

This document is intended for international students that have already been accepted into the Jackson School of Geosciences but have not yet and/or recently started their degree program.

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Before you move to USA

<https://global.utexas.edu/iss/life-at-ut/pre-arrival>

As an international student you will need a Visa to enter and stay in the US for the duration of your studies. Most international students acquire F1 Visas but there are other Visas that might be issued depending on your studies, status, and profession (J1, M1, H1-B, EB-5, Green Card Lottery).

F-1 Visa: Students admitted to a full-time program of study, meet the English requirement (Depends on the school), and be able to show proof of funding for at least the first year of study.

J-1 Visa: Students or researchers who have funding from an outside source (e.g. scholarship, grant, government, or other), or are coming for short-term exchange programs.

The F1 Visa process:

Where to apply? <https://www.usembassy.gov/>

Once you get accepted from the school you will need to follow the next steps to get your F1 Visa:

- 1) Pay the Sevis fee of ~\$200 (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) and receive your I-20 from the school.
- 2) Complete the F1 Visa application form and receive the DS-160 document (and pay the fee of ~\$100-200--depends on your home country).

<https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/>

- 3) Schedule and attend the F1 Visa Interview in the American embassy or consulate of your home country (up to 120 days in advance of your starting date)

For your interview you will need:

- A valid passport (notice that you must be in your home country to renew your passport and the international office will notify you when your passport is near expiration)
- The Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-160
- The application fee payment receipt
- A recent passport photo (Maximum 6 months old)
- A Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F1) Student Status (Form I-20)

Depending on your home country and the embassy, additional documents may be requested to prove your eligibility for the F1 student visa such as: academic transcripts, degrees, test scores (TOEFL, SAT, GRE, GMAT), proof of your intent to depart the U.S. after your program is complete, and proof of your financial stability.

- 4) Wait for your F1 visa approval --You can enter the U.S. 30 days prior to the start date of your program

- However, you can purchase 1 or 2 months of English classes before your program starts through the ESL department.
(<https://global.utexas.edu/english-language-center/programs/academic-english/summer>)

More useful information about F1 visa can be found here:

<https://www.internationalstudent.com/immigration/f1-student-visa/>

What if I have dependents and they need Visas? Learn more here:

<https://global.utexas.edu/iss/immigration/f-1/dependents>

Find a house/apartment:

<https://global.utexas.edu/iss/life-at-ut/housing>

How do I look for a house/apartment?

Most realtors in Austin are free of charge. Get in contact with them, let them know what you want and they will be happy to help!

Many properties in Austin are managed by companies. The employees of these property management companies are happy to help find you a place to live.

-List of rental companies that you can secure from outside the country

- 512 living
- Stone Oak Property Management

Platforms to do the research yourself might be:

<https://www.zillow.com>

<https://uptownrealtyaustin.com/leasing/>

You can also find roommates: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/458528044205531/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/UTSubletRoommateFinder>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/819571114777811>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/145710366135463>

When should I start looking for a house?

Start your search EARLY before your desired move-in date. Housing in Austin can fill up quickly. The sooner you start your search, the better. Keep in mind that a lot of apartments are available only 60 days before the “move in” date.

How much will I need to pay before arrival?

You will likely need to pay an application fee (~\$150), show proof of financial income, pay a security deposit (typically ~1.5x rent cost--or 2 months of rent) and the upcoming rent. Note that some companies will also require you to have a guarantor if the monthly rent is more than 1/3rd of your monthly income.

How much should you pay in rent?

Studios/1 bedroom apartments are around 900-1500 dollars

If you decide to have roommates, rent can range from 500-1000 dollars.

Where should I live?

It depends on if you are a student working at main Campus or at Pickle, and what you like to do in your free time (i.e. proximity to downtown or quiet living).

Most graduate students live in the North Campus, Hyde Park, North Loop, and East Austin neighborhoods. Additionally, many students live closer to campus in the beginning years (since they take more classes and need to be on campus more often) and gradually move further away where the rent is cheaper and the lifestyle is quieter.

(have a map showing zones where graduate students live)

****If you are a student working at the Pickle Research Campus -- you will have an office at Pickle but your classes will be on the main campus. There is a bus that runs between the campuses and it typically takes ~35-45 minutes (drive time) or ~1 hour if you factor in waiting at the bus stop. Living in between the campuses will be cheaper, however you**

will still have a commute to both your classes AND office. It's likely best to live close to one of the campuses to minimize your commute and then some form of bike/walk/bus to get to the other campus. Remember, there is plenty of parking at Pickle, but parking on the main campus can be very difficult. Talk to your advisor about your schedule and how you will split your time between the main and Pickle campuses. Usually you can also request to have a small office on the main campus as well, to minimize the time lost commuting back and forth.

I don't have a car, is that a problem?

Not necessarily but you should take into consideration the bus routes and where the grocery stores are located. You can find the bus routes here:
https://capmetro.org/uploadedFiles/New2016/Plan_Your_Trip/Destinations_Schedule_Book/system_map.pdf

Many students have managed just fine to use bicycle transportation during their time here. Austin has some roads that are safe for biking and others that are very dangerous. The city is working to improve the biking infrastructure, but it is slow. Do NOT bike on roads without established bike lanes!

Can I rent a furnished apartment?

Yes, but, furnished apartments are significantly more expensive. It makes more sense to buy all new furniture upfront and pay it off (most apartments and houses have washer, dryer, oven, fridge etc)

You can also find second hand furniture/decor or electrodomestics:
<https://buynothingproject.org/>
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/287809972313693>
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/381628841954441>
<https://austin.craigslist.org/>

** find more options for furniture purchases below in this document**

Who should I live with?

This will obviously change depending on your own situation, personal desires, and if you have children and/or a partner. Many JSG students live with other JSG students. If you are willing to have roommates, this is likely your best option. It is very helpful to have fellow students to commute to campus together, discuss your research in less formal settings, make connections within our geoscience community, and have mental support throughout the hardships of graduate school. Living with roommates will also be significantly cheaper!

How about the utilities?

That depends on the apartment complex/house and the company you are renting with, see more information on the "how to set up utilities section".

Final arrangements:

You likely already have these documents but before you leave make sure that you have taken care of the following arrangements:

- 1) Officially translated **transcript** and **degree**
- 2) Birth certificate
- 3) **Test scores** (GRE, GMAT, TOEFL, IELTS)
- 4) **I-20** (Make sure numbers on your I20 and Visa match. If they don't, be aware that you may be pulled aside for an hour or so in a room at the airport while they confirm your status. Don't panic!)
- 5) **VISA** and **passport** (make sure your passport is valid for at least the duration you are planning to stay in the US-- you can always renew it when you go back to your country for vacations)
- 6) Prescriptions for any medication you carry with you (customs might request them)
- 7) Letter indicating your enrollment in a grad program
- 8) **Vaccination record** (<https://global.utexas.edu/issr/life-at-ut/pre-arrival/immunization>)
Begin the process of immunization documentation ASAP (~5-6 months prior to starting the program--it takes time.. and money)
- 9) If you want to rent a car, make sure that you have issued an **international driving license** in your country. It will be valid for a year, you can get an American driving license once you are in the country (See below).
- 10) Unlock your phone! Be prepared to use an American sim card, if you don't want to buy a new phone you will need to unlock your phone before you arrive in the US.

Moving to USA

Where do I stay--how do I move?

When you arrive at the airport make sure you know where you are going and how you will get there. You can use Taxis, Uber, Lyft (download the apps at your phone) or take the bus <https://www.austintexas.gov/department/ground-transportation-barbara-jordan-terminal>.

You might need to find temporary housing if your lease doesn't start when you arrive in Austin (be aware of your lease starting date and plan accordingly)

Recommendations for short-term stays when you move here:

- Airbnb
- TripAdvisor
- booking.com

Where do I buy furniture/ groceries/ electronics?

Furniture

- Target
- IKEA
- Craigslist 101
- Buy second hand from facebook UT groups:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1587488854834034/>
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/381628841954441/>

Groceries

- HEB
- Central Market
- Whole foods
- Fiesta Market

Electronics (talk to your advisor and JSG IT about receiving a computer workstation)

- Best Buy
- UT campus computer store: <https://campuscomputer.com/campuscomputer/>

Where do I rent a car or a moving truck?

- **Rent a car**

In order to rent a car you will need your international driving license AND your original driving license from your country.

<https://www.kayak.com/Cheap-Austin-Car-Rentals.22863.cars.ksp>

<https://www.expedia.com/Car-Rentals-In-Austin.d178234.Car-Rental-Guide>

- **Renting a truck**

If you need to buy furniture you likely need to rent a truck. Before you do so, talk with GSEC or other fellow students, you might be able to find someone to help out with your furniture.

<https://www.uhaul.com/Truck-Rentals/>

https://www.pensketruckrental.com/?gclid=EAlaIqobChMIgd2s8v696wIV0cDACH1MWwN-EAAYASAAEgKfk_D_BwE

<https://www.budgettruck.com/>

Set up accounts for utilities

- Gas (<https://www.texasgasservice.com/>)
- Electricity/water (<https://www.austintexas.gov/>) (Deposit on electricity (\$200))
- Phone
 - Providers:
 - ATT
 - T- mobile
 - Verizon
- Internet
 - Providers:
 - ATT
 - Spectrum
 - Google Fiber
 - Grande

Orientation/Student ID/Verify i-9 and Visa documents

- Check in with myIO: <https://global.utexas.edu/iss/advising-services/myio>
- Get your **student ID** from the main building ASAP so you can use public transportation and have access to the buildings.
(we can add a picture showing how to swipe your ID on the bus)
- Verify you **i-9 and Visa documents** with the Human Resources Service Center schedule an appointment <https://hr.utexas.edu/coronavirus>

The HRSC is accepting appointments via two methods:

Phone: By calling 512-471-4772 and leaving a detailed message with your name, EID and a contact telephone number on our voicemail. Our voicemails are being checked every 30 minutes from 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. Monday-Friday.

Or:

Emailing hrsc@austin.utexas.edu: In the subject line of your email type "Request for an Appointment". In the body of your email please include a contact phone number and briefly state why you are requesting an appointment (i.e. notary services, turning in retirement or benefits paperwork etc.)

A staff member will return your call to schedule an appointment to come in on Mondays or Thursdays between 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. We are located in the UTA Building located at 1616 Guadalupe Street, first floor, suite 1.408, past the elevators.

Appointments for notary services/I-9 verifications are limited to 15 minutes and appointments for benefit changes/enrollment are limited to 20 minutes.

Get a social security number (if you are RA/TA)

<https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10181.pdf>

<https://www.ssa.gov/ssnumber/>

You can apply for a SSN in person: <https://www.ssa.gov/> but you need to be physically present in the US at least 10 days before you apply.

You will need to have with you:

1. Valid passport
2. I-20
3. I-94 arrival record (print from <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/>)
4. Proof of Employment (You will get these from the business office in EPS)

Get a ITIN number (if you have a fellowship)

You can get this by making an appointment with Texas Global/ISSS

Get your Driver's licence <https://www.dps.texas.gov/DriverLicense/ApplyforLicense.htm>

or Texas Identification Card <https://www.dps.texas.gov/DriverLicense/applyforID.htm>

****The Department has resumed all in-office driver license (DL) and identification (ID) card services by appointment only. <https://www.dps.texas.gov/DriverLicense/appointments.htm>****

Do not put this off, you don't want to have your passport everywhere you go. You can choose to either get a driver's licence or an identification card.

In order to get your **driver's licence** you need to have with you:

- Evidence of lawful presence (for F1 students: Unexpired foreign passport or I -94 or I-20--*honestly is better to have them all with you!*)

<https://www.dps.texas.gov/DriverLicense/documents/verifyingLawfulPresence.pdf>

- Texas Residency
- Identity
- Social Security Number
- Evidence of Texas Vehicle Registration* for each vehicle you own. Registration must be current. Visit Texas DMV vehicle registration for more information (New Residents who are surrendering an out-of-state driver license only)
- Proof of Insurance for each vehicle you own (If you do not own a vehicle, you will sign a statement affirming this.)
- You will also need a six-hour adult Driver Education course, if you are 18 through 24 years of age.

In order to get your **Texas identification card** you need to have with you:

- Evidence of lawful presence (for F1 students: Unexpired foreign passport or I -94 or I-20) <https://www.dps.texas.gov/DriverLicense/documents/verifyingLawfulPresence.pdf>
- Texas Residency
- Identity
- Social Security Number

Open a bank account

(<https://global.utexas.edu/iss/life-at-ut/pre-arrival/banking>)

In order to open a bank account you will need your 1) Passport 2) Proof of address (e.g., utility bill, apartment contract).

3) College address 4) In some cases social security number (SIN) or Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) (It is not always required -depends on the bank)

The bank also might require:

- I-94 card
- I-20, DS-2019, or I-797 approval notice
- Another form of identification, such as a foreign driver's license or credit card
- Form W-8 BEN if you're not eligible for an SSN or ITIN

The last step is to make a deposit in order to activate the account.

Some big banks in Austin are:

- 1) UFCU
- 2) Chase Bank
- 3) Bank of America
- 4) Wells Fargo
- 5) Compass Bank

Health Insurance

You can find most of the things you need about health insurance in Texas Global:

<https://global.utexas.edu/issv/advising-services/insurance>

As an international student ***you are required to have health insurance at all times***. That means that when you move to the US in August you will need to pay for your insurance before the program starts in September.

You need to fill out an international student waiver every semester if you're not going to use the UT Academic Blue (e.g. if you want UT Select, or if you get UT Select as a Ta/GRA employee)

Keep in mind that if you are enrolled and have financial support for 11.5 months your insurance fees will be fully covered!

- Every semester you will need to pay an out pocket evacuation fee (~30-100 dollars)
- Resources available at UT health center
 - List of in-network doctors, dentists, and mental health professionals that are within a certain radius of campus
 - Colors of Austin

Taxes

<https://global.utexas.edu/issv/advising-services/taxes/general-information>

Even if you didn't have an income as an F1/J1 student in the US you still need to do your taxes. UT has a tax advisor that you can schedule an appointment and get some extra help (<https://global.utexas.edu/issv/advising-services/myio/students>) but the process is not too complicated.

You will need to pay taxes on the following things:

- Wages and compensation
- Salaries and tips
- Interest
- Some scholarships/fellowship grants (ex. GSA AAPG grants etc)
- Prizes/awards (ex. JSG research symposium)

What will you need?

You will fill out your taxes in the online platform GLACIER

<https://www.online-tax.net/glogin.asp?Error=Login> the instructions are straightforward but be prepared to have some information:

You will be required to enter your

- 1) Name
- 2) Current address
- 3) Passport
- 4) History of arrivals and departures for the U.S from the past 5 years
(<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/#/home>)
- 5) Social security number (SSN) or IRS individual taxpayer identification number (ITIN)
- 6) Forms:
 - a) Form 1040NR-EZ or 1040-NR
 - b) Form 8843
 - c) W2
 - d) Form 1042-S (if you received scholarships or fellowships)

****Note that GLACIER does not open until mid March****

Changing address in Texas

If you change your address within Texas you will need to:

- 1) Officially report it at USPS <https://moversguide.usps.com/mgo/disclaimer>
- 2) Get a new Texas ID or driving license within 60 days of moving
- 3) Update your contact information in your UT homepage

Renewing your Visa

If your Visa expires while you are still a student you would have to renew it if you want to travel internationally. You can stay in the country with an expired Visa but you cannot re-enter the country.

To renew your visa **you cannot be in the US**. You will have to make an appointment through the American embassy of the country you are interested in renewing your Visa. During COVID chances are you can only do that in the country of your citizenship. During normal times you can do that to any other country except the US.

There are quite a few things you will need to have for your Visa renewal:

On the day of your interview, you may present the following documents.

1. A valid passport that has been signed by the applicant.
2. Complete the Online Visa Application Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application, **Form DS-160 – Learn more** about completing the **DS-160**. You must: print the application form **confirmation page** to bring to your interview.
3. One photograph that meets the required specifications. Your photo must be in the format explained in the **Photograph Requirements**. You will upload your photo while completing the online Form DS-160. Even if you have successfully uploaded the photo to the DS-160 please bring one with you on the day of your appointment.

Additional documents for students

1. All completed pages of original form I-20 A-B or Form I-20 M-N.
2. **SEVIS I-901** fee receipt. In your case as a returning student you do not have to pay the SEVIS fee again. Please be prepared to present the receipt of your initial payment when you first applied for an F-1 visa.
3. Documentary evidence of finances per the following table. Certificates of eligibility for F-1 status for academic and language (A-B) or Vocational (M-N) students.

****Remember after your appointment it might take up to 3-5 weeks until you receive your Visa****