

Chico State Renter's Certificate Program



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Overview

The Chico State Renter's Certification Program provides renters seeking their first off-campus housing opportunity with the tools to ensure a successful housing experience. At the same time, by completing this short course, and corresponding exam, local landlords will know that you have taken the time and made the effort to become a successful resident.



Goals

- To provide you with basic knowledge to successfully find a roommate, locate housing, understand your rental agreement, and increase the likelihood of receiving your security deposit and a positive rental reference.
- To assist landlords in recognizing that their resident has the basic understanding of their off campus housing opportunities and expectations.

Estimated Time

30-45 minutes

Instructions

- After reading this document, you will be prompted to answer 20 questions to demonstrate your comprehension of the material.
- A passing score of 70% or greater will result in your obtaining a "Certificate of Completion" that you can use when applying to participating Chico area off campus housing properties.
- Any questions should be directed to the Director of Off Campus Student Services at Kendall 110 or via email at dpherbert@csuchico.edu.

The information contained in this course is intended to provide you with general guidance but should not be construed as legal advice. Laws are modified and changed on a regular basis and certain topics are subject to legal interpretation. If you feel you need clarification or assistance, you are advised to seek legal counsel.

Before You Rent

This section applies helpful information that you will need as you begin your rental search. You will identify tools to choose a roommate and determine if a specific property fits your specific needs.

Housing Lease Is Your Largest Financial Obligation While in School

When you sign a 12-month lease, depending on the type of lease you are typically obligating yourself for thousands of dollars each year.

Did you know that sharing a room can save you hundreds of dollars each month and significantly lower your educational expense? Consider this as a way to significantly lower your educational costs.

Certain property management companies will use high pressure sales techniques to convince you to rent from them. Signing a lease is likely the biggest financial decision you will have made in your life and should be taken slowly and seriously. Being pressured to make a quick decision is not worth a “one time savings” that you may be offered. Take your time, ask questions (see below), and if you need advice contact family, friends or even the Off-Campus Student Services office on campus before you sign your new lease.

Basic Questions to Ask



- What can you afford?
- How long is the term of the lease and does that fit your specific needs?
- Do you want a place by yourself or do you want a roommate(s)?
- How far from campus do you want to live?
- Do you own a pet and will the property allow pets?
- What kind of transportation will you need? Keep in mind that campus neighborhood parking is very limited;
- What is your lifestyle, quiet and studious, socially active or a bit of both?
- Am I old enough to sign a lease (18 +)?

Choosing your roommate

Students often discover (after it's too late) that choosing the wrong roommate can create a miserable home life distracting them from their classwork. Carefully prepare.



Here is a partial list of questions you should consider when selecting your roommate:

- Identify your study habits. Are they compatible? Do you require a quiet household? Consider your privacy needs.
- Do you have similar social habits? Are your feelings on drinking, smoking and drug use compatible?
- Will you or your roommates have regular overnight guests?
- Will someone want to have pets? Does your landlord allow pets?
- As silly as it may seem, a very common area of dispute is personal tidiness and cleanliness expectations.
- Studies show that a "BFF" does not always make the best roommate.
- Talk through the [Roommate Compatibility Survey](#) with prospective roommates

Choosing your location

There are multiple resources designed to assist you in locating off campus housing. The Chico State website offers an Off Campus Housing link where local companies advertise their availabilities. In the spring, the University hosts a housing event on campus where area properties are featured. Private social media sites including Craig's List are popular among students.



Consider the following in your research:

- Will you be able to access campus conveniently during all types of weather conditions from your home?
- Does the landlord/property you are considering have a good reputation amongst their current residents?
- Does your location allow pets?
- Do I have adequate money to cover up front costs required before move-in and what extra expenses should I expect over and above my rental cost?
- Does the neighborhood I am considering fit my lifestyle?



The Housing Connection program located on the [Off-Campus Student Services website](#), is an excellent resource to find housing providers that work closely with the University.



Housing Discrimination

Housing discrimination can take on a variety of forms. Under California's Fair Employment and Housing Act and Unruh Civil Rights Act, it is unlawful for a landlord, managing agent, real estate broker, or salesperson to discriminate against any person because of the person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, childbirth or medical conditions related to them, as well as gender and perception of gender), sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, ancestry, familial status, source of income, disability, medical condition, or age in any of the following ways:

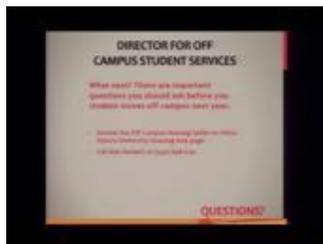
- Refusing to sell, rent, or lease;
- Refusing to negotiate for a sale, rental, or lease;
- Representing that housing is not available for inspection, sale, or rental when it is, in fact, available;
- Otherwise denying or withholding housing accommodations;
- Providing inferior housing terms, conditions, privileges, facilities, or services;
- Harassing a person in connection with housing accommodations;
- Canceling or terminating a sale or rental agreement;
- Providing segregated or separated housing accommodations;
- Refusing to permit a person with a disability, at the person with a disability's own expense, to make reasonable modifications to a rental unit that are necessary to allow the person with a disability "full enjoyment of the premises". As a condition of making the modifications, the landlord may require the person with the disability to enter into an agreement to restore the interior of the rental unit to its previous condition at the end of the tenancy (excluding normal wear and tear). Refusing to make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, practices, or services when necessary to allow a person with a disability "equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling" (for example, refusing to allow a person with a disability's companion or service dog). For further information on housing discrimination, visit the [State of California's Department of Consumer Affairs web site](#).

After you have found your ideal home and roommates

Your rental agreement will undoubtedly be the most significant financial commitment you have made thus far in your life. The contract you sign represents a serious financial obligation that you should understand before signing on the bottom line. Before you finalize your decision and sign the contract, review your landlord's leasing policies carefully and ask questions!



- Does your rental agreement apply to just your room or do you have any obligations for the “common living area”?
- Does your lease have “**Joint and Several**” terminology? If so, understand that **you may be obligated for your personal obligations as well as the obligations of everyone else that you live with.**
- WATCH: this [brief 90 second video on Joint and Several Liability](#).



- Read and understand all of “House Rules”. Recognize that not complying with these rules could result in your eviction and substantial financial penalties.
- Obtain Renter’s Insurance. If the living area in your home is damaged by fire, water or smoke, or if your personal items are stolen, you will not be protected unless you have renter’s insurance.
- Agree to a move in date that works for you, your roommates and your landlord.
- A lease generally defines only the legal relationship between the tenant and their landlord.

While You Rent

Your new living arrangement comes with rights and responsibilities that are consistent with the rental agreement that you signed, California State law and the expectation that you comply with the laws and good neighbor expectations associated with being a member of the Chico community.

Rights

California State law establishes standards that landlords are required to meet as it relates to their tenants living conditions. "Habitable" living conditions and expectations for repairs within those areas are defined by the [California Department of Consumer Affairs handbook](#).



Some of the highlights include (this is a partial list):

- Plumbing in good working order including hot and cold running water;
- Heating systems in good working order;
- Electric and gas systems in good working order;
- At least one working toilet, wash basin and bathtub or shower in a private and ventilated room;
- Operable dead bolt locks on the main entry door and locking devices or security devices on windows;
- Working smoke detectors;
- Landlords are allowed to enter your home only under certain circumstances. Landlord (or their agent) must give tenant reasonable advanced notice (usually at least 24 hours) in writing before entering your home and typically during normal business hours (8:00 AM to 5:00 PM weekdays). The notice must state the date, approximate time, and purpose for entry.

Landlords can only enter your home for the following reasons:

- Electric and gas systems in good working order;
- In an emergency
- When the tenant has moved out or has abandoned their rental unit.
- To make necessary or agreed-upon repairs, decorations, alterations, or other improvements;
- To show the rental unit to prospective tenants, purchasers, or lenders, to provide entry to contractors or workers performing work on the unit, or to conduct an initial inspection before the end of tenancy;
- If a court order permits the landlord to enter;
- If the tenant has a waterbed, to inspect the installation of the waterbed when the installation has been completed, and periodically after that to assure that the installation meets the law's requirements;



Advanced written notice IS NOT required under the following circumstances:

- If a court order permits the landlord to enter;
- To respond to an emergency;
- The tenant has moved out or has abandoned the rental unit;
- The tenant is present and consent to the entry is given at the time of entry;
- The tenant and landlord have agreed that the landlord will make repairs or supply services, and have agreed orally that the landlord may enter to make the repairs or supply the services. The agreement must include the date and approximate time of entry, which must be written within one week of the oral agreement.

Responsibilities

Your responsibilities while living in your home should be spelled out clearly in your lease.



These items include but are not limited to:

- Paying your rent on time (specified within your lease) and in a manner as required by your lease;
- Complying with “house” or “community” policies included within your lease;
- Reporting any damages to your landlord that could create a safety concern or make your home “uninhabitable”;
- Keep your home in a clean condition to insure that no long term property damage is created;

How to Pay Your Rent

The most common method of rent payment is a personal check.



How to write a personal check:

- Place the landlord's name or property management company name (as described in your lease) after "pay to the order";
- Date the check (upper write hand corner on line that says "date")
- Write the amount of the check to the right of the dollar sign;
- Write the monetary amount of the check in "words" below the "pay to the order" line;
- Sign the check on the line in the bottom right corner of the check;
- Place your rental address in the "memo" section of the check;
- **Pay your rent on time to avoid a late charge and possible additional legal fees.**

Other methods of payment:

- Electronic rent payment: Many property owners now allow you to set up an "electronic" rental payment that is deducted from your checking account automatically each month. Other forms of electronic payments include bank "bill pay" and EFT services.
- Cashier's Check: A check issued by your bank that guarantees your payment. There is typically a charge for your bank to issue a Cashier's Check.
- Money Order: If you do not have a checking account, you may purchase a Money Order from a grocery store, post office, or check cashing establishment. Money Orders are typically purchased with cash and may have a maximum limit. They are typically considered an acceptable form of payment. **Always keep your receipt in the event that you need to prove that you paid with a Money Order at a later date.**

Safety

While everyone would like to believe that their home is safe, taking precautions may prevent an unwanted intruder.

	<p>Lock your house and windows when you or your roommates are not home.</p>
	<p>If you own a bike, obtain a bike license from the City of Chico (online). The cost is minimal and the license is good for three years. In the event your bike is stolen, the license often assists in recovery efforts;</p>
	<p>Take pictures of your belongings so that if you do suffer a loss, you have proof of your ownership;</p>
	<p>Obtain renters insurance. A detailed summary is included in this section. The cost of renters insurance can usually be shared by all your roommates and will prove invaluable if your belongings are stolen (and you have pictures of those belongings). Remember, your landlord's insurance will typically not cover your losses resulting from fire, flood or burglary.</p>
	<p>Does your landlord offer any additional safety features at their property (gates, patrol, bike storage)?</p>
	<p>Cooking and grease fires are the #1 cause of household fires. In the event of a grease fire, smother the flame with the lid of the pan or use baking SODA (not powder). NEVER put water on a grease fire and never discharge a fire extinguisher onto a pan as both of these methods can actually spread the fire. Watch this video to see this in action.</p>

Maintaining a Clean Home

Keeping your home clean and clutter free has many advantages. Avoiding mildew may keep you and your roommates healthier. Sweeping and mopping floors and keeping your kitchen free of dirty dishes on a regular basis limits the likelihood for you to invite unwanted insects into your home. Cleaning your bathrooms limits the spread of disease and keeping drains clear of hair prevents clogged drains that can lead to expensive plumbing bills that may be charged to you. Finally, the cleaner you maintain your home, the easier it will be to return your home to its original condition and the higher the likelihood that you will receive some of your security deposit back when you move out.



Maintenance Items

Things break from time to time and need to be repaired. Sometimes you will be the cause and other times, things just wear out and need to be repaired or replaced. The most important thing to remember is to notify your landlord of maintenance items early to avoid additional damages and possible increased charges.

Maintenance Item	Description
	<p><i>Plumbing:</i> Too much toilet paper, or feminine hygiene products being used in the toilet often cause “soft clogs”. If a landlord determines that you were the cause for a clog, you may be responsible for the plumbing costs.</p> <p>The general rule of thumb is, if it’s not human waste, don’t flush it down the toilet.</p>
	<p><i>Garbage disposals:</i> Use a strong flow of cold water when using your disposal and let the water run until all the grinding has taken place and the remains has had a chance to run through the sink drain. Don’t overflow the disposal and don’t place fibrous materials (potato or carrot peels, onion skins, artichokes, etc...) in the disposal. Be careful to avoid bottle caps or other small objects to fall into your disposal. Keep in mind, your disposal IS NOT a primary method for food disposal and should be used with care. When you do have a problem, let your landlord know early before the problem becomes worse and the repair costs increase.</p>
	<p><i>Smoke Alarm:</i> Never disconnect a smoke or CO alarm. If you are having problems with these alarms, let your landlord know as they are intended to save lives;</p>

Maintenance Item	Description
	<p><i>Moisture Damage:</i> If you notice moisture damage forming, attempt to clean it with a common household disinfectant. If you determine that the damage is caused by a leak in the building's exterior walls or roof, notify the landlord immediately. Moisture damage is often just a sign that a more aggressive cleaning is needed but it can also mean there is a habitability issue that should be addressed to avoid health consequences.</p>
	<p><i>Loss of keys:</i> Landlords have different policies relating to lost keys. You may be charged a fee for lock out services so make sure you keep your keys in a safe and secure place;</p>
	<p><i>Yard upkeep:</i> If you have a yard, make sure you know if you or your landlord is responsible for the upkeep.</p>

Be a Good Neighbor



Are you a good neighbor? What else can you do to be a good neighbor?

Take pride in where you live. Neighborhood wellness is the willingness of people to see past themselves as individuals and consider how each person impacts one another collectively while living in proximity to one another. Good communication between residents and neighbors can improve the quality and character of your neighborhood and enhance your “Chico Experience”.

Waste Receptacles

- Place outside for collection the night before your scheduled pick up time and return to the storage area by the end of your collection day;
- If you live in an apartment, find out where to throw out trash and do not overload (or block) dumpsters; If your dumpster is overflowing, contact your landlord immediately;
- When recycling, be sure to break down boxes and only place recyclable items in the recycle bin;
- After a party, pick up trash around your property that may have been the result of that event. Consider cleaning up from the neighboring properties as well just in case your guests may have littered as they were walking to their cars;
- Weeds and lawns should be cut and trimmed and the waste disposed of property. If your landlord pays a third party to perform this service, notify the landlord if the service provider is not performing as they should.

Parking and Vehicles



Most campus area housing provides parking yet these spaces are typically limited. If you can walk or ride your bike to campus, you will typically find not having a car is a better option.

NEVER leave anything of value in your car, either day or night. It is just a matter of time before someone will vandalize your car and you will lose your belongings.

If you have a car with an out of state registration, know that if the car is in California for more than 9 months, you may be required to register your car in California. In certain circumstances, the Department of Motor Vehicles will issue an "interstate" registration during your temporary residency.

Excessive Noise Ordinance

The City of Chico adopted a Noise Ordinance that is intended to keep its neighborhoods peaceful and quiet and discourage the highly disruptive nature of excessive noise. The [Chico Municipal Code](#) allows for law enforcement to issue a citation if unreasonable noise limits are not modified when requested by law enforcement.

You can avoid a noise ordinance violation by being a responsible party host, avoiding party crashers, and keep your party indoors with your windows closed. It is always a good idea to let your neighbors know in advance and give them your cell phone number so they can alert you of an emergency.

Unruly Gatherings Ordinance

In an effort to bring unsafe gatherings under control, the City of Chico passed an [Unruly Gathering Ordinance](#) giving law enforcement the ability to cite those responsible for holding these events. Even if you are not the facilitator of such an event, if law enforcement determine that your home is the involved with the event, you could be held responsible and subject to criminal (misdemeanor), civil or administrative enforcement.

You can avoid violating this ordinance by insuring that only those you have invited attend your party, that everyone consuming alcohol is over 21 years old, make sure you have someone sober that is designated to keep the party under control and if things do appear to be getting out of control, contact local law enforcement BEFORE they contact you.

Bottom line, conduct yourself as if you were at your at your families home and everyone was at home and you should be fine!

Use of Combustible (indoor) Furniture Visible in Public Right of Ways



In response to outbreaks of arson and unintended patio fires, the City of Chico adopted changes to the Municipal Code prohibiting the use of any combustible furniture on outside patio's and lawn areas. Therefore couches, chairs, mattresses, futons and other furniture not designed or intended for outdoor use is prohibited.

Keep in mind:

- Furniture burning is illegal and may be prosecuted as **a felony** resulting in sentencing to State Prison;
- There are substantial fines attributed to arson caused fires;
- Those found guilty of arson (felony) must register as an arsonist;
- If you leave your couch on your porch and someone else lights it on fire, you could be held liable for a felony and held liable for the damages.
- A college student could find himself or herself suspended from College and no longer eligible for federal student grants.
- Smoke from burning couches and other articles are poisonous. When furniture burns, the fumes are toxic when inhaled, are released into the atmosphere and the residue contains harmful chemicals that pollute our creek ways;

Over 150 arson fires were handled during a 12-month period in Chico and 90% of those were in the campus neighborhoods. Indoor furniture will not be tolerated in outdoor settings so it is best that you have that hauled away before it results in a Code violation or worse yet, a fire.

Activity (Party) Reporting Form

If you plan on hosting a large social event at your home, it is recommended that you notify the Chico Police Department 72 hours in advance. By doing so, you can avoid an unwanted visit by police should the noise level at your event exceed community's limits. Rather than having the police arrive at your event unannounced, the host will receive a call indicating that a complaint has been filed and asking that you reduce your noise. You will be provided 20 minutes to comply with the request avoiding the possibility of being cited for a municipal code violation. Students using this advance notification tool find that they establish a more cooperative relationship with local law enforcement and create a safer event for their guests. The Activity Report can be found on the Chico Police Departments website under [Forms & Documents/Activity Report Form](#).

Renter's Insurance

A landlords' insurance policy does not cover your personal property, clothes, furniture, jewelry, computers, sound system, (you get the picture) against destruction or loss.



Here are some things you might not know about Renters Insurance:

- Renter's insurance provides protection against losses from fire or smoke, vandalism, theft, explosion or water damage from plumbing;
- Renter's insurance will help cover additional living expenses if you have to move into temporary quarters because your home has been damaged;
- Renter's insurance also provides personal liability coverage if one of your guests is injured while visiting you or your pet attacks them and they sue you (yes, this does happen).
- Students less than 25 years of age may have **limited protection** provided by their parents' homeowners or renter's policy but that typically won't provide all the coverage's listed above.
- Renter's insurance is relatively inexpensive and when the cost is shared amongst your roommates is probably less than the cost of a couple of latte's each month.

It is important to keep a list of all your personal property, room by room, noting the cost (value) and date of purchase. Take a picture of each of your valuables as this will help you when you file a claim.

Your Rental History is Important to You

You may not realize how important a good rental reference is until you go to apply for your next home and discover that local landlords share past rental history with one another. For this reason, it is important for Chico State students to communicate and cooperate well with their landlords and neighbors to ensure they receive a favorable rental reference. Many companies will contact past landlords and ask if you paid your rent on time and if they were good tenants. If your rental reference is not good, you will find it very difficult to overcome the bad reference and secure future housing both while you are in Chico, and after you graduate. Take your rental reference as seriously as you take your credit reference because they really are both equally as important.

Ways to have a positive / negative rental history:

POSITIVE:



- Pay your rent in full and on time;
- The only people living in your home should be those who's names are on your lease;
- Make sure you comply with any "House Rules" at your property;
- Respect the property and your neighbors;
- Keep your home and the property clean and in good order;
- Conduct a move out inspection with your landlord and make sure the property looks as good when you leave as it did when you moved in.

NEGATIVE:



- Don't pay your rent on time or in full;
- Have those who are not on your lease living with you;
- Disregard your "House Rules" leading to legal notices being issued;
- Loud parties and lack of sensitivity to your neighbors quiet will lead to both poor rental history and police action;
- Damages to your property will result in costly repairs;
- Not cleaning your home at move out will result in costly professional cleaning;

Your rental history follows you during your years in Chico and beyond. A poor rental history will likely make it difficult for you to find a good rental in future years. Don't assume you will be okay...take your rental history seriously!

After You Rent

When vacating a rental, leave it in the same (or better) condition than it was in when you first moved in. This will help you to get your security deposit back and also help you to build a good rental history. The following are ideas to consider when your move out.

Move out basics



- You are entitled to a "pre-move out" inspection or "walk through" and your landlord must offer you one. During this inspection, the landlord inspects the rental unit with you and identifies conditions that could justify deductions in your security deposit. With this inspection, you are prepared to address these issues in advance of your move out and ideally receive more of your deposit back;
- Be sure you notify the Post Office and your landlord of your forwarding address so that your security deposit can be sent to you after you move out.
- Return all of your keys to the landlord;
- Your deposit should be returned to you (after any deductions) within 21 days of vacating your rental. Any deductions that were charged to you should be itemized along with receipts for any expenses that the landlord incurred;
- Notify the utility companies that you have moved and stop service in your name;

Cleaning Essentials

Your rental unit should be returned in the same condition that you received it. Picking up and cleaning before guests arrive is typically not the same as cleaning your home before vacating and often takes several days to complete. If you fail to clean your rental thoroughly, expect to be charged for professional cleaning services. Landlords typically require carpets to be cleaned professionally so check your lease before you rent a carpet shampooer at your local grocery store.



A few more cleaning tips:

- Always clean from the top down. For example, when you clean ceiling fan blades, the dust and dirt fall to the ground. If you just mopped your floor, you will have to do it over again.
- Look for dried food along the walls and trims in your kitchen and clean those before you mop the floor;
- Move furniture away from the walls when cleaning. When the furniture is moved out, you don't want any surprises.
- Never deposit your furniture in the common area or dumpster. The local waste haulers typically offer services at the end of the year for disposal of large items like couches and mattresses.
- Most property owners discourage tenants from repairing holes in their walls. Ask your landlord what you can and cannot do relating to sheet rock repairs.

Disposing of Unwanted Furniture



Unwanted furniture can be a nuisance to deal with and can cost you disposal and labor fees if left behind. Consider contacting a local thrift store if the items are in good condition. Ask your landlord if they will be providing a service to dispose of unwanted items. Check with the University Off-Campus Housing Department about **City of Chico “Drop and Dash”** programs that are typically provided at the end of the spring semester and provide locations for you to “drop off” your unwanted furniture at no charge to you. Maybe there is a friend who is looking for a good couch for next year that would be happy to take the item off your hands. And whatever you do, don’t leave unwanted furniture in the streets or parking lots. If someone sets your furniture on fire and it is determined that you improperly disposed of the item, that is illegal and you could be charged with a crime up to a felony depending on the consequences of that action.

Pass a good word along

There are many landlords in Chico, some that offer excellent properties and service and others that might not seem so great. Be fair in your assessment of your landlord. Sometimes you might not like their decision but when you put yourself in their shoes, you might understand the reasons why they make their decisions. If you have a good experience, pass the word along to others so that others might know where the best places around Chico are to rent. Property owners who make the effort to provide quality housing deserve to be bragged about.

Keep this Resource for Future Reference

You are encouraged to make a copy of this Rental Housing Certificate Program for future reference. Keep in mind that specific laws do change from time to time and it will be your responsibility to remain current on any changes that take place. Changes will typically be spelled out in your lease so know what you are signing.

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