



COLLEGE OF SCIENCE

DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY & BIOCHEMISTRY

International Graduate Student Handbook





COLLEGE OF SCIENCE

DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY & BIOCHEMISTRY

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Table of Contents

El Paso, Texas – “The Sun City”	3
The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP)	4
The Office of International Programs (OIP).....	6
International New Student Information.....	7
American Culture	12
University Culture	14
Contacts	16



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 22nd 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)





COLLEGE OF SCIENCE

DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY & BIOCHEMISTRY



Academic Advising Center	104
Administration Building	1
Bell Hall	55
Benedict Hall	28
Bioscience Research Building	16
Biology Building	200-B
Boquillas Hall	274-A
Brumbelow 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
Lhakhang	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:	oip@utep.edu
Phone:	915-747-5664
Website:	https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/oipsa/
Sunapsis online portal:	https://sunapsis.utep.edu/

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 must be done 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
 - 600 Texas Ave
 - El Paso, TX 79901
 - 1-866-964-6229
- **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.
 - SSN Checklist: <https://www.utep.edu/human-resources/Files/docs/SSN%20Checklist.docx>
- 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/office-of-international-programs/visas/f-type-visa/f1-work-ssn.html> (Social Security Number tab)
- 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 Coordinator and Human Resources regarding any questions or concerns regarding the hiring process.
- **IMPORTANT:** Again, you will not receive a paycheck until these three items are complete:
 - CBC is complete and approved
 - New Hire documents are complete, submitted, and approved
- Please review the **Student Responsibility** section on this webpage: <https://www.utep.edu/human-resources/services/onboarding-center/hiring-process-new.html>.

In-State Tuition Waiver Request

- The Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry will submit an In-State Tuition Waiver Request.
 - This will allow you to pay tuition at the same rate as Texas residents.
- **IMPORTANT:** In-State Tuition Waiver Requests cannot be approved until your TA/RA appointment has been finalized.
- Once the waiver is approved, you will receive an email from Graduate School requesting your acknowledgement.
- Approved waivers in the Fall semester are valid for the whole academic year, i.e., Fall and Spring semesters.
 - Requests must be done for newly appointed students in the Spring and Summer semesters.
- **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.

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 cost to you.
- **IMPORTANT:** While your appointment is being finalized, you will be charged the Graduate SHIP premium of \$1,215 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/paying-for-tuition/Payment-Plan.pdf>
 - 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
- Paydirt Loan: short-term loan, \$500 maximum.
 - https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/scholarships/_Files/images/Page_1from-FIN_PaydirtLoan_18.pdf



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 **MUST OBTAIN SSA LETTER**
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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"> • CBC is complete and approved • New Hire Documents are complete, submitted, and approved
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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"> • https://loans.utep.edu/launch.aspx 	Sign up for a Tuition Payment Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://secure.touchnet.net/C21711_tsa/web/caslogin.jsp
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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



Dear 

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 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
 - Especially 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.



Contacts

Graduate Advisors

- ChemGradAdvisor@utep.edu
- Dr. Skye Fortier – asfortier@utep.edu
- Dr. Wen-Yee Lee – wylee@utep.edu

Graduate Student Coordinator

- Veronica Fortier – vedominguez@utep.edu

Administrative Services Manager

- Maria Rodriguez – mhmarquez@utep.edu

Office of International Programs

- 915-747-5664
- qip@utep.edu
- <https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/oipsa/>

UTEP Graduate School

- 915-747-5491
- gradschool@utep.edu
- <https://www.utep.edu/graduate/>