

# College Life Off Campus

Welcome to college and off-campus living. Breathe deep and enjoy the sense of freedom that comes with living away from home or out of the dorm. But be warned: with this newfound independence, comes new responsibilities.

You may have aced juggling school, home and activities in high school, but college throws a few more curveballs your way. Homework is crammed in between classes, social gatherings, extracurriculars, and jobs. Finding and maintaining an off-campus apartment adds another layer. Then cooking, cleaning, even laundry needs to happen. But when? How?

Fortunately, ForRentUniversity.com® is here to help. We're your guide to living off campus, dealing with roommates, knowing your rights as a tenant, protecting your safety, and more. Oh, and we'll help you find an apartment with a washer and dryer to handle that laundry!

## An FAQ for Students - Apartment and Leasing Information

Where can I find more information about living off-campus at my school specifically?

ForRentUniversity.com provides options and information about apartments near campus at universities and colleges nationwide. Just enter your college's name in the search field above. We also suggest getting to know the off-campus housing office at your university. The staff there will help you get the most out of off-campus living and can address any specific concerns.

What should I consider when assessing off-campus student apartments?

Choosing the right place to live will require weighing several choices: individual lease or a joint lease, a furnished apartment or unfurnished apartment, utilities included or paying your own bills, walking to campus or taking a shuttle, parking in a lot or on the street, pets allowed or dogs and cats prohibited. Plus, of course, how many bedrooms and bathrooms you need. And, perhaps most important, what your maximum price is. Fortunately, after you've made your decisions, ForRentUniversity.com lets you filter apartments near your campus based on all of those factors.

What do I need to know before signing a lease?

Do not take this task lightly. A lease is a binding contract that sometimes requires a co-signer or guarantor such as a parent or guardian. Know all of the details, obligations, rules, and regulations of your lease agreement before signing. Visit the student legal services office at your university for help understanding the lease and your rights and obligations.

Should I get an individual lease or a joint lease?

That's a personal preference. Individual leases allow two or more people to live in the same apartment but sign separate leases and pay separate rents. In college towns, you

might see individual-lease apartments with several bedroom-bathroom suites arranged around a common kitchen and living room. With joint leases, all roommates sign one lease and pay the rent collectively. The main advantage of an individual lease is that you don't bear financial responsibility for your roommates. The main disadvantage is that you don't necessarily get to pick your roommates, especially if one moves out and is replaced by the property manager. Learn more in our Individual-Lease Guide.

What should I be aware of when contacting a property management company for information or a tour?

Know your rights! The Fair Housing Act protects you from discrimination. If any landlord refuses to rent to you based on your race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, handicap, or sexual orientation, you have the right to speak out. Contact your student legal services office if you feel you have experienced discrimination in leasing an apartment. Also, each time you visit a property, you will fill out a guest card and be asked how you were referred to that apartment community. If you found the community through ForRentUniversity.com, please indicate that on the guest card.

What rules should I expect when living in an off-campus apartment?

As an apartment resident, you have responsibilities. Adhere to your lease obligations. Reach out to your property manager when repairs are needed. Get to know and respect your neighbors. Entertain wisely and control the noise level for others in the community. Keep your apartment clean.

What precautions can I take to stay safe?

Crime has no address. So, no matter where you live, you should think about your safety. Always be observant and aware of your surroundings. Don't walk alone at night. Keep windows and doors locked at all times. Never open the door without checking the peephole first. Keep blinds closed and light on when going out of town. Lock your car at all times and never leave valuables inside. Don't announce to the world through social media that you will be away from home for an extended period of time, and don't brag online about that new iPad or flat screen TV. Most importantly, you should contact the police and your management office promptly to notify them of any suspicious activity.

How do I handle living with roommates?

Roommates don't have to be the enemy; they can become your friends. It's important to have open communication about cleaning, paying rent, and sharing central living spaces. Draft a set of house rules. Knowing up front, what each of you expects will help establish your relationship. Keep your room and valuables locked for privacy. (Tip: Check ForRentUniversity.com listings for apartments with individual locking bedrooms.) Set rules for visitors and study times. Lastly, set aside time just to enjoy being roommates – cooking dinner, watching a movie, or playing games. See the ForRent.com Apartment Living blog for more tips on living with roommates.

How do I budget my finances now that I'm living off-campus?

While many schools have prepaid meal plans, many more everyday expenses can add up (think toilet paper). If you need help budgeting wisely, you have some easy and, more importantly, free options. The free online budgeting tool Mint.com can also be downloaded as an app for an iPhone or Android phone. Create an account, set budgets, and watch as the app keeps track of where your money is going. If keeping track of your finances yourself works better for you, download a Microsoft Excel budget template and fill in your expenses for each month. Don't forget to put away some money in a savings account any chance you get. Having money out of your more accessible checking account may help you not spend it right away.

How can I personalize and decorate my space within the restrictions of the apartment community?

Review your apartment community's rules before coming up with your design plans. If decorating restrictions are getting you down, don't worry. Options still exist to make your apartment feel more like your own. If painting or putting up wallpaper is out, look into vinyl wall decals or patterned fabric. Avoid nail holes by instead hanging decorations with inexpensive and damage-free adhesive products. For inspiration, visit our College Life Pinterest board. ForRent.com's DIY Under \$50 Pinterest Board is great for college students with a limited budget. For the finishing touch of any room away from home, put up favorite photos of family and friends to brighten your mood. Discover more suggestions on the Apartment Living blog.