



PennState
Dickinson Law

PRE-ARRIVAL HOUSING GUIDE 2024-2025

International Programs & Graduate Education
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Carlisle, PA 17013
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2024-2025

Welcome to Penn State Dickinson Law!

As you may have discovered, securing comfortable and affordable housing near the Penn State Dickinson Law campus can be challenging. However, with consistent effort, careful research, and this reference guide, you will find a place that is convenient for you. As an international student from Canada, I initially struggled with securing housing. All worked out for me and it will work out for you, too.

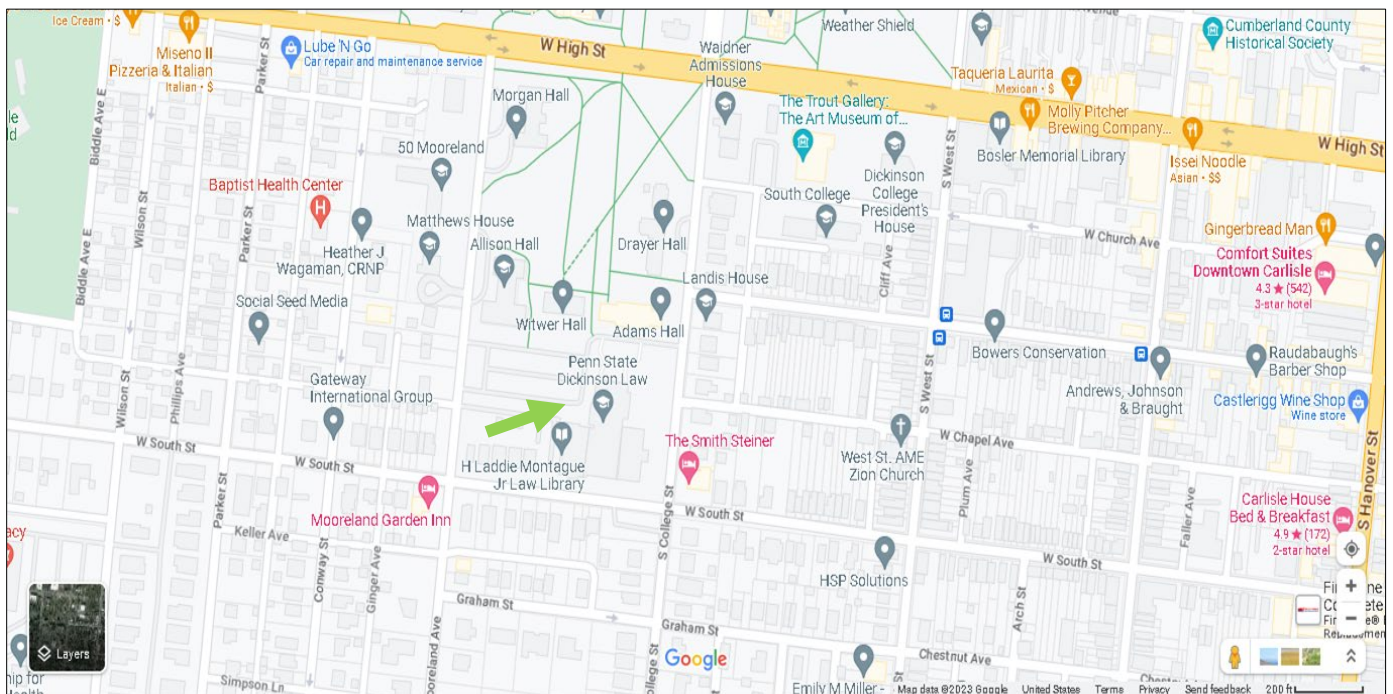
The Dickinson Law campus is surrounded by closely linked streets with many housing options that are within walkable distance. The map below shows some of the closest streets around the law school. It is recommended that students choose housing options within the downtown area of [Carlisle](#), which is within easy walking distance to the law school campus, local shopping and entertainment. For those that have personal means of transportation, there are many housing possibilities within a short drive to campus.

Housing is generally affordable, especially for those that share expenses with roommates. Most students spend between \$500-\$1,000 USD per month on housing. Housing outside of Carlisle may be more affordable, but Carlisle does not have reliable public transportation.

This reference guide has been developed to address many of your housing questions. As I am already here in Carlisle, please feel free to call on me to assist you. I am here to help.



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HOUSING IN CARLISLE

There are many housing options available to you. Here are some possibilities:

1. **Studio Apartments.** A studio apartment is generally a self-contained space that houses everything in a single room with a separate bathroom. The most common studio apartments usually have shared bathrooms.
2. **Multi-Bedroom Apartments & Houses.** Bedroom apartments or houses usually have at least one bedroom and a living room, including kitchen, bathroom and sometimes dining room, laundry room, etc.
3. **Suites.** Suites are mostly furnished with features like carpeting, top-quality light fixtures, and convenient appliances, like dishwashers or garbage disposals. They have common rooms, balconies, and many people often say that suites are much more comfortable.
4. **Shared Housing.** Some students rent shared houses or apartments where each tenant rents a room and shares the living room, bathroom, and other spaces with the other tenants.
5. **Room in Private Home.** Some Carlisle residents rent out one or more of their rooms to tenants. In some cases, this may feel like a “homestay”.
6. **Single Family Home.** An apartment or house suitable for one family. Ideal for students here with families.
7. **Long-Term Hotels.** Some hotels may accommodate long-term bookings for a relatively lengthy period like few weeks to few months. Usually there is a discount for longer stays.
8. **AirBnB.** There are many short-term rentals available in Carlisle noted on AirBnB and other housing sites.

DISTANCE

Housing options within walking distance of the law school are recommended. Biking is also possible, keeping in mind that Carlisle does not have well-established bike lanes. If you would like to use a bike, it is good to take weather into consideration. Carlisle is usually cold during spring and rainy in the fall.

If you intend to have a car, more affordable housing options are located within driving distance of the law school. When finalizing a lease, be sure to

CONDUCTING A HOUSING SEARCH

Dickinson Law maintains a database on the website where [property owners list available housing options](#) around the campus. In addition, there are [various websites](#) you may also use in the search for your housing choice.

To the extent possible, inspect the actual unit you intend to lease and consider creating a list of the necessary repairs to be done prior to move in. Take photos of the entire place at the time of move in.

inquire about the availability of parking, which may not be free. Consider proximity to shopping centers, local restaurants and entertainment.

[Carlisle, PA](#) is generally regarded as a safe and healthy community. There are generally few areas where residents cannot walk freely outside. Typical precautions are suggested. When considering housing options, students should consider the area nearby and the walking route to the Dickinson Law campus.

Security is also an important factor to consider. It is recommended that there are two means of egress (exit) from the unit. For fire safety, a smoke detector is required by law to be in a housing unit. Ensure that, at least, one is installed in the unit. Unless already included, be sure to arrange for utilities like water, electricity, Internet, etc., to be turned on by the date you move in. Consider your intended arrival date when signing a lease (e.g., August 1, 2024).

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1. **Dishwasher.** It is common to find automatic dishwashers in most housing units in the U.S. Some apartments, however, may only have space for a dishwasher, but not the appliance itself. Check to see what your choice of housing has.
2. **Air-Conditioning.** Most housing will have central heating and air-condition, or individual units in each room of the home. It can get cold in the winter and very hot in the summer. Check to ensure heating and air-conditioning is included.
3. **Cable & Internet.** Inquire as to whether the home already is already cable and internet ready. In some cases, the home may only be serviced by particular providers.
4. **Parking.** Off-street parking is common in the U.S. Ensure that your housing unit has parking spaces if you will have access to a vehicle.
5. **Furniture.** Inquire as to what furniture remains with the home. It is common to find the kitchen and bathroom fully equipped. Even in furnished homes, you may need to still buy needed accessories.
6. **Laundry.** Inquire if the home or the property has access to laundry facilities.
7. **Smoking.** Depending on your needs, find out whether smoking is allowed in the home. Americans can be very strict with regard to smoking.
8. **Pets.** Some landlords allow tenants to keep pets, additional “pet fee” and deposit will likely be required.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Living with others can lower housing expenses. Most students have roommates with whom they share accommodation, thereby splitting both the rent and utility bills. Rooms in a student or private house tend to be the least expensive, but harder to find. It is advised that you include the cost of renting or purchasing furniture if your housing unit isn't furnished. Also, when calculating your maximum affordable rent, be sure to include utilities. You may inquire from your landlord or the out-going tenants (if available) the average costs of utilities in housing unit.

Most landlord will require that you pay a security deposit. Security deposits are used to repair any damage you may cause while living in the home. You are entitled to receive a refund of your security deposit after you move out, less the cost of

repairing any damages. If the landlord keeps any portion of the security deposit, you must also receive, in writing, an itemized list of what the needed repairs were and how much each repair cost. It is not likely that you will be charged for normal wear and tear, that is, the things that periodically need replacing.

Security deposits are usually not more than two months' rent. Landlords must issue receipts for the security deposit, though it is sufficient if the deposit amount is specified in the lease. To help ensure the return of your security deposit, we strongly encourage that you request a list of existing damage to the housing option at the time of move in. Take photos at the time of taking occupancy.

SIGNING A LEASE AGREEMENT

It is very important that you carefully read the housing lease before you sign it. This way you can limit future problems with your landlord. Oral leases are not recommended because they do not provide sufficient legal protection for the tenant. You should ask for a written lease. Some landlords, especially property managers, may require application fees to process your application to rent any of their housing units. Find out the exact procedures for each landlord with whom you are interacting.

SETTING UP UTILITIES

It is important to know what, if any, utilities are included in the lease agreement. In most cases, water and sewer services will be included, but generally electric, gas, internet, etc. are not. Tenants must contact local utilities providers to get these services set-up, and in some cases, this can take up to two weeks. In the Carlisle area, the following are major providers:

Be sure to note the duration of the lease and the penalties should you need to vacate the home prior to the expiration of the lease. Most leases are 12-months in duration although some landlords will consider 6-months leave with an additional monthly premium. Consider your intended arrival when signing a lease. International students may not arrive into the U.S. more than one month prior to the start of classes.

- **Electric.** PPL, www.ppelectric.com
- **Gas.** UGI Utilities, Inc. www.ugi.com
- **Internet.** Xfinity, www.xfinity.com

Contact the [Borough of Carlisle](#) with questions related to water and sewer.

GENERAL TIPS

- **Transportation.** If you do not have a car, choose a unit that is close to the law school or within walking distance.
- **Lease.** Leases are generally for one year. Not all landlords allow their tenants to sublet their apartments/houses.
- **Background Check.** Some rental applications might require a criminal background check, which requires a social security number. International students may only get a social security number with employment. International students may need to explain this to potential landlords.
- **Renters' Insurance.** The landlord's property insurance policy usually does not cover your personal possessions, so you might need to consider purchasing renters' insurance to cover your personal belongings. Getting

- quotes for renter's insurance is usually quick, easy and affordable.
- **Issues/Concerns.** Notify your landlord or leasing office in writing of any problems you face with the home. Upon moving in always take pictures of the condition of the apartment/house. Documenting the condition of the residence upon move in is always a good idea in case the landlord attempts to withhold your security deposit due to previous damage.
- **Repairs.** If damage to the property occurs during the rental period, it is the landlord's responsibility to fix/ repair the damage.
- **Major Appliances.** Most apartments include a stove, oven and a refrigerator, but always confirm this with your landlord/leasing office. Ask if a microwave is provided.

- **Laundry.** If a washing machine and a dryer are not included in the unit, ask about on-site laundry facilities or nearby laundromat options.
- **Walk Through.** When at all possible, try to view the apartment before you sign the lease. You're going to be living there and should be 100% sure that this is the right place for you. Remember, a lease is a binding contract and once you sign it, it can be very hard to cancel.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

1. **Don't sign a lease without reading it thoroughly.** Thoroughly read the lease before you sign it. This is because once you make a commitment and sign the lease, the agreement becomes binding, and it will serve as a reference should any issue arise throughout the tenancy.
2. **Don't sign a lease without viewing the property and meeting with the landlord.** It is recommended that you or someone you know visits the housing unit before you sign the lease. This is to ensure that the description and actual unit match as promoted. Knowing what is expected can help you with finalizing your housing budget ahead of moving in.
3. **Don't forget to take into consideration your transportation options.** This is very important because the distance to the law school matters a lot. Most students, especially those that are not mobile, usually secure housing in locations that are within walking to the law school. Carlisle does not offer reliable public transportation.
4. **Don't fail to consider the cost of utilities.** It is very important to consider the cost of utilities and what is specifically covered in the lease. Electric and gas, in particular, can be quite expensive. This will enable you to have a fair idea of what you will spend each month, in addition to your monthly rent. Consider asking the landlord or tenants for copies of the previous utility bills for both summer and winter (these are the most expensive seasons for heating and cooling). This information can be helpful in budgeting.
5. **Don't fail to understand your responsibilities as a tenant (e.g., trash disposal, lawn care, etc.).** The responsibilities of any tenant are usually stated in the lease. Read the lease agreement thoroughly and ask questions if you do not understand any of the responsibilities or anything in the lease. If you are renting a room in a private home, you may want to ask about their policies on overnight guests.
6. **Don't lose housing by failing to submit a deposit quickly.** It is recommended that that you immediately secure any housing unit you have chosen by paying the deposit and signing a lease (if required). This gives the landlord the assurance that you are interested in the housing unit and prevents the landlord from making it available to other renters.

If you can't view the apartment in person, try to ask someone you know or trust to view the apartment on your behalf and take a video so you can see the entire property (not just what's viewable in pictures on-line). You can also ask the landlord for as many updated pictures as possible regarding the property so you can make an informed decision on if you want to live there.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: *I just got accepted to Dickinson Law. When should I start looking for housing options?*

A: Once you have been accepted, you should start searching for accommodation immediately, even if you require a visa to enter the United States. What most visa-seeking international students do is to start the search as soon as possible and intensify the search after securing a visa, after which they make commitments for the accommodations they find.

Q: *What is the average cost of apartments around the law school?*

A: With or without utilities, a studio room is within the range of \$650 to \$800, one/two-bedroom apartments could be between \$850 and \$1,500. However, it is recommended that students get roommates to cut some costs by splitting the rent and utility bills.

Q: *I have found an apartment but the owner requests that I make a commitment in the form of a security deposit.*

A: Yes, most property owners require that you make a deposit before securing an apartment. This deposit will be refunded if at the end of the lease you did not damage any part of the housing unit or the property in it. Deposits could be an equivalent of one or two-months' rent. Also, some landlords will require one month's rent in advance.

Q: *How do I make payment from outside the United States?*

A: Most landlords will require that you make an international wire transfer or pay via some other electronic means, such as PayPal or Venmo. This may take time to go through depending on your country. However, another way to make the payment is if you have someone in the United States who is willing to assist you.

Q: *I have found an apartment, but the landlord requests my credit history. What is that?*

A: A credit score or history assures the landlord that the intending tenant is credit worthy and can relatively afford to pay without undue owing of rent. If you are an international student, you may not have a US credit history. A possible solution is to assure the landlord that you can pay the rent and that you are an international student who already proved your financial capacity to the law school before you were issued your I-20.

Q: *My landlord is asking that I sign a lease.*

A: Yes. Most landlords will require that you sign a lease. In this case, if you want to move before your lease expires, you may be required to find someone to replace you and continue the lease for the unexpired term. You will be asked to pay the remaining portion of the lease should you not find someone to take over the lease.

Q: *Can I share an apartment with other students?*

A: Yes. Most Dickinson Law students share with other students. This helps to cut costs by splitting the rent and bills.

Q: *Can I find fully furnished accommodation?*

A: Yes. Fully furnished housing units are available but will most likely cost more per month. A fully furnished housing unit usually has everything in it like kitchen equipment, laundry, equipped living room, bed, etc. You move in with your personal belongings without buying any major property. Unfurnished units may require you to buy everything you need. For short stays, it may be cheaper to rent a furnished apartment.

Q: *How is rent paid in the United States?*

A: Rents are generally paid once a month, usually via bank check. If you pay in cash, be sure to get a written receipt.

Q: *Are there any student dorms or student housing available in Carlisle?*

A: No. Dickinson Law does not provide student dorms or student housing. Each student is responsible for securing accommodations off-campus. There are student-friendly housing options in Carlisle and around the law school.

Q: *Can I sign a 9-month lease?*

A: Most landlords will require that you sign a full 1-year lease. It is rare to find housing where you will be permitted to sign a shorter-term lease. However, a private homeowner, who lives in the same house or apartment as the students, may permit renting out one or two of their rooms without requiring the students to sign a lease. Peculiar circumstances of the landlords determine how this plays out.

Q: *Is there public transportation to the Dickinson Law campus?*

A: Public transportation is not readily available in Carlisle. Students are recommended to secure housing within walking distance to the campus. However, students who intend to drive may find much more affordable housing options within driving distance to the law school.

Q: *I found a great apartment in Mechanicsburg. Can I easily commute?*

A: Yes. Mechanicsburg is about a 20 minutes' drive to the law school. One will need a personal vehicle as reliable transportation is not available.

Q: *What if I cannot locate housing?*

A: It is not likely that you will be unable to locate any housing at all. However, should that be the case, you may want to reach out to Dickinson Law for guidance. Do not arrive without pre-arranged housing.