

INCOMING EXCHANGE STUDENTS HANDBOOK



Office of International Programs and
Study Abroad

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Welcome Exchange Students to UTEP

The Office of International Programs and Study Abroad (OSA) welcomes you to the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) and the city of El Paso. The OSA works with incoming exchange students studying at UTEP for a semester or year from our Exchange Partner Universities. We are here to help you meet your academic goals, get settled in your new home in El Paso, and support you throughout your time at USA. Please keep us in the loop of your whereabouts!

In the meanwhile, read this information to help you prepare for your study abroad experience.

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OTHER IMPORTANT CONTACTS

UTEP Counseling Center

202 Union West
El Paso, Texas 79968
t: (915) 747-5302

UTEP Police Department

24/7 Emergency and Non-Emergency calls
t: (915) 747-5611

Lost and Found

t: (915)747-6640
e: lostandfound@utep.edu

Crime Prevention

t:(915)747-6640
e: police@utep.edu

UTEP Student Health Center

Union East Ste. 100
t: 915.747.5624 (primary)
t: 915.747.6545 (secondary)



911

THE UNIVERSITY

The University of Texas at El Paso is forging dramatic new directions in higher education. UTEP has become a national model for creating and successfully executing highly competitive academic and research programs while maintaining a deep commitment to serving a 21st century student demographic. It is this dedication to providing access and excellence to students in its region that has resulted in UTEP becoming the only research doctoral university in the United States with a Mexican-American majority student population.

CAMPUS SETTING

Unique in campus architectural styles, UTEP's facilities were inspired by buildings in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan. The 420-acre campus is bustling with growth, including the recent completion of a number of such significant construction and renovation projects as new state-of-the-art facilities in chemistry, computer science, engineering, health sciences, and nursing, and a major pedestrian-friendly transformation of the campus core. Recent construction is also enhancing quality of life by adding student housing, parking garages, and an expanded swimming and fitness center.

In addition to housing more than 800,000 volumes, 260,000 government documents, 71,000 electronic journals, and 1.6 million microforms, the Library offers a rich array of learning spaces and support services.

The UTEP campus also offers rich cultural resources including museums and galleries, a Chihuahua Desert garden, a cinema and numerous musical and theatre performance spaces, as well as outstanding sports and recreational facilities.

Its 12,200-seat Don Haskins Center and 52,000-seat Sun Bowl serve as venues for both UTEP women's and men's intercollegiate athletics teams and major regional entertainment programming, ranging from Cirque de Soleil to Elton John to the Rolling Stones. UTEP Miner athletics are an important part of campus culture and community pride. UTEP competes in NCAA Division I-A as a member of Conference-USA. UTEP has won numerous national championships in track and field and remains the only university in Texas to win an NCAA Men's Basketball Championship. In that 1966 championship game an all African-American Miner starting lineup faced the renowned Kentucky Wildcats, and their victory forever changed the face of intercollegiate athletics. The story of this major milestone in NCAA history was captured in a popular Hollywood film, *Glory Road*.

UTEP is an urban university located in El Paso, Texas, a growing community of 750,000 which, together with Ciudad Juárez, Mexico forms the world's largest bi-national metropolitan area, totaling 2.5 million residents. El Paso's attractive and affordable living conditions and broad range of unique cultural and intellectual options, and the surrounding region's beautiful mountain desert terrain, abundant sunshine and outdoor recreational opportunities, combine to offer a highly satisfying quality of life.

LUGGAGE

Make sure to check the airline policies and guidelines (found on their websites) for luggage policies and weight limits. Usually, you are allowed to check one large suitcase (approximately 30") and to carry-on one smaller suitcase (20" or less) or bag as well as a personal item, such as a laptop bag, purse, etc. Some airlines charge for a second checked bag.

Remember if you are taking two different flights (booked separately), you will have two different sets of baggage policies; most low cost international airlines have much stricter baggage restrictions.

Before you check-in your luggage, remember to take off any old baggage claim tags. Also, you should make your luggage distinguishable from others (stickers, ribbons, etc.). Most travelers use standard black suitcases, which all look the same.

Double check that you collect the right luggage at Baggage Claim. You do not want to end up with someone else's suitcase.

It is recommended that you submit your cell-phone number at the time of your ticket purchase or in your flight account settings before the date of your flight; this will allow you to receive instant notifications on the status of your flight. Make sure to confirm your flight is on time before you depart for the airport.

Try to get a good night sleep before your flight. Leaving home well rested can help minimize the stress of traveling.

Dress comfortably for the long flights. Bring a sweater or jacket and socks to wear because it is usually very cold on long international flights.

If possible check-in within 24 of your departure time. You should arrive at the airport at least two hours before your flight departs, with a printed itinerary on hand.

While at the airport, keep close eye on your bag so that your items do not get stolen. Do not accept any items from strangers to carry on board the plane– this is a serious safety issue.

PACKING FOR EL PASO

DON'T OVERPACK! All returning study abroad alumni complain about bringing too much luggage. You will always return from a study abroad program with more things that you left with (ex: souvenirs).

On average, there are 297 sunny days per year in El Paso, Texas. The July high is around 96 degrees. The January low is 30 Fahrenheit.

We recommend you pack light and bring mainly neutral colored clothes, as you will have an easier time matching outfits and getting ready for the day. If you are coming during the winter bring a good jacket. Additionally, dress code at UTEP is informal, however, we recommend you pack one formal attire for presentations or especial events.

Don't forget, you will walk a LOT! El Paso has great mountains for hiking. Therefore, it is a good idea to pack comfortable shoes (make sure to break them in before you depart).

Make sure you pack all of your valuable items, such as electronics and medicine, in your carry-on luggage so you can keep them with you at all times. Your carry-on should also include your passport, visa, acceptance letter, housing information, contact information of university/program director & state-side emergency contact and your Emergency Action Plan.

Be prepared for the unexpected and pack an extra outfit in your carry-on in case your luggage arrives after you do. If you pack toiletries in your carry-on, they must all fit in quart-size bag and be 3.4 ounces or less.

Make sure to make copies of your important documents (e.g. passport, visa, insurance documents, credit cards, prescriptions). Leave a copy with family, and bring a copy with you abroad. It is also recommended you email a copy to yourself. Pack a small first aid kit, and extra pair of glasses or contact lenses.

Upon your arrival, you will receive a school package with basic school supplies. You do not need to bring them from home.

STUDY ABROAD TRANSITION TIPS

1. Know Your Destination
 - Understanding something about where you are going is guaranteed to assist you in being accepted.
2. Prepare to be understood and to understand

- It is not just *what* you know that is important but *how* you communicate.
- 3. Learn the Language
- 4. Learn Why Culture Matters
 - Understanding something about how cultures work, the logic behind their behavior, and the values that inform their actions will go a long way in helping you to adjust overseas.
- 5. Get the Logistical and Practical Arrangements Settled
 - Nothing is a worse beginning to a study abroad than the anxiety of where to eat, sleep, bathe, use the facility, take classes, and how to get around.
- 6. Find a Mentor
- 7. Stay Curious
- 8. Watch for Culture Shock
- 9. Keep a journal or notebook
- 10. Chill out
 - Be as non-judgmental as you can while, being as open to new ideas and experiences as you dare. If you need some quiet time and privacy, take it!

LANGUAGE

Although English is the official language in USA, in El Paso, you will see that many also speak Spanish.

Language acquisition is one of the key benefits of studying abroad. There are many benefits to being multilingual including better brain functionality, increased ability to multitask, and more rational decision-making. Also, individuals who speak more than one language can expect to earn a higher salary compared to those who only speak one language.

Learning a language abroad can be fun and challenging. You could enroll in a language class at the university. You could also make friends with local students, and encourage them to speak to you in their native language and correct your mistakes.

Key words or phrases include:

ENGLISH

- Hello / Goodbye
- Please / Thank you
- I am sorry / Excuse me
- My name is...
- Do you speak English?
- Where is the bathroom?
- I do not understand
- I do not speak...
- How much does this cost?

SPANISH

- Hola / Adios
- Gracias / Por favor
- Lo siento / Compermisio
- Me llamo...
- ¿Habla Inglés?
- ¿Dónde está el baño?
- No entiendo
- No hablo...
- ¿Cuánto cuesta?

Additionally, useful language tools and technology are available for you to utilize.

FOREIGN ACADEMIC SYSTEMS

KEYS TO SUCCESS ABROAD

Make sure you introduce yourself to your professors at the beginning of the semester. Tell them that you are a study abroad student.

You should connect with other students in your classes. Meeting local students would be advantageous because they would have a better understanding of the academic system. Forming a study group would be a great way to learn the material and make friends.

Do not wait until the end of the semester to begin studying for your final exam or completing your final project. You will want to enjoy the last few weeks abroad, and will not want to be stressed and overwhelmed with studying and projects. It is recommended that you read, review your notes daily, or prepare for your final project.

If you encounter academic difficulty, you should email or meet with the professor to ask for guidance or assistance. Additionally, you can speak with your on-site resident director or international office staff to see if there are tutoring options available.

It is important for you to know the effects of dropping or failing a class while studying abroad. If you drop a class abroad, you will not be enrolled fulltime, which can cause you to be out of status with your student visa.

It is important to determine what the professor's policies on having food and drinks or using technology during class.

The relationships between professors and students are formal in the U.S. For example, professors should be address using their appropriate title: Dr. Mr. Mrs. Miss, etc. Always ask before making any assumptions.

TRANSCRIPTS

At the end of your program, you should request your transcript to be sent to your home university. Please verify with OSA before your departure.

Keep in mind that it may take several weeks or months after your program ends for your transcript to arrive.

THINGS TO DO

There are a lot of events happening at El Paso during the year! We recommend the following websites:

- www.utepspecialevents.com
- utep.edu/rsd/
- www.studentlife.utep.edu/events.html
- www.visitelpaso.com/events
- www.downtownelpaso.com/events
- www.elpaso411.com
- www.allevents.in
- www.elpaso.eventful.com
- www.epscene.com
- www.elpasolive.com
- www.eventbrite.com/d/tx--el-paso/events/
- www.whatsuppub.com/features/calendar/
- www.guestlife.com
- www.elpasotimes.com/entertainment/
- www.elpasoproud.com/calendar
- www.kisselpaso.com/

HAVE FUN IN COLLEGE!

Managing your money responsibly doesn't mean you can't have fun while you are in college. There are many activities on the UTEP campus that you can enjoy for free. The fees you pay with your tuition are used to provide you with a fun college experience. Get involved on campus and take advantage of all the activities. The Union Cinema offers great movies; hang out with friends in the Bhutan Lounge or; navigate the internet in the new Miners Lounge. You can have a picnic with friends on the campus lawn or show your school spirit and cheer in the Sun Bowl stadium. Enjoy a **concert**, **play**, or recital. Experience world cultures by visiting a **museum**, **gallery**, or tasting world cuisine at the International Food Fair. **Take some advice from other UTEP students about having fun in college – on a budget!**

EXPLORE FUN ACTIVITIES ON CAMPUS

Most activities are free for students!

- Go see a movie at the Union Cinema
- Make some noise at a Miners game
- Attend a lecture series
- Get in shape at the Recreational Sports Center
- Share coffee with friends at the Library or Union
- Attend a recital or concert
- Enjoy music at the Music Café on the Union Plaza
- Relax and picnic on the campus lawns
- Attend Minerpalooza (August 31st, 2018)
- Join a student club
- Take a rafting or hiking trip with recreational sports
- Play video games and pool in the Mine Shaft
- See a play at the UTEP Dinner Theater
- Attend a student forensic event

A NIGHT OUT ON A BUDGET-- If you must consume alcohol, drink responsibly!

- Be the designated driver
- Drink soft drinks instead of alcohol
- Look for drink specials or free admission
- Pile in one car and share the ride

DATING WITHOUT OVERSPENDING

- Go for a bike ride and share an ice cream cone
- Have a picnic instead of going out to eat
- Go hiking and watch the sunset
- Tour the holiday lights with a cup of hot chocolate

FUN WITH FRIENDS

- Get together for a game night at someone's house
- Rent movies for \$1 at Red Box
- Cook meals together or potluck
- Go sightseeing and take photos
- Scrapbook and blog

- Take a day-trip to a place near El Paso
- Go window shopping without your credit cards
 - **Sunland Park Mall**
750 Sunland Park Dr. El Paso, TX 79912
 - **Cielo Vista Mall**
8401 Gateway Blvd W, El Paso, TX 79925
 - **The Outlets Shoppes at El Paso**
7051 S Desert Blvd, Canutillo, TX 79835
- Join an intramural team
- Use coupons for restaurants, bowling, and movies
 - <http://elpaso411.com/category/el-paso-eats/>
 - #itsallgoodep
 - <https://foursquare.com/top-places/el-paso/best-places-happy-hour>
 - <https://www.groupon.com/local/el-paso/restaurants>

STRETCH YOUR DOLLAR

- Limit the number of drinks you buy at the club
- Leave your credit cards at home – use cash
- Limit clubbing to special occasions, not every weekend
- Go out for lunch or coffee instead of dinner
- See a matinee instead of an evening show
- Enjoy a UTEP event together
- Share the costs! Split the check!
- Create a home theater with a video player and projector
- Get together to watch a game on TV
- Enjoy the food and music at a local festival or fiesta
- Spend a day at the zoo
- Volunteer in the community
- Visit a museum or go to an outdoor concert
- Check the local newspaper for events that are free!
- Share an entrée or have an appetizer for a meal
- Pass on the expensive coffee drinks
- Get a bus pass – save on gas and parking
- Pack a lunch – it costs less than eating at a restaurant
- Recycle your water bottles
- Buy used books or share books with friends in the same class
- Ask yourself “Do I want this or do I need this?” before making a purchase. Only buy what you need
- Share clothes with friends and do your manicure at home – you look good girl!
- Buy classic styles rather than trendy clothes

WHERE TO GO?

Outdoors:

- **Scenic Drive**
 - Scenic Dr. 79902
 - Hours: 6:00am- 12:00am
- **San Jacinto Plaza- Downtown El Paso**
 - 201 E Main St, El Paso, TX 79901
 - <http://downtownelpaso.com>
- **Wyler Aerial Tramway**
 - 1700 McKinley El Paso, TX 79930
 - Hours: Call before visiting
 - Closed Monday through Thursday
 - Sunday: 10 am - 5 pm
 - Cost: \$8 per person
 - Phone: (915) 566-6622
- **Farmers Market**
 - 117 Anthony St, El Paso, TX 79901
 - Hours: Saturday 9:00am-1:00pm
- **Zoo**
 - 4001 E Paisano Dr, El Paso, TX 79905
 - Phone: (915) 212-0966
 - Hours: Sunday-Saturday 9:30am-5:00pm,
 - Cost: \$12 per person
 - <http://www.elpasozoo.org/>
- **Chamizal- Music under the stars**
 - Monday- Saturday 7:00am-10:00pm
 - 800 South San Marcial Street
 - El Paso TX 79905
- **Franklin Mountains State Park (Hiking)**
 - El Paso, TX 79930
 - <http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/franklin-mountains>

Indoors:

- **The El Paso Holocaust Museum**
 - 715 North Oregon, El Paso, TX 79902
 - Phone: (915) 351-0048
 - Entrance Fee: Free
 - <http://www.elpasoholocaustmuseum.org>
- **Museum of Art**
 - Arts Festival Plaza, El Paso, TX 79901
 - Phone: (915) 212-0300
 - Hours: Tuesday -Saturday: 9am-5pm
 - Thursdays:9am-9pm | Sunday 12pm-5pm
 - Cost: Free

- <http://www.elpasoartmuseum.org/>
- **Plaza Theater**
 - 125 Pioneer Plaza El Paso, TX 79901
 - Phone: (915) 534-0633
 - Entrance Fee: Visit Website
 - <http://elpasolive.com/venues/plazatheatre>
- **Alamo Draft House Cinema**
 - 250 East Montecillo Blvd El Paso, TX 79912
 - Phone: (915) 845-7469
 - Entrance Fee: Visit Website
 - <https://draffthouse.com/el-paso/theaters>

TRANSPORTATION

El Paso Sun Metro

Downtown Station

601 S Santa Fe St, El Paso, TX 79901

(915) 212-3333

- **Main route around UTEP**
 - Route 10
- **To Cielo Vista Mall**
 - Route 59
- **To Sunland Park**
 - Route 14
- **To The Outlets Shoppes at El Paso**
 - Route 17

UBER (Taxi)

- <https://get.uber.com/>

LYFT (Taxi)

- <https://www.lyft.com>

UTEP Bike-Share

- Oregon Street next to the Hilton Garden Inn
- IC-4 (red) parking lot north of the University Library

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN

All international students holding non-immigrant visas are eligible and are required to purchase this UT Student Health Insurance Plan. The Board of Regents has authorized the assessment of a health insurance fee to international students. International students are automatically enrolled into the Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP) and the cost of the insurance is added to the student account and paid through tuition.

There is the option of waiving the university provided health insurance plan. Proof of outside insurance must be provided in order to waive the health insurance fee on a student's account. The deadline to submit a waiver is census date, **NO EXCEPTIONS.**

Note: If the requirements are not met or proof of coverage is not submitted by the deadline, the insurance fee will not be waived and coverage through the UT Student Health Insurance Plan will remain in place. There will be no exceptions made if waiver is not submitted on time.

For more information visit: <https://www.utep.edu/human-resources/services/benefits/student-health-insurance-plan.html>

Or contact them at: hrs@utep.edu

HEALTH INFORMATION

Prior to departing for your study abroad experience, visit your primary care physician to discuss your travel plans. There are a number of important topics to cover.

VACCINATIONS

Ensure your routine vaccinations are current. Check the Center for Disease Control (<http://www.cdc.gov/>) website to get any recommended or required vaccinations. Obtain a copy of your up-to-date vaccination record and bring it with you. Plan early as it may take 6-8 weeks to get all recommended vaccinations.

PRESCRIPTION MEDICINES

Talk to your doctor about how to maintain your supply of prescription drugs while you are abroad. You may not have access to the same medicines abroad. Also, many countries will not allow medicine or prescription drugs to be mailed. Customs will confiscate the items.

Bring copies of all your prescriptions with you. Keep your prescription medicine in the original packaging when traveling. Do not pack your medicine in your checked baggage; instead, put it in your carry-on.

SERIOUS MEDICAL CONDITIONS

If you have a serious medical condition, which may require treatment while abroad, secure a letter from your health care provider, which describes your situation, and outlines what steps to take if you experience any related symptoms while abroad. Let a trusted friend, your resident director, international office staff, or university health center to know about your condition, and any essential medicines you may need to take.

POTENTIAL MEDICAL ISSUES ABROAD

Be aware of the risks and causes of infections and conditions depending on your region of travel. Emerging infections and conditions change rapidly – www.CDC.gov/travel is a good resource to keep up to date.

HEALTHY LIVING WHILE ABROAD

There are a number of steps you can take to ensure you stay as healthy as possible while abroad.

- Wash your hands
- Eat a balanced diet (limit raw or undercooked food)
- Get plenty of sleep
- Exercise
- Stay hydrated
- Avoid high risk sexual behavior
- Consume alcohol responsibly
- Use sunscreen

BEFORE DEPARTING

Bring a copy of your vision prescription. Read and talk with others who have traveled about dealing with culture shock and homesickness. Think about the strategies you already use to deal with stress in your life. Talk with friends and family about how to stay in touch.

SAFETY ABROAD

The safety of our students is the utmost priority for The University of Texas at El Paso. For you, your own personal safety should be your number one priority as well. [El Paso is among the Best Places to Live in the nation, according to U.S. News and World Report rankings for 2017.](#) Unfortunately, it is not possible to predict any situations students may encounter while abroad; therefore, it is important for you to have the necessary information to make well-informed and responsible decisions while abroad.

Make sure to have access to contact information and phone numbers in case of an emergency.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF...?

- **My passport or wallet is stolen**

First step is to file a police report with the local authorities. To replace your passport, you will next need to contact the nearest Embassy or Consulate – specifically the Consular Section to report your passport lost or stolen. Make sure to provide the Consular Officer with a copy of your stolen or lost passport. Also, if your wallet is stolen, you will need to call the bank and cancel your credit or debit card(s). The phone number for the bank is found on the back of the card. Do not forget to make copies of your passport and credit or debit cards (front and back) and keep them in a safe place. Make sure to notify your family, your International Office staff, as well as, the UTEP Office of International Programs and Study Abroad of any issues related to theft or lost items.

- **I am a victim of rape or sexual assault**

UTEP encourages faculty, staff and students to report incidents of sexual violence including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking immediately so that appropriate support and assistance can be provided to you and to ensure the safety of the community. Please contact the Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinators who can assist you with reporting.

Please refer to UTEP Title IX website for additional information:

<http://www.utep.edu/titleix/FAQs.html>

- **I experience a severe medical emergency**

Contact your insurance provider *immediately*. Also, you (if possible) should contact your International Office staff and UTEP Office of International Programs and Study Abroad to inform them of the situation.

- **I am arrested**

Contact the nearest Embassy or Consulate. Your Embassy or Consulate staff can provide specific assistance if you have been arrested or incarcerated.

Also, you (if possible) should contact the your International Office staff and UTEP Office of International Programs and Study Abroad to inform them of the situation.

ROAD SAFETY

According to the Association of Safe International Road Travel (ASIRT - <http://www.asirt.org/>), road crashes are the leading cause of death and injury for healthy Americans traveling abroad. Young people, ages 15-24, are at greatest risk. You will more likely do not drive; however, it is important to be aware of road safety issues especially when planning long distance trips.

ASIRT suggests that students:

- Select the safest form of transportation in the area
- Avoid late night road travel in countries with poor safety records and/or mountainous terrain
- Understand how seasonal hazards affect road conditions
- Know the dates of local holidays (when road accident rates rise)
- Avoid riding with a driver who appears intoxicated, irrational, or over-tired
- Wear seat belts whenever possible

Here are some suggestions to stay safe while walking:

- Be aware of traffic patterns in your area (they may be very different from those in the U.S.)
- Be especially alert at intersections
- Wear reflective clothing if jogging at dusk or dawn (especially in locales where jogging may be uncommon)
- Do not walk where you cannot easily be seen
- Avoid hitchhiking
- Remember that most road fatalities are pedestrians

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

Alcohol

The legal age to consume alcohol in the USA is 21. It is important to consume alcohol in a responsible manner while participating in your Study Abroad program. Alcohol can decrease coordination and impair speech, memory, attention and judgment. Consuming too much alcohol can lead to serious accident or injuries and even death.

Please remember, the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures Section II: Student Affairs – Student Conduct and Discipline applies to you (website: <http://admin.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=30195>)

See section 1.2.1 *Who is Subject to Discipline*. It states: “Any student who engages in conduct that violates the Regents' Rules and Regulations, the U. T. System or University rules and regulations, specific instructions issued by an administrative official of the University or the U. T. System acting in the course of his or her authorized duties, or federal, state, or local laws is subject to discipline. A student is subject to discipline for prohibited conduct that occurs on or off campus, including but not limited to University or U.T. System sponsored off-campus activities such as field trips, internships, rotations, clinical assignments, practicum training, or student teaching, regardless of whether civil or criminal penalties are also imposed for such conduct.”

Additionally, section 1.2.4 entitled Health or Safety, states: “Any student who engages in conduct that endangers the health or safety of any person may be subject to discipline.”

Please note, if you consume alcohol in an irresponsible manner, which endangers the health or safety of any person (including themselves) that you will be subject to discipline by UTEP.

Drugs

DO NOT USE DRUGS. The consequences and penalties for illegal drug use are very severe. **Remember, ignorance of the laws is not an excuse.** You may face a serious penalty ranging from fines and jail time to years of hard labor or even the death penalty depending on the crime.

UTEP's Handbook of Operating Procedures also clearly states, in section 1.2.3 entitled *Drugs*, "Any student who is found responsible for the illegal use, possession and/or sale of a drug or narcotic is subject to discipline".

GENERAL SAFETY TIPS

Source: *It's Your World Handbook* by Bill Hoffa

- Be aware of your surroundings at all times. Don't wander through unfamiliar areas alone, and always remain alert.
- Read the local papers to find out where high crime areas are and whether civil unrest is brewing.
- Don't go out alone at night. Even when you're with friends, stick to well-lit streets where there are a lot of people.
- Don't attract attention to yourself with provocative or expensive clothing or boisterous conversation in public. Observe local students' behavior, and try to mimic it.
- Stay away from demonstrations or any kind of civil disturbances. Even innocent bystanders can be hurt or arrested.
- In general, avoid being engulfed in a crowd. This is the preferred environment of pickpockets.
- Protect your passport. Keep it with you, in a front pocket or your purse. Be careful when displaying it.
- Don't flash jewelry, expensive cameras, or electronic equipment.
- Use caution when walking or jogging. In certain areas, drivers may not expect anyone to be running along the road.
- Remain alert when walking. Before crossing streets, remember to look both ways; in some countries, traffic will be coming from the opposite direction from what you would expect.
- When crossing streets, keep in mind that pedestrians may not be given the right of way.
- Accidents can happen anywhere. If driving, know what local traffic laws are and follow them. Always use a seat-belt. Make sure you understand local road signs and signals.
- Before you travel from your program site, find out what methods of transportation are safest and whether any roads should be avoided.

- Use only official taxis. Unless meters are used, agree on the fare before you get in.
- Be careful with alcohol. If you drink, make sure it is only with people you know and trust, and designate one person to remain sober. Never drink and drive.

CULTURE, DEPRESSION AND STUDY ABROAD

WHAT IS CULTURE?

Culture is an invisible aspect of being in another country that, if misunderstood, could seriously affect how you enjoy your time overseas.

It does not necessarily mean the same thing as being a "cultured person" or possessing a taste for modern art, champagne, and opera.

Culture is comprised of all those things we learn as a part of growing up. It is made up of the things that we know to become a functioning member of that group. It is essentially a shared set of values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors which are widely held by members of a group.

Things like:

- Language
- Religion
- Beliefs about economic and social relations
- Political organization and legitimacy

As well as the thousands of "Do's and Don'ts" that society deems important.

CULTURE: THE ICEBERG

Culture has been aptly compared to an iceberg.

Just as an iceberg has a visible section above the water line, and a larger, invisible section below the water line, so culture has some aspects that are observable and others that can only be suspected, imagined, or intuited.

Studying abroad is an opportunity to experience something new and novel directly, and that is what makes study abroad so exciting.

In the course of encountering alternative ways to live life and solve problems, it is possible to experience tremendous intellectual and personal growth. Becoming skilled at functioning effectively in another country builds a capacity for making all kinds of transitions and for "cultural learning" generally.

Patterns are not only considered good and proper, but also natural and normal. This is why cultural matters are deeply rooted and intensely felt by members of a society.

Studying abroad, which promotes encountering cultural difference and, hopefully, crossing cultural boundaries, can be expected to be uncomfortable and even incomprehensible some of the time.

SYMPTOMS OF CULTURE SHOCK

- Extreme homesickness
- Feelings of helplessness/dependency
- Disorientation and isolation
- Depression and sadness
- Hyper-irritability, may include inappropriate anger and hostility
- Sleep and eating disturbances (too little or too much)
- Excessive critical reactions to host culture/stereotyping
- Excessive drinking
- Recreational drug dependency
- Extreme concerns over sanitation, safety (even paranoia), and being taken advantage of
- Loss of focus and ability to complete tasks

DEPRESSION

Depression is a depressive disorder, which is pervasive, persistent and has a wide range of symptoms.

Symptoms of Depression

- Negative views
- Worthlessness
- Incapacity
- Guilt
- Sleep disturbance
- Sadness; Crying; Depressed mood
- Loss of energy
- Impaired concentration
- Thoughts of death/suicide

Signs of Depression

- Impaired work ability
- Poor social functioning
- Psychomotor retardation
- Pessimism
- Better off dead
- Thoughts of suicide
- Suicide / action
- Fear / belief of bodily illness

Culture Shock versus Depression

It is important to understand that "culture shock" has a wide range of symptoms and that many people experience only mild annoyances and temporary dissatisfaction in the process of adjusting to life overseas.

Depression can be a profoundly disorienting experience and take much longer to recover from, particularly if those in the midst of the experience are unaware of the sources of the problem and have no idea of how to counteract it.

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH DEPRESSION

- Identify whether or not you have depression and seek help if necessary
- Take care of your body
- Maintain a good social support network
- Be around positive people
- Do fun or helpful activities
- Change negative thinking patterns
- Stay in touch with the Office of Study Abroad

CULTURE: THE BODY SPEAKS

Nonverbal communication carries as much or more information than a verbal message alone.

These nonverbal aspects carry significant messages, but often those messages are not clear.

There are five channels of nonverbal communication:

Touch – Usually in the USA you will see people greet someone by handshake; Mexican-American may kiss on the cheek or even hug you.

Eye Contact - Americans depend on direct eye contact as a sign of active listening. Without such connection they may feel that they are "out of contact" with the other person.

Gestures - Americans fall somewhere in the middle of the range so to them Italians may seem wildly expressive, while Japanese are perceived as "hard to read". While there are some universally understood gestures, there are many more which are highly localized.

Personal Space - Refers to the use of space in communication. All human beings are territorial to some degree and, although personal space is always context-sensitive and variable, group norms exist for all cultures. Interpersonal space in sitting, standing, and speaking have cultural meanings and may trigger intense emotional responses when violated. In the USA are in the middle of the range you are to be perceived as "a cold person" by standing too far away, or "threatening" (or even worse, romantic) by standing too close.

Regulators - Relate to the pace of verbal exchanges, "turn-taking," starting and/or completing the exchange, and "pauses," "silences," and "interruptions"

during conversation. All cultures have well-established patterns that are important to maintain a correct flow in a conversation. This can be very subtle, but when people are "out of sync," severe dislocation and miscommunication can occur. When they are excited, Americans are quick to interrupt another speaker, and often use a relatively direct communication style.

NEW CULTURES: COMMON REACTIONS

1. Arrival/Honeymoon Phase

Most travelers find the first few days or weeks in a new country an exhilarating experience. This stage will be brief, but can linger for a month or more when cultural differences begin to sink in.

2. Deepening Culture Shock

For most study abroad students, culture shock is a mild, transitory annoyance that can be overcome with relative ease through personal effort and increased knowledge and with the assistance of sympathetic friends and advisers. It rarely lasts more than a week.

3. Moving On and Adapting

Moving beyond culture shock and continuing to live and learn overseas puts you on the path to becoming intercultural fluent.

Becoming more deeply engaged with the local culture increases your level of intercultural adaptation and your ability to reach your goals. It also makes cultural learning more enjoyable, if not always easier.

Being aware of this cycle of cultural adjustment will allow you to better understand your reactions during your time abroad.

TRAVEL

You will likely travel in the USA. **ALWAYS let us know where you are going.**

Here are some tips for making your trip more enjoyable:

AIRFARE

Airlines use computer systems to adjust fares in real time, so it is important to check ticket prices early and often. You should delete the cookies in your browser before you search for flights.

It is important to compare price versus convenience when researching airfare. Sometimes, the most affordable flights have extremely long layovers. You also want to ensure that your flights arrive and depart from the same airport.

Studies show that optimum time to purchase plane tickets is either Tuesday afternoon (around 3:00 PM EST), Wednesday morning (around 1:00 AM EST) or during the day on Saturday or Sunday. The website, www.cheapair.com, provides suggestions as to when you should buy your ticket based on your destination.

- A ticket to Europe should be purchased 150 days prior to departure.
- A ticket to Asia should be purchased 129 days prior to departure
- A ticket to the South Pacific should be purchased 70 days prior to departure.
- A ticket to Latin America should be purchased 80 days prior to departure.

You should be as flexible as possible when purchasing your ticket. Avoid peak seasons such as Christmas, summer and holidays (both in the US and abroad) because ticket prices are usually higher. The best days to fly are Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday.

Purchasing a round-trip ticket is usually more affordable than purchasing two separate one-way tickets. If you do not know your exact return date, research the fees associated with changing your ticket. Some airlines charge a ticket change fee in addition to the difference in fare.

Additionally, purchasing a long-haul international flight in addition to a shorter international flight may seem like a cheaper alternative. However, luggage restrictions may be different and it could cost you a lot more in overweight baggage charges.

Additionally, check with your credit card to see if you have points or miles that you can use.

You can purchase your ticket through a travel agent or use an online search engine.

It may be beneficial to set-up a fare alert online to notify you when the price of the ticket drops.

STA Travel has a special program called "*Book Now, Pay Later*" in which you are able to pay a \$300 deposit to lock in the price of your ticket and pay for it seven days prior to departure. Visit the website for more information:
<http://www.statravel.com/airfare-deposit-program.htm>.

You may want to purchase trip insurance to cover trip cancellation, interruption, flight delays or lost baggage. There are a number of options to purchase travel

insurance online. Often airlines will offer travel insurance to be purchased alongside the airfare. Additionally, some credit cards offer basic insurance coverage for tickets purchased with the card.

HOUSING

STUDENT RESIDENCES

This option provides the opportunity for communal living with other international or local students. You will require a refundable security deposit, so it is important for you to check how you need to pay it.

- **Cost-** Even though, the Student Residences option is not always included in the program cost, it is still an affordable option. All of the rooms are already furnished and utilities are usually included in the housing charge. Additionally, meal plans are included in the Student Residence contracts.
- **Convenience-** Student Residences guarantee laundry facilities in each hall without having to walk outside the building. Also, the Student Residences are conveniently located usually within walking distance from the school or a 5-minute walk to a bus line.
- **Sense of Community-** Living in a dorm is a great opportunity for you to meet other students and develop close friendships. There may also be pre-arranged activities available through the dorm for you to learn more about the local city, country or culture.

For more information visit UTEP Residence Life website: <http://utep.edu/housing/>

UTEP Residence Life Front Desk

- Miner Village: **(915) 747-5352**
- Miner Heights: **(915) 747-6112**
- Miner Canyon: **(915) 747-6351**

CURRENCY AND BANKING ISSUES

Each country has its own currency and the exchange rates fluctuate daily. The value of the local currency against the US dollar can go up or down significantly and may affect your budget and financial planning. Regularly check online to see what the current exchange rate for the currency of your host country. A popular website to use is www.xe.com.

There are four main options for using money abroad: cash, ATM/debit cards, credit cards and traveler's checks.

CASH

It is important to remember that if cash is lost or stolen it is not usually recoverable. It is recommended to purchase \$50 - \$100 worth of local currency before departure for food, transportation or other needs upon arrival in your host country. Carry only as much cash as you need for a day. Extra cash should be kept in a secure location.

ATM Cards

This is the preferred method of accessing money for most who travel abroad. It is important for you to notify your bank that you will be studying abroad so that your card does not get canceled while you are overseas. ATMs provide favorable exchange rates but bank cards are debited in local currency so it is important be aware of current rates. Also, your home bank and the bank abroad may have a limit on the amount of money you can withdraw and/or charge you fees each time you use the ATM. Contact your bank to know what your withdrawal limit is and what fees you may incur using international ATMs. These fees can add up quickly so it maybe more reasonable to withdraw larger amounts less frequently than smaller amounts more frequently.

Make sure to make copies of the front and back of your ATM card and keep the copies in a safe place in case your card is lost or stolen.

International Banks

Some banks are international and have branches and ATMs worldwide. Two popular international banks are HSBC and Citibank. If you have an account at either of these banks, you can avoid ATM and bank fees. Also, Bank of America has partnerships with international banks in specific countries. If you have a Bank of America account, you can use these banks without incurring fees:

- Barclays (United Kingdom)
- BNL D'Italia (Italy)
- BNP Paribas (France)
- China Construction Bank (Mainland China)
- Deutsche Bank (Germany)
- Scotiabank (Canada, Peru, Chile and the Caribbean)
- Westpac Bank (Australia and New Zealand)

Wiring money

It is possible to transfer money from a bank or financial institution in the US to a bank or financial institution in the country in which you are studying. Wire transfers can take anywhere from 2 to 10 business days and fees may be incurred. There are many online websites that allow you to transfer money

internationally, however, there may fees and a less desirable exchange rate. Many banks also can transfer money internationally as well.

CREDIT OR DEBIT CARDS

Using a credit card is a secure way to access money abroad. The most widely accepted credit cards are Visa and MasterCard. When using your credit card abroad, you will be charged in the local currency and the credit card company will use the most current exchange rates. However, most credit card companies now charge an international transaction fee, which can be 2-3% of the purchase. Contact your credit card company to find out what the fee is.

It is possible to withdraw cash from an ATM with a credit card but the interest rate is very high and does not stop accruing until you have paid off the balance on your card. You will need to know the four-digit pin number.

It is important for you to notify your bank that you will be studying abroad so that your card does not get canceled while you are overseas. Make sure to make copies of the front and back of your ATM card and keep the copies in a safe place in case your card is lost or stolen.

Pre-paid debit or cards

It is possible to purchase prepaid debit or credit cards that you can load with a foreign currency normally at a favorable exchange rate. The cards may have fees when purchasing or loading them. Depending on the type of card, they can be used as traditional debit or credit cards.

TRAVELER'S CHECKS

Another, less popular, option for securing money abroad is traveler's check. They can be purchased in the foreign currency prior to travel. While abroad, they can be cashed at banks or exchange offices. Make sure to keep a copy of the traveler's checks so that they can be replaced if lost. Many locations no longer accept traveler's checks; therefore, this is not a recommended option.