

What to Look for in a University-Based Retirement Community

Recognizing that a senior living community is a better option than aging at home can be difficult for seniors, their families and their caregivers. The decision can be easier if the senior finds a community that appeals to their interests, such as continuing their education. More and more people opt for university-based retirement communities (UBRC) because they combine care with lifelong learning opportunities. This checklist can help you and your loved ones see if your preferred UBRC has what you need now and throughout your golden years.

Educational Programming and University Affiliation

- Does the UBRC offer courses on subjects you have an interest in?
- Are those courses taught at the level you need (e.g., do they provide credits toward a degree?)
- Are you an alumnus of the university/college affiliated with a UBRC? If so, you might find it easier to relocate.

Location

- Is the location close enough for your family to visit so you don't go long periods without seeing loved ones?
- Is it close enough for your family/caregivers to get to quickly in an emergency? (NOTE: UBRCs are becoming more popular but are still relatively new, so you may have to compromise on location.)
- Is the nearest hospital within reasonable traveling time?
- Is there enough to do locally to satisfy your social needs, such as parks, restaurants, entertainment venues and cultural attractions?

Housing

- Is it a community where you can remain, regardless of the state of your health? (NOTE: Most UBRCs are continuing care retirement communities, which means they offer a continuum of care, from independent living to skilled nursing.)
- Does it have the home type you want to live in, such as an apartment, condo, duplex, single-family home or cottage?
- Does the home have (at least) a 24/7 emergency response system and common senior-friendly features, such as a walk-in shower and grab rails?

Safety and Security

- Does the home have standard safety features, such as smoke alarms and sprinkler systems?
- If the community is on campus, does it benefit from the university's security? If not, are there surveillance cameras and someone awake on-site 24/7? If it's part of a retirement village, is it gated?
- If applicable, is the memory care unit's courtyard secure, and are all external doors fitted with access-control systems, such as keypads?

Amenities

- Does the UBRC organize social activities for residents, and do they have access to the university's amenities, such as its library, sports facilities and cultural venues?
- Is there an on-site hair salon/barbershop?
- Does the monthly fee include housekeeping, laundry, maintenance and utilities?
- Are meals freshly prepared and served daily in a group dining environment?
- Is there transportation for medical appointments and/or leisure trips?

Levels of Care

- Is there quick access to medical care, such as an on-site registered nurse?
- What's the ratio of staff to residents? (This should be relatively low at the independent living end of the scale, gradually rising to high at the skilled nursing end)
- Do staff members monitor medications or help administer them?