

The University of Texas at San Antonio

UTSA Global Initiatives

Living in San Antonio

Learn about the climate, how to find an apartment,
a bank, a grocery store, and so much more.



WEATHER IN SAN ANTONIO

South Texas has about 300 sunny days a year. Summers are warm; winters are mild. July is the warmest month and January is the coolest.

San Antonio generally does not get a lot of rain, but we recommend purchasing a raincoat and/or an umbrella for rainy days. We do occasionally receive tropical storms from the Gulf of Mexico. Be prepared for occasional days of heavy rain.

Visit [Weather.com](https://www.weather.com) or the U.S. National Weather Service for more details on current temperatures.

CLOTHING

The best advice is to pack light. Lightweight clothing is recommended.

We suggest a dress for women and a sport coat and tie for men for special occasions.

We also encourage you to bring your traditional clothing from your country for cultural festivities.

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Suggested attire

- Warm months: shorts, light pants, and T-shirts
- Winter months: pants, a sweater, long-sleeved shirt, or jacket
- Other international students suggest that you bring some extra money for clothes and shopping at the malls once you get an idea of what other students are wearing.

FOOD STORES AND RESTAURANTS

You will find many restaurants and grocery stores in San Antonio, but not many area within walking distance of the main campus of UTSA.

The Main and Downtown campuses have several dining options. There are several food stores and many restaurants nearby that offer options for those with different food preferences or diet restrictions.

A few are within walking distance of the UTSA main campus. You can use VIA city bus service or the campus shopping shuttle to help you get to places further away.

Restaurants are often reviewed on websites such as [Yelp.com](https://www.yelp.com) or [Zomato.com](https://www.zomato.com). You might want to check what other diners say about a restaurant before you go.

Grocery stores near UTSA main campus:

- H-E-B (12777 W-10, San Antonio, TX 78230)
- Wal-mart (5555 De Zavala Rd., San Antonio, TX 78249)
- Target (17502 La Cantera Pkwy, San Antonio, TX 78257)

Restaurants near UTSA main campus:

- Whisky Cake Kitchen & Bar
- Cheddar's Scratch Kitchen
- Hula Poke
- Chuy's
- Plucker's Wing Bar
- Taco Palenque



POSTAL, INTERNET AND TELEPHONE SERVICE

Postal Service

The United States Postal Service (USPS) will deliver mail to your home. You can update your address information at www.usps.gov. [Click here](#) to find the closest one to you.

Internet, Cable and Telephone Services

In the United States, these services are often sold as a group by providers. You may receive a better rate by “bundling” these services.

- AT&T
- Spectrum
- Grande Communications: This company has very limited service in the San Antonio area. Check their website to confirm you are in their service area. Call 210-320-4600.

Local and Long-distance Telephone Services and Internet Access Options

Visit these websites for more information on how to establish a home telephone for local and long-distance calling as well as Internet and wireless services. You can compare prices at www.phonedog.com.

- AT&T : Visit their website for information on how to establish your home phone for local and long-distance calling.
- Verizon: 1-800-483-4000. Verizon offers multilingual customer service in Spanish, Mandarin, Korean, and Vietnamese.
- Grande Communications: This company has very limited service in the San Antonio area. Check their website to confirm you are in their service area. Call 210-320-4600.

International Calling

It may be cheaper to use Skype or a calling card purchased online or at a local store.

A calling card will allow you to use any phone to make an international call. CallingCard.com will allow you to compare rates and purchase online. Many San Antonio stores sell international calling cards, including Wal-Mart, Dollar General and Target.

Cable Only

DirectDigital TV: This service requires a Dish and receivers. Check out their website for special offers.

Other providers listed above also will sell cable services separately, if you choose not to use Internet or telephone service.

HOUSING

On Campus

There are several on-campus living facilities, including Laurel Village, Chaparral Village, Chisholm Hall and University Oaks. Visit UTSA Student Housing for more information about student housing available on campus.

Off Campus

You may choose to live off-campus. There are currently no restrictions on where UTSA students may live. There are several apartment complexes and communities close to the UTSA campuses and accessible by shuttle, VIA city bus or car.

GAS, ELECTRIC, TRASH AND WATER SERVICES

If you live in a house or an off-campus apartment, you may have to arrange for the following services:

Gas and Electric Services

City Public Service, also known as CPS: (210) 353-2222

CPS is the energy company that you need to call to turn on your electric and gas service in San Antonio.

Water Services

San Antonio Water System, also known as SAWS: 210-704-SAWS. SAWS provides water and sewer services.

Laundry

Many dorms, apartments and houses in San Antonio provide a washing machine and dryer.

Some laundry tips:

Most washing machines have three temperatures

- Hot – for whites and very dirty clothes
- Cold – for delicate clothing and clothing that has dye that may wash out in warmer water temperatures
- Warm – for everything else!

Drying machines have three temperatures:

- Normal – for regular clothes and towels
- Permanent Press – to reduce the wrinkles in clothes
- Low – for delicate clothes

On-Campus Facilities

There are laundry facilities available for students living on campus. If you live in Chaparral Village, there are five laundry facilities; one is located in each of the neighborhood centers. University Oaks offers three laundry facilities, and Chisholm Hall offers four – one on each floor!

Off-Campus Facilities

There are private laundry facilities, also called Laundromats, all over San Antonio. These facilities require coins to use the washers and dryers.

Here is a partial listing:

Kwik Wash Laundry

8810 Huebner Rd., San Antonio, TX.

(210) 696-6883

Kwik Wash Laundry

12831 Cogburn, San Antonio, TX.

(210) 697-9200

Pilgrim Launderers & Cleaners

11703 Huebner Rd., San Antonio, TX.

(210) 561-2282

MONEY AND BANKING

Currency Exchange

You will not find a currency exchange at the airport.

You must go to local banks to exchange money; however, not all banks will change money for you.

Here is a list of some banks that will exchange currency:

- Bank of America: For account holders only.
- Chase Bank: For account holders only.
- Citibank: For account holders only.
- IBC Will only exchange Mexican Pesos and Euros.

Banking

You also will want to establish an account at a local bank. This will allow for an easy transfer of funds and access to a checking account/debit card.

Banks will allow international students to open an account as long as they can provide two forms of ID.

Valid ID includes:

- Passport
- Visa
- Credit card
- Drivers license (U.S. or international)
- Your student ID.

You should not need a Social Security number to open a bank account.

In order to transfer money into your bank account, you should contact the bank to discuss wire transfer options. There is a small charge to have money wired into your account.

There are many options available:

Credit Human

12840 IH-10 West & DeZavala Road, Suite #102
San Antonio, Texas 78230
1-800-234-7228 or 210-258-1234
E-mail: sacu@sacu.com
www.sacu.com

Chase Bank

10999 IH-10 West, Suite #100
San Antonio, Texas 78230
210-691-8200
www.chase.com

Bank of America

5403 DeZavala Road
San Antonio, Texas 78249
210-561-3350
www.bankofamerica.com

BBVA Compass

15900 West Cantera Parkway
San Antonio, Texas 78256
210-641-0013
www.bbvacompass.com

Citibank

15900 La Cantera Parkway, Building 18
San Antonio, Texas 78256
1-800-627-3999
www.citibank.com

IBC Bank (Located Downtown)

130 East Travis Street
San Antonio, Texas 78205
210-518-2500
www.ibc.com

IBC Bank

15900 West Cantera Parkway
San Antonio, Texas 78256
210-354-6934
www.ibc.com

Security Service Federal Credit Union (SSFCU)

9253 North Loop 1604 West (off Bandera Road)
San Antonio, Texas 78249
210-476-4000
www.ssfcu.org

Security Service Federal Credit Union (SSFCU)

12707 IH-10 West (off DeZavala Road)
San Antonio, Texas 78230
Telephone: 210-476-4000
www.ssfcu.org

Credit Human has ATM (automated teller machines) located throughout campus.

TRANSPORTATION

Public Transportation

If you don't have a car, you should familiarize yourself with [VIA Metropolitan Transit](#), also known as VIA. This local bus service is **free for all students** and will help you maneuver your way around the city. You can go online and look at bus schedules.

You also can even use the [Trip Planner](#) to find out which route you should take to get to your destination.

DRIVERS LICENSE

For information on how to obtain permission to drive in the State of Texas, see the Texas Department of Public Safety website.

Generally, a person 18 to 75 years of age, with a valid out-of-country driver's license in their possession, may drive a private, non-commercial motor vehicle for up to one year from their date of entry into the United States - if their home country has reciprocity with the U.S.

You must be able to prove that you reside in Texas and that you have lived here for at least 30 days. You must prove your residency using two documents that contain your name and residential address. Acceptable documents are listed on the Texas Department of Public Safety website.

You also should call or email the Texas Department of Public Safety License Issuance Office at 512-424-2600 (English) or 512-424-7181 (Spanish) or by e-mail at license.issuance@txdps.state.tx.us to verify that your license has reciprocity in the U.S.

If you are a holder of a valid foreign drivers license and want to obtain a Texas driver's license, you must take and pass all required tests-vision, driver knowledge and driving and maneuverability.

This handout offers instructions for students and scholars interested in obtaining a Texas driver's license.

License Issuance
(210) 531-1000
7410 Huebner Rd.
San Antonio, TX 78240
license.issuance@txdps.state.tx.us

OWNING AN AUTOMOBILE

To drive a car in the United States, you must have a valid U.S. driver's license or another driver's license that is recognized by U.S. authorities. If you have an international driver's license, be aware that it is only valid for one year and must be shown with your valid home country driver's license.

To obtain a Texas driver's license you must pass both a written and a driving examination.

A learner's permit allows beginners to practice driving with a licensed driver in the car.

Automobile Purchases

Buying an automobile requires experience and knowledge. Whether you look at a car dealership, or answer an advertisement by a private seller, take the automobile to a mechanic and have him or her examine it. This can help you to avoid making a bad purchase.

If you decide to buy a car:

- Make sure that the Certificate of Ownership or Title is transferred to you from the previous owner. Inspect the Certificate of Title to the vehicle to determine the actual owners, the lien holders to be paid-off at the time of the sale.
- Take the vehicle to a mechanic for a complete inspection to determine if any repairs will be necessary and to see whether the vehicle has had extensive body repairs after an incident. Make sure that you register the car within 10 days after purchase.
- **REMEMBER:** You must have liability automobile insurance before driving the car.
- If you do not have a written warranty, you probably purchased the vehicle in "as is" condition without any warranty. Once you complete the transaction the seller will not reimburse you for repairs after the sale, or refund your purchase money if you find problems with the vehicle.

State safety inspection laws require that the automobile be inspected once a year at a DPS approved Official Inspection Station. These usually are gasoline stations or automobile repair garages. There is a fee which varies by type of vehicle and home address for the inspection. Once the vehicle passes inspection, an inspection sticker is placed on the inside of the front windshield on the driver's side. The large number on the sticker tells you what month to have your car inspected each year.

License plates are required on the front and back of your car to identify the car as yours.

The police will give you a ticket if you drive any vehicle which does not have liability insurance, current registration and an inspection certificate. Remember you also need a driver's license.

When you sell your vehicle to an individual, do not accept either a personal check or payment plan.

Financial Responsibility in Case of Accident

If you are in any accident involving you as an operator or owner of the automobile in which any person (including yourself) is injured, or in which there is at least \$500 in property damage, you should follow the guidelines for reporting an accident (Found in your DPS Driver's Handbook). You should also contact an International Student Advisor.

In any accident, regardless of the amount of damage, be sure that you and the other person involved in the accident exchange the following information:

1. Phone numbers
2. Names
3. Addresses
4. Name of automobile owner's insurance company and insurance policy number. This is extremely important.

Auto Insurance

Insurance can be obtained from many insurance companies. Look in the Yellow Pages under "Insurance." All rates in Texas are about the same for the same risk classification and types of coverage.

There are three types of automobile insurance:

1. Accidental – pays for damage to your automobile when you have an accident.
2. Comprehensive – insures against many kinds of damage that occur to your car (e.g. a tree falls on it, vandalism, etc.).
3. Liability – pays for injury, loss of life, and damage to other cars or property caused by your automobile.

State law makes the owner (not necessarily the driver) subject to high losses if his/her automobile causes injury, loss of life, or property damage. Protect yourself! Be very careful about allowing others to drive your car. Be sure the person has auto insurance.

Secure at least the minimum amount of liability insurance required by the State Financial Responsibility Law. This coverage includes:

- \$20,000 for bodily injury or death for one person
- \$40,000 for bodily injury or death for two persons
- \$15,000 for property damage.

Cost to you will vary because of age and driving experience, but it is usually \$500 or more per year.

PERSONAL SAFETY

The University of Texas at San Antonio [Campus Police website](#) offers many tips for staying safe. Pay attention to the [UTSA Campus Alert](#) system for recent postings on crime and weather closures.

RELIGION

The United States embraces the right of freedom of religion. You should be able to worship as you choose while at UTSA. There are also several faith-based student groups on campus.

SAN ANTONIO AREA

There are many things to do in and around San Antonio. The [San Antonio Chamber of Commerce](#) website has information for those who want to explore the city and its many cultural, sporting, and fun offerings.

Other options:

- La Cantera Mall, within walking distance of Main Campus
- The Rim, shopping, restaurants and the Santikos Palladium movie theater
- Six Flags Fiesta Texas, amusement park
- Many museums
- The Riverwalk and downtown San Antonio
- Day trips to local Hill Country communities
- North Star Mall

U.S. CULTURE AND CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

In the Classroom

- In the U.S., it is acceptable to ask questions or discussions with your professors.
- Some professors view class participation as part of the course grade.
- If you do not understand the course material, it is acceptable to meet with the professor during office hours. You should not be afraid to ask for help.
- Due dates for assignments are firm. You must hand in the assignment by that date to receive full credit.
- If you know you will miss a due date, you should explain to your professor as soon as possible and try to work out an arrangement that is agreeable. Some professors will try to help you; others might be more firm in their due date requirements.
- Time management is an important skill to learn.
- Critical thinking must be learned. You should not copy answers from the Internet.
- Independent thinking is valued in U.S. culture.
- Presenting ideas clearly and in a well-thought-out manner is valued.
- U.S. students can be competitive.
- Treat all students equally.
- Informality is normal.
- Friendship is based on similar interests and doing things in common – sports, movies, studying.

Interacting with Americans

- Americans are very informal in dress and social interactions. American students wear jeans and T-shirts and carry backpacks.
- People call each other by their first names; it is a sign of mutual respect, open dialogue and intellectual exchange.
- Use titles for professors and those in authority until asked otherwise (Professor/Doctor/Mr./Mrs./Ms.).
- Americans place a high value on time. They do not like to wait. It is considered rude to be late; if you will be late to a social engagement, call or text to let others know and give an explanation.
- Americans value hard work.
- Americans view themselves as individuals with freedom and responsibility to manage their own lives.
- Americans are not always comfortable being obligated or dependent on others.
- Americans value personal space. We tend to stand about two or three feet apart when talking to each other. We might move back if we feel another person is too close.
- Americans tend to make eye contact when speaking. This is seen as showing you are truthful and trustworthy.
- Americans are very direct. We do not guard our emotional responses, as some other cultures do.
- Watch how Americans say something: You can learn how we feel about a subject by the tone of our voice, our facial expressions, or our hand gestures.
- If you are invited to someone's home for a party or dinner, it is appropriate to let the host know if you will attend. This is called RSVP (please respond). You do not have to bring a gift, but flowers or other small items are appropriate if you want to gift your host/hostess.
- It is appropriate to let your host know if you have certain foods you cannot eat.
- Americans like to look and smell good and be "germ-free". Some Americans might react negatively to those who do not bathe frequently, use deodorant, or regularly wash their clothing.

Regional Phrases and Slang

You will find that U.S. citizens have many regional phrases and use slang. Sometimes there is no direct translation. Some English words have multiple slang definitions. Context is important!

Here are some slang dictionaries that might be helpful:

[Online Slang Dictionary](#)



Dealing with Organizations

- Be respectful.
- Remember that in the U.S., rules are followed. Procedures and paperwork are not negotiable.
- It is more effective to explain exactly what you need and what kind of problem you have been having, and ask, "What do I do now?"
- If you follow procedures and instructions carefully, a lot of time and energy can be saved.
- If you aren't sure, ask.
- Take the names and phone numbers of those who were able to help you, in case there is a delay or problem and you need more help.

Adjustment/Culture Shock

Culture shock is a physical and psychological reaction that comes from changes to your everyday routine.

Almost everyone who moves to another country will experience some culture shock.

It is a natural process and nothing to be ashamed of.

The stages are

- **Pre-departure Anxiety:** This happens in your home country, before you leave. You will experience a gradual increase in your emotional excitement.
- **The Honeymoon:** The first reaction to a new culture is often euphoric. The differences in scenery, food, language or dialect are very exciting.
- **Initial Culture Shock:** This is where excitement turns into frustration. It is difficult to communicate. You can't find your favorite foods. You miss family and friends.
- **Surface Adjustment:** You have settled into a new routine. You are registered for classes and you've started meeting people, some with similar interests.
- **Deep Culture Shock:** There may be unresolved differences between American culture and your home culture.

Physical symptoms

1. Fear of physical contact with the host national
2. Health and safety are over-stressed
3. Absentmindedness
4. Crave food from home
5. Use alcohol or drugs to cope
6. Work declines in quality
7. Unsuccessful performance of daily tasks
8. Fatigue

Psychological symptoms

1. Anxiety and irritability
2. Frustration and disorientation
3. Rejection of others from host country
4. Hostility toward host country
5. Excessive fear of being robbed, cheated or injured
6. Fear of physical contact with the host national
7. Health and safety are over-stressed
8. Absentmindedness
9. Crave food from home
10. Use alcohol or drugs to cope
11. Work declines in quality
12. Unsuccessful performance of daily tasks
13. Fatigue
14. Misinterpretation of others' gestures and body language
15. Self-doubt
16. Aggressive attitude
17. Mood swings
18. Feeling of helplessness
19. Feeling of being rejected

Adaption and Adjustment: This requires the ability to know yourself well and know the ways of the culture and its expectations for you. You might be challenged to learn new concepts and ideas. Keep an open mind and it will help you adapt in this new culture.

What can I do about culture shock? Do not isolate yourself. You are not alone. Go out with friends or classmates. Do things socially beyond studying. See a counselor in International Student Services or UTSA's Student Counseling Services if you feel overwhelmed.

Culture Shock Survival Tips

- Avoid isolation. Talk to others.
- Keep in touch with home. Use e-mail, texting and social networking sites to stay in touch with family and friends at home.
- Keep your sense of humor.
- Withhold judgment on something until you understand it.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions if you do not understand something
- Do things you enjoy doing to relax: Paint, read, exercise, play music
- Seek help if you need it from family, friends, your host family, academic advisors, International Student Services, your professors, or UTSA Student Counseling Services.

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

A Social Security Number is a nine-digit number issued to those who are authorized to work in the United States. Its primary purpose is to report wages to the U.S. government for taxation purposes. Only those F-1 and J-1 visa students who are authorized to work can apply for an SSN. International faculty, staff and scholars at UTSA on a J-1, TN, O-1, E-3 visas may also need a Social Security Number.

Documentation Required for SSN Application

All F-1 and J-1 visa students

Are required to provide the following items to the Social Security Administration when applying for a Social Security Number:

- A completed Social Security application form (Form SS-5). This can be filled out at the Social Security office, or it can be downloaded and completed in advance. Copies of the Social Security application can also be obtained at the Office of International Programs front desk
 - In order to complete '#5' on the application, please consider the following:
 - If you check "Legal Alien Allowed to Work" you must provide a valid Form I-20 or DS-2019 as proof that you are eligible for employment. If you do not possess one of these documents, you may provide a valid Employment Authorization Document (also known as an 'EAD card'). It is best to take a copy of your employment letter with you at the time you apply for the SSN.
 - If you check "Legal Alien Not Allowed to Work" or "Other," you must provide a document from a U.S. Federal, State, or local government agency that explains why you need a Social Security number and that you meet all the requirements for the government benefit. NOTE: Most agencies do not require that you have a Social Security number.
 - A letter from the employer (for F-1/J-1 visa students ONLY)
 - The letter must be signed and dated by the supervisor or a person who has hiring authority in the department in case of an on-campus job
 - The letter must include required details about the job. The template below should be printed on letterhead.
 - Letter of Hiring (fillable format, PDF)
 - Letter of Hiring (for handwritten completion, MS Word)
 - **If you are a student:** A letter from International Student Services, which verifies good immigration status and full-time enrollment for the current semester, can be requested after you register for classes.

- **If you are a J-1 Scholar:** A letter from International Scholar Services to verify immigration status and employment at UTSA. This letter is provided to you during J-1 Scholar Orientation.
- I-94
- I-20 or DS-2019

Take all required documents and copies of documents with you to the Social Security Administration office.

All TN and H-1B visa holders

Are required to provide the following items to the Social Security Administration when applying for a Social Security Number:

- A completed Social Security application form (Form SS-5). This can be filled out at the Social Security office, or it can be downloaded and completed in advance. Copies of the Social Security application can also be obtained at the Office of International Programs front desk
 - In order to complete '#5' on the application, please consider the following:
 - If you check "Legal Alien Allowed to Work" you must provide a valid Form I-20 or DS-2019 as proof that you are eligible for employment. If you do not possess one of these documents, you may provide a valid Employment Authorization Document (also known as an 'EAD card'). It is best to take a copy of your employment letter with you at the time you apply for the SSN.
 - If you check "Legal Alien Not Allowed to Work" or "Other," you must provide a document from a U.S. Federal, State, or local government agency that explains why you need a Social Security number and that you meet all the requirements for the government benefit. NOTE: Most agencies do not require that you have a Social Security number.
- USCIS approval notice, if applicable
- Visa
- Passport
- If you are a J-1 Scholar: A letter from International Scholar Services to verify immigration status and employment at UTSA. This letter is provided to you during J-1 Scholar Orientation.

All J-1 Scholars

Are required to provide the following items to the Social Security Administration when applying for a Social Security Number:

- A completed Social Security application form (Form SS-5). This can be filled out at the Social Security office, or it can be downloaded and completed in advance. Copies of the Social Security application can also be obtained at the Office of International Programs front desk
 - In order to complete '#5' on the application, please consider the following:
 - If you check "Legal Alien Allowed to Work" you must provide a valid Form I-20 or DS-2019 as proof that you are eligible for employment. If you do not possess one of these documents, you may provide a valid Employment Authorization Document (also known as an 'EAD card'). It is best to take a copy of your employment letter with you at the time you apply for the SSN.
 - If you check "Legal Alien Not Allowed to Work" or "Other," you must provide a document from a U.S. Federal, State, or local government agency that explains why you need a Social Security number and that you meet all the requirements for the government benefit. NOTE: Most agencies do not require that you have a Social Security number.
- USCIS approval notice, if applicable
- Visa
- Passport
- A letter from International Scholar Services to verify immigration status and employment at UTSA. This letter is provided to you during J-1 Scholar Orientation.

Directions to Local Offices

Please see Directions and Maps for information on the locations of Social Security Administration offices. After you apply for your Social Security Number, you will receive a temporary card to take to your employer. You will receive your Social Security Card in the mail approximately two weeks after you file your application for the card.