

Finding Housing at Notre Dame

Common Lease Options

BY THE BEDROOM | Each resident of the apartment or house signs a lease and pays a monthly cost based on the bedroom each occupies, independent of each other. Pro: each person is only responsible for the cost of their room, regardless of the total capacity or occupancy of the house or apartment. Con: you may have limited if any choice of roommates.

BY THE UNIT | Each resident of the apartment or house jointly signs a single lease and shares the monthly cost for the entire apartment or house (unit). Pro: these arrangements tend to be more affordable. Con: if your roommate unexpectedly moves out, you could be held responsible for their share of expenses.

FURNISHED | Furnished properties will often include furniture like mattresses, beds, dining tables, couches or chairs. These items will be included for you and in the space when you arrive. You will likely need to supply linens like bed sheets and towels. You cannot remove these items from the space and will need to use what is provided.

UNFURNISHED | You will need to supply all furniture for the space, including mattresses, beds, dining tables, couches or chairs; in addition to any personal items you will need and want to have. You will be responsible to move all your items in, and take everything with you when you leave. There are companies that allow you to rent furniture at an additional cost and will deliver and pick up your items. This can be helpful for you to get established in your new space.

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4 Top Considerations

COST | Cost is not just rent. Your expenses could include application fees, a housing deposit, utilities deposits, monthly utilities bills (water, electricity, gas, internet), renter's insurance and monthly rent. You should thoroughly research all expected costs related to the properties you are considering before making a decision. What is included, and what is not? What is already connected, and what will you have to pay to connect? What are your move-in costs, and what are your monthly costs? What is the range of monthly utility costs, and what is the average monthly utility costs? Be sure to create a monthly budget to ascertain what you can afford and how much you want to spend before signing a lease. Note: If you will be paid a stipend from your department, it could be as late as September before you receive your first stipend payment. So plan your spending and savings accordingly.

LOCATION | In general, the closer you are to campus, the more you will have to pay. As you get farther from campus, you will generally pay less and have more spacious options. But location is also about proximity to other things, such as grocery shopping, schools, parks, and places of worship; and these are all especially important if you will not have a car. South Bend is designed for vehicular traffic, so things are spread out and not particularly convenient or close for pedestrians. Consider the types of places you will want or need to visit, then consider how close you want or need to live in proximity to those places.

TRANSPORTATION | Drive: If you have a car, you will pay a modest fee to park on campus, and you may be charged a parking fee at your apartment complex. But you will have maximum flexibility in selecting housing locations. Walk/Bike: If you do not have a car, and plan to walk or bike to campus daily, you will need to be quite close to campus in order to do so safely throughout the year as the winter months make these activities difficult and sometimes dangerous in areas where snow is not routinely plowed. Bus: If you do not have a car, and plan to use public transportation to campus daily, you should make sure the locations you are considering are in close proximity to a bus route that will get you to campus. You should also consider the following pros & cons: Pros: [Transpo](#) is free to all Notre Dame students; it is a more eco-friendly option than driving; buses have bike racks, so you can bring your bike to get around campus. Cons: buses do not run on Sundays; routes and schedules are limited; it takes longer to reach your destination.

SAFETY | As is common in cities, some areas are safer than others. Neighborhoods with sidewalks are safer for pedestrians and children. Neighborhoods with bike lanes are safer for cyclists. Neighborhoods with lower crime rates are safer for everyone. Before deciding where to live, research [crime maps](#) for the area, paying particular attention to the types and frequency of criminal activity. Also, note safety features of the property itself, such as lighting, locks, external access points, enclosed parking, and security personnel.

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Where to Look for Housing

UNIVERSITY-RELATED | Notre Dame has several University-Related Housing options that are specifically designed for graduate students: [Fischer Graduate Residences](#), [Overlook at Notre Dame](#), [The Landings](#), and [The Foundry](#). These are all close and convenient.

OFFCAMPUS.ND.EDU | The offcampus.nd.edu website offers simple online tools and resources to help you search for housing based on your specific needs. You can narrow your search by desired criteria (pets, in-unit washer/dryer, etc.), use the roommate matching tool, and read through a list of helpful resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS | Each graduate program has a department administrator who is a wealth of information. This vital staff member can share recommendations from students in your department, put you in touch with other students looking for roommates, and provide information on different neighborhoods and community resources.

ONLINE CONNECTIONS | Notre Dame's Graduate Student Life [facebook group for new graduate students](#) is a great place to ask questions, share ideas, and get opinions about housing options. You can look at other facebook groups/pages such as [GSG](#), [GSN](#), or [ND Sublets](#). There are also plenty of non-ND resources as well, but be sure you are using a reputable source of information before signing anything.

Helpful Resources Before, During, and After Signing a Lease

[Office of Residential Life](#)

[Offcampus.nd.edu Resources Page](#)

[Rent Affordability Calculator](#)

[Notre Dame Clinical Law Center](#)

[City of South Bend Human Rights Commission Housing Resources](#)

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Miscellaneous Tips & Common Practices

It is common for landlords to run a background check on potential residents, so there is no need to be surprised or alarmed by that. However, background checks cannot be run on international students who do not yet have a social security number. For this reason, some landlords may be hesitant to lease to international students, or may require they purchase rental fee insurance for a small cost to mitigate their risk.

If you want to know more about the background of your landlord, you can easily search online for the name of the property management company to see if there are any ratings, recommendations, or complaints about them. For individual property owners, you can ask for a reference from a former tenant. They are not required to provide one, but you have the right to request it.

If this will be your first time living in the US, or in the midwest, you should spend some time questioning any assumptions you might be making based on your past living experiences. For example, if you are accustomed to being able to get anywhere on easily available public transit, do not assume you will enjoy that same level of ease here. If you have a habit of visiting the neighborhood bakery or fresh produce market for dinner ingredients on your walk home every night, do not assume getting to those vendors will be as convenient here. If you are used to finding specialized ingredients (Kosher, Halal) in every store, do not assume these will be as readily available here. Talk to current students about your needs and expectations to be sure you have an accurate understanding of what your experience here is likely to be, and how that affects where you choose to live.

There is no reason a potential landlord would need your photograph. If they ask for one, decline to provide it, then seriously consider why they want it, and whether you should trust their intentions.

The Fair Housing Act forbids property management companies from asking any questions about or making leasing decisions on the basis of race, religion, sex, national origin, disability, familial status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. If a potential landlord asks about any of these aspects of your identity, they could be in violation of your rights. Individual property owners who rent rooms or houses are exempt from these requirements. However, if a potential landlord seems overly concerned about an aspect of your identity, then you might want to consider why they are concerned and whether you feel safe entering into a contractual relationship with them.

When you sign a lease with a landlord or property management company, you are entering into a legal contract with this individual or group. Your lease will tell you important information about expectations and responsibilities for you, your roommates, and guests. Please read this lease carefully and keep a copy of your lease for your records. It is important to document any conversation you have with your landlord in terms of your lease, your fees, expectations, etc. Communications between you and your landlord regarding fees should be completed in writing, via email or text message. You are encouraged to complete a room condition report when you move-in to your new home. This will allow you to document the condition of your space- if there is a hole in the wall for example, take a photo of it, and report it to your landlord. You will complete a second report when your lease ends and you move-out. Your landlord can determine any fees based on the condition of the property at move-in and move-out.