Living in the DC Metropolitan Area

(Updated Spring 2011)

***The opinions expressed in this document do not represent the views of the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Maryland, College Park.***
Welcome to the University of Maryland!

One of the greatest advantages to living in the DC metropolitan area is the vast array of living options you have. At the same time, this can be the biggest challenge to living in the DC metropolitan area. Over the years, your fellow graduate students have amassed a wealth of information pertaining to specific apartment complexes, DC and its surrounding areas, and management companies in general. In an effort to help you navigate the waters of finding a place to live, information has been culled from a number of students who have noted the pros and cons of living in specific apartments or certain areas of the region. You may also find resources such as craigslist.com, washingtonpost.com, campus housing resources, etc. to be helpful as you begin your housing search (see the link to the “Stuff I Wish I Knew When I Started Grad School” on the ccjs.umd.edu website for more information on local housing resources).

- Katie Kozey

Many Thanks to the Contributors:

Brandon Behlendorf  Bianca Bersani  Cortney Fisher
Dave Mazeika  Dawn Daggett  Gillian Pinchevsky
Katie Kozey  Laura Garnier  Lauren Rothe
Maggie Pendzich  Megan Augustyn  Melissa Rorie
Steph Dipietro  Summer Acevedo  Susan Fahey
Tracy Sohoni  Wendy Povitsky Stickle  Mauri Matsuda
Holly Nguyen  Nicole Jackson  Rachel Freeland
Kyle Thomas
College Park
Zip code: 20740-20742

The College Park area is the closest to campus that you can get. There is easy access to the beltway and you are within a 5 minute drive to restaurants in the area. Also, Shoppers grocery store is located right on Baltimore Avenue and there are others on side roads. I would not recommend living in the neighborhoods closest to campus because they are occupied by mostly undergrads who have a tendency to be a bit rowdy or noisy at times, crime rates are a little higher, and the living quarters aren’t as nice. The neighborhoods after the exit to the beltway (going north on Route 1 towards Laurel) are much nicer, but a little pricier.

**Graduate Gardens/Hills** (Summer and Nicole)

Pros
- Walk to campus, no parking permit and/or car needed
- Fairly easy bus access – you can walk to union and pick up the shuttle to the metro
- Relatively cheap for a location so close to campus
- “I lived alone and had a great experience” – Nicole
- Good place for graduate students
- Complex is pretty quiet – no noise problems

Cons
- On the edge of a dicey area. I used to run to my car when I went out at night. Regular patrols by local police department help, and if you have a roommate you should be ok. Management has close ties with the University.

**Westchester Park** (Summer)

Pros
- Located between College Park and Greenbelt, at the intersection of 193 and 201. Roughly 4 miles from campus.
- Quiet, lots of older people live here. Condos are a bit dated, towers are a little scary (old).
- Rent is reasonable (about $1200 for a 2 br/1ba), ample parking, on UM and Metro shuttle stop (10 minute ride to campus, leaves about every hour). Access to jogging trail.
- I would live here if you’re laid back and want to be close to campus without paying extra for a gym, washer/dryer, etc.

Cons
- Not the prettiest complex; no amenities to speak of
- Subject to brown-out in the hot summer months.

**Daniels Run** (Bianca, Laura)

This place is your typical apartment complex – 3 or 4 floors of apartments. It’s near the intersection of New Hampshire and Adelphi Road, but back a bit so you don’t get all the traffic congestion that you would if you lived on the main streets. If you wanted to live close to campus, I would recommend checking into this place.

Pros
Pros

- Pet friendly (cats), although they do have a monthly pet fee
- Amenities: gym, offsite pool, clubhouse
- Apartments are relatively well maintained – no issues with bugs and the maintenance staff was usually very responsive
- The apartments are a pretty decent size
- They have a staff that cleans the common areas every week which is great
- There is a washer and dryer in most apartments
- Mostly young professionals, so fairly quiet atmosphere
- Commute to campus is minimal – 5 minute drive, close enough to bike, close to a bus line that runs to campus
- Secure buildings with an access code needed upon entrance to any of the buildings
- Parking was ok; guest parking is a bit of a pain - you can pay for garage parking under the building
- Very close to the beltway (access to both 495 and 95 north)

Cons

- Can be pricey
- Area can be a bit sketchy crime-wise, but I never had a problem
- Visitor/guest parking can be problematic
- Appliances are a bit dated

**Wynfield Park Apartments** (Gillian, Megan, Summer)

**Pros**

- Very nice apartments with granite countertops and in apartment washer/dryer
- Gated community – great for Safety
- Although it is more expensive than most other places in College Park, it is VERY clean and everyone is really friendly
- Pet-friendly neighborhood (only a one-time deposit at time of move in). Allows big dogs!
- Plenty of parking. Requires parking permits and will tow those who do not have a permit or guest permit after 10pm – They make the complex’s safety a top priority
- Great amenities – pool with lifeguard (even though deepest part is only 5 ft), a nice gym with a flat screen TV, and two bbq spots
- Not many students, so the noise level is kept to a minimum
- IKEA is right across the street
- New shopping center across the street:
  - Buffalo Wild Wings, Starbucks, Pearl Vision, Verizon, **Coming Soon** **Einstein Bagels, , Potbelly, Essential Day Spa, Massage Envy, etc.
- Right at the intersection of Baltimore Avenue and 495 (great access to go any place around the city). Easy access to 295, 95, 495, and route 1; roughly 4 miles to campus
- Complex hosts functions – wine parties, summer barbecues, movie nights (not well attended but great for free food, soda, and beer)
- Free coffee and cookies everyday
- Office will accept your couriered packages
- Well maintained, if something breaks they fix it right away
• Cute park behind complex (Sunnyside park)
• Central heating and AC

Cons
• No elevators (4 stories) and all door entries are outside, but there are well covered hallways.
• Very expensive unless you get a 3 br/2 bath and share the costs.
• Not immune to disturbance calls, my old roommates had their cars broken into.
• I would live here if you can afford it. I think they have income requirements though.
• Rent does not include utilities

The University View (Lauren)
This place is really close to campus, but if you missed it while driving along route 1, don’t be surprised, there is a huge construction site outside of it at the moment. It is across the street from the McDonalds and is walking distance to campus (8204 Baltimore Ave). There is a front and back route to walk to campus along with shuttles that run every 10-20 minutes during the day, and every 15 or so minutes at night. The daytime bus shuttles back and forth from the View to the Stamp Student Union. The evening shuttle is a circulator shuttle that goes all around campus, but you’ll eventually get back to the View.

Pros
• Walking distance to campus
• Fully furnished apartments
• Low utility costs: the website says utilities are included, but they only cover a certain percentage. You pay the rest and that number is slightly arbitrary and is based on the building’s energy consumption divided by your square footage. It’s never more than $40, but plan to add about $25 a month to your costs.
• The building is VERY safe. This can be a con too because having guests is a pain. You have to sign them in and they have to give their photo ID to the front desk. There is surveillance however 24/7.
• Maintenance and work orders can be handled online and are completed promptly.
• There is a parking garage right under the building
• New apartments
• Washer/dryer in unit, garbage disposal, dishwasher, and in double units, private bathrooms
• Gym, lounge, and study rooms in building
• Pool deck

Cons
• It’s on the pricey side, especially if you get parking
• Management is terrible
• You can pay your rent online, but it doesn’t always work. They may have fixed it though, not 100% sure
• Visitor parking can be a problem, but not on weekends (except basketball/football weekends). Lot 11 is OK to park in on weekends.
• No Pets.
• The building is mostly populated with undergraduate students so it can be loud at times
• Not too much in the area except McDonalds, Burger King, and Taco Bell. There is also a liquor store right in front of the building.

Overall – it’s good in a pinch, especially if you don’t have a car. Little worries because of furniture and safety. Rather pricey, construction (no idea when the project will be completed) and poor/frustrating management.

**Downtown Silver Spring**

**Zip code: 20910**

Downtown Silver Spring is a little bit pricier than some other areas, but it has a lot of advantages. It’s walking distance to the metro so it’s easy to get in and out of DC, walking distance to several great restaurants and to grocery stores. The town hosts local events (farmer’s market, jazz festival, thanksgiving parade, etc). And, there is a UM shuttle that takes you to campus. It generally takes about 20 minutes to drive to campus.

**The Alexander House** (Kyle Thomas)

Location: Downtown Silver Spring on Second Avenue and Cameron Street (Right near the Silver Spring Metro Station).

**Pros:**

• As said above, it is located right by the metro station. This gives you easy access to any areas in the DC metro area (including College Park).
• There is also a free UM shuttle that can pick you up from the metro station. It comes about every 40 minutes and it is a great way to head into campus.
• It is an excellent location if you do not have a car. Located right downtown, there are a lot of activities to take part in. Half a block away from a diner, only a few blocks away from Panera Bread, Chipotle, Potbelly, Macaroni Grill and other restaurants. There is also a movie theater, Borders bookstore, Starbucks, Seattle's Best and a mall within walking distance. And perhaps most importantly, there is a grocery store only a few blocks away.
• From April to December there is a Farmer's Market right downtown.
• Inside the complex there is a small work out room with machines and treadmills.
• Very safe (both the complex and the larger area). Huge doormen are present in the lobby 24/7 and you have to have a fob to enter the complex. Silver Spring is very safe. I walk downtown late at night all of the time and never feel threatened.

**Cons:**

• -The biggest downside about living in Silver Spring is its proximity to campus. On average, it takes about 30-40 minutes using the shuttle to get into campus, and usually even longer when taking the metro. It makes it a pain if you are trying to head in just to grab something. I usually spend that time just reading for classes, so in some ways it isn't bad.
• One con about the Alexander House is its price. As a graduate student you qualify for section 8 housing which helps, but still, I pay over $1200 a month in rent.
Other than that I love living in Silver Spring and highly recommend the Alexander House to any incoming graduate students.

The Blair Apartments (Rachel Freeland)
Downtown Silver Spring, 5 minutes from SS metro station
1401 Blair Mill Road
Silver Spring, Md 20910

Pro's:
- allows pets
- apartments are spacious
- free parking
- utilities included
- multiple gyms on site
- walking distance to grocery store and downtown silver spring
- security patrols 24/7
- 20 minutes from campus

Con's:
- not all apartments are renovated
- rent is a little pricey
- can be noisy depending on which side your apartment faces
- sometimes hard to find parking close to your building after 9 pm

Summit Hills Apartments (Tracy, Wendy)
NOTE: there are a lot of buildings and a lot of variation exists between the different buildings.

Pro's:
- There is ample - FREE parking.
- Great location and a little more affordable than other downtown locations.
- The management is very quick to respond to any problems, they are friendly, and they deliver your packages so you don’t have to go to the post office to pick them up.
- They have nice amenities like a pool and a gym, etc.

Con's:
- Full disclosure - the on-site convenience store and dry-cleaners were recently robbed. But we have a baby and still feel pretty safe. (I'm happy to talk more to anyone about it, and would greatly appreciate it if they use my name as a referral if they do come here since I would get a discount off of my rent - Tracy).
- Others comment about the safety of the apartments (car was stolen) – seems to depend upon the building you live in.
- Not really a “gated” community.
- Instance of a problem getting a pet deposit back.
Silver Spring/College Park Border
Zip code: 20903

Living slightly west of Downtown Silver Spring and closer to campus has apartments that tend to be slightly more affordable, and many are not run by a large management group so you get landlords that are easily accessible. The cons of living away from downtown, however, are that you need either a bike or a car to get around; the area does not have many stores/shops you can walk to. In a car, Downtown Silver Spring is 5 minutes away. Some buildings have shuttles to campus, which takes about 20-30 minutes. You get all the pros of Downtown Silver Spring - the Saturday farmer’s market is great! However, there is not much in walking distance and it does not have an urban feel so if you don’t have access to a car this area might not be for you.

Suburban Hill Apartments (Katie)
- Parking, all utilities, and gym access are all included in the rent.
- Rent: This past year a 1BR was $1100. Lower rent for longer leases and repeat leases.
- Drive into campus is on back roads with very light traffic, and the commute is about 5 min.
- Easy route into DC via New Hampshire Ave., and the beltway entrance is 1 mi. north.
- One of the landlords and most of the maintenance people also live in the building, so they are very good about quick repairs and responses to problems.

NOTE: Not all buildings are the same, and I would not look at the apartments at the intersection of New Hampshire Ave and University Blvd. because I believe they have had a string of burglaries lately (as in 2009)

Powder Mill Village (Nicole)
- Heard that it has a lot of roach problems from friends

Hyattsville/Adelphi
Zip Code: 20783

This area tends to be a bit cheaper than the surrounding areas. There are a couple of apartment complexes, including one called Powder Mill Village that seems to be popular with foreign exchange students. I live in an apartment above someone’s garage that I found on Craig’s List and have lived in this area for 3 years (Melissa).

Pros
- Cheaper.
- About 3 miles from campus.
- Free shuttle Monday through Friday that runs from campus to Powder Mill Village.

Cons
- Campus is not accessible by walking and I would not recommend biking—there are few sidewalks that would lead you to the nearest bike/walking trail.
- Metro buses are not convenient—you’d have to transfer at least once to get to campus.
- The shuttle takes between 45 minutes to an hour to get to campus.
• The area is safe enough during the day, but I would never go for a walk after dark.
• There’s really not much to do in this area—no bars, few restaurants, and everything is a long walk or a car ride away.

Cheverly
Zip Code: 20785

I have lived in Cheverly, MD for 8 years and love it. Although this community is all single family homes, there are generally two rental options. There are houses for rent here that are very reasonably priced (usually 2-3 bedrooms), and there are also other rentals options such as renting a bedroom in a house or a finished basement. I am not sure how one would search for available rentals here, other than craigslist, realtor.com, there is also a website I maintain called www.cheverlylist.com which is kind of like a craigslist for Cheverly residents but not terribly active. The zip code is 20785, but this zip code covers a lot of different towns, so if someone searches on realtor.com, they want to make sure it says Cheverly. (Dawn)

Pros
• Only 7 miles from College Park and a very easy commute by car (15-20 minutes), only 2 exits on the BWI parkway.
• There is a bus that goes to College Park but it takes forever – close to an hour.
• Metro accessible – orange line.
• The community is very politically active, diverse, clean, and police are very responsive.
• There is plenty of street parking.

Montgomery County – Bethesda/Rockville/Gaithersburg/ Wheaton
Zip code: 20847-20853, 20877-20899, 20902

The Rockville/Bethesda area can be quite pricey.

Any Where in the Northern Montgomery Area (Wendy)
Pros
• Great for grad students who are coming with families.
• From the Rockville area it takes about 20-40 minutes (with heavy but moving traffic) to get to College Park it can take up to an hour in peak commute times.
• Great schools, restaurants, and very safe.

Downtown Wheaton (Sarah, Laura)
I don’t have information on a specific rental apartment, but there are houses in the area for rent.
Pros
• You are in Montgomery County – cheaper car insurance.
Crime rates can vary – some places with higher crime rates are certain parts of Silver Spring, Wheaton and Gaithersberg – still lower than Prince George’s County where UMCP is. Crime is lower in Bethesda, Rockville and Northern Montgomery County.

Seems to be reasonably priced.
Fairly residential – mostly neighborhoods.
Close to the Wheaton metro station, easy to get in and out of DC (about a half hour metro ride on the red line).
Short drive to Silver Spring, Rockville, Bethesda, Kensington (dining, shopping and entertainment).
Lots of good restaurants (Thai, Chinese, Italian, El Salvadorian, Diner, and more).
Grocery store, Target, and a Mall.
Wheaton Regional Park: has lots of walking trails, dog park, ice skating rink, tennis courts, carousel, mini train and more.
Botanical Garden: great in all seasons, butterfly garden in the summer, elaborate light display in the winter.
Wheaton Regional Library: there is a good used book store attached.

Cons

Not very walker friendly. A lot of streets don't have sidewalks. I would recommend this area if you have a car.
A bit of a drive to campus, but there is a bus that you can take (not sure how long it takes to get there). It generally takes about 30 minutes to drive to campus.

**Gables on Tuckerman** (part of the Penbrooke Community in N. Bethesda) (Megan)

Pros

- It is right off Rockville Pike at the Strathmore Center.
- Very close to the Grosvenor Metro (red line).
- It is very residential. There are two condo associations and a third townhouse association that make up the Penbrooke Community.
- Has a gym, a clubhouse, 3 community pools (a workout pool for laps, a fun pool, and then a kiddie pool).
- It is very pet friendly.
- It is mostly young working couples with a few older near retirement age couples.
- It is close to the beltway, grocery stores, malls, metro - it is ideal.
- This is a place that you can buy or rent depending on availability.. I currently live in a two bedroom two bath place that is bi-level. It isn't tons of space but the bi-level aspect makes it perfect and seem like there is way more space. Plus, Teddy (my dog) absolutely loves the grassy areas and park that are right here.

Cons

- None. I absolutely love the place!
- Pricey but worth it

**Oxford Square Apartments** (Susan)

Garden style apartments located about a mile off of Route 355 (Rockville Pike) and Nicholson Lane.
Pros:
- Accepts cats.
- If you get a special, can be relatively inexpensive.
- Expansive floor plans.
- Amenities: outdoor pool, gym.
- Rent drop-off box.
- Easy parking.
- Wooded quiet location very close to White Flint Mall.
- Big windows, big eat-in kitchens.
- Located close to a back-way to College Park.
- Balconies with sliding glass doors.

Cons:
- Does not accept dogs.
- Electric appliances.
- Mostly one bathroom, even in 2 bedroom apartments.
- Traffic between College Park and Rockville can be bad during rush hour.
- Not particularly metro-convenient - need to take a bus and/or walk.
- If you don't get a special, can be expensive.
Huntington Gateway (Brandon)

Pros
- Large, clean apartments.
- Very responsive management (i.e. air conditioning broke on a hot Saturday evening in August, the maintenance manager left having dinner with family to fix the air conditioner within 30 minutes of it breaking!).
- Allows Pets.
- Great amenities (indoor pool and hot tub, gym, tennis court).
- Free shuttle to Huntington Metro station (Yellow line, about 1 mi away).
- Free 1 spot garaged parking.
- Easy access to Target, Wal-Mart, grocery stores, and Old Town Alexandria.

Cons
- Moderately expensive (better for couples than for single just-out-of-undergrad students).
- Far from campus (non-rush hour drive roughly 35 minutes, metro commute between 1 hr and 1.25 hours).

Avalon Communities (Steph) (Locations in Arlington and Alexandria)
- The apartments tend to be on the pricier side and the Alexandria location is about a 45 minute metro ride to College Park, but this is one of the few apartment complexes that allow pets (including up to 2 big dogs!); they even have a small fenced in dog park for residents.
- The Alexandria complex is about a 7 minute walk to the Eisenhower Avenue Metro stop on the Yellow Line.
- There is ample parking in the complex and on-site storage space available.
- They have a small (but very nice) gym and a pool.
- It's only a 10 minute drive to Old town Alexandria.
- There is a large movie theatre and several restaurants within walking distance (10-15 mins).
- The community is gated and the location is very safe.

Ridgeleigh at Van Dorn (Susan)
Garden style Apartments in a larger community of apartments, condos and townhouses

Pros
- Accepts cats and dogs.
- Relatively expansive floor plans.
- Balcony with sliding glass door, big windows.
- You can pay rent online.
- Centrally located dog courtyard with bags and trash can that's regularly emptied.
- Good maintenance team.
• Renovated apartments are really nice but expensive; unrenovated apartments are cheaper but older-looking.
• Will accept packages at clubhouse if signature is required.
• Pretty easy parking.
• Free shuttle to Van Dorn St metro during rush hour (which is also walkable and there is a bus line that runs within the larger community that can take you during rush hour - one outside the community that can take you outside of rush hour).
• Extremely close to a beltway entrance/exit at Van Dorn Street.
• Two outdoor pools, a jacuzzi, newly renovated gym.
• Nice community - family and young professional oriented.
• Have garages available for rent (not all are attached to your apartment).
• Located close to two shopping malls and several strip malls/box stores.
• Newer company - keep up the maintenance pretty well.

Cons
• Not much visitor parking.
• Traffic can be difficult on Van Dorn and on the beltway at times.
• 45 minute drive to College Park during rush hour - can be longer depending upon accidents, construction, etc.
• Is located in VA so no in-state tuition if that applies to you.
• Dumpster gets quite full on the weekends.

DC/Capitol Hill
Zip Code: 20002

There are some great rental deals in the Capitol Hill area, particularly in terms of English basement apartments; Craigslist is a good source for listings. (Maggie)

Pros
• Close to the metro (Union Station, Eastern Market, Capitol South).
• Street parking is easy to find.
• Quiet neighborhood, particularly on the weekend.
• There are a lot of bars, restaurants, dry cleaners, corner markets, etc.
• Easy access to downtown DC.
• Safe area (is patrolled by both DC police and Capitol Hill police).

Cons
• If you don’t have a car, a metro ride to campus (including the shuttle from the College Park station to campus) can take about 45 minutes.
• The bar/restaurant scene is dominated by Hill staffers on weekdays (which is either a pro or con depending on your tastes).
• Parking can be hard to find if you do not have a spot.

DC - Petworth, Columbia Heights, Shaw (Mauri)

Pros
• Can be cheap (for DC), though there is a lot of variation in price (takes some searching)
• Lots of basement apartments, multi-unit buildings, and row houses for shared/group housing situations (check out craigslist)
• Walker friendly
• Parking is fairly easy (many units have their own private parking, but street parking seems pretty ubiquitous)
• More nightlife, eateries, shopping, and things to do
• Easy access (via bike, transit, and walking) to various neighborhoods in DC (Downtown/Chinatown, U St, Dupont, Adam's Morgan, Capitol Hill, H Street)
• Green line, so a short (10-15 minute) trip to the College Park metro

Cons
• Higher crime
• Requires driving or public transportation to get to campus

If you're looking for an urban option other than DC, Baltimore is worth considering
Pros
• Cheap
• Campus is accessible by MARC and is about a 45 minute drive on either 1-95 or 295
Cons
• Commute
Management Companies in the DC and Surrounding Area

Many of the management companies have specials (discounted rates or a waiver of a security deposit) if you are a graduate student with the University of Maryland. Although they ask for a copy of your student ID as verification, since you won’t have one of these yet most accept a copy of your acceptance letter as proof of graduate student status.

Avalon Management Company (http://www.avaloncommunities.com/dc-region-apartments/)
- They are usually a little newer, nicer, and safe.
- They have fair pet policies and don't automatically take security deposits.
- They are all over the D.C. metro area.
- Avalon at Traville (North Potomac) location is walking distance to the UMD Shady Grove campus.
- These are going to be a bit pricier than other places (e.g., Summit Hills) but it is worth the cost if someone can afford it.

Southern Management Corporation (http://www.southernmanagement.com/index2.cfm)
- They have locations/complexes all over the D.C. metro area.
- Tend to be more affordable.
- Choices vary - some fancier and nicer, some older and not as nice.

Other Housing Ideas / Resources

House versus Apartment (Dave)
I would recommend that incoming students NOT live in an apartment - find a house to rent on craigslist. It's usually cheaper, cleaner, and a better social environment. Many of the apartment complexes around College Park are terrible... poorly managed, dilapidated, etc....

Sorority / Fraternity House Living (Courtney)
Pros
- It's free, and you get paid to live there and make sure that the building doesn't fall down around the angels living inside.
- You also get three meals a day for free.
- The commute is awesome (right across the street, pretty much) and it's not that bad, really.
NOTE: I have no idea if there are other House Director positions available right now for the fall, but any interested students should contact Heidi Biffl at hbiffl@umd.edu. All fraternities and sororities need a House Director!

Off-Campus Housing Services (University of Maryland)
The University of Maryland offers resources regarding off campus housing. If you follow the link provided below, you will find information on available rental units in the area, a roommate finder tool, as well as a link to other useful information such as bus routes, crime stats, and area amenities.
- http://www.och.umd.edu/