

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.

Please supplement it with resources on <https://www.jsg.utexas.edu/gsec/resources-for-graduate-students/>

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Before you move to USA

<https://global.utexas.edu/isss/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 ~\$350 (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 and 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/isss/immigration/f-1/dependents>

Find a house/apartment:

<https://global.utexas.edu/issr/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.apartments.com/>

<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>

You can also browse for available university housing:

Most graduate students who live within the university housing system either live in University Apartments (<https://housing.utexas.edu/housing/university-apartments>) or East Campus Graduate Apartments (<https://housing.utexas.edu/housing/east-campus-graduate-apartments>). These apartments are located ~20 minutes by bus south of the main campus, so it will take more than an hour to commute from these apartments to the Pickle campus (see notes on Pickle campus on the next page).

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-\$1700

If you decide to have roommates, rent can range from \$600-\$1000.

This typically does not include water (up to ~\$60), electricity, sewage, trash, parking, cable or internet.

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.

Important admin?

Before or as you sign your lease, you will most likely need to obtain:

- Renters insurance (can be done in minutes, download an app from a major insurer, put in property details and pay annual fee; insurers include Geico, State Farm, Allstate, progressive, Liberty Mutual)
- Set up your electric/gas/water accounts with the City of Austin. You will need to go in person. Water/electric is through <https://www.austintexas.gov/>, gas is through <https://www.texasgasservice.com>
- INSPECT YOUR APARTMENT ON MOVE-IN! Check everything is ok and record and photograph every fault/issue/scratch so that you can get your deposit at the end if they claimed you damaged those things.

*****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? Buses!

Not necessarily, but you should take into consideration the bus routes and where the grocery stores are located. You can find the bus schedules and maps here:

<https://www.capmetro.org/ride/plan/schedmap>

And download this app to see buses and pay fare if you do not have cash or a student card:

https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.cubic.ctp.app&hl=en_US

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/umo-mobility/id1540611257>

Typically I find that the Google maps tracking of Capmetro buses is more reliable than the Umo app.

A one way ticket is currently \$1.25 and they only take the exact amount if cash.

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. For an affordable option, East

Campus Graduate Apartments offer furnished apartments, which are still slightly more expensive than University Apartments. 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 electronics:

<https://buynothingproject.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/287809972313693>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/381628841954441>

<https://austin.craigslist.org/>

Sometimes graduating students give away or sell their furniture at a lower price, so be on the lookout for these kinds of email announcements!

** 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!

Additionally, you can be paired with roommates if you sign up to live in 2+ bedroom apartments with University Housing.

How about the utilities?

That depends on the apartment complex/house and the company you are renting with. University Housing (both apartments and graduate apartments) rents include utilities and internet so you don't have to pay them separately, but most off-campus housing require you to pay utilities separately. 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 VISA when you go back to your country for vacations. If your home country has a consulate/embassy in the US, you can renew your passport by going to the closest consulate/embassy of your home country (typically they are located in Houston/Dallas/Washington DC, but check with your home country immigration resources).
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/iss/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, and then you can get a Texas driving license once you are in the country (See section for driving license).

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

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

Your first steps in Austin should include:

1. Check in with myIO: <https://global.utexas.edu/isss/advising-services/myio>
2. Get your student ID from the main building ASAP so you can use public transportation and have access to the buildings. (you swipe your student card on the bus in the card reader next to the driver)
3. Verify your I-9 and Visa documents with the Human Resources Service Center schedule an appointment <https://hr.utexas.edu/coronavirus>
4. Make an appointment and get immunizations at the UT clinic <https://www.healthyhorns.utexas.edu/uhs/international-students.html> .
5. Clinic address is
Student Services Building (SSB)
100 West Dean Keeton Street
Allergy, Immunization, and Travel Clinic – Room 2.102 (*you can also get free doctors appointments, sports injury visits and physiotherapy at SSB!!!!*)

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/>
- Left out on front lawns when people leave or are done with goods (be careful about pests)

Groceries

- HEB
- Central Market
- Whole foods
- Fiesta Market

Electronics

- Jackson School IT office (talk to your advisor and JSG IT about receiving a computer workstation)
- UT campus computer store: <https://campuscomputer.com/campuscomputer/>
- Best Buy
- Online (facebook marketplace, craigslist, etc), but be careful.

Where do I rent a car or a moving truck?

Rent a car

In order to rent a car you will need either an American driving license or 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 (unless you buy them from an entity who offers delivery). 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/>

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

Set up accounts for utilities

You will need to set up accounts with the following:

- Gas (<https://www.texasgasservice.com/>)
- Electricity/water (<https://www.austintexas.gov/>) (Deposit on electricity (\$200) that counts towards your electric bill))

You also have a choice of providers for internet and phone, and can find the best deal by searching online.

Phone providers:

- ATT
- T- mobile
- Verizon
- Mint mobile

Internet providers:

- ATT
- Spectrum
- Google Fiber
- Grande

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

General info: <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.

The office at 1029 Camino La Costa, Austin, TX 78752, is readily accessible by bus (takes > 1hr each way).

Apply for an appointment online (<https://secure.ssa.gov/ossnap/public/landingOSSnap>). As an address, some put down their advisor's or a friend's.

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 or BEG in Pickle Campus)

Social Security Number Documentation

*Evidence Documentation For You

Please select all the documentation that you can give us to prove your age, identity and immigration status.

☐ Foreign Passport
☐ I-551 Permanent Resident Card
☐ I-94 with No Foreign Passport
☐ I-94 with Unexpired Foreign Passport
☐ I-766 Employment Authorization Document (EAD) Card
☐ Admit (ADM) Stamp in Unexpired Foreign Passport
☐ I-551 Stamp (Temporary)
☐ Current, Valid U.S. Drivers License
☐ I-551 Machine Readable Immigrant Visa (MRIV)
☐ U.S. State Identity Card
☐ Birth Certificate - Foreign
☐ DS-2019 Certificate of Eligibility
☐ I-20 Certificate of Eligibility
☐ Other Evidence to prove age, identity, and immigration status

You do not need all of these, just passport, i20 and i94 will do, but this shows alternatives available.

Having an SSN is preferable, but almost all legal docs will take ITIN or SSN. Both are free to obtain.

Get an ITIN number (if you have a fellowship)

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

Get your Driver's license

<https://www.dps.texas.gov/DriverLicense/ApplyforLicense.htm>

Do not put this off, you don't want to have your passport everywhere you go. (this license can be used for air travel within the USA). You can choose to either get a driver's license or an identification card.

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

- Passport and 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!*)
- Texas Residency proof (apartment lease)
- Social Security Card
- 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.

or Texas Identification Card

<https://www.dps.texas.gov/DriverLicense/applyforID.htm>

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 (apartment lease document)
- Social Security Card

You will likely be required to do a multiple-choice theory test, and after you pass that you will need to take a driving test. Check on the DMV site whether your country's licence is accepted by the USA. Many licenses are allowed to drive in the US for up to 30 days grace period, after which a US license is required, BUT MAKE SURE THIS APPLIES BY PHONING THE DMV.

For your DMV (appointments<https://www.dps.texas.gov/DriverLicense/appointments.htm>), getting appointments in Austin can be difficult as they get booked up months or weeks ahead. You can use the DMV appointment booking website to shop around for closer appointments in nearby towns or stations (assuming you have transport or a friend to get you there).

Tips for getting an appointment: check for appointment availability in the nearest DPS through this website: <https://www.txdpsscheduler.com/> at 8 am for near-future (even same-day) availability. Based on our experience, if you check for availability later during the day (after 9 am), the available time slots are usually within months ahead.

There are fees for every step of the DMV process, and for non-resident aliens, your license will expire every year, likely meaning you have to appear in person annually to renew your license. DO

THIS A MONTH AHEAD OF EXPIRATION, because there are new verification processes and it can take a while to get your new license.

Open a bank account

General info: (<https://global.utexas.edu/issv/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 (SSN) 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. If you bring your card from a home bank (Visa or Mastercard best), they can directly transfer funds from your home bank to your US bank as though paying for groceries (make sure you tell your home bank you are overseas so that they do not flag your transactions as fraud).

Some big banks in Austin are:

- UFCU (easy to get to, friendly staff, do not require SSN or ITIN, most common option for international students, services but ATMs are limited to only in Texas and mostly Austin)
- Chase Bank
- Bank of America
- Wells Fargo
- 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 appointed as TA/GRA employee) because your insurance will be covered through your employment and so you don't have to be charged for international student insurance through the tuition. Waiver can be accessed using this link: <https://utdirect.utexas.edu/apps/issv/insr/waiver/>

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

Health resources available at: <https://www.healthyhorns.utexas.edu/uhs/index.html>

Tuition

If you're employed as a GRA, you need to apply for a waiver for tuition, so you will be charged the tuition for a Texas Resident (half of tuition for international and out-of-state students), and the other half will be covered either by EPS/BEG/UTIG. To submit the waiver, use this link: <https://utdirect.utexas.edu/acct/fb/waivers>

Taxes

General info: <https://global.utexas.edu/isss/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 (tax day is mid April every year). The US typically deducts 14% tax from all payments to you (except some grants or where certain tax treaties exist). Sometimes you will receive money back from the government if they decide you owed less than 14%. The reverse may also be the case.

UT has a tax advisor that you can schedule an appointment and get some extra help (<https://global.utexas.edu/isss/advising-services/myio/students>) but the process is not too complicated. Alternatively, Foundation Communities Prosper Tax Help can help you understand and file your taxes for free (601 W Braker Lane, Austin, 78753, accessible by bus 801 north).

UT provides a discount code so that international students can file taxes for free through GLACIER. This discount covers the basic e-filing of federal tax, and no extra services such as GLACIER's tax consultant or state income taxes (Texas does not have state income tax, but GSA grants may require you to submit Colorado income tax).

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?> 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 (you typically receive it in December/January)
 - 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
- 4) Update your address on any accounts or delivery services where they may send mail or packages.

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 your home country to renew your Visa. You can do that at any other country's embassy except the US, but availability may be limited, and the requirements may be stricter than if you're renewing in your home country.

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. 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.

Renewal fee (\$185 in 2025)

**** they will check your social media so DOUBLE CHECK that you have saved the link correctly for them to access and make your account public, because you will be delayed if they cannot see your social media****

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****

**** In theory, student visa renewals are supposed to be automatically expedited, but this varies from place to place*****