

# OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING HANDBOOK

2026

**ADVOCATE**

**CELEBRATE**

**EDUCATE**

**SERVE**



University Life  
**CONTEMPORARY  
STUDENT SERVICES**  
George Mason University®

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**01**

**RENTAL PRICES SNAPSHOT**

**02**

**BEFORE YOU SIGN**

**03**

**VIRGINIA RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES**

**04**

**QUESTIONS TO ASK**

**05**

**TIPS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

**06**

**LIVING WITH ROOMMATES**

**07**

**RENTERS INSURANCE**

**08**

**BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOR**

**09**

**SAFETY & SECURITY**

# RENTAL PRICES SNAPSHOT



University Life  
**CONTEMPORARY  
STUDENT SERVICES**  
George Mason University®

## Fairfax, Virginia

Bedrooms	Avg. Rent
studio	\$1,902/mo
1 bedroom	\$2,117/mo
2 bedroom	\$2,528/mo
3 bedroom	\$2,948/mo

*Prices based on Fairfax, VA, Spring 2026 data from Apartments.com*

# BEFORE YOU SIGN

Protect yourself from scams and other bad situations. Do the following before you sign a lease.

## **Know Your Rights and Responsibilities**

Familiarize yourself with local and state laws governing tenants and landlords. Additional documents on your rights and responsibilities are available through our online [resource folder](#).

## **Visit the Property and Meet the Landlord**

A lease is a legal contract, so you should always see what you're getting and meet your landlord before committing to live there and pay rent for however many months your lease will be for.

## **Read and Understand Your Lease**

Make sure everything you have been promised is in writing and that you're not agreeing to anything strange or that you don't want to. You should also make sure it covers the basics for a lease. For more information on what is normal for a lease consult Fairfax County's [Lease Checklist](#).

## **Don't Pay Upfront**

You can expect to pay a small application fee, but reputable landlords or companies will not ask for rent or a security deposit before a lease has been signed.

## **Meet and Get to Know Your Roommates**

A peaceful and harmonious place to live is important to your success as a student and overall wellbeing. A good roommate isn't just someone you can get along with, but someone you can live with and rely on to follow house rules.

## **Plan for Additional Costs and Transportation**

Utilities may or may not be included in the cost of rent. Always know which utilities you will be responsible for paying. You should also figure out travel from your new home to class, work, or the grocery store and plan for any transportation costs.

# VIRGINIA RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES



University Life  
**CONTEMPORARY  
STUDENT SERVICES**  
George Mason University®

## Applications

Application fees may not exceed \$50. However, this does not include additional costs for a background check. A refundable application deposit may also be required, which must be returned if the unit is not rented.

## Security Deposits

Landlords can require a security deposit of up to two months' rent.

## Fit and Habitable Living Space

Renters have the right to a unit that is fit and habitable and share some of the responsibility of maintaining it. Landlords are generally responsible for repairs and maintenance, while renters must keep a clean and safe environment and promptly report things like mold or pests to a landlord.

## Moving into an Unhabitable Unit

Renters have seven days to terminate their lease at move-in when the dwelling poses a serious threat to life, health, or safety (such as a fire hazard, infestation of rodents, or a lack of heat).

## Rent and Late Fees

Renters must pay rent on time and pay any late fees if rent is not paid on time, as outlined in their lease.

## Landlord Access

A renter must allow the landlord access to the unit, provided the request is for a reasonable time and practical purposes such as maintenance or inspections. Unless it is an emergency or the maintenance is requested by the renter, a landlord must provide 72 hours' notice of all maintenance.

***Disclaimer.** This page is only a snapshot summarizing some of the rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants in Virginia. Additional documents on your rights and responsibilities are available through our online [resource folder](#).*

# QUESTIONS TO ASK

This page includes example questions you may want to ask your landlord before signing a lease. But you should think hard about your lifestyle and ask any additional questions that may be important to you.

**How long are your lease terms?**

**Are there any additional fees on top of rent (such as a trash collection fee)?**

**Am I responsible for maintaining the property in any way (such as mowing the lawn)?**

**Can we hang pictures, paint the walls, etc.?**

**Do you allow pets? If so, is there an additional deposit and monthly pet fee?**

**What parking is available for both tenants and guests?**

**How do I contact you, and how do I make a maintenance request if there's a problem?**

**What shared or community spaces and amenities are available and included?**

**Is the unit furnished or unfurnished?**

**Are there any rules or prohibitions on alcohol or smoking?**

**How many keys will we receive for the unit, and what is the cost of a lockout or to replace a key?**

# ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

## Stay Safe

Use reputable sites like GMU's Official [Off-Campus Housing Finder](#), Apartments.com, Zillow, etc. If you look for roommates or housing on sites like Facebook or Craigslist, be wary of scams and visit properties and potential roommates with a friend or relative.

## Parking and Transportation

Parking is available on campus, but a parking pass is required. Visit [transportation.gmu.edu/parking](https://transportation.gmu.edu/parking) for more information. Navigating Northern Virginia without a car can be a challenge. If you won't have a car or a driver's license, look for housing near access to public transportation like the Mason Shuttle, Metro, and the Fairfax City CUE bus.

## Understand and Obey Applicable Laws

Remember to obey all laws while in the United States. If you plan on driving, review the [Virginia Driver's Manual](#). Additionally, abide by all city, county, and state regulations related to maximum occupancy in a residence (**Fairfax City and Fairfax County legally limit the number of unrelated residents to four**).

## Security Deposits

When you sign your lease, you'll be expected to pay a security deposit, usually an amount equal to one month's rent. However, if you do not have a US Social Security Number or credit history, it may be more. Please note, however, that security deposits in Virginia cannot be more than two months' rent.

## Meet with a Peer Mentor

Contemporary Student Services has peer mentors available for appointments throughout the fall, spring, and summer terms. If you have any questions or want to talk with another international student with experience and training in off-campus housing, email us at [masoncss@gmu.edu](mailto:masoncss@gmu.edu).

# LIVING WITH ROOMMATES

Roommates are a great way to save money on housing. This page includes example questions you may want to ask potential roommates to prevent misunderstandings or bad situations later. But you should think hard about your lifestyle and ask any additional questions that may be important to you.

## Roommates and Rent

How many people do you want to share your home with? How many people do you realistically think you can comfortably live with in the space you are looking at? What are you willing to pay as your share of the rent? How are you willing to divide the rent cost?

## Committments

How long do you plan to live here together? Whose name will the various utilities be under?

## Household Chores

How frequently do you expect your roommate to participate in household cleaning? How much do you care about cleanliness/maintenance?

## Drugs and Alcohol

What are your views on the consumption of alcohol and/or other substances? Is smoking an issue? Would certain areas of your residence be off-limits or designated for smoking?

## Guests

Will you have guests stopping by? How frequently and for what length of time? Is there family or partners that will be visiting over? How often? Will they be staying the night? How often?

## Lifestyle

What kind of lifestyle do you plan to lead in your new home? What are your study habits? What is your attitude toward overnight guests, parties, etc? Will conflicts occur with your roommate because of different personal schedules, diets, pets, noise levels, or parties?

## Sharing

Would you rather buy food and supplies (laundry detergent, toiletries) separately or together? What are you willing to contribute (furniture/appliances) to furnish the home?

## Relationship

Are you looking for someone to hang out with or someone to just share the bills? Are political or religious outlooks important to you?

# RENTERS INSURANCE

At many properties, you will be required to have renters insurance. Some leases may even require your insurance policy meet certain coverage minimums. However, even if it is not required, you may want to consider a policy so that you are protected and compensated if your personal property is stolen or destroyed.

## What is Renters Insurance?

Renters insurance provides monetary protection for your belongings in the event of things like fire or theft. Most policies also include liability coverage for you against liability claims by others in the event of damages to someone else's home or if someone is injured in your home.

## How Much Does it Cost?

Renters insurance typically costs \$10 to \$15 a month, but prices vary depending on coverage. Many insurance companies have a mobile app and will give you a free quote after completing a brief survey.

## Why You Should Have Renters Insurance?

The main reason to consider having renters insurance (assuming it's not required by your landlord) is so you can replace your personal property (such as furniture, clothing, computers, etc.) if it is lost or damaged by theft, fire, or severe weather. If you don't have renters insurance, you'll be on your own paying to replace lost or damaged property.

## How Can I Get Renters Insurance?

As mentioned above, many insurance providers have mobile apps that will provide you with a quote in a few minutes. It may only take a few minutes more to complete your policy, but it's good practice to compare quotes with multiple companies.

## Where Can I Get Renters Insurance?

### Lemonade

[www.lemonade.com](http://www.lemonade.com)

### Liberty Mutual

[www.libertymutual.com](http://www.libertymutual.com)

### Progressive

[www.progressive.com](http://www.progressive.com)

### Allstate

[www.allstate.com](http://www.allstate.com)

# BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOR

Living on your own or with roommates can be an exciting and memorable part of your college life, but it also entails certain responsibilities on your part. In addition to establishing good rapport with your roommates, attempt to be a courteous neighbor and be aware that wherever you live, there are local regulations you need to abide by.

## Get to Know Your Neighbors

Your neighbors could be people with a long history in your new neighborhood, and their experiences with students in the past could have been positive or negative. There are also many George Mason Alumni in Northern Virginia. Getting to know them helps them see you as a person and not just the student next door.

## Respect Your Neighbors

Your actions affect others in your neighborhood. Loud music or noise and unruly parties may upset your neighbors who have young children who go to bed early or who have long commutes to work in the morning. Many communities also have noise limits, and violating them could lead to a fine. Other important ways to respect those around you include:

- Cleaning up after pets
- Keeping your home clean and neat by taking out the trash, trimming your lawn, clearing sidewalks of snow, etc.
- Driving at safe speeds through your neighborhood
- Not parking in your neighbors' yards or blocking your neighbors' driveways or allowing your guests to do so

## Communicate With Your Neighbors

If you are going to have a lot of guests or host an event, let your neighbors know and share your contact information so they can reach you if there's a problem. You may find they are much happier and open to you hosting guests if they know ahead of time and can reach you if things get out of hand.

## Obey Applicable Laws and the Student Code of Conduct

Students of George Mason University must at all times obey all applicable local, state, and federal laws and the George Mason University Student Code of Conduct.

## SAFETY TIPS

- Keep your doors locked at all times.
- Close and lock your windows when you leave your home and at night.
- Leave an exterior light on at night.
- Avoid allowing strangers into your home.
- Secure your valuables out of sight.
- If you come home and see an open door or broken window, do not go in; call 911 and wait for the police in a safe place outside of your home.
- Mason Alert is the university's official emergency notification system. Visit [Alert.gmu.edu](http://Alert.gmu.edu) to receive text messages from Mason Alert.
- Download the "Rave Guardian" app.
- Remember, George Mason University Police Department provides a 24/7 escort service for anyone who feels unsafe when walking across campus. Call 703-993-2810 for the service.

### FOR EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE CALL

911

### NON-EMERGENCY NUMBERS

#### GMU Police

703-993-2810

#### Fairfax City Police

703-385-7924

#### Fairfax County Police

703-691-2131

#### Arlington County Police

703-558-2222

#### Manassas City Police

703-257-8000



# CONTEMPORARY

## STUDENTS ARE

**OFF-CAMPUS STUDENTS**  
**ADULT LEARNERS**  
**TRANSFER STUDENTS**  
**RETURNING TO COLLEGE**  
**VETERANS OR MILITARY**  
**AFFILIATED**

**ONLINE LEARNERS**  
**PARENTS OR CAREGIVERS**  
**FOSTER CARE ALUMNI**  
**SYSTEM-IMPACTED**  
**MARRIED, WIDOWED OR**  
**DIVORCED**

## HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?



Events and engagement opportunities for students to connect with faculty, staff, and each other



Contemporary Student Lounge located in the HUB 1012 with space to hang out, have a snack or a meal, and relax between classes



Student community spaces for transfer students, parenting students, and adult learners



Website with tailored resources by student population located at [contemporary.gmu.edu](http://contemporary.gmu.edu)



Peer mentors who are available for walk-ins and by appointment



Mason's Official Off-Campus Housing Finder at [och.gmu.edu](http://och.gmu.edu)

