Finding Roommates

THE PERSON OR PERSONS WITH WHOM YOU CHOOSE TO LIVE will play a major role in your University experience. Often, when people search for roommates, they say, “I could live with anyone.” That, in fact, is rarely true. It’s important to set aside time to talk with prospective roommates before you make commitments, take your time and don’t compromise on what is important to you. Stop by the office for a more extensive list of questions.

Finding a Roommate

The first and best place to begin your search is the UCSB Community Housing listings website at www.housing.ucsb.edu. You can advertise yourself as a roommate available or advertise vacant space in your rental unit. You can also visit our office personally, call 893-4371 or e-mail us at ucsbcho@housing.ucsb.edu.

Discussion Topics

How much can each of you afford to pay for an apartment? Don’t forget to include the cost of monthly utilities in this amount.

How will deposits and monthly joint bills be paid? These include security and utility deposits, internet, cable television, gas, and electric bills. You will need to determine how to split the utility bills.

How will you handle the general cleaning responsibilities? It is important to agree upon who will clean what and how often. Also discuss what “clean” means to each of you to make sure your expectations are in agreement.

How do you feel about overnight guests? Consider both the dating type of guest and the little sister/high school friend type of guest.

Do you like to cook? Do you prefer to eat together or separately? Do you want to share food expenses or shop separately?

How much privacy do you need? Do you need a private bedroom?

Equal Access

FEDERAL AND STATE FAIR HOUSING LAWS require that any decision by a property provider to rent or not to rent be based on the qualifications of an individual applicant, not on any categorical judgment of an identifiable group of people. Equal Access is the key principle in all Fair Housing Law and protects prospective tenants from discriminatory practices.

Tenants’ Rights

The Equal Access principle prohibits discrimination based on color, religion, national origin, age, gender, marital status, sexual orientation or disability. Housing applicants may not be denied solely because the family includes a child or children. The Equal Access principle also insists that property providers quote the same rates and schedule of payments to all applicants.

Property Provider Rights

Property providers do have a right to require certain information about prospective tenants. They use this information to evaluate applicants and choose among them. A typical application will require information about credit cards and bank accounts. It is common for property providers to run credit reports on potential tenants and their cosigners; expect to provide your social security number, income and bank information and an application fee.

If a tenant does not meet the established income criteria, a property provider is legally allowed to charge a higher security deposit to that tenant.
What are your study habits? Do you need a totally quiet environment when you study or is background noise/activity fine with you?

What are each of your habits and feelings toward smoking, drug and alcohol use, music and pets?

What are your sleeping habits? Do you like to go to bed early or stay up late? Do you desire a quiet apartment when you are sleeping?

This topic is particularly important if you are sharing a bedroom.

**After the Move, Settling In**

Now that you’ve made your decision to live together, fill out and sign a formal Roommate Agreement Form. This will clarify the responsibilities of each member of the household and set some ground rules for your new home. A sample Roommate Agreement Form can be found in the forms section of this publication.

When you first set up your household, allow a period of time in which you and your roommate concentrate on just being yourselves and living in a way that makes you comfortable. After a week or two of doing what comes naturally, set aside time to talk about the ways your living styles conflict with or complement each other. Frankly discuss things that bother you as well as things you really enjoy. Where there are differences, work together to explore creative solutions that allow both of you to get what you want out of your living situation.

**Communication & Mediation**

The Community Housing Office provides a mediation service if you need help discussing and resolving difficult issues with roommates. Mediation is a process in which people who have a dispute can communicate with the help of a neutral third party. More information on the Mediation Program can be found on page 29.

The most important thing is to keep the lines of communication open. If something new bothers you, or your arrangements are not working, talk to your roommate(s). The idea is to keep life running smoothly. Successfully living with someone else means working hard to have a place you can all feel good about coming home to after a long day on campus or at work.

**COMMUNITY HOUSING OFFICE PERSPECTIVE**

Finding a good roommate isn’t easy without a little work—one with whom you get along well and have fun; have similar lifestyles; can split rent, chores, and utilities fairly; and respect each other’s privacy. But, trust me, your work pays off in the long run! I meet with students daily who have very different lifestyles, study habits, cleanliness needs, and money management skills. Tension builds, fights ensue, friendships suffer, grades drop, and sometimes leases are broken due to their differences and lack of communication. Spend time getting to know your potential roommates by asking the important questions found in this guide. Remember...friends are not always the best roommates. Communication is key at the start of living together so fill out a Roommate Agreement form from the CHO to save heartache later on! And please, if life with your roommate is getting rocky and you need some advice, come in so that we can help with conflict resolution, mediation, or just an ear to listen.

Maya Salmon
Program Coordinator, CHO

**JOINT & SEVERAL CLAUSE**

If two or more people sign a Joint & Several lease, they are collectively responsible for the full payment of rent throughout the period of the lease. If one roommate moves out before the end of the contract term, the property provider is legally entitled to collect the full rental amount from the remaining roommate(s).

The property provider may pursue the vacated resident, or s/he may simply leave the responsibility with the roommate(s) who stayed. This is the property provider’s decision to make, not the tenants’. The tenants can choose to pursue the roommate who left for some of the rent money, to find a suitable replacement, or pay the full rental amount themselves. The possibility of such complications illustrates the importance of a formal roommate agreement in which roommates make specific and explicit commitments to each other and to the successful functioning of the household. (For additional information, please refer to the sample Roommate Agreement in the Forms section of this publication.)