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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 begin living 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 to make informed decisions within the JMU off-campus community. The first, and 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.

Is living off campus actually the best choice for your Duke? How well do they know their potential future roommates? 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? Are they ready to cook for themselves?

There are so many things to consider in this decision making process. 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

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/Tenant Conflict Options
- Housing/Food Insecurity Assistance

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

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 day-to-day basis such as paying bills, committing to 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 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 in that 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.
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 or worked with the property in the past
• researching online reviews about the landlord or property using www.apartmentratings.com
• researching 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 age 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 Hall are equipped with Card Access systems that restrict access to occupants only. Each hall has a Resident Advisor that lives in the building and is 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
Upper-class Residence Halls are located across campus including in the Bluestone Area and on East Campus. Additionally, over 500 beds are offered in the newest facility, the Apartments on Grace. Located off 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 include wireless internet, cable TV, all utilities, access to study lounges, and a variety of recreational areas including billiards rooms, sand volleyball courts, basketball courts, and barbecue areas.

Live Supported

We’re here for you
The Resident Advisers and Hall Director are always available to help you with everyday life. Living in the building with the hall staff will give you a support system unlike any other!

Academic support
Be sure to check out 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!
Once you and your JMU student have decided that off-campus living is the right choice, the first step in this process is finding housing.

**Step 1:**

*Identifying Your Student’s Needs and Wants in Housing*

Talk with your student to consider these housing factors:

- Lease terms
- Amenities needed/wanted
- Location in relation to campus
- Bedrooms and bathrooms
- Furnished/unfurnished
- Pet policy
- Price range

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Step 2:

Identifying Housing Options

Once you and your student have identified what he or she needs, you can begin to identify housing options in the area. Two resources that can be helpful are the Off-Campus Life Housing Guide and the Off-Campus Partners Listing website.

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 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?
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 does recommend that parents and students talk with other students who have lived at these locations to help inform their decision making process.

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?

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

Once your student has decided on the housing location that best meets his or her 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.

Types of Leases

Individual Lease

An individual lease is when the tenant signs for a single room, meaning he or she is 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 he or she will have a bedroom to rent at the location.

• Your student will not necessarily be guaranteed a certain room or to be placed with certain individuals, and he or she may be reassigned to a different room at the apartment complex.

What is a lease?

A lease is an agreement between your student and his or her landlord. It outlines responsibilities while renting for both the tenant and landlord. It includes things like monthly rental cost, how these 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, he or she is still financially responsible the minute the lease is signed.
**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.

It’s important to note that some housing providers in the area will allow your student to sign a joint lease for a multiple bedroom apartment without all of his or her roommates to fill the apartment yet. Our office does not suggest doing this because, if your student cannot find someone to fill a bedroom, they are all responsible for that portion of the rent.

**Hybrid Lease**

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

Advantages
- Your student and his or her roommates cannot be split up or a random roommate placed in the apartment without permission.
- Your student is individually responsible for his or her rent.

Disadvantages
- 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.
Who signs the lease?

The tenant (your student) and the landlord always sign the lease. If your student is signing a joint lease, the other roommates will also sign this document. Landlords also require most students to have a guarantor sign the lease because students may not be able to demonstrate a credit history or the ability to pay for the terms of the lease. The guarantor guarantees to the landlord that the rent for the apartment can and will be paid.

When signing the lease agreement, always ask questions and make sure you fully understand the entire document. A landlord will still hold your student to terms and conditions that were in the lease even if they were overlooked. Also, if the landlord has made any promises related to this housing, make sure this is clearly written into the lease.

For more assistance with understanding leasing or the lease signing process, Off-Campus Life offers a Leasing 101 Workshop and more information about this process is on the website.

jmu.edu/ocl
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 he or she will be graduating from a program in December, or has an internship or student teacher placement that will make him or her 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 these 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 he or she is 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 the Off-Campus Life’s Facebook page.
- There are groups on Facebook, specific to JMU, where students post these 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.
Roommates

Another task that is an important part of living off-campus will be finding roommates. OCL typically suggests that students have their roommates in place prior to signing a lease, especially if signing an individual lease, but sometimes that can be difficult to manage.

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 himself or herself 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 area student housing providers, 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 his or her roommates have a conversation about expectations for living together and any specific house rules. It is recommended 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
Preparing 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 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 coverage for loss or damages to property if there is an incident in the apartment or on the apartment property that leads to this damage. 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 homeowners insurance policy if you have one. Sometimes dependent students are covered under their parent’s homeowners insurance policies.

Events covered by renter’s insurance include:

- The building catches fire and your student’s belongings are damaged.
- An electrical power surge damages your student’s computer, TV, or stereo.
- Personal property is either damaged, destroyed, or stolen.
- Your student accidentally damages another person’s property.
- Someone sustains an injury on the property.

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.
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 provide and specific furnishings they don’t. You and your student should also check to see if mattresses are included in the furnishings. 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. Also, some of these furnished apartments offer options that can be left unfurnished should your student want to utilize their own furniture. Though many student housing locations are furnished, there are some unfurnished off-campus housing locations in the area. If your student does decide to rent an unfurnished apartment or home, 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.

Cable and Internet

Two utilities that your student may want to have in his or her 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, he or she will have to select a company or companies to provide this service 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.
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, he or she 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 he or she is responsible for connecting at this housing, the next step is encouraging your student to have a conversation with his or her roommates about how responsibilities will be divided for utilities.

You, your student, and his or her 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 partners 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 his or her JMU account and has an active JMU email account can purchase a UDAP contract. This contract is purchased by your student through his or her MyMadison account, and 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). Also, only one UDAP contract needs to be purchased per apartment or household, meaning this $40 cost could be divided up between your student and his or her roommates. However, whichever student purchases the UDAP contract must have utilities all connected in his or her name, making him or her ultimately responsible for payments of these bills.

Should your student and his or her roommates want to just have one UDAP contract, we do encourage you to have a signed agreement for how utilities should be paid monthly by all roommates. Also, 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 cumbiagasva.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–Friday.

Harrisonburg Water and Sewer

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

Checklist and Expectations

Upon signing a lease, your student will likely receive some type of student resident handbook explaining move-in procedures, or you can find specific information about this on the website for the housing complex or property management company.

Prior to the date this lease starts, 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, he or she 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 his or her 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 his or her 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 when 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 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.
Fall Semester

Freshmen Move-In
On Campus
- Assess what he or she likes about living on campus
- Assess what he or she would like that on-campus living doesn’t provide
- Assess how he or she is doing academically, managing time, dealing with independent living skills, and navigating Harrisonburg and campus.
- Assess his or her social connectedness with campus

Off-Campus Life
Fall Housing Fair
- This event provides the opportunity to learn about the area’s apartment complexes and meet property managers.

Family Weekend
- This is an opportunity to look with your student at any information from the Housing Fair about off-campus housing, and to even visit some of the off-campus housing.
- Continue to use this time to assess how your student is doing acclimating to JMU.
Thanksgiving Break

- Talk with your student about what he or she has liked about or not liked about living with an on-campus roommate(s), and what this might mean for what he or she is 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 he or she is 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.

End of Fall Semester

- Check in with your student academically, because any academic concerns could indicate that on-campus living might be a better option.
- If your student is best suited to live on campus, you can assist him or her with completing an on-campus housing contract on the Office of Residence Life’s website.

Thinking Ahead

- If your student will be living off campus, help him or her explore the priorities he or she has 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.
Spring Semester Begins

- If your student has decided to live on campus for a second year, he or she needs 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 provided to meet on-campus roommates if having difficulty finding on-campus roommates for the upcoming year.

Spring Housing Fair

- If your student has decided to live off campus for sophomore year, he or she should be searching for and securing roommates, and identifying locations to live.

Off-Campus Life

- It is a one-stop shop experience for students and their roommates to see student housing providers who advertise through the Off-Campus Life office.
- 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.
JMU Spring Break

- This will be a time to work with your student, if he or she is home during break, to make sure he or she understands 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 he or she has or is 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 with transportation to and from campus.

UDAP Contract Go On Sale

- If your student will be living off campus Fall 2019–Spring 2020 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 him or her purchase a contract via MyMadison prior to leaving for the summer.
A New Adventure

We hope this guide has provided 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 and 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