

Welcome to Northwestern University's Political Science Department!

This guide gives you an overview of neighborhoods, transportation and housing information in Evanston and Chicago. If you have any questions, contact the department graduate program assistant, Courtney Syskowski at csyskowski@northwestern.edu.

Finding a Place to Live...

- Start your search for housing early. You may end up choosing an apartment you wouldn't otherwise just because you're in a hurry.
- Make sure you're going to be comfortable wherever you live. Graduate school can be stressful at times, and dealing with traffic, crowds, or the lack of a coffee shop etc., may take additional time and add to your overall stress level. You want your home to be a place where you can relax.
- Know your rent limit and stick to it. Remember, you are probably going to be living on a fixed income, and the cost of living in certain parts of Chicago can be high. Additionally, you will want to have some extra money to enjoy the city while you're here!

Where Most Graduate Students Live

Current graduate students generally live in Evanston or Chicago neighborhoods north of the loop and close to Lake Michigan, with a handful residing in the surrounding suburbs.

Evanston is a good choice if you want to live close to school. If you want to be close to shopping, restaurants, and bars in Evanston, consider living in downtown or near Chicago Ave. in the Main and Dempster areas. Those are nice areas to live but Evanston in general does not have as much nightlife as some parts of Chicago. Evanston is also a good option to consider if you have children, since the schools are highly rated and close to campus. Generally, the concentration of undergrads and rent tend to increase closer to the Northwestern campus. The quality of the apartment can decrease the closer you are to campus because many landlords know that undergrads don't care about the conditions and they aren't very good at keeping apartments well-maintained. Many people living in Evanston take the train or bike, walk, or ride the intercampus shuttle to school

(<http://www.northwestern.edu/userservices/transportation/shuttles/intercampus/intercampus.html>).

Chicago is a good choice because of the amenities that come with living in a city, (e.g., higher density and diversity of restaurants, bars, clubs, museums, parks) and because there are more neighborhoods to choose from. Most graduate students live in neighborhoods along the El (i.e., the red line) from Lincoln Park up to Rogers Park. Some people consider parts of Rogers Park and the area near Howard unsafe but rent is very affordable, but decide for yourself. People who live in Chicago tend to live as close to the red line or campus shuttle stops as possible for easy commuting. If you plan on living in the city south of the Belmont stop, keep in mind that the purple line express only runs during weekday rush hours. Some people bike from Chicago (typically in the warmer weather), but most people take the campus shuttle, the train or drive.

Another option for living arrangements is the on-campus graduate student residence hall. This is an option for mostly international students or students looking for short-term accommodations upon arriving to Evanston and spots do fill up quickly, but you may be able to score one if you get lucky. You can contact the graduate housing office for more information at 847-467-4663 or look at the website: <http://www.northwestern.edu/gradhousing/>.

Apartment Finding Services--a sampling from the Yellow Pages

Apartment People	www.apartmentpeople.com	773/248-8800
Apartment Source	www.apartmentsource.com	773/404-9900
Chicago Apartment Finders	www.chicagoapartmentfinders.com	773/883-8800

There are many apartment finders in the city. These services are usually free, although some do charge a fee. Many will drive you to the apartments after going over your requirements and preferences in their office. You usually don't have to make an appointment, but call ahead to be sure about this and whether they charge a fee. Student reactions to these finders were mixed. In general, apartment finding services can be a quick and efficient way to find an apartment. However, the agents can be insistent to the point of being pushy, as they often work on commission.

You can also look at the apartment rental postings on Craigslist (chicago.craigslist.com). Use caution when investigating Craigslist listings and be sure to ask about utilities, security deposits, and move-in fees when you meet with the landlord or property manager. Craigslist now has a "map view" option which can be a helpful way of sorting through postings and figuring out what grocery stores, transportation options, coffee shops, etc. the apartment is near.

If you are unable to make a trip out to the area, there are also free home finding services available. These companies will send you details and take pictures of potential housing opportunities that match your interests. This is a great service if you can't visit ahead of time and want to move in as soon as you arrive. **One such service is available here:** <http://www.gradproperties.com/nwu/index.php>

If you find an area you like, you can also walk around looking for "For Rent" signs or check online or newspaper listings on your own. It is possible to find good deals outside of these services, but it takes more effort and time. So, if you like the challenge of looking for a place on your own, or if it's worth it to spend a little more time and effort in order to get the right place, you'd be better off looking for a place on your own. If convenience and saving time are important, use an apartment finder.

Hostelling International operates a hostel in downtown Chicago, at 24 East Congress Parkway, corner of Wabash and Congress. Daily rates vary from \$34 for a dorm bed to \$79 for a private bedroom; rates increase over the weekend. See www.hichicago.org or call 312/360-0300.

Newspaper and Online Listings

The Chicago Reader is the most widely used source for finding apartments. The Reader is a free weekly newspaper that contains extensive apartment listings. The Reader comes out on Thursdays and is available in many locations throughout the city (such as restaurants and shops) and online. The Reader also has an apartment finder service on the Internet. This list is updated every Tuesday night, two days before the paper Reader comes out, so you can get a jump on the listings. Find them at www.chireader.com.

In Evanston, a lot of housing is available starting in May and June because of the Northwestern University students leaving for the summer. The Pioneer Press and the Evanston Review are two papers that have a lot of listings.

Online sites such as Craigslist are also a good starting place. Additionally, some sites let you research the relative cost of apartments in the same neighborhood, allowing you to determine which offers are good/better deals. Some also allow you to see listings on a map, so that you do not have to look up each listing separately. (See HotPads.com <http://hotpads.com/>)

Things to know before renting an apartment

Housing options include rental apartments, houses and rooms. We suggest finding an apartment, as a house will most likely be prohibitively expensive and quite difficult to find, and a room won't offer you the quiet, privacy and space you will need in which to live and study. Use the information included in this section to locate an apartment that best fits your needs.

In almost every circumstance you will have to sign a lease for an apartment. This is a legal document that serves as a contract between you and the landlord. You each have rights and responsibilities that are established by the city in which the apartment is located. At minimum, the lease should list the dates of occupancy (usually one year), who is to live there, what the tenant (you) is responsible for, such as heat, electricity and telephone, the amount of the rent and security deposit (an additional sum of money that covers any damage or cleaning expenses once you move out; if there is no damage, you will get it all back after you leave) and any restrictions, such as whether you can have a pet. In general, the landlord is responsible for general maintenance of the common areas (hallways, entryways) and anything that breaks or stops working in your apartment (broken windows, stove stops working, sink is clogged). You are responsible for cleaning the apartment and such things as light bulbs and batteries for the smoke detectors. A copy of Chicago's municipal code can be obtained from city hall if you wish to review the specific rights and responsibilities of the landlord and the tenant. These laws vary outside of Chicago (i.e., in the suburbs), so you'll need to ask those cities about their landlord/tenant laws.

Be aware that if you break your lease (move out before the lease is up), you can be sued by the landlord for the remainder of the rent plus other fees. It is possible that you might be able to arrange with the landlord your moving out early, but the landlord is not obligated to do this. You

may also sublease your apartment (find someone else to move in under the terms of your lease), depending on your lease terms.

You are responsible for paying for your telephone and cable television, if you choose to have it. Most places will also require you to pay for your electricity. Sometimes heat is included, sometimes it isn't. The landlord almost always pays for water, sewer and garbage pickup.

Renting Policies to Keep in Mind

- Each city/suburb has its own laws regarding tenant/landlord relations. In Chicago, landlords are required to attach a summary of the part of the Municipal Code that addresses this area. This code delineates the rights of the tenant, as well as how to remedy specific problems. You can get the complete code at City Hall. There are also several tenant rights organizations in the city.
- Ask about what happens to your security deposit while you're living in their unit. In the city of Chicago, landlords are required to put your deposit in an interest-bearing account that is separate from the account into which your rent payment goes and return the interest to you each year. This ordinance affects only buildings with a certain number of tenants. Ask the landlord or call one of the tenant organizations to check. Other cities may have different laws regarding this, so make sure you ask. Also, it is illegal for landlords to require you to mail your rent to a post office box. They need to have an actual street address.
- April 1st and October 1st are the traditional moving days in Chicago. Not all landlords follow this; however, you may find that your lease will be up on one of those two days, regardless of when you originally signed the lease.
- Chicago has a recycling ordinance. Every building with over a certain number of units (around 6 or 10) is required to have a recycling program in the building. Recyclables are put into blue bags, which can be purchased in grocery and other stores. Suburbs will have their own programs. Check with the landlord or with the city government offices.
- It is important to check out what kind of heat is offered in an apartment. Although it will most likely be very warm when you are looking, be aware that Chicago can get extremely cold, and how your apartment is heated will become very important to you. There are several options for heat: radiator--paid for by the landlord, uses steam, very warm, often difficult (if not impossible) to regulate; electric or gas--paid for by the tenant (you) and can be very expensive, depending upon how warm you like to keep your apartment. Most older buildings will have radiator heat. If you have to pay for your own heat, ask the landlord to tell you the average cost per month and show you a bill if possible.

Public Transportation

Public transportation is provided by three separate systems—the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) which includes the elevated trains (known as “El” or simply “L”) and city buses, the Metra Suburban Rail service, and the PACE suburban bus system.

The CTA is readily available in Chicago and its surrounding suburbs, including Evanston. The El runs throughout Chicago and into Evanston. Currently students are required to pay a \$110 student fee every quarter that covers transportation and other services. For this you get an “all you can ride” pass that covers all CTA trains and bus routes.

Individual rides cost \$2.25 or you can purchase additional fare cards for 1 day, 3 days, 7 days, and monthly rides. The CTA also has convenient smartphone applications for tracking buses and El train arrival via GPS. More information about train fares, schedules, and purchasing the Chicago Card can be found at <http://www.transitchicago.com/>.

The Metra Suburban Rail service is mostly for suburban and longer distance commuting into downtown Chicago. The system stretches well beyond the Chicago city limits, from southern Wisconsin to south and west of the city. More information can be found at <http://metrarail.com>.

The PACE Suburban Bus Service serves the southern, western and northern suburbs surrounding Chicago, including parts of Evanston that are not covered by the CTA. Bus Route #250 is especially helpful, as it starts at the Davis Street L stop in downtown Evanston and culminates at O’Hare airport. More information can be found at <http://www.pacebus.com>.

There are also Northwestern University shuttle routes that serve the Evanston campus and parts of Evanston, Northwestern’s Chicago campus and a few shopping areas. All Northwestern University shuttle routes are free with a student ID. There is also a SafeRide program that picks people up from school and takes them home (9:00 pm to 2:30 am seven days a week during the academic year when classes are in session). You can visit the following websites for more information on both of these transportation possibilities:

<http://www.northwestern.edu/saferide/index.html>, and
<http://www.northwestern.edu/userservices/transportation/shuttles/evanston/index.html>.

Many students bike to commute. Evanston is completely flat so road bikes and hybrids are popular. There are some hardcore people that bike to school year round, but remember Evanston gets cold. There are also many short and long-distance bike trails near Evanston that are popular with cyclists. You can always look on Craigslist or the recyclery (<http://www.therecyclery.org/>) to find a used bike. There are also 2 bike stores in Evanston that sell new bikes and accessories, <http://www.wheelandsprocket.com> and <http://www.ponyshop.com/contact.html>). Kryptonite brand “U”- shaped bike locks are sold at cost by Northwestern police department and it is a good idea to register your bike with them just in case it does get stolen (<http://www.northwestern.edu/up/special/bike-registration-locks.html>).