

HOUSING TIPS FROM MCO GRADUATE STUDENTS

WHERE TO LIVE

GSAS Residence Halls*

The residence halls are the absolute closest living option (right next to and across the street from the Northwest building!) and they offer the convenience of no utilities and free high-speed internet. Students often elect to live in residence halls if they are looking for the most hassle-free living option (in fact, your housing fees are charged directly to your Harvard account and can be paid automatically, meaning once you sign up you don't need to worry about 'living' until the summer-time).

**Due to the pandemic, the capacity of the residence halls has been significantly cut. Housing for G1s is not guaranteed at this time, and the capacity of the residence halls for fall 2021 will depend on the trajectory of the pandemic.*

► <https://gsas.harvard.edu/student-life/housing/gsas-residence-halls>

Harvard University Housing

Harvard University Housing consists of apartments designed for graduate students, post-doctoral fellows and young faculty. Much like the GSAS residence halls, they are very convenient—utilities and high-speed internet are included, not to mention your rent can be charged to your Harvard account—but they are also very sought after. So much so, that there is a lottery which we recommend you enter immediately after you accept Harvard's offer.

► <http://huhousing.harvard.edu/>

OFF-CAMPUS

Cambridge

Most students decide to live on their own. Of the three cities most students live in, Cambridge can be the closest to campus, but not necessarily. A good number of students live in Central Square, a lively area, with a hint of grit that is a bit closer to MIT than Harvard. Central Square is where a lot of Cambridge nightlife is located and is only about a mile from campus. The Central Square T Stop is one stop away from the Harvard Square Stop. Inman Square is another popular option among students, with a quieter atmosphere and a sampling of good restaurants, including a favorite of the G1's *Olecito*. There are other areas in Cambridge students choose to live, but they can be farther away from campus. Once you begin looking for a place you will realize that of the three most popular cities, Cambridge is noticeably more expensive.

Somerville

Somerville is the city bordering the north side of Cambridge. Even though campus is technically located in Cambridge, some parts of Somerville can be closer than many parts of Cambridge. Porter Square is at the border between Somerville and Cambridge and is known for being lively, convenient (next to the Porter Square T Stop) and a short walk from campus. There's a 24 hour grocery store, pharmacies, delis, among other good things. Davis Square is also very popular and has a reputation for being a hip neighborhood. The Davis T Station is one stop further from Porter. The historic Somerville Theatre is located there where you can catch the newest movies at a beautiful old-fashioned movie theater for only \$8.00 before 6pm! Somerville shares many of the benefits of Cambridge, but with a generally lower price-tag.

Boston

Some students elect to live across the Charles River in Boston. Living in Boston proper is

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decidedly more challenging because some sort of transportation beyond walking, such as biking, the T, or a bus, will be necessary. Allston is located directly across the river from the Cambridge campus and is a nice area. Some students also live by the Harvard Medical School. For your first year, however, we recommend you stick to Somerville or Cambridge because you will be spending most of your time on the Cambridge campus.

WHEN TO LOOK

As soon as you accept Harvard's offer, start your search. We say this because if you do so, you will be able to locate a place you like at a leisurely pace. The Greater Boston Area housing market is remarkably fast-paced, and you will need some time to learn the ropes (see below).

Unless you are planning on doing a summer rotation, look for apartments whose lease starts in August. September is doable, but is more difficult schedule-wise.

HOW TO PREPARE

During the summer, the typical turn-around time for apartments in the Greater Boston Area can range from a few hours, to maybe a few days, but hardly ever more than that. If there's an apartment you find online that has been listed for over two weeks, beware—there may be something amiss. The market is so hot that sometimes places will be gone before the listing is even put up online. What this means is that for your best shot, consider coming to the area in late spring or early summer and visit places you like that have just been listed (maybe a few hours, maybe a day or two). We say this because generally a viewing of the apartment will be required to be considered by the broker or owner, and with no viewing, you don't have a chance. Moreover, within a day, most good places will already have several interested parties.

Don't waste your time emailing. Call! Always, always call.

If neither you nor any of your potential roommates can make it to Boston, it is possible to have someone you know in the area visit the apartment for you, if the owner allows it. Housing in Boston is dominated by brokers. Use this to your advantage. One of the most efficient ways to find a place is to make friends with one or two brokers. You will meet them when you call to find out about listings you see online. Chances are those listings are gone, but you can tell the broker the details of the place you are looking for ("four bedroom, near Harvard") and they will call you as soon as a new apartment comes up, many times before it is even officially listed. This is how you win the game. Go view the apartment immediately after it is listed, and if you like it, immediately sign a check. We mean it.

Because housing in Boston is a seller's market (the large number of universities means students always need a place to live), you will need a lot of cash up front to lock down a place. Prepare to have to pay the equivalent of four-times first month's rent to sign a lease (Security Deposit, Broker's Fee, First Month's Rent and Last Month's Rent). This type of arrangement is the norm in Boston, so all you can do is prepare. On the bright side, only one of those expenses you don't recover, the broker's fee.

If you are strongly thinking about coming to Harvard, consider looking for potential roommates during the interview weekend. Two, three and four bedroom apartments are much more affordable than one bedroom apartments.

As soon as you accept Harvard's offer, sign up for the Harvard Housing lottery—it doesn't hurt to try, and you can add roommates to the draw afterwards.

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Begin looking for apartments online and get a sense of where you would like to live as soon as you accept the offer, or shortly thereafter. We recommend:

- ▶ www.craigslist.com: Once a listing appears on craigslist, chances are it's already gone. Consider setting up an alert on your phone for new listings as soon as they become available. However, you have the highest chance of finding a place being rented by an owner as opposed to the websites below.
- ▶ www.trulia.com: Trulia has lots of listings all over the area. They seem more likely to be still available than the ones on Craigslist. Pretty much all of them are posted by brokers.
- ▶ www.zillow.com: Zillow, like Trulia, can have a good number of fresh listings, almost always posted by brokers. However, it has an excellent interface that allows you to search very easily for the type of place you want (number of bedrooms, number of bathrooms, max rent, etc.).

Remember, always call the phone number on the listing! The market is very fast-paced. If the place is still available, schedule a viewing immediately, and be prepared to sign a lease immediately as well.

CARS

Cars are not really necessary to have in the Boston area; the public transportation system is great, and GSAS students can sign up to receive a discount on MBTA monthly passes. There are also many ZipCar lots on and around campus, should you need to rent a car. If you do have a car and want to bring it, unless your apartment complex has its own garage, you will need to get on-street parking. For many apartments this is free or very inexpensive (check with the landlord), but note that you will need to get a permit from the city where your apartment is located. Therefore, you will need to have the car registered under your name at the address you will be living. So if you are from out of state, you will need to get the registration changed before you can get a permit).

PETS

Typically, apartments are not pet-friendly. Cats are sometimes a possibility, but if you have a dog, you may have to look for housing a bit farther away.