


American University Off-Campus Housing Guide



Last updated May 2018

WELCOME

Welcome to the American University Off-Campus Housing Guide. Whether this is your first time searching for off-campus housing or you have lived off-campus before, this resource can help you navigate the housing process.

Many pages in this guide can be printed out and used as worksheets. Worksheet pages are indicated by the printer icon: 

We have incorporated results from our Fall 2017 Off-Campus Housing Survey. For more information on our survey, visit bit.ly/2GShtsG.

If you have additional questions or suggestions regarding off-campus housing, please email offcampushousing@american.edu.





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All images from Canva except above by Ama Ansah

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Image via Library of Congress

YOUR HOUSING TIMELINE

While everyone's timeline for finding and moving in to an apartment is different, this off-campus housing guide is designed to help you navigate the process. Below are some "mile markers" to help you prepare for and execute your search in an organized manner.

WHEN THINKING ABOUT LIVING OFF-CAMPUS...

- Consider where you would like to live. Research neighborhoods and visit if possible.
- Look at your budget. How much will you be able to spend on housing? On transportation?

WHEN LOOKING FOR HOUSING...

- Tour multiple properties and compare. What did you like and dislike about each property? What were the pros and cons?
- When on tours, ask questions, take photos, and make notes. (see page 10)
- Learn your rights as a tenant.(see page 7)
- Find roommates if necessary. (see page 17)

WHEN YOU'VE FOUND HOUSING...

- Apply for the apartment and pay the security deposit.
- Read your lease carefully before accepting.
- Consider renters insurance.
- Plan your move in (see page 19)

HOUSING SEARCH FAQs

Q: How long does the housing search take?

A: The length of your search depends on what you are looking for and what is available.

Q: What is the best time of year to search or move?

A: There is not an optimal time of year to search for housing. Consider when you will need housing, when you will have time to move, and budget your time accordingly.

Q: When do I start looking for an apartment?

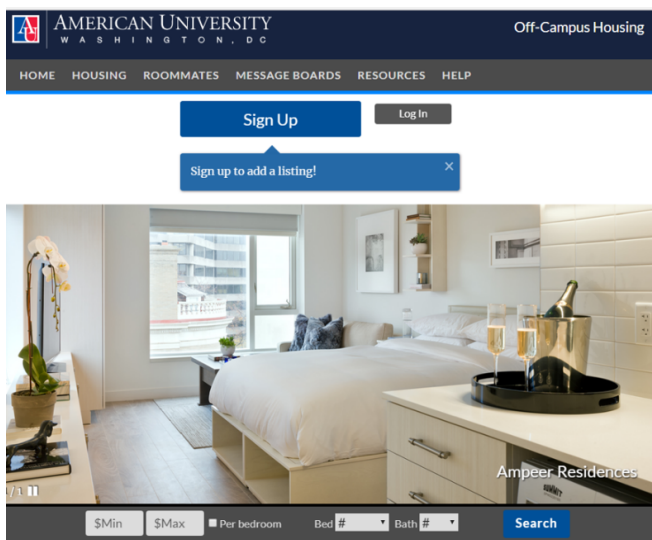
A: It is a good idea to begin your search two to three months before

your anticipated move. Most properties will not know their availability until a few months before your projected move in. Starting your search a few months in advance gives you time to compare properties and fully consider all your options.

Q: How can I find housing?

A: Students find housing in a variety of ways. According to our Fall 2017 Off-Campus Survey, students find housing in the following ways:

- AU Off-Campus Posting site
- Apartment finding sites
- Social media
- Family/Friend Suggestions



Off-Campus Posting Site

offcampus.american.edu

The AU Off-Campus Posting site lets students search for apartments and homes that have a history of working with AU students. All individually owned properties on the site have been approved by our office. Students can also search for roommates with the roommate finder feature.

NECESSITIES

What are your top priorities when looking for a new home? It is beneficial to determine your needs, wants, "deal breakers," and aspects you can compromise on. The worksheet below can help you get started.

Ranking Needs and Wants

Below are some common examples of what one might need or want in off-campus housing. Rank these items in order of your personal priority.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| ___Close to campus | ___Disability Accessibility |
| ___Utilities included | ___Close to grocery stores, banks, restaurants, etc. |
| ___Parking available | ___Close to work |
| ___Necessity of roommates | ___Close to transportation |
| ___Amenities (pool, gym, etc) | ___Pets allowed |
| ___Laundry facilities | ___Cost |
| ___Neighborhood/Location | ___Other: _____ |
| ___Lease terms and length | |

My top 3 priorities are...

According to our Fall 2017 Off-Campus Survey, the top three factors in our students's housing search are **cost**, **proximity to campus**, and **neighborhood**.

COST OF LIVING

BUDGETING 101

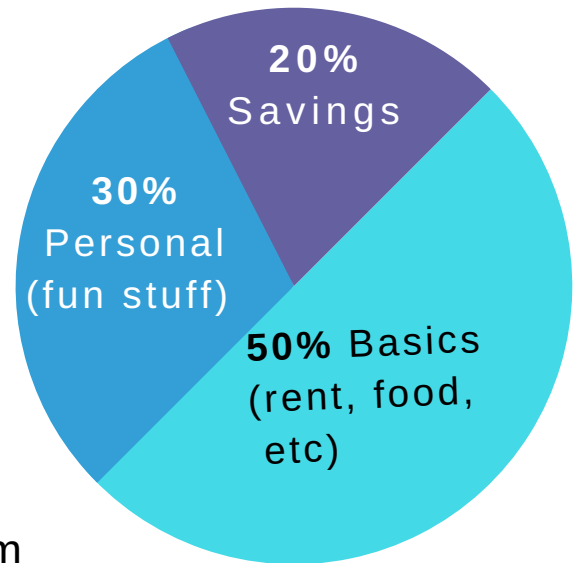
1: TRACK YOUR SPENDING to understand where your money is going.

2: The 50/30/20 RULE suggests half your income should go to essentials, 30% can be personal spending, and 20% should go to savings.

3: BREAK DOWN your essential and personal spending into sub categories.

4: CREATE A BUDGET and track your spending. Find a budgettracking system that works for you.

5: STICK WITH IT You may slip up at first but with practice, you'll find a budget that works for you.



RENT

According to our Fall 2017 Off-Campus Housing Survey, the average monthly rent for American University students is **\$1,217/month** including utilities. Roommates help lower cost of living. Students who lived with other people paid an average of **\$1,146/month** while students who live alone paid **\$1,592/month**.

For more information, view our off-campus housing survey!

DO I NEED TO BRING MY CAR?

This is a question many students ask when moving to DC or living off-campus. Everyone's situation and reasoning is different, but here are some questions to ask yourself when deciding.

Start!

Not often, I'll leave it



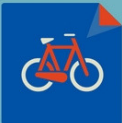
Are you comfortable with city driving? If you have trouble navigating traffic, narrow streets, or parallel parking, it may be a good idea to leave your car behind.

How often do I use my car?

All the time!

Walking Distance

How close do you live to campus/work/internship?

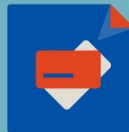


Do you know about Capital Bike Share? There are 350+ bike stations in the DC, MD, VA area, where you can rent a bicycle. You can sign up at capitalbikeshare.com

A little far, but on the the metro

Far (1hr+ commute)

Are you eligible for U-Pass? All full-time undergrad, grad, and law students can take part in the U-Pass program as of Fall 2016. Visit american.edu/upass



Does your apartment have parking?

It sure does!



Most apartments offer parking at a monthly rate. Prices vary based on location but tend to fall in the **\$100-\$175** /month range.

Nope.

Will you be traveling outside the DC metro area often?

Pretty regularly.

We suggest not bringing your car

We suggest bringing your car

Not very often.

We suggest not bringing your car

The Answer?

Think about the questions here and weigh your pros and cons. Also consider your financial situation. In the end, the decision is up to you!

TRANSPORTATION

Most DC area residents travel by public transit. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority maintains the Metro, DC's underground subway service, and the Metro Bus system. For more information, visit wmata.com or american.edu/transportation



Tenleytown/AU Station via Google street view.

U-PASS

The U-Pass program allows all full time undergraduate, graduate, and law students to use the metro at a heavily discounted rate. Valued at \$1/day (\$130/semester, included in tuition), students are able to travel all over DC and into Virginia and Maryland via public transportation.

AU SHUTTLE

American University has multiple shuttles that run between the Tenleytown metro, Washington College of Law, main campus, and occasionally the Spring Valley building.

During the academic year, shuttles run from 7am to midnight on weekdays and 8pm to midnight on weekends.

LOCATION

The location of your future home affects many facets of your life: the length of your commute, cost of living, and how you spend your free time. It is important to choose a neighborhood that you like, as you will be spending a lot of time there. Here are some areas where members of the AU community reside.

According to student's self-reported addresses via registrar's office, Fall 2017. All registrar's office data reported anonymously to Housing & Residence Life.

Where do off-campus students live?

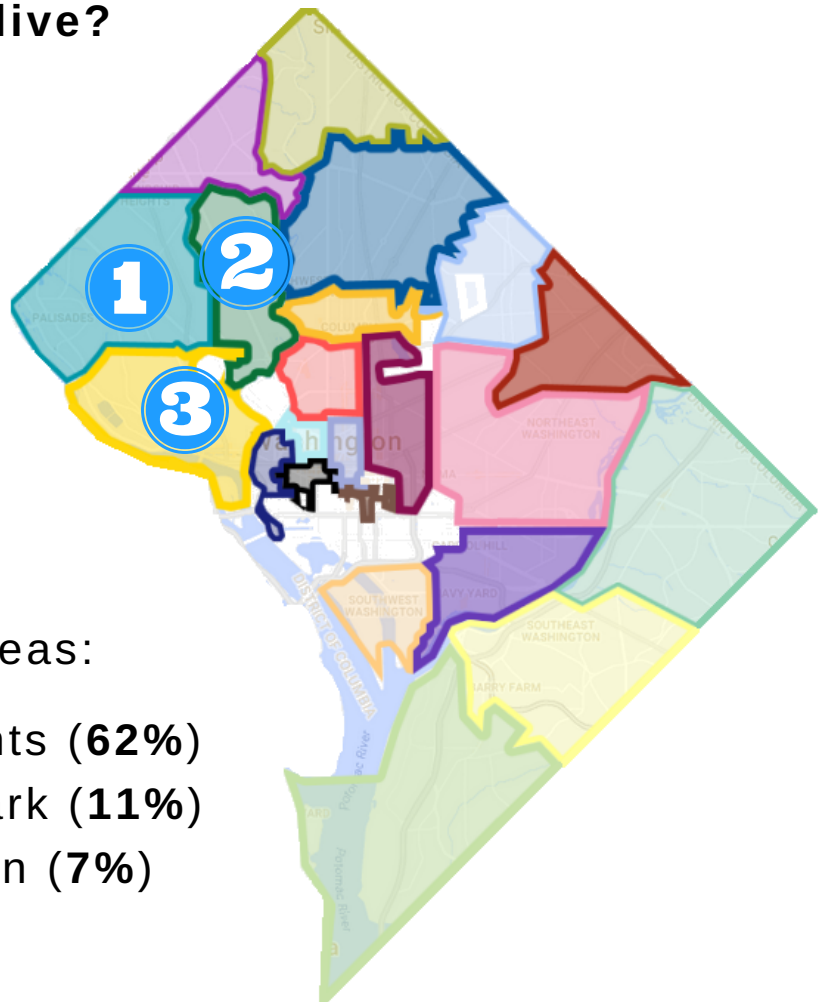


21% Maryland, 12%
Virginia

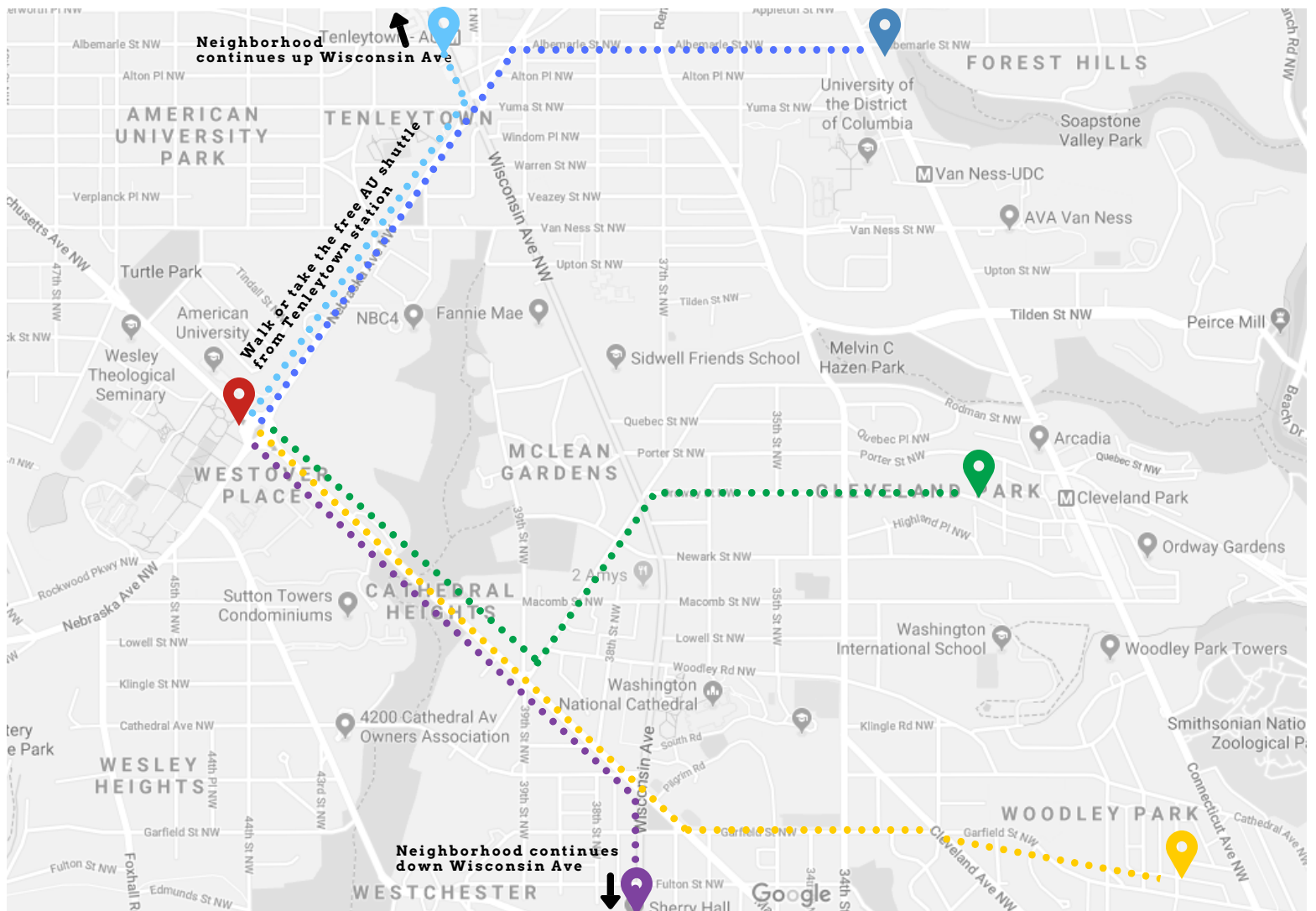
67% live in DC.

Most DC students live in these areas:

- 1) 20016:** Tenley/Cathedral Heights (**62%**)
- 2) 20008:** Van Ness/Cleveland Park (**11%**)
- 3) 20007:** Glover Park/Georgetown (**7%**)



CLOSE TO CAMPUS



Above is a map of neighborhoods closest to American University. This map shows approximate walk times to American University's main campus.
Note: walk times based on Google Maps.

Map Legend

- ● ● ● ● ● 35 min walk from Van Ness
- ● ● ● ● ● 30 min walk from Cleveland Park
- ● ● ● ● ● 40 min walk from Woodley Park
- ● ● ● ● ● 25 min walk from VanNess
- ● ● ● ● ● 20 min walk from Tenleytown

ACCESSIBILITY

For students with physical disabilities, finding accessible off-campus housing is of utmost importance. Below are some resources to help you in your search:



**Washington DC
Office of Disability
Rights**

odr.dc.gov
441 4th Street, NW,
Suite 729 North,
Washington, DC
20001
(202) 724-5055



**Washington DC
Office of Human
Rights**

ohr.dc.gov
441 4th Street NW,
Suite 570 North,
Washington, DC
20001
(202) 727-4559



**General Services
Administration
Resources Portal**
gsa.gov/portal/content/193773

TENANT RIGHTS

Established in 2006, the **Office of the Tenant Advocate (OTA)** is an organization that serves DC renters and provides them with access to legal information regarding their rights as tenants. They provide reports on new laws and regulations affecting those who rent and live in Washington, DC.

Phone: (202) 719-6560

Address: 2000 14th Street, NW, Suite 30 North, Washington, DC.

STUDENT CONDUCT



GOOD NEIGHBOR POLICY

In accordance with Washington, DC regulations and the University's "Good Neighbor Policy," all members of the University community are required to park on campus or use public transportation when visiting AU. Members of the AU community are not allowed to park in the surrounding neighborhood. For more information and full text of the "Good Neighbor Policy," visit <https://bit.ly/2wr7llL>

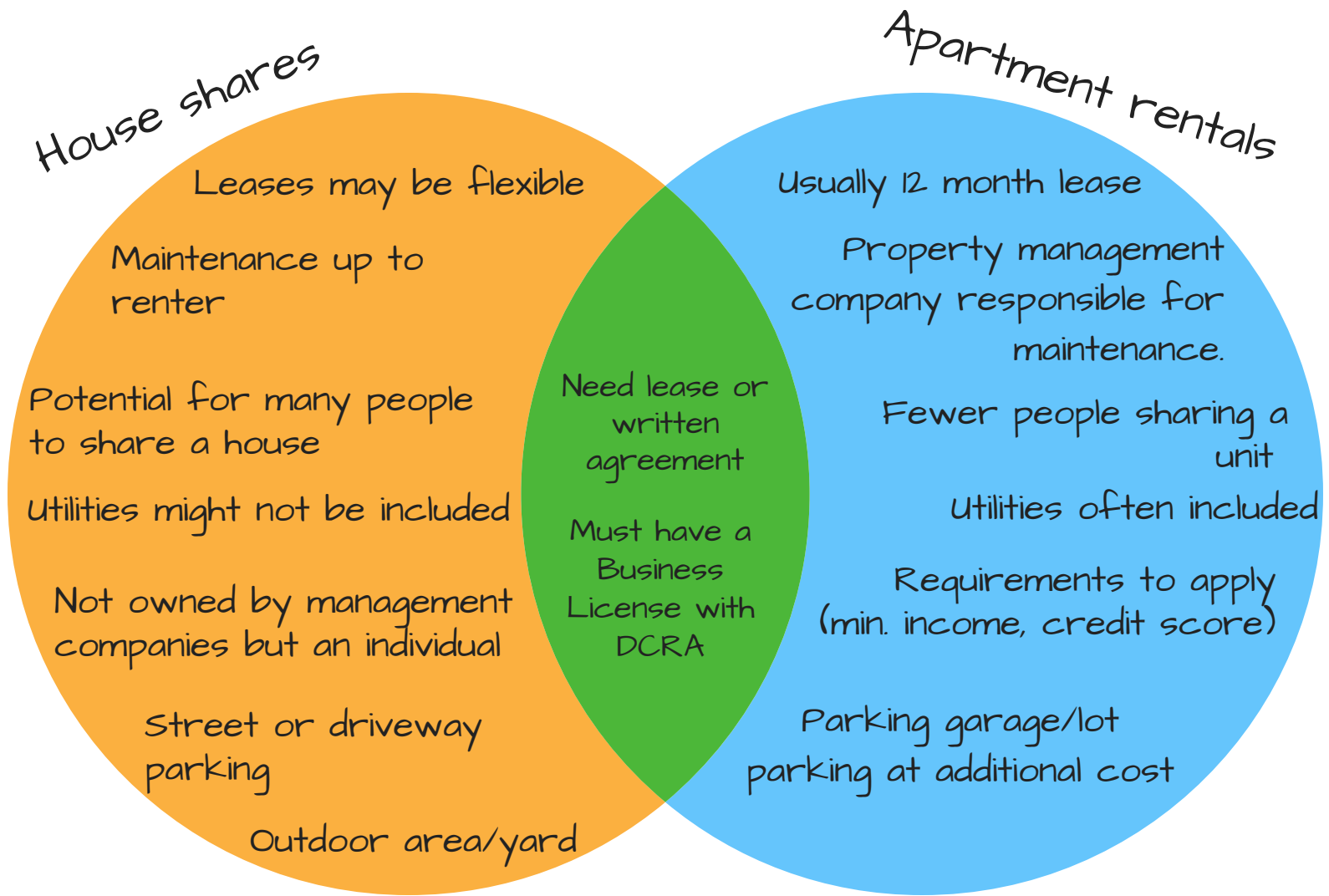
STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT

The Student Code of Conduct applies to all AU students, including those who live off-campus. The code states that AU "may take disciplinary action for off-campus infractions of the Code when a student's behavior threatens or endangers the safety and well-being of the campus community" or violates the law.

For more information, visit Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution services at american.edu/ocl/sccrs/

TYPES OF HOUSING

Knowing what types of off-campus housing are available will allow you to make an informed decision.



Group home: a house shared by a number of unrelated people. You will "take the place" of someone who has recently moved out. Kitchen, bathroom, and other common areas shared.

Private rooms: Your roommates may either own or rent the property. Common areas, kitchens, and possibly bathrooms are shared with house-mates.

Basement Apartments/English Basements: A small apartment in the basement of a house. Will likely include a private bathroom and kitchen.

APARTMENT SEARCH: TIPS FOR TOURS

Before the tour



First impressions count! Dress professionally and be polite.



Arrive a few minutes early. This allows you to sit in the lobby and observe. Can you see yourself living here?

During the tour



Test your cell phone service while touring the building. Make sure it's not a dead zone!



Take notes! You'll be taking in a lot of information, so it helps to write it down.



Take photos! This makes it easier to compare apartments later.



Look closely at the apartment. Do you see any potential problems?

After the tour



Review your notes and photos. What did you like? What didn't you like?



Email the landlord, leasing agent, or property manager with follow up questions.





Apartment Tour Worksheet

Here are some important questions to ask the leasing agent during your tour! Take this worksheet along with you on your tour or fill it out afterwards to compare apartments you have visited.



Apartment name: _____ Leasing Agent: _____

Residency

When is rent due? _____

Are utilities included in the rent? Which utilities? _____

Does this apartment offer any community events? _____

How do I get my packages and mail? Is there a package delivery room? _____

What are the rules regarding trash disposal? Recycling? _____

How do residents enter the building? How do guests enter the building? _____

Is there a security guard on duty or someone at the front desk? _____

If I want to add a roommate after signing the lease, what is the process? _____

Does management ever enter a residence without giving notice? If so, under what conditions? _____

What are the penalties for breaking a lease? _____

Is subletting allowed? _____

Maintenance

What do I do if something breaks? How do I file a maintenance request? _____

What is the turn-around time on maintenance requests? _____

Does each unit have its own heating/AC? Can I control my heat/AC? _____

Can I open/close the windows? _____

Have you had pest issues recently? Will I need to be wary of pests? _____

Basic Amenities

Is there parking available to residents? Yes/No How much is parking? _____



Is guest parking available? Yes/No How much is guest parking? _____

What facilities does this apartment have on site? (Gym, Pool, Business Center, Printing Facilities) _____

Is there laundry on-site? Where? _____

Are storage units available? _____

Neighborhood

Where is the nearest public transportation source? _____

Where is the nearest grocery store? _____ Drugstore? _____

Convenience store? _____ Good restaurants? _____

How safe is the neighborhood? (Recent crimes, recurring safety issues, etc.) _____

Other things to consider doing:

- ☐ Check to make sure there are enough electrical outlets in each room.
- ☐ Check the water pressure, cabinets, light switches, etc.
- ☐ Ask to see a copy of the lease.
- ☐ Ask about any move-in fees and security deposits.
- ☐ Pay attention to the condition of carpets, check for mold or fungus in the bathrooms, and be on the lookout for water stains. If something does not look right, ask!

Notes:

THE LEASE

A lease is a legally binding document. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that you **read** and **understand** your lease before signing!

Your lease should include...

- Names and addresses of landlord and tenants
- Rent information- how much, when rent is due, etc.
- Security deposit information - how much, conditions for return, date of return, etc.)
- Maintenance and repair responsibilities
- Details regarding subletting
- Conditions of the landlord entering your property

- Inspection dates, who inspects the property, etc.
- Conditions for terminating the lease
- Restrictions on noise, smoking, storage, parking, pets, etc.

Before signing your lease...

- Make sure you understand your agreement.
- Make sure your name, contact information, etc. is spelled correctly!
- Research any terms or conditions you do not understand or contact the Office of the Tenant Advocate.

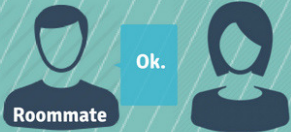


View of the Capitol Building. Photo by Ama Ansah

Subletting Your Property

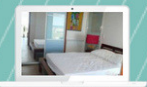
STEP 1: PERMISSION

Check your lease: does it allow you to sublet? Talk with your landlord before listing.



If you have a roommate, talk to them about your intentions to sublet. Involve them in the process.

Furnished 1br for summer sublet...



Advertise your apartment. Tell your friends, use social media, and list on our AU Off Campus Posting Site!

STEP 2: LISTING

STEP 3: INTERVIEW



Once people respond to your listing you (and your roommate) should set up meetings with the potential subletter. Decide who you think would be a good fit and offer them the sublease. Let those who did not get the sublease know that you won't be making an offer.

STEP 4: CONTRACT



What are the dates of this sublet? Will rent be paid to you or directly to the landlord? What condition do you expect the room to be in when you return? Set out your expectations in a written agreement.

STEP 5: LEAVE

Stay in contact with your roommate (if you have one) as well as your subletter to make sure that everything is going smoothly.

HAGS! :D



See ya!

SUBLETTING

Going away for the summer? Taking a semester off? Traveling abroad? There are many reasons why a student might be interested in subletting their rental or apartment.

This guide may help you through the subletting process.

Note: Not all properties allow subletting. Check your lease before listing!

AIRBNB

An alternative to traditional subletting is Airbnb.com, a popular site for travelers looking for short term accommodations.

Read through your lease and speak with your property manager or landlord to make sure that you are allowed to post your space on Airbnb.com.

Washington, D.C. Airbnbs **must follow the same rules and regulations as other rentals.** The D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) requires all rentals and Airbnbs to obtain a Basic Business License (BBL) to legally operate.

ROOMMATES



If you are planning on living with a roommate (or two), take the time to discuss each of the following topics that are common causes for roommate disputes. Discuss what each person wants and come to an agreement that will be acceptable to all of you, and discuss how you will come to solutions when new situations arise.

on the issue of

SHARING PROPERTY

When is noise permissible? Hair dryers, music, talking, etc? Define what you mean by "noise."

on the issue of

STUDYING

Music or no music? Lights? Can I have study groups over? Will anything change with exams?

on the issue of

GUESTS

How long can guests be over? How far in advance do I need to tell my roommate?

on the issue of

CLEANLINESS

Is there a difference between being "neat" and being "clean"? Define what you mean by clean?

on the issue of

SHARING PROPERTY

What can be shared? Under what circumstances? Do any differences exist between sharing clothes, food, computers, electronics, etc.?

ROOMMATES



on the issue of

SOCIALIZING

Can I have friends over to hang out? What is allowed? Video games, eating, etc?

on the issue of

RENT

How will we divide rent? Will rent be paid by check, online, etc?

on the issue of

OTHER

on the issue of

OTHER

on the issue of

OTHER

on the issue of

OTHER

MOVING IN

You've found a place to live, signed the lease, and know your tenant rights--now it is time to move in. Before you do, here are a few things to remember.

Set a move in date:

When does your lease begin? You cannot move your belongings into your new residence until your lease begins.



Communicate with your landlord:

Once you have a move in date in mind, contact your landlord or property manager to let them know your intentions. If you live in an apartment, you may need to reserve a freight elevator.



Get your keys:

How will you get the keys to your property? Make sure that you have access to your keys on move in day. Talk to your landlord or property manager and make a plan.



Communicate with your roommate(s):

Make sure everyone you are living with knows when you are moving in.



Arrange parking:

When you move in, will you be bringing your belongings in a car, moving van, or some other vehicle? Make sure you have somewhere to park as you load and unload your vehicle to avoid an unnecessary ticket.

MOVING IN

Find Furniture:

Furnished apartments in Washington, D.C. are rare. In general, you will have to furnish your apartment upon move-in. There are many furniture stores in the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia area, most of which deliver.

Remember these move in essentials:

- Tape
- Scissors/box cutter
- Trash bags
- Cleaning supplies
- Hammer and screw driver
- Measuring tape



Get permission for pets:

Can you have a pet? Check your lease and speak with your property manager. Some properties only allow certain animals.



Introduce yourself to neighbors:

Once you have moved in, it is polite to introduce yourself to your neighbors.



Update your address:

Don't lose your mail. Update your address with magazines, newspapers, and other subscription services. Change your default address on online shopping and delivery sites.



MORE RESOURCES

Tenant Rights and Laws

**Office of the
Tenant Advocate**
ota.dc.gov
2000 14th Street,
NW, Suite 300 North,
Washington, DC
20009
(202) 719-6560

**Virginia
Department of
Housing and
Community
Development**
dhcd.virginia.gov
(804) 371-7000

**Maryland Attorney
General's Office,
Consumer Protection
Division**
marylandattorneygeneral.
gov/Pages/CPD/landlords
(804) 371-7000

AU Resources

**American University
Housing & Residence
Life**
202-885-3370
housing@american.edu
Anderson Hall
Room 130

**American University
Off-Campus Housing**
202-885-2645
offcampushousing
@american.edu
Anderson Hall
Room 130

**One Card & Dining
Programs**
202-885-3375
idcards@american.edu
MGC 330N

AU Public Safety
EMERGENCY:
(202)-885-3636
NON-EMERGENCY:
(202)-885-2527

Dean of Students
202-885-3300
Butler Pavilion,
Room 408

**Office of Advocacy
Services for
Interpersonal and
Sexual Violence
(OASIS)**
(202) 885-7070
oasis@american.edu
McCabe Hall, Room
123