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pinterest.com/jmuocl
A Note from OCL

JMU Family,

The college experience is full of big choices. Your Duke has already made a significant one in choosing to come to JMU. As you and your college student navigate this first year, one of the next major choices to be made revolves around future living arrangements. Although all freshmen are required to live on campus, students can choose to live off campus, in the Harrisonburg community, their sophomore year. The pressure to make this decision is going to start much earlier than you might expect, leading to students making critical choices before they’re fully prepared.

Part of the goal of Off-Campus Life (OCL) is to assist our students in gaining the necessary knowledge and skills they need to make informed decisions within the JMU off-campus community. One of the most important things a student can do is to take their time before they sign a lease with an off-campus housing provider. The leasing process for student off-campus housing starts early in Harrisonburg, and information gathering, research, and careful thought should happen before any commitments are made.

There are so many things to consider in this decision making process. Is living off campus actually the best choice for your Duke? How well do they know their potential future roommates? Are they ready to cook for themselves? Do they understand the legally binding nature of a lease? Have they fully considered their budget and how best to allocate their resources if they move off campus?

We have developed this guidebook to help you and your Duke along the journey. We know you’ll have more questions than what’s covered here, so don’t hesitate to reach out to us for assistance.

Off-Campus Life would like to welcome you to our community! We are here to help make Harrisonburg, home.

The OCL Team
Off-Campus Life Office

Expectations, roommates, living conditions, budgets, and landlords can make or break a student’s college career. Living off campus presents new challenges and opportunities for growth and change. Students will find that they have more choices and decisions to make on a daily basis, such as paying bills, getting to class on time, and remaining involved in JMU activities. It is the mission of Off-Campus Life (OCL) to assist students in gaining the necessary knowledge and skills to make informed decisions within the JMU off-campus community.

Local property managers and landlords have the opportunity to advertise their available housing on our Off-Campus Partners website, offcampushousing.jmu.edu, which students can access to search for housing options and for roommates. Since fair housing laws do not recognize students as a protected class, housing providers can screen for student status and not rent to them. In an effort to streamline the search process in the Harrisonburg community, Off-Campus Life has an agreement with Off-Campus Partners to run a listing website for local housing providers.

Off-Campus Housing: Information You Should Know

Because JMU students represent a large percentage of the population living in rental housing in the Harrisonburg community, many individuals have the false impression that these housing locations are somehow affiliated with, endorsed by, or operated by James Madison University. It can also be misleading because some area properties market themselves using “at JMU” in their name or describing themselves as a preferred location for JMU students. These housing providers are not under JMU oversight for their policies, practices, or conditions.

One way in which many of the housing providers are affiliated with James Madison University is through a subscription/contract agreement with Off-Campus Life and Off-Campus Partners, LLC. Properties in the area who want to advertise available housing to JMU students sign a contract agreement with the University, Off-Campus Life, and Off-Campus Partners, LLC to advertise housing through the oversight of our office.

Off-Campus Life assists with:

- Finding Housing
- Transportation Information
- Budgeting
- Advertising Subleases
- Understanding Leases
- Roommate Agreements
- Roommate Conflict Options
- On- and Off-Campus Educational Programs
- Utility Deposit Assistance Program
- Landlord and Tenant Conflict Options
- Housing and Food Insecurity Assistance

Our office hours are Monday–Friday 9am–5pm when JMU is in session.

To Live On, Or Not To Live On?

Off-Campus Life suggests parents and students research housing by:

- talking with students and parents who have lived in or worked with the property in the past
- researching online reviews about the landlord or property using apartmentratings.com and Google Reviews
- reviewing Off-Campus Life’s complaint log in the office.

All JMU freshmen, with the exception of local commuter students, married students, or students over the age of 21, must live on campus. The decision to move off campus after freshman year can be difficult to make.

Here are some things to consider when helping your student decide:

- Has your student already signed a second-year housing contract?
- Is your student content with the JMU environment and their program of studies?
- Has your student had difficulty managing academics during their freshman year?
- Has your student had difficulties following the code of student conduct at JMU?
- Does your student have necessary budgeting, cooking, shopping, cleaning, and time management skills to help with this transition?
- How has your student acclimated to living with a roommate and building community?
Living On Campus

The Office of Residence Life (ORL) and Off-Campus Life (OCL) encourage students to live on campus for at least two years. Research shows that students who do so are more likely to graduate, more satisfied with their college experience, and more involved on campus. Living on campus has benefits that off campus housing just can't rival, such as location, convenience, safety, amenities, and engagement!

**Live Safe**

**Know your neighbors**
ONLY full-time JMU undergraduates can live in JMU’s residence halls, which means you are guaranteed to be sharing space with other Dukes and ONLY other Dukes!

**Security**
All JMU residence halls are equipped with Card Access systems that restrict access to occupants only. Each hall has an RA staff that lives in the building and are available to assist with everything from routine questions to emergency situations.

**Safety**
All of JMU's residence halls meet all state mandated fire codes, including centralized alarm systems that communicate alarms directly to the fire department and the JMU police whenever the system is activated. All rooms are also equipped with hard-wired smoke detectors and heat sensors.

**Live Close**

**Convenience**
Everything you want to do at JMU is just a short walk or bus ride from your residence hall, including UREC, the Health Center, D-Hub/E-Hall, football and basketball games, the Student Success Center, Madison Union and, of course, your classes!

**Location**
Upperclass residence halls are located across campus, including in the Bluestone Area and on East Campus. Additionally, we offer over 500 beds in our newest facility, the Apartments on Grace. Located off of Main Street, these apartments are a combination of four-person and two-person units, with residents in double bedrooms. Each unit has a kitchen, as well as a bathroom for each bedroom in the apartment.

**Amenities**
Your semester room rent and fees includes wireless internet, cable TV, all utilities, access to study lounges, and a variety of recreational areas, including billiards rooms, sand volleyball, basketball courts, and barbecue areas.

**Live Supported**

**We’re here for you**
The Resident Advisers (RAs) and Hall Director (HD) are always available and are there to help you with everyday life. Living with our hall staff will give you a support system unlike any other!

**Academic support**
Be sure to check out our Academic Support Programs as well! It’s ORL’s mission to design and maintain a caring environment that encourages academic success, personal growth, and responsibility to one’s community.

**Live Engaged**

**Engagement**
Research shows that compared to college students who live off campus, students who live in the residence halls are more likely to graduate, more involved in extracurricular, social, and cultural events on campus, more positive about the social climate, and interact more frequently with faculty members and peers.

**Hall Programming**
With frequent hall programming and many opportunities to engage with fellow residents in the residence halls, you’ll always have the chance to build and be a part of a community!
House Hunters

Step 1:
Identifying Your Student’s Needs and Wants in Housing

Talk with your student to consider these housing factors:

• Lease Terms
• Needed/Wanted Amenities
• Location in Relation to Campus
• Bedrooms and Bathrooms
• Furnished or Unfurnished
• Pet Policy
• Price Range

Step 2:
Identifying Housing Options

After you and your JMU student have decided that off-campus living is the right choice, the first step in this process is finding housing.

What amount of monthly rent can you afford?

Here is a breakdown of average monthly rental rates of apartments/housing in Harrisonburg:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bedroom</th>
<th>Rent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 bedroom</td>
<td>$763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 bedroom</td>
<td>$472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 bedroom</td>
<td>$398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 bedroom</td>
<td>$415</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once you and your JMU student have decided that off-campus living is the right choice, the next step is to tour these locations and speak with leasing managers to discuss available housing. In-person contact allows you and your student to get a sense of what the property is like and to learn information about property policies.

Step 3:
Visiting Housing Options to Help You Decide

After you and your student have identified locations that seem ideal for off-campus housing, the next step is to tour these locations and speak with leasing managers to discuss available housing. In-person contact allows you and your student to get a sense of what the property is like and to learn information about property policies.

Here are some questions you may want to consider during the visit:

• What is the typical lease length?
• Are there short-term lease options for residents?
• What is the monthly rental price and what is included in the rent?
• What percentage of residents are JMU students?
• Is a security deposit and/or application fee required?
• What is the cost of the security deposit and application fee?
• Does the property provide individual or joint leasing?
• Do you offer roommate matching on-site?
• What process do you use for matching and assigning roommates?
• Are there policies on overnight guests, parties, or quiet hours?
• Is housing fully furnished and what furnishings are provided?
• What is the pet policy?
• Is subleasing allowed and what are the procedures and fees for this?
• What type of security is provided on-site for residents?
• Does the property assist with roommate conflict?
• What is the process for requesting repairs and maintenance?
• Is there a charge for parking or a permit required?
• Is visitor parking available?
• Is renter’s insurance needed or required?
• What are some specific amenities offered?
• Are there allowances to be released from a leasing agreement?

Off-Campus Life Housing Guide

Off-Campus Life publishes this housing guide yearly for students and parents. Some helpful things that this housing guide includes are:

• Property names, addresses, and contact information
• Bedroom and bathroom options offered
• Amenities provided at the apartment or house
• Map providing the location of housing related to JMU’s campus
• Information on leases, utilities, and safety

Off-Campus Partners, LLC Listing Website

Off-Campus Life also partners with an agency that provides a listing website for students and parents to use in searching for available housing. This website, offcampushousing.jmu.edu, allows students to search for housing options by rental price, amenities, location to campus, leasing terms, and much more.
Step 4:
Assessing Safety, Landlord Compatibility, and Current Resident Experience

Off-Campus Life is often asked by both parents and students about which apartments are the best, safest, etc. OCL is not able to promote or demote any specific properties, but we do recommend that parents and students talk with other students who have lived at these locations to help inform their decision making process.

Landlord Compatibility

When the landlord is not present, talk to current tenants to find out what their experience has been like.

Ask questions such as:
- Was the place ready for move-in at the start of the lease term?
- Does the landlord make timely repairs?
- Does the landlord provide 24-hours’ notice prior to entering the premises?
- Is the landlord both respectful and easy to work with?
- Would you rent from this landlord again?

OCL recommends the following security measures prior to leasing and upon move-in:
- Is it well-lit surrounding the building, particularly from parking areas to entrances?
- What is the condition and structure of front doors?
- Are there deadbolts? Are hinges on the outside non-removable?
- Does the door have a peephole? If not, can one be installed?
- Does the door securely fit the jamb?
- Do sliding glass doors have blocking cleats to prevent opening from the outside?
- Do all windows have working locks?
- Can windows still be locked even when opened a few inches for ventilation?
- Is the mailbox lockable and in good condition?
- Are there a sufficient number of working smoke detectors in the living space and in hallways? Are they battery-operated or hardwired?
- Are there adequate emergency escape routes in case of fire?
- Are there fire extinguishers available in each apartment and in common areas?
- Are window air conditioners secured from the inside?

Step 5:
Choosing Your Home Away from Home and Lease Signing

Once your student has decided on the housing location that best meets their needs, it’s time to begin the process of securing housing through lease signing. Because lease signing is such an important and serious process, and likely your student’s first experience of signing a legal contract, we want to provide you some information on the following pages about leasing and what to expect.

Off-Campus Life sees many problems each year related to students not reading or understanding their lease, signing a lease prematurely, or not knowing what type of lease they are signing and how this impacts their responsibilities as a tenant. Also, because you will likely be the guarantor for your student’s lease, this could cause financial and other consequences for you.

Who signs the lease?

The tenant (your student) and the landlord always sign the lease. It outlines responsibilities while renting for both the tenant and landlord. It includes things like monthly rental cost, how those monthly payments will be made, and information on utilities, costs for damages, rules for the property, pets, etc. No matter how your student’s situation may change, they are still financially responsible the minute the lease is signed.

For more assistance with understanding leasing or the lease signing process, Off-Campus Life offers a Leasing 101 Workshop. More information about this process is on the website. jmu.edu/ocl
Comparing Leases

Individual Lease

An individual lease is when the tenant signs for a single room, meaning they are individually responsible for paying rent and any damages to that room.

Advantages

- Your student will not be held responsible for problems a roommate causes, and each person deals with the landlord individually.

Disadvantages

- The landlord can place anyone into empty bedrooms without your student’s approval.
- Your student and the landlord are only signing upon the agreement that they will have a bedroom to rent at the location.
- Your student will not necessarily be guaranteed a certain room or certain roommates, and they may be reassigned to a different room at the apartment complex.

Joint Lease

A joint lease is a lease signed by all occupants, making the entire group responsible for damages and paying the full rent.

Advantages

- Your student and their roommates have control of who may move in.

Disadvantages

- If a roommate misses rent or causes damages to the apartment, your student can be held responsible to pay this rent and these damage costs.

Hybrid Lease

A hybrid lease is a combination of a joint and individual lease because it has qualities of both.

Advantages

- Your student will not be held responsible for problems a roommate causes, and each person deals with the landlord individually.

Disadvantages

- Your student and their roommates cannot be split up or have a random roommate placed in the apartment without permission.
- Your student is individually responsible for their rent.
- Damages to the apartment and any maintenance repairs will be split equally between all roommates regardless of who incurred the damages or where they were located.
Support for Student Basic Needs

The Pop-Up Pantry is a joint effort on campus, with representation from across the University and Harrisonburg community, including support coming from the Basic Needs Advisory Board, which is co-chaired by Off-Campus Life and Community Service Learning staff. We have a partnership with the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank to ensure a consistent supply of quality nutritious food. The pantry is stocked with shelf-stable goods, hygiene products, and limited fresh produce. The pantry is open to all JMU students, no questions asked.

Hours of operations, along with a “curbside pickup” option, can be found on our website at jmu.edu/ocl/pop-up-pantry

JMU Career Clothes Closet

The JMU Career Clothes Closet is a clothing and accessory resource for all JMU students, with a specific focus on professional dress and interview attire. This is a donation-based resource, and students are welcome to take one complete outfit from closet, free of charge. The closet opens once a semester, typically the week prior to the Campus-Wide Career Fair, sponsored by Career and Academic Planning.

The Career Clothes Closet is a joint venture, with support coming from several campus departments and academic units. Be sure to follow us on social media for the most up-to-date information on the closet.

For more details, visit jmu.edu/cap/events/careercloset

General Support and Referrals

We understand that every student faces struggles, and we are here to offer assistance. We are aligned with campus and community partners that can help. Please reach out to us for support.

Take Your Time Before You Sign!

Special Leasing Considerations

There are times when you and your student may want to consider short-term leasing options rather than signing a 12-month lease agreement. If you have a student who will be out of the area for a semester to study abroad with JMU, if they will be graduating from a program in December, or has an internship or student teacher placement that will make them unable to fulfill the terms of a full-year lease, Off-Campus Life encourages your student to pursue a short-term housing option. OCL also encourages signing a 9-month lease should your student want to return home over the summer and have inability to pay rent for off-campus housing during those summer months. There are apartments that have offered short-term leasing in the past and a list of these properties is available through the OCL office.

Advertising a Sublease

In the event that your student does sign a full-year’s lease that they are not able to fulfill, you can advertise this available housing if the landlord permits subletting, although there are never any guarantees that you will find someone to take over your student’s lease.

Contact the Off-Campus Life office for more information.

• Your student is free to post their available housing on Off-Campus Life’s Facebook page.
• There are groups on Facebook, specific to JMU, where students post housing opportunities, including the group, JMU Housing, Sublets, and Roommates.
• The OCL office has a list for students who are looking for available housing. OCL also provides this list at transfer orientations in December and June.
• Your student can also advertise through our partner website, offcampushousing.jmu.edu. An advertisement, which can include pictures and amenity information, can be purchased by any JMU student for $25.

Off-Campus Life recognizes that basic needs are important, and that every student’s experience is unique. Housing and food insecurity impact many college students, and our population is not immune to these struggles. To better support our community, we offer a number of resources, programs, and referrals.
Roommates

Roommate Compatibility

While it might be easy for your student to find someone to live with off-campus, or to be randomly matched with another individual, it may not be as easy to find a compatible roommate. Your student may want to be asking themselves the following questions:

• Does this roommate keep a similar schedule?
• Does this roommate have similar expectations for cleaning the apartment?
• Does this roommate have a similar smoking preference?
• Does this roommate have similar expectations for guests visiting, overnight guests, or hosting parties?
• Does this roommate show responsibility to pay rent on time or do chores?
• Does this roommate have a similar preference for pets?
• Does this roommate have conflict resolution skills?
• Are they trustworthy?

Finding Roommates

• Roommate matching at an off-campus housing location
  Many student housing providers in the area, especially those that do individual leasing, will offer roommate matching.

• Roommate Finder Profile
  Our partner website has a roommate finder search tool to assist JMU students.

• Finding roommates via social media
  Your student may also be able to find roommates to live with off-campus through advertisements and contacts on Facebook.

• Off-Campus Life Roommate Mixer
  Off-Campus Life provides Roommate Mixer events once per semester.

The Importance of a Roommate Agreement

No matter how well your student does in identifying a roommate who would be compatible, there are still potential conflicts that will come up living together. Many of these roommate conflicts may be the result of unclear expectations related to what living together will be like. As a result, OCL recommends that prior to living together, your student and their roommates have a conversation about expectations for living together and any specific house rules. It is recommend that this conversation involve signing a roommate agreement.

Some areas to focus on in a roommate agreement are:

• How rental payments will be handled
• Who will be responsible for utility connection, and how will payments be divided
• How the security deposit will be divided up and returned to roommates upon move-out
• Whether or not the household will have quiet study hours
• Whether or not food, shopping, and cooking will be shared, or if all roommates will purchase groceries and cook independently
• What items will be shared among roommates and what items will be off limits
• Whether or not overnight guests will be permitted and any rules around this
• Whether or not there will be a cleaning schedule and how chores will be divided
• Any rules or expectations about hosting parties
• Whether or not pets will be allowed and who will take responsibility for pets
• Any expectations or rules should a roommate have to terminate their lease.
Prefering for Your Move

Security Deposit

Almost all leases require a security deposit. The deposit is held by the landlord for the length of the lease to guard against losses, such as those incurred due to damage not resulting from normal wear and tear or from a tenant moving out before the lease expires. The security deposit is usually equal to one month’s rent and is paid in advance or with the first month’s rent. In addition to the security deposit, some complexes have additional fees that need to be paid prior to move-in, such as a pet deposit fee.

Renter’s Insurance

Renter’s insurance provides a tenant with coverage for loss or damages to the property. The apartment your student will live in is likely insured for structural damage, but this does not include insurance for your student’s personal property, such as furnishings, clothing, car, etc.

Some landlords will require your student to have a renter’s insurance policy of some type and to provide them with proof of this policy prior to lease signing or taking possession of the apartment. If your student is required to have this insurance or chooses to have it, you may want to check your homeowner’s insurance policy. Sometimes dependent students are covered under their parent’s homeowner’s insurance policies.

Transportation

Once a JMU student moves off campus, one concern that needs to be addressed is how to get back and forth to campus for classes and activities. Many students and parents are concerned about whether a car will be needed for transportation, the distance of off-campus housing from JMU, and the accessibility of public transportation.

One option for transportation to and from campus is through the Harrisonburg Department of Public Transportation (HDPT). All JMU students ride for free on HDPT transit buses with their JACard. Many off-campus apartments even have an HDPT bus stop on-site to assist students with transportation. The full HDPT transit bus schedule can be found at hdpt.com.

Cable and Internet

Two utilities that your student may want to have in their apartment, but won’t be covered by the Utility Deposit Assistance Program (see page 20) are cable and internet. Though some apartments include these utilities in the price of monthly rent, others have you connect these utilities yourself.

If your student chooses to have cable and/or internet, they will have to select a company or companies to provide these services and purchase a package, as well as have these services connected at off-campus housing. The OCL website lists some area providers of these services that you can contact about rates, packages, and any connection fees.

Furnishings

Many apartments for students in the area are fully furnished. However, you will want to understand what “fully furnished” means, as all apartments or landlords may have specific furnishings they do or don’t provide. You’ll want to have your student consult their lease agreement or contact their landlord to know the specific furnishings provided, and what options are available as some apartments have specific furnishing packages that can be chosen. You and your student should also check to see if mattresses are included in the furnishings.

Though many student housing locations are furnished, there are some unfurnished off-campus housing locations in the area. Some of the furnished apartments offer options that can be left unfurnished should your student want to utilize their own furniture. If your student does decide to rent an unfurnished apartment or house, there are companies which offer furnishing packages for a monthly rental fee to help with providing these needed items. Information about such corporations is available on the Off-Campus Life website, jmu.edu/ocl.

Even if your student’s apartment or house does come fully furnished, there will be some essential supplies needed for off-campus living that were not needed for on-campus living. These include items for cooking, cleaning, and creating a comfortable living space.

Events covered by renter’s insurance include:

- If the building catches on fire and your student’s belongings are damaged.
- If an electrical power surge damages your student’s computer, TV, or stereo.
- If personal property is damaged, destroyed, or stolen.
- If your student accidentally damages another person’s property.
- If someone sustains an injury on the property.
Utilities

Getting Started

Unless your student is living in a location that includes all utilities in the monthly rent or is living with individuals who have already connected utilities in this housing, they will have to take responsibility for connecting some or all of these utilities off campus. This would include utilities of electricity, water, gas, internet, and cable.

Once your student knows what utilities they are responsible for connecting, the next step is encouraging your student to have a conversation with their roommates about how responsibilities will be divided for utilities.

You, your student, and their roommates can choose to divide up these connection deposits and pay them, with the chance of having these deposits credited back on utility bills after a year of on-time payments for services, or they may take advantage of the JMU Utility Deposit Assistance Program (UDAP). In Harrisonburg, deposits for utilities can range as follows:

Gas Connection with Columbia Gas: Up to $200
Electricity Connection with Harrisonburg Electric Commission: Up to $300
Electricity Connection with Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative: Up to $600
Water and Sewer Connection with Harrisonburg Water and Sewer: Up to $350

Utility Deposit Assistance Program

JMU has partnered with sponsored utility companies in the area to offer the Utility Deposit Assistance Program (UDAP). Any full-time, degree-seeking, active JMU student who has no financial holds on their JMU account and has an active JMU email account can purchase a UDAP contract. This contract is purchased by your student through their MyMadison account. Purchase of such a contract will result in sponsored utility companies waiving any deposit fees for connection. A contract costs $40 and is good for one calendar year (August 1–July 31). Only one UDAP contract needs to be purchased per apartment or household, meaning this $40 cost could be divided up between your student and their roommates. However, whichever student purchases the UDAP contract must have utilities all connected in their name, making them ultimately responsible for payments of these bills.

Should your student and their roommates want to have just one UDAP contract, we do encourage you to have a signed agreement for how utilities should be paid monthly by all roommates. There is the option for different roommates to take responsibility for payment of different utilities, should one student be uncomfortable with ultimate responsibility for all utility bills.

For more information about UDAP contracts, visit jmu.edu/udap

Connection of Services

Columbia Gas

Gas services through Columbia Gas are connected over the phone. This company can be contacted during business hours Monday through Friday from 8:30am–5:00pm at 1-800-543-8911. Your student should have their 5-digit UDAP Contract ID # ready to provide over the phone during this connection process. Their website is columbiaagasva.com

Harrisonburg Electric Commission

If your student would like to connect services in person, they can visit the Harrisonburg Electric Commission office from 8:30am–5:00pm, Monday through Friday. The office is located at 89 West Bruce Street Harrisonburg, VA 22801. If your student would like to connect services over the phone, they can contact Harrisonburg Electric Commission at (540) 434-5361 from 8:30am–5:00pm, Monday through Friday.

Harrisonburg Water and Sewer

Harrisonburg Water and Sewer is the water company that contracts with UDAP. In order to connect water and sewer services with this company, you will need to visit their office in person or mail the required information to their office.

If you would like to apply for these services in person, you can visit Harrisonburg Water and Sewer at 2155 Beery Road in Harrisonburg between 8:30am–4:30pm, Monday through Friday. When visiting the company, you will need to bring a completed Application for Water and Sewer Services, which can be printed from their website, a picture ID, your lease or a copy of your lease, and your UDAP contract, which you can print on MyMadison.

If you would like to apply for these services by mail, you can mail your completed Application for Water and Sewer Service, a copy of your lease, a copy of your photo ID, and a copy of your UDAP contract to the water company at their address.
Upon signing a lease, your student will likely receive some type of student resident handbook explaining move-in procedures. You can find specific information about this on the website for the housing complex or property management company.

Prior to the start of the lease, your student should be in contact with their landlord or property manager to discuss a time and location for key pick-up and details regarding move-in.

When your student is moving into an apartment, they should expect it to be clean and move-in ready. However, we all have our own perceptions of cleanliness, so it is always a suggestion to bring cleaning supplies along on move-in day.

One important, yet overlooked, item for move-in is the receipt and completion of a move-in checklist for the apartment or house. This checklist allows your student and their roommates to note damages and concerns to the landlord that exist in the housing prior to taking possession of the unit. OCL recommends that the apartment be walked through by your student and their roommates with this move-in checklist to document any additional concerns prior to moving in any items. A copy of this checklist should also be provided to the landlord within 5 days of moving in, along with any pictures or notes of damages, and a copy kept.

If you begin completing the move-in checklist and notice problems that should not be present or need immediate attention, do not move your things into the apartment. Immediately contact your landlord to address this situation and find a solution that works. Completing the checklist and moving in items indicates consent to living in the apartment in its current condition.

Suggested Planning Timelines

Securing Off-Campus Housing

Each year, off-campus apartment complexes launch aggressive marketing campaigns to entice students to sign apartment leases. Be prepared for the housing rush! It begins very early, and students are persuaded that they’d better nail down housing or they might be homeless! However, housing for the fall semester is often available even past when the fall semester begins in late August.

OCL recommends waiting to sign leases until the spring due to the following factors:

• Freshmen students have not had time to get acclimated to classes or the University after only a month or two into the semester.
• Some freshmen students may need to withdraw or want to transfer and signing a lease early would lock them into off-campus housing, complicating this process.
• Roommates that a student may want to live with in September of their freshmen year are possibly not individuals they will want to continue living with by the end of this year.
• Talk with your student about what they have liked or not liked about living with an on-campus roommate(s), and what this might mean for what they are looking for in compatible off-campus roommates.

• Review the housing information gathered in October and talk about housing priorities, especially in terms of rent and expenses that are within your student’s budget.

• Get a sense for what your student wants/needs and how they are doing at JMU.

• Help your student look at pros and cons for living on and off campus to make a decision about the right option.

• If your student will be living off campus, help them explore the priorities they have for a living location, and use Off-Campus Life’s Living Priorities Rubric.

• Encourage your student to create a roommate profile on our partner website to look at available housing, and to look through our Housing Guide to identify properties that match off-campus housing needs and desires.

**Fall Semester**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freshmen Move-In On Campus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Assess what they like about living on campus</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Assess what they would like that on-campus living doesn’t provide</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Assess how they are doing academically, managing time, dealing with independent living skills, and navigating Harrisonburg and campus</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Assess their social connectedness with campus</td>
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<th>Off-Campus Life Fall Housing Fair</th>
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<td>• This event provides the opportunity to look about the area’s apartment complexes and meet property managers.</td>
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<th>Family Weekend</th>
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<tr>
<td>• This is an opportunity to look with your student at any information from the Housing Fair about off-campus housing, and to visit some of the off-campus housing options.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Continue to use this time to assess how your student is acclimating to JMU</td>
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**Thanksgiving Break**

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<td>• Check in with your student academically. Any academic concerns could indicate that on-campus living might be a better option.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If your student is best suited to live on campus, you can assist them with completing an on-campus housing contract on the Office of Residence Life’s website.</td>
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**Thinking Ahead**

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Spring Semester

Spring Semester Begins

• If your student has decided to live on campus for a second year, they need to make sure to complete the online housing contract and follow any instructions from the Office of Residence Life for online roommate and room selection.
• Your student can also attend any residence hall events to meet on-campus roommates if they are having difficulty finding on-campus roommates for the upcoming year.

Off-Campus Life

Off-Campus Life Spring Housing Fair

• This event is a one-stop shop for students and their roommates to see student housing providers who advertise through the Off-Campus Life office.
• This is an opportunity to have your student talk with managers about lease signing processes and fees, and gather information to bring home over spring break to begin the lease signing process.

Spring Semester Begins

JMU Spring Break

• This will be a time to work with your student, if they are home during break, to make sure they understand the lease agreement prior to signing.

Return from Spring Break

• Now through the end of the semester, you can be working with your student to make sure that they have found or are finding roommates to live with off campus, signing a lease for off-campus housing, working with roommates to set-up living expectations, signing a roommate agreement, discussing who will be responsible for off-campus utilities, and beginning to pay any fees or deposits needed.
• This will also be a time to help your student find transportation to and from campus.

UDAP Contract Go On Sale

• If your student will be living off campus Fall 2020–Spring 2021 and needs to connect utilities, this will be a good time to decide whether to purchase a UDAP contract.
• It will also be a time to work with roommates to discuss who will be responsible for the utilities, how utility payments will be divided up, and to make sure that this agreement is put into writing, possibly even in the signed roommate agreement.
• Have your student purchase a contract via MyMadison prior to leaving for the summer.
A New Adventure

We hope this guide has been a tool for you to use to help your student in deciding if embarking on the off-campus living journey is the right choice for them. Living in an apartment or home in the community for the first time is both exciting and scary, but you are now well prepared with information to assist.

Should you or your student have any additional questions about this process, please feel free to contact our Off-Campus Life office or visit us in person. We want to assist in any way possible to make this a smooth transition for you and your student. Our office also offers fun events to assist with things like budgeting, cooking, shopping, and connecting with other off-campus students. We want to continue providing you and your JMU student with the keys to making Harrisonburg home!
Off-Campus Life

(540) 568-6071
jmu.edu/ocl
ocl@jmu.edu

Festival Conference & Student Center,
Room 1130

Monday–Friday,
9:00 AM–5:00 PM