



# *Off-Campus Guidebook*

YOUR KEY TO MAKING  
HARRISONBURG HOME



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# *A Note from OCL*

## **JMU Family,**

The college experience is full of big choices. You have already made a significant one in choosing to come to JMU! Another major choice to be made revolves around your future living arrangements. Although all first-year students are required to live on campus, students can choose to live off campus in the Harrisonburg community in their second year and beyond. The pressure to make this decision can sometimes lead to students making critical decisions 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 the best choice for you? How well do you know your potential future roommates? Are you ready to cook for yourself? Do you understand the legally binding nature of a lease? Have you considered your spending habits and how to best allocate your resources if you move off campus?

We have developed this guidebook to help Dukes 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 provide students with the tools to make informed decisions in their transition to living off-campus, sustain basic needs support, and empower all students to be responsible and engaged citizens within their community.**

Local property managers and landlords have the opportunity to advertise their available housing on our Off-Campus Partners website, [offcampushousing.jmu.edu](http://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  
8am-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 deciding:

- Have you already signed a second-year housing contract?
- Are you content with the JMU environment and your program of studies?
- Have you had difficulty managing academics during your first year?
- Have you had difficulties following the code of student conduct at JMU?
- Do you have the necessary spending habits, as well as cooking, shopping, cleaning, and time management skills to help with this transition?
- How have you 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 University Health Center, dining halls, football and basketball games, the Student Success Center, the 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 Needs and Wants in Housing*

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*

Once you have identified what you need, you can begin identifying 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 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 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 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 you have decided on the housing location that best meets your 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 a student's first experience 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, a parent who signs as a guarantor for their student's lease can also face financial and additional consequences.

## Who signs the lease?

The tenant (the student) and the landlord always sign the lease. If 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 lease terms. The guarantor guarantees 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 you to the terms and conditions in the lease even if they were overlooked. Also, if the landlord has made any promises related to this housing, ensure they are specified within the lease.

### *What is a lease?*

A lease is an agreement between the tenant (the student) and their 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 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](http://jmu.edu/ocl)

# Comparing Leases

## Individual Lease

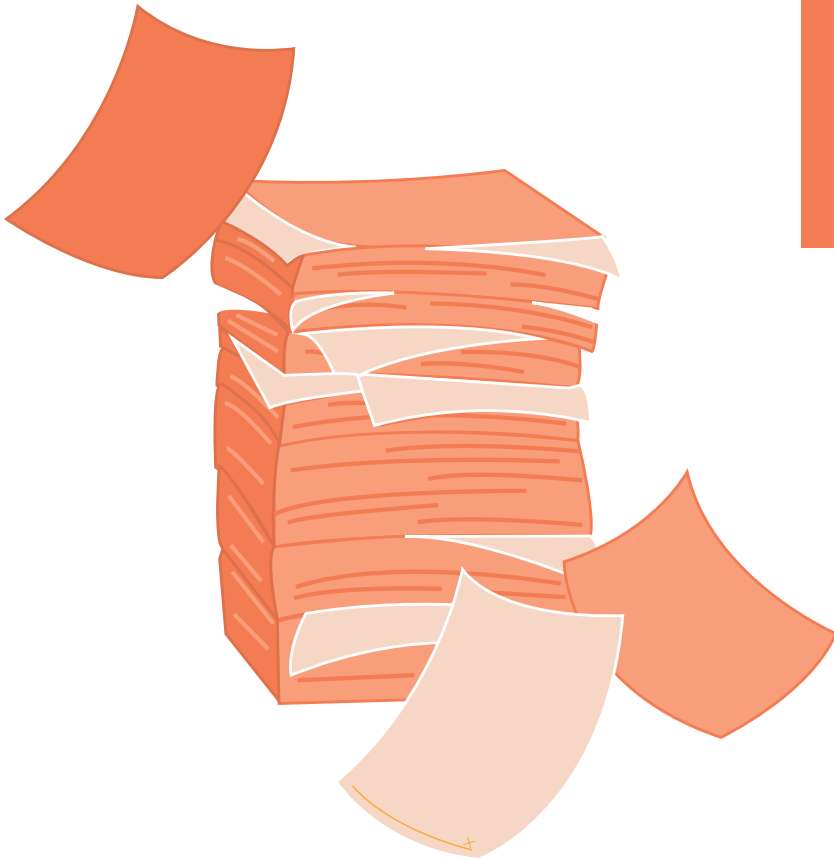
An individual lease is when the tenant signs for a single room, meaning they are individually responsible for paying rent and any damages to that room.

### *Advantages*

- You are not 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 approval.
- You and the landlord are only signing upon the agreement that you will have a bedroom to rent at the location.
- You will not necessarily be guaranteed a certain room or certain roommates, and you 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.

It's important to note that some housing providers in the area will allow you to sign a joint lease for a multiple bedroom apartment without having enough roommates to fill the apartment yet. Our office does not suggest doing this because if you cannot find someone to fill a bedroom, you are responsible for that portion of the rent.

### *Advantages*

- You and your roommates have control of who may move in.

### *Disadvantages*

- If a roommate misses rent or causes damages to the apartment, you can be held responsible for paying 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*

- You and your roommates cannot be split up or have a random roommate placed in the apartment without permission.
- You are individually responsible for their rent.

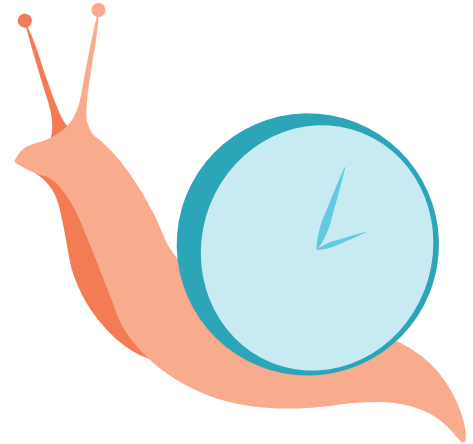
### *Disadvantages*

- 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.

# Take Your Time Before You Sign!

## *Special Leasing Considerations*

There are times when you may want to consider short-term leasing options rather than signing a 12-month lease agreement. For example, if you will be out of the area for a semester to study abroad, plan to graduate from a program in December, or have an internship or student teacher placement that will make you unable to fulfill the terms of a full-year lease, we encourage you to pursue a short-term housing option. We also encourage signing a 9-month lease should you plan to leave Harrisonburg during the summer and do not want to pay rent for off-campus housing during those months. Some apartments have offered short-term leasing in the past, and a list of these properties is available through the Off-Campus Life office.



## *Advertising a Sublease*

If you sign a full-year lease and cannot fulfill it, 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 lease.

Contact the Off-Campus Life office for more information.

- Advertise through our partner website, **[offcampushousing.jmu.edu](http://offcampushousing.jmu.edu)**. An advertisement, which can include pictures and amenity information, can be purchased by any JMU student for \$25.
- There are groups on Facebook specific to JMU where students post housing opportunities, including the group: JMU Housing, Sublets, and Roommates.
- Feel free to create a post for available housing on [facebook.com/Off.Campus.Life](https://facebook.com/Off.Campus.Life).
- The Off-Campus Life office has a list of students who are looking for available housing. We provide this list at transfer orientation in December and June.



# Support for Student Basic Needs

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.

## The Pantry

The Pantry is a joint effort on campus, supported by the Basic Needs Advisory Board, co-chaired by Off-Campus Life and Community Service Learning staff, as well as university and Harrisonburg community partners. The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank ensures we have a consistent supply of quality, nutritious food options. The pantry is stocked with shelf-stable goods, some hygiene products, and limited fresh produce. We are open to all JMU students, no questions asked.

More information, along with hours of operations as well as curbside and rapid pick-up options, can be found at [jmu.edu/osl/ocl/pantry](https://jmu.edu/osl/ocl/pantry)

## JMU Career Clothes Closet

Organized by The Pantry and UCC, the JMU Career Clothes Closet is a donation-based resource for all students, with a specific focus on professional attire, accessories, and footwear: students are welcome to take one complete outfit from the closet, free of charge.

The JMU Career Clothes Closet is open regularly at the JMU University Career Center. Follow @jmucareer on Instagram for updates, and email [career@jmu.edu](mailto:career@jmu.edu) with questions or info on how to donate.

## Student Support Hub

We understand that every student faces struggles, and we are here to offer assistance. The Student Support Hub houses information about campus and community resources that can help students meet their basic needs. The hub will continually be updated as we learn about existing resources and additional resources are created. Visit [jmu.edu/ssh](https://jmu.edu/ssh) to view available resources and access support.

# Roommates

## Roommate Compatibility

While it might be easy for you 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. You may want to be asking yourself 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?

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 when signing an individual lease, but sometimes that can be difficult to manage.

## Finding Roommates

- **Roommate Finder Profile**  
Visit [offcampushousing.jmu.edu](http://offcampushousing.jmu.edu) and utilize the Roommate Finder tool.
- **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.
- **Finding roommates via social media**  
You may also be able to find roommates to live with off-campus through the JMU Housing, Sublets, and Roommates group on Facebook.



# The Importance of a Roommate Agreement

No matter how well you do in identifying a potentially compatible roommate, conflicts can still arise when 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, we recommend that before living together, you have a conversation with your roommates about expectations for living together and any specific house rules. We also 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



# 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, 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.

### Events covered by renter's insurance include:

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

## Renter's Insurance

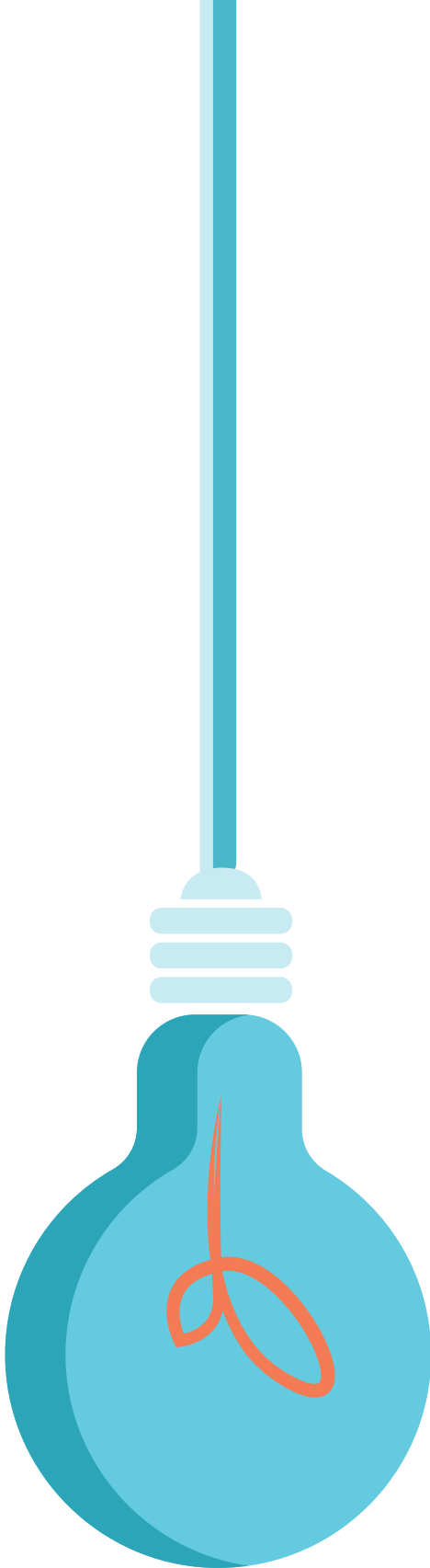
Renter's insurance provides a tenant with coverage for loss or damages to the property. The apartment you will live in is likely insured for structural damage, but this does not include insurance for your personal property, such as furnishings, clothing, car, etc.

Some landlords will require tenant's to have a renter's insurance policy of some type and to provide them with proof of this policy before lease signing or taking possession of the apartment. Note that 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](http://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 do or don’t provide. You’ll want to consult the lease agreement or contact the landlord to know the specific furnishings provided and what options are available as some apartments have specific furnishing packages that can be chosen. You 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 furnished apartments offer options that can be left unfurnished should you want to bring your own furniture. If you decide to rent an unfurnished apartment or home, some companies offer furnishing packages for a monthly rental fee to help with providing these needed items.

Even if an 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 you may want to have in your apartment but are not covered by the Utility Deposit Assistance Program (see page 20) are cable and internet. Though some apartments include these utilities in the monthly rent price, others have you connect these utilities yourself.

If you choose to connect cable and/or internet, you 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.

# Utilities

## Getting Started

Unless you plan to live in a location that includes all utilities in the monthly rent or move in with individuals who have already connected them, you will have to take responsibility for connecting some or all utilities when living off-campus. This would include electricity, water, gas, internet, and cable.

Once you know what utilities you are responsible for connecting, the next step is to have a conversation with your roommates about how responsibilities will be divided for utilities.

As for connection deposits, you might consider splitting the payment amongst your roommates, with the chance of having these deposits credited back on your utility bills after a year of on-time payments for services. Or you can 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 (UDAP)

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 can purchase a UDAP contract. This contract is purchased through MyMadison. 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 a 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 a student and their roommates want to have just one UDAP contract, we do encourage them 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](https://jmu.edu/udap)

# Connection of Services

## *Columbia Gas*

Call 1-800-543-8911 during business hours Monday through Friday from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm ET. Have your 5-digit UDAP Contract ID # ready to provide during this connection process. Visit **columbiagasva.com** for more information. Harrisonburg Electric Commission

## *Harrisonburg Water and Sewer*

Visit the Harrisonburg Water and Sewer office at 2155 Beery Rd, Harrisonburg, VA 22801, or connect services over the phone by calling (540) 434-6783 during business hours Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm ET. Have your 5-digit UDAP Contract ID # ready to provide during this connection process. Visit **harrisonburgva.gov/water** for more information.

## *Harrisonburg Electric Commission*

Visit the Harrisonburg Electric Commission office at 89 West Bruce Street, Harrisonburg, VA 22801, or connect services over the phone by calling (540) 434-5361 during business hours Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm ET. Have your 5-digit UDAP Contract ID # ready to provide during this connection process. Visit **harrisonburgelectric.com** for more information.

## *Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative*

Visit the Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative office at 180 Oakwood Drive, Rockingham, VA 22801, or connect services over the phone by calling (540) 434-2200 during business hours Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm ET. Have your 5-digit UDAP Contract ID # ready to provide during this connection process. Visit **svec.coop** for more information.



# Moving-In

## Checklist and Expectations

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

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

When you move into your apartment, it should be clean and move-in ready. However, we all have our perceptions of cleanliness, so we always suggest bringing cleaning supplies along on move-in day.

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.

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





# 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:

- First-year students have not had time to get acclimated to classes or the University after only a month or two into the semester.
- Some first-year 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 a student may want to live with in the fall of their first year may not be individuals they will want to continue living with by the end of their first year.





# Fall Semester

## First Year Move-In On Campus

- Assess what you like about living on campus.
- Assess what you would like that on-campus living doesn't provide.
- Assess how you are doing academically, managing time, dealing with independent living skills, and navigating Harrisonburg and campus.
- Assess your social connectedness with campus.

## Off-Campus Life Fall Housing Fair

- This event is a one-stop shop for students and their potential roommates to see student housing providers who advertise through Off-Campus Life office.
- This event provides the opportunity to learn about the area's property managers and gather information about lease signing processes and fees.

## Family Weekend

- This is an opportunity to look with your family at any information from the Housing Fair about off-campus housing and to visit some of the off-campus housing options.
- Continue to use this time to assess how you are acclimating to JMU.



### Thanksgiving Break

- Talk with your family about what you've liked or not liked about living with an on-campus roommate(s), and what this might mean for what you're looking for in potential compatible off-campus roommates.
- Review the housing information gathered at the OCL Fall Housing Fair and discuss housing priorities, especially regarding rent and expenses that align with your financial capabilities.
- Get a sense of what you want/need and how you are doing at JMU.
- Think of the pros and cons of living on and off campus to make a decision about the right option.

### End of Fall Semester

- Check-in with yourself academically. Any academic concerns could indicate that on-campus living might be a better option.
- If you decide you are best suited to live on campus, complete an on-campus housing contract on the Office of Residence Life's website.

### Thinking Ahead

- If you decide you are best suited to live off campus, explore your priorities for a living location.
- Utilize Off-Campus Life's Housing Guide as a resource for identifying properties that match your off-campus housing needs and desires.
- Create a Roommate Finder profile on [offcampushousing.jmu.edu](http://offcampushousing.jmu.edu) to explore potential roommates and housing locations.



# Spring Semester

## Spring Semester Begins

- If you have decided to live on campus next year, complete the online housing contract and follow any instructions from the Office of Residence Life for an online roommate and room selection.
- Attend residence hall events to meet on-campus roommates if you have difficulty finding on-campus roommates for the upcoming year.

- If you have decided to live off-campus next year, should be searching for and securing roommates and identifying locations to live.

## Off-Campus Life Spring Housing Fair

- This event is a one-stop shop for students and their potential roommates to see student housing providers who advertise through the Off-Campus Life office.
- This event provides the opportunity to learn about the area's apartment complexes and meet property managers and gather information about lease signing processes and fees.





### JMU Spring Break

- If returning home for the break, work with your family to ensure you understand the lease agreement before signing.

### Return from Spring Break

- Now through the end of the semester, make sure you 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.
- Confirm your transportation to and from campus next year.

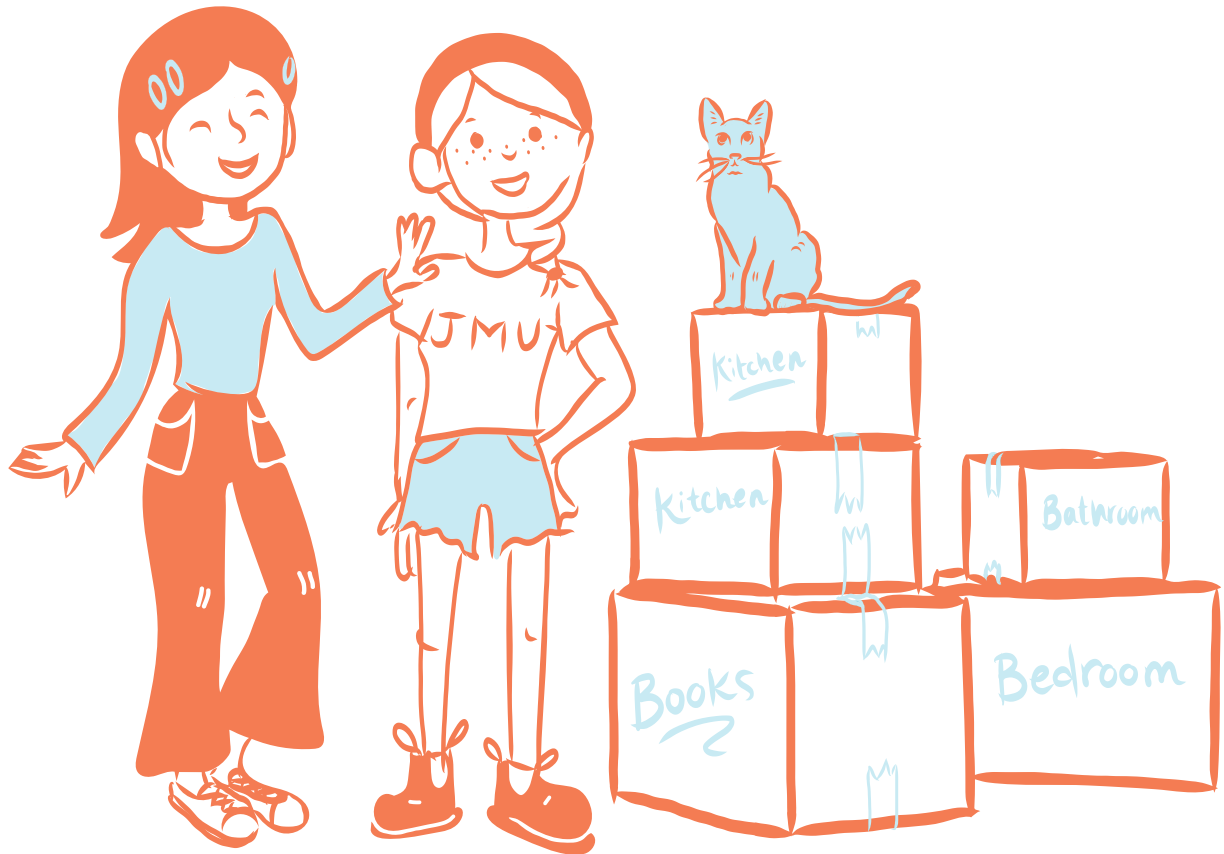
### UDAP Contracts Go On Sale

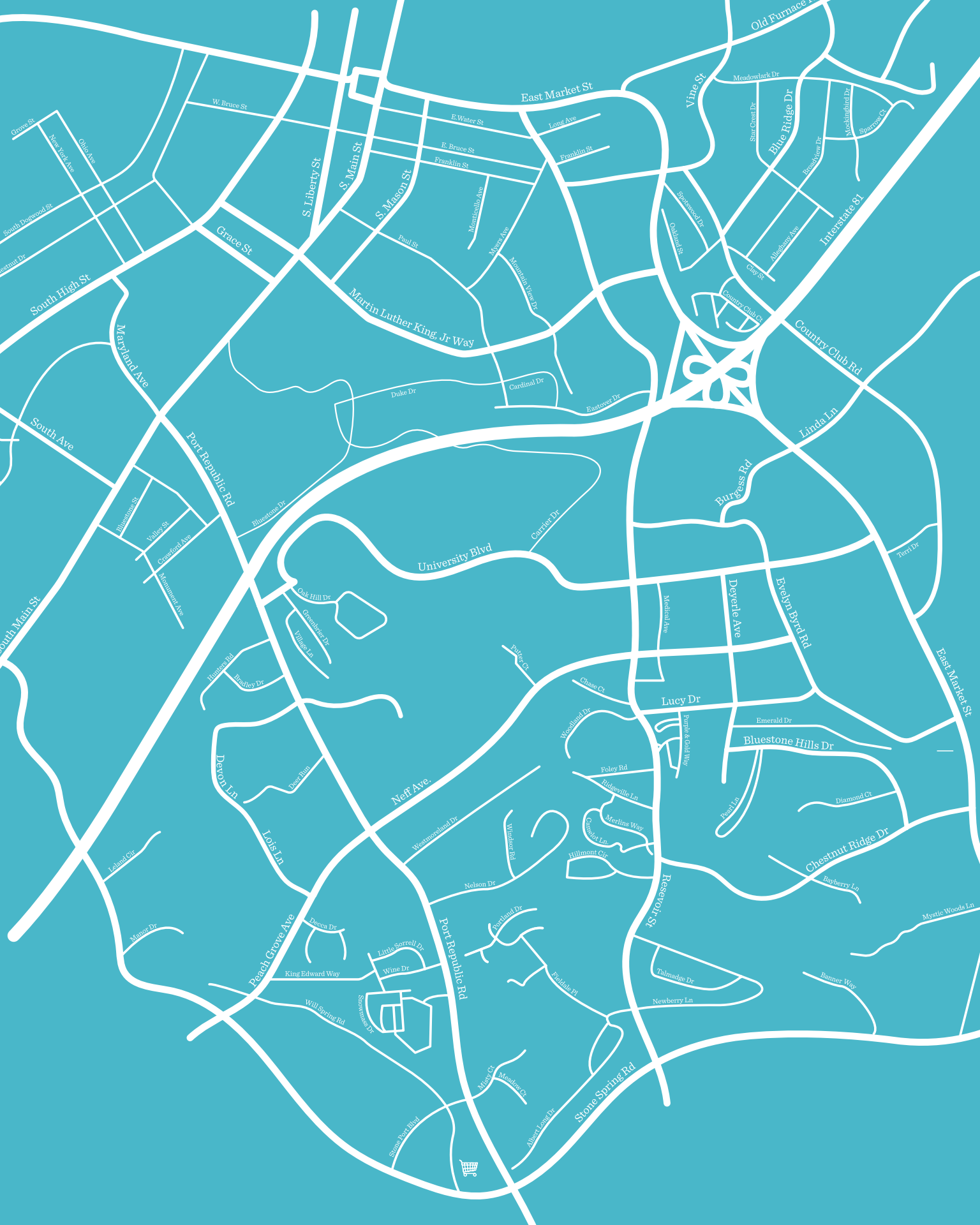
- If you'll be living off-campus next year and need to connect utilities, decide if you would like to purchase a UDAP contract.
- Work with roommates to discuss who will be responsible for the utilities, how utility payments will be divided up, and to make sure that this agreement is put into writing, possibly even in the signed roommate agreement.
- Purchase a UDAP contract via MyMadison before the summer break.

# A New Adventure

We hope this guidebook has helped you decide if embarking on the off-campus living journey is right for you! Living in an apartment or home in the community for the first time is exciting and scary, but we are confident that now you're well prepared with information to answer many of your questions and ease some of that anxiety to ensure a smooth transition.

Should you have additional questions about the process, please contact the Off-Campus Life office by email at [ocl@jmu.edu](mailto:ocl@jmu.edu), phone at (540) 568-6071, or visit us in person in The Union 205 H-L (Taylor Hall, 2nd Floor). In addition to this guidebook and our Housing Guide, we offer programming and resources for JMU students, such as financial literacy workshops, commuter appreciation events, and other opportunities to connect with fellow off-campus students. For more information, visit [jmu.edu/ocl](http://jmu.edu/ocl). We look forward to continuing to provide all Dukes with the keys to making Harrisonburg home!





Map showing streets including: East Market St, South High St, University Blvd, Martin Luther King, Jr Way, Peach Grove Ave, Devon Ln, Lois Ln, Port Republic Rd, Stone Spring Rd, and many others.



# JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY®

## Off-Campus Life

MSC 4214, 285 Warren Service Drive  
The Union, Taylor 205 I-L  
Harrisonburg, VA 22807  
(540) 568-6071 Phone  
[ocl@jmu.edu](mailto:ocl@jmu.edu)  
[jmu.edu/ocl](http://jmu.edu/ocl)