

BRUINHUB & COMMUTERS: SPATIAL JUSTICE IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

AN UPDATE ON THE UCLA + cityLAB BRUINHUB

The BruinHub is one key, but partial, response to a growing problem at UCLA. In 2019, cityLAB published its research report, "My Commute is Hell" (MCiH), about students who must live far from campus. Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic has put into stark relief pre-existing inequalities that already plagued our UCLA student body, predicated on (but not limited to) race, class, gender identity, physical ability, and citizenship status. In turn, those inequities are mirrored in students' unmet needs for food, shelter, and space for rest/recreation/study, short-circuiting their success in the academy and beyond. These challenges are exacerbated by the current public health crisis, economic fallout, and social isolation wrought by the pandemic. If UCLA is to meet the needs of these students, it should prioritize creative solutions that centralize the experiences of students most affected by the crisis. The BruinHub is one such solution that, with an expanded mandate, can assist in providing safe, accessible space for underserved students.*

* While some of the data below is national, internal surveys indicate that UCLA follows similar patterns.



TRANSPORTATION

Before the pandemic, the hellish super-commute (defined as 90+ minutes one-way) was an issue for at least 18% of students who live off-campus (MCiH). There is a real risk that commute times will increase even more as students decide to live further from campus to save money, and as the stigma of public transit due to perceived risk of contagion sets in. Moreover, the anticipated service cuts in public transit will leave commuting students with even fewer transportation options. The university needs to be thinking about the long-term implications of this transportation reality, and create on-campus spaces for commuting students to rest, study, store food and belongings, and sanitize.

UCLA TRANSPORTATION PREDICTS

-  ↓ DECREASED PUBLIC TRANSIT RIDERSHIP (SAFETY + SERVICE)
-  ↓ VANPOOL REDUCED
-  ↑ INCREASED SINGLE OCCUPANCY CAR TRIPS
-  ↑ INCREASED BIKING



HOUSING

Following public safety guidelines, UCLA Housing is decreasing dorm density to safely house students in the Fall. Housing will prioritize students most in-need, including Pell Grant recipients, students who depend on services that only exist on-campus, and students who live far from campus. Even so, on-campus housing remains expensive (the most affordable on-campus option is equivalent to a rent of \$1,370/month without a meal plan) and out-of-reach for many selected students. Students living off-campus are likely to face increased housing precarity: nationally, 43% of students living off-campus are housing insecure, and 15% are experiencing homelessness. For these students who still cannot afford housing, spaces of respite are needed.

STUDENTS IN COVID-19 SURVEYS

-  **18%** CANNOT STUDY OR ENGAGE IN CLASSES WHERE THEY LIVE
-  **6%** ARE NOT SAFE WHERE THEY LIVE
-  **43%** ↑ LIVING OFF-CAMPUS FACE HOUSING INSECURITY
-  **38%** ↑ EXPERIENCE FOOD INSECURITY
-  **15%** ↑ EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS

* arrows indicate changes since MCiH
HOPE Center, #RealCollege During the Pandemic



BRUIN EXPERIENCE

The shift to remote learning complicates the university's efforts to take into account the unique circumstances faced by nontraditional students. A recent survey distributed by the First Year Experience office (FYE) revealed that many commuting students are concerned about internet connectivity, grading, and flexibility in terms of coursework. Despite the creative work of centers like FYE to maintain virtual events for traditional and nontraditional students alike, it will be critical for the University to prioritize programs and spaces that serve these students in the short and long-term. Essential university resources like access to the internet, library, study space, food pantries, identity-based and community building programs, to name a few, need space, both virtually and physically.

STUDENTS IN COVID-19 SURVEYS

-  **78%** EXHIBIT AT LEAST MILD ANXIETY
-  **36%** ARE NOW FAMILY CARETAKERS
-  **63%** ARE NOT ABLE TO CONCENTRATE ON SCHOOL

OF FIRST YEAR COMMUTING BRUINS,

-  **46%** LACK CONSISTENT WIFI
- 80%** ARE CONCERNED ABOUT GRADES AND ACADEMIC FLEXIBILITY

HOPE Center, #RealCollege During the Pandemic
FYE, Spring StudentSupport for COVID-19 Survey



INCREASED INEQUALITY

The impacts of COVID-19 have furthered existing inequalities among students. Off-campus students with limited economic support frequently live in overcrowded housing unsuitable for studying or attending online classes. These same students often have to choose between working more hours to make a living (and thus risking more exposure to the virus) and studying. These impacts, whether they be economic, health, or spatial, disproportionately affect students who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). The university needs to prioritize economic, health, and spatial support to provide safe environments, like the BruinHub.

STUDENTS IN COVID-19 SURVEYS

50% OF WHITE STUDENTS	65% OF LATINO STUDENTS	71% OF BLACK STUDENTS
ARE EXPERIENCING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY.		

AMONG WORKERS AND LEARNERS,

50%	HAD TROUBLE UNDERSTANDING REMOTE COURSE MATERIALS
32%	ARE CONSIDERING WITHDRAWING OR DEFERRING

HOPE Center, #RealCollege During the Pandemic
UCLA Labor Center, Survey of Workers and Learners in Los Angeles County During COVID-19



BRUINHUB SUMMARY

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The BruinHub is one innovative solution for students, when some or all return to campus. Fabrication, comfort, maintenance, and safety of the Study Pods have been extensively studied to ensure feasibility.

The data above and recent cityLAB research make clear the pressing need to address the growing crisis of "super commuting" to UCLA's campus. Now, there are fewer students living on-campus, rents in Westwood continue skyward, and students will increasingly move to more affordable, more distant parts of the city. That means commute times will rise, forcing students to choose between sleeping in the library or in their car, rather than make the long journey home. The BruinHub, workshopped with UCLA students over the past year, will be a space where commuting students can safely study, relax, connect with campus services, and build community while they wait out traffic.

In Fall 2020, a small number of courses and research activities are expected to return to campus. In addition to the students who will be on campus, the university will need to address basic needs of the larger, remote study body population, many of whom face academic and at-home challenges made more burdensome by the pandemic. More than ever, students who live at the intersection of multiple crises related to public health (COVID-19), economic precarity (lack of jobs and access to financial resources), and racial discrimination (and in particular anti-black racism), need access to resources, safe spaces for community and study, and support networks.

The BruinHub addresses all of these goals. It will be a creative, destigmatizing prototype to be installed at the Wooden Center. With follow-up research into student and staff responses to the BruinHub, study pods can proliferate to other sites on campus, to serve even more students.



BRUINHUB PROVIDES

- HUB AS HOME-AWAY-FROM-HOME
- 24/7 ACCESS TO SAFE SPACE FOR STUDY, SERVICES, AND REST
- COVID-BASED SAFETY STANDARDS FOR SANITIZING & SOCIAL DISTANCING
- WIFI, CHARGING STATIONS, FOOD PREP STATION, AND PERSONAL STORAGE
- CENTRALIZED DISTRIBUTION OF CRITICAL CAMPUS SERVICES AND INFORMATION