

# **Securing Housing Off-Campus**

## **Advice for International Students**

Northwestern | OFF-CAMPUS LIFE

# The Off-Campus Life Office

**We serve as the first point of contact for students moving and living off-campus.**



When to Start Searching & Where to Live

# **OVERVIEW OF HOUSING**

# When to Start Searching

- As soon as you need a place, start looking!
- Most graduate students start looking for housing in April through July
- Most leases are signed in July through August
- After submitting an application, ask the landlord when you can expect to receive a decision

# Where to Live

Graduate students taking classes in Chicago live in the Loop, but also further north (Edgewater, Lakeview, Rogers Park neighborhoods) and even into Evanston

- Learn more about Chicago neighborhoods with this [interactive map](#)

Popular Evanston neighborhoods for Northwestern students are west and south of campus

- Students often live within a few blocks of the CTA or Metra train lines

# On-Campus Housing

There are no University owned on-campus rental properties on the Chicago campus

[On-campus graduate student housing options](#) in Evanston fill up very quickly and is only available for full-time enrolled graduate students & post-doctoral candidates.

For more information regarding the application process, you can contact (847) 467-4663 or [housing@northwestern.edu](mailto:housing@northwestern.edu).

# Location & Transportation

- It is important to think about location before committing to a lease
  - Things to consider: distance to classes, nearby public transportation, proximity to grocery stores/laundromat, & neighborhood safety
- Transportation Options
  - Bicycles, Walking, [University Shuttles](#), [CTA trains and buses](#), [Metra trains](#), & Cars (may require [on-campus parking pass](#))

# Think About Your Budget

- Consider the following expenses:
  - Rent and deposit amount
  - Monthly utilities
  - Furnishing your apartment
  - Food expenses
  - Do you have pets? Pet fees/deposits
  - **Renters insurance**
- Utilize our [monthly budget spreadsheet!](#)
- Financial Aid:
  - Talk with your financial aid advisor!





# Amenities and Utilities

- **Amenities & Utilities** will vary with each lease contract, depending on the landlord/apartment building.
- **Amenities** that may be included: in-unit or in-building laundry, kitchen appliances, parking, Internet, cable TV, etc.
- **Utilities** that may be included: water, electricity, heat, garbage pick-up, gas

Authentic Information & Reliable Housing Options

# **FINDING HOUSING & ROOMMATES**

# Places4Students

- Northwestern University partners with [Places4Students.com](https://places4students.com). It's free to you!
  - Rental Property listings
  - Roommate Finder
  - Student Sublets
- If you need a shorter term, check the “Sublet” and “Short-Term Rental” tabs

# Finding Reliable Housing

## (Even If You Aren't Currently in the Area)

- Before visiting, contact landlords by phone/email with any questions about properties you're considering.
- Recommendation: view housing options in-person!
  - Plan ahead to make appointments to visit potential properties as soon as you arrive.
  - If this is not possible, arrange a video call tour of the property (e.g., Zoom).

Lease Options, Amenities & Utilities, & Fees

# **HOUSING & LEASE DETAILS**

**\*\*READ YOUR LEASE!\*\***

# Understanding Your Lease

What is the *single most important thing* you can do before signing your lease?



Read It

# Your Lease: How to Read It

- Leases can be challenging even for native English readers!
- Make it easier:
  - Review the [Chicago](#) or [Evanston](#) landlord-tenant ordinance summaries so you know your rights, and what to watch for.
  - Compare your lease to a model lease (like [this one](#) for Evanston).

# Your Lease: Key Questions

- There are lots of questions to consider!
- You can use OCL's lease review document; just [email us to get a copy](#).
- Some sample questions:
  - What's the term?
  - Is it a joint or individual lease?
  - How can you leave the lease early? Are there penalties to do so?
  - How and when do you pay rent?
  - How do you request repairs, or pest control?
  - Whether and how can you sublet?
  - What rules govern my use of the property?



# Application & Lease Fees

- Many landlords require tenants to pay application and move-in fees (or security deposit), in addition to the first month's rent, before signing the lease agreement.
- If you have to pay non-refundable fees, those are typically charged in place of a refundable security deposit.
- **A security deposit can be no larger than one and a half times your rent payment**

Social Security Number, Credit, Co-Signers, & Conflicts

## **ADDITIONAL LEASE ISSUES**

# Social Security Number (SSN) for International Students

- Your application may be turned down without an SSN or ITIN
- You will be able to obtain an SSN eventually if you have an on-campus job.
- Some landlords will accept a valid passport, Form I-20, or Form DS-2019 as proof of being an international student studying at Northwestern

# Credit History Review

- Landlords may ask for a Social Security number in order to conduct a credit check as part of the application.
- Poor credit history?
  - Find someone (often a family member) willing to co-sign your lease, or be a guarantor on it.
- What if you don't have an SSN?
  - If you have an on-campus internship/assistantship, obtain a letter from your academic department with the terms of your position and its pay
  - Obtain a letter of sponsorship or other proof of income (e.g., bank statements) to demonstrate your ability to pay.
  - Provide contact information (email) from previous landlords

# When Things Go Wrong

- Apartment living doesn't always go *exactly* perfect.
- Have an issue with your neighborhood/neighbors?
  - Try 3-1-1 Services to find local options and resources
  - Evanston: <https://www.cityofevanston.org/how-to/311>
  - Chicago: [https://311.chicago.gov/s/?language=en\\_US](https://311.chicago.gov/s/?language=en_US)
- Have a landlord conflict?
  - [Metropolitan Tenants Organization](#)
  - [Law Center for Better Housing](#)
- Have a roommate conflict?
  - [University Ombudsperson](#)

# Connect With OCL

- Visit us in the lower level of Scott Hall!
- Visit [our website!](#)
- Contact us to schedule a meeting!
  - Email: [offcampuslife@northwestern.edu](mailto:offcampuslife@northwestern.edu)
  - Phone: 847-491-8430
- Use our LinkTree to connect to our socials!



# Questions?

