

## Off-Campus Living

### Things to Keep In Mind When Looking For Accommodations to Rent In and Around the City of Atlanta.

#### **You are not obligated to rent an apartment if you look at it!**

When looking for accommodations as a prospective tenant, remember that you are the customer and you are looking for a place to live that is a good fit for you and your lifestyle. If you do not like the first house or apartment you visit, then continue looking. All you have to tell the landlord is that you want to look around more. Do not feel pressured to accept an apartment or house that you do not like. It is very important that you see the apartment you are going to rent before you sign any agreements or leases. Get everything in writing before you sign a lease! All expenses of repair, painting, etc. should be written into the lease agreement before you sign it.



#### **Suggested Questions for Landlord**

- How much is the monthly rent?
- How much is the security deposit?
- What is included in the rent? Utilities? If not, what is the average monthly cost of utilities?
- Is it furnished?
- What are the amenities?
- Can I use the kitchen?
- Will I share the room with anybody?
- How many people are sharing the house? Are they all males or females?
- Is smoking permitted?
- How far is it from the house (or apartment) to the bus stop?
- Monthly Lease: Is it renewable automatically?
- Yearly Lease: Is it renewable automatically?
- How much is the deposit?
- Is there any laundry facility available?
- What notice is required to terminate the agreement?
- Parking: Is there a lot? A garage?
- On-Street Parking? Are spaces assigned?
- Are pets allowed?
- Are there any restrictions?

#### **Security Deposits and First Months' Rent**

A landlord will probably ask you for money before you move into an apartment. This may be in the form of a security deposit and usually includes the first and last months' rent. This can sometimes

amount to more than \$1,000 dollars. A “security deposit” is an amount of money that is supposed to guarantee that the tenant will care for the dwelling. If the tenant does not care for the property or clean it before leaving, the landlord has a legal right to keep the security deposit. Otherwise, the land lord must return the security deposit within a month after the tenant leaves. You should have the agreement about the security deposit in writing included in the lease. Landlords will often ask for the sum of the first and last months’ rent before the tenant moves into the apartment. This is to protect the landlord in case the tenant leaves early without paying the rent for the agreed upon lease term. Each landlord has particular requirements for deposits. You should ask the landlord about his particular requirements.

### **Signing a lease**

In most cases, the landlord will require the tenant to sign a lease. A lease is a written agreement between a tenant and a landlord that describes the responsibilities of each party. This is a binding legal document that commits the student to a specific period of residency in the unit. Most landlords want the tenant to sign a one-year lease. This presents a problem if the student leaves for the summer, because you must find someone to assume responsibility for the lease. If you know that you will not be in Atlanta for the entire year, you should not sign a year’s lease. Shorter leases are available.

### **Utilities**

Unless someone is already living in the dwelling, the new tenant must start utility services, such as telephone, electricity, and gas. The tenant may need to assume the cost of water, garbage and pest control (a service where a company exterminates insects on a monthly basis), and may want to pay for cable television connection. Prospective tenants should ask the landlord about which services the landlord will provide and which services the tenant must arrange. This is important because utilities require deposits that may be expensive.

### **Duration of the Lease**

A prospective tenant should not sign a lease for a period longer than he anticipates needing the housing. Some landlords will agree to leases of 6-, 9-, or 12-month duration with the option of renewing each additional month. The renter should ask whether he/she can “break” the lease (terminate occupancy early) if she/he gives a one or two month notice to the landlord. If not, the renter will be required to pay rent until the end of the period covered by the lease even if she/he moves out and lives elsewhere. Many unpleasant disputes arise between landlords who want to keep their property rented and student renters who, after signing a lease, decide for some reason that they wish to live elsewhere. The lease should specify whether “subleasing” is permitted. “Subleasing” is a lease arrangement whereby another person replaces the initial tenant with responsibility for the lease.

### **Restrictions**

The lease may contain restrictions, such as not permitting animals or children in the dwelling. Ask the landlord about her/his particular requirements. If you do not obey the restrictions on the lease, the landlord can ask you to leave.