

**Journalist Portfolio (Writing)**  
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**“It’s like reaching for the stars”: Drop in international student enrollment attributed to soaring rental prices, said AMS**

*Skyrocketing rent in Vancouver is deterring international students from coming to study and those who’re already here from staying upon graduation*

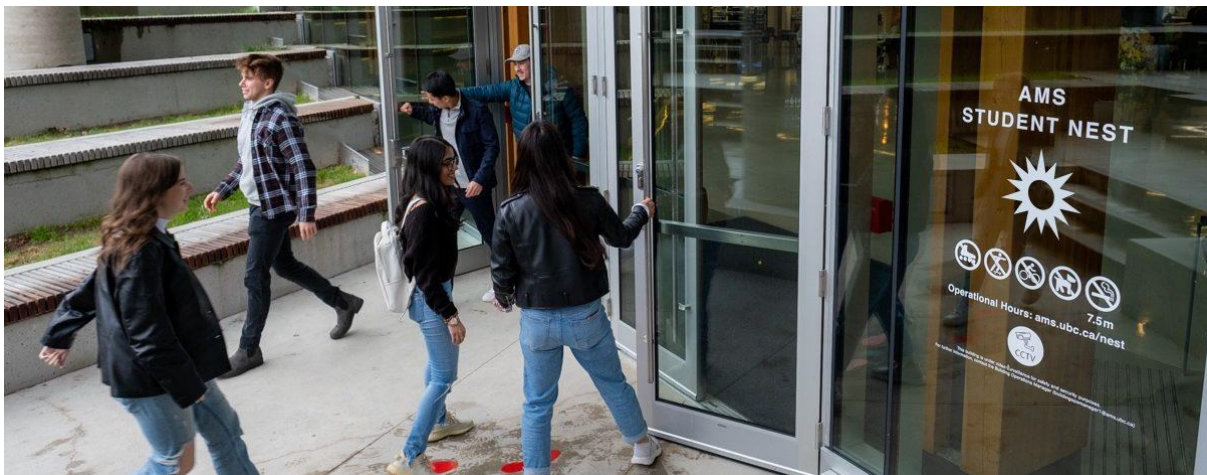


Photo: UBC AMS

Arriving in Vancouver with her two suitcases three years ago, Amy Zhou embarked on a new journey as a food and nutrition sciences student at the University of British Columbia (UBC). She didn’t know her entire study tenure would be filled with endless struggles with affordable housing.

In 2021, when Zhou first rented her apartment the rent was \$1,200. Last month, her landlord told her that if she wants to stay, the rent will go up to \$1,400.

“It feels like reaching for the stars and putting an unwarranted weight on my family’s shoulders,” said Zhou.

International students who are going to move or arriving this year are coming into an expensive rental market. According to a recent report from Statistics Canada based on the

2021 census data, new renters in Vancouver moved in within the last year are paying a quarter more than renters who have been in their units for more than a year on average. Young people aged 18 to 24, who often move for school and work, are almost twice as likely to have no choice but to pay these higher rental prices compared to established renters.

Renters in B.C. are protected by a current 2 per cent rent increase cap per year during the agreed tenancy, which will be lifted to 3.5 per cent starting January 2024. But for international students like Zhou, paying four months' rent for an empty apartment between terms seems like a waste. This leaves them vulnerable to unexpected and substantial rent hikes.

"Although long-term agreements provide some stability, as international students, we often prefer shorter leases so that we can go back to our hometown to visit our family during summer vacations," Zhou said.



Kamil Kanji Photo: UBC AMS

Kamil Kanji is the Vice President of Academic and University Affairs at the Alma Mater Society (AMS) of UBC, the largest student union in Canada. He said the demand of on-

campus housing options is far beyond the supply, leaving international students vulnerable to discrimination in the rental market.

“Graduate and first-year undergraduate students have some level of housing guarantee that's reserved for them, but really it's international students that end up facing the brunt of the housing crisis on this,” said Kanji.

“Predatory landlords often take advantage of the fact that many international students come into Canada without really knowing what their rights are as tenants of different spaces.”

In a survey conducted by the AMS from March to April this year, nearly 60 per cent of respondents have encountered financial hardship related to the cost of housing, up from 40 per cent in 2021. Out of a total of 3,000 student responses, Black, Indigenous and people of colour reported heightened levels of hardship, with Indigenous, west Asian and Latino students reported the highest of 70 per cent or above.

Kanji said the surging rental prices are not just deterring international students from staying after graduation but also from enrolling in the first place.

“This year we've seen a decline in international student enrollment. And so not only is it going to impact students' willingness or wanting to stay in Canada, but it's already impacting their willingness to even attend UBC or come to British Columbia to start their education.”

International students currently face barriers in the competitive rental markets because landlords often hesitate to rent to them, said Greg Park, a representative from liv.rent.

“We heard from some landlords that they were receiving over 80 applications for one property. Rather than just doing credit checks, they're actually asking for pre-paying your rent and showing a savings account with regular deposits, which could be really hard especially for international students,” said Park.

Landlords are as unhappy as renters. Ivy Ng found herself standing at the crossroads as the roaring rental market had pushed her towards a quandary — considering selling her rental properties in Richmond.

“Taxes, utility costs, insurance expenses, maintenance fees — everything is going up. The truth is, no matter how much we increase the rent, it's a drop in the ocean compared to the soaring mortgage costs,” she said, “Being a mother of three, I care about the struggles of kids studying overseas. But how can I lend a hand if I already have too much on my plate?”