



Off-Campus Student Housing Guide

Helpful information to find, lease, and move into your off-campus home

This guide is intended to provide students with: 1. a basic overview of landlord/tenant laws; 2. information for establishing off-campus residency within Lexington or Rockbridge County; and 3. tips for being a good citizen and member of the community.

Adapted with permission from the University of Missouri-Columbia's Off-Campus Housing Guide

**Note: The legal information contained in this guide is general in nature and does not constitute legal advice. For specific questions about Virginia law, please consult an attorney.*

Emergency Numbers

Emergency	911
Lexington Police	462-3705
Rockbridge County Sheriff	463-7328
Carilion Stonewall Jackson Hospital	458-3300
Traveller.....	458-8900
W&L Public Safety.....	458-8999
Student Health Center.....	458-8401
Office of Health Promotion	458-4501
University Counseling Center.....	458-8590
Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students	458-8754

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Section 1

Looking for a Place

Where to Start

There are several resources available to aid W&L students looking for rental property. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- **Colonna & Associates**
(540) 463-7157 | www.colonnaassociates.com
- **James Moore Real Estate**
(540) 463-7080 | www.jwmre.com
- **H and K Properties, Inc.**
(540) 464-3922 | www.handkproperties.com
- **Mead Associates**
(540) 463-7168 | www.meadproperties.com
- **RE/MAX**
(540) 463-7629 | www.remax-towncntry-lex-va.com
- **Security Management, Inc.**
(540) 464-4832 | smirent@hotmail.com
- **Sterling Properties & Management, LLC**
(540) 460-1111 | davidstull32@gmail.com
- **Stonewall Country Properties**
(540) 461-2500 | <http://www.lexrealty.com>

Determining Your Needs

As a prospective tenant, you have the right to ask the landlord questions. Before signing a lease, be sure that you are satisfied with the condition of the property, services provided by the landlord, and the security of the unit. Use the following tips to avoid common rental problems:

- Make sure you understand and can manage all the costs of renting the property—rent, security deposit, utilities, upkeep, insurance, etc.
- Before you rent, always inspect the apartment or house for needed repairs, bugs, rodents, and obvious electrical or plumbing problems.
- Give a list of the needed repairs to the landlord and make sure these repairs are made before you sign a lease. See Appendix A for a sample move-in checklist. You may want to take photos to document the condition of the property when you move in.
- Ask your landlord if he/she can change the locks or have them re-keyed. If the landlord does not, ask if you can make the changes and then provide him or her with copies of the new keys.

Before You Rent

Before signing a lease, have the following questions answered. It is a good idea, if possible, to have them addressed in the lease, as well:

- Who will pay for electricity, gas, water, cable, internet, etc.?
- When is rent due?
- What repairs and cleaning will the landlord do?
- What is the policy on keeping pets?
- Are fees charged for late payments?
- Who maintains the yard and handles snow removal?
- Is parking provided?
- How much are the deposit and the application fee (if any)?

Discrimination

Landlords cannot refuse to sell, rent, sublease or otherwise make housing available based on a renter's race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, or national origin. Landlords also cannot charge some individuals higher rent or falsely state that housing is not available for discriminatory reasons. However, there are some exceptions to these rules. If you believe you have been a victim of discrimination, the following agencies can help:

- Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students
Washington and Lee University
242 Elrod University Commons
204 W. Washington St.
Lexington, VA 24450
(540) 458-8754
- If a realtor discriminates:
Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation
9960 Mayland Drive, Suite 400
Richmond, VA 23233
(804) 367-8500
dpdor@dpdor.virginia.gov
www.dpor.virginia.gov
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Housing
Discrimination Hotline: (800) 669-9777

Ready to Sign the Lease?

It is important to have a written lease because it provides evidence of the exact terms of agreement. Read the lease carefully.

Security Deposit

Most landlords require a deposit at the time a lease is signed. This deposit is money that the landlord collects as a security against property damage, unclean conditions, and unpaid rent. The amount may vary; it is often equal to one month's rent, but it cannot exceed two months' rent. Landlords may also charge a pet deposit, if applicable, as long as the total of the pet deposit plus the security deposit does not exceed this months' rent.

It is a good idea for you to take photos before moving out to show that the property was clean and in good repair when you moved. Within 45 days from the date the lease ends, the landlord is required to either return your full security deposit or give you a written list of reasons why part or all of the security deposit was withheld. The landlord may retain all or any portion of the deposit to cover any damages or charges for which you are liable under the lease. The landlord may also retain all or any portion of the deposit if you break the lease agreement. It is important for the tenant to make it known where they will be staying during the 45 days after the tenancy ends so that the security deposit can be sent.

Section 2

After the Lease is Signed

Once a lease has been signed, the length of the tenancy binds the landlord and tenant unless either party violates the lease. If the tenant enters into a one-year lease, but decides to move out after two months without the landlord's permission and if the landlord has not broken the lease, the tenant could owe the landlord 10 month's rent even though the tenant is not living on the premises any more.

Renter's Insurance

Before moving into your new rental home, make sure your belongings are protected. Renter's insurance is available at a relatively low cost and is one of the wisest purchases a renter can make. The landlord or property owner's property insurance will not cover your personal property. If you are still on your parent/guardian's insurance, you may be covered by your parent's homeowner's insurance. Check with your parents to determine what would and would not be covered in the event of a loss. Insurance agents are listed in the Yellow Pages. Shop around for a good price before buying a policy as price and coverage will vary.

Renter's Responsibilities

- Pay rent on time
- Keep the property clean
- Pay for damages resulting from their own negligence or the negligence of a guest
- Refrain from taking on additional occupants or subleasing without the landlord's written permission
- Allow the landlord to enter the premises to make needed repairs and follow inspections
- Follow ALL provisions of the lease

Landlord's Responsibilities

- Make sure the property is livable and complies with all building and housing codes.
- Make and pay for repairs due to ordinary wear and tear
- Refrain from turning off a tenant's water, electricity, or gas
- Provide written notice to tenants when ownership of the property is transferred to a new landlord
- Not unlawfully discriminate
- Not raise the rent or change other lease provisions without giving the tenant proper notice (generally one month's written notice unless the lease says otherwise) and obtaining the tenant's written consent to the change

Repairs

Your lease should state which repairs are the landlord's responsibility and which are the tenant's. If you live with more than one tenant, you should select a spokesperson who will be responsible for contacting the landlord and requesting repairs. Ordinary wear and tear and damages due to natural forces (e.g. weather) should be the responsibility of the landlord. Damages caused by the negligence of the tenant or a guest should be paid by the tenant. When repairs are necessary, ask the landlord to make repairs within a reasonable period of time. If repairs are not made, make a

written request for the necessary repairs and keep a copy of the letter. If the dwelling becomes unsafe due to repair problems, the tenant should contact the local health department or building inspector. If a tenant withholds rent payments until repairs are completed, the tenant may be in violation of the lease and may be subject to eviction.

Eviction

A landlord may not evict a tenant without a court order. The landlord may begin the proceedings if a tenant:

- Damages property
- Fails to pay rent
- Violates the terms of the lease
- Injures the landlord or another tenant
- Allows alcohol or drug related criminal activity on the premises
- Fails to vacate at the end of the lease term

The tenant will receive a notice that an eviction lawsuit has been filed and will have the opportunity to be heard in court before any eviction.

Expiration of a Lease

Leases specify a date on which the tenant must move. In some situations, the landlord requires a notice, and in other cases notice is not required. Read your lease carefully to determine whether or not you are required to provide notice. Some leases contain an automatic renewal clause. These are automatically renewed unless the tenant provides advance notice to the landlord that the tenant will move when the lease ends. Any agreement between a tenant and landlord allowing the tenant to stay after the lease ends should be in writing.

Lease Termination

If a tenant needs to move out before the lease terminates, the lease may be cancelled if the landlord approves. The tenant and landlord should sign a statement that the lease has been cancelled by mutual agreement.

Subleasing

If a tenant wishes to move out before a lease ends, he may choose to sublease. This means transferring your lease to another person who moves in and pays rent. Before subleasing to another individual, the tenant must get the landlord's approval. When subleasing, you are responsible to your landlord for the original lease. You also can be held responsible for any problems created by the new tenant. Remember, you should have a written agreement to sublease or cancel your lease.

Resolving Conflict with Your Roommates

Before you move in, discuss with your roommates what everyone is bringing. When everyone arrives, organize a group meeting to discuss how things will work. Do not let conflicts linger. If you have a problem with one of your roommates, be sure to talk about it right away. Make sure you have a good idea of everyone's habits (e.g. sleeping, studying, and cleanliness) before agreeing to live together. It is a good idea to split the utility bills between the house members. The way, one person is not responsible for all of the bills. Make sure you communicate with your roommates about what you owe.

Section 3

Health Information

Dealing with Alcohol Emergencies

How to Spot Danger: Symptoms of Alcohol Poisoning

- Unresponsiveness—the person cannot be awakened
- Skin is cold, clammy, pale or bluish color
- Breathing difficulties—shallow or slow breathing
- Vomiting while unresponsive means danger or choking

Caring for Someone who is Intoxicated

- If someone is showing signs of alcohol poisoning, they need immediate medical assistance. Call 911 or transport them immediately to the hospital.
- Stay with the person – don't leave them alone. They may be more drunk than they appear and may become unconscious or injure themselves.
- Have the person lie on their side to reduce risk of choking.
- Give them water to drink if they are awake and not vomiting.
- Only time will sober them up, not exercise, coffee, a cold shower, etc.
- Do not give them aspirin, ibuprofen, or acetaminophen.
- Call the Student Health Center at 458-8401 for advice if you're not sure what to do.

Section 4

Know the Law

Noise

In the city of Lexington, an ordinance prohibits music that disturbs others or that can be heard at a distance of 50 feet between 11 PM and 7 AM.

- On the first visit by police, you will receive a written warning.
- On the second visit by police, you will be given a citation and be requested to appear in court. You will be fined and there will be additional court costs.

Parking

All students must register motor vehicles in their possession with the Office of Public Safety. Only those motor vehicles that have been registered and provided with the appropriate identifying parking permits will be permitted to use University parking areas during the hours of 8 AM to 5 PM Monday-Friday.

- Students residing within one-half mile of Washington Hall, and not living in University housing, are required to register their vehicles but are not allowed to use University parking areas during these times. No parking registration fee is charged for these students. Students residing more than one-half mile from campus are eligible to park in University parking areas and must pay a parking registration fee each academic year.
- Parking ticket violations given by the city are paid in the City Treasurer's Office. If you need additional information regarding your ticket or wish to contest it, please contact the Police Department Administrative Offices at (540) 462-3705.

Trash

Properties must be kept clear of excessive trash. A fine could result.

Trespassing

Any person found trespassing on a private lot can be charged with a misdemeanor.

Section 5

Off-Campus Safety

Safety Tips

- Report all crime and any suspicious activity to the Lexington Police Department or Rockbridge County Sherriff's Office.
- Keep your doors locked at all times, especially when you are alone, sleeping or the apartment is unoccupied (even if only for a few moments).
- Determine who is on the other side of the door before opening it. Have repair or service personnel show official identification and confirm their presence with the person requesting the service. Delivery persons should remain outside to await the person requesting the delivery.
- Be sure you have blinds or curtains on your windows to discourage window peepers. Always keep your windows covered at night.
- Be sure all outdoor lighting fixtures are in working condition.
- Place items of value out of sight and in locked areas. Do not leave valuables unattended in such common areas as laundry rooms and lounges.
- Make a list of your valuables—DVD players, stereos, computer, and jewelry. Take photos of the items, list their serial numbers and descriptions. Check with law enforcement about engraving your valuables.
- Avoid walking alone at night, but if you must, stay in well-lit, open areas.

Burglary

- If something looks questionable—a slit screen, a broken window, or an open door—don't go in. Call the police from a neighbor's house, a cell phone, or a public phone.
- At night, if you think you hear someone breaking in, leave safely if you can, then call police. If you can't leave, lock yourself in a room with a phone and call police.
- Guns are responsible for many accidental deaths in the home every year. Think carefully before buying a gun. If you do own one, learn how to store it and use it safely. Also, check the provisions of your lease, because some landlords prohibit firearms.

Protecting Your Vehicle

- Lock your car.
- Never hide a spare key on the vehicle.
- Roll up windows completely.
- Remove keys from ignition.
- Park as close as possible to an open business.
- Do not leave valuables in open sight. Place the valuables in trunk, if possible.
- When parking curbside, always park with the wheels turned toward the curb.
- If you have a garage, use it and lock the garage door.
- Never leave your car running if unattended.
- If your car is stolen, before it can be listed as stolen, you must have your license plate number and/or vehicle identification number.

Fire Prevention

- Be sure smoke detectors are in proper working condition. Install new batteries at the beginning of each semester.
- Do not overload electrical outlets. If you need to plug multiple appliances into an outlet, use a fused power strip.
- Avoid running extension cords under the carpet or through doorways.
- Put out candles and incense when unattended.
- Extinguish all smoking materials thoroughly.
- Clean up immediately after parties and take all trash outside.
- Don't leave food unattended on the stove or in the microwave.
- Plan your escape routes in case fire does strike.
- Make sure all exit doors are unlocked and not obstructed.
- Know two ways out of your apartment/house.
- Clean the dryer lint filter after every use.
- It is a good idea to consider purchasing a 2A 10BC fire extinguisher for your home.
- For chimneys: Make sure you have a screen or gate in front of the hearth to prevent sparks from flying out on to the floor. Don't stack wood or kindling in front of an open hearth. Extinguish the fire completely before leaving or going to sleep. Don't have low-burning or smoldering fires. Make sure your landlord inspects your chimney every year.

Carbon Monoxide

- Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas. Purchase a carbon monoxide detector in order to protect yourself from poisoning. Detectors can be purchased from local home improvement stores.

Secure Your Place!

Whether you are going home during an extended University break, or are just leaving town for a couple of days, the following tips increase the security of your Lexington residence:

- Be sure there is good lighting around all doors, especially those doors not visible from the street.
- Lock sliding doors, and place a wooden or metal bar in the track of the doors.
- Don't hide spare keys in places outside.
- Arrange for a neighbor whom you trust to watch over your house or store your valuables while you are away.
- Take anything of value home with you. Don't leave any valuable items near windows.
- Take pictures of any valuables in case they are stolen.
- Make sure all windows are secure and close your curtains and blinds.
- Stop mail and paper delivery.

Section 6

Useful Information and Phone Numbers

Telephone

Telephone service in the Lexington area is provided by Century Link. You can contact them at (888) 723-8010.

Internet

High-speed Internet service is available in Lexington and the Rockbridge area from several providers. Check the Yellow Pages for current listings.

Electricity

Electricity in Lexington is provided by Dominion Virginia Power. Their number is 1 (866) 366-4357.

Gas

Columbia Gas of Virginia can be reached at (800) 543-8911 for routine service and inquiries. for 24-hour emergency service, call (800) 544-5606.

Water

The City of Lexington and Rockbridge County Water & Sewer Authority are the local public water providers.

Trash Collection

To find out how trash is collected in your neighborhood, ask your landlord. If you live outside the city limits, contact private companies for trash collection. If you don't want to hire a private company, you are responsible for putting your trash into a dumpster. For more information about trash collection in the city, contact Lexington Public Works at (540) 463-3154.

Recycling

The Rockbridge County Recycling Center is located next to the jail on Greenhouse Road. Visit the W&L website for more information about recycling.

Cable

Cable service is provided by Comcast. Their telephone number is 1 (866) 922-0069.

Voter Registration

In order to vote in Virginia you must:

- Be a resident of Virginia
- Be a citizen of the U.S.
- Not claim the right to vote in any other state.

- Be at least 18 years old by the day of the next election.
- Not currently declared mentally incompetent by a court of law.
- Know that if convicted of a felony, your right to vote must have been restored.
- Re-register if you have changed your name or moved.

You can inquire about voter registration at the time you apply for a Virginia Driver's License.

Driver's Licenses and Vehicle Registration

To apply for a Virginia driver's license, you must show two proofs of identification, one proof of legal presence and one proof of Virginia residency. If you are from out of state, the DMV may exchange your out-of-state driver's license for a Virginia driver's license if you meet the state requirements. Motor vehicles must be registered both with the state and with the local DMV office (110 Walker St., Lexington) and with the locality where it is garaged (city of Lexington or Rockbridge County). The Virginia DMV website is www.dmvnow.com.

Local Resource Information

Lexington Chamber of Commerce.....	(540) 463-5375
Lexington City Hall Office.....	(540) 462-3700
Rockbridge Area Recreation Organization	(540) 463-9525
Rockbridge/Lexington Health Department	(540) 463-3185
Voter Registration-Lexington.....	(540) 462-3706
Voter Registration-Rockbridge County	(540) 463-7203
Lexington Police Department	(540) 462-3705
Rockbridge County Sheriff's Office	(540) 463-7328
Rockbridge County Administrator.....	(540) 463-4361
Stonewall Jackson Hospital.....	(540) 458-3300
Rockbridge Area Information Line.....	(540) 261-9528
Legal Aid Society	(540) 463-7334

Section 7

Internet Resources

- Virginia Landlord-Tenant Handbook
<http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/index.php/dhcd-resources/landlord-tenant-handbook.html>
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
www.hud.gov
- Lexington/Rockbridge County Chamber of Commerce
<http://www.lexrockchamber.com/>
- Virginia Attorney General's Office
www.oag.state.va.us
(804) 786-2071
- Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles
<http://www.dmv.state.va.us/>
- Rockbridge County
<http://www.co.rockbridge.va.us/>
- City of Lexington
<http://www.ci.lexington.va.us/>
- City of Buena Vista
<http://www.buonavistavirginia.org/>

Appendix A

Apartment Condition Checklist

The purpose of this checklist is to document the original condition of the apartment at the beginning of the lease term. Examine each item in the apartment and record its condition by checking the appropriate column. NP = no problem; P = problem; or NA = not applicable. Then on a separate sheet of paper, describe each problem in as much detail as possible. If you choose, you can provide this to your landlord, or keep it for your records. You may also want to take photos.

Street Address: _____ Apt. No.: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Living Room

NP	P	NA	
			Doors
			Screens
			Windows
			Floor
			Rug/Carpet
			Walls
			Shades/Blinds
			Ceiling
			Closets
			Light Fixtures
			Outlets
			Fireplace
			Sofa
			Lounge
			Chairs
			Other chairs
			End tables
			Coffee Tables
			Lamps
			Bookshelves
			Drapes/curtains

Dining Room

NP	P	NA	
			Doors
			Screens
			Windows
			Floor
			Rug/Carpet
			Walls
			Shades/Blinds
			Ceiling
			Closets
			Light Fixtures
			Outlets
			Tables
			Chairs
			Cabinets
			Drapes/Curtains
			Shades/Blinds

Kitchen

NP	P	NA	
			Doors
			Screens
			Floor
			Walls
			Ceiling
			Closets
			Sink
			Stove/Oven
			Hood/Fan
			Refrigerator
			Garbage Disposal
			Dishwasher
			Light Fixtures
			Shades/Blinds
			Counter Tops
			Drawers
			Cupboards
			Cabinets
			Dinette Chairs
			Dinette Chairs
			Drapes/Curtains

Bathroom

NP	P	NA	
			Doors
			Fan
			Tissue Holder
			Towel Racks
			Mirrors
			Medicine Cabinet
			Other Cabinets
			Drawers
			Bathtub
			Shower
			Shower Tiles
			Shower Curtain/Door
			Sink
			Toilet

			Light Fixtures
			Outlets
			Drapes/Curtains
			Shades/Blinds

Bedroom 1

NP	P	NA	
			Doors
			Screens
			Windows
			Floor
			Rug/Carpet
			Walls
			Ceiling
			Closets
			Bookshelves
			Light Fixtures
			Outlets
			Box Bed Spring
			Bed Frame
			Bed Headboard
			Shades/Blinds
			Night Tables
			Lamps
			Mirrors
			Dressers
			Chairs
			Study Table/Desk
			Drapes/Curtains

Bedroom 2

NP	P	NA	
			Doors
			Screens
			Windows
			Floor
			Rug/Carpet
			Walls
			Ceiling
			Closets
			Bookshelves
			Light Fixtures

			Outlets
			Box Bed Spring
			Bed Frame
			Bed Headboard
			Shades/Blinds
			Night Tables
			Lamps
NP	P	NA	<i>(Bedroom 2 cont)</i>
			Mirrors
			Dressers
			Chairs
			Study Table/Desk
			Drapes/Curtains

Bedroom 3

NP	P	NA	
			Doors
			Screens
			Windows
			Floor
			Rug/Carpet
			Walls
			Ceiling
			Closets
			Bookshelves
			Light Fixtures
			Outlets
			Box Bed Spring
			Bed Frame
			Bed Headboard
			Shades/Blinds
			Night Tables
			Lamps
			Mirrors
			Dressers
			Chairs
			Study Table/Desk
			Drapes/Curtains

Bedroom 4

NP	P	NA	
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			Doors
			Screens
			Windows
			Floor
			Rug/Carpet
			Walls
			Ceiling
			Closets
			Bookshelves
			Light Fixtures
NP	P	NA	<i>(Bedroom 4 cont)</i>
			Outlets
			Box Bed Spring
			Bed Frame
			Bed Headboard
			Shades/Blinds
			Night Tables
			Lamps
			Mirrors
			Dressers
			Chairs
			Study Table/Desk
			Drapes/Curtains

Additional sheets are attached that describe in details problem conditions in the apartment.

Landlord/Agent

Date

Tenant

Date

Tenant

Date

Tenant

Date

Tenant

Date

Tenant

Date

Tenant

Date

Revised December, 2013

WASHINGTON AND LEE
UNIVERSITY

Lexington, Virginia 24450-2116