

Showcase Your Space

Moving to a new country often means starting from scratch—new environments, new people, and new routines. My housing experience has played a significant role in shaping my adjustment to life here, not only by giving me a place to stay but also by creating a small community that feels like home. I currently share a four-bedroom apartment with two other Kenyans, and together we have created a living space built on friendship, shared culture, and mutual support.

One of my roommates is Peter Otieno Obura, whom I fondly refer to as “*Makobura*,” meaning *son of Obura* in the Luo language. Luo is widely spoken in western Kenya along the shores of Lake Victoria. Interestingly, prominent global figures such as Barack Obama’s father and actress Lupita Nyong’o are of Luo heritage. Peter is over six feet tall, passionate about basketball, and enjoys spending time working out at the gym. He studied Electrical Engineering in his undergraduate program with a focus on telecommunications engineering and is currently my classmate in the MS in Data Science and Analytics program.

Peter is also an excellent cook and takes pride in preparing Kenyan cuisine. Many evenings in our apartment revolve around cooking together, experimenting with familiar dishes from home while occasionally trying new recipes. He has a strong interest in neural networks and enjoys building solutions that can be applied across different sectors. Before coming here, he had opportunities to work with OpenAI-related initiatives in Kenya. We first met on January 8, 2026, during orientation at the Mary Idema Pew Library. Although we had just met, it quickly felt as though we had known each other for much longer.

Another person I live with is Harrison Githinji Gitau, a medical technician originally from Nakuru in Kenya’s Rift Valley region. Harrison is of Kikuyu descent, married with two children, and is currently pursuing a master’s degree in bioinformatics and health informatics. He is extremely outgoing and friendly, always ready to help when someone needs support. Harrison and I met earlier than the others, we boarded the same flight from Nairobi to Frankfurt and then onward to Chicago. During our first days in the United States, we stayed with his cousin David in Alpine while discovering and adjusting to America together.

Harrison’s life story is particularly inspiring. He is a cancer survivor who traveled to India for treatment and medication. His resilience and positive attitude often remind us of the importance of perseverance. He enjoys storytelling, playing cards, and listening to hip-hop music. Conversations with him often turn into long evenings filled with laughter, life lessons, and reflections on our journeys.

In our shared apartment, we pool our resources together and function almost like a small family. We cook together, eat together, and go grocery shopping together. Even though we have only known each other for a short time, barely two months—the friendly nature of everyone involved, combined with our shared dreams and ambitions, has created a strong bond between us. Our lounge is a common space where we often sit and talk, share stories from home, discuss our

academic work, or simply unwind after a long day of classes. Occasionally, we also go to the gym together, which helps us stay active and maintain balance between academic responsibilities and personal well-being.

Our apartment has gradually become more than just a place to live. It has become something of a meeting point for Kenyans living along West Campus Drive. We often invite friends over for meals, storytelling sessions, and card games. Sometimes there are a few drinks, and the conversations flow late into the night. In those moments, our apartment transforms into a cultural hub where we reconnect with our roots, share experiences of navigating life in a new country, and support one another through the challenges of graduate school.

Having such a supportive housing environment has greatly influenced my experience. Adjusting to a new academic system, climate, and culture can be overwhelming at times. However, knowing that I return each day to a home filled with familiar language, laughter, and shared experiences has made the transition much easier. The sense of community within our apartment helps reduce feelings of isolation and reminds us that we are not navigating this journey alone.

Living together has also allowed us to learn from one another in meaningful ways. We come from different professional backgrounds—engineering, healthcare, and data science—and our conversations often turn into informal learning sessions. Whether discussing new technologies, health innovations, or data-driven solutions, we constantly exchange ideas that broaden our perspectives.

Reflecting on my growth and adaptation, I realize that this living arrangement has strengthened important life skills such as collaboration, empathy, and cultural appreciation. Sharing responsibilities in the house—cooking, cleaning, budgeting, and organizing social gatherings—has required communication and cooperation. It has taught us patience and flexibility, especially when balancing busy academic schedules.

More importantly, our home has become a place where motivation is shared. When one person feels overwhelmed with coursework or personal challenges, the others step in with encouragement or practical help. These small acts of support have created an environment where everyone feels motivated to pursue their goals.

Ultimately, our apartment represents more than shared housing; it represents community, resilience, and friendship. In a foreign country far from our families, we have built a small support system that allows us to grow both academically and personally. Through shared meals, conversations, and experiences, we continue learning from each other while moving steadily toward our dreams.