Commuter Connections
Graduate Student
Guide to Off-Campus Housing

The Department of Graduate Student Affairs can help to assist you in your search for off-campus accommodations! You are encouraged to meet with Steven Weglinski in the Graduate Student Center at Kutz Hall during our hours of operation Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm, or contact him via email or phone. We will be able to be a valuable resource to help you find information and identify your specific housing needs.
Where should I live?

It is important to think about location when living off-campus. Do you want to be near campus? Will transportation be a problem? These are some questions to ask yourself when looking into off-campus housing. You should choose a neighborhood that can best accommodate your needs and lifestyle. Many students live within walking distance to the university. Others may live off of the Fitchburg Commuter Rail and closer to the city. Where you live will depend on your individual needs and your specific budget. The three main streets that are near campus include South Street, Main Street and Moody Street. These three streets form a triangle and the majority of Brandeis University students live within or around the triangle. If you have received a map of Waltham, it is helpful to outline these streets in order to figure out the proximity of potential apartments to the university. CLICK HERE to see a map of the area with the outlined FREE Brandeis Shuttle Map.

Some questions to ask yourself in general and about specific rentals?

1. Where is the house located?
2. Are stores located conveniently to my home?
3. How safe is the neighborhood?
4. Is there adequate parking?
5. Who do I call in case of an emergency?
6. Will I live alone or with others?
7. What is the cost of the rent per person?
8. How many bedrooms are there?
9. Is heat included in the price of rent?
10. What type of heat (oil, gas, electric) does it use?
11. What appliances/amenities are included with the house?
12. Are laundry facilities close?

Waltham has an excellent variety of restaurants and shops, an independent movie theater and affordable prices. Public transportation affords easy access to local shopping and cultural events as well as access to Cambridge and Boston. In Waltham, depending on your location you can also take the FREE Brandeis Shuttle to campus daily. A good number of graduate students live either in Waltham, Porter Square, Cambridge and Somerville areas. These areas have a large student population, many local services, and are easily accessible to Brandeis and downtown Boston without a car.

PRO TIP:
Check out our Neighborhood Guide ONLINE
If you have a car, you will have greater flexibility because you will not need to rent in towns with access to public transportation. With a commuter pass purchased from Brandeis University, you can park in designated lots on campus (approx. $120 for the year). You can purchase a parking pass from the Office of Public Safety when you arrive at campus. However please be forewarned that the greater Boston area is not very car friendly. Traffic and hard to read street signs can make it a challenging place to drive. Be sure to inquire about parking and actual commute times when considering any apartment.
Porter Square, located about one and a half miles outside of Harvard Square, is popular with graduate students. It is approximately 20 minutes away from Brandeis and five minutes away from downtown Boston by commuter train. The commuter train runs regularly from Porter Square to the Brandeis/Roberts Station. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) subway trains also run out of Porter Square to Boston and Cambridge. It is important to think about your first year at Brandeis and living off-campus if you are considering living off of the commuter rail line. Some things to think about include what time will your classes meet? What are your study habits and will you need frequent access to the library? Do you mind occasionally waiting outdoors in very cold winter weather? **Keep in mind that the Fitchburg commuter rail has limited running times and will not be running on Weekends until December of 2015.** If you know you study late at night then the train might limit the amount of time you can spend on campus.

Brandeis is located on the Fitchburg/Acton Commuter Rail train line at the Brandeis/Roberts stop. Heading towards Boston, this train stops in downtown Waltham, Waverly Square, Belmont Center and Porter Square. The end of the line is in Boston at North Station. Many Brandeis students live in the Somerville and Cambridge areas and commute via train. There is an MBTA bus stop in front of the main entrance to Brandeis on South Street that connects with other bus lines that go throughout Waltham, Belmont, Watertown, Cambridge and Boston. Visit [http://www.mbta.com](http://www.mbta.com) for more train and bus transportation schedules and maps. (You may want to check the 70, 553/554 bus lines to see those that run closest to campus).

**PRO TIP:**
*Use Google Maps to view estimated times for travel by car, public transport, or walking!*
What should my budget be?
Waltham is one of the more affordable suburbs in the greater Boston area. There are several large apartment complexes in Waltham; apartments are also located in multifamily homes and smaller apartment buildings. A typical apartment in the area is a two story or three story home that has two or three apartments stacked on top of each other. When examining what your budget should be you should think about heat and other utility bills. Later in this booklet all the local utility companies are listed.
Before you move in you can call the specific company to get a yearly average of utility costs. It is especially important to take heat into consideration as it is cold in Waltham and heating costs can be very expensive in the winter. However, some rentals may have heat included in the rent.

Typical Rental Rates (monthly)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Bedrooms</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waltham</td>
<td>$850 – $1200</td>
<td>$1100 – $1600</td>
<td>$1700 – $2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>$900 – $1200</td>
<td>$1200 – $1700</td>
<td>$1700 – $2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>$900 – $1300</td>
<td>$1300 – $1700</td>
<td>$2000 – $3000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before you begin making calls to realtors or landlords, it is advisable to figure out how much you want and can afford to spend on housing. You should create a budget for yourself that includes rent, utilities, books, transportation, food, entertainment, and the other expenses that might arise during the year.

Other costs that you may have to pay include the first month’s rent, a security deposit of one month’s rent, last month’s rent (equal to one month). If you find an apartment through a realtor you may also have to pay a realtor fee, typically equal to one month’s rent.

Example
If your portion of the rent is $650.00
1st month’s rent: $650.00
Last month’s rent: $650.00
Security Deposit: $650.00
Broker Fee: $650.00
Your total needed to secure the apartment would be $650.00 x 3 + $650.00 = $2600.00

PRO TIP:
To help you budget for expensive heating bills, request to see the past year’s month-by-month heating costs before securing your rental!
**Need help finding a roommate?**

Often times, it is too expensive to live by yourself. Having a roommate can cut cost dramatically and also help keep you connected to campus events and activities.

To help you find a roommate for your off-campus housing, we partnered with My College Roomie. As a new student, you automatically receive a welcome email with information to get started. You can log in any time using your Brandeis email at [http://grad.brandeis.mycollegeroomie.com/](http://grad.brandeis.mycollegeroomie.com/).

**How do I choose a roommate?**

Living with a roommate can be one of the most difficult and rewarding experiences of graduate school. The key to living with someone is to remember that everyone has the right to live in a safe, clean and healthy situation that allows them to pursue academic and personal endeavors. With that in mind, we have included some suggestions in hopes that your experience leads to a successful, healthy roommate relationship.

Create a roommate contract when you move in with your roommate. It can help your roommates and you remember to clarify what was discussed and agreed upon. (take your time to find the right situation)

1. Take the time to find a roommate you feel you will be compatible with.
2. Talk 2-3 times over the phone/e-mail/Facebook before meeting in person.
3. Be honest and open about your needs, concerns and expectations.
4. Get to know the person before you pass judgment.
5. Share basic information with one another including hometown, major, family and interest.
6. Upon arrival, complete a [Roommate Agreement Contract](http://grad.brandeis.mycollegeroomie.com/).
7. Discuss how you should set the apartment up and then do it together.
8. Discuss what is shareable (food, computer, appliances, printer, etc).
9. When a problem arises talk about it with that person first.
10. Establish guidelines about the following [can be found in Roomate Agreement](http://grad.brandeis.mycollegeroomie.com/)
   -- cleanliness, cooking and housework
   -- guest, study time, work schedules, privacy, celebrations/parties
   -- financial stability: bills, rent, food, phone and payment processes (who collects/pays what and when)

Sometimes living with someone from a different region of your country or an entirely different country can be an extremely rewarding, yet challenging experience. Different communities have different concepts of personal space, ownership, communal space and property, food, noise, money, etc. It is very important that you are as direct and patient as possible in order to avoid misunderstandings.

Remember it is important to be as open and honest about who you are. It is also important to think about using a [Roommate Agreement](http://grad.brandeis.mycollegeroomie.com/) to establish expectations.
**Subletting**

You should be aware that the majority of leases are for 12 months. If you are signing a 12 month lease you should be aware of the sublet section of your lease. Many leases will be very clear in what the sublet policy is for that apartment.  

**Subletting works in two ways.**

1) You may be able to lease all or part of the leased premises to another person and retain some right to the original lease.  
2) The second option is you may relinquish your portion of the lease completely to the person you sublet to. In this situation the person you sublet to would pay the landlord directly. You must check with the landlord; in most cases the lease will have a provision for subletting with their permission.

The original tenant is responsible for the actions of the sub-tenant. To avoid any confusion, enter into any arrangement carefully and obtain a written sub---lease. However, some landlords do not permit subletting, and doing so can cause you to lose your apartment.

**Local Realtors/Brokers**

A realtor can help you locate accommodations that a landlord has listed with them. You may be required to sign a contract that holds you responsible for payment of the agent’s fee. This fee should be paid only after you have actually signed a lease for an apartment referred to you by that agent. Some agents do require the fee, deposit and initial rent deposit upon application for a specific apartment. If this is required, do not relinquish money unless you are certain you want the apartment if the application is approved. Many landlords require initial payments of first and last month’s rent and a security deposit. If a realtor helps you find an apartment, expect to be charged a fee equal to one month’s rent (i.e. if one month’s rent is $650, expect to put down $2600 for the apartment – first, last, security, realtor/broker).

**Legality and Your Rights**

A lease is a legally binding contract between a tenant and a landlord. Any terms or conditions not prohibited by law may be included in the agreement. If either party fails to abide by the terms of the lease, the offended party may be entitled to certain concessions, including the possibility of termination of the agreement. You should obtain everything in writing, including specific provisions agreed upon with the landlord in your lease.

Please carefully review all the terms of a lease or tenancy at will agreement. Discuss any provisions or special circumstances before signing the lease. Any item that may need further clarification should be discussed **before signing**. Every party involved should have and keep a copy of the signed lease agreement.
The Attorney General’s “Guide to Landlord/Tenant Rights” is available ONLINE for students to use while reviewing their lease.

Some important definitions:

- **Common Areas**: All exterior and interior areas contiguous to a rental unit and units but not within the aforementioned nor under tenant control by mutual consent.

- ** Dwelling**: A structure or part thereof consisting of one or more units and used as a household for living purposes.

- **Household**: A family and/or one or more unrelated persons who share the same dwelling unit.

- **Landlord**: The owner or lessor of a given dwelling unit or any person authorized to manage or otherwise perform the owner’s or lessor’s obligations on her/his behalf.

- **Owner**: One or more persons holding legal title to a dwelling or exclusive rights to use or administer the same. Term also applies to a mortgagee, such as a bank, which has taken the legal possession of a dwelling.

- **Rental Agreement**: An oral or written lease agreement establishing certain terms, conditions, rules and regulations concerning the use and occupancy of a dwelling unit.

- **Security Deposit**: A deposit of money required by a landlord from a tenant that must be returned within thirty days after a tenant vacates a unit unless the unit is damaged or rent is owed. In either of these cases an appropriate deduction is made and the remainder, 5% interest and an itemized listing of deductions, must be sent to the tenant.

- **Tenant**: You, any person or head of household occupying a dwelling for living purposes who assumes responsibility by making a rental agreement with the landlord; plus those other occupants of the unit making up the tenant’s house hold at the time such agreement is made or at any time thereafter with the landlord.

Again, please read carefully over all provisions in the lease, including the sublet section if you are planning on staying for less than 12 months. Be sure to keep a copy signed by all parties. You should save all receipts, records and correspondences with your roommates and landlord until you have moved out of the apartment and your security deposit has been returned. **Do not sign a lease that does not have all of the information filled in – especially the payment schedule, price, contract length and any other things you have agreed upon ahead of time.**
Resources For After You've Moved In

The Office of Graduate Student Affairs (GSA) is continually looking for ways in which to make living off-campus easier for our students so that they can focus on their learning experience. Some of the programs we offer are:

**Mediation:**
Not everyone is a great communicator. When necessary, our office will work with students to get the lines of communication flowing and to collaborate on creating a Roommate Agreement that is manageable and realistic. [CLICK HERE](#) to get started on a Roommate Agreement! Before a disagreement escalates into an intolerable situation the first step is to check in with Steve or Jessica at the Graduate Student Center in Kutz Hall. Although GSA cannot offer extensive legal advice, the office can guide you through options and effective communication strategies to try and resolve the problem.

**Off-Campus Living workshops:**
Being a tenant and a good neighbor comes with certain rights and responsibilities. Know what those right and responsibilities are before you sign a lease or confront a landlord. The Office of Graduate Student Affairs often advertises and can help connect you to multiple opportunities to attend workshops (around Waltham) and meet with experts to answer your questions.

**Here Are Some Useful Numbers to Get You Started**

**National Grid (gas)**  
Customer Service: 800---233---5325  
Emergency Gas Safety: 800---233---5325  
[www.nationalgridus.com](http://www.nationalgridus.com)

**NSTAR (electric)**  
Customer Service: 800---592---2000  
[www.nstaronline.com](http://www.nstaronline.com)

**Verizon (telephone / internet)**  
Customer Service: 800---870---9999  
[www.verizon.com](http://www.verizon.com)

**Comcast (cable/internet)**  
Customer Service: 800---266---2278  
[www.comcast.com](http://www.comcast.com)

**MBTA (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority)**  
For information on subway, bus, commuter rail schedule, maps and fares.  
Customer Service: 617---222---3200  
[www.mbta.com](http://www.mbta.com)

*Charlie Cards are free cards that can be picked up at kiosks in the subway or at local MBTA offices. You can add money to them in the metro. When you add money to them and then use them for busses and subway rides you receive discounted fares.*
MBTA also publishes a Charlie Card Discount Book each year so that Charlie Card users can present their Charlie Card at Boston area businesses and receive discounts. You can consult the Charlie Card Discount Book ONLINE to learn more about local discounts at area museums, restaurants and other services.

**Moving In / Out**
You always want to plan ahead for moving. It can be time consuming and often more expensive than anticipated. Listed are a few reminders before moving in and moving out. If you have used furniture for sale or you would like to purchase used furniture, please go to my.brandeis.edu (classified section).

**Before moving in:**

- Do not move into an apartment if the condition is unacceptable.
- Arrange utilities before you move in. Try to set up phone lines and/or cable in advance.
- You need to display your name on the mailbox to receive you mail – DISPLAY LAST NAME.
- It is better to ask the landlord or neighbors about the trash disposal schedule before you throw away your garbage and recycling.

**Before moving out:**

- You must give a 30---day notice to your landlord if you are planning to move out, even if your lease expires.
- Before you move out, be sure to clean your apartment thoroughly. You can be charged for additional cleaning if the condition of the apartment does not meet requirements.
- Make an appointment with your landlord and jointly inspect the apartment. The security deposit may not be refunded in full if there is any damage in the apartment. Be sure to return the keys to the landlord. (Including mailbox key if there is one)
- Change your address with school and local post office.

**Being a good neighbor**
The neighborhoods in the Waltham area are made up of a tight knit group of residents, business owners and students that all work hard to create a sense of community. As a student at Brandeis you are expected to act responsibly as a community member. Many areas have active neighborhood associations as well as neighborhood watch groups in relation with the Waltham Police Department. Brandeis encourages students to become active positive members of both the community at large and that in which they live.
Steps to being a good neighbor
Be neighborly; it is not required that you introduce yourself to your neighbors, but being friendly helps in building relationships. Simple gestures in the community will provide for a more comfortable setting and a pleasant experience. This can include observing reasonable hours for noisy activities. Remember that noise travels, especially if you live above or below someone!

Alternative House Arrangements
While between homes, use Orbitz.com or Hotwire.com to find cheaper rooms at hotels. We also include additional cost effective resources to consider.

Marriott Hotel Newton
2345 Commonwealth Ave
Newton, MA 02466
617---969---1000

Holiday Inn Express
385 Winter Street
Waltham, MA 02451
781---890---2800

The Westin Hotel -- Waltham
70 Third Ave
Waltham, MA 02451
781---290---5600

Embassy Suites
550 Winter Street
Waltham, MA 02451
781---890---6767

Global Immersions Inc: (Watertown, MA) 888---924---2712
www.globalimmersions.com
Provides home-based housing placement services for all lengths of stay.

Boston Homestay Inc: (Needham, MA) 781---449---9733
www.bostonhomestay.com
A temporary homestay placement service for international students and professionals.

Airbnb.com
Save money by renting from a local host.

Boston Hostels
hostels.com/boston/usa
Inexpensive accommodations for shared temporary living

Disclaimer: The Office of Graduate Student Affairs provides information to students as a courtesy service to help with finding suitable housing for students attending Brandeis University. The information is for the use of Brandeis students and is only updated periodically. Brandeis University accepts no responsibility for the reliability of the information provided or those listing with the Department. Contact with persons listed herein will be conducted independently of the University. Brandeis University will not be involved in any negotiations between you (the leaseholder) and any landlord, property owner, student, prospective student or realtor.