

Moving Off-Campus

If you are looking for an apartment off-campus, particularly if you are not experienced in real estate matters, you should proceed with caution.

Apartments for Rent

Never sign a lease without physically inspecting the apartment. Ask the landlord for a copy of the certificate of occupancy, demonstrating that the apartment has been inspected by a certified inspector in the last 3 years.

What should I look for when I shop for an apartment?

Call the landlord and set up a time to see the property. If a landlord is unwilling or unresponsive to your request to see the property, it is likely an unsuitable property. If you are renting from out of town, ask the landlord to send you photographs and schedule an appointment to see it when you arrive in Buffalo. View the apartment at different times of the day and evening to make sure it is well lit and safe.

Walk through the property with the landlord and visually inspect it carefully. You should document and videotape or photograph damage in the apartment. Make a "property/damage report checklist" outlining all repairs, no matter how small. Tenants and landlord should sign and date the property/damage report checklist and attach it to the lease. Download the checklist below and take it with you when you look at apartments.

- [Renter's Checklist: PDF](#)
Crime-Before you sign a lease, get a sense of the level of crime in the vicinity by visiting www.crimereports.com

General

- Don't use an attic for a sleeping space unless there are two clear exits.
- Don't use a basement as sleeping space unless there are two clear exits.
- Ensure there are working smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors in the apartment.
- Look to see if there is/are:
 - Holes or damage to walls, windows, doors
 - Worn carpet
 - Signs of rodents or insects
 - Sufficient closet and storage space
 - Lockable storage
 - Sturdy Handrails on all stairs
 - Basement, attic, and hallways are free of debris
 - Smoke detectors on every floor and in every bedroom
 - Carbon monoxide detector in a hallway or sleeping area

Electrical

Make certain:

- Lights and outlets all work
- Exterior lights at doors and entrances all work properly
- Circuit breakers are used in the basement rather than old fashioned fuses

Water/Bath/Kitchen

Check for:

- Leaky faucets or water stains on ceilings/floors
- Bathroom tiles or walls that feel “spongy”
- Adequate water pressure. Flush toilets and run hot water
- Cabinets and drawers open properly
- The presence of mold

Heating/Cooling

Is there:

- Adequate insulation and a storm window for every window?
- A heat duct, vent or radiator in every room?

Exterior

Are the:

- Sidewalks, driveway, front/back yards in good condition and free of debris?
- Handrails on all stairs sturdy?
- Porch or balcony railings secure?

Doors/Windows

Make sure:

- Exterior doors have sturdy deadbolt locks and a peephole or window
- Locks will be changed before you move in
- Windows in good condition with working locks
- Door locks are the “thumb and latch” style, meaning you do not need to use a key to lock and unlock the door from the inside.
- All windows have storm windows, screens, and blinds, shades or drapes

What should I ask the Landlord?

Ask as many questions as necessary. If a landlord refuses to answer or is evasive, seek another property. If a landlord agrees to make improvements to any apartment/property, get this in writing with a timeline for completion. Be specific.

Quick Landlord Questions

- Are appliances included and in good repair (stove, refrigerator, microwave, dishwasher)?
- Is the unit furnished?
- Is there laundry on-site? Is it coin-operated?
- Are utilities covered in rent? Which utility companies do you use?
- Where are the circuit breakers or fuse box?
- What are average monthly costs for utilities? Ask for copies of the bills from the previous tenants or contact the utility companies yourself.
- Are heating and cooling systems and hot water heater in good condition?
- If there is not off-street parking, is there on-street parking and does it alternate?
- Is there a street parking ban during winter months?
- Will you supply garbage containers and recycling bins? Where are they stored?
- When is garbage collected?
- Are pets allowed? Is there an additional security deposit required?
- Do you live nearby? Can you quickly respond to emergencies?

Location Matters

Depending on your circumstances, the location of your off-campus housing may be an important consideration for you. This is particularly so if you do not have a car. Most on-line map search engines will give you the distance to campus. Start with zip code 14222 for the closest apartments to campus.

Rent is just one cost

The cost of utilities is often overlooked by students who are apartment searching. Before you sign a lease, contact utility companies for past utility costs and setup fees and deposits. If utilities are included in your rent, find out how much control you'll have over their use. You will want to know which appliances come with the apartment, such as refrigerator, stove, oven, dishwasher, clothes washer and dryer, and air conditioner.

The most expensive utility cost will be to heat your apartment. Ask the landlord if the unit is heated by natural gas, electricity, or home oil, and what company delivers the service. In Buffalo, National Fuel (<http://www.nationalfuelgas.com/>) is the gas company, and National Grid (<http://www.nationalgridus.com/>) delivers electricity. You will also need to find out if you, or your landlord, will pay for water and sewer service and garbage pick-up. In addition to these, you might want cable or satellite television, and internet service. All of these should be factored into the cost of your off-campus

apartment before you add furniture, cleaning supplies, small appliances, pots and pans, light bulbs, shower curtains, plunger, etc. Resist the urge to pick up couches, sofas, and mattresses that other students have put out for the trash, as these can be bug infested.

My Rights as a Tenant

Sample Lease – A lease is a binding legal document, and they are NOT all the same. Get good answers to any questions you have about the lease. If repairs are needed, have them written into the contract, with a timeline for completion. Never let anyone pressure you into signing with just a once-over. The following is an example of a standard lease: <http://www.ilrg.com/forms/lease-res/us/ny>

Money and Budget - Are you wondering, “What money do I need in order to move in.” Often landlords require the first month’s rent, a security deposit equal to one month’s rent, and the last month’s rent. Plus, there can be installation fees for cable/satellite service, telephone service, internet, heat and electricity.

Roommate Contract

Tips for Choosing a Roommate

Personal problems with roommates can cause unneeded stress in your life. Remember that friends are not always the best roommates. Friends may take advantage of the situation by borrowing your clothes without asking, or they may not clean up their mess if they think you will clean it for them. If the roommate relationship becomes strained, you may lose a friend as well as a roommate.

Here are some tips for ensuring that you and your roommate(s) have a quality living experience together:

- Discuss study habits and the expected study environment. Will you have some sort of “quiet hours”?
- Discuss utilities. What type of internet plan do you want, or will you all have separate cell phones? Will you have cable and if so, what cable package?
- Discuss visiting hours/procedures, if there will be any. Discuss party procedures, if there will be any.
- Discuss the lease term. Most leases are 12-month contracts, but many students tend to leave for the summer. Make sure all roommates are clear on expectations. Will a roommate leaving be responsible for paying the rent? Will they try to find a replacement roommate (and if so, is this acceptable to the roommates remaining)?
- Make a cleaning agreement or contract, including sweeping, dusting, cleaning up messes, doing dishes, cleaning the bathroom, etc.
- Agree on a food policy. Do you share the cost of food or do you shop individually and have a “hands off” policy?

- Establish drinking and smoking rules.
- Be careful that you and your roommates have the same idea of your relationship. Are you looking for a best friend, someone to do things with on weekends, or just a roommate?
- Always communicate concerns as soon as they happen.
- If you are concerned about your roommate's ability to pay rent regularly, ask to see a credit report. Offer a copy of your own in return. A free copy of your credit report can be obtained at <http://www.annualcreditreport.com/cra/index.jsp>
- We strongly suggest you do not pay your rent in cash. We suggest the same when it comes to paying for your share of utilities. Even if your roommates are close friends of yours, we highly suggest that you pay your rent with a check, money order or credit card. Think twice before handing over cash to your roommate(s). If there is a question or dispute later, it is much more difficult to prove that you gave your roommate cash versus a check/money order.