

Off Campus Living



renters checklist



a guide for finding safe housing off campus

<http://offcampusliving.org>

Off Campus Living

This resource will prove to be a helpful tool in your search for off campus housing. We will help you to increase the odds that your independent college living experience will be everything you expect it to be.

Mission

The Off Campus Student Resident Task Force (OCSR-TF) is committed to improving the safety and well being of college students living in privately owned houses and apartments by:

1. Building positive relationships with students, property owners, neighbors, municipalities, and other interested parties.
2. Raising awareness of individual and shared responsibilities relative to students living in off campus housing.

By accomplishing this mission we expect to ensure students the opportunity to live and learn in a safe, clean and responsive environment.

How You Can Avoid Trouble

The **Off Campus Housing Renters Checklist** on the following pages is a quick and simple tool to aid you through an evaluation process that could save you a lot of grief. Use the off campus renters checklist as a guide for answering questions of whether the building or new apartment is a safe place to live.

Always protect your possessions by obtaining renters insurance and never rent an apartment that is lacking smoke and CO detectors.

One other good indicator for making the decision of whether or not to rent the apartment is asking yourself if you would recommend this apartment to a friend.

Please visit our website at <http://offcampusliving.org> for more useful tools to aid in your off campus living experience.

Off Campus Housing Renters Checklist

This Renters Checklist and process is dedicated to improving the fire and life safety in off campus housing not provided by a participating college or university.

This Renters Checklist and process is intended to be used by persons evaluating a potential residence for possible living accommodations. It may be used for establishing criteria to support a final decision and as a tool by the perspective renter to measure one property against another. Landlords may use this form to evaluate their property and demonstrate that it meets these basic needs. Housing services choosing to require that a landlord submit a Renters Checklist as part of their listing process will provide a copy to students seeking housing for comparison with a Renters Checklist completed by them when considering the rental property.

Address: _____ Date Inspected: _____

Owner: _____ Contact number: _____

Owner's representative: _____ Contact number: _____

Repairs needed ___Yes ___No

If yes, repairs to be completed by the following date: _____

Exterior of building and yards

A **B**

- | | |
|---|--|
| Building exterior appears to be clean and well maintained | <input type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> no |
| All doors, stairs and fire escapes are unobstructed and in good condition | <input type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> no |
| Property around the building is clean and well maintained | <input type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> no |
| Porches are free of furniture designed for interior use | <input type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> no |
| Garbage containers with lids provided (totes if required) | <input type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> no |
| Fluids for snow blower, lawn equipment, etc. are not stored in building | <input type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> no |

Living room, common areas

- | | |
|--|--|
| All interior walls and ceilings are in good condition (no signs of leaks) | <input type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> no |
| Electric outlets on each wall, outlets have covers and are in good condition | <input type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> no |
| All wall electrical switches work easily and light fixtures work properly | <input type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> no |
| Hallways and common areas are illuminated | <input type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> no |
| Smoke detectors in each hallway leading to bedrooms | <input type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> no |
| Carbon Monoxide detector located on each floor containing bedrooms | <input type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> no |
| Windows operate easily | <input type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> no |
| All exit routes are clear, doors work freely | <input type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> no |
| Exit doors free of locking devices that may interfere with exiting
(no keys required to exit) | <input type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> no |
| Carbon Monoxide detector present in apartment | <input type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> no |

If you have checked any boxes in the "B" column you should not rent the apartment until the landlord has corrected the items of concern.

Kitchen

A **B**

All interior walls, ceiling and floor are in good condition (no signs of leaks)	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Electric outlets on each wall, outlets have covers and are in good condition	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
All wall electrical switches work easily; Light fixtures work properly	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Do appliances provided appear to be clean and in good working condition?	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Are the appliances electrical cords in good condition?	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Kitchen exhaust and kitchen surfaces are free of grease	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Hot and Cold water turns on and off without leaks	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Sink drains ok (not real slow, no leaks under sink)	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Windows operate easily, exit route is clear, doors work freely	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>

Utilities & housekeeping

All circuits marked on electrical panel	<input type="radio"/>	Breakers	<input type="radio"/>	Fuses	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Basement is not cluttered with combustible debris	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>				
Oil/gas burners have an identified emergency shut off switch	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>				
Laundry rooms (if provided) are neat, clean and free of lint	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>				
The basement is dry and free of standing water and mold	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>				
A 3 foot clearance is maintained around furnace, boiler and hot water tank	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>				
Do all of the rooms have heat?	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>				

Bathroom

Interior walls, ceiling and floor are in good condition (no signs of leaks or mold)	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Electric outlets have covers and are in good condition (GFCI preferred)	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
All wall electrical switches work easily; Light fixtures work properly	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Hot and Cold water turns on and off without leaks at sink	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Hot and Cold water turns on and off without leaks at tub/ shower	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Window, operates easily, or exhaust vent fan (exhausted to exterior)	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Toilet flushes completely and does not leak	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Tub and Sink drains ok, (not real slow or plugged)	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>

Bedroom #1 (not permitted in cellars or attics)

Interior walls, ceiling and floor are in good condition (no signs of leaks)	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Electric outlets on each wall, outlets have covers and are in good condition	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
All wall electrical switches work easily; Light fixtures work properly	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Smoke detector is present in bedroom and tests ok (press button to test)	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Window (1 required) operates easily, glass not broken, screens provided	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>
Door works freely, latches and locks (no keys required to exit)	<input type="radio"/>	yes	<input type="radio"/>	no	<input type="radio"/>

If you have checked any boxes in the "B" column you should not rent the apartment until the landlord has corrected the items of concern.

Bedroom #2 (not permitted in cellars or attics)

A **B**

- Interior walls, ceiling and floor are in good condition (no signs of leaks) yes no O
- Electric outlets on each wall, outlets have covers and are in good condition yes no O
- All wall electrical switches work easily; Light fixtures work properly yes no O
- Smoke detector is present in bedroom and tests ok (press button to test) yes no O
- Window (1 required) operates easily, glass not broken, screens provided yes no O
- Door works freely, latches and locks (no keys required to exit) yes no O

Bedroom #3 (not permitted in cellars or attics)

- Interior walls, ceiling and floor are in good condition (no signs of leaks) yes no O
- Electric outlets on each wall, outlets have covers and are in good condition yes no O
- All wall electrical switches work easily; Light fixtures work properly yes no O
- Smoke detector is present in bedroom and tests ok (press button to test) yes no O
- Window (1 required) operates easily, glass not broken, screens provided yes no O
- Door works freely, latches and locks (no keys required to exit) yes no O

Bedroom #4 (not permitted in cellars or attics)

- Interior walls, ceiling and floor are in good condition (no signs of leaks) yes no O
- Electric outlets on each wall, outlets have covers and are in good condition yes no O
- All wall electrical switches work easily; Light fixtures work properly yes no O
- Smoke detector is present in bedroom and tests ok (press button to test) yes no O
- Window (1 required) operates easily, glass not broken, screens provided yes no O
- Door works freely, latches and locks (no keys required to exit) yes no O

Bedroom #5 (not permitted in cellars or attics)

- Interior walls, ceiling and floor are in good condition (no signs of leaks) yes no O
- Electric outlets on each wall, outlets have covers and are in good condition yes no O
- All wall electrical switches work easily; Light fixtures work properly yes no O
- Smoke detector is present in bedroom and tests ok (press button to test) yes no O
- Window (1 required) operates easily, glass not broken, screens provided yes no O
- Door works freely, latches and locks (no keys required to exit) yes no O

Smoke and CO detectors are required by law.
Never rent an apartment where they are not installed and working.

If you have checked any boxes in the "B" column you should not rent the apartment until the landlord has corrected the items of concern.

Other item(s) noted during evaluation:

Some things you may want to keep in mind when looking.



Partitioned, basement, or attic rooms: It is rare for a city or town building department to give approval for partitioning of living and/or dining rooms into bedrooms. Some landlords will try to do this illegally to maximize the number of students renting, but it is at the cost of those students safety. Unless there are two means of exit provided, and the city or town has given approval in writing, basement and attic rooms are also illegal to rent.



Structural, water, or fire damage: Look for signs of damage. This can be an indicator of previous serious problems with the property that can affect your safety and the safety of your belongings. If you find signs of previous damage, be sure to find out what the cause was and what has been done to rectify the problem so that it does not reoccur.



Upholstered furniture stored outside: This type of furniture was not designed for outdoor use. Upholstered furniture burning on your porch presents a very real threat to your safety. Ignited by a carelessly discarded cigarette or an ash dropped between the cushions, fire develops slowly. It can take hours before flames are visible; long enough for you to be sound asleep and unaware of the rising threat to your life. Rodents look for a warm cozy place to nest and raise their babies. Placing upholstered furniture outdoors provides them with an inviting environment. So it is in your best interest to make sure upholstered furniture is kept inside when looking at rental properties.



Fire Protection Equipment: Smoke detectors are basic life safety devices that are required by the Fire Code to be on every level, in hallways leading to bedrooms and in every bedroom of a residence. Make sure that they are present and that they work. Some buildings may have a full fire alarm system, and or a sprinkler system, if so, an annual report indicating that it is operational should be available for your review.



Carbon Monoxide Protection Equipment: Carbon Monoxide (CO) detectors are required by New York State Law to be installed in every residential property where CO gas may be present. Carbon Monoxide is a by product of flame burning fuels, i.e. natural gas used to heat the residence and to create hot water. Poor

maintenance or malfunctions of the fuel burning appliance or venting system will result in CO gas accumulating inside the residence, threatening those inside. A CO detector will alert occupants of the presence of this deadly gas so that they may take action to protect themselves. Be sure that a CO detector is present on each floor where bedrooms are located.



Means of Exit: Whenever you go into a building it is important to know that you can get out of that building in an emergency. Beware of obstacles that may restrict your ability to escape. Bedrooms located in basements and attics are not permitted by the Fire Code and should not be considered for occupancy.



Electrical Safety: Fires caused by faulty electrical wiring or electrical equipment is a leading source of residential fires and therefore needs to be part of any fire safety evaluation. Starting at the power panel; screw in fuses indicates that the system has not been updated. Switch type circuit breakers are

a sign that some system improvements have been made in an older building or that circuit breakers were originally installed. If appliances, i.e. dishwasher, clothes washer and dryer, stove, refrigerator make sure that they work and that they clean. Where possible look at the power cords. Are they soft and supple or are they stiff and cracked? Are the plug ends broken with wires and insulation showing? Something that most people don't know is that the ground pin on a three prong plug is important and should not be removed because the outlet will only take a two prong plug. This is absolutely necessary to avoid an electrical shock. Unplug the appliance and take a look. Flickering lights, sparks, electrical wall switches that work intermittently may all be a sign of danger. You will need to have power for your computer, stereo, chargers, etc. and outlets on each wall will lessen the need for extension cords.



Housekeeping: Does the place look clean and is it well maintained inside and out? This should be simple to evaluate and is an indication of how responsive the landlord will be when things need to be repaired. Mold is a common problem wherever moisture is allowed to persist and it can be a serious health risk. Look for mold on the basement walls and wherever water may collect. Do not permit furniture designed for interior use to be on outside porches. This is a serious fire safety risk.



Heating and Air Conditioning: Does the furnace or hot water boiler look dirty and unkept? If the answer is yes, it likely is not being maintained and is in need of service. Black soot at the bottom of the hot water tank is a good indication of a problem with the tank or a blocked vent pipe, a condition that can cause you to be overcome by carbon monoxide gas.



Building Maintenance: Does the exterior of the building look well kept? Can you see peeling paint, rotten wood, broken windows, loose gutters, broken concrete, uncut vegetation? These things are easy to spot and will tell you a lot about the quality of the building and the landlord.

Off Campus Living.org

Please visit our website at <http://offcampusliving.org> for more useful tools to aid in your off campus living experience. Some of the resources available on our website's Housing Page include:

Rental Property Database - Listing of off campus housing targeting students as the primary customer. This list is compiled using various resources found in the public domain and matches the advertised number of bedrooms with the number of bedrooms found in municipal records. Where more bedrooms than are listed in the municipal record are advertised, serious life safety conditions may exist, i.e. converted basement and or attics. In addition, the Rental Property Database lists the response to three life safety questions provided by advertisers:

- 1) Does the apartment have functioning smoke detectors?
- 2) Is the apartment equipped with a Carbon Monoxide detector?
- 3) Is the electrical wiring in the apartment up to code?

Renters Check List - This is a property survey tool used by both the tenant and the Landlord to document the apartment condition before the tenant moves in. Issues found during the property survey are identified for correction and at the end of the lease period, to settle disputes about condition of the property.

Housing Concern Referral - Should you experience a problem with your rental property this tool provides a simple way of describing the issue and formally documenting notice to the landlord. The website also provides a link to the City of Buffalo 311 system for use by a complainant to report issues of concern.

Student Survey - A survey that is used to develop a better understanding of the housing concerns students are experiencing, so that the OCSRTF may target specific issues as may be appropriate to the need.

Off Campus Living

University at Buffalo

UB Greek Affairs
Community Relations
Judicial Affairs
Off Campus Student Services
Environment Health & Safety
International Student & Scholar Services
University Police

Canisius College

Office of Residence Life
Facilities Department

Buffalo State College

Environmental Health & Safety

SUNY Geneseo

Environmental Health & Safety

Erie Community College

Student Affairs

Buffalo Community

Saint Joseph University
Problem Properties Task Force
University Heights Community
Development Association, Inc.
Gloria J. Parks Community Center

City of Buffalo

Department of Economic Development,
Permits and Inspections
Mayor's Anti-Flip Task Force
City of Buffalo Fire Department
Fire Department Fire Prevention
Fire Department Fire Investigation

Town of Amherst

Building Department

Town of Tonawanda

Building Department
Environmental Health & Safety

Life Safety Organizations and Businesses

Housing Opportunities Made Equal
Simplex Grinnell

Housing Providers

Collegiate Village
Villas at Chestnut Ridge

Design Consultant

Robert Hochberg

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