THE OXFORD HOUSING EXPERIENCE:

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO QUALITY OFF-CAMPUS LIVING FOR YOUR OLE MISS STUDENT

SURVIVING THE "HUNGER GAMES" OF OXFORD: YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Oxford, Mississippi, home to the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss), has quickly become one of the most competitive housing markets for college students, as record-breaking enrollment drives already high demand. With limited on-campus housing primarily reserved for freshmen, upperclassmen need to secure off-campus options for their second year – generally within a few months of moving to Oxford.

This guide, written by an Ole Miss mom, who also owns and manages a number of properties in Oxford, provides firsthand insights into Oxford's rental market, neighborhoods, essential budgeting tips, and practical advice to help parents navigate the complexities of finding safe, comfortable, and convenient housing for their Ole Miss student, within their budget and without surprises and with much less stress.

UNDERSTANDING THE OXFORD HOUSING MARKET

With the university's enrollment growing rapidly, on-campus housing is now primarily available to only freshmen, but even freshmen may be offered waivers to live off-campus if on-campus space runs out. The university has master-leased apartment complexes near campus to provide additional housing for first-year students, which then limits other off-campus housing options for upperclassmen.

Navigating the off-campus housing market can be particularly challenging, especially from afar, amid the abundance of information and misinformation circulating on the University's social media parent pages.

Here are a number of things you need to know about Oxford...

- Oxford's rental market is highly competitive, with many properties starting lease renewals **as early as October for the following school year.**

- Due to Oxford's 99.9% occupancy rate, increasing University of Mississippi enrollment, a rise in short-term rentals like Airbnbs further reducing off-campus rental availability, and the city's growing appeal beyond the university, **securing housing early is essential.**

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- Oxford has been one of the leading markets in the country for rent increases, with average rents reportedly rising by 38% over a recent two-year period. This trend has been driven in part by high-end townhouse developments that have entered the market, raising the overall average. While luxury developments contribute to this rise, even mid-range properties typically experience annual rent increases, often ranging from 10-15% and sometimes even more.

- Almost all leases in Oxford are 12 months in duration and require tenants to move out 10-14 days before the lease term ends if they're not renewing, allowing for unit preparation for incoming residents. For students who need to arrive early for activities such as sorority recruitment or athletics, it's essential to verify the move-in date, as some properties don't schedule move-ins until mid-August.

- Also contributing to the increasing costs of housing in Oxford is the city's distinctive topography and rich historical heritage which present unique challenges for construction, particularly near Ole Miss. The city is characterized by rolling hills, with downtown Oxford situated on one ridge and the university on another, while main commercial corridors lie in the intervening valleys. This varied elevation necessitates careful planning to address geotechnical issues such as soil stability, erosion, and drainage.

Additionally, Oxford's commitment to preserving its historical character imposes further considerations, especially in areas like the Courthouse Square Historic District, which features buildings dating from 1840 to 1950. Construction in these areas is subject to stringent guidelines to maintain architectural integrity and protect the city's cultural heritage. Developers must navigate these regulations to ensure new structures comply with the existing historical context.

KEY AREAS FOR STUDENT HOUSING IN OXFORD

Oxford offers a variety of neighborhoods and housing options that cater to different student needs and preferences. Here's a general overview of the area:

- **Master-Leased Communities**: University of Mississippi has established master lease agreements with several apartment complexes in Oxford to meet the demand for student housing. These master-leased communities, which include **Revel Oxford**, **Lark Oxford**, **Gather Oxford**, **The Quarters at Oxford**, and **Taylor Bend**, are considered "on-campus housing" for freshmen, providing an option for students who need university-managed housing close to campus. Some of these properties may still have units leased to upperclassmen but verify this early to avoid being left without a lease.

- **Downtown Oxford (Close to The Square)**: Known for its vibrant social scene and proximity to Oxford's best restaurants, shops, and entertainment options, downtown is popular with students who want to be close to the action.

The Square is about a mile from campus, and while walkable, most students take the **Oxford University Transit (OUT)** or drive to campus. Rentals close to the square are often privately owned.

- **University Avenue and Jackson Avenue**: These main corridors provide easy access to campus, grocery stores, dining options, and **OUT** routes, Oxford's public transportation system (OUT Schedules and Maps). Housing options such as **College Town** and **U Club** are popular for students who prefer amenities like gyms, pools, and study lounges.

- **South Oxford (Oxford Farms)**: The Oxford Farms area in South Oxford is known for its newer, high-end complexes, such as **The Mill, Stillwater**, and **The Reserve**. These properties offer an elevated living experience with new finishes, large living spaces, generously sized bedrooms, en-suite bathrooms, laundry rooms, and outdoor living areas. For those seeking less expensive apartment-style accommodations, **ARCHIVE Oxford** and **The Azul Apartment Homes** provide additional options in South Oxford.

These communities feature modern amenities including gyms, study areas, and pools, catering to students looking for comfort, convenience, and ample social spaces.

- **Old Taylor Road**: Old Taylor Road combines easy access to Ole Miss with a quieter residential feel. Options like **Old Taylor Place** and **Faulkner Flats** provide a more relaxed setting close to campus, making it a good choice for students who want a balance of convenience and calm.

- **North Oxford**: North Oxford includes neighborhoods such as **Rowandale**, **The Pearl** and **Oxford Commons**, offering upscale housing with easy access to shopping and highways. North Lamar also features areas that provide a more suburban setting, ideal for students who prefer a bit of distance from the campus bustle.

Each neighborhood provides unique features, so finding the right area depends on your student's lifestyle, transportation needs, and budget.

DECIDING ON ROOMMATES, BUDGET, AND HOUSING TYPE

When selecting off-campus housing, early planning is crucial. Here are some key factors for parents and students to consider:

- **Roommates**: Many leases require students to secure roommates early, especially in multi-bedroom units. Larger complexes often require each student to apply separately, which can complicate the process if you're trying to secure a specific unit for multiple roommates. Some parents may consider leasing the entire unit in advance and then adding roommates later, offering to cover deposits and transfer lease responsibility as other students are identified.

- **Car and Transportation**: Consider if your student will have a car, and if not, prioritize properties near the OUT (Oxford University Transit) or within walking or biking distance of campus. Even for students with cars, parking permits at Ole Miss are allocated based on class standing, with seniors receiving first priority.

Some remote parking options require students to park and then take a shuttle to campus, making proximity to the OUT or a short walk to campus a valuable convenience.

- **Budgeting**: Housing prices in Oxford are typically calculated per bedroom, so it's essential to understand what's included in the monthly rent. Parents should check for included utilities, such as electric, gas, water, internet, and trash pickup, and determine if additional fees, like HOA charges, pet fees, or administrative costs, apply. This knowledge can help avoid unexpected expenses.

In Oxford, rental prices have been on the rise. You can expect to budget at least $1,000 per month per person for apartments, plus utilities. For newer, higher-end townhomes, rents can exceed $1,500 per month, with most utilities included except for electricity. Despite these increases, Oxford's rental costs remain more affordable compared to those in many other university towns.

- **Housing Type**: Oxford's rental market offers various types of housing, including apartments, townhouses, and standalone homes, each with its own advantages. Apartments often provide communal amenities like gyms, pools, and study lounges, while townhouses in areas like South Oxford offer more privacy, larger living spaces, and dedicated outdoor areas. Standalone homes and townhouses provide additional independence and are typically managed by private landlords, which can mean more personalized lease terms and flexible arrangements.

LEASE TERMS: RENTING BY THE ROOM VS. JOINT AND SEVERAL

Understanding lease terms is crucial when selecting off-campus housing:

- **Renting by the Room**: Some large complexes lease individual rooms within multi-bedroom units. In this arrangement, the complex has the right to fill any vacancy by assigning another student to the open bedroom, making it a good option for students without predetermined roommates. However, it's essential to be comfortable with the possibility of sharing space with new roommates if a vacancy arises.

- **Joint and Several Leases**: In Oxford, many rental properties operate under a "joint and several" lease agreement, where all roommates sign a single lease and are collectively responsible for the entire rent. This means that if one roommate fails to pay their share or moves out, the remaining tenants are liable for covering the full rent amount.

Landlords often require a notarized parental guarantee for their student's portion of the rent. This arrangement is well-suited for students with established roommate relationships, as it necessitates a higher level of commitment and accountability among all tenants.

Understanding the specifics of lease terms helps parents and students make informed decisions, as each arrangement comes with different levels of flexibility and responsibility.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR LEASING IN OXFORD

Here are other important points for parents and students to consider when evaluating Oxford's student housing options:

- **Subleasing Policies**: Some properties permit subleasing, which can be beneficial if your student plans to leave Oxford for summer internships, study abroad, or other extended breaks. However, some properties may prohibit subleasing altogether, so it's important to review the lease terms carefully.

- **Parking Arrangements**: While some complexes offer on-site parking, others may charge additional fees for reserved spots or have limited availability. Some townhouses or standalone homes might only offer street parking, which can be a concern during high-traffic events like game days.

- **Furnished vs. Unfurnished Units**: In Oxford, some rental units come furnished with essentials like beds, desks, and dining tables, offering convenience for students moving from out of town. However, this convenience often comes at a higher rental price, and the quality of furniture can vary widely. Most new townhomes and standalone homes are typically unfurnished.

- **Noise Levels and Student-Friendly Policies**: Some complexes cater to a quieter environment, while others may accommodate a more social, active student lifestyle. Asking about quiet hours or student policies can help align housing choices with your student's preferences.

- **Pet Policies**: If your student has a pet or is considering one, be sure to check for non-refundable pet deposits and monthly fees, as many properties have specific policies regarding pets.

- **In-Unit Amenities and Appliance**s: Essential appliances like washers, dryers, and dishwashers can vary by property. Some units only have communal laundry, while others offer fully equipped kitchens, which may be a priority for some students.

- **Parental Guarantor Requirements**: Many leases require a parental guarantor, who will co-sign or provide a notarized guarantee. Some complexes have financial requirements for guarantors, so be aware of these when considering properties.

- **Game Day and Event Regulations**: Properties near campus or event areas may have specific rules for game weekends or busy times. Ask if there are any restrictions on parking or guest policies during these high-traffic periods.

- **Utilities and Billing Setup**: When renting in Oxford, it's important to understand the utility arrangements, as they can significantly impact your monthly expenses. Some properties require tenants to set up and manage their own utility accounts, while others include utilities in the rent or bill tenants directly. In shared accommodations like townhomes or condos, typically one resident sets up the utility accounts and coordinates cost-sharing with roommates. Being aware of these arrangements beforehand can help you budget effectively and avoid unexpected costs.

- **Security Deposits and Damages**: Make sure you understand the security deposit amount and what it covers. Some complexes have stringent policies on damages, and it’s helpful to know the process to ensure that any pre-existing damage is documented. Many properties have a portion of the security deposit that is non-refundable.

- **Move-In and Inspection** Process: Most complexes conduct a move-in inspection to document the unit’s condition and avoid disputes over pre-existing damages at move-out. Be sure your student completes this inspection, and take photos for extra documentation.

- **Internet Speed and Connectivity**: Reliable internet is essential for students, and some complexes may have slower, shared services. Check if internet is included or if you need to set it up separately, especially in high-demand areas.

- **Study Rooms and Quiet Spaces**: Access to quiet study spaces or private lounges is invaluable for students who prefer studying at home. Larger apartment complexes in Oxford often provide these amenities, which is particularly beneficial for those seeking a tranquil study environment outside their individual living spaces.

- **Fire Safety and Emergency Procedures**: Ensure the property has proper fire safety features like smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, and clear emergency procedures in place.

- **Lease Transfer Policies**: If there's a chance your student might transfer schools, graduate early, or leave Oxford for other reasons, check if the complex allows lease transfers. Some properties have strict policies, while others may offer lease buyout options.

INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS FOR OXFORD RENTALS

Securing the right insurance is critical when renting in Oxford. Most landlords will require renters to have general liability coverage up to the value of the unit which will be stated in the lease, and you may want to add contents coverage to protect belongings.

- **Using Local Insurance Brokers**: If your current insurance broker is out of state, they may not be able to provide coverage in Mississippi. In this case, you'll need to work with a local insurance broker who can write policies in Oxford. Local agents often provide better and more affordable coverage options than policies offered directly through complexes or those marketed specifically to students.

- **Better Coverage at Lower Cost**: Local brokers typically offer comprehensive liability and contents coverage at a lower price than rental policies provided by apartment complexes.

By securing appropriate coverage through a local agent, you can ensure your student's belongings and liability are protected while meeting landlord requirements cost-effectively.

ROOMMATE COMPATIBILITY

Choosing the right roommate can significantly impact your college experience, influencing both your academic success and personal well-being. To help you find a compatible living partner, here are some assessments, tests, and discussion topics to discuss before committing to live together (or use as a discussion guide to address compatibility issues if you already do live together!):

Roommate Compatibility Tests:

- **The Roommate Compatibility Quiz by College Magazine**: This quiz helps assess potential compatibility by exploring habits and preferences. Link to Quiz Here
- **Roommate Test by Psychology Today**: A 10-minute assessment designed to evaluate your suitability as a roommate and compatibility with others. Link To Assessment Here
- **Roommate Compatibility Quiz by ProProfs**: This quiz offers insights into how well you might get along with a potential roommate. Link to Another Quiz Here

Discussion Checklists:

- **100 Questions to Ask a Roommate Before Moving in Together**: This comprehensive list covers topics from financial concerns to lifestyle choices, aiding in setting clear expectations. Link to Questions to Ask Potential Roommates

- **Roommate Checklist by Northwestern University's Off-Campus Life**: A resource that emphasizes the importance of discussing various topics before signing a lease and moving in together. Link to Roommate Checklist

- **31 Essential Questions To Ask A Potential Roommate**: This list provides crucial questions to ensure you're making an informed decision about living arrangements. Link to More Questions to Ask Potential Roommate

Utilizing these tools can help identify potential areas of conflict and ensure a more compatible and enjoyable living situation.

Creating a roommate agreement is a proactive step to ensure a harmonious living environment by clearly outlining each person's responsibilities and expectations. This document can help prevent misunderstandings and conflicts among roommates.

Here are some resources to guide you in drafting a comprehensive roommate agreement:

- **eForms' Free Roommate Agreement Template**: Offers a customizable template covering essential aspects such as rent, utilities, cleaning duties, and guest policies. Link to eForms

- **iPropertyManagement's Roommate Agreement Template**: Includes a free template and detailed explanations of each section to ensure all important topics are addressed. Link to iPropertyManagement

- **LegalTemplates' Roommate Agreement Template**: Offers a free, customizable template with guidance on legal considerations and essential clauses to include. Link to Legal Templates

Creating a comprehensive roommate agreement is essential for fostering a harmonious living environment. Beyond the standard clauses, it's important to address specific areas that often lead to misunderstandings.

Consider having the following discussions and documenting them in the agreement:

- **Rent and Utilities**: Specify each roommate's financial obligations, including rent amounts, due dates, and how utilities will be divided.
- **Household Chores**: Outline a cleaning schedule or assign specific duties to maintain a tidy living space.
- **Guest Policies**: Establish rules regarding visitors, including frequency and overnight stays.
- **Quiet Hours**: Set agreed-upon times for reduced noise to accommodate study and sleep schedules.
- **Conflict Resolution**: Include a process for addressing disputes to ensure issues are handled constructively.

- **Sharing Food and Pantry/Fridge Items**
  - **Personal vs. Shared Items**: Clearly define which food items are communal and which are personal. For instance, staples like milk or bread might be shared, while specialty items remain individual.
  - **Purchasing Responsibilities**: Establish a system for restocking shared items, such as alternating weeks or splitting costs equally.
  - **Labeling**: Agree on labeling personal items to prevent unintentional usage.
- **Borrowing Personal Items (e.g., Clothes)**
  - **Permission Protocol**: Set a clear rule that personal items, especially clothing, require explicit permission before use.
  - **Return Condition**: Items should be returned in the same condition, cleaned if necessary, and promptly.
  - **Replacement Agreement**: If an item is damaged or lost, the borrower agrees to repair or replace it.

- **Addressing Issues and Conflict Resolution**
  - **Open Communication:** Encourage roommates to voice concerns promptly and respectfully.
  - **Regular Meetings:** Schedule periodic check-ins to discuss any issues and adjust agreements as needed.
  - **Mediation Plan:** If conflicts escalate, agree on involving a neutral third party, such as a resident advisor or mutual friend, to mediate.

By incorporating these sections into your roommate agreement and clearly defining expectations, you can proactively address common areas of contention, fostering a more respectful and cooperative living environment.

OTHER HOUSING STRATEGIES: LEASING EXTRA BEDROOMS AND PROPERTY INVESTMENT

In Oxford's competitive rental market, parents seeking housing solutions for their college students—while also securing a place to stay during visits—might consider the following strategies:

- **Leasing a Multi-Bedroom Unit**: Renting a property with an extra bedroom allows parents to have a dedicated space for their visits. This arrangement provides convenience during events like move-in days, family weekends, game day weekends or university functions, eliminating the need for hotel accommodations.

- **Purchasing a Property**: Investing in a condo or house for offers several benefits:

  - **Financial Investment**: Purchasing a property for your student to reside in during their college years offers several financial advantages over renting.

Mortgage payments contribute to building equity, and upon your student's graduation, you have the option to sell the property, potentially recouping your investment.

Alternatively, retaining ownership allows you to continue generating rental income and benefit from property appreciation over time. This strategy not only provides stable housing during college years but also serves as a long-term investment opportunity, with excellent tax benefits.

- **Rental Income**: If the property has multiple bedrooms, renting out the extra rooms to other students can generate income to offset mortgage costs.
- **Consistent Housing**: Owning a property ensures stable housing for your student throughout their college years, avoiding the uncertainties of annual lease renewals and the hassle of moving.
- **Personal Use**: The property provides a convenient place to stay during visits, eliminating the need for hotel reservations and associated costs, especially beneficial during busy times like game day weekends.

Oxford boasts a wealth of experienced real estate agents well-versed in the local market dynamics. Consulting with one of these professionals can provide valuable insights into property values, rental demand, and potential appreciation. Additionally, discussing financing options with a mortgage advisor or local banker will help determine the feasibility of such an investment. By leveraging local expertise, you can make informed decisions tailored to Oxford's unique real estate landscape.

By exploring these options, parents can find housing solutions that not only meet their students' needs but also offer potential financial benefits and personal convenience.

ACTION ITEMS

Securing suitable off-campus housing at the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) requires proactive planning and exploration of various resources. Here are actionable steps and suggestions for parents and students to find the ideal rental:

- **Start Early**: Begin your housing search well in advance, as desirable properties tend to be leased quickly.

- **Utilize University Resources**:

  - **Ole Miss Off-Campus Housing Website**: The university offers a dedicated platform listing available rentals, including apartments and houses. Link to Ole Miss Off-Campus Housing Site

  - **Student Housing Office**: Contact the office for guidance on housing options and recommendations.

- **Leverage Social Media and Online Platforms**:

  - Housing Websites: Explore platforms like Uloop, which cater to student housing needs near Ole Miss. Link to Olemiss Uloop

- **Facebook Groups**: Join groups such as "Oxford MS: Off Campus Student Housing/Rentals/Rooms For Rent" or other Ole Miss Parent groups. Link to Ole Miss Rental Facebook Group

- **Network with Current Students**:
  - **Word of Mouth**: Inquire with current students about available rentals or upcoming vacancies.
  - **Lease Transfers**: Express interest in taking over leases from graduating students or those planning to move, ensuring a seamless transition.
- **Engage Local Real Estate Professionals**:
  - **Realtors**: Seek recommendations for local real estate agents experienced in student rentals and reputable owners and property managers.
  - **Property Managers**: Contact property management companies that specialize in student housing for available listings.

- **Attend Housing Fairs and Events**:
  - **University-Sponsored Events**: Participate in housing fairs organized by Ole Miss to meet landlords and explore options.
  - **Community Events**: Engage in local events where property owners may advertise available rentals.
- **Visit Potential Properties**:
  - **Schedule Tours**: Arrange visits to prospective rentals to assess their condition and suitability.
  - **Meet Landlords**: Use this opportunity to discuss lease terms, amenities, and any concerns directly with property owners.
- **Review Lease Agreements Thoroughly**:
  - **Understand Terms**: Carefully read and comprehend all lease provisions, including rent, duration, and policies.
  - **Seek Clarification**: If uncertain about any terms, consult with a legal advisor or the university's housing office.

- **Consider Roommate Compatibility**:
  - **Shared Housing**: If planning to share accommodations, ensure potential roommates have compatible lifestyles and expectations. Just because someone is fun to go out with or talk to in class doesn't mean they'll be a suitable roommate. It's important to discuss daily habits, study routines, cleanliness standards, and sleep schedules to ensure a harmonious living environment. (See links above for discussion topics and compatibility quizzes).
  - **Roommate Agreements**: Draft agreements outlining responsibilities and shared expenses to prevent conflicts. (See links above)
- **Plan for Financial Commitments**:
  - **Budgeting**: Establish a clear budget that includes rent, utilities, and other living expenses.
  - **Security Deposits**: Be prepared to provide deposits as required and understand the conditions for their return.

By following these steps and utilizing the available resources, parents and students can effectively navigate the housing search process and secure accommodations that meet their needs and preferences.

NAVIGATING OXFORD HOUSING WITH CONFIDENCE

Securing quality off-campus housing in Oxford can be challenging, but with careful planning and consideration of all options, parents can help their students find the right fit. By starting early, assessing housing needs, and exploring creative solutions, parents and students can make the Oxford housing experience less stressful and more rewarding. With a little patience and preparation, you can navigate the Oxford housing landscape confidently and find a comfortable, supportive home for your Ole Miss student.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Michelle Goheen is a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) with an extensive career with the world's leading consulting firms, including Ernst & Young and PwC, where she specializes in mergers, acquisitions, and IPOs.

As an Ole Miss parent with a daughter in the Class of 2027, she personally navigated the challenges of securing quality housing in Oxford's competitive market. This experience inspired her to share her insights and expertise to assist other families in understanding the local housing dynamics.

Through Collegiate Capital LLC, Michelle raises equity from investors seeking to benefit from the Oxford market without the challenges of property management. Collegiate Capital is currently conducting an equity raise for their latest project in Oxford, offering opportunities to accredited investors with investment amounts ranging from $50,000 to $2 million. For more information, please see the Collegiate Capital website or reach out to Michelle directly.

She also leads Collegiate Management Oxford, a property management company dedicated to providing parents and students with a higher-end leasing experience. Collegiate Management oversees properties within the Collegiate Capital portfolio, ensuring accommodations are well-managed and maintained. The team focuses on clear communication, easing parents' minds about their students' off-campus living experience.

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