

Until the 1960s Brown University discouraged off-campus living in order to maintain its status as a “residential college.” In the 1960s the University’s interest in expanding the student body dovetailed with its students’ interest in alternatives to dormitory life. Rather than building new dormitories, Brown began to allow more and more students to move off-campus.

The increase in off-campus living exacerbated a housing crisis on the East Side, inflated market demand for housing, and encouraged landlords to view nearby, low-income Fox Point as an area for profitable investment. Original residents were forced to leave as apartments were subdivided into student dwelling units and the population became much denser. Residents that stayed were often bothered by noisy and inconsiderate students. Neighboring RISD and Bryant College also contributed to this trend, but in fewer numbers and at a less alarming rate. Appendix A from Report 1 documents the numbers of students living in the area over time.

Brown was not a passive bystander in this trend. Its holding company, Fairview, rented to students in the same manner as a private landlord. The University contributed both directly and indirectly to the influx of students and hence the resulting problems. Among the other major speculators include Doyle Realty, which still operates on the East Side.

In 1969 students and faculty formed the Ad Hoc Committee on Housing and Urban Expansion under the stated goals of remedying the University’s insensitivity toward its neighbors, the displacement of the University’s neighbors and the rapidly-inflating housing market on the East Side. The report of the Committee recommended a series of proposals for the future of the University’s relationship with the community:

- The University should institute an off-campus permission process starting in the 1970-71 school year, including address registration.
- The University should allow no new students into Fox Point in 1970.
- Students should be encouraged to seek off-campus housing only from a list of existing student apartments.
- Students should submit their leases to the University
- Any net increase in students should be offset by an increase in on-campus housing
- Long-range master plan for housing: construct more housing, improve existing housing, decrease student population in Fox Point
- Brown should provide low-income housing at the “Bond Bread” site on Brook St
- Brown should advocate for home ownership in Fox Point

Although Brown did not instantly act upon these recommendations, it appears that the University’s policy toward student housing did shift remarkably starting around 1970. In the early 1970s, Brown acquired approximately 800 “beds” from the relocation of Bryant College. A report researching the new Bryant facilities stated that, despite this extra space, the University needed room for 1,200 more students if “it is to honor its pledge to Fox Point.” This last statement implies that the considerations of Fox Point residents were at least on the radar of administrators at the Brown. According to the minutes of the Campus Planning Committee, the off-campus housing limit was reduced to 500 in 1971

and the subsequent housing shortage was solved by “planned overcrowding” rather than student expansion into the East Side. This policy, which was undoubtedly unpopular with the student body, suggests that the University was committed to the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee. At this time the City of Providence was considering redefining a “family” – a zoning loophole to prevent students from living in Fox Point and the Camp St. area. This policy, although out of Brown’s control, also limited students in Fox Point. For decades Brown students have made efforts to be contribute toward their neighbors. Even at the height of the student influx in the late ‘60s, students formed Project Equality (summer project for students to educate the community), a group independent study on Brown’s relationship with the Providence Community, a Community Involvement Center and the Brown Youth Guidance club. This good will continues today through the Swearer Center for Public Service and other tutoring and community-outreach programs. The University itself is still often on shaky ground with its neighbors. Conflicts, frequently recorded in the Brown Daily Herald, have surrounded student behavior, employee parking and building plans. Organizations like the Fox Point Citizens' Association and the College Hill Neighbors' Association often voice their opposition to the student population and the University’s plans for expansion.

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REPORT 2: Preliminary Report, Utilization of Bryant Campus Facility. May 1970. Brown University Archives.