

Brandeis Visions for Waltham

**affiliated with the 'Visions of Waltham' report from the
League of Women Voters - Waltham**

**Senior Capstone Seminar: Sociology in the World
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Introduction

The city of Waltham plays a vital role in Brandeis students' college experiences. In an effort to understand student engagement with Waltham, we senior Sociology majors in the capstone course set out to use our sociological skills and knowledge to conduct research for an organization in the greater Waltham community. This report, undertaken by the Sociology Senior Capstone course, "Sociology in the World," explores how students relate to their surroundings in the Waltham area.

At the start of the semester, we reached out to people in the Waltham community to find an appropriate organization with whom to partner. We narrowed our search down to four organizations with varying missions and needs. After doing diligence on their mission, scope, outreach and leadership, we selected the Waltham chapter of the League of Women Voters, an organization that advocates citizens communicating and becoming involved with their local governments. We chose the organization because it is conducting a project that has the potential to directly impact the experiences of our fellow students as well as residents in the Waltham community.

The League of Women Voters (LWV) organizes and leads the Waltham Visions Project, which explores the opinions and feelings Waltham residents have about their community and their ideas about what can be improved within the city. The LWV brings these findings to city government officials in order to facilitate communication about what can be done to better serve Waltham residents. Their 2013 report analyzed data from interviews the League conducted with Waltham residents and documented residents' feedback about their experiences living in Waltham. Shelley Drowns, the President of the League, expressed interest in learning about Brandeis students' perspectives on Waltham and incorporating them into the League's advocacy work. College students make up 19 percent of the Waltham population. The LWV wants to ensure that our opinions are taken into consideration. As seniors, we wanted to conduct an academically engaging project while also addressing a longstanding disconnect between Brandeis students and the local Waltham community. Therefore, we felt that we could contribute to the Waltham Visions Project by using our sociological research skills. We set out to gain awareness of students' perspectives on Waltham through administering a survey and conducting a focus group regarding students' opinions about the city of Waltham. Through this research and analysis, we were able to draw a variety of conclusions about how students engage with the Waltham community and generate suggestions for the ways in which the relationship between Brandeis and the city of Waltham can be improved.

Methods

Our study received approval by the Brandeis Committee for Protection of Human Subjects. We utilized two types of data collection methods. First, we administered a survey to 80 Brandeis students. In all, 77 students were undergraduates, and three were graduate students. Of the 77 undergraduates, there were 32 seniors, 13 juniors, 14 sophomores, and 18 freshman.

We recruited the majority of the survey participants in the campus center. We set up a table with a display board which had photographs of Waltham. As students walked by, we asked them if they would like to participate in our study. Also, we actively approached students who were standing around or sitting in the campus center. Additionally, approximately 25 of the surveys were administered outside of the campus center.

The following are some of the questions we asked in the survey:

- What does Waltham have to offer students?
- What would you like Waltham to offer students (that it currently does not)?
- Do you volunteer in Waltham?

The last question in the survey asked participants to identify their favorite hangout spot in Waltham. The survey could be completed in approximately five minutes (see Appendix A for the complete list of survey questions).

The second data collection method we used was a focus group, a round table discussion, to gain a more in-depth understanding of students' perspectives of and engagement with Waltham. The survey provided us with the ability to hear from a large number of students, while the focus group gave us a smaller number of individuals' stories and personal anecdotes of Waltham experiences. We recruited friends and acquaintances to participate and solicited participation from the introductory sociology course. The participants for this part of our study included 11 Brandeis students (six seniors, three juniors, one sophomore, and one freshman). Of the students who participated, four were male, and seven were female. Two of the Capstone students served as note takers, and two served as moderators. The focus group lasted approximately one hour (see topics list in Appendix B). While the sample group was not random and therefore not statistically representative of the entire Brandeis community, the findings are still useful in the frame of qualitative methodology.

After the data collection was complete, we thematically coded both the surveys and the notes from the focus group, identifying important patterns and themes in the data. The coded survey notes and coded survey data were then used to write this report. Each stage of our research was a very collective process for us in the Capstone class.

Findings

Brandeis Students' Perceptions of Waltham

Connections to Community

Students' connectedness to the Waltham community falls along a spectrum. Some students are more connected to the Waltham community than others, and during the focus group, we sought to identify certain factors that affect students' relationships to the city. One student said, "I think you feel more part of the Waltham community as you get older." Some upperclassmen are not on meal plans, so they have more opportunities to go off campus for food. Also, more people have cars when they are further along in their Brandeis careers, which provides them with easier access to off-campus venues. Another student said that living off campus helps provide more exposure to the Waltham community.

Some students feel that Brandeis students are welcomed in the community. For example, a student from our focus group mentioned attending a garage sale close to campus and noted how warm and friendly the homeowners were. They were very excited to hear that she and her friends went to Brandeis and gave them various items for free because they were students at the University. Other students feel well received by the community because they support local businesses, which makes shop owners happy.

Another student in the focus group noticed that she did not see a lot of college students in Waltham, which felt discouraging. There is "no Brandeis spirit in Waltham," a student noted. The only example of Brandeis spirit the student could think of is displayed at the Prime Deli which has Brandeis t-shirts on the walls and Prospect Cafe that has "Brandeis Sandwich." While some businesses do advertise in the on-campus newspapers, that is about the extent of their "presence" on campus. Some students feel that the shops and restaurants do not make much of an effort to attract students. As a result, the students therefore are not well informed that these businesses exist. Furthermore, the student felt that the lack of Waltham support was a result of Brandeis not being a sports school. If Brandeis had stronger athletics then she thought that the Waltham community would come to campus to cheer them on.

Exposure to the city through eating out and shopping is not necessarily enough to make students feel like they are part of the community. One senior said, "Going to restaurants on Moody Street would not make me feel part of the community." She essentially believes that through *interacting* with Waltham residents, one can feel a part of the community. Building connections to Waltham residents is an important step to engaging with the community.

One way students build strong relationships with Waltham residents is through volunteering. During the focus group, students were asked about connections to particular groups

of people in Waltham. One freshman explained that she feels a connection to the people at the Waltham Community Day Center, where she has volunteered. Another student discussed how she feels a connection to certain people in Waltham she has met through tutoring. She talked about running into her tutee's mom in the supermarket and chatting with her. Volunteering seems to be a salient way to foster a deeper sense of connection with the Waltham community.

Not all students, however, volunteer or regularly spend time in the community. Those students may develop perceptions of Waltham from a lack of knowledge and engagement. A student in our focus group noted that he did not know that the farmer's market existed. Other students are unaware of other stores and opportunities that Waltham has to offer because they are uninformed. Part of that could be Brandeis's fault for not promoting events in Waltham—they often advertise on campus activities in weekly e-mails sent to the school. Conversely, students' perceptions could also have developed through word of mouth, not direct interaction with the Waltham people.

Diversity

Our findings demonstrate that Brandeis feels disconnected from the Waltham community, a result of some misperceptions and lack of knowledge about Waltham's residents. Waltham's ethnic diversity is one of the factors that contributes to Brandeis' perception of Waltham. Some Brandeis students are aware of the ethnic diversity that exists among the Waltham population. Others however, like a senior from our focus group, "didn't realize how racially and ethnically diverse Waltham is" she said. The senior found out about the diversity by living off campus and seeing a variety of immigrant groups represented in her neighborhood. Others have experienced the diversity by volunteering at local elementary schools while some students who frequent Moody Street have dined at a variety of ethnic restaurants. This ethnic diversity creates a distance between some of the Brandeis community while it also brings together other Brandeisans and members of the Waltham community who share the same ethnicities.

Many students value the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity in the Waltham community. When asked how her perceptions of the Waltham community have changed throughout her time at Brandeis, one student in the focus group said that she was previously not aware of the diverse groups of people living in Waltham. This statement is indicative of the typical Brandeis student not being very engaged with other residents of the community and thus unaware of the diversity that exists.

Some participants in the focus group expressed connections along ethnic lines to certain people and places in Waltham. Three students mentioned appreciating the existence of businesses that cater to people of their heritages. One Hispanic student reported being pleasantly

surprised at the existence of a large Hispanic community in Waltham. Another student reported feeling close to a particular Spanish barber shop.

There was also discussion about the benefit of volunteering with organizations that serve people of lower socioeconomic backgrounds. One student said that his experience volunteering with The WATCH Housing Clinic, a Waltham nonprofit that connects residents with affordable housing, has been a very positive experience. He has gotten to know the Waltham residents that this organization serves and become familiar with their circumstances.

Some clubs, like Waltham Group, and a few experiential learning classes do engage with the Waltham community, which equip students with an understanding of the diverse people of Waltham. Waltham Group is a volunteer community service organization through which hundreds of students participate in outreach programs on campus, in Waltham and the greater Boston community. It has over 19 programs that work with all members of the Waltham community—from young children to jobless adults. However that volunteering is done purely due to one's interest in interacting with the Waltham residents and helping people. According to our survey 24 students of 78 volunteer through Waltham Group. Over 200 Brandeis students volunteer for one of the many Waltham Group projects.

Physical Environment

Waltham has a variety of notable indoor and outdoor spaces. One theme evident in our data is the appreciation of outdoor attractions and recreational opportunities in Waltham, as well as certain indoor facilities. During the focus group, students were asked, “What is the most fun you’ve ever had in Waltham?” One student’s response was bike riding along the Charles River. He said that it was “beautiful.” Another student also discussed the charm of certain outdoor areas in Waltham. She mentioned the reservoir, Prospect Hill Park, and Waltham Fields Community farm. Additionally, for the survey question, “What does Waltham have to offer students,” two of the students mentioned the hiking trails.

Students also go into Waltham for indoor activities. Four of the survey participants said they go into Waltham to go to the movie theater. The public library is another indoor facility utilized by some Brandeis students. Three students mentioned this when asked about why they go into Waltham. Furthermore, when answering the survey question, “What does Waltham have to offer students?,” five of the participants noted the public library.

Safety Concerns

Safety in Waltham is a concern many students voiced in our research. When responding to a survey question about what they wanted Waltham to offer students, three participants

responded that they would like Waltham to have safer streets. Four students in the focus group expressed safety concerns when asked if they would consider living in Waltham after graduation from Brandeis. There were discussions about the lack of lighting on Waltham's streets at night. One student called Waltham a "day town," indicating that he does not believe students can feasibly spend time there at night. Another student said that he would feel more integrated into the community if he were able to feel safe spending time in the city at night. Another student stated that her parent bought her a flashlight so she could navigate the streets of Waltham more safely. Students also mentioned the lack of lighting near the Charles River apartments, which are dorms that are located further from campus than others and are closer to the general city of Waltham. Although students do not appear to feel safe in the city of Waltham, they report feeling much safer on the Brandeis campus. One student said she felt that the Brandeis police were "amazing" and mentioned how she felt safe during last year's shoot-out in Watertown.

Students mentioned additional experiences they have had in Waltham which made them feel unsafe. Female students reported receiving "cat calls" from male drivers when walking on Waltham's South Street. They also spoke of the large amount of abandoned buildings in Waltham, which give them a generally unsafe feeling of a city in disrepair. Many students referred to Waltham as "sketchy," a colloquial word that means unsafe and shady. This feeling is a result of publicized violence in Waltham. Students were aware of of stabbings, muggings, and rapes that occurred in Waltham. They said that emails from Edward Callahan, Head of Public Safety at Brandeis, about these attacks dissuade them from spending time in the community. One student even said that her father "bought her pepper spray" in order to make her feel safer living in Waltham. Thus, safety concerns largely influence students' opinions toward Waltham. If more safety precautions were taken such as adding lighting to the city's streets, students might be more inclined to travel into Waltham at night and engage with its community.

Student's Perceptions of Waltham's Perception of Them

We also inquired about how students believed they were perceived by Waltham residents. In order to understand how Brandeis students thought about the student body's current relationship with Waltham, we discussed it briefly in the focus group and left it as an open-ended question on the questionnaire.

In the focus group, respondents believed that Waltham residents felt disconnected from Brandeis. As one junior mentioned, Waltham residents don't seem to know what Brandeis really is and, consequently, show very little enthusiasm for it. Very few restaurants show spirit for Brandeis through any posters or pennants.

Similarly, a senior pointed out that Brandeis students only talk with their friends when they go into Waltham; they don't interact with community members, which could lead to feelings of alienation among Waltham residents. A first-year student described a more negative perception when she went to get her haircut at a local salon; she said the employees seemed to think of Brandeis students as "robots." Both students described an alienated relationship between students and Waltham. By their descriptions, Brandeis students have very little to do with local residents, and a cultural difference between Brandeis college students and Waltham residents is palpable.

The students that we surveyed with our questionnaires were more pessimistic about Waltham residents' attitudes toward Brandeis than those in the focus group. Twenty seven of the 80 students we surveyed believed that Waltham residents had some sort of negative attitude toward Brandeis, while 10 students thought they viewed Brandeis positively. Nineteen students believed Waltham residents to merely be indifferent to us, and another 11 were unsure of the community's opinion. The 11 students who are unsure speak to the lack of connection between Brandeis and Waltham; those students have such minimal interaction with members of the larger Waltham community that they cannot estimate how they, as Brandeis students, are received. The specific language written on the questionnaires speaks volumes about these perceptions. Students believe that Waltham residents considered them "a nuisance," "privileged," "isolated," "wealthy," and "buzzing flies in their ears." This small sampling of responses speaks to socioeconomic differences, tension about the rowdiness of college students (such as those living off-campus), and a lack of involvement with the community.

This is not to say that there were no points of praise. Seven students wrote that they were appreciated by local business owners for the business that they bring as college students, and six students believed that the community appreciated our service work, such as through the Waltham Group, Brandeis' community service outreach program. Based on our findings, greater engagement with Waltham both through community service work and consumerism might be a pathway for stronger relationships.

At the focus group we also asked students about whether they would live in Waltham after graduation. A senior who currently lives in Waltham said she would live here because the cost of living here is cheaper than in Boston, and there is good public transportation with access to the city. Another senior who lives on campus and considers himself to be "Brandeis-centric" felt differently than his classmate and would probably "tend to something closer to Boston with easier T access," he said. Brandeis students appreciate Boston. However, transportation plays a large factor in people's abilities to access the city.

Commerce

Restaurants

Restaurants are one of the key points of interaction between Brandeis students and the City of Waltham. Students reported eating in one of Waltham's many restaurants upon first visiting Brandeis as prospective students with their families. Now enrolled at the University, students continue to dine at local restaurants with friends fairly regularly. In both the focus groups and the questionnaire, students frequently discussed the role of Waltham restaurants.

Students regularly mentioned restaurants in response to several questions on our questionnaire, which speaks to their relevance in student life. When asked why they would go into Waltham, 29 students cited restaurants. Similarly, when asked what Waltham has to offer students, 28 students cited restaurants. For both questions, "restaurants" was one of the most popular responses by students (often tied or closely followed by "Hannaford" and "food"), reflecting the importance that restaurants hold for students in their engagement with Waltham. Students also cited a couple of specific restaurants that they enjoyed, such as Chipotle, Lizzy's, and Taquería Mexico, indicating the relationships that some students build with specific restaurants and their staff.

Restaurants throughout Waltham serve many different functions for Brandeis students. Almost all students in the focus group expressed an interest in eating off-campus and having some variety outside of campus dining halls. Waltham restaurants easily fill that role, but students noted complications in their attempts to dine off-campus.

There is a two-pronged barrier to obtaining off-campus food. First, students often participate in an on-campus meal plan, and focus group participants expressed concern with purchasing food off-campus when they had already been required to pay for on-campus food. Second, participants note that on-campus events interested in catering are discouraged from bringing in food from a local restaurant; they are encouraged to order food through Sodexo. Both of these points are issues with University policy that emphasize the on-campus caterer and discourage students from eating in off-campus restaurants. Furthermore, the University's consideration of a future policy that would mandate meal plans for all students, even those not living in university housing, would further discourage students from eating in local restaurants, as they have already paid for meals provided by the University. That is not to say, however, that students do not eat in off-campus restaurants at all. Our focus group consisted of several seniors who are no longer on meal plans, and one of them reported going to Prime Deli and the 99, which are convenient options because of their location (close to campus). Another senior expressed his preference for the newly-opened Chipotle and Panera, two popular chain restaurants, in the strip mall on Main Street.

Two seniors in the focus group remarked that the restaurants in Waltham are important for framing the town's identity. One respondent explained that walking down Moody Street, with its many ethnic restaurants, contributes to Waltham's sense of diversity. The other said that the many restaurants helped give Waltham the feeling of a college town. For these students, the restaurants make positive contributions to the town's identity and create an appealing environment. In spite of this, participants also noted that the absence of students from these restaurants detracted from this image, with one participant expressing surprise that more students didn't eat in the restaurants more frequently. This could be the result of either the University policies described above, transportation limitations, which are discussed in the next section, or an insufficient number of students to create a critical visible mass.

In response to the question asking what students would like to see in Waltham, a few respondents offered suggestions. Eight students wanted more food options, often specifying an interest in variety beyond Asian cuisine, on Moody Street. Three students asked for Kosher restaurants, which speaks to Brandeis' Orthodox Jewish population that can only eat in restaurants that have been certified by a *mashgiach*, or Kosher supervisor. The absence of any local Kosher restaurants limits Orthodox Jews to eating either in on-campus Kosher facilities or driving to another town. Additionally, two students proposed a frozen yogurt parlor and one suggested a Starbucks.

Students also talked about their desire for more spaces to hang out. Although many students noted that local bars were good spots to spend time in the evening and have a drink, they noted that there weren't many spaces to simply get off campus during the day. We note that some restaurants and cafés, such as Café on the Commons and Panera, can fill this role, but students may not know of them.

Overall, students value the restaurants in Waltham, as they provide variety to their on-campus cuisine and help create the identity of the city. Brandeis policies do not encourage students to eat in local restaurants but rather to eat on-campus. For many students, the restaurants are a primary point of interaction with the City of Waltham. Although there may be areas of improvements for the City to consider regarding its restaurants, most of the improvements need to be made by Brandeis.

Nightlife

Students recognized the presence of a bar and nightlife scene in Waltham and appreciated the experiences that these places had to offer. The student focus group participants generally have a favorable view of the nightlife in Waltham. When responding to a survey question about why they go into Waltham, ten students said that they travel into Waltham to go to bars. In addition, seven students mentioned bars as a feature that Waltham offered students.

During the focus group, people spoke about specific positive instances going to bars when asked about prior experiences in Waltham. One student mentioned going to a bar with live music as being his most fun experience spending time in Waltham. Another student talked about the Gaff, a bar on Moody Street, and said it was a great place to frequent. A third student mentioned enjoying Senior Bar Night, during which Waltham bars offer discounts to students.

Although many students enjoy the nightlife in Waltham, some express a desire for improvement with the current nightlife scene. When responding to the survey question about what do they wish Waltham had to offer students, four students stated that they would like Waltham to offer more nightlife and one student said they would like Waltham to offer bars with live music. Therefore, many participants would like Waltham to expand its current nightlife offerings, particularly to include more live music. Although The Gaff and The Skelling, two bars in Waltham, do offer live music, students seemed to be unaware of these offerings.

Shopping

Our research finds that students heavily rely on the shopping opportunities that Waltham provides. The stores that were mentioned most frequently in the survey are Hannaford, the grocery store, and CVS pharmacy. Students in the focus group mentioned that these two stores were the “most useful” places in Waltham. Both shops are located on Main Street in Waltham, a mile and a half from campus. They are accessible by walking, biking, driving, and taking the Bran Van, which stops at both stores.

Twenty nine students who took the survey said that they go into Waltham to go food shopping at Hannaford. The data show that freshman, sophomores, juniors and seniors go to Hannaford despite the fact that all students who live on campus (with the exception of Ridgewood) are required to be on a meal plan. Usually when students are on a meal plan they tend to consume meals on campus and purchase groceries on campus at the convenience store (C-Store). However, food at the C-Store is expensive and the offerings are limited, demonstrating that students are willing to go off campus and buy their own food where there is more variety and affordable prices.

Some who either see the Bran Van as unreliable or do not have cars opt to walk to the market even though they incur the burden of carrying their heavy bags in frigid temperatures. As one junior from the focus group said, “even to do groceries is such a pain.” During the winter and spring, snow is not always cleared and sidewalks become slippery and dangerous. The bad weather conditions can deter students from walking into Waltham, particularly long distances to go food shopping.

When the climate improves, some students elect to shop for their produce locally. When asked what Waltham has to offer students, one person mentioned the Farmer’s Market, which is

open June through November and is located on Main Street in Waltham Commons. A senior who lives off campus described the farmers market as “awesome.” It has “great stands, beautiful people, lots of students and people from the town” and has a community vibe, she said. Other underclassman who live on campus had never heard of the farmer’s market but want to go now that they know it exists. Some people noted that the meal plan acts as a disincentive for students because they do not want to spend money on food from off campus restaurants if they are already paying for food on campus.

Adjacent to Hannaford is CVS Pharmacy. Eighteen students of all class years said that they go into Waltham to shop at CVS. Even though there is a Walgreen’s, CVS’s competitor, located on South Street, only 3 students said that they go there for their drugstore needs. Many of the items that students purchase at CVS and Walgreens are not sold in the campus grocery store (such as prescriptions), while other objects are overpriced and students would rather venture off campus to purchase them at a lower cost.

Moody Street is another main shopping location in Waltham that boasts a variety of stores. A student in the focus group called Moody Street “quaint” due to its “small-town feel.” The street is filled with an eclectic group of diverse shops and restaurants. Three people from the survey noted that they used Waltham for the Dollar Stores on Moody Street, which sell a range of affordable knick-knacks. Moody Street also boasts a few used bookstores. One of them is called “Back Pages Books” and owned by Brandeis alumnus Alex Green. Another Moody Street shop some students frequent is the India Market. A senior from the focus group said that he likes to go to the India Market to shop for halal meat and affordable produce. Individuals also noted that Waltham offers second-hand clothing shops on Moody Street and health and beauty services such as nail and hair salons.

Some wish that there were more mainstream and big box discount stores. In contrast, one senior noted that she appreciated Waltham’s small town feel and the fact that it does not have big box stores found in nearby neighborhoods like Watertown and Framingham.

Disincentives for Engagement

Transportation Barriers

Transportation plays an integral role in Brandeis students’ ability to connect with greater Waltham. Our questionnaire and focus group explored in-depth barriers to transportation into Waltham. Although Brandeis is only located a mile and a half from the main attractions in town, lack of reliable transportation sometimes inhibits students from venturing into Waltham. There are five ways that Brandeis students can plausibly access Waltham: walk, drive in a car, ride a

bicycle, take the university's van service (called the Bran Van), or take the university's campus shuttle service, which is a larger bus operated by an outside company, Joseph's Shuttle.

Most commonly, on the questionnaires, which directly asked students how they travel into Waltham, students cited three primary methods of travel: driving, walking and taking the Bran Van. They occasionally circled more than one option, indicating a variety of ways that they traveled, but in sum, the results were largely split evenly. Forty students reported using the Bran Van, 35 students reported walking, and 32 students reported driving themselves. In addition, three students wrote that they biked, and two students wrote that they used the campus shuttle.

In the focus groups, one senior noted that walking into the city is usually not a logical option for students because of the distance between the Brandeis campus and downtown Waltham. Another senior reiterated this concern, noting that Brandeis is located close to the Waltham city line and is geographically removed from local affairs. Although we did not inquire on the questionnaire where students walk, it is very possible that students walk to Hannaford and Chipotle, which are both about a 15 minute walk from campus. In fact, one junior expressed frustration with the distance of walking to Moody Street, saying that she often eats at the 99 because of its close proximity to campus. As another junior said, "walking is such a pain." Although walking can be pleasant at the beginning and end of the academic year when the weather is warmer, it is not so during the winter. Furthermore, walking is an undesirable option during the winter months, when it is cold and sidewalks may be slippery or unplowed.

A senior in the focus group explained the limitations of the Bran Van service, especially on Friday nights when students might be inclined to dine out with friends. Students must reserve a spot on the Bran Van before boarding; they cannot simply board without any prior notification (although they sometimes do, leaving students who have made reservations in advance without seats). Because there are a limited number of Bran Vans on the road at one time, the senior reported that they are often completely booked at times of peak traffic into Waltham, such as a Friday night. As a result, some students can be dissuaded from riding them.

If a student does not have a car on campus (which would be all first-years and sophomores along with a substantial cohort of juniors and seniors), then the options for easy and convenient transportation into Waltham are highly limited. This is particularly the case in the winter and early spring when the weather is frigid. One sophomore in the focus group expressed a desire for bigger campus vehicles to transport students into Waltham, as a Bran Van is only a van, as well as for more Bran Vans on the road.

We should note that 31 of our 80 respondents to the questionnaire said that they go into Waltham at least once per week, and 29 said that they go into Waltham two to three times per week. Although these results may sound heartening, it is likely that students are mainly going to Hannaford and nearby restaurants for food during their ventures to Waltham and are not really exploring the city.

Focus group respondents did not really discuss bikes, as that may be a potential solution to this problem, although many students are likely unfamiliar with the process of where and how to lock a bike and rent a helmet. The University does have a bike rental program called Deis Bikes, but it was mentioned minimally in our focus group. Similarly, the presence of Zipcars on campus for students to rent was not acknowledged by any of our respondents.

Boston as a Competing Urban Center

When students are looking to escape from Waltham, they can board a free shuttle that drops them off in Harvard Square and Boston Thursday through Sunday. Many students take advantage of this opportunity to spend time in the city (shopping, eating, visiting museums, attending concerts and sporting events), which is about 10 miles from campus. The shuttle is rather reliable and a great resource for all students. A senior noted that taking shuttle into Boston or Cambridge is easier than going into Waltham or a neighboring town if you don't have transportation. A junior who participated in the focus group noted that she "goes into Boston so much more than Waltham" because everything one could need is easily accessible and all in one place. Since the Bran Van is not consistently punctual, often overcrowded and there is more to do in Boston and Cambridge, many find it easier to take the Boston/Cambridge shuttle, which is much bigger and more consistent (than the Bran Van) because it is operated by an outside company called Joseph's Shuttle.

However, four students who took our survey did note that they would prefer better transportation into Boston since sometimes the shuttles break down and run late. Other students looking to go into Boston during can also take the Commuter Rail, which is a short walk from campus. Graduate students who live in Boston and neighboring cities frequently take the commuter rail as a mode of transportation to and from campus. The costs can add up quickly as a one way ride depending upon location can run up to \$11.

Recommendations

We are interested in creating and enhancing reciprocal relationships between the two communities. Based on our research, below are our recommendations for allowing this to happen. Some of the recommendations were generated by students from the focus group and survey, while others were suggested by us.

- **Student clubs taking initiative to engage with Waltham**

- **Host performances in Waltham**

Students could look to perform more visibly in Waltham. As suggested in the focus group, the Waltham Commons would be a nice venue for student performances. By performing in Waltham, student groups would gain more recognition and would garner more community support. Perhaps then more Waltham residents would attend on campus performances as well because they would know about the various performance groups.

- **Invite community to lectures on-campus and performances**

There are many lectures here at Brandeis that would likely be of interest to community members. Inviting community members to more of our lectures may foster a greater connection between Brandeis and Waltham. Furthermore, posting more flyers in Waltham stores and restaurants for Brandeis performances may be a very helpful way to better advertise our events to the community.

- **Consider club-related mentoring and instruction through Waltham schools**

Connecting more Brandeis clubs to parallel clubs in Waltham schools for mentoring programs could help unite Brandeis students with the Waltham community. Brandeis has an initiative called Clubs in Service, which encourages clubs and student organizations to connect with the Waltham community. Brandeis a capella groups have performed in the Waltham community.

- **Transportation**

Given student concerns about Bran Van service, the Department of Public Safety should consider how to make Bran Vans more punctual. By reforming the Bran Van's consistency, more students would be encouraged to use them regularly. Systems should also be put in place to ensure that drivers efficiently follow through with student reservations and are thus on time when picking students up. Lastly, Public Safety should consider instructing the Bran Vans to expand their route beyond Main Street and Moody Street if student interest reflects such a desire.

- **Bran Vans should be more consistently punctual**

- **Drivers should follow through with reservations**

- **More spots on Bran Vans at peak hours**

- **More stops in Waltham beyond Moody Street and Main Street**

■ **Better dorm security**

Dorm safety and concerns of non-Brandeis students' access to the dorms is an issue some students mentioned at the focus group. They noted finding menus from Waltham restaurants under their dorm room doors, which indicates that non students (restaurant employees) gain entry into campus dorm buildings. Dorms are accessible by swiping Brandeis ID's that are only issued to current students. However, occasionally students often let non-students who assume that they have a legitimate reason for entering these buildings into the dorms. Students would be more comfortable if the University took additional measures to ensure that dormitory doors are not propped open (and if restaurants encouraged their employees to not enter dormitories to drop off take-out menus).

■ **Walking Club**

When asked about their feelings about transportation to Waltham, students lamented that it was difficult walking back to campus from Hannaford with their groceries after grocery shopping. In addition to offering more reliable Bran Van service, we also feel that this issue could be tackled within the context of public health on campus. We propose that current Brandeis students consider starting a walking club to improve their general health and fitness. Getting students to walk more often could make them more motivated to walk into the city of Waltham from campus and engage with its residents.

■ **Cooking club hosts local chef**

Another way to promote more student engagement with Waltham is by including Waltham businesses in club activities. For example, the cooking club on campus could invite a chef from a Waltham restaurant to visit campus and give cooking lessons and demonstrations to students. In addition to teaching students a valuable skill, these lessons would promote Waltham businesses on campus and encourage student interaction with Waltham residents.

■ **University should re-evaluate policy to better facilitate restaurants catering events on-campus**

Students lamented not being able to request catering from local restaurants through on-campus events. The university's current policies strongly encourage students to use Sodexo, the university caterer, for catering on-campus events. Students would appreciate being able to share a greater diversity of cuisine from Waltham restaurants with their peers at campus events. Local restaurants would additionally benefit from the Brandeis business.

Waltham Recommendations

■ **Discounts publicized to students**

While students appreciate the shopping opportunities that Waltham provides, they do want to see more stores and a welcoming environment for students. Such an environment could be created by stores offering student discounts. Discounts would encourage more students to shop at local stores and would make them feel more welcome. On Wednesday nights, Joe Sent Me, a bar on Main Street, hosts a Brandeis night where students 21+ are invited to grab a beer at a discounted cost and hang out with friends. This is one of the few circumstances where undergraduates go into Waltham to spend time with friends in a social setting, not just dining. The discounts geared toward them makes them feel like they belong in the community.

■ **Better lighting in Waltham to create sense of security**

Students on-campus are often aware of the crime that occurs in Waltham, both petty and violent. Although improving local crime rates is a long-term objective, some students raised the simple request that Charles River Apartments (Brandeis-owned off-campus housing) and popular student areas in Waltham, such as Moody Street and Main Street, have better lighting in the evenings. Additional lighting both fosters greater feelings of security and allows people to be more aware of their surroundings.

■ **More live music in the evenings at local bars and restaurants**

Students expressed interest in more entertainment options in Waltham. In the focus group, one person mentioned enjoying live music in bars and we feel that offering more of this would encourage students to socialize in Waltham and connect with the community. Students are unaware of bars that currently offer live music in the evenings, which could be better advertised.

■ **Off-campus hang out space**

Many students expressed an interest in hanging out or completing schoolwork in a casual venue off-campus but lamented that none currently exists. (Students in the focus group did take note of Café on the Common but cited its highly limited evening hours as a drawback.) A casual space designed for both informal socializing and independent work, such as a café near campus, that has extended hours appropriate for college students would be well-received by the student body.

Appendix A
Brandeis Visions of Waltham
Sociology 2014 Capstone Project

Questionnaire:

1) What is your status at Brandeis?

Class of 2017/ Class of 2016/ Class of 2015/ Class of 2014/ TYP/ Graduate/ Faculty/ Staff

2) How do you travel into Waltham?

Walk/ Car/ BranVan/ bike

3) How often do you go into Waltham?

Once per week/ 2-3/week/ 4+/week

4) Why do you go into Waltham?

5) What does Waltham have to offer students?

6) What would you like Waltham to offer Brandeis students (that it currently does not)?

7) How do you think Waltham residents perceive Brandeis students?

8) Do you volunteer in Waltham? (Yes/No)

If yes, where? What do you do?

9) What is your favorite hangout spot in Waltham?

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions:

- What is your first memory of Waltham? Why did you go in? What were your initial perceptions?
- Did you go to Waltham when you visited campus?
- What is the most fun you've ever had in Waltham?
- Do you, as a Brandeis student, feel like a part of the Waltham community? Why/why not?
- If not, do you wish you did? What barriers prevent you from feeling that connection?
- Do you feel a particular connection to any group/neighborhood in Waltham? What group (ethnic, services worship)?
- Do you have any relationships with Waltham residents outside of Brandeis? Who are they? Are they positive relationships?
- Would you consider living in Waltham post-graduation? Why/why not?
- What deters you from going into Waltham?
- What would make you want to go?
- What do you think about the safety in Waltham? Do you feel comfortable there at night/during the day?
- Do you frequent Harvard Square and Boston more often/less often than Waltham?
- Transportation: Do you walk into Waltham? Do you take the Bran Van?