



COLUMBIAESC

ENGINEERING STUDENT COUNCIL

Prepared by the Engineering Student Council, Policy Committee

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22 March 2017

A Report on the Experiences of 3-2 Combined Plan Students at Columbia University

INTRODUCTION

The following report has been created as an educational resource on research that evaluates the experiences of 3-2 Combined Plan students with academics, student life, housing, and financial aid at Columbia.

METHOD

A survey entitled, "Short Questionnaire for 3-2 Students" was commissioned by the Engineering Student Council (ESC). The following information was solicited from survey participants:

1. A ranking of student satisfaction with academic, financial aid, housing, and student life
2. The problems that students have encountered regarding academics, financial aid, housing, and student life
3. Additional problems students encountered
4. Basic demographic data including class year and major

The survey was sent out on Facebook and via listservs to the general undergraduate SEAS community. All submissions were anonymous.

RESULTS

All results are up to date as of March 20th, 2017.

Out of the 34 responses, 38.2% were from the Class of 2017, 50% were from the Class of 2018, and 11.8% were from graduated classes, as seen below in Figure 1. ESC estimates there to be around 80 students in each 3-2 Combined Plan class year.

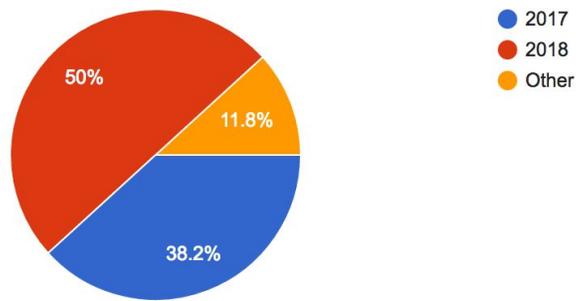


Figure 1. Survey participants by graduating class

A wide variety of majors responded to the survey. The majority of responses came from Computer Science and Computer Engineering, followed by Mechanical Engineering, Civil Engineering, and Electrical Engineering. A summary of respondents by their majors can be found below in Figure 2.

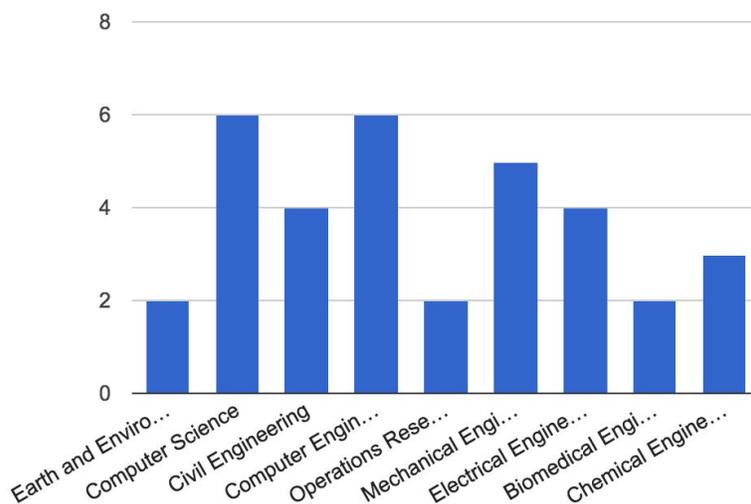


Figure 2. Survey participants by academic major

I. Ranking for the statement, **“I am happy with Columbia’s existing housing options and policies. (1- strongly disagree, 5- strongly agree)”**:

The average score is 2.94. A summary of the rankings is shown in Figure 3.

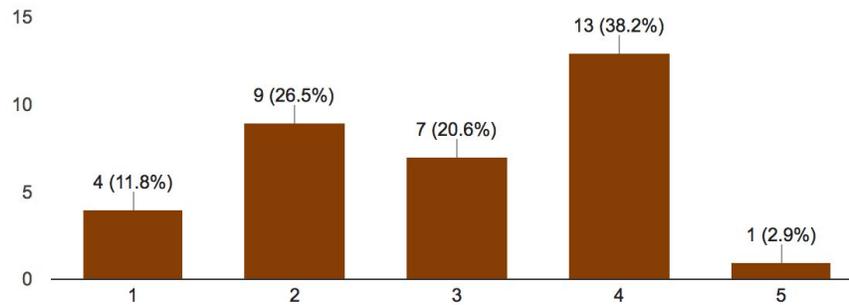


Figure 3. Rankings of satisfaction with housing option and policies

II. The answers for the question, “**What specific problems have you encountered with housing, if any?**” are presented below.

No free laundry, yet Columbia thinks it is acceptable to subsidize laundry for undergraduate residents that chose to pick into Carlton Arms (not even 3-2) while ignoring the 3-2 students who don't have any choice but to live in Carlton. No common spaces in Carlton Arms. The laundry room has been under construction for the entire semester. **Some 3-2 students have inconsistent building access with their CU IDs across campus.**

I am happy to have housing, but since we are so far from campus, it isolates the 3-2 students and **doesn't help us integrate** better with the Columbia community.

Carlton Arms is **disconnected from campus and policies** there (like lack of free laundry for all of last year) made me feel like the administration doesn't care about Combined Plan students

3-2 students have no choice but to live off campus. In addition to that, unlike the rest of the undergraduate student population, 3-2 students are not guaranteed housing for their senior year. 3-2 students also do not get free laundry while they live at Carlton Arms. These 3 policies make 3-2 students feel **unwelcomed** in the Columbia community. In addition to that, by keeping 3-2 students at Carlton Arms, Housing is essentially isolating them from the rest of the community, which results in the lack of understanding of Columbia culture, and **a disconnect with student life.**

Need guaranteed housing!!!

Again, they admit undergrads and transfers with 100% housing guarantee but the **rule doesn't apply** to the senior 3/2 peeps.

Nice to be all together, not nice to be 10 blocks away from campus, we all have to walk to the back of campus at Nudd

The description of housing is **not honest** and not adequately described

Problems: elevators barely work, water bottle filler doesn't work, drying machines don't dry, the

distance from campus requires that we have a gym in the dorm building (especially in the winter), heaters don't work at all in some rooms and overheat others, there is **a permanent bee hive in the shower**, kitchens have crickets and mice, the bathroom needs a vent, the light timer--especially in the bathroom-- goes off too quickly, **fire alarm sound is deafeningly loud**, the rooms have **bad lighting**.

I am happy that I am with other combined plan students. It has made the transition much easier.

I mean, we only had one option. Carlton Arms is fine.

housing is awful

Carlton Arms is very far. A shuttle would be nice.

3-2 students are housed far off-campus, so it makes **it hard for them to build relationships with peers who already have some experience in their department**. The advice from such peers greatly aid newer students in succeeding academically.

too far from campus. also elevator in Carlton Arms sucks

Carlton arms needs a lot of work and 3-2 students need to be more part of the Columbia student body and this building prevents it.

Mostly a positive experience, but washing machines were often out of order in both of the buildings I stayed.

Carlton Arms was very **detached from the rest of the dorms**. It was also brutal going to Mudd and back to Carlton Arms.

Carlton Arms, where all the first year 3-2 students live, has no free laundry service.

Wish it was **closer to campus**.

3-2 students should get housing for both years.

On campus housing was great, in EC. However, Carlton arms was terrible with malfunctioning elevators (least of the issues), many nights of **no heat**, poorly sealed windows that let the cold air in on the riverside side of the building, and **no a/c permitted**. Other than that, it was good

Carlton arms housing is not **an effective way to live** as a student. The facility is dark and the services are horrible. The elevators never worked, the package service would lose mail, and the cleaning service was **not consistent**.

III. Ranking for the statement, “I am happy with Columbia's existing student life. (1- strongly disagree, 5- strongly agree)”:

The average score is 3.29. A summary of the rankings is shown in Figure 4.

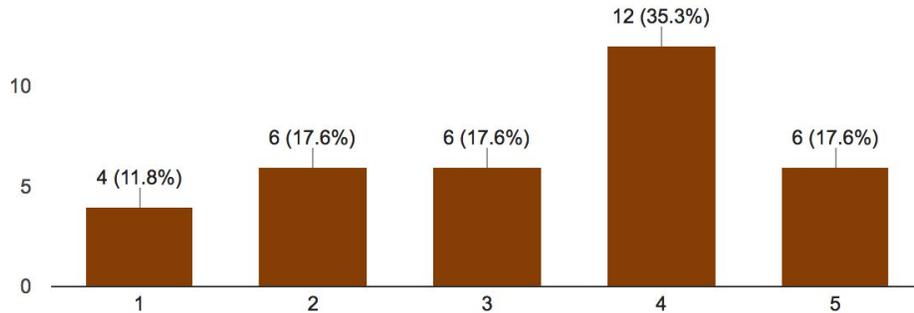


Figure 4. Rankings of satisfaction with student life

IV. The answers for the question, “**What specific problems have you encountered with student life, if any?**” are presented below.

Hardly any effort on the part of Columbia (especially SEAS) to welcome and include the 3-2 students.

It is very isolating to be a 3-2 student. With the transition in after 3 years of college and the lack of activities to create a community in Carlton Arms nor on campus.

There is **no sense of community** in any of the student organization. 3-2 students tend to **never know what is happening on campus**.

So little community, **barely any resources for transfers** to adjust to Columbia life, etc...

Breakfast should be served earlier

I think I need to make more of an effort.

There was so student body community.

Overall I am happy with the existing student life. It would be better if we could have official 3-2 student organizations for additional academic, student life, and career advising helps.

It is pretty **impossible for 3-2 students to integrate with the rest of campus** especially because we live so far

It seems like the administration is trying to make Columbia a place where students can't have fun.

I find that the people running for office in student life do not deserve their positions or titles because they do not look to build a strong community, host well designed and executed events that promote

positivity and togetherness, and most importantly, build school spirit with positive memories. Many of the events that are run are focused on playing the same music, which is inappropriate for the setting, then having a line form for free shirts or other giveaways, and very few people are able to meet new friends.

V. Ranking for the statement, **“I am happy with Columbia's existing financial aid options and policies. (1- strongly disagree, 5- strongly agree)”**:

The average score is 3. A summary of the rankings is shown in Figure 5.

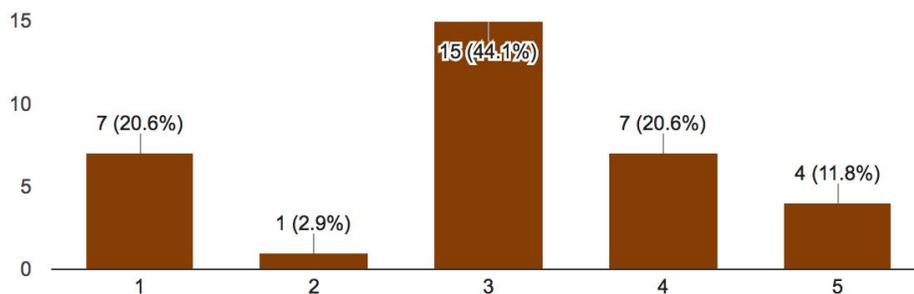


Figure 5. Rankings of satisfaction with financial aid options and policies

VI. The answers for the question, **“What specific problems have you encountered with financial aid, if any?”** are presented below.

They didn't even know I was Combined Plan until my second year here, and when they found out I was, my need based aid decreased but they finally gave me work-study. Just a really flawed system if it took them a year (plus me coming in for a meeting) to figure it out.

Not meeting entire financial need leaves me in a bit of a hole

By being an RA, I do not qualify to earn more money because my work-study allocation was \$2000, which is less than how much Student Life pays for my housing.

No money for international 3/2 students despite their proven records; why can't they support them or meet atleast a part of their needs considering such a tiny population? Somebody needs to remind them.

I am happy and grateful that Columbia provided a significant amount of aid, but Columbia **did not provide for my full need**. It does not seem fair that **Combined Plan students do not have access to as much aid as normal students**.

there are none

The combined plan program is not full need and it's bullshit! **I have to exist on 6 meals a week to afford it and I'm very very sad and hungry all the time**. How can you say you're committed to accessibility and providing for poor students and then say, "but jk not you combined plan students

you're second class citizens." It's messed up.

People are getting financial aid over others that need it more. Better workers to help customers is needed.

Financial aid for Master's Degree programs was not available and would have been appreciated. Undergrad financial aid was sufficient.

Financial support at Columbia is **extremely limited**.

N/A Did not apply for or receive financial aid.

It was a huge pain and very very very **disorganized** system. Schools and departments don't communicate with each other well. I had a **terrible experience** with dealing with financial aid, registrar, and bursar offices. They had all the money and info but failed to record properly and blamed my family instead of owning up to their mistakes and **advised me to leave school**. This was unacceptable and unprofessional.

VII. Ranking for the statement, **"I am happy with Columbia's existing academic options and policies. (1- strongly disagree, 5- strongly agree)"**:

The average score is 3.32. A summary of the rankings is shown in Figure 6.

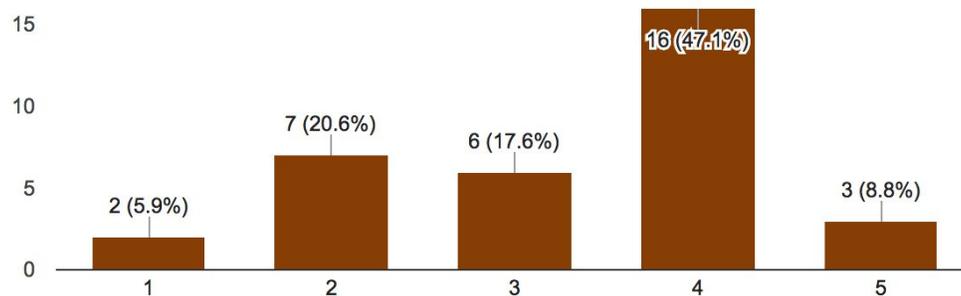


Figure 6. Rankings of satisfaction with academic options and policies

VIII. The answers for the question, **"What specific problems have you encountered with academics, if any?"** are presented below.

Only one semester to transfer former credits from old institutions. Maybe better to extend for a full year. Also, this isn't just a 3-2 problem but it would be really cool to extend the research for credit to up to 6 credits so a more thorough understanding/experience can be achieved.

Registration for classes are different at various schools so if the process should be better explained.

Class conflict resolve is not that great

Same as most other undergraduate students (particularly in CS). It's hard to get into core/elective classes while 3-2 students have more limited time here.

Absurd amount of tech electives, no options to take a lighter class load and very insufficient peer advising and combined plan advising, **being a transfer is a bad experience and I cannot recommend this program to anyone**. Let 3-2 students take art, language etc classes.

Problems: Shortage of classes, **shortage of good teachers**, chalkboards, chalkboards that don't work, chalk that doesn't write, white board markers are dried out, **CS TA room sucks--way too small and impossible to properly work in, CSA only creates time consuming roadblocks** Sorry to sound harsh, but all of this and the following is the truth.

Some professors are not as attentive

Work load is a little **excessive**.

The professors are really not impressive. **The classes are underwhelming and the people are overwhelming**; it's a weird juxtaposition with how much students care about grades when the professors & structure of courses are pretty piss poor for an ivy league institution

I want more guidance on EXACTLY what classes to take and the quality of teachers and who I would learn well from and the class dynamics. I also want to be able to GET A TUTOR through the school if I need one without having to pay for it.

I was disappointed with the lack of an aerospace engineering program before I came to the school. I would also like to have seen some classes on developing electronics in hazardous/radiation-heavy environments.

the 60 credit requirement is too much

Columbia engineering **education is not very thorough**. Professors use the same p-sets, textbooks, and tests.

Certain classes **require extra efforts to register** (e.g you need to get the permission first, then submit paper work to the department. It takes times, sometimes the class is fully when we are granted registration). 3-2 students are generally not allowed to defer their graduation for additional learning purposes.

I specialize in Wireless Communications and the EE department typically hires mediocre adjuncts to teach communications courses.

Very **impersonal**, professors **don't seem to show interest** in actually teaching, they should take teaching classes to learn to communicate and also develop a system of asking questions that tells them whether the class is following the material or not. Also, they are not engaging on the whole as professors in a class.

IX. A summary of the question, “**Please rank the following in order of importance to you (1=most important, 4=least important)**” is presented below in Figure 7.

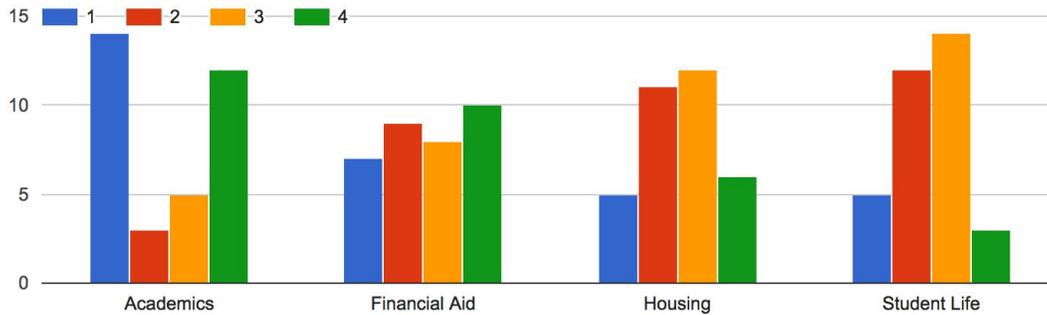


Figure 7. Rankings of order of importance

X. The answers for the question, “**Are there any other general problems you've encountered at Columbia? If so, what?**” are presented below.

There are a large number of students who are **struggling with depression**, are overworked and do not contribute to one another's positive experience at this school.

The Columbia Transportation Shuttle is basically pointless. The shuttle arrives anywhere from 3 min before the shuttle time (I witnessed the shuttle drive away from the bus stop as I was walking to it 3 min before the stated shuttle arrival time) to 12 min after (I have waited 12 min unfortunately). **I once waited 10 min, and the driver did not even look to make a stop, he/she drove straight by me full speed.** He/she did not notice me. Sometimes the shuttle flat out does not show up. **The shuttle is very necessary for the cold weather.** Being that there are so many variables involved with using the shuttle, it basically **impossible to use.**

I am getting my life destroyed by my senior design class and **I have no where to turn for help. I just hate myself so much.**

Classes suck in the sense that they are unnecessarily more difficult because of the ineptitude of some of the professors. They simply cannot command a classroom of students, and I surprisingly miss the professors at my previous institution.

It seems hard to find entry level job postings targeting specifically undergrads, not grad students, but that's not in your control haha. That's just my general problem right now.

Columbia has less engineering industry connections than other schools. 95% of the efforts CCE put are finance related, for students who are into engineering industry, it is not a good news.

DISCUSSION

It is important to note that 3-2 students have had experiences at other colleges and universities. Their responses indicate how the Columbia experience compares to the undergraduate experiences of the 20+ previous institutions of 3-2 students..

From the responses, it seems that the majority of the surveyed 3-2 Combined Plan students believe that Carlton Arms is not a good housing option as a first year Columbia student due to the long distance from Mudd. Because of this distance, and the fact that Carlton Arms is not under Undergraduate Housing, students feel a disconnect from the campus activities. Isolation from the main campus and lack of shared living space with non-3-2 students also makes it difficult for 3-2 students to integrate with the rest of the Columbia community and build relationships with those who already have some experiences in their department.

In terms of student life, survey responses indicates the lack of resources and a sense of community at Columbia. Many students ranked student life as being second only to academics in importance. Students feel unaware of campus activities as student groups rarely advertise in Carlton Arms, the walk from Carlton Arms to main campus is prohibitive, and there are few official, targeted attempts at including 3-2 students in campus programming.

Surveyed 3-2 students also indicated that Columbia did not provide financial aid for their full need. A student even indicated that they “have to exist on 6 meals a week to afford [Columbia]” because Columbia was not able to provide full aid for them.

Out of the four surveyed areas (housing, student life, financial aid, and housing), academics had the highest average rating of 3.32 out of 5. With that said, the responses indicate a dissatisfaction with professors’ interactions with students, describing them as “impersonal” and “don’t show interest”. Some students even indicated that they have a sense of hopelessness due to their senior design and do not know where to seek help.

Overall, the surveyed responses indicate that 3-2 students generally do not have a good experience at Columbia University.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Housing

ESC recommends that 3-2 students are put in campus housing that is closer to the main campus during their first year at Columbia University. This way, 3-2 students club events and extracurricular activities on campus will be more accessible. Putting 3-2 students in dorm housing that is managed by Undergraduate Housing rather than UAH will also make 3-2 students feel more included in the community because they will also be able to have free laundry, like everyone else on campus.

If the above suggestion is not possible, then ESC requests Carlton Arms to be a housing option for more traditional four year students so that 3-2 students do not feel that their living situation is unique. In addition to that, Carlton Arms should have the same security access policies that Undergraduate Housing dorms have. Currently, Carlton Arms require students living on campus to keep their IDs at the security desk. This difference in policy discourages student

organizations from flyering at Carlton Arms, thus making Carlton Arms' 3-2 residents less aware of events happening on campus.

ESC also recommends guaranteed housing to be offered both years for 3-2 students. Uncertainty in living situation can cause anxiety among students at the end of the Spring semester, which can affect students' performance in school.

II. Student Life

At NSOP, 3-2 students often get conflicting answers from their NSOP leaders because the NSOP leaders are not aware that 3-2 students have a different academic schedule and living arrangement. ESC recommends that NSOP organizers inform the NSOP leaders about the difference between 3-2 students and regular transfer students during the training period.

Furthermore, ESC recommends an additional orientation for 3-2 students led by second year 3-2 student leaders. Currently, there is a Combined Plan Mentorship Program organized by a Carlton Arms RA that pairs each first year 3-2 student to a second year 3-2 student mentor. The Mentorship Program also hosts 3-2 specific events such as "Meet and Greet other 3-2s in Your Major". ESC recommends that the Office of Undergraduate Student Life work with the Combined Plan Mentorship Program to create an additional orientation for 3-2 students by financing and supporting training for the 3-2 mentors.

III. Financial Aid

Columbia's Financial Aid Office claims to meet the full needs of the students, however, 3-2 students have not had the same experience. ESC recommends a thorough investigation on why Columbia Financial Aid is unable to meet the needs of 3-2 students and requests an expansion on financial aid for 3-2 students. . In addition to that, ESC recommends soliciting donations from 3-2 alumni and parents to create an additional scholarship for 3-2 students who need extra funding to continue at Columbia.

IV. Academics

ESC recommends 3-2 specific academic advisors for 3-2 students. 3-2 students often have questions related to requirements and tutor support but do not know where to turn to. Traditional CSA advisors lack knowledge in the 3-2 program and therefore 3-2 students are often given conflicting information. If there were academic advisors specifically for 3-2 students, then 3-2 students will know exactly where to seek help.

ESC also recommends that there be special 3-2 events with the deans at least once during their two years at Columbia. These events will bond 3-2 students together and the deans will have the opportunity to hear about students' experience at Columbia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ESC thanks all of those who participated in the survey.