Off-Campus Life & International Office
Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about Off-Campus Life

- Where can I find information about applying for a driver's license, credit/debit cards, and health insurance?
  - General information about driver's license and state ID options
  - Visit local banks to apply for credit and debit cards (learn more in this handbook)
  - Health insurance at Northwestern
  - Optional student dental insurance at Northwestern

- What are some recreational or entertainment activities available in Evanston?
  - Century 12 movie theater
  - Beaches & Parks
  - Biking Paths
  - Restaurant and shopping discounts with your WildCARD
  - Listing of all concerts, theatre, art exhibits, and film screenings on campus

- Where can we find information about documentation that international students need to turn in?
  - Student orientation and check-in requirements after U.S. arrival

- How can we access various parts of Chicago from Northwestern? How does the CTA work?
  - Learn more about Northwestern Shuttles via the YouTube Video HERE
  - Northwestern Shuttle routes and schedules
  - CTA train and bus routes; Metra train routes (commuter rail system)
  - CTA U-Pass for all full-time students in The Graduate School (discounted fare card for unlimited rides)

- Does Off-Campus Life or International Office provide services for buying homes?
  - No, we offer resources and advice about leasing off-campus apartments and houses. However, we do not provide services for purchasing homes.

- What amenities and utilities are typically included in a rent?
  - Amenities and utilities will vary with each lease contract, depending on the landlord/apartment building. It is important to ask the landlord, before you sign your lease, about the amenities and utilities that are included
  - Amenities that may be included: in-unit or in-building washing machine and dryer for laundry; microwave; refrigerator; stove; dishwasher; hardwood/carpeted floors; pool; gym; pets allowed; outdoor area; air-conditioning; storage space; bike storage; parking; Internet; cable TV
  - Utilities that may be included: water, electricity, heat, cooking gas, garbage pickup (ask your landlord for an estimate of monthly utility expenses if they are not included in the rent)

- What are some tips for staying safe off-campus?
  - Download the NUhelp app to view the Map and Safety features
  - Northwestern Police crime prevention resources

- What is the best time for international applicants to search for housing?
  - You should search for housing as soon as you know that you’ll need a place
  - Most graduate students start looking for housing in April through July
  - Most graduate students sign leases in July, August, and September
Where can I find authentic information about renting houses and roommates?
- Northwestern University has partnered with Places4Students.com, a website that provides off-campus housing solutions for students, faculty, staff, and other community members. This service is FREE for students to use for finding a place to live off-campus
- Places4Students.com also has a 'roommate finder' feature; you can 1) look for other students who have a place but need a roommate, 2) indicate that you would like a roommate to occupy an available room in your place, or 3) find other students who want a roommate but are still in the process of searching for a place
- If you are looking for housing options near the downtown Chicago campus, you may want to consider using free apartment-finding services, such as Student Space, Chicago Apartment Finders, or The Apartment People

How do I find reliable housing options if I am not currently in the U.S.?
- It is always recommended to view housing options in-person, so plan ahead and make appointments to visit potential properties as soon as you arrive in the U.S.
- If this is not possible, you could arrange for a tour of the property via video call (e.g., Skype)
- Contact landlords by phone/e-mail with any questions about properties you're considering (sometimes pictures are not objective and do not provide the necessary detail)
- Always make sure to read the lease before committing to a property (more tips here)

How short of a time period can the lease last? Can I sign for a quarter?
- Leases typically run 12 months or an academic year. You may be able to find a more short-term option, such as a quarter-long sublet or a month-to-month lease. Be sure to check the “Sublet” and “Short-Term Rental” tabs on Places4Students.com

How should I deal with my lack of credit history in the USA?
- You can try to show other proof of income (e.g., bank statements) to demonstrate your ability to pay rent on time
- If you have an on-campus internship/assistantship, try to get a letter from your academic dept. that lays out the terms of your job and indicates how much you will be paid

Some agents required an application fee, move-in fee, and 1 month’s rent before lease signing. Is that normal?
- Yes, many landlords will require tenants to pay application and move-in fees, 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

Would you recommend off-campus housing or on-campus housing for incoming students?
- One of the benefits of living off-campus is having more control over your living space. That being said, some may prefer on-campus graduate housing because of the services included in your contract. You may be able to find off-campus housing options that are cheaper than the on-campus apartments (on-campus rates are available here). Graduate students have reported that their average monthly rent expense for off-campus housing ranges anywhere from $600 to over $1,200

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