

### **How do I begin my housing search?**

We recommend beginning your search by visiting our Off-Campus Student Affairs website (<http://offcampus.students.gwu.edu/>). You will be able to browse links to rental search engines and local leasing agencies; read about different neighborhoods in DC, Maryland, and Virginia; and learn about tenant rights and responsibilities. Your second stop should be <http://gwoffcampus.com>. This website features rental listings, a GW roommate profiles section, message boards, and other resources.

### **How can I connect with other GW graduate students looking for housing?**

The GW Off-Campus Housing search engine (<http://gwoffcampus.com>) provides a “Roommates” feature where GW students can create personal profiles and search the profiles of other students looking for housing or a roommate. The website also offers a “Message Boards” section where you can connect with other students looking for housing or buying or selling furniture.. You must create a free account in order to use this website and its features. The GW Hatchet also provides a classifieds page where you can browse listings for housing and roommates directed at the GW community: <http://gwhatchet.campusave.com/>.

### **What types of housing are available in Washington, DC and the surrounding areas?**

- **Apartment communities:** A building or group of buildings made up of individual apartments. Usually has a central leasing and management office. Some smaller apartment buildings may be managed by a single landlord or off-site management company. Amenities vary, but may include laundry facility, community room, exercise room/gym, business center, pool, etc.
- **Converted apartments in private homes:** Private apartment that is located inside of a single-family house (oftentimes on the basement level). Landlord is the home owner who may or may not live on-site. May have a private entrance. Amenities vary, but can include private bath, kitchen, washer/dryer.
- **Group Houses (Room in house occupied by several people):** Very common in DC. Each person may rent a bedroom with a private or shared bathroom. Common areas are shared between all residents (kitchen, living room, yard). Utility costs are often divided between all roommates.
- **Furnished Apartment:** Apartment that contains basic furniture and appliances so that the renter does not have to purchase those items. May include bed/mattress, dresser, couch, dining table and chairs, bookcase, etc.

### **What other costs besides rent should I be aware of and budget for?**

Common utility costs may include water, electricity, gas, cable, internet, and phone. You should ask the landlord or property manager which utilities are included in the cost of rent and which utilities/fees the tenant must pay for before signing a lease. The landlord/property manager should also be able to give you an estimate of the cost of each utility for a typical unit per month.

### **Are there special housing options for international graduate students?**

The Columbia Plaza Housing Program is an attractive housing option for Law, Medical, and graduate students at the George Washington University. The university serves as a referral agent for participants in the Columbia Plaza Housing Program, allowing students to secure competitively priced housing in a convenient location. GW students seeking off-campus housing through this program do not have to demonstrate the minimum income requirements that are necessary from non-GW students when applying to live in the building. The Columbia Plaza Housing Program is not available to undergraduate students. Students interested in leasing with Columbia Plaza should contact [gwhouse@gwu.edu](mailto:gwhouse@gwu.edu) no earlier than 30-35 days prior to their desired move-in date.

Other specialty housing options for international students in Washington, DC include:

- International Student House (Dupont Circle) (<http://ishdc.org>)
- HelloGWU ([www.hellogwu.com](http://www.hellogwu.com); Listings maintained by the GW Chinese Students and Scholars Association)
- Cassa Housing (<http://www.cassahousing.com/>; special packages for international students)

### **How much will it cost if I want to live close to campus in Foggy Bottom?**

Affordable options can be found throughout the city and along DC's public transportation system. Rents around the city and in the suburbs range from \$1,000 to \$2,900 per month for a one bedroom apartment. Foggy Bottom is one of DC's more expensive neighborhoods. The average price for a one-bedroom apartment is \$2,200. Rooms in group houses may be a more inexpensive option in Foggy Bottom. Residents within a group house may cycle out of the property. This means that the original signers of the lease may not live at the property anymore. You may or may not be asked to sign a lease. If you start living in a space without signing a lease, you will not have rights as a tenant and may be asked to move out without notice. Also be aware that factors such as the age and condition of the building may impact the price. If the advertised price of a unit is very low compared to others in the same area, be sure to inspect the unit carefully before signing a lease.

### **If I can't find a place to live near GW, how will I get to school?**

Washington, DC has an extensive public transportation system consisting of Metrorail trains and buses. It is generally very easy to get around the city. When looking for housing outside of Foggy Bottom, make sure to research the distances to the nearest Metro stations and bus lines. Many neighborhoods in Northern Virginia are still very convenient to GW and offer lower average rental prices, including Arlington (Rosslyn, Courthouse, Clarendon, Ballston, Crystal City, Pentagon City) and Alexandria (King Street).

### **How do I know if a neighborhood is safe?**

The safety of Washington, DC neighborhoods can vary. You may want to check out <http://crimemap.dc.gov> or [CrimeDC.com](http://CrimeDC.com) for additional information regarding a particular area.

### **What documents will I need to rent an apartment?**

Some documents and/or items that *may* be required of international students before signing a lease:

- Guarantor-Some apartments may require you to have someone living in the United States who will "guarantee" payment of rent if you fail to do so.
- Completed Application and Application Fee-Rental history and references are often required on applications. Application fees vary greatly, depending on the rental agreement.
- Copy of Passport
- Copy of I-20 or Student Visa
- Acceptance letter from George Washington University
- Financial statements
- Payment in full for the term of lease

### **When should I start looking for housing?**

Give yourself an adequate amount of time for your housing search. Start researching your options as soon as you know you will need off-campus housing. Finding housing can take anywhere from eight to twelve weeks, or more. You may not be able to find permanent housing before arriving in Washington, DC, and you should arrange a temporary place to stay while you search for a place to live.

### **What do I do if I can't find a place to live before I arrive in DC?**

If you are not able to secure permanent housing before arriving in DC, you may find it much easier to do so once you are in the city. There are several options for temporary housing, including hostels, hotels, and temporary rentals. Some resources for locating temporary housing:

- [Loftstel](#)
- [DC Hostel Search Engine](#)
- [Airbnb](#)

### **What is the difference between a hostel and a hotel?**

In most cases, hotels are the more luxurious of the two and, therefore, more expensive. At a hotel, a traveler can have his own room and bathroom as well as maid service and other amenities. Hostels are generally used

by younger travelers with less money to spare, and those visiting one will most likely be required to share a room as well as bath and shower rooms. Some will include a hot meal or beverage in the accommodation price and most will provide a kitchen area where guests can cook their own food.

Via <http://www.wisegeek.org/what-is-the-difference-between-a-hostel-and-a-hotel.htm>

### **Can GW Off-Campus Student Affairs recommend properties to rent or landlords to rent from?**

The Office of Off-Campus Student Affairs cannot recommend properties or landlords. Our office functions as a resource center by providing information and links to listings, housing advocacy organizations, and other sources. We cannot guarantee housing or the quality of housing and the University is also not liable for any misrepresentation between the landlord and the student. If a student has questions or concerns about a lease or a property, our office is available to answer questions and suggest resources.

### **When should I sign a lease?**

Once you submit a rental application and it is approved, you are not obligated to sign a lease. You should look at several properties so that you can compare costs, amenities, convenience, and get the best value for your budget. You should also ask to review a copy of the lease and take the time to read it thoroughly before you sign.

### **What should I know before signing a lease?**

Most leases generally contain the same essential information, but they also may contain different clauses or components. Tenant's lack of awareness of agreements in the lease can lead to problems. Make sure that if the lease contains something that you do not understand, you seek advice in interpreting it before signing. Pay careful attention to the length of the lease and the terms for extension and termination of the lease. You will want to make sure that you can stay in the property for the full length of time that you will be in the area for classes and final exams.

### **Should I ask the landlord for an official inspection of the apartment before I move in?**

Before you sign or pay anything it is a good idea to do a walkthrough. Take note of any problems (missing appliance, fixture, or furniture) or items that need repair, and have the landlord sign the document (some landlords will provide an inspection form, but you may have to create your own document). This alerts the landlord to problems that he/she must fix and ensures that you will not be held responsible for the damage or repair costs.

### **What may be done if the landlord fails to complete repairs on time?**

Try to work through issues concerning repairs with your landlord. After attempting to correct concerns yourself, you may report problems to the DC housing inspector for further review :  
<http://dcra.dc.gov/node/509352>

### **Can my landlord enter my apartment, or let repairmen in, when I'm not there?**

To repair the property a landlord may enter at any time if it is an emergency (flood or leaking water, malfunctioning smoke alarm). Otherwise the landlord should give reasonable notice. Reasonable notice is considered to be 24 hours.

### **What do I need to know about my security deposit, and when do I get it back?**

Most landlords require tenants to pay a security deposit before they move in. It should be no more than one month's rent. You must also sign a lease if you are giving a security deposit to a landlord; otherwise there is no confirmation or obligation of the deposit. Also, understand the terms and conditions relating to the deposit. When you move out the landlord has 45 days to return your deposit or to notify you in writing if they intend to apply the money towards damages. The landlord has 30 days from notification of payment of damages to return the rest of the deposit: <http://www.rentlaw.com/washingtondclandlord.htm>

### **Should I purchase renter's insurance?**

Renter's insurance provides a significant benefit when something goes wrong (theft, fire, flood) and your belongings are lost or damaged. Renter's insurance policies are often very affordable. For more information, visit: <http://www.realtor.com/advice/should-you-have-renters-insurance/>

**Whom do I call if I disagree with my landlord?**

You should always try to communicate with your landlord. In the event that you are unable to come to an agreement, keep copies of all correspondence for future reference. The DC Office of the Tenant Advocate (OTA) advises tenants on resolving disputes with landlords, identifies legal issues and the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords, and provides legal and technical assistance for further action such as filing tenant petitions. For more information, visit: <http://ota.dc.gov/>.

**Can I, as a tenant, be cited for violating housing codes?**

The DCRA states that tenants may be issued housing violation notices for unsanitary conditions. The law states that tenants have a responsibility to maintain and clean the property, and to use all the electrical, gas, plumbing, and heating equipment properly. Landlords have the right to ask for Housing Regulation Administration (HRA) inspections of a property if they think it is not being maintained properly.

**What can I be evicted for and what is the process?**

A landlord may not evict you without prior written notice unless the tenant has waived their right to written notice in the lease for nonpayment of rent. If a landlord wants to evict you for violating your tenancy agreement, it must be a violation of a specific lease provision and he or she must take action within six months of the violation. If your landlord serves you with a notice to “correct or vacate” or “cure or quit” document, indicating an intention to evict if you do not remedy the problem, you have 30 days to correct the violation.

You can also be evicted if the building you live in is scheduled for substantial renovations or alterations, or is to be demolished or no longer used as a housing property, in such cases you have several rights as a tenant, including the right to be notified in advance, and the right to relocation assistance.