

An aerial photograph of Montana State University in Bozeman, Montana. The image shows the university's campus with various buildings, parking lots, and green spaces. In the foreground, there are residential areas with houses and apartment complexes. The background features rolling green hills and a range of mountains under a blue sky with scattered clouds. The text 'MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY' is written in yellow capital letters at the top, and 'OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING GUIDE' is written in large white capital letters below it, separated by a thin yellow horizontal line.

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING GUIDE

What you need to know when looking for off-campus housing and for living off-campus.



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MSU Photos by Kelly Gornall, Adnan Samir-Gonzalez and Sepp Jammotta. Design by MSU Creative Services.

INTRODUCTION TO OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING

The mission of the off-campus housing resource at Montana State University is to provide assistance to MSU students living off-campus or looking to move outside of the residence halls. The Department of Residence Life strives to educate students about living off-campus, to provide resources to help students be successful in their academic careers, and to promote MSU in the Bozeman community.

In this guide you will find several sections discussing components of living in the Bozeman community. There are also several resources on the web site located at www.montana.edu/reslife/offcampus.html. There you will find several forms and links to resources.

LOOKING TO LIVE OFF-CAMPUS?

Things to consider about living off-campus:

Budget When looking to live off-campus, many students do not consider the entire costs associated with renting a property. There are deposits, rent, utilities, cable, internet, phone, food (off-campus meal plans are offered through Culinary Services), transportation, furnishings, cleaning supplies, renter's insurance and trash, to mention a few of the costs. These items need to be included in your budget. Before you look at housing options, you need to create a realistic budget that you are able to afford.

Roommates: Are you looking for a place to share with one or more roommates or would you prefer to live alone? Do you already know who you are going to live with? Have you set up expectations of who will be responsible for what in the rental? Roommates can be a great way to supplement some of the costs associated with living off-campus, but it is important to consider your compatibility with potential roommates.

Distance from MSU: Are you looking to live within walking or biking distance? Or, would you prefer to drive to campus? If you choose to drive, you must purchase a parking permit to park your vehicle on campus. There is also the Streamline bus service which offers free rides to and from campus throughout the Bozeman community.

Pets: Many people choose to live off-campus in order to have a pet. Be aware that many places require an extra deposit, some non-refundable, along with a pet rent to be added to the regular rent rate and many do not allow pets or only allow certain types of pets. Also, there are city ordinances in Bozeman that could affect your pet. This information is available at www.bozeman.net/visitors/Pets.

Renter's insurance: MSU suggests that all students purchase renter's insurance to protect their valuables in case of a disaster. This service is not provided by landlords and many landlords require tenants to purchase renter's insurance.

QUESTIONS?

Call Residence Life at 406-994-2661.

Or visit us, located under the Miller Dining Commons in the Hedges complex.

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QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

1. How much can you afford to pay for rent and other expenses?
2. Do you want to live with roommates or by yourself?
3. What transportation will you use?
4. How long of a lease do you want?
5. Do you want to live in an apartment or a house? Do you prefer to have a yard?
6. What features are most important to you?

Length of the lease: Are you looking for a six-month, 10-month or 12-month lease? If you are looking for a shorter term, you may need to consider subleasing the property that you end up choosing.

Type of housing to lease: Have you decided that you want to live in a house, apartment, townhome or condo? Before you look at available properties, it helps to know which type of property you would prefer to live in during the next year.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR HOUSING

Making the decision of where to live is a big step, so it is important to spend time visiting properties and gather as much information about the property, landlord, and neighborhood to aid you in your final decision.

Here are some places to look for housing:

- Look for housing through the Off-campus Housing page at www.montana.edu/reslife/offcampus.html
- The classified ads section of the Bozeman Daily Chronicle
- Message boards across campus

Once you have narrowed your search to a couple properties that fit your needs and your budget, you should have a list of questions to ask landlords to find out additional information not listed in the announcement. It is also beneficial to do some research on the landlord and surrounding neighborhood. A good resource that reviews several apartment complexes in the Bozeman area is www.apartmentratings.com.

TIP Look for resources through the Off-campus Housing page at www.montana.edu/reslife/offcampus.html.



BEFORE SIGNING THE LEASE

You may be asking yourself, “What exactly is a lease?” A lease is a legally binding contract between a tenant and a landlord, in which the landlord agrees to temporarily give possession of a property to the tenant in exchange for money. Montana law requires that all leases be in writing. If you are working with a landlord who wants the lease to be a verbal agreement, you should not rent the property. **Get everything down in writing before signing a lease.** The lease should have provisions stating the address of the property you will be taking possession of, the length of the lease term, cost of the rent, security deposits, and who is responsible for maintenance of the property.

ASMSU Student Legal Services

Cromwell Law PLLC

Phone: 994-2933

Attorney: Audrey & Charlie Cromwell

Location: SUB 221

Note: There are as many varieties and variations of residential leases as there are landlords renting property. This guide’s intention is to provide base knowledge of lease agreements and is not intended to provide all of the legal policies regarding leases. It is highly advised to seek legal counsel before signing any lease or any legal document for that matter. ASMSU houses a full time lawyer to counsel students with legal matters. You may set up an appointment for legal counsel in the SUB 221 or by calling 406-994-2933.

✓ Questions to Ask Property Managers

- Who pays for utilities?
- What do utilities usually run, in summer and winter? Is it gas or electric heat?
- Who pays for cable and internet?
- Who pays for hot water? How many heaters are there and are there enough for everyone living in the unit?
- Is the unit furnished?
- Is parking space available? Is the location near a bus stop?
- What are the rules on guests and visitors? What are the restrictions, if any?
- Are pets allowed? What are the restrictions? Is there an extra deposit and/or rental fee?
- Is there storage space?
- Is painting needed or permitted? Who is responsible for this?
- If repairs are needed, is the property manager willing to make them before you move in?
- Are there laundry facilities in or near the building?
- Who is responsible for yard maintenance and snow/ice removal?
- How safe is the area? Is security provided?
- Is there 24 hour emergency service if needed?
- When is rent due? Is there a charge for late payments? How is rent paid (cash or check)?
- What deposit and fees are required? How much of that is refundable?
- What length leases are available?
- Is subletting permitted? Is there a fee for subletting?
- If you're interested in renting an apartment/house, can you leave your name and a deposit now to reserve the place? Does this guarantee you the apartment/house for when you want to move in?

LIVING WITH AND FINDING ROOMMATES

A roommate is a great way to supplement some of the costs associated with living off-campus. However, your happiness with your living environment can be affected greatly by your relationship with your roommate. You should also keep in mind that friends are not always the best roommates. Before moving into a rental or house with someone, it is wise to set up expectations. A contract between the parties is a great example of how to develop expectations with your roommate(s). You can use the template of a roommate contract located at www.montana.edu/reslife.

If you are looking for roommates, there are resources to list this information, just as there are resources to list rental properties. You may post listings for roommates on with the Bozeman Daily Chronicle and around MSU. A word of caution: thoroughly screen each candidate before adding them to a lease.

✓ Questions to Ask Potential Roommates

- What are their general lifestyle habits? Do they keep their living area clean and organized? What are their social and study habits? What is their typical level of noise?
- What is their school/work schedule?
- What are their likes and dislikes?
- How do they solve conflicts? Are they willing to compromise?
- How will you handle paying bills?
- Are you going to share food and other items?
- How will you split cleaning responsibilities?
- Will you have overnight guests and visitors?
- Do they smoke?
- Do they have any allergies?
- Are pets acceptable? What type and how many?
- Does the person with the bigger room need to compensate the others?
- What is your expected level of privacy?

RENTAL AGREEMENTS

A tenant's rights and responsibilities are determined by the rental agreement and the Montana Residential Landlord and Tenant Act. This law includes certain requirements that apply regardless of what is in the rental agreement.

Before signing any rental agreement, these are the things a renter should know:

- Fully understand what the written agreement says and make sure that the verbal explanation matches the written agreement.
- Check to make sure the agreement doesn't contain any illegal provisions in violation of the Montana Residential Landlord and Tenant Act or the federal Fair Housing Act.
- The agreement should be complete, and address how you and the landlord will handle situations like necessary repairs, unauthorized pets or guests, nonpayment of rent and the cleaning you are expected to do when you move out.
- Even if a rental agreement is not signed or returned by the landlord or tenant, it is still considered to be in effect if the tenant pays rent or the landlord accepts payment of rent.

Security Deposits

At the beginning of the rental agreement, a landlord may require a tenant to pay a deposit that is refundable when the tenant moves out, if the tenant causes no damage, completes all required cleaning, and owes no unpaid rent or utilities.

At the time the landlord and tenant enter the rental agreement, the landlord must provide the tenant with a written statement of the condition of the property, signed by the landlord. If the landlord does not provide such a statement, the landlord may not keep any part of the tenant's security deposit for damages when the tenant moves out, unless the landlord can clearly prove that the tenant caused the damage.

Common Types of Rental Arrangements

Lease – A lease requires the tenant to stay in the unit for a specific period of time (for example, one year). A lease must be in writing and neither the landlord nor the tenant can change the terms of the lease, including raising the rent, during the term of the lease unless they both agree to the change.

Month-to-Month – A month-to-month rental agreement is open-ended, with rent usually payable on a monthly basis. The agreement

may be in writing or it may be an oral agreement. Either the landlord or the tenant may change the terms, raise rent, or end the month-to-month agreement at any time with proper notice.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CREDIT REPORTS

What is credit and why is it useful?

Credit is a representation of an individual's financial reliability. Credit is useful because it allows us to purchase goods and services that one may not be able to do so otherwise, including attending college, purchasing vehicles or other large ticket items, and buying a home.

Why is good credit important?

Good credit leads to more credit, while bad credit leads to no credit. Not only do creditors use credit reports to determine loan qualification, they also use it to determine the loan interest rate. Thus, the better the credit rating is, the lower the interest rate will be.

What is a credit report and when is it used?

A credit report is a history of one's bill paying habits and creditworthiness. Items that appear on a credit report include but are not limited to: utility and medical bills, rent payments, credit cards, car and school loans, and mortgages. Credit reports are used by financial institutions, courts, creditors, landlords, insurance companies and some employers.

Getting Your Credit Reports

Montana residents are able to get a credit report for free. The amendment to the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) requires each of the nationwide consumer reporting companies to provide you with a free copy of your credit report, at your request, once every 12 months. This means that you can get three credit reports each year, one from each company. For example, you could send for Equifax in January, Experian in May and Trans Union in September.

To order your **free** annual report go to www.annualcreditreport.com, or call **877-322-8228**, or complete the Annual Credit Report Request Form (printed from www.ftc.gov/credit) and mail it to:

Annual Credit Report Request Service

P.O. Box 105281

Atlanta, GA 30348-5281

For financial education resources, please visit the Allen Yarnell Center for Student Success in the Strand Union Building, room 177 or online at www.montana.edu/aycss.



WHAT TO LOOK FOR ON YOUR CREDIT REPORTS

- Your Name
- Your correct address
- Your correct phone number
- Your correct social security number
- Your marital status
- Your Employment Information
- Your Credit Accounts
- Your Account Histories



MOVING OUT

Notice to vacate

When preparing to move out of the rental, it is your responsibility to inform your landlord that you will be leaving. You should give your landlord a written statement of the notice to vacate at least two months in advance before you vacate the property. You will also need to schedule an inspection. It is highly suggested that you be present at the inspection to dispute any charges that can be deducted from the security deposit.

Preparing for the inspection

Before you have the landlord perform the final inspection of the rental you need to:

1. Move all of your stuff out of the rental
2. Remove all nails and tacks in the walls and patch those holes
3. Repair any damages for which you are responsible
4. Fully clean the rental or have a professional clean the rental
5. For your benefit, take photos or shoot a video to record the condition of the rental after you have cleaned

Also included in the forms section of this guide is a checklist for checking-out of a rental property. Before the inspection you should have your copy of the inventory and condition form to help dispute damages that you did not cause. If there are damages that you caused but cannot repair, let your landlord know of these prior to the inspection.

The inspection

To insure a favorable inspection outcome, have your inventory and condition form with you and walk through the rental with the landlord. If the landlord assesses charges, make sure those charges are your responsibility. If they are not, you may dispute them with the landlord during the inspection using the condition form as the basis for the dispute.

After the inspection you need to provide your landlord a forwarding address so that the security deposit can be returned. Montana law states that the landlord must return the security deposit minus deductions within 10 days of the final inspection.

Proper Notice to Leave

The written notice a tenant is required to give a landlord upon moving out depends upon the type of rental agreement. A tenant who is moving out may not sublet or transfer possession of the rental unit to someone else unless the landlord has approved this in writing.

Lease – A tenant cannot terminate a lease prior to its expiration unless the landlord agrees. A tenant who chooses to move out before the lease has expired is responsible for paying the rent for the remainder of the lease until the landlord finds another tenant.

Month-to-Month Agreement – A tenant must give 30 days' notice to terminate a month-to-month rental agreement. It is a good idea to give this notice in writing and to keep a copy for your records.

Return of Deposits

A landlord may keep part or all of a tenant's security deposit to pay unpaid rent, utilities, late charges, damages to the property, cleaning expenses paid by the landlord, and a reasonable amount for the landlord's labor.

In certain circumstances, the landlord may not keep part or all of the security deposit. For example:

- The landlord cannot deduct cleaning expenses from a security deposit unless the landlord gave the tenant written notice of the cleaning that needed to be done, and gave the tenant at least 24 hours to do the cleaning.
- The landlord must send the tenant a written list of any deductions from the security deposit within 30 days. Any landlord who fails to provide the departing tenant with such a list may not withhold any portion of the security deposit for the damages or cleaning charges.
- If the landlord did not provide the tenant with a written statement of the property's condition at the time the tenant moved in, the landlord cannot keep any part of the security deposit for damages unless the landlord can prove by clear and convincing evidence that the tenant caused the damage.

Evictions

Lease – A lease may not be terminated early unless the tenant has violated the rental agreement or the requirements of the Montana Residential Landlord and Tenant Act.

Month-to-Month Agreement – A landlord may generally terminate a month-to-month rental agreement by providing 30 days' notice to the tenant.

Tenant Violations

If the tenant has violated either the rental agreement or the requirements of the Montana Residential Landlord and Tenant Act, the landlord may terminate a rental agreement with 14 days notice to the tenant, except under the following circumstances:

- The landlord need only give three days notice if the tenant's violation involves any one of the following:
 - unpaid rent
 - an unauthorized tenant or pet
 - damage to the rental property
 - the tenant's arrest for producing or manufacturing drugs on the rental premises
- The landlord need only give five days notice if it is a repeat violation about which the landlord has previously notified the tenant within the past six months.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As a tenant, you need to know about your rights and responsibilities. While each lease is different from the next, here are common rights and responsibilities required by Montana and Federal laws.

Your rights include:

1. The right to know the name of the landlord.
2. The right to possess the rental.
3. The right to have the landlord maintain the rental.
 - a. Property must meet all applicable housing and building codes for the Bozeman area.
 - b. Make necessary repairs to keep the rental in a habitable condition.*
 - c. Supply running water and reasonable heat.
 - d. Install approved carbon monoxide and smoke detectors.
4. The right to live in a rental free of unlawful or unreasonable entry by the landlord or to be kept from the rental by the landlord.

**If the landlord fails to make the necessary repairs, make the repair request in writing, then seek legal counsel.*

TIP For more information about your rights and responsibilities as a tenant please visit leg.mt.gov/BILLS/MCA_toc/70_24.htm.

Your responsibilities include:

1. Maintain the rental as outlined in the lease.
2. Allow the landlord to enter the rental, in these circumstances:
 - a. Only with good reason.
 - b. Only when given 24 hours' notice of entry by the landlord.
3. Provide the landlord with keys to the locks.
4. Follow the landlord's reasonable rules.
5. Not to move out of the rental before the end of the lease term.
6. Maintain the smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.
7. Leave the rental once the agreement has ended.



DINING ON-CAMPUS

The SUB is located in the center of campus. It is a great place where students often study, relax and most importantly—**eat!** There are multiple options for food available in the SUB throughout the day. For more information, visit www.montana.edu/ufs/menus.

Off-campus Meal Plans

There are two dining halls on campus: Miller Dining Hall—located between North and South Hedges on the west end of campus and Rendezvous—located in Johnstone Center on the north end of campus. Off-campus Meal Plans can be purchased in the amounts of 25, 50, 75 or 100 meals per semester.

NUTRITION SERVICES OFFICE

Individual services can be provided by a registered dietitian and licensed nutritionist, and are covered by the health fee paid when taking seven or more credits. If you are taking less than seven credits and choose to pay the Student Health Service fee for the semester, nutrition services may be utilized as well.

Jill Abbott-Stoltzfus, MS, RD, Nutritionist

406-994-7097

jabbott@montana.edu

North Hedges Room 1

Services include:

- Helping students to plan simple, economical meals.
- Helping a person learn to live with food allergies, intolerances, or special dietary needs.
- Helping sort out basic nutrition facts.
- Helping persons who want to lose body weight or achieve fitness.
- Helping persons who have an eating disorder.
- Helping student groups by providing presentations or materials.
- Helping athletes and active adults with nutrition-related topics and meal planning for competition.
- Helping with specific health problems such as high blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol.

Office of Health Advancement · Nutrition Counseling

406-994-4380

1102/1106 S. 6th Ave. · Bozeman, Montana

www.montana.edu/oha/nutrition



BE SAFE WHILE LIVING OFF-CAMPUS

TIP In an *emergency*
call **911**
or University Police:
994-2121.

Even though Bozeman is considered to be a relatively safe community, there are several actions you can take to be even safer:

- Lock your exterior doors and windows even if there is someone home.
- If walking around at night, stay in well-lit areas, avoid walking alone and keep your cell phone handy in case you need to call the police.
- Be attentive to what is happening around your community and do not be afraid to report any suspicious activity to the Bozeman Police.
- Lock your car doors and do not leave any valuables in plain sight.
- Close the window shades to your apartment when not at home.
- Do not allow illegal drug or alcohol activity in your rental. This includes prohibiting persons less than 21 years of age to drink alcohol.
- Know the guests that may be entering into the rental.
- Regularly test the carbon monoxide and smoke detectors to make sure they are working properly and immediately replace batteries to the detectors if they are not working.
- Report any damages or repairs that threaten the safety and security of the property to the landlord as soon as possible so that he/she may schedule a time to repair the issue(s) immediately.
- Do not leave spare keys in hiding places.
- Ask neighbors to keep an eye on your place when leaving town.
- When leaving for extended periods of time, like for breaks, leave your heat on to no less than 55 degrees so that the water pipes do not freeze and break, which can flood your rental.



CHECKLIST FOR PARTY SAFETY

- Do not allow anyone under the age of 21 into the party if alcohol is going to be served.
- Know who is in attendance at your party.
- Keep alcohol inside of the party. This will help keep the noise down and limit the size of the party.
- Designate a sober monitor to oversee the party, control noise and monitor people who may be drinking excessively.
- Inform your neighbors about the festivities well in advance.
- Keep the noise down. The number one reason why police are called to a party is because of noise.



TRANSPORTATION

Streamline Bus

Streamline offers fare free service throughout the Bozeman area to fulfill everyone's transportation needs. Get information about routes, schedules and more at www.streamlinebus.com.

Walking and Biking

Walking is an effective way of traveling short distance, just remember to stay safe. When walking around at night, keep in mind that Safety Escorts are available through the University Police. Using a bicycle is a cost-effective method of transportation. There are some things you should know before you use one on campus.

Bicycle Registration

To help prevent theft, or recover your bicycle if it is stolen, we encourage you to register your bicycle with the University Police. Registration is free.

Registration is easy to do; here's how:

- Complete a bicycle registration card at the University Police office.
- Make sure you include the serial number so that your bike can be traced.
- Affix the registration decal to the frame of your bicycle.

Here are some suggestions which may help you in preventing bicycle theft:

- **Keep** your bicycle locked at all times. Check with a bicycle dealer for an appropriate lock.
- **Always** secure the bicycle to a bicycle rack. If your bicycle is not secured to a solid object, all a thief has to do is pick it up and carry it away. This has happened before; don't let it happen to you.
- **Register** your bicycle with the MSU Police. This provides important information to help recover your bicycle if it is stolen, and helps the police get it back to you if it is recovered.



Regarding bicycle safety:

- Scan the road behind. Learn to look back over your shoulder without losing your balance or swerving left. Some riders use rear-view mirrors. Always look back before changing lanes or changing positions within your lane, and only move when no other vehicle is in your way.
- Go slow on sidewalks and bicycle paths. Pedestrians have the right-of-way. By law you must give pedestrians audible warning when you pass. Don't cross driveways or intersections without slowing to walker's pace and looking very carefully for traffic from behind, especially traffic turning right.
- Ride in a straight line whenever possible. Ride with the traffic. Keep to the right, but stay about a car door-width away from parked cars.
- Avoid road hazards. Watch out for parallel-slat sewer grates, slippery manhole covers, oily pavement, gravel, and ice. Cross railroad tracks and speed bumps carefully at right angles.
- Choose the best way to turn left. There are two ways to make a left turn: 1) Like an auto, signal, move into the left lane, and turn left. 2) Like a pedestrian, head directly to the far-side crosswalk. Walk your bicycle across.
- Obey traffic signs and signals. Cyclists must behave like other vehicles if they are to be taken seriously by motorists.
- Ride a well-equipped bicycle. Always use a strong headlight and taillight at night and when visibility is poor. Be sure your bicycle is adjusted to fit you properly. For safety and efficiency, outfit it with bells, rear-view mirrors, fenders (for rainy rides), and racks, baskets or bicycle bags.

BEST WAYS TO AVOID A PARKING TICKET

- Register your vehicle
- Don't use reserved spaces
- Stay out of yellow zones
- Park in your assigned area
- Don't park in a service drive
- Leave handicap spaces empty
- If you get a ticket, pay it on time
- Limit yourself to 20 minutes in loading zones

HOW TO AVOID TOWING ON CAMPUS

- Don't accumulate 3 or more tickets
- Don't park in a red zone
- Don't park in a handicap zone

Driving and Parking

MSU Parking Services are maintained through the University Police.

All cars on campus must have a valid hangtag purchased from University Police. MSU's parking regulations are enforced year round, including summer, all breaks and days with no classes but when MSU offices are open.

All hangtags must be visible from the exterior of the vehicle. Hangtags are issued to the owner of the vehicle, not the vehicle, meaning the same hangtag can be used for different vehicles, but not both vehicles at the same time.

REMEMBER

- You are responsible for anyone parking your vehicle on campus.
- All students, faculty, staff and visitors must register their vehicle or obtain a parking permit to park on campus.
- You are responsible for all fines assigned to your vehicle.

Residential Parking

Many areas surrounding MSU's campus require parking permits for the residents living in these areas. It is important to be aware of these areas whether you live there or are a visitor. Residential Parking Permits cost \$25 per year, and are available from the City of Bozeman, Finance Department.

Motor assistance available for you

University Police provides students, employees and visitors motor-vehicle assistance. Call **994-2121** anytime and one of our officers will assist you with:

- Access to locked vehicles
- Jump-starting dead batteries
- Weather-related problems
- Calling tow-trucks when necessary
- Other appropriate situations



QUICK RESOURCE LIST

Phone numbers

Police – Emergency	911
Bozeman Police – Non-Emergency	582-2000
MSU Residence Life & Culinary Services	994-2661
University Police and Parking Services	994-2121
ASMSU Student Legal Services	994-2933
SUB Retail Dining	994-3663
Office of Health Advancement	994-4380

Websites

MSU Homepage	www.montana.edu
MSU Residence Life & Culinary Services	www.montana.edu/reslife
City of Bozeman	www.bozeman.net
Apartment Reviews	www.apartmentratings.com

Check out our resources at

www.montana.edu/reslife/offcampus.html



Residence Life

Hedges Complex

www.montana.edu/reslife

406-994-2661 · housing@montana.edu