



COLLEGE OF SCIENCE

DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY & BIOCHEMISTRY

# International Graduate Student Handbook





College of Science

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## El Paso, Texas – “The Sun City”

Located at the foot of the Franklin Mountains, El Paso is on the U.S./Mexico border, in the farthest western part of Texas. The population is 680,000+ and is the 22<sup>nd</sup> largest city in the United States. Just across the border in Mexico is Ciudad Juárez with a population of 1.4 million.

Located in the Chihuahuan Desert, El Paso enjoys, on average, 302 days of sunshine per year with hot summers, low humidity, and cool to mild dry winters.

Places of interest include Scenic Drive, Franklin Mountains State Park, the El Paso Museum of Art, the El Paso Zoo, and a number of historic and cultural sites and neighborhoods.

### Fast Facts

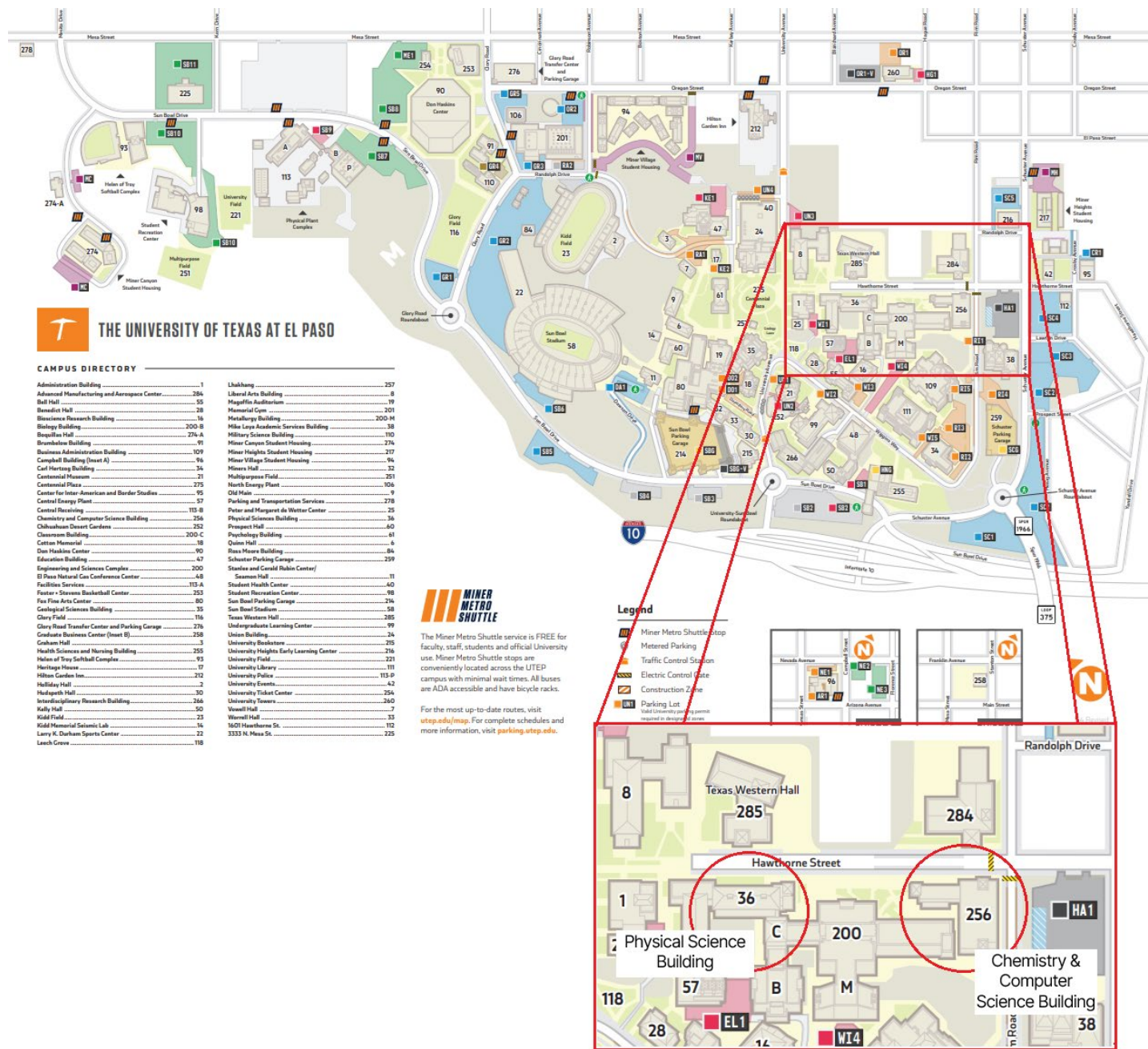
County:	El Paso
Elevation:	3,740 ft (1,140 m)
Incorporated:	1873
Time Zone:	Mountain Time Zone
Airport:	El Paso International Airport
Awards:	All-American City Award (2010, 2018)



# The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP)

UTEP is the second oldest institution in The University of Texas System. Officially opened in the fall of 1914 as the State School of Mines and Metallurgy, it has grown to a student population of more than 25,000 and a designation as an R1 university by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. UTEP is also among the top 10 universities in the country for improving the social mobility of its graduates.

## Campus Map





COLLEGE OF SCIENCE  
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY & BIOCHEMISTRY



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO  
CAMPUS DIRECTORY

Academic Advising Center .....	104
Administration Building .....	1
Bell Hall .....	55
Benedict Hall .....	28
Bioscience Research Building .....	16
Biology Building .....	200-B
Boaillas Hall .....	274-A
Brumelow Building .....	91
Business Administration Building .....	109
Campbell Building (Inset A) .....	96
Carl Hertzog Building .....	34
Centennial Museum .....	21
Centennial Plaza .....	275
Center for Inter-American and Border Studies .....	95
Central Energy Plant .....	57
Central Receiving .....	113-B
Chemistry and Computer Science Building .....	256
Chihuahuan Desert Gardens .....	252
Classroom Building .....	200-C
Cotton Memorial .....	18
Don Haskins Center .....	90
Education Building .....	47
Engineering and Sciences Complex .....	200
El Paso Natural Gas Conference Center .....	48
Facilities Services .....	113-A
Foster • Stevens Basketball Center .....	253
Fox Fine Arts Center .....	80
Geological Sciences Building .....	35
Glory Field .....	116
Glory Road Transfer Center and Parking Garage .....	276
Graduate Business Center (Inset B) .....	258
Graham Hall .....	3
Health Sciences and Nursing Building .....	255
Helen of Troy Softball Complex .....	93
Heritage House .....	17
Hilton Garden Inn .....	212
Holiday Hall .....	2
Honors House .....	43
Hudspeth Hall .....	30
Interdisciplinary Research Building .....	266
Kelly Hall .....	50
Key Shop/Hawthorne Building .....	73
Kidd Field .....	23
Kidd Memorial Seismic Lab .....	14
Larry K. Durham Sports Center .....	22
Leech Grove .....	118
Lhaxhang .....	257
Liberal Arts Building .....	8
Magoffin Auditorium .....	19
Memorial Gym .....	201
Metallurgy Building .....	200-M
Mike Loya Academic Services Building .....	38
Military Science Building .....	110
Miner Canyon Student Housing .....	274
Miner Heights Student Housing .....	217
Miner Village Student Housing .....	94
Miners Hall .....	32
Multipurpose Field .....	251
North Energy Plant .....	106
Old Main .....	9
Parking and Transportation Services	
Customer Service Office .....	38
Administrative Office .....	112
Peter and Margaret de Wetter Center .....	25
Physical Sciences Building .....	36
Prospect Hall .....	60
Psychology Building .....	61
Quinn Hall .....	6
Ross Moore Building .....	84
Schuster Parking Garage .....	259
Stanlee and Gerald Rubin Center/ Seamon Hall .....	11
Student Health Center .....	40
Student Recreation Center .....	98
Sun Bowl Parking Garage .....	214
Sun Bowl Stadium .....	58
Undergraduate Learning Center .....	99
Union Building .....	24
University Bookstore .....	215
University Heights Early Learning Center .....	216
University Field .....	221
University Library .....	111
University Police .....	113-P
University Relations .....	42
University Ticket Center .....	254
University Towers .....	260
Vowell Hall .....	7
Worrell Hall .....	33

## The Office of International Programs (OIP)

The UTEP Office of International Programs primary function is to assist international students maintain their visa-status. Please contact their office if you have any questions regarding the admission process, maintaining your visa status, international travel, etc.

Location:	Union East Building, Room 203
Email:	<a href="mailto:oip@utep.edu">oip@utep.edu</a>
Phone:	915-747-5664
Website:	<a href="https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/oipsa/">https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/oipsa/</a>
Sunapsis online portal:	<a href="https://sunapsis.utep.edu/">https://sunapsis.utep.edu/</a>

## Maintaining your Visa Status

You must follow a set of requirements in order to maintain your legal status. Careful maintenance of your visa status is required to successfully navigate through the Chemistry and Biochemistry program. If you do not maintain your visa status, you will be considered "out of status" and may be required to leave the United States and may not be allowed to return. All of the following is required:

- Report to the Office of International Programs upon your arrival in El Paso. You are required by law to report to OIP within 15 days of entering the country. You must present your passport, visa, I-94, and I-20 or DS-2019.
  - Report any dependents if applicable
- Stay in touch with OIP. The office will send reminders, updates, and other important information to your UTEP email address.
- Maintain your passport. Do not allow it to expire while you are in the U.S.
  - Contact your country's consulate or embassy in the U.S. for renewal procedures
  - If your passport is lost or stolen, contact your country's embassy/consulate and notify OIP
- Enroll as a full-time student
  - Exceptions made for thesis/dissertation; request must be made through OIP
- Report any change in your contact information within 10 days
  - Can be done through Goldmine or by visiting OIP
- Keep your I-20 and DS-2019 valid (unexpired)
- Notify OIP and your PI if you plan to travel out of the United States
- Pay state and federal taxes (if employed)
- Obey state and federal laws

## International New Student Information

### Arrival

- Graduate School recommends you arrive 30 days (1 month) before the start of the semester.
  - Early arrival may be necessary to provide sufficient time to process your hiring and Social Security Number documents.
- Immediately upon entry to the country, you must report your arrival to the UTEP Office of International Programs (OIP).
  - <https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/oipsa/office-of-international-programs/home/admissions-process.html>

### Obtaining your Social Security Number (SSN)

- In Sunapsis, you must submit the “Social Security Letter” request at the same time with your “On Campus Work Authorization” request.
- The Social Security Number (SSN) application can be started [online](#) and the process must be completed in-person at the Social Security Administration (SSA) Office after your arrival in the U.S. You must call for an appointment as soon as you receive your On Campus Work Authorization and your Social Security Letter from OIP.
  - Social Security Administration Office (1-866-964-6229)
  - 600 Texas Ave, El Paso, TX 79901
- **EXTREMELY IMPORTANT:** You must obtain the receipt letter from the SSA agent at your appointment.
  - This letter allows you continue the hiring process.
  - An example of the letter is shown on page 10 of this handbook.
- Once your SEVIS record is registered and updated, the Social Security Administration Office and other government systems will also update so your SSN request can be approved.
- **IMPORTANT:** It is extremely important that you start the SSN application process as soon as possible as it will delay your ability to get paid.
  - You will not receive pay for any period that you are ineligible to work.
  - [https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/oipsa/global/international\\_programs/f-1/employment1/ssn.html](https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/oipsa/global/international_programs/f-1/employment1/ssn.html)
- Once you obtain your SSN card, you MUST present it to the Human Resources Department to avoid any payroll interruptions.

### Hiring Process

- The Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry will initiate a Criminal Background Check (CBC) before your arrival. It will be sent via email (please check your spam folder as it may route there).
  - **IMPORTANT:** The link to the CBC questionnaire is valid for one-time use and expires within 48 hours.
- The Human Resources (HR) Department will provide a New Employee Hire Packet and instructions on where to submit the packet and copies of your identification documents to you (most likely via email).
- **IMPORTANT:** Please remember to regularly check your email (preferably at least once a day) for any emails from our Administrative Services Manager and Human Resources regarding any questions or concerns regarding the hiring process.
- **IMPORTANT:** Again, you will not receive a paycheck until these items are complete:
  - CBC is complete and approved
  - New Hire documents are complete, submitted, and approved
- [https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/oipsa/global/international\\_programs/f-1/employment1/on-campus.html](https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/oipsa/global/international_programs/f-1/employment1/on-campus.html)

## In-State Tuition Waiver

- In-State Tuition Waivers will be applied automatically to your account as long as you meet the eligibility requirements (Employed as a TA/RA and enrolled as a full-time student).
  - This will allow you to pay tuition at the same rate as Texas residents.
- **IMPORTANT:** In-State Tuition Waiver will not be approved until your TA/RA appointment has been finalized.
- **Please do not be alarmed by your high tuition payment.** If your in-state tuition waiver has not been approved because the hiring process is not complete, then your fees will reflect the non-resident tuition rate. Once your waiver is approved, the in-state tuition rates will be activated and you will see your tuition fees reduced/reversed.

## Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP)

- As an international student, it is mandatory that you have a valid health insurance plan.
- UTEP offers a Graduate Student Employee (GSE) SHIP at no out-of-pocket cost to you.
- You MUST Opt-In to the GSE plan here: <https://airtable.com/appvf6boiX0QosWkR/shratlY14AizmCqyM>.
- **IMPORTANT:** While your appointment is being finalized, you will be charged the Graduate SHIP premium of \$1,428 which is added to your tuition cost. Once your appointment is finalized and qualify for the GSE plan, the charge be reversed.
- You can view SHIP information here: <https://www.utep.edu/human-resources/services/benefits/student-health-insurance-plan.html>.

## Expenses/Budgeting

- Because the hiring process may take up to 30 days to complete, you will need to budget your money for living expenses until you receive your first paycheck (usually the first week of October for fall semesters, and Feb/March for spring semesters).
  - Rent \$500-\$1000/month
  - Utilities \$100 - \$200/month (approx. if not included in rent)
  - Food \$500/month (approx.)
  - Transportation \$30 monthly bus pass
  - Tuition 20% down payment of tuition cost for the semester
    - Students can apply for an Emergency Tuition Loan to cover this fee (see Loan Information below).
    - NOTE: If your in-state tuition waiver has not been approved yet, you will have to pay 20% of the non-resident tuition fees at first. Again, once your waiver is approved, the in-state tuition rate will be activated and you will see your tuition fees reduced.

## Loan and Tuition Payment Plan Information

- Emergency Tuition Loan: Tuition and book loans available.
  - <https://loans.utep.edu/launch.aspx>
- Tuition Payment Plan: <https://www.utep.edu/vpba/student-business-services/home/payment-options.html>
  - Log into Pete's Payment Options to set up your payment plan using your UTEP credentials: [https://secure.touchnet.net/C21711\\_tsa/web/caslogin.jsp](https://secure.touchnet.net/C21711_tsa/web/caslogin.jsp)
- Miner Support: <https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/miner-support/>



The Chemistry & Biochemistry Department will initiate the Criminal Background Check (CBC) before your arrival.



## Arrival

At most 30 days before the start of the semester	Report your arrival to OIP via Sunapsis
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## Obtaining your Social Security Number (SSN)

Submit the Social Security Letter and On Campus Work Authorization in Sunapsis	Make appointment at the Social Security Administration Office <b>**MUST OBTAIN SSA LETTER**</b>
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## Hiring Process

Complete the New Employee Hire Packet	Check UTEP email account frequently for any communication from Human Resources, OIP, or the Chemistry & Biochemistry Department	Hiring process is not complete until: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CBC is complete and approved</li> <li>• New Hire Documents are complete, submitted, and approved</li> </ul>
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## Tuition

In-State Tuition Waiver will not be granted until hiring process is complete	Emergency Tuition Loans available <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="https://loans.utep.edu/launch.aspx">https://loans.utep.edu/launch.aspx</a></li> </ul>	Sign up for a Tuition Payment Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="https://secure.touchnet.net/C21711_tsa/web/caslogin.jsp">https://secure.touchnet.net/C21711_tsa/web/caslogin.jsp</a></li> </ul>
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## Example of SSA Letter

### Social Security Administration Important Information

SOCIAL SECURITY  
600 TEXAS AVE  
EL PASO TX 79901-1429  
Reference Number: 21231011214  
Date: August 19, 2021

[Redacted]

Dear [Redacted]

This is to acknowledge that you applied for a Social Security number on August 19, 2021.

Before we can issue you a Social Security number card, we must verify the document(s) you gave us to show your Alien status with the Federal, State, or local office in the United States that issued the document(s). This may take up to 4 weeks.

If that office verifies the authenticity of your document(s) we will mail you a Social Security number card. If that office does not verify your document(s), you are not eligible for a Social Security number card and we will inform you of this in writing.

If you are not a U.S. citizen and you are applying for a Social Security number card for employment purposes and your immigration status allows you to work, you may legally begin employment while you await issuance of a Social Security card. You cannot work if your immigration status does not authorize you to do so.

#### If You Have Any Questions

For general information about Social Security, we invite you to visit our website at [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov) on the Internet. For general questions and specific questions about your case, you may call us toll-free at 1-800-772-1213, or call your local Social Security office at 866-964-6229. We can answer most questions over the phone. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, you may call our TTY/TDD at 1-800-325-0778. If you do call or visit an office, please have this letter with you. It will help us answer your questions.

If you plan to visit an office, you may call ahead to make an appointment. This will help us serve you more quickly.

Field Office Manager

## American Culture

Beliefs and attitudes are diverse in the United States. However, there are some main characteristics that are true for a majority of Americans. There are also laws that we must adhere to. Here is a brief guide to American culture:

### Alcohol/Smoking/Drugs

- Legal drinking age is 21
  - It is a crime to serve/buy alcohol to someone under the age of 21
- Legal smoking age is 21
  - Smoking is not allowed on the UTEP campus
- Buying and selling illicit drugs is illegal in the United States and is punishable by jail time and/or fines

### Cleanliness/Personal Hygiene

- Americans typically shower and wear deodorant/antiperspirant every day
  - Extremely important if working in close quarters with others
- Typically wash clothes/clean room/home regularly
- Generally keep workspace clean
  - Especially important if working in a laboratory

### Driving Laws

- You must obtain a valid driver license if you plan to operate a vehicle
  - <https://www.dps.texas.gov/driverlicense/applyforlicense.htm>
- You are required to have your vehicle inspected and registered
  - <https://www.txdmv.gov/motorists/register-your-vehicle>
- You are required to purchase car insurance and carry all your registration and insurance documents in your vehicle at all times
- Always wear your seatbelt; all passengers are required to wear seatbelts as well
- Do not engage in Distracted Driving
  - Texting while driving is illegal
  - Pay attention to other drivers and your surroundings at all times
- Must obey all traffic laws and posted roadway signs
- [Texas Driver Handbook](#)

### Dining Etiquette

- In general, Americans eat with their mouths closed and chew quietly
- In general, Americans do not share dishes at a table unless otherwise agreed upon
  - Everyone has their own plates of food when eating together
- Most Americans eat three times a day: breakfast, lunch, dinner
- Most meals are eaten with utensils with the exception of foods such as burgers, sandwiches, and pizza
- It is expected to tip your server at restaurants
  - Generally, a tip of 15% of your bill is expected
  - It is considered extremely rude to not leave a tip

## Personal Space

- Personal space is very important to Americans
- Americans are generally comfortable with 2 feet of personal space during conversations
- Americans typically do not hug or kiss an acquaintance or colleague upon greeting
  - Shake hands or nod your head in greeting is appropriate

## Social Courtesies

- Americans value politeness and patience
- Saying "please" and "thank you" go a long way
- Treat everyone with the same respect you expect to receive
- Ask before borrowing anything
- Punctuality is highly valued
  - If you are going to be late, it is important to notify whoever you are meeting with
- People get in a line to wait for various things
  - It is considered rude to cut in line or to push your way through a line
  - Calmly wait your turn
- Littering is frowned upon and you can be fined or face jail time if you violate littering laws

## Tipping Etiquette

- In the United States, it is expected to tip for various services
- Services that generally require tipping include, but is not limited to:
  - Servers at restaurants
  - Taxi services
  - Pizza delivery
  - Salon services (haircuts, etc.)
- Standard tip is 15% of your total bill
- It is considered extremely rude to leave no tip

## University Culture

There are expectations and rules in an American university setting. Here is brief guide to university culture here in the United States:

### Academic Integrity

- In American universities, there is a high standard for academic integrity
- Be familiar with the [UTEP Academic Integrity and Scholastic Dishonesty](#) policies
- Students cannot use unauthorized sources for an assignment
- Students cannot receive assistance on a test

### Classroom Etiquette

- Participating in class discussion is normally highly encouraged
  - May contribute to the overall grade (refer to class syllabus)
- Arrive to class on time
- Be prepared for the class discussion including any assignments that were assigned
- Do not hesitate to ask for help or clarification from the professor as needed
- Professors expect students to attend office hours if students have questions outside of class

### Plagiarism

- Students are expected to use their own ideas and knowledge
- Plagiarism includes verbatim or near-verbatim copying and very closely paraphrasing text or results from someone else's work or their own work (known as duplicate publication)
- Familiarize yourself with these guidelines and best practices:
  - [American Chemical Society Ethical Guidelines](#)
  - [Council of Writing Program Administrators Best Practices](#)
- Consequences of plagiarism include, but not limited to, loss of Teaching Assistant or Research Assistant eligibility, expulsion from the university, and loss of professional credibility

### Communication

- Students are expected to check their UTEP email account routinely (*at least once a day*) for any communication from their advisors, UTEP announcements, lab coordinators, etc.
- Generally, if a response is expected, it should be done within 24 hours
- If there is a personal issue that is preventing you from performing your duties in and out of the classroom, you must communicate that with your graduate and research advisors

## Assignments & Examinations

- The number of assignments and examinations vary from one course to another
- Be sure to review the class syllabus very carefully to fully understand the professor's requirements
  - This includes how assignments and exams are graded and when they are due.
- If a student is unfamiliar with the type of assignments or exams, please contact the professor for clarification

## Attendance

- Students are expected to attend classes, scheduled meetings, etc.
- If a student is unable to attend any scheduled classes/meetings/etc., it is required to notify the professor/advisor/meeting host at least 24 hours in advance, if able.
- Attendance rules also applies to Teaching Assistant duties
  - TAs are expected and required to attend meetings with lab coordinators, assigned laboratory classes, and exam days for proctoring.

## Teaching Assistantship Responsibilities

- As a Teaching Assistant (TA), you have a serious responsibility to the department and University to meet the responsibilities and duties as assigned and described in the Teaching Assistant General Guidelines and Agreement Form you will be provided with at the beginning of each semester.
- You will be expected to be present for your duties at your assigned laboratory section/sections and any scheduled office hours.
- TAs are also expected to comply with any employment regulations and requirements in the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures.
- If you do not adhere to the employee standard of conduct, your Teaching Assistantship may be subject to termination.
  - Conduct subject to disciplinary action and/or dismissal include, but not limited to:
    - Failure to maintain satisfactory work performance
    - Unacceptable conduct (examples: neglect of duties, falsification of grades, violation of laboratory safety rules, failure to cooperate with supervisors, theft, refusal to follow instructions, repeated tardiness or absences, etc.)



## Contacts

### Graduate Advisors

- [ChemGradAdvisor@utep.edu](mailto:ChemGradAdvisor@utep.edu)
- Dr. Skye Fortier – [asfortier@utep.edu](mailto:asfortier@utep.edu)
- Dr. Lela Vukovic – [lvukovic@utep.edu](mailto:lvukovic@utep.edu)

### Graduate Student Coordinator

- Veronica Fortier – [vedominguez@utep.edu](mailto:vedominguez@utep.edu)

### Administrative Services Manager

- Maria Rodriguez – [mhmarquez@utep.edu](mailto:mhmarquez@utep.edu)

### Office of International Programs

- 915-747-5664
- [oiip@utep.edu](mailto:oiip@utep.edu)
- <https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/oiipsa/>

### UTEP Graduate School

- 915-747-5491
- [gradschool@utep.edu](mailto:gradschool@utep.edu)
- <https://www.utep.edu/graduate/>