

Managing Your Finances Off Campus

Students often ask whether it is less expensive to live on campus or off campus. The answer to that question depends on information that is specific to you. However, we can provide you with information about costs you should consider when moving off campus.

Whether you are just thinking about moving off campus, or have already made the decision, the information that follows is designed to help you anticipate, plan, and manage the costs of living off campus.

MONEY SAVING TIPS AND ADVICE

RENT

When you're shopping for an apartment, be sure to ask what utilities are included—heat, hot water, electricity. The more that is included, the more expensive the rent will be, but you also won't have to worry about paying additional bills.

Rent varies throughout the University area. Factors that determine the amount of rent that is paid include the following:

- In general, the closer the unit is to campus, the more expensive it will be.
- In general, the larger the unit, the more expensive it will be.
- In general, furnished units are more expensive than unfurnished units.
- In general, the more utilities included in the rent, the more expensive the rent will be.
- In general, studio and one-bedroom apartments are more expensive per person than multi-room units.

SECURITY DEPOSIT

When you're estimating how much money you'll need to live off campus, don't forget you'll need a large amount of money up front. Almost every landlord will require you to pay a security deposit in addition to your first month's rent before you move in. A security deposit can be anywhere from one to two times your monthly rent and will depend on your landlord. A security deposit is designed to protect a landlord from damages caused to an apartment or from unpaid rent.

It is a good idea to protect your security deposit by taking several pictures or a video of your apartment and completing an apartment condition checklist and reviewing it with your landlord BEFORE you move in, while the apartment is empty. Pictures, a video, and an apartment condition checklist will serve as evidence of the condition of your apartment before you live there. You should also take similar pictures or a video when you move out. Be sure to keep copies for yourself.

WINTER HEATING

If heat is not included in your rent, ask your landlord for an estimate of expected heating costs. The landlord must provide this information to prospective tenants upon written request. This is the best way to know what you should expect to pay. Also consider signing up for a budget payment plan. It will spread your bills out evenly over the entire year so you're not stuck with large bills during the winter months. The following are some money-saving tips:

- Set your thermostat lower when you are not home and when you are sleeping.
- Put an extra blanket on your bed and wear an extra layer to be comfortable.
- Set your thermostat at 68 degrees. For every degree you set your thermostat back, you can save 3 percent of your annual heating costs.
- Ask your landlord to install a programmable thermostat that allows you to set up heating programs that will automatically change the thermostat's set temperature between comfort levels and energy-saving levels at specified times.
- Keep curtains and shades open during the day to capture warmth and closed at night to prevent heat loss through windows.
- Keep doors of unused rooms closed, and use a towel to eliminate drafts under doors.

SPLITTING BILLS

When you move to an apartment, you'll have many separate bills. Each bill will need to be in just one person's name. If you have roommates, split the utility bills between house members. This way, one person is not responsible for all of the bills. Communicate with your roommates about what you owe.

CLEANING SUPPLIES

Keep in mind that when you move off campus you'll be responsible for keeping your entire apartment clean. Make sure you have appropriate cleaning supplies and equipment, such as a vacuum cleaner for carpets or a mop for hardwood floors. You may also want some small rugs to protect the floor from snow and salt in the winter.

FOOD AND GROCERIES

It's important to budget enough money to maintain healthy eating habits off campus. Save money by buying in bulk or using coupons. Store brands are often a better bargain than national labels, and the quality is just as good. When comparing costs, keep your eye on unit prices. Another way to eat well is to purchase a five-meals-a-week meal plan so you have the option of eating some meals on campus.

PETS

One advantage of living off campus is that your apartment may allow you to have a pet. While this seems like a fun benefit, having a pet comes with many costs and responsibilities. It costs a lot to take care of a pet—including food and veterinarian bills. It is illegal to abandon pets once you move, so make sure if you get a pet you'll be able to take it with you when you move out.

TRANSPORTATION

Will you be driving more now that you live off campus? Maybe not, but it is an important cost to consider. You should also consider whether you'll need to pay for parking. If no parking spot is included with your apartment, will there be sufficient off-street parking? If not, parking tickets can be costly, and parking illegally could get your car towed. You may want to consider keeping your car on campus by purchasing a campus parking pass.

CREDIT CARDS

Resist the urge to use a credit card to pay for living expenses; credit cards aren't free money! Credit cards typically have very high interest rates. Not only will you be paying for your purchases well into the future; you will actually be paying much more for them than if you just paid cash. It's a good rule of thumb that if you don't have enough cash to buy a certain item, you shouldn't be buying it at all.

BUDGET WORKSHEET

It is important to make a budget if you are considering moving off campus. Working through a budget will help you identify and estimate the costs of living on your own. Once you estimate how much it will cost to live off campus, compare this to the cost of living on campus to see which option is better for you.

Make sure you use consistent measures; for example, to get an accurate comparison of income and expenses you must list them all in the same units (per month, per semester, or per year). This will require you to multiply or divide certain income or expenses to be consistent.

Also give some thought to one-time or occasional expenses—things like car repairs and registration, gifts for friends and family, vacation and travel, and other expenses that might occur just a few times a year, or maybe not at all. It's good to set some money aside for these unexpected expenses.

It is important to note how much of your total income should be allocated for the costs associated with living off campus. The following percentages of your total income are the average for students living off campus. These are only guidelines, however. You should tailor your budget to fit within your needs and priorities. First, use the table below to determine your total income. Then calculate how much should be spent on each expense.

INCOME SOURCES	AMOUNT
Family Contribution	
Scholarships	
Employment	
Loans	
Financial Aid	
Savings	
Other	
Total	

EXPENSES	PERCENT OF TOTAL INCOME	AMOUNT
Education (<i>tuition, books, fees, supplies</i>)	70%	
Housing (<i>rent, utilities, phone, renter's insurance</i>)	14%	
Food	6%	
Transportation (<i>car payment, gas, insurance, repairs</i>)	5%	
Personal/Miscellaneous (<i>clothing, health, laundry, cleaning</i>)	3%	
Entertainment (<i>movies, sporting events, concerts</i>)	1%	
Other Expenses (<i>parking, childcare, loans, travel</i>)	1%	

Syracuse University

Office of Student Living on South Campus

Division of Enrollment and the Student Experience
Goldstein Student Center, Suite 206
401 Skytop Road
Syracuse, New York 13244
t: 315.443.5489
f: 315.443.2343

<http://housing.offcampus.syr.edu>