

Housing Frequently Asked Questions

The following questions were answered by current OSU graduate students.

Questions About Searching for Housing

Is it okay to ask landlords many questions before signing a lease?

Yes, do not worry about bothering landlords, it is better to clarify everything beforehand than face problems later. Asking questions about space, furniture, utilities, and lease terms is expected.

Should I request a virtual tour before signing a lease?

Since photos and listed square footage can be misleading, virtual tours can give you a better understanding of actual room sizes and layouts.

What's the difference between living in a house vs. an apartment?

When you rent a house, there is more responsibility related to yards, snow, and basements. Houses may include washer/dryer or may only have hookups, so proper communication about it with landlords would be beneficial. In an apartment, your responsibility for the maintenance would be less but often have smaller living spaces.

What should I know about mold and older buildings?

Ohio has many older buildings, and mold is a serious issue, especially for people with health sensitivities. Ohio law gives limited protection regarding mold, and thus remedying the issue can be both a financial and emotional burden. If this is something that you are concerned about, we recommend looking for newer buildings and/or units that only have hard wood flooring to reduce the chance of mold issues.

What are the pros and cons of living off-campus vs. on-campus?

The pros of on-campus housing offer responsive maintenance, familiarity with university systems and high level of safety. However, on campus units are smaller, more expensive and less comfortable than off-campus options.

Are short-term leases possible?

Yes, but they are rare and apartments typically charge more for them. Short term options include renting room or subleasing, so clear communication with landlords is key if seeking for short term lease.

Questions About OSU Campus and Columbus

Can I live in Columbus without a car?

Yes, but with limitations. The options of walking, city buses, biking and scooters are available. They work if you are close to campus, and not having a car eliminates any parking concerns. However, traveling via bus will take longer, waiting at the bus stops during the winter can be challenging, and many areas of Columbus are not accessible via bus. Here are some tips to getting around Columbus without a car:

1. Plan extra time if you are using buses.

2. Winter weather requires proper shoes and warm clothing.
 - Also be aware that many sidewalks in Columbus are not plowed and you may be forced to walk on the street or in inches of snow.
3. Biking is affordable but weather dependent.
 - Also depending on where you are and where you are going there may be a lack of bike lanes available
4. Scooters and shared bikes are useful for short trips.

What is commuting to campus like?

If you don't have car, it is recommended you live within walking distance to campus as public transportation in Columbus is not great. If you do have a car, there is more flexibility. There is not a lot of traffic in Columbus, except for peak rush hour or during game day, so if you live within the circle created by the 270 highway, the commute should generally not be more than 20 minutes.

What is parking on campus like?

You will have to pay for parking on campus, and prices vary depending on what permit you get. You can look at costs of various permits [here](#). When choosing a permit, you will want to consider where your building is located, what parking lots and garages are near there, and which and how often CABS (Campus Area Bus Services) routes go there. Although, be warned the CABS routes have been known to change every 6 months or so. We do recommend you talk to others in your department about what permit makes the most sense for you. Hourly parking or day passes are also available for purchase, if you don't plan on driving to campus regularly.

What is parking in Columbus like?

In some of the busier areas (e.g. Short North, Downtown, Grandview, the University District), it is very hard to find free parking, and you will probably have to pay for parking, especially during weeknights and weekends.. However, finding free parking in the more suburban areas of Columbus (e.g. Upper Arlington, Hilliard, Dublin) is very easy.⁴

How safe is Columbus for students?

Safety varies by neighborhood and personal comfort level. It is important to stay alert, avoid walking alone late at night and not leaving valuables in car. Many people feel safe in areas where there are other people with foot traffic.

International Student Specific Questions

What are the biggest challenges for international students before arriving in the U.S.?

The biggest challenge for international students is lack of local knowledge. International students are unaware of neighborhoods, which areas are safe, which apartments are budget friendly. They are also unsure about how close they should live to campus. Understanding the U.S. lease systems can be difficult as most leases are 12 months long which is very different from many other countries.

What resources can international students use to find housing?

International students can reach out to their academic advisor or department as they link students with current PhD or graduate students who already live in the area. The university off campus housing website is also helpful as it lists verified housing options. Similarly, communicating with current graduate students can also provide insights about neighborhoods and housing options. Students may need to contact several landlords rather than just one. Landlords respond with follow up questions or requests for additional documents. More than one message is required for reaching a final agreement and securing housing.

What should I expect about U.S. leases?

Most of the leases are for 12 months and breaking a lease early can be expensive. It is important to read the terms and conditions of lease before signing. Similarly, contact Student Legal Services before signing, although please note you won't have access to Student Legal Services until you begin your term as a student.

What final advice would you give international students?

International students should talk to current students as early as possible and ask many questions related to housing options and daily life. It is beneficial to use Student legal Services for guidance. Similarly, in choosing house students should think about location, safety, transportation as well as health concerns like mold, ventilation and carpeting. You can always move to other areas once you become familiar with the area.