

Many housing options are available to graduate and professional students at the University of Pennsylvania. You may choose to live on campus, in the high-rise apartments at Sansom Place, or you can choose to live off campus, as most of the graduate and professional students at Penn do. Philadelphia, the fifth largest city in the United States, has a reputation as one of the most livable cities in the country, a major urban center that has retained the feel of a "city of neighborhoods". With rents remaining steady or modestly increasing over the last two years, the cost of housing in Philadelphia continues to be much more affordable than in other East Coast cities, such as Boston and New York. With a well-developed and well-coordinated mass transit system (SEPTA), many areas of the city and the suburbs are within easy commute. Penn's campus is located at the eastern side of University City/West Philadelphia and in close proximity to the Center City area. The vast majority of graduate and professional students choose to live in Center City and University City, within easy reach of school, shopping, cultural and recreational attractions and outstanding restaurants.

How can the Office of Off-Campus Services (OCS) help?

The University of Pennsylvania Office of Off Campus Services (OCS), at 3702 Spruce Street (phone number 215-898-8500, fax number 215-573-2061) is designed to assist students, staff and faculty at all stages of their off-campus living experience. A list of services is provided below. You can access all our information online at www.upenn.edu/offcampusservices. When you are in town you can use the office as your base for your housing search. Our user-friendly office has computer terminals for your searches and telephones to call and set up appointments.

OCS Services

COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS, a part of the OCS website with interactive maps, detailed landlord and building profiles, and everything else you need for your housing search. From the OCS home page, click on "Graduate Guide 2011*." The 2010 guide is posted for reference.

SEARCHABLE DATABASE OF AVAILABLE RENTALS, updated daily, with several hundred available units at any one time. Listings include individual rental units (studios, one-, two-, three or more- bedroom apartments and houses) as well as share and sublet opportunities. Most of our rental listings are for University City and Center City areas. Other Greater Philadelphia area listings are also available. Run your customized search at www.upenn.edu/offcampusservices.

LANDLORD SURVEY hosted by the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (**GAPSA**), includes yearly-updated landlord and building ratings and comments from tenants regarding their housing choices. Survey results are linked from the OCS website under "Tenant Feedback."

OCS organizes an **ANNUAL RENTAL HOUSING FAIR**, where students can explore housing options, meet landlords, tour properties and make informed decisions. The Rental Fair will take place on **Tuesday, April 5, 2011**. For students unable to attend, OCS will create a virtual housing fair on our website during the month of April.

If you are **LOOKING FOR A ROOMMATE**, whether you already have a place or not, you can use our roommate search service and reach out to other graduate students who are also looking to share an apartment.

OCS REVIEWS LEASES and OFFERS COUNSELING to tenants who have lease questions or are involved in landlord/tenant disputes. University of Pennsylvania students have access to **UNIVERSITY-SUBSIDIZED LEGAL ASSISTANCE IN LANDLORD/TENANT MATTERS**. A referral from OCS must first be obtained.

*Graduate Guide will be updated for 2011 by the end of March.

When to Start

Due to a tight rental market in Philadelphia and surrounding counties, graduate students begin inquiries as early as February and the actual search in March. Companies that target the graduate student market will usually have information about available apartments as early as March/April. Other companies, however, will not know about availabilities until 60 or 90 days before the new lease is supposed to start. Check the lists of apartment buildings on our website to see when the buildings have their summer - fall availability information.

It is important to be flexible about the beginning date of a lease, especially if it is a good apartment. The housing search season begins in March/April and can go on until the beginning of August. If you cannot visit Philadelphia to look for housing before late summer, you are still likely to find a place but it may not be your first choice option.

Neighborhood Choices

UNIVERSITY CITY

Situated within the area known as West Philadelphia, University City extends west to 50th Street and includes the Powelton Village area, north of campus. Nearly 6,000 Penn students, graduate and undergraduate, rent apartments or houses in this area. While undergraduate students cluster in the area immediately west of campus, to 42nd Street, graduate students tend to go farther west, all the way to 48th Street, and beyond, usually within the area covered by Penn Transit. Thousands of other Penn affiliates - staff, faculty, alumni - own or rent in the University City neighborhoods of Spruce Hill, Garden Court, Cedar Park, Squirrel Hill and Powelton Village.

From most residences in University City, one can easily walk to campus in about 15-25 minutes or travel even more quickly by bike. **Penn Transit Services** offers door-to-door transportation to the Penn affiliates who live in University City (to 50th Street and including Powelton Village). This service is available between 6 p.m. and 3 a.m. and it is free with a Penn ID. The University also runs buses along established routes in the neighborhood. Some of the large area landlords run their own free shuttles to/from the campus area (A.H. Klein Properties and Campus Apartments).

The rental housing stock of University City consists mainly of Victorian homes, converted into apartments, and small, medium and high rise apartment buildings. Several high-end options have been added to the University City housing stock, through renovation of old buildings or construction of new ones.

University City buildings and recent renovations:

The Domus luxury apartment complex, located at 3411 Chestnut Street, features resident amenities and retailers.

The Left Bank, at 31st and Walnut Streets, offers luxury apartments at prices comparable to Center City apartments of similar quality.

The Hub, at 40th and Chestnut Streets is a 101-unit apartment building that has been popular with graduate students in the last four years since it opened.

The 4111 Walnut building and some other apartments along 41st and 42nd and Walnut Streets have been recently renovated and, in terms of prices, are at the high end of the rental market for the area. **Pine Arms**, at 40th and Pine Streets, is another recently renovated building targeting the graduate student market.

Other high rise apartment buildings in University City are: **Chestnut Hall**, at 3900 Chestnut Street, **The Fairfax**, at 43rd and Locust Streets and **Garden Court Plaza**, at 4701 Pine Street.

In Powelton Village, the **Old Quaker Building** and the **Courts Apartments** offer comfortable apartments at prices among the highest in University City, yet lower than the Center City prices.

There are a lot more small and medium size apartment buildings in University City/West Philadelphia, where the majority of tenants are graduate students. Check the OCS online listings or contact the office for more information. All prospective tenants should consult the **GAPSA Landlord Survey** for tenant feedback about area landlords. Current survey results can be accessed at www.gapsa.upenn.edu/gapsa-landlord-survey.

The University City area is home to many cultural institutions, and a large number of award-winning restaurants. Programs for clean and safe streets, marketing initiatives and many developments in retail and entertainment are making University City a choice destination for living and having fun.

CENTER CITY and ART MUSEUM

Some of the most popular Center City neighborhoods are Fitter Square, Rittenhouse Square (both west of Broad Street), Society Hill and Old City (east of Broad Street). Center City housing is comprised of modern luxury apartment complexes and condos, brownstones, row homes and warehouse apartment buildings. For 2011, we estimate that Center City rents will increase only slightly, if at all, with one-bedroom units most likely to have gone up. In these times of economic downturn, landlords seem more interested in tenant retention and high occupancy.

Center City is a popular choice for graduate students, especially in the area west of Broad Street. Many of the students who live in Center City cite the existence of shops, cafes, movie theaters, and fitness facilities as the main attraction. Higher prices than in other areas, difficulty in locating suitable units, parking and walking distance to/from campus have been cited as disadvantages. While street parking is not easily available,

some apartment complexes offer indoor parking at an additional cost. Students who live in Center City use public transportation or bike to and from campus. Between 6 p.m. and 3 a.m. transportation to/from Center City – as far east as 20th Street - is available to Penn affiliates through **Penn Transit Services**. Dial 898-RIDE to access the service.

The Art Museum area has more moderately priced high-rise apartments, brownstones and row homes. The area is not as easily accessible to the Penn Campus. There is no direct public transportation so you can either bike, use a car or plan to spend extra time going back and forth every day. Some apartment buildings offer their own shuttle services. For people who love the outdoors and want to bike and jog, the Fairmount Park nearby may represent a great advantage.

Steps in off-campus housing search

Step One: Budgeting

Rent

University City

Rents across University City vary widely, depending on location, type of building and amenities. At the low end, one may find **studios** for as low as \$500 while at the high end studio rents can go up to \$1600 or more. **One-bedroom** rents also range widely, from as low as \$540 in some buildings and locations to as high as \$1700. Two-bedroom rents may start as low as \$750 and go up to \$2650. Contact the leasing company to inquire about any special offers or concessions available at lease signing.

A range of good quality options may be found with a monthly rent of \$775 - \$925 for a studio and \$875 - \$1135 for a one bedroom in University City.

Center City

We estimate Center City 2011 **studio** rents to range from a low of \$765 to a high of \$1650, and **one-bedrooms** from \$1090 to \$2720. For high-rise accommodations, plan to spend no less than \$900 for a studio, and no less than \$1250 for a one bedroom. At 2400 Chestnut, one of the most popular housing choices for graduate students, average rents for 2011 are: \$1383 for a studio, \$1488 for a one bedroom and \$1918 for a two bedroom. Prices for apartments in brownstones may be lower but the quality of such units varies widely and students should make sure that they visit the units before committing to a lease. For detailed and updated information about rental costs, check our **Apartment Rental Costs** page online.

Additional costs

If **utilities** are not included in rent, please be aware that the cost of natural gas, oil and electricity is high. Also think of the cost of a **renter's insurance policy**, which will add about \$20 to your monthly expenses. While water is almost always included in the rent and heat can *sometimes* be included, electricity is most often the tenant's responsibility and the tenant almost always pays telephone and cable.

Step Two: Searching

Information about the major buildings in Center City and University City, with contact information, prices and time frame for inquiry and application, is available on the OCS website.

Once you have narrowed down your choices, visit the units that match your needs, if possible. Compile a list of advantages or disadvantages for each, so you can make the decision easier. Since the deposit may be *non-refundable* it is important to have some basic questions/requests answered before putting any money down. If you make the decision to rent after obtaining the information over the Internet, be extra careful, make sure you ask detailed questions about the property, obtain pictures, and, if at all possible, have a friend visit the place for you. Detailed written correspondence in situations like this is important.

Housing Search Websites

OCS Interactive apartment search database will give you information about hundreds of available units in the area: www.upenn.edu/offcampusservices
Craigslist remains popular, but we urge students to use caution on this website because of the greater prevalence of various scams: www.craigslist.org
Philadelphia Weekly, a free publication that comes out every Wednesday: www.phillyweekly.com

Step Three: Applying and Signing the Lease

In preparing for the application process, remember that the landlord will run a credit check on you and that he/she may require proof of income (grants, fellowships, stipends). Certain buildings in Center City have very stringent income requirements and they may ask for a co-signer to the lease.

For international F1 visa students, who will not be issued a Social Security Number until they secure on campus employment, it is advisable to have a copy of the Penn admission letter to accompany the I-20 form. A Social Security Number is not required to sign a lease, open a bank account or a utility account, but most landlords do require a SSN, and they must be educated regarding the regulations put forth by INS.

Keep in mind that the rental market is still tight and the tenants may not be able to negotiate the lease. Once signed, the lease is a legally binding document and breaking the lease without financial loss is only possible if you or the landlord can secure another qualified tenant for the apartment.

If a lease contains illegal clauses, they are not enforceable, however, unfair clauses can be. Regardless of what the lease says, remember that the law requires that landlords provide a safe and healthy unit, in compliance with the requirements of the Property Maintenance Code.

Check the renewal clause in your lease. Many leases in Philadelphia renew automatically for a period of one year or one month, in the absence of written notice. If you do not give written notice you may find yourself responsible for the lease and you stand to lose the security deposit and will be responsible for rent until another qualified tenant is found. Do not let this happen to you.

Become an informed consumer and an educated tenant. Know your rights and responsibilities (see next page for a list). Even if you are not able to negotiate much at the beginning of the lease, you will still be protected by the landlord-tenant law, and by federal, state and local ordinances.

Moving In

When you take possession of the premises, fill out a *move-in/move-out checklist*. If your landlord does not provide you with one, use the OCS form, which you can also download from our website. **Documentation and written communication are key to getting the landlord to maintain the property.**

During your tenancy bring all the problems regarding your apartment/house to the attention of your landlord. It is your responsibility as a tenant to do so. *Keep communication open.* Make sure the landlord has provided you with ways of reaching him/her in case of an emergency and for any routine maintenance and repair problems. Follow up a call that has not been immediately responded to with a written note, better yet, an email. If you get no response, send your letter certified mail, return receipt requested.

Keep the premises clean and remember that you are responsible for any damage done through misuse, abuse and negligence. If your landlord does not provide you with recycling containers and information, ask the landlord to do so. Recycling is the law in Philadelphia.

Obtain renter's insurance. The landlord's insurance policy does not cover your possessions. Check the OCS website for more information.

Moving Out

Give proper notice of lease termination and provide the landlord with written notification of your forwarding address for the return of your security deposit. Make sure you can prove that you have done so. Many leases renew automatically for another year, or another month or two months in the absence of written notice. Don't let yourself be caught in a lease longer than the one you wanted.

Leave the apartment clean and remove your possessions. Ask the landlord to inspect the apartment with you before termination. Document with pictures the condition of the premises before leaving. Wear and tear is the responsibility of the landlord but delivering the premises clean and in a condition similar to the one at the beginning of the lease is yours. Make sure that you can prove you have returned the key to the apartment on the day of the move out. The landlord may consider you did not surrender the premises unless you have returned the key to the units.

The landlord has 30 days to communicate with you about the security deposit and return the deposit or part of it. Always keep the envelope in which the landlord's letter arrives. The postmark on the envelope will show when the landlord mailed the letter. For information about security deposit return and assistance with recovering unfairly withheld funds, please contact our office.

Annual Rental Housing Fair
Tuesday, April 5, 2011
11 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Wynn Commons, Houston Hall
Rain Location: Hall of Flags, HH

Tenant's Rights

- **Fair Housing**, freedom from discrimination because of membership in a protected class (in Pennsylvania the protected classes are: race, color, national origin, gender, familial status, disability, creed, ancestry or age - over 40)
- A clean, safe place to live, in compliance with the warranty of habitability. This includes:
 - Structurally sound building
 - Waterproof roofs, ceilings and walls
 - Walls and woodwork properly painted (no peeling paint)
 - Adequate heat in winter
 - Hot and cold running water
 - Bathroom equipment, drains that work properly
 - Functioning stove
 - Doors that lock properly
 - Windows that work and can be locked
 - Apartment/house free from infestation with roaches and/or rodents
 - A building with smoke detectors, fire extinguishers and fire escapes
 - Repairs made promptly and properly by property owner/manager
- Enforce the right to habitable premises by using legal remedies such as repair and deduct, rent reduction, rent withholding, or move out of uninhabitable premises with the right to recover all prepaid rent and deposits

NOTE: CONSULT WITH A HOUSING COUNSELOR OR YOUR ATTORNEY BEFORE USING ANY OF THE ABOVE REMEDIES

- Privacy and protection from intrusion and harassment from the landlord
- Quietly enjoy full possession and use of the premises
- Make complaints to governmental authorities about violation of rights without retaliation
- Move out when necessity arises, for any number of legitimate reasons and have the landlord make a diligent effort to mitigate damages
- Prompt return of all deposits and interest due
- Property seizures, lock-outs or evictions **only** in accordance with established legal procedures and with proper advance notice
- Recover damages for violation of rights
- A lease that guarantees these rights in writing

Tenant's Responsibilities

- Use the dwelling unit for residential purposes only
- Limit the number of people living in the unit to the number of people written into the lease. However, this does not mean that the landlord can restrict your right to have visitors on the premises and reasonable overnight guests;
- Pay rent and utility bills that are the tenant's responsibility under the lease, on the due dates and in the agreed way;
- Keep unit clean and safe; promptly notify landlord of any damage to the premises; pay for any damage caused by tenant or his/her guests; this does not apply to normal wear and tear and maintenance of the property, which are the responsibilities of the landlord;
- Dispose of all trash and other waste in a clean and safe manner and according to the instructions provided by the landlord; if tenants violate trash disposal rules they can be fined by the City of Philadelphia;
- Use electrical, plumbing and heating facilities in a safe and careful manner;
- Not destroy, deface, damage the premises or remove any part of the premises;
- Not make any alteration to the premises without first getting the property owner's consent in writing;
- Not keep any animals in the unit, unless permitted by the lease (service animals for people with disabilities are excepted);
- Not change locks to the premises without written permission from property owner, who must have access to the premises at all times, in case of an emergency;
- Conduct themselves, and require any person on the premises with tenant's consent to conduct themselves, in a manner that will not disturb the other tenants' peaceful enjoyment of the premises;
- Report all problems with the apartment to the property owner/manager; communicate problems with the property and give notices in writing; keep copies of all written communication with the property owner/manager;
- Leave apartment clean and in a condition similar to the one at the beginning of the lease, wear and tear excepted;
- Fill out a move-in/move-out checklist;
- Provide proper written notice of intention to terminate or renew lease
- Provide written notification of forwarding address for the return of security deposit

Questions?

Check www.upenn.edu/offcampusservices, call or visit the office at any time before, during or after your tenancy. We hope that by following these guidelines you will make your off-campus living experience a happy one. Once you have lived in your residence for some time, remember to fill out the GAPSA Landlord Survey (www.gapsa.upenn.edu) and let others know about good places and not-so-good places to live. Contact us with your comments. Call us at 215-898-8500 or write at ocliving@exchange.upenn.edu.

DISCLAIMER: OCS materials are intended for use only as consumer information and a general overview of issues and concerns related to rental housing. They are not exhaustive and should not be relied upon as legal advice.

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