

## TOP TEN RENTER'S MISTAKES

Many first-time renters are unaware of important factors to take into consideration when searching for off-campus housing. Here are some of the most frequent mistakes that renters make when looking for off-campus housing, and tips for how you can avoid them.

- 1. Signing a lease without reading it thoroughly.**  
Carefully read your lease before you sign it; make sure that you understand what all of its provisions mean, as well. Our "Understanding Leases" and "Lease Signing Checklist" handouts can serve as guides. You can also take your lease to the Undergraduate Legal Aid office and have them review the lease with you.
- 2. Signing a lease without visiting the property and meeting with the landlord.** Signing a lease before viewing a property is risky — you are legally bound to the property as is, so you may be unaware of existing damages that need repair. Additionally, visiting the property allows you to not only see exactly where you will be living, but you will also get a feel for the neighborhood and whether you would be comfortable living there.
- 3. Forgetting to take into consideration your transportation options (car, bus, shuttle, walking, etc.)** There are many factors to consider when moving and transportation should be a priority. You should consider both the logistics of getting to campus and elsewhere as well as the costs associated with your options. If you will drive, keep in mind parking permit, gas, insurance, and maintenance expenses. If you will be riding public transit, calculate the monthly cost of fares. To lower your transportation costs, consider living in an area served by Shuttle-UM, which is free to students.
- 4. Not conducting a walk-through with the landlord to detail existing damages prior to signing the lease.** Schedule a walk-through of your unit with your landlord to get a detailed account of pre-existing damages to the unit. If necessary, take pictures for future reference. This will protect you when you move out because you will be held accountable for any damages once you occupy the unit.
- 5. Not taking into consideration the cost of utilities.** Utilities may or may not be included in your rental price. Be sure that you know which utilities you will be responsible for activating and paying. Specific questions to consider: Are they included in the rent? Will there be extra fees for cable/internet? What is the average cost per month? Use our "Utility Companies" handout to contact local companies for estimated cost per month.
- 6. Not meeting or speaking with your roommates before you move in together.** Since you will be sharing close living quarters with them, it is important to meet or speak with your roommates prior to moving in. This will allow you to learn more about them and their living, study and other habits. This prior meeting will also allow you an opportunity to figure out who will bring what into the unit.
- 7. Not setting down house "rules."** Everybody has different expectations of new roommate situations. Setting house rules early allows everyone to voice their expectations and come to a compromise. Rules can also outline what roommates will do in case of a conflict. Communication is key! Use our "Roommate Guide" for more information on settings rules and addressing roommate disagreements.
- 8. Not being clear on the responsibilities of a tenant.** Just as your landlord has certain obligations to you, you also have certain legal obligations to your landlord. Among them are paying rent and, if applicable, utilities in full and on time. Other tenant responsibilities include maintaining a reasonably clean rental, taking care of some household maintenance, and notifying the landlord in a timely manner of any needed repairs. Consult our "Living Off-Campus: Strategies for Success" handout for information on how you can be a responsible tenant.
- 9. Not securing the rental unit.** Regardless of where you live, it is always important to be proactive about your safety. Making sure your rental is secure is as easy as locking doors and windows, and activating a security system, if you have one. Be sure to consult our "Safety Tips" and "Security Checklist" handouts for more detailed information.
- 10. Withholding rent or not paying rent on time!** Some landlords may give a small leeway period for paying your rent, but if you exceed that time period you run the risk of late fees or even eviction from the property. Additionally, do not withhold your rent until a landlord makes repairs or meets some other condition. Unless you have set up an escrow account, you are legally obligated to pay your landlord according to your lease.