



Cornell University  
Graduate School

## The Inside Scoop: Graduate and Professional Students Discuss Housing Options, Student Life, and Living in Ithaca

5/15/20

**JULIE PAIGE:** Congratulations, and welcome to our Cornell community, and our fifth annual off-campus living webinar, designed for incoming graduate students. We are live today on Friday, May 15, 2020, 10:00 to 11:00 AM, Eastern Daylight Time. My name is Julie Paige, Director, Off-Campus, Cooperative, and Graduate Living. I am also joined by my colleagues Jason Kahabka, an Associate Dean from the Graduate School; Denise Thompson, Manager, Off-Campus Living at Cornell; and five graduate students representing different fields and living in popular areas of Ithaca where graduate students reside. I also want to thank my partner from the Graduate School, Senior Assistant Dean, Janna Lamey, for her partnership and for cosponsoring this webinar with us.

Abdullah, of our graduate students who you will hear from shortly, lives in on-campus housing in our Hasbrouck apartment complex, which contains accommodations for both single graduate students, and those with partners and children. Currently, we have a waiting list, but if you would like you can still apply. It will be important to keep all your options open at this time. If you are unable to move into Hasbrouck for this coming year, hopefully there will be opportunities for you later in your Cornell career.

I realize you have a lot of on your minds right now regarding plans for Cornell's reopening for the fall semester. Jason, from the Graduate School, will address some of your questions in his opening remarks. At the end of June, it is likely we will hear from President Pollack regarding the status of Cornell's reopening for fall semester. Please note the main purpose of this webinar is to focus on housing.

I am now going to turn it over to Jason, who will give you an update from the Graduate School.

**JASON KAHABKA:** Good morning, everyone. My name is Jason Kahabka and I'm an Associate Dean at Cornell's Graduate School. Today's session is intended to help you make some decisions about housing in the Ithaca area, and to hear directly from Cornell students who can give you some helpful advice. But I know this is a really unusual year. Most of us are struggling to understand how all these disruptions from the coronavirus pandemic might change our plans for the summer and fall. I'd like to share some basic information, but also acknowledge that we simply don't have answers to many questions right now.

Perhaps the most common questions I hear from our incoming students are whether the campus will be open in August, and whether classes will be offered online. The short answer is

we don't know yet. Dr. Martha Pollack, Cornell's president, has formed several committees that include faculty, staff, and students to develop recommendations. But we're also waiting for guidance from New York State and from the US government on whether colleges and universities can begin to reopen, and when travel restrictions may ease.

So here is what we can expect. By late May, later this month, we expect to have more clarity about when the physical campus will begin to reopen, and some research activities will resume. Because the health situation at Ithaca is good and improving, we're optimistic that we will begin to slowly reopen by early summer. By late June, the university plans to make decisions about whether some or all courses will be offered online or on campus. So we encourage you to continue developing your plans to travel to campus this August.

We also know that many international students are worried about whether they will receive their visas in time. It's a good sign that the US consulates are now scheduling visa appointments for summer, so we remain optimistic. However, I encourage students to consider waiting until you have a visa before you sign a lease or before making any non-refundable travel plans. Unfortunately, there is a chance that visa processing might be delayed for some students and they may choose to request a one semester or even a one year deferral to start their degrees in 2021.

So to summarize, there is still a number of uncertainties, but we'll share information with you as soon as we're able. You should hear more about the campus opening schedule in late May, and you should hear more about the format of fall classes in late June. But please know that we are currently planning for on-campus instruction. And we may also offer options for online classes as well. You'll receive messages about these topics from your graduate program and the university in the coming weeks, as more information becomes available. Until then, I hope you find it helpful to talk with current students to learn about their experiences living, commuting, shopping, and having fun in the Ithaca area.

I'd like to introduce Denise Thompson, Manager of the Off-Campus Living Office, she'll talk about her office and offer some guidance and information about leases.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you, Jason. Good morning. So I am the off-campus living manager here at Cornell, and it is a true honor to spend a little bit of time with you today. I love the Ithaca area, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to work in the area and where I grew up. Cornell is an amazing institution with awesome staff and students that I get to interact with on a daily basis. There is a lot of uncertainty in the world right now, but with a little bit of planning and patience everything will work out. The information given today is designed to help you prepare for your search, look at apartments, and make smart decisions when you find a place to rent.

Off-campus Living services all Cornell's students, staff, and faculty, but our main focus is on our students living off-campus. We have just shy of 17,000 undergraduate, graduate, and

professional students living in and around Ithaca, and I truly believe most are having a great housing experience.

Preparation is an important part of your housing search process. A little preparation can make what feels like a daunting task much easier, and help you find the right apartment for your needs. Use the resources on our website, which can be found at [offcampusliving.cornell.edu](http://offcampusliving.cornell.edu), to answer some of these questions and many more.

So you may be asking, what are your wants? Is there a washer dryer? Do you want a view? Do you want to be able to have pets? What are your needs? Think about transportation, non-smoking, air conditioning. What is your rental budget? You need to determine your affordability. Which neighborhood do you like? Those questions and many more can be answered, or you may be given tools to answer those questions, on our website.

My office has two new sites to help students looking for housing. The first is our listing site, and that can be found at [listings.offcampusliving.cornell.edu](http://listings.offcampusliving.cornell.edu), where landlords can list their available properties and students can list available sublets. Our site has some really great features, while also incorporating safety information. Our office also partnered with the Ithaca building division of the City of Ithaca to create an online safety site. It's [safety.offcampusliving.cornell.edu](http://safety.offcampusliving.cornell.edu). And this displays the relative safety information for the Ithaca properties.

My number one recommendation when searching is to take your time. Explore all your options. Everything you have done to prepare for the search will assist you. Use the off-campus living resources. Use your colleagues, use your friends. They can assist you in finding a great apartment.

It's important to remember a lease is a legal binding document. It's between you and the landlord. It is important to know your rights. In June 2019, New York State expanded our tenant right laws. My office can review the New York State Attorney General's Tenants Rights Guide and the subsequent laws with you before you sign your lease. When you're looking at property, I want you to know that 77% of all the residential property in Ithaca is rental property. There is plenty of housing in Ithaca and the surrounding neighborhoods. I mention this because I understand that this is a time of great uncertainty, but a little bit of patience will really help. As I said early in this presentation, a lease is a legally binding contract, and you will be required to pay rent even if you don't make it to Ithaca. Thus, my recommendation is to wait. Sign your lease when conditions become more clear. You will find housing, I promise.

Finally, Off-campus Living is here to help you. We're not just here for you finding housing, but we're here for you during and after. Please look for my bi-weekly newsletter and semesterly events once you get to Ithaca. Thank you.

JULIE PAIGE: Thank you, Denise. And now we're going to turn it over to our student panelist. And we're going to start with Abdullah.

ABDULLAH: Hello. My name is Abdullah, and I'm a PhD student in the Material Science and Engineering. I found my first apartment through Craigslist, which is a townhouse in a complex in Freeville. Freeville is a rural area a few miles out of Ithaca. The townhouse that I used to live in was very spacious, very convenient, so it was so good for a single family. Freeville is quiet, really isolated. It was on a bus line to go to campus. However, it's more difficult not having car commute to the campus.

The buses for shopping and traveling to Cornell was kind of limited. I have a wife and a daughter, and my family is happy. However, because it was too quiet for us, I applied to move in and to live in Hasbrouck and moving to on-campus housing for my second year at Cornell. Which is, if you want to know more about Hasbrouck, it is a family-oriented oriented complex housing and it is located in North Campus. And it's very convenient, and we are so happy that my daughter, she is having a lot of fun. She's having a lot of friends over here with our neighbor kids. Yeah. That's what I have.

JULIE PAIGE: Thank you, Abdullah. And also, if you do have school aged children, there is a bus, a school bus that picks up children right at Hasbrouck to go to the elementary school. So thank you. So we're going to turn it over to Ben, our next student panelist.

BENJAMIN ROSE: Hi guys, I'm Benjamin Rose. And I'm 32, I'm a third year PhD student in the sociology department. In Ithaca I've lived in two housing co-operatives, or co-ops. One is Von Cramm, which is a mostly undergrad housing. The other one is Gamma Alpha, which is mostly graduate student housing. And then also in shared flats in Fall Creek and Downtown.

So for single rooms and shared flats or studios, I recommend using Facebook to find housing, because the descriptions are often more detailed than on Craigslist. Then for apartments, if you're a couple or if you want to move in with friends, I recommend Craigslist, HotPads, Trulia, or Facebook, or the Cornell resources. And now I'm going to talk real quick about the three neighborhoods that I've been living in. Collegetown, Fall Creek, and Downtown.

Collegetown is closest to campus. The main demographic, I would say, is undergraduates and younger graduate students right out of college. There are quite a few frat houses. There are not many possibilities to go grocery shopping, and I would say the vibe is very similar to being on campus.

Then Fall Creek, in my point of view is one of the nicest areas to live. It's a really cute, mostly residential housing. A few professors live there as well. It's close to Downtown, and the buses in the morning run frequently. And so if you take a bus in the morning, it's about the same time as walking to campus from Collegetown. So Fall Creek is actually quite close to campus if you take the bus.

Downtown is a bit busier than Fall Creek but still very livable. You don't want to live directly on the Commons because of partying undergrads, but if you live a little bit off from the Commons, let's say on Geneva Street, for instance, that's a really good location. For single rooms and

shared flats, I would say you should expect roughly \$700. And for a two bedroom apartment, you can get them around \$1400. There are often cheap options available as well, but they are further away. And I personally recommend living downhill, so Downtown or Fall Creek, and not in Collegetown, just because you can walk and bike everywhere. You have access to a lot of parks, and it's quieter. Thank you.

JULIE PAIGE: Thank you, Ben. And I'm going to turn it over to Celine.

CELINE CAMMARATA: Good morning, everyone. So my name is Celine Cammarata. I am a fourth year PhD student in Human Development. When I first moved up to Ithaca, I found my first apartment through Craigslist and through Ithaca Rents, which is another website that I think a lot of people don't know about. It's just ithacarents.com, I think. Maybe dot org. And that apartment is actually right where-- one of the places Ben was just mentioning, which is on Geneva Street on the south side of the Commons. The location was great, but we were-- my husband and I were living a roommates, so we wanted to try to get our own place following that. I should say, also, when I found my first apartment here, I had the luxury of being able to take a weekend trip up to see all the apartments I was considering, because I was coming from New York City. So if you were able to do that, which is obviously more limited right now, but it is very nice to actually figure out what the neighborhood is like and whether it meets your needs, and how close it is to campus and those things.

So we wanted to get our own place after that, so we moved into a studio on South Hill. I think that is a neighborhood fewer Cornell students typically go to. It's really an Ithaca College neighborhood. But I would say it is my favorite place I've lived in Ithaca. It's really close to Downtown while still being quite accessible to campus if you are willing to take the bus. But then what we decided after this first two years is that we actually wanted to buy property, so we then purchased our own house which is where I'm living now. We've been here for four years now. And that was a great experience and something I would recommend students at least considering, if not right away then certainly later on. Ithaca has a really great real estate market, so if it's something you've ever thought about it's definitely worth considering.

So where I live now is on Route 79 just outside of town. Our priorities were to find a location that was very close to campus and very close to Downtown. So driving, we're about three to five minutes from either campus or Downtown. I typically bike to campus or take the bus, because it's about three miles to the very center of campus, less than that if you're going somewhere on the periphery. I've actually pretty much always commuted by bus primarily since I've been in Ithaca. I only use my car for shopping and going on outings and stuff, which is really nice to not have to be so reliant on it day to day.

And some of the advantages I found from both living a little bit farther outside town and especially from owning a home. First of all, space. We have a five bedroom house, of which-- we have a three bedroom house with an apartment attached to it, which we actually rent out and that supplements our mortgage. That's part of why we choose this house. But even on our side, it's three bedrooms for substantially less than we were paying for a studio apartment once

you factor in the rental income. So just to put into context, this two unit, five bedroom house, our mortgage is about \$1,500. And as Ben was just saying, you'll pay about that for a two bedroom apartment. So it's something to think about. We also have about a half acre of land and a large yard, which is great for us because we have dogs. And renting, finding rental spaces with pets was very challenging. So definitely something I would consider.

So yeah, where I live now is fairly rural, but I would say suburban. But like I said, very accessible to campus and Downtown. And the neighborhood is really a mix of Ithaca locals and quite a number of graduate students as well.

JULIE PAIGE: Thank you, Celine, very much. And thank you for talking about house ownership, so that's great. So I'm going to turn it over down to Shalil, who will talk about his experience.

SHALIL: Hi, everyone. I'm Shalil, and I study electrical and computer engineering. So my first year, so I came in as an international student, and in my first year I took some time to decide the place. So I came to Ithaca in August before I picked a place to live for the first year. And my first apartment, I found it through Cornell's off-campus campus housing website. I found it particularly useful compared to most other websites, because coming as an international student, it wasn't really clear to me how to properly filter listings in Craigslist. And the place I found was in Downtown on Court Street, and I found it to be a very, very nice place to be, especially in the first year. And Cornell offers free bus services for first years, so going uphill-- you could walk uphill, I could also take the bus.

And the Downtown, I think as Ben mentioned, is extremely bikeable. And Ithaca has a bunch of events that happen every month or so, and was very-- it was very easy to join these things. And in general, lots of my friends still live in Downtown. And I think it's a great place to be.

In my second year I moved to Cayuga Heights, mainly to commute by bike. And it was the same elevation as the campus, so I didn't have to, like, bike uphill. Also, it gave me a chance to reduce my rent. And it's a very quiet neighborhood, mainly families. Some professors and some grad students. There's a bunch of schools around there, so it's very safe. And I think it's a great place in general to be, but I didn't particularly like this apartment.

So in my third year I moved to Lansing, which is a little far away from campus. And it was useful for me to get a car at that point, otherwise it would have been a little difficult to go to campus, because it's, like, only two buses per day. But it certainly offered a lot more spacious apartments and a lot more light. The neighborhood is very quiet, and a lot of space outside. I found it really nice to, even though during the lockdown, it was very nice to have all the nature outside and easy to walk around without running into a lot of people.

So I think I also wanted to mention one other neighborhood. As an engineering student, Belle Sherman is very close to the engineering college, and also very walkable from that campus. And mostly graduate students and professors also live there, too. One message that I want to highlight is, I've found it very useful to have good landlords and landladies when I look for a

place, because having a responsible and responsive landlord and landlady helped me out a bunch of times.

JULIE PAIGE: Thank you, Shalil. Appreciate hearing about the different places that you lived. And now we'll hear from our last student, Stella.

STELLA: Hey everyone. My name is Stella and I am originally from Bulgaria. Here I study in an MPS program in Technology Management, which is part of the Dyson School. So in general, my classes are held in three different locations on campus. These are Warren Hall, Sage Hall, and Breazzano. And they have about 15 minutes in between, so it was important for me to plan my commute between all these places.

So here I live in Collegetown, which I really like because of three major reasons. The first one is the proximity to campus, especially to Breazzano and Sage Hall, which is I have the majority of my classes. Then the second reason is the good social life. There are a lot of options for restaurants and bars, and also there are many other students that live in this area, both undergrads and graduate students as well. And then the third thing that I like about this area is the convenient transportation options. Because I don't have a car, so it was important for me to be in a place where I can easily go from one place to another, or just to have convenient transportation options.

So initially I was accepted in a one bedroom apartment in Hasbrouck, but decided to look for other options. And the reason was that this particular option didn't provide AC and private laundry facilities, which at this point was important for me to have on my own. So this is why I decided to look for other options. And so, based on conversations and recommendations from other students and other people that live here, I decided to leave in residential housing in Collegetown, because it provided fitness facilities and also a shuttle that brings you to campus. So this was important for me to have in mind. And then this is how I ended up here, and so far it really meets my needs.

JULIE PAIGE: So I want to thank Stella and all the rest of the panelists for sharing your personal experiences. This was really helpful. And now we're going to move into our question and answer portion of the webinar. So remember, feel free to submit your questions through the Q&A feature on Zoom. And then also, we did receive a number of questions ahead of time. So I'm going to turn it back over to Denise Thompson.

BENJAMIN ROSE: You're muted.

JULIE PAIGE: Where's Denise? Uh oh.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you. I was muted. I apologize. So I would like to direct this question to Ben. What are current students doing to deal with the uncertainty of being able to attend in-person classes in the fall of 2020? Can you give the student perspective for us?

BENJAMIN ROSE: Yeah, for us of course it was quite a change. I used to come into my office every day, and my office space was really my main study space and I avoided studying at home. And so that changed drastically now, and I would say housing is even more important right now than it was before, because you want to have a good study space. So when you're looking for housing, just make sure that you have, for instance, a desk in your own room, so that you don't have to work in a living room-- a shared living room with other people. Maybe you like that, but maybe you want to also have a place where you can just study in quiet. So I would say just like maybe right now invest a little bit more money into your first year lease, just so that you have a good study space.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you, Ben. And this one is for Shalil. How to effectively compare options and prioritize aspects related to housing? So let me re-ask that question because I stumbled. How do you suggest to effectively compare options and prioritize aspects related to housing?

SHALIL: I found it useful to first have a list of things that I think that are useful for me. And I usually kept those prioritizations in mind when I evaluate housing. And in my-- when I first came in, I think I found some of the resources in the off-campus website very useful. It was like an initial starting point for me. And I used that prioritization in order to decide what I want to prioritize. And one thing I really found useful was asking for references from landlords and landladies. All of the times I asked for them they were very forthright in providing me with references. And if I've got a lot of useful information from that. And I used my prioritization to ask specific questions from the references.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank. You And Abdullah, if I could ask you this question came in. What is the best area for a grad student with a young family? We have a person with three children.

ABDULLAH: Well, when it's come to-- so there are a few good choices for housing for family with kids. Hasbrouck is one of the top choices, I would say. But it might be quite little for a family with three kids. For me, our family of a daughter-- an infant daughter. And I feel it's a little tight for us. There are like few choices I've been exploring, previously, in Lansing area that might be a good choices for family housing. I don't remember what the name of the complex is, but I visited one of the complexes earlier, and it's a family oriented, spacious. But it's quiet, further from the campus, and the commute to campus is around 15 minutes or so.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you. So if I could ask Stella, does Ithaca have any online shops that home deliver products?

STELLA: Yeah, sure. So yeah, as I mentioned, I don't have a car. So this was quite a challenge to go shopping. So I would say Ithaca has two-- one very good option, which is Instacart. So it is connected with different stores, and you can pick which store you want to order from. And then they deliver directly to your door. And it can be-- you can schedule when you want to get your food or your goods delivered. So it's quite convenient.

Also I've used the service by Walmart. They also provide delivery services to your home. So I would say that the options are pretty good, especially in the winter I was using it a lot, since the winter, I would say it's quite difficult. So yeah, in general there are quite good options in this regard, and you shouldn't worry about it.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you so much. And Shalil, this question I'm going to direct to you, but I will also ask that other of our panelists may chime in as well. Can you tell me more about life in Ithaca? So what is your perspective?

SHALIL: I'd like to talk about outdoor living in Ithaca, which is what I find most rewarding. Ithaca does have a bunch of restaurants and some places that you can hang out. It's not like New York City or something, but it's quite nice for a small city. But I find Ithaca extremely nice for outdoor activities. During summer you can-- you have the lake so that you can go boating or kayaking. And then it's extremely, most of the areas are extremely bikeable. And there's a lot of bikers around. You can also-- there's a bunch of state parks around, so a lot of places to hike. And during winter you can go cross-country skiing. There's a downhill skiing spot nearby, so outdoor activities-wise, I have found Ithaca to be very nice.

And also, Ithaca does host a bunch of events every month or so over the year. And those have also been nice gatherings for people and sometimes it's very interesting to check them out.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you.

BENJAMIN ROSE: Maybe I'll-- Yeah, I'll quickly talk about. So I fully agree with Shalil. I am a runner, so I always go running in the morning and we have so many spots where you can run to and then actually go for a swim. Because we have so many waterfalls and so many lakes around here. From my house, for instance it's a 15 minute run to Buttermilk State Park, where you can just, like, there's a big swimming hole. And then you can also go on a hike there if you would want to. But also, if you live Downtown or in Fall Creek, there's just a ton of bars with pool and darts. And so if you like that, then it really pays off to live Downtown, because everything is so walkable. You can go to GreenStar, for instance, do your grocery shopping, then go to a coffee shop, let's say Gimme! Coffee, and get a coffee. And then later on you go to the Rhine House and play some pool and have a beer with friends. So if you like this kind of lifestyle, then you will see that Ithaca is very rewarding.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you. Any of our other panelist? OK. If I may direct this question to Celine. What helped you most when transitioning to Cornell and grad school?

CELINE CAMMARATA: So I had a little bit of an unusual transition, in that I had actually been working at Cornell for a couple of years before I started grad school. But I think definitely what helped most is just talking to other current students. Not only, you know, we're talking today about housing and obviously it's really helpful to hear from a lot of people about that, but just about everything related to your program and the university. There's a lot that you just won't know until someone tells you.

And I think you really need to try to jump in and ask as many questions as possible from students who are a bit farther ahead, from administrators, to really understand things like what exactly is the degree structure, what does-- what do these various things mean, how stringent are these timeline components? Questions like that. And the same goes for choosing where to live. I would say it's really helpful to talk to people, not only about what they think is good and bad, but why they think that. Because your priorities may be very different. And some people really want to live in a quiet area, some people really want to live in a busy area, and you need to know that to evaluate what they recommend to you.

And I think the same goes for talking to people and gaining advice about your transition into being a grad student. Some people will say, like, oh yeah, it's great! I love working all the time. And you're like, well, maybe I don't want to do that. You know? Like you need to filter what people are saying a bit. But I would say just try to gain advice and insight from as many people as possible. And I think one thing that has really struck me about grad school is there are experiences you kind of know everyone has, but you don't think they're going to happen to you. And then they do. So just kind of accept that there are things that we all go through and buckle in, I would say. But talking to peers is really the best way to get an idea of how that's going to happen.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you. Would any of our other panelists like to chime in there as well about your transition? Abdullah?

ABDULLAH: Yeah, sure. So yeah. So my name is Abdullah, for people who came later. So I grew up in Saudi Arabia, and moving to Ithaca, the transition was a quite different. So over in Saudi Arabia, you know how warm it is? So we used to go to malls. Like the type of activity that used to have all the time is quite different. And we didn't do that nature activities as much. So moving to Ithaca was an opportunity for us to explore different. Some people find this like bizarre, like, oh, like, hiking and [INAUDIBLE]. Yes, so really. So we were able to explore and find new types of activities, I'm going out and having fun, that the Ithaca area could offer. So that was a cool thing I would talk about. Otherwise, most of the activity that I used to be, like, most OK with are not available around here. But you will find your way.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you so much. So I am going to talk, I think, on just a couple questions. So I'm seeing some about signing lease agreements early. There was some guidance from some other grad students at a different housing webinar about the need to sign in March. And then students that are concerned about signing lease agreements when they really only want to be here eight months versus 12 months. So I think let me just try to answer those questions.

So I'm going to say that in the recent years we have seen our housing stock increase significantly. And the rush for housing that some of the current graduate students who are getting ready to leave Ithaca, what they experienced was a very tight market. We were at a 0.5% vacancy rate, which is extremely unhealthy. A healthy vacancy rate is around 7%. And

right now we are about two to three percent vacancy before COVID. So with that being said, there's plenty of beds. The rush for housing is predominately the closer you are to campus, would be where more students would probably be signing their lease agreements early.

But what I do have to say is that with COVID, there's going to be students that are not going to be coming to Cornell, so there's going to be subletting opportunities. I've talked to a lot of landlords. There are vacancies. They're concerned about their vacancies. So you will be able to negotiate on price, negotiate on amenities, such as maybe including parking if you have a car, maybe including trash in your monthly rent. The standard operating procedure that has been going on for the past few years is not what's going to be happening in the next year or two. So I would say be flexible, remain open, and try to work out what's going to be the best for you.

So if I could go to my panelists who have a car. So there are some questions about transportation. I myself, I drive in an hour to and from work every day. So I have a Jeep with four studded snow tires for the winter. But how do you find driving in Ithaca in the winter months?

CELINE CAMMARATA: I can probably speak to that. I have a Toyota Yaris. If anyone doesn't know what that is, it's basically a clown car that's like that size. And I have a very steep driveway. So I think there's a few things about that. One is, as I said in my intro, I actually don't drive to work. That's something I really enjoy is not having to drive to work, so I usually take the bus in the winter. But for driving around to get to grocery stores and that type of thing, I think it definitely is a good, responsible choice to have snow tires, which I have actually never done. But it's been fine, you know? As long as you are cautious, I think you'll just have to accept there are going to be some days that are dangerous-- where conditions are dangerous, and you need to plan for that and don't get stuck somewhere. Like don't leave if you can't get back. But honestly it's never been that much of a challenge for me, as long as I take my time. So that's been my experience.

BENJAMIN ROSE: And maybe I'll also chime in real quick. Yes, so I think it's really only a few days in the winter where this really applies. Because it's usually the days where unexpectedly a lot of snow is falling, and then the city just, like, has a hard time keeping up with the snow. But usually if there has been a lot of snow for a lot of days, then they have plowed the snow quite a bit. And so sometimes it happens that, like, for people who have to come into work by car for one or two days per semester they can't come in, because it's too snowy. But yeah, if you can avoid going in by car, I think it's recommendable. Because you pay quite a bit of money for on-campus parking. And also, if you have a car and you live in Collegetown, you typically also have to pay for a parking spot because the area is just very tight, versus if you live Downtown or Fall Creek, you usually just have, like, on street parking that is free. That's another thing that has to be considered.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you. So anyone else? Abdullah, do you have a vehicle? Would you like to talk about it?

ABDULLAH: Sure, yeah. I have a comment I just want to add to Benjamin, talk about for the parking. And I would add that, on the other hand, one of the most choices that I still regret that I bought a sedan car. For people who didn't know, Ithaca area is more or less a lot of hills over here. So having a sedan car was a little bit of a struggle for me. That was my point. Like just if you are thinking you might want to think about it, what type of car would be proper, especially which geographic area are you going to live in.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you. So one of the questions that I'm seeing is, is there a checklist of sorts before you sign a lease and what are the tenant rights and responsibilities? So I'm going to share that on our off-campus living website, so [offcampusliving.cornell.edu](http://offcampusliving.cornell.edu), you do have a lease signing checklists. My office, so I have seven peer advisors and myself, can also review a lease with you before signing. And we also can go over the tenants' rights and responsibilities. So both the New York State law and our local laws that protect tenants. So we can do that with you. We can do it via Zoom. Some of our students-- well, all of my students are working remotely, so we can even do that later during the night for us, so it may be better timing for you.

One of the things I would like to ask our panelists is I'm seeing some questions go through about finances. So one, an earlier question was regarding banks. And another question I was hoping you could answer is, what are your recommendations as some of those international students that would be able to provide our incoming students with what do they need to know about their finances and signing a lease and what type of documents? That type of thing. So I open that up to whoever would like to answer. Stella?

STELLA: I can speak on that. Do you refer just in terms of the housing or in general?

DENISE THOMPSON: In general, I think. You could do general. But then if you also wanted to talk about your lease, as well.

STELLA: OK. Yeah, so for the lease I didn't have any issues about it. I just had to pay a deposit upfront, and I did this over the phone with my local card from Bulgaria. There was no issues about it. Then when I came here I opened an account in one of the local banks. And I decided to do so, because I thought that it would be good to have an account in a bank that I can go to right here, not a larger bank which don't have an office here. So I think that this is something important to consider. And I really believe that it would be better to open an account in a bank that has an office in Ithaca. So I would say that the procedure is quite easy. There were no complications about it. So yeah, I would say that it's quite easy for international students, and I didn't have any complications about it.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you. Anyone else? Ben, would you feel comfortable talking a little bit about finances?

BENJAMIN ROSE: Yeah, so. I'm not really sure what to say. If you want to open up a bank account, I think in the beginning if you don't have a social security number, it's just a little bit

more restricted if I remember correctly. Like you weren't able to get a credit card with a high limit or something, I don't remember exactly. But if you're a PhD student, at some point because you work for Cornell, you will actually apply to get an SSN, and then the options on types of credit cards and bank accounts that you can choose from are different. You will have more options, basically. And then regarding landlords. Most of them actually have Venmo, for instance. So it's not that hard to transfer money from one bank to the other.

For those of you who come from the European Union, I think it's good to note that the US doesn't have an international-- or like a standardized form of transferring money. Like in the EU you just have this one number. And it's always free, and you can easily transfer money from Germany to Italy, for instance. And here it's a little bit more difficult from one bank to another bank. You have to always see what kind of options there are. So for me this was in the beginning a little bit confusing because I thought, oh, America probably has a system, but they don't have a nationwide system for that.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you so much. Jason, if I would like to ask you a specific question around COVID and one of the things that we received early was, will the new-- and this is for particularly international students-- so will new students be required to maintain a 14 day quarantine when they first arrive in Ithaca to ensure community safety? I understand this question might be out of the scope of the webinar, however in that case, does Cornell have any plan to help first-time students make their transition smooth when they first arrived to Ithaca?

JASON KAHABKA: That's a great question, and it's a question that we can't answer with 100% certainty right now. I can tell you that Cornell's policy has been to follow the guidance of both the US Centers for Disease Control, the CDC, and of New York State's legal requirements. So if the CDC or if New York State requires travelers, either domestic or international travelers, if they require or recommend a 14 day quarantine, my expectation is that the university will also require or recommend that. So for students, I think the safest thing to do would be to monitor both the CDC website, if this is an urgent question for you, and also expect that your graduate program will send you information as the time-- as August approaches and we know more information. But it's possible, but right now there's no guidance on that, because international travel is so heavily restricted right now. But that may change quickly.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you so much. So I have heard from our panelists, like they like to walk and run and swim, but what about the health care, like the facilities? To work out, to, you know, what type of-- do you go to the gym? What is there either on campus or off campus? Ben or Stella?

STELLA: Yeah, so I have a gym in the place where I live, so I haven't used the gym on campus. But what I have done on campus is figure skating, and there is a really cool rink. So I really recommend the incoming students to try something new, because I've never done this before and I think that it is really cool to try some of the sports that are really diverse and really offer a lot of exciting things to do.

BENJAMIN ROSE: Yeah, I agree. Like for me this was amazing to check out the P.E. Department, like the physical education department. Like, make sure that in the first semester, just sign up for one course, whatever it is. Because you will meet new people and the facilities at Cornell are great. I play squash, for instance, and if I now look at my own friend network, I would say about like 30% of the people that I regularly hang out with are from my squash club. And the squash facilities are free at Cornell. Then we have a swimming pool, which is also free, I believe. And so, like, yeah, you should really make and make use of these really amazing facilities.

SHALIL: Yes. I agree with Ben. Cornell outdoor facilities have been great. I also have played squash, and also rock climbing, which I have never done back home. I found it very interesting and very mind relaxing after work. Cornell also offers a lot of outdoor education courses. I also took a bunch of them. They were really interesting-- they were really cool.

Just to answer your question, Ithaca also has a bunch of gyms outside of campus. My roommate takes one in the Ithaca Mall. And he finds it really useful. and there's also another one in Downtown, right next to the lake inlet. And people have mentioned that that's also-- that also has really great facilities.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, I would add to what Benjamin has talked about, how P.E. Courses are amazing. The on-campus facility for gymnasium are really distributed, and there are, like, quite a few of them. And most of them are well-equipped, so that's a good thing about, like, campus gyms.

JULIE PAIGE: So I'm going to step in for a minute and thank everybody for the great questions. We have five minutes to go. So Denise, we'll have time for one more question.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you, Jules. So I would like to know, because I think it would be probably very helpful for everyone to kind of hear, what your experiences have been when you move in? So was your apartment furnished? And what did you-- what was the furnishings in your apartment, so people can plan on what they might need to buy or bring with them?

CELINE CAMMARATA: If I can jump in. When we moved into our first apartment in Ithaca, the thing we encountered was that the apartment was very dirty. Like it hadn't really been cleaned. And that's something that was really frustrating to us when we moved in. And I think maybe something to take up with your landlord ahead of time. Make sure, like, what the process is going to be and what you can expect. We've always lived in unfurnished apartments and furnished them ourselves by choice, but I have friends who have been here their entire PhDs and never bought furniture. So I think you can really do both, depending on just what type of apartment you want to look for.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you.

BENJAMIN ROSE: Yeah, I lived in mostly furnished apartments, so if you move into a housing co-op, it's almost always furnished. And different furniture would be a bed, a nightstand, a desk, a chair, and then a dresser and maybe a closet. And I think it's fairly standard, like when it says furniture, you can almost always expect exactly that what I just that. The landlords just, like, get a feeling for what a student needs and that's apparently what they think is a student needs, and it's also what a student needs, so OK.

SHALIL: Yeah, if I can add to that. When I came in as an international student, I found it a little difficult to, like, plan to get furniture in the first year. So the apartment I got had-- was furnished. It was, like, an old house, about 150 years old. It had, like, really solid desk and a big king sized bed and everything. And my landlady took proper action to clean the apartment every month or so with a service that she hired directly. So that was very useful. I think that was particularly useful for me as an international student, because Ithaca doesn't have, for example, an IKEA or something, so it's a little inconvenient to get furniture in a couple of days or something. So you need to plan it out a little bit. And I found it useful to check out websites and gradually accumulate furniture for the later years. There's a lot of reused furniture, if you keep a lookout. But yeah, initially it might be a little helpful to take a finished apartment.

STELLA: Yeah, I completely agree with [INAUDIBLE]. I think, coming as an international student, it might be very helpful if you have a furnished apartment, just because you're coming here, you don't know anything and it might be just more convenient just to go there and start living normally. And then as you continue being here, you will figure it out, you will figure out the options. And you'll be able to plan accordingly.

BENJAMIN ROSE: Yeah, can I say one more thing about that? So if you want to buy some furniture, I agree that, like, buying new furniture in Ithaca might be a bit more difficult, but buying used furniture is fairly easy. The stores that come to mind is Ithaca Reuse, then the Salvation Army, and then there is some more upscale, like, places where you can buy high end used stuff that's more expensive, but usually then from the 70s and looks really stylish. So I forget the name but there is one. And how to transport this, we have Ithaca Car Share, and they have a Toyota Tacoma, which is basically a pickup truck, with a huge space to put things on. And so if you want to furnish your own apartment, I would recommend just, like, applying for the Ithaca Car Share, and then just, like, renting the Toyota Tacoma for a few hours and go shopping. Ithaca Reuse really has a ton of stuff.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, I just want to add to that.

DENISE THOMPSON: Yes, Abdullah.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, I just want to add to that. I would recommend having an online list of type of furniture that you might want that could be deliverable to your location. And also use the thrift stores, or the used furniture around town. As everyone mentioned, yeah, there is not much of

options, but my online option was, like, a good transition for me when I moved in here. I was all set before I came, and I knew about it. I just had all of my furniture needs all done online. Yeah.

DENISE THOMPSON: Thank you so much. And before I turn over this to Julie, I just want to recognize that we do have quite a few questions that have come in, either before or during our webinar, and myself and the peer advisors are going to work on a Q&A. And we're also going to try our best to respond to everybody individually. But if you have questions, please feel free to email [offcampusliving@cornell.edu](mailto:offcampusliving@cornell.edu). Julie?

JULIE PAIGE: I once again would like to thank all the panelists, the five students, Jason, and Denise. And we wish you good luck at Cornell and in your housing search. And we're looking forward to hopefully meeting you in person in August. And also, our website, [offcampusliving.cornell.edu](http://offcampusliving.cornell.edu). Have a good Friday, everybody, and a good weekend. Bye bye.