that authentic connection and closeness can thrive.

### 2. Listening and Communication

Next, Marigold touches on the need for listening and patience between partners: “We’re often listening as we’re thinking about our own response.” She highlights the need to be open to “hearing the other person [not just their words], but where they’re coming from.” Communication ties in with the listening aspect and she highlights the importance of “communicating about [your] needs, [being] prepared to share, [asking] for what you need, [and] avoid making assumptions.”

### 3. Support each other and seek opportunities for growth

If you’ve ever had an awful day or missed out on a promotion, if you have a partner, it’s likely you’d turn to them when things are going poorly. Marigold touches on both the need to rely on a partner when things feel difficult, but also the importance of having someone in your corner to cheer you on and support your growth. Marigold reminds us: “Part of your role as a partner in a meaningful relationship is to help each other become the best version of yourselves.”

# An exploration of rising food costs on campus

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Eduardo Matzumiya, Contributor



While the global economy continues to recover from the lingering effects of COVID-19 lockdowns, the cost-of-living crisis remains a cause for concern for Canadians, especially students. According to data from Statistics Canada, the consumer price index (CPI) – a measure of price changes over time as experienced by consumers – increased from a value of 149.4 in December 2019 to 188.0 in December 2024 for groceries, and from 157.9 in December 2019 to 188.3 in December 2024 for food purchased from restaurants. This represents a 26 per cent increase in national grocery prices and a 19 per cent increase in national restaurant food prices over a five-year period. For context, a CPI of 100 represents prices in the year 2002, which are used as a baseline reference.

In an episode of the Eh Sayers podcast released on May 8, 2024, Taylor Mitchell, a senior economist working for Statistics Canada, explained some of the macroeconomic factors driving this massive inflationary spike in food costs in recent years. “We’ve seen droughts and rain impacting

supply and shortening the growing season. We’ve seen Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which had a very noticeable impact, especially if you’re someone that likes to buy bread or pasta or anything that contains wheat... And we have trade embargoes with Russia that have reduced supplies for some other inputs.”

That brings some clarity to rising food prices on a macro scale, but how about something much closer to home? A large majority of UW’s student population consumes food in and around campus, with two major players largely controlling the market – UW Food Services, with locations all across campus, and WUSA Food Services, which concentrates its activities within the confines of the SLC. What factors affect food prices on campus, and perhaps more importantly, are there any measures being taken to keep food prices on campus under control?

Both parties mentioned similar core factors affecting product pricing – cost of goods (both raw and processed), cost of labour, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the cost of

Table 1: Comparison of average 12-month per cent increase in prices over the last five years (2019-2024) on a national level with those derived from UW Food Services and WUSA products.

National Groceries	National Restaurants	UW Food Services	WUSA Food Services
22.50%	17.25%	31.34%	25.44%

packaging – the latter of which was significant for both UW Food Services and WUSA. According to Lee Elkas, director at UW Food Services, seasonal fluctuations in the cost of goods are also a significant factor, though these are mitigated through pricing contracts that are negotiated with suppliers ahead of time based on cost forecasts. Furthermore, Elkas highlighted that while a three to five per cent annual increase in prices due to inflation is standard for the food service industry, the post-COVID period has seen inflationary cost increases in the eight to ten per cent range, more than doubling the industry standard. A price analysis by Imprint using data provided by UW Food Services showed that UW food prices have increased by an average of 31.34 per cent over the last five years, compared to the industry average of 17.25 per cent.

On the other hand, Hannah Wardell, media relations manager for WUSA, highlighted wholesale prices of

be aware that the SLC’s trustworthy 24/7 convenience store operated as an INS Market (formerly International News) franchise location for 10 years. As the contract expired on Oct. 31 of that year, the location quickly spun out a brand-new name and image that were originally meant to be temporary, but have since earned the hearts of UW students, continuing to operate under WUSA. Not being tied down by a franchise contract gives WUSA greater control over product pricing, which they’ve since taken advantage of. “We have frozen most retail prices of confection and beverages since the rebrand to pass the savings to our members,” Wardell said. “For example, the cost of a 591 mL bottle of Pepsi is \$1.99 plus HST as are most chocolate bars. Typically, a bottle of Pepsi that size costs upwards of \$2.49 plus HST (option for 2/\$4) in vending machines.”

Speaking of franchises, it’s no secret that both WUSA and UW Food Services own and operate multi-

Items	2019 price (\$)	2024 price (\$)	12-month %change
ML Diner Burger	7.19	8.99	25.0
Smokehouse Poutine	Reg 5.19   Lrg 6.19	Reg 7.29   Lrg 8.29	Reg 40.6   Lrg 33.9
Hagey Hall Panini	7.79	9.99	28.2
Baked Goods	Lrg Muffin 2.29	3.29	43.6
	Lrg Cookie 2.69	3.29	22.3
	Plain Bagel 1.89	2.49	31.8
	Speciality Bagel 2.39	2.99	25.1
			<b>AVG: 31.3</b>

Table 2: Price histories of select items sold by UW Food Services across multiple establishments on campus.

retail items, such as soft drinks and prepackaged snacks, as a limiting factor for prices of products at FlockStop. She mentioned that FlockStop operates with gross margins ranging from 20 to 50 per cent depending on the product being sold. “This does not mean we’re making 20 to 50 per cent profit as a store, but the markup from the wholesale cost is in that range. This is lower than most convenience stores and other food outlets,” Wardell clarified.

One factor unique to FlockStop is the rebrand it underwent during the fall of 2022. Newer students might not

ple franchise locations on campus, such as the recently inaugurated Chaska location in the SLC, which is under WUSA management. Meanwhile, UW Food Services operates 13 franchise locations across the entirety of campus, including five Tim Hortons, two Starbucks, two Jugo Juice, two Rolltation locations, a Chatime location in DC, and the ever-popular Subway and Pizza Pizza locations forming part of Brubakers in the SLC. So how much control does the university have over food prices at all these locations?

According to Elkas, “Due to franchise policies, we are required to adhere to the standards set by each

franchise location. This includes restrictions on purchasing practices (e.g., what and where we purchase food products).” These restrictions mean UW Food Services has limited control over product pricing at their franchise locations on campus. However, in October 2024 they introduced Value Picks – a series of meal deals in the \$6.99 to \$7.99 price range – at some non-franchise locations in an effort to “embrace affordable prices and convenient accessibility.” On the other hand, Wardell stated that while WUSA does have control over product pricing at Chaska, they align the majority of their prices with Chaska’s agreed upon MSRP, though she highlighted that there is some variation allowed

has a limited impact on pricing decisions. “It is also important to understand that UW Food Services operates with [a] higher skill set of chefs and cooks and pays its full time employees above minimum wages that are established through collective bargaining with local CUPE,” he said.

Meanwhile, Wardell highlighted WUSA’s own competitive advantages within the campus retail space. “WUSA’s market positioning includes providing value in their purchase, expanded hours of operations and student jobs. We do this while bringing the best possible price to our members.” She emphasized that while WUSA operates independently, they try to work alongside the university to ensure diversi-



for promotions.

When it comes to food retail locations on campus, UW Food Services clearly has the bigger footprint when compared to WUSA. Naturally, this makes the question of competition an interesting one, especially due to WUSA’s unique relationship with the university and its quasi-autonomous operation of the SLC. “WUSA currently operates approximately less than 10 per cent of all commercial activity on campus given our limited real estate or opportunities for growth,” Wardell said. It’s worth noting that WUSA is bound by the 2012 SLC Operating Agreement when it comes to new ventures on campus, as outlined in section 5 and 15 of said agreement. “[Furthermore] the university does have ultimate veto to any new concept creations [section 6a]. These constraints have limited WUSA’s ability to bring various menus and/or concepts to campus in the past,” Wardell said.

For their part, while UW Food Services recognized WUSA’s presence on campus, Elkas stated that competition

ty in offerings and maintain competitive pricing, with the ultimate goal of keeping foot traffic on campus. “The more offerings we have on campus, the less likely it is for students to travel off campus to grab a bite to eat,” Wardell concluded.

Items	Pre 2019 Price	2019 price	2024 Price
Egg Salad	3.99	4.49	5.49
Fried Chicken Box	5.99	6.99	8.99
Orange Chicken	7.79	N/A	9.49

Table 3: Price histories of select items sold at FlockStop in the SLC. “This data is difficult to locate, so we’ve provided what we can based on limited records of past transactions,” said Hannah Wardell, WUSA’s media relations manager.





# Imprint's Early 2025 Oscar Predictions

Abhiraj Lamba, Contributor

Andie Kaiser, Senior Editor

Just like clockwork, it's awards season again — and this time, it's pretty messy.

We've had controversy around the use of AI in films like *The Brutalist*, discourse around the need of intimacy co-ordinators in films like *Anora*, and pretty much everything about *Emilia Pérez* (including the recent resurfacing of horrific tweets from lead actress Karla Sofía Gascón)!

With almost a month to go till the 97th Academy Awards on March 2 and most of the precursor awards yet to take place, a lot can change about this year's race. Until then, here are our early Oscars predictions.

Note that Canada is still yet to receive many of the nominees in theatres, so we haven't covered every category — keep an eye on Imprint's website for updated predictions once we've seen more of the nominees and are deeper into the season.

## Best Picture

**Abhiraj:** This may be one of the most competitive Best Picture races I've seen in my predicting career. Although *Emilia Pérez* was considered the universal frontrunner for much of the race, I think it's been engulfed in far too much controversy. When all is said and done, I believe *Conclave* will take this one home — and I can't help but note how the movie acts as a fantastic metaphor for this race.

**Andie:** On the topic of *Emilia Pérez*, I'm with Abhiraj on this one. Despite its AI controversy in recent weeks, *The Brutalist* might still pull through, although I'd be more than happy to see a *Conclave* win.

## Best Directing

**Abhiraj:** Consistently one of the safest categories to predict, I think Brady Corbet is taking this one home for *The Brutalist* and I don't foresee much that could happen this season to change that.

**Andie:** My thoughts exactly. Exciting to see a Coralie Fargeat nomination here though!

## Best Actress in a Leading Role

**Abhiraj:** I'm probably going against the grain here but *I'm Still Here's* surprise presence in the Best Picture race is likely to have a domino-effect on other races including this one and I think Fernanda Torres (who is the second Brazilian actress ever to be nominated for an Oscar after her mother) will take this home.

**Andie:** In what has shaped up to be an increasingly messy race, it's looking more likely than ever that Demi Moore will take this category for her performance in *The Substance*. After winning a Golden Globe back in January, there's a strong narrative here for her (although as Abhiraj says, Fernanda Torres could perhaps challenge this).

## Best Actor in a Leading Role

**Abhiraj:** Timothée Chalamet in *A Complete Unknown* is the wild card here and it wouldn't exactly be a surprise if he wins but I think Adrien Brody likely has an upper hand for his performance in *The Brutalist*.

## Best International Feature

**Andie:** I tend to agree with Abhiraj here. Chalamet is campaigning hard, but Brody has the Golden Globe under his belt so it might be tough to challenge. Interestingly enough, if Chalamet were to win, he'd become the youngest actor to do so in this category — replacing the current record which was set by Brody in 2002.

### Best Actress in a Supporting Role

**Abhiraj:** This category is Zoe Saldaña's to lose and although she may be hurt a little by all the controversy surrounding *Emilia Pérez*, at the end of the day I think she'll come out on top. A possible upset in this category could be Ariana Grande for *Wicked*. My personal favourite in this category however is Isabella Rossellini's gripping performance in *Conclave*.

**Andie:** Whether I'd like to admit it or not, Zoe Saldaña seems to be riding the wave here with *Emilia Pérez*, especially after her Golden Globes win. That being said, anyone who knows me knows how much I adore both Grande and Rossellini.

### Best Actor in a Supporting Role

**Abhiraj:** Kieran Culkin has this one in the bag for his skilled performance in *A Real Pain* but if his on-screen *Succession* brother Jeremy Strong were to one-up him, I wouldn't be surprised.

**Andie:** Out of the acting categories, this one is probably the easiest to predict, with Kieran Culkin leading the way with his performance in *A Real Pain*.

### Best Original Screenplay

**Abhiraj:** Screenplays are almost always my strongest category to predict, and I think Brady Corbet and Mona Fastvold are a lock in this category, winning for *The Brutalist*.

**Andie:** I'm tentatively leaning the same way, although I wouldn't be too shocked if Sean Baker's *Anora* snuck up here. *The Substance* would be a fantastic upset though, with an absolutely hysterical screenplay by Coralie Fargeat.

### Best Adapted Screenplay

**Abhiraj:** This was my first prediction of the year and one I intend to stick with to the end. Peter Straughan is taking this home for his masterful script *Conclave*.

**Andie:** Gotta be Peter Straughan for *Conclave*! This was such a fun, engrossing movie, and I'd be heartbroken if it didn't at least take this category.



**Abhiraj:** Another category where *Emilia Pérez* was long assumed to be the frontrunner, I think the tide turned the moment Brazil's submission *I'm Still Here* managed to be nominated for Best Picture. Perhaps earlier, right after lead actress Fernanda Torres' Golden Globe win.

**Andie:** We can only hope that *I'm Still Here* is able to take this category from *Emilia Pérez* (France's submission), but I'm not quite ready to get my hopes up. With a whopping 13 nominations, Academy voters signaled that they somehow enjoyed this mess of a film.

### Best Documentary Feature Film

**Abhiraj:** *No Other Land* is one of the most powerful films I saw this year and I think much of the Academy will agree. Despite not having US (or Canadian) distribution yet, this joint Israeli-Palestinian production is likely to take the Oscar home.

**Andie:** I've yet to see this year's nominees, but all signs point to a win for *No Other Land*.

### Best Original Song

**Abhiraj:** "El Mal" from *Emilia Pérez* will probably take this home, with an upset in this category being unlikely.

**Andie:** Out of its (baffling) two nominations in this category, "El Mal" from *Emilia Pérez* is poised to win here.

### Best Animated Feature

**Abhiraj:** The Latvian film *Flow* which has also been nominated for Best International Feature has been critically acclaimed for the authenticity of its animation and is likely to take this one home.

**Andie:** *The Wild Robot* has had consistent critical success, so I'd bet it stands a strong chance here. That being said, *Flow* has a real possibility of taking this one instead.

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**Best Makeup and Hairstyling:**

**Abhiraj:** *A Different Man*

**Andie:** *The Substance*

And finally, a few more categories where both of us can agree on:

**Best Original Score:** Daniel Blumberg for *The Brutalist*

**Best Sound:** *Dune: Part Two*

**Best Editing:** *Conclave*

**Best Cinematography:** *The Brutalist*

**Best Visual Effects:** *Dune: Part Two*

**Best Production Design:** *The Brutalist*

**Best Costume Design:** *Wicked*

# The subtle peer pressure of “quiet luxury” on campus

## Is silent the new standard?

Khalid Safdar, Contributor

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**H**ow many times have you walked out of a lecture hall or a communal area and felt the need to upgrade your tech, replace your water bottle, purchase a new clothing article, or even just wanting to buy something simply because you saw many people carrying it on campus?

It's almost as if in public spaces, a quiet but unmistakable trend has taken hold: the rise of “quiet luxury” among university students. Unlike flashy designer labels, this post-pandemic trend is marked by expensive but understated items — MacBooks, iPads with Apple Pencils, Stanley or Owala tumblers, minimalist Arc'teryx or Aritzia jackets, and New Balance sneakers. These objects don't scream wealth — they whisper it. On campuses where social dynamics are always shifting, this subtle form of status signaling has become an unspoken norm.

“It's not just about having nice things,” said Aliza Ali, a second-year economics undergraduate. “It feels like you need them. No one pressures you directly, but you feel it.”

For many students, these items represent more than just convenience or durability — they symbolize belonging. The allure of “quiet luxury” lies in its ability to exude prestige without overt excess. Unlike traditional luxury brands that flaunt status through logos, this new wave of high-end products is rooted in quality, exclusivity, and understated elegance. The student with the latest MacBook Air and noise-cancelling AirPods may not be trying to show off, but their choices subtly reinforce a hierarchy of access and privilege.

For some, these items are seen as investments in academic success. High-performance laptops assist with coding assignments, tablets simplify note-taking, noise-canceling headphones enhance focus during study blocks, and Apple Watches or Oura Rings track and measure workouts or sleep cycles. While these tools undoubtedly offer advantages, they also reinforce a sense of exclusivity, making it harder for students without them to feel like they're on an equal playing field.

The normalization of quiet luxury on campus creates an

environment where high-end products become the baseline expectation. While some students without these items don't feel left out, others do — but those who own them may not realize how their possessions shape social dynamics. Study groups form around common devices — sharing notes is easiest when everyone is using an iPad with Notability or GoodNotes. The rise of aesthetic-driven productivity content on social media further fuels the pressure, making it seem like success is tied not just to hard work but also to having the right tools.

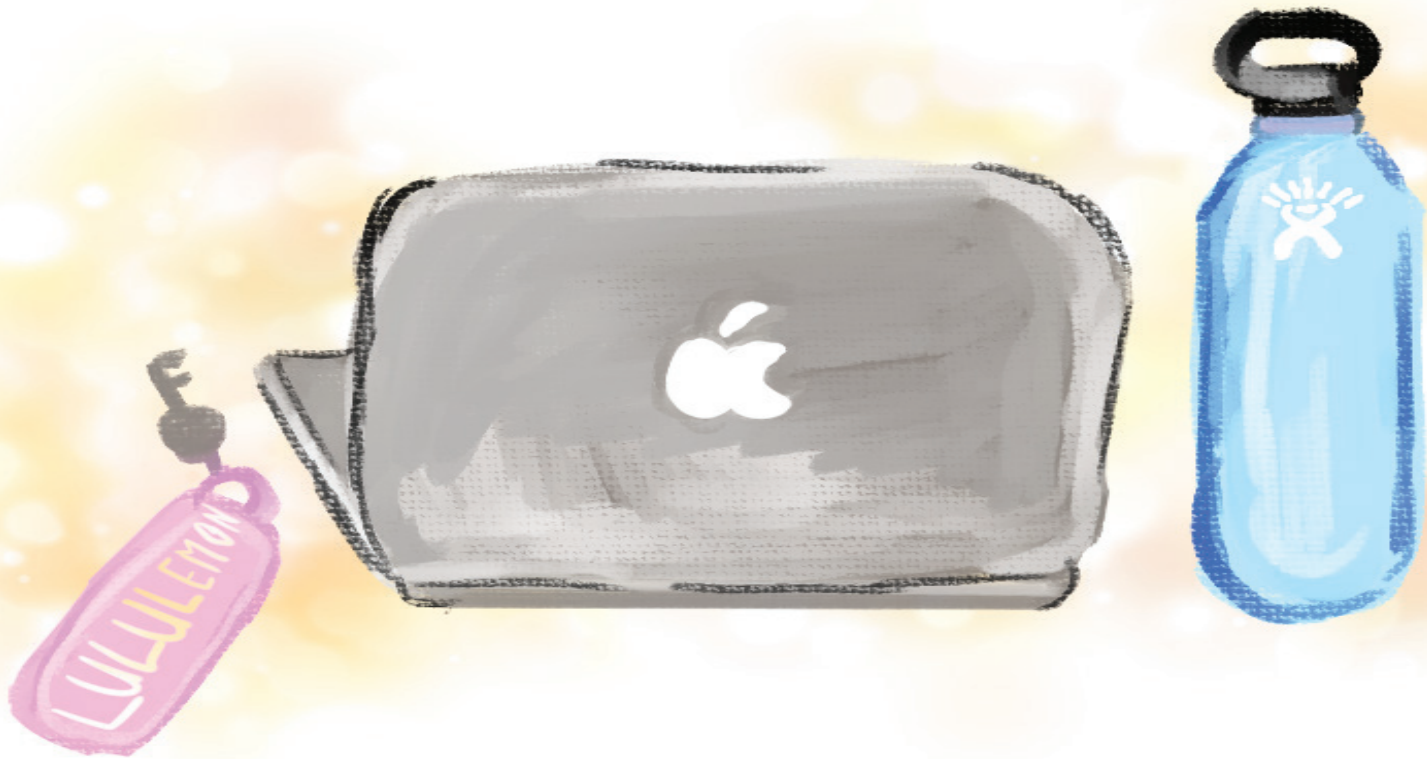
Social media plays a massive role in perpetuating and heightening the quiet luxury trend. Study vlogs, specific niche TikToks, and “day in my life” videos often showcase well-curated, aesthetic study spaces featuring high-end tech and accessories. These videos create an illusion that these items are necessary for success, fuelling comparison culture among students. Many influencers have brand partnerships with trending brands such as Owala, Amazon, Apple, and Lenovo, further reinforcing the false perception of success and self-care. As students frequently encounter these products, they may begin to see them as essential, fostering a sense that owning them is necessary for achievement or well-being.

Platforms like Instagram and TikTok also drive the resale market for these items. Second-hand marketplaces for designer bags, headphones, and high-end tech allow students

**“It's not just about having nice things. It feels like you need them. No one pressures you directly, but you feel it”**

— Aliza Ali,

Second year economics undergraduate



to participate in the trend at a slightly lower price point, but the pressure to keep up remains. Even with discounts, the financial burden persists, leading to an ongoing cycle of aspirational spending.

“I saved up for months just to get an iPad and the expensive pencil you need for it because everyone else in my program had one,” shares Daniel Tsao, a second-year biology student. “It felt like I had to buy in just to stay on the same level.”

A UW professor from the science faculty, who asked to remain anonymous, has noticed this shift firsthand in his lectures.

“For my course, iPads are absolutely not required, yet I see more and more students using them. It’s becoming the norm — almost as if it’s a form of social signalling — rather than an exception. A simple notebook would suffice, yet I sometimes wonder if students feel pressured to have one just because the person sitting next to them has one rather than for any real academic advantage.”

This phenomenon extends beyond mere preference — it becomes a social mechanism for fitting in.

“I think people resort to buying items they see around campus in order to fit in with others, even if it’s just subtly. People may also resort to buying ‘quiet luxury’ items to avoid being judged or stereotyped as ‘not as wealthy.’ You often see groups of people around campus with the same sort of aesthetic,” said Ella Crawford, a fourth-year psychology student. “Some students may view aesthetic matching as a way to potentially make friends and/or be accepted by others. It is important to note though that sometimes people are not consciously aware of their purchasing decisions. They may buy something that is popular around campus without

actually realizing that’s the only reason they are buying it.”

While some can afford these items with ease, others resort to stretching their finances, feeling that owning a particular laptop or water bottle is essential for fitting in. The desire to match peers may lead to increased spending on tech gadgets, apparel, and accessories — sometimes at the cost of more essential expenses like textbooks or groceries. The cycle of quiet luxury creates a subtle divide between those who can keep up effortlessly and those who struggle to do so.

When campuses are filled with the same “quiet luxury” staples, personal style becomes homogenized. The emphasis on minimalism and neutral aesthetics leaves little room for uniqueness, making self-expression feel like a paradox — everyone looks put-together, but in the same way.

Awareness is the first step in addressing the quiet luxury phenomenon on campus. Recognizing the social pressures at play allows students to make more intentional choices about their purchases, distinguishing between what they truly need and what they feel pressured to own.

Ultimately, quiet luxury will likely continue to shape campus culture, but its influence doesn’t have to be absolute. By challenging the silent standards of status, can students redefine what belonging really means — beyond the brand of their laptop or the bottle they carry to class?



# Increased vacancy rates in Waterloo Region has not meant affordable student housing

Jansher Saeed, Staff Writer

Student housing rental vacancies have hit a historic high in Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo while rent continues to rise. According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), this year, rental vacancies across the region have reached their highest level since 1993 following growing restrictions on international study permits which have reduced international student rental demands.

“Even after vacancies [due to] federal policy changes, rent has not decreased. I don’t think even the university realizes the full impact of the housing situation on students, the prices for university accommodation tend to be just as high. Having to pay \$800 for a room every month as a student is nothing but a burden and the search process can be very stressful as well,” said Swarnima Pandey, a fourth-year political science student.

A new report from Desjardins finds that while Waterloo has the most student housing available amongst Canadian cities, the city is still 5,000 units short of meeting the enrollment needs of the city’s student population. While increased vacancy rates will make more student housing available, students note that availability does not equal affordability.

“The prices are very expensive, it feels like landlords are taking advantage of students. The average for a one bedroom is \$1,800 to \$2,000,” said Tiffany Chan, a fifth-year biology student.

According to the Provincial Policy Statement 2024 under the Planning Act, an affordable unit is defined as housing that costs 30 per cent or less of a renter’s income. Budget student housing options may pose additional pressures.

“It’s hard to find comfortable housing at affordable prices. There are horror stories that you hear about many affordable buildings talking about bad living conditions such as roach infestations, bed bugs, mold, and just overall bad management. Desirable buildings such as Rez-One or ICON are usually above \$1,000,” said Matthew Kwan, a fourth-year environmental engineering student.

Students have also raised concerns regarding the difficul-

ty of finding sublets for the spring term at competitive rates as student vacancies grow.

“For many years [the] spring term has been really difficult to find sublets as there are much fewer students. As a result of this, many leaseholders looking to sublet their places had to lower their charging rates and pay the difference between the rent and charging price. With many international students leaving the KW area, this makes it even harder to find sublets and further impacts those looking to sublet their places,” Kwan said.

As a result of this, many leaseholders looking to sublet their places had to lower their charging rates and pay the difference between the rent and charging price. With many international students leaving the KW area, this makes it even harder to find sublets and further impacts those looking to sublet their places,” Kwan said. “I am likely looking to sublet my room next semester,” said Raunak Dhillon, a second-year



Iqra Majeed

planning student. “This notwithstanding, subletting does not seem to cover nearly enough of the rent. An anecdotal example is that of my friend who is currently on a co-op term. His rent is about \$980, but was only able to sublet for \$600.”

International students face unique challenges when it comes to finding sustainable student housing accommodations including overall cost of living, navigating Canadian legal processes, and access to curated community and university resources.

In January 2024, the federal government announced a strict cap on permits provided to international students, cutting them by as much as 50 per cent in Ontario. Fast forward to Jan. 22, 2025, the federal government has issued another series of caps on new visas issued to international students over the next two years, further disincentivizing international students from coming to KW for their studies.

Notably, UW has not yet shared updates regarding additional visa caps on their international experience page, which the university markets as the “hub for international support and experiences at Waterloo.” The last announcement posted was in November 2024.

“I’m an international student,” Pandey said. “I think the biggest challenge is when you move to Canada the first time because you are looking for housing from outside Canada and you have to show interest in renting the place very quickly, which might not give you enough time to consider your options and ask all the questions you might have.”

Pandey shared that she is graduating in spring 2025, but whether or not she continues to live in KW moving forward grows uncertain as the rising cost of living and international resident policies increasingly produce complications.

“If rent remains this high, I might consider moving somewhere else especially, if I can find a job with a remote or hybrid work setting. I think the federal policy will have an impact on me in some way since I am an international student and so, navigating that and considering my options will take some time,” Pandey said.

UW also faces a \$75 million operating budget deficit for the 2024-25 fiscal year, resulting from decreased international student tuition revenue and lack of provincial funding for postsecondary institutions. “The conditions that created our budget difficulties do not show signs of improving. We expect existing revenue constraints on provincial government grants and domestic tuition rates, and uncertainties related to international enrollments to persist through our planning period



of the next three years,” said James Rush, vice-president academic and provost, and Jacinda Reitsma, vice-president administration and finance, in a press release.

It remains uncertain whether an operational deficit may impact housing-related services and services for international students that the university provides. However, students noted a lack in university services and support to meet students’ growing concerns regarding finding housing in an increasingly volatile housing market.

“I feel like they do not really provide much support to students in finding off campus housing. Most people find housing by themselves using apps like Discord, Whatsapp, [or] Facebook,” Kwan said.

## “It feels like nothing is being done to keep these landlords and management companies in check”

- Tiffany Chan, fifth year biology student

Others say a mix of university policies, government policies, and landlords are to blame.

“I don’t believe proper services are provided because the prices have been continuing to increase since COVID. It feels like nothing is being done to keep these landlords and management companies in check,” Chan said.

“Even on campus housing is quite unaffordable. Prices are consistently higher than average and the student housing market off campus seems to be monopolized by certain real estate firms,” Dhillon said.

Some student housing-related services are provided by the university and WUSA. More information can be found at [wusa.ca/wusas-housing-playbook-is-live/](https://wusa.ca/wusas-housing-playbook-is-live/).

# Sustainability action on campus

## UW ranks in the top 3 per cent of sustainable institutions

Bethany Helaine Pörtl, Contributor

The University of Waterloo was recently identified as being in the top three per cent of sustainable institutions globally by the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) Sustainability rankings. Placing 60th out of 1700 participating campuses is an incredible achievement for the university. Now that we are identified in the top three per cent, what does it mean for our sustainable future?

“The QS Sustainability Ranking is relatively new, but we have seen our ranking improve from the 2024 results, from 68th overall to 60th overall. This was driven by increases in the Environmental Impact section of the ranking, where we moved from 113th to 96th, and the Social Impact section, where we moved from 57th to 27th,” said Mat Thijssen, Director of Sustainability at the UW Sustainability Office. Established in 2004, the QS World University Rankings publishes widely read rankings of institutions across a number of categories. The ranking for sustainable institutions measures sustainability across 50 environmental, social, and governance indicators. These include teaching, research, and operational practices. To achieve the sustainability ranking, UW was evaluated across three lenses in the category of environmental impact, where UW scored 74.5 in environmental sustainability, 73.8 in environmental education, and 98.1 in environmental research.

“It is promising to see the university’s continued rise in rankings and its commitment to sustainability,” shared Lily Viggiano, senior project manager at GreenHouse, United College, UW. “Across campus, impactful initiatives — such as student-led movements, climate-action programs like Changemaker Labs, campus-wide Green Office programs, and strategic leadership at the top — demonstrate that meaningful change requires collaboration at every level.” In February 2024, United College joined the Green Office program, which is one initiative introduced to campus by the Sustainability Office with the intention of building capacity for sustainable action throughout campus offices. United staff are “embracing this initiative as a catalyst for action on both personal and professional fronts,” Viggiano said.

United’s Green Office was recognized with a silver designation by the Sustainability Office in November at the annual Sustainability Summit. “Sustainability challenges us not only to turn off the lights, but also to thoughtfully consider which light bulbs to choose. Every individual has a sphere of influence where they can make decisions, inspire change, and positively impact

their environment,” Viggiano expressed. In 2017, the Sustainability Office established 27 sustainability focused objectives through UW’s Environmental Sustainability Strategy. Each year, they publish the Environmental Sustainability Report with updates on the progress and action towards their goals. Academics, operations, and engagement are the broader categories that include objectives towards teaching, research, climate change, waste, water, transportation, grounds, procurement, community and more. These objectives can be matched up to the various QS ranking indicators.

“The QS Sustainability Ranking is a very positive recognition of the many efforts that are underway at Waterloo to advance sustainability, on the campus itself, and through our teaching and research. We are delighted to be recognized among the top institutions globally,” Thijssen said.



There are nearly 500 courses related to environmental sustainability students can take at UW, which has the largest environment faculty in Canada with nine undergraduate programs. QS rankings consider environmental education at UW, looking at how both current students and alumni impact sustainability.

“The Sustainability Office supports many areas of the campus in planning, implementation, and continuous improvement and measurement of our sustainability actions, which are captured in our public annual report. We work closely with Institutional Analysis and Planning to provide data and case studies or examples for several sections of this ranking,” Thijssen said. The Sustainability Office has been a part of the collaborative Accelerating Integration of Sustainability into the curriculum project, which works to gather student input about how sustainability can be included in all programs. As per the 2024 Environmental Sustainability Report, “Objective A1: By 2019, ensure undergraduate students from any program of study will have the opportunity to learn about sustainability in their courses” has



been achieved.

How do students feel about the way sustainability interacts with their degrees? The Waterloo Climate Institute held a student forum on Jan. 23 called “Climate Change in your Curriculum,” seeking input on what students would like to learn about climate change. Climate change is fundamentally related to sustainability, as shifting towards sustainable practices reduces negative effects of climate change. “Climate” is mentioned explicitly three times in the QS sustainability indicators, and 14 of the 17 indicators are closely related to climate change solutions. “Generally speaking, I think UW is sustainable. From my work with [the Student Climate Council], it’s clear that there’s programming in place that is working towards change. However, in my experience, often these programs are not made widely aware, limiting their success. I would love to see Climate Institute programming being more wide-spread — something we’re actively working towards,” said Charlotte Schwartz, a third-year geography and environmental management student and Student Climate Council undergraduate representative. “Outside of the faculty of environment, many students on campus do not have access to sustainability education. Presenting even an overview of environmental issues in diverse courses could have an amazing impact,” Schwartz said. Sustainability needs to be integrated across various disciplines. While often associated with the environment faculty, sustainability permeates all academic courses.

The Green Labs program demonstrates the ability for on-campus labs and researchers to consider and work with sustainability in mind throughout research work. Two QS sustainability indicators, weighted at four per cent and five per cent, relate to alumni impacts. This demonstrates the continuity of sustainability learned from the UW ecosystem and carried into the workplace. Around 25,000 four-month co-op work terms are completed by UW undergraduate students each year. Co-operative and Experiential Education (CEE) at UW is committed to raising sustainability awareness during work experiences through their Sustainability Impact Framework.

According to the 2022 Ontario Graduate Survey 96 per cent of UW co-op grads are employed six months after gradua-

tion. How many of these post-grad jobs are connected to sustainability? “As a faculty of environment alumna, I am very proud to see the university recognized for its sustainability initiatives and high-quality programming focused on environmental action,” Jenna Phillips, who now works as a policy analyst at Forest Products Association of Canada, said. “When people think of the University of Waterloo, their mind often jumps to computer science and engineering programs (which are great of course!). But I also think their minds should jump to the amazing sustainability offerings, including world-class faculty, social incubators, and the rich community of climate change makers that keep emerging from the school. Since graduating and moving from Waterloo, I’ve been pleasantly surprised at just how many people I’ve met doing amazing work in the field that once came from the University of Waterloo.”

“This recognition in the QS Rankings is a long time coming; I hope it motivates the university to expand its offerings focused on innovation and problem-solving, while being accountable to keep improving its sustainability reputation,” Phillips shared. UW is on a continuing sustainability journey, with twenty-one of the objectives set in 2017 achieved as of 2025, and six objectives the campus is continuing to work towards. With QS ranking UW in the global top three per cent for sustainability, and this year marking the final stage of the 2017-2025 Environmental Sustainability Strategy on campus, what’s next?

“We have many actions underway, including projects to reduce energy and greenhouse gas emissions, strengthen campus biodiversity, and support sustainable choices for students and employees,” Thijssen said. “Two current examples are the recent launch of the Sustainability Leadership Certificate, a co-curricular credential that any student on campus can complete as part of their academic journey at Waterloo, as well as the development of Waterloo’s first Sustainable Transportation Plan.” Another third-party system for evaluating sustainability progress, and a complement to the QS Sustainability Rating is the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS).

UW recently received a gold rating from STARS, the second highest achievable rating. Continued student engagement and infrastructure planning are at the forefront of our campus’ future sustainable action plan. As students we can play an active role in contributing to the pursuit of sustainability on campus through campus systems, curriculum and commitments to environmental targets.

UW is in the top three per cent of sustainable campuses worldwide. Let’s keep strengthening and growing our sustainable practices, looking for ways to incorporate sustainability into each area of our campus and daily lives. The future of sustainability starts today, and it is our sustainable future to create.



# Calls to Action

1. Reflect on your personal connection to sustainability, asking: what does sustainability mean to me?  
 1. How can I try to engage in more sustainable practices in my personal life? Who can I talk with about sustainability?
2. Reflect on where you see or would like to see sustainability on campus, asking: what programs does the Sustainability Office run? How can students provide input on where sustainability should be integrated in curriculum or campus systems? What are the university's commitments to net zero, sustainable waste management, responsible procurement and more?
3. Get involved and bring sustainability with you: when you join a club on campus, share your ideas about sustainability, low waste practices and encourage discussion with others about why these considerations are needed. Take sustainability with you into your co-op jobs and the workplace by questioning employer sustainability plans and suggesting good sustainable practices. Join a sustainability focused club to learn more, attend sustainable campus events, share your voice, and become a leader of sustainability.

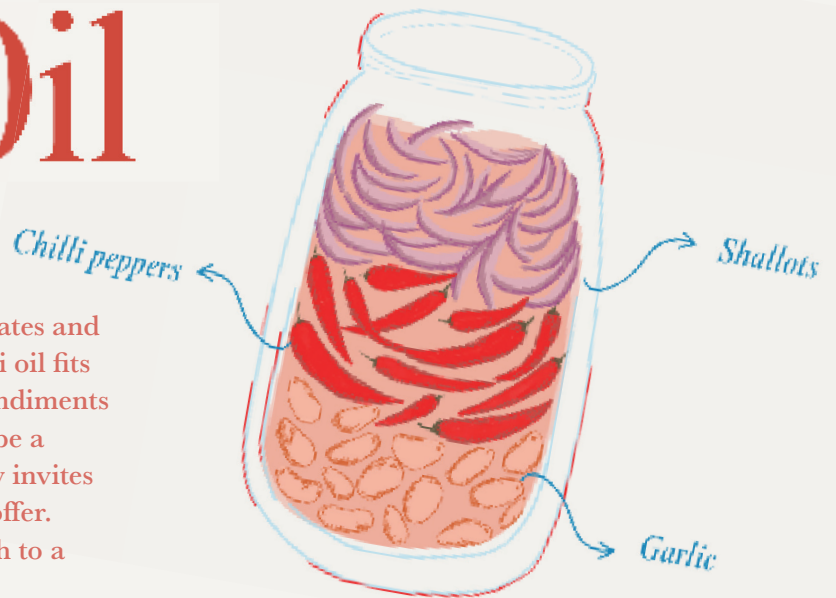
## Three Environmental Impact lenses and their associated indicators

Lens	Indicator	Weight
Environmental Sustainability	ES1 - Alumni Impact for Innovation	5%
	ES2 - Member of an officially recognised sustainable group	1%
	ES3 - Climate change commitment (staff perception)	2%
	ES4 - Publicly available strategy or policy on sustainable procurement and investment	1%
	ES5 - Student Society focused on Environmental Sustainability	1%
	ES6 - Net Zero Commitment	1%
	ES7 - Emissions Efficiency	1%
	ES8 - Renewables Generated Onsite	1%
	ES9 - Progress Towards Target	1%
	ES10 - Policy on Climate Strategy	1%
Environmental Education	EE1 - Academic Reputation in Earth & Environment	10%
	EE2 - Alumni Impact for Environmental Sustainability - Public and Third Sector	4%
	EE3 - Climate Science and/or Sustainability Courses	3%
Environmental Research	ER1 - Research Impact on SDGs for Sustainable Research	9%
	ER2 - Sustainable Research National Statistics	1%
	ER3 - Research Center with an Environmental Sustainability Focus	2%
	ER4 - Policy Citations (Environmental)	1%

# Chilli Oil

Ingrid Au, Contributor

February is about true love and soul mates and frankly, I would proudly say that chilli oil fits under both these topics. Out of all the condiments that exist, I truly believe chilli oil should be a staple in everyone's kitchen. Its versatility invites a new depth of flavour that most cannot offer. Trust me, this recipe will elevate your dish to a whole different level.



## TOOLS

- Wok or deep pan
- Spatula
- Cutting board
- Knife
- Sanitized mason jar
- Optional: food processor

## INGREDIENTS

- 20-30 fresh cayenne or Thai chilli peppers (about 1 whole bag)
- 1 bulb of shallots, sliced or finely chopped
- 1 bulb of garlic, finely chopped
- 1 cup of cooking oil (grapeseed, avocado, peanut, etc.)

**ATTENTION:** Please be careful when making this recipe as it involves very hot cooking oil.

## INSTRUCTIONS

On a cutting board, slice your chilli peppers, shallots, and garlic. If you have a food processor, combine the three ingredients into the processor and blend until roughly chopped.

In a pan with 1 cup of cooking oil and the blended aromatics, heat the oil to high heat. The oil should be at about 225-250 F/110-120 C, causing small bubbles to slowly rise from the aromatics. Please be careful not to overfill your pan with oil, as this may be a fire hazard. Once the bubbles are present, reduce the heat to low and let simmer for 5-10 minutes or until the garlic and shallots turn golden. Be sure to watch

the mixture so it does not burn. Once golden, remove it from the stove and let the oil and aromatics infuse for at least 30 minutes.

While the aromatics infuse, sanitize your mason jar by washing the jar and boiling it in a large pot for 10 minutes. Let the jar cool and pour the chilli oil inside. You may store the chilli oil in the fridge for up to 2-3 weeks.

Truly, nothing beats a good old chilli oil and I am honoured to share my love for it with you. This recipe can be combined with a fried egg, noodles, rice, or added to a dip to spice things up. Hope you enjoy it!

# February crossword

Zoe Cushman, Contributor

## ACROSS

- 1 Soak up the sun, as a reptile
- 5 Four-legged military vehicles from Star Wars
- 10 It may be furrowed
- 14 Raunchy
- 15 Witch trials town
- 16 Chomp
- 17 Exchange premium
- 18 ~
- 19 Cotton swab often misused to clean ears (do not do this)
- 20 Trans anthem by German artist Yu
- 22 Criticize harshly
- 24 Top-left keyboard key
- 25 New Zealand
- 27 Warm embrace
- 29 Counterpart of bro
- 30 The Shifting \_\_\_ (Slay the Princess god-character)
- 34 Two-channel sound system
- 37 Small recipe measurement (abbreviated)
- 39 Meme phrase paired with an UNO reverse card (two words)
- 40 Tight braid
- 42 Late, as an assignment
- 45 Kerfuffle
- 46 Fair folk
- 48 Patron
- 49 Amplify
- 52 Key two below 24A
- 54 Classic arcade game with a floor pad (abbreviated)
- 55 Reluctantly allow
- 58 Police officer, slangily
- 61 Minecraft mob that was originally intended to be a pig
- 64 Sing-along activity
- 66 Volcanic flow
- 67 Thrash
- 69 Hertz competitor
- 70 Old, as a cheddar
- 71 1,000 kilograms
- 72 Let off some steam
- 73 Turn down
- 74 Playlist units
- 75 Nineteen-month Taylor Swift tour

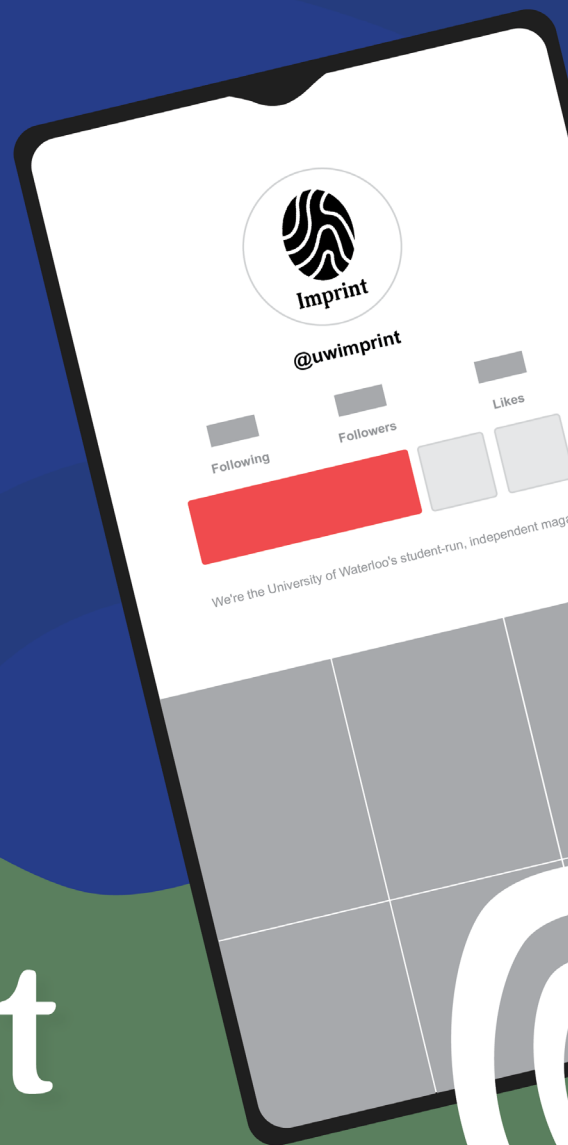
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70						71						72				
73						74						75				

## DOWN

- 1 Tumblr mini-advertising campaign
- 2 Shield of Athena
- 3 Unexpected reversal
- 4 Old stage name of Kendrick Lamar
- 5 Phys-\_\_\_ (UW science degree, abbreviated)
- 6 Contaminates
- 7 Everything
- 8 Titular soccer coach on a hit Apple TV+ series (two words)
- 9 Smudge
- 10 Sweet pork bun (two words)
- 11 Beatles' meter maid
- 12 'Barnyard' protagonist
- 13 Sobbed
- 21 Enthusiastic
- 23 Mother
- 26 Earth Sciences Museum building (abbreviated)
- 28 Ashes holder
- 31 In disguise
- 32 Person, place or thing
- 33 Song for two
- 34 One who breaks picket lines
- 35 Task list (two words)
- 36 Roblox death sound
- 38 Pipe plastic
- 41 Location of most of this puzzle's solvers, presumably
- 43 Senior
- 44 Purge
- 47 Corn unit
- 50 Unwavering
- 51 Outdo
- 53 Cake- and bread-making hobby
- 56 Some turns
- 57 Stories
- 59 Apostrophe-like character that signifies a glottal zstop
- 60 Nuisances
- 61 Outfitted
- 62 Anger
- 63 Tied, as a score
- 65 Black U.S. dialect
- 68 Raggedy doll

Crossword solutions are published on [www.uwimprint.ca](http://www.uwimprint.ca).

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