

Welcome to Texas A&M University



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Reciprocal Exchange Handbook for Incoming Students

Study Abroad Programs Office

3262 TAMU • College Station, TX 77843-3262 • +1 (979) 845-0544 • <http://studyabroad.tamu.edu>

Table of Contents

Texas A&M University 4

Study Abroad Programs Office 5

Texas A&M Reciprocal Exchange Program Guidelines 6

Immunizations..... 8

Packing Suggestions 9

Practical Information for Travel Planning & Arrival..... 10

Money Issues 11

Legal Age for Alcohol Consumption 13

Housing and Dining 13

Health Insurance Requirements 15

Academic Issues 16

Campus Services and Facilities 18

Traditions at Texas A&M..... 20

Aggie Sports and Leisure 21

Community Life 23

Transportation..... 24

Travel Within and Outside the United States..... 25

Your 1st Aggie Quiz 30

**OFFICE OF THE ASSOCIATE VICE PROVOST
STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS OFFICE**



Howdy,

On behalf of Texas A&M University, welcome to the Reciprocal Education Exchange Program (REEP) and Texas A&M University. You are about to embark on a true adventure, not only in a new educational system, but also in Aggie and Texas culture. Be open-minded and take advantage of opportunities when they arise. This will be a memorable and enriching experience for you if you actively participate in campus and community life.

There are many questions you probably would like to have answered to prepare yourself and your family. This handbook covers basic information on such subjects as travel, housing insurance, exchange program guidelines, finances, immunization requirements, Aggie life and traditions, and more.

As you read through this handbook, you will find that some of the university information does not match information in other A&M publications. You must remember that you are participating in a special exchange program; therefore, some information has been changed to meet the requirements of the exchange program and this office. Please always defer to the information in this handbook.

If the handbook fails to answer all of your questions, please feel free to communicate with us at any time. My colleagues and I in the Study Abroad Programs Office want you to have the best experience possible while studying here at Texas A&M.

We look forward to your arrival and to hearing from you concerning your travel plans.

Sincerely,

**Jane Flaherty, PhD, Director
Study Abroad Programs Office**

First Floor, Pavilion
Texas A&M University, Main Campus
3262 TAMU
College Station, Texas 77843-3262

Tel. 979.845.0544 Fax. 979.458.3623
<http://studyabroad.tamu.edu>

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

Texas A&M University was established in 1876 and its original function was as a military institution. The Corps of Cadets still plays an important role at A&M but in 1965 membership in the Corps was changed from mandatory to voluntary. Since then, life at Texas A&M has evolved into an eclectic academic community with deep-seated traditions held over from its early days.

Texas A&M offers a variety of programs in both undergraduate and graduate studies through the following academic colleges and schools: Agriculture and Life Sciences, Architecture, Bush School of Government & Public Service, Mays Business School, Dentistry, Education & Human Development, Engineering, Geosciences, Law, Liberal Arts, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Public Health, Science, and Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences.

The university's enrollment is greater than 65,000 including more than 14,000 graduate students. The international student population is more than 5,300 representing more than 100 countries.



STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS OFFICE

The Study Abroad Programs Office (SAPO) is located on the first floor (ground floor) of the Pavilion. As with most other offices at Texas A&M, SAPO is open from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. In case of emergency, see the contact information below. If you have a question or problem, a SAPO staff member will assist you. SAPO staff will be able to guide you to the appropriate person or department to help you adjust to life in Aggieland.

The study abroad advisors for Reciprocal Exchanges are part of the study abroad programs team. If you have problems during your exchange that you cannot otherwise solve, come to our office. (We also enjoy student visits when there is no crisis!) Our office works closely with International Student Services (ISS). The ISS office issues your U.S. immigration paperwork so you can obtain your student visa. The Study Abroad Programs Office, however, will be your main point of contact since you are an exchange program participant.

Study Abroad Programs Office

Monday – Friday, 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM (Central U.S. Time)

Texas A&M University

3262 TAMU

112 Pavilion

College Station, TX 77843-3262

Office: +1/ 979-845-0544

After-hours **EMERGENCY ONLY** cell phone: +1 979-255-6103

Web site: <http://studyabroad.tamu.edu/>

International Student Services

Office: +1 979-845-1824

Website: <http://iss.tamu.edu/>



TEXAS A&M RECIPROCAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM GUIDELINES

The Exchange Program is designed for both undergraduate and graduate students. It is important that you understand that the United States Government, the State of Texas, Texas A&M University and the Study Abroad Programs Office have regulations which you need to know. These regulations make it extremely difficult to change or modify the way a certain exchange program has been established.

Please carefully read and make sure you understand the following information:

- 1. Enrollment:** ALL reciprocal exchange students are enrolled as “non-degree seeking” students. Because you will receive your degree from your home institution, at Texas A&M you are classified as non-degree seeking. Additionally, all exchange students must be enrolled as full-time students, defined below for undergraduate and graduate students. Whether you are classified as undergraduate or graduate student often depends on the actual terms of the exchange agreement, not always your actual academic level. If you are classified as an undergraduate, you may not take graduate level courses.

Full-time requirements
 - Undergraduate: minimum of 12 credit hours per semester. Undergraduate courses are all numbered 499 and below.
 - Graduate: minimum of 9 credit hours per semester. Graduate courses are numbered 600 and above.
- 2. Registration:** All course selections will be reviewed by a Texas A&M academic advisor and are subject to approval and availability. In order to register and attend classes, all registration holds must be removed from the student’s record (this includes the ISS check-in hold and the immunization hold). You will fulfill these requirements during the orientation sessions the week prior to the start of classes.
- 3. Language Proficiency:** Students should be able to engage in university-level discussions, research, and reading in English prior to arrival. Although there is no formal English proficiency requirement for students participating in reciprocal exchanges at Texas A&M University, the general requirement for international students at Texas A&M is a score of 550 or higher on the paper version (p-BT) of the TOEFL exam or 80 on the internet based version (i-BT) or a minimum IELTS score of 6.0 overall. It is recommended that exchange students coming to Texas A&M keep this in mind.
- 4. Transcript (Grade Report):** The coordinator of your exchange program at Texas A&M will arrange for an official transcript to be sent to your home institution upon completion of the exchange program. For an official transcript to be issued, students must pay ALL outstanding fees, including health insurance, printing charges, library fines, late fees, housing fees, etc.

Reciprocal Exchange Program Guidelines

5. **Payment Deadlines.** Students are expected to meet any and all financial obligations to the university by the designated due dates. Failure to pay charges on time may result in late fees. Questions about charges to your student account should be addressed to Student Business Services in the General Services Complex (GSC), Suite 2801 (Bus Route 06). -If there continue to be problems, please contact your program coordinator at A&M. Again, no transcript can be issued if you owe Texas A&M any money.
6. **Immigration Documents & Visa:** When entering the United States, exchange students MUST have the following documentation with them and easily accessible while traveling:
 - Valid passport
 - J-1 or F-1 visa for the U.S.
 - DS-2019 or I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility which should be stamped upon your entry into the U.S.)

Once you receive the DS-2019 or I-20 Certificate of Eligibility from Texas A&M, you will need to make an appointment with the U.S. Embassy/Consulate in your country to get your student visa for the U.S. Students who participate on reciprocal exchanges are issued J-1 or F-1 visas for exchange visitors. Check with the U.S. Consulate or Embassy responsible for issuing your visa to find out the details about what you need to do and how. Currently all persons seeking student visas for the United States are required to have a personal interview with a U.S. consular agent. Advance planning can save you much time, travel, and money. If you experience problems with the visa issuance process (before you leave home), please e-mail both the Study Abroad Programs Office (SAPO) studyabroad@tamu.edu and International Student Services (ISS) iss@tamu.edu.

7. **Financial Aid:** Unfortunately, neither financial aid nor scholarships are available for exchange students.
8. **Housing:** Exchange students are encouraged to live on campus in university housing during their exchange. Housing is arranged in the residence halls (also called dormitories or “dorms”) for these students unless the student chooses to live off campus. Once you sign the contract, you are committed for the full length of your exchange.

Furthermore, we strongly advise living on campus with U.S. students to facilitate cultural immersion, language enhancement, and involvement in campus life. One way to achieve this is through our Global Living Learning Community (LLC). Opening in fall 2018, incoming exchange students will be paired in a dormitory with domestic A&M students and participate in cultural events and activities as well as intercultural dialogue each month. Learn more at <http://reslife.tamu.edu/living/llps/available/global>.

Exchange students can choose, however, to live off campus. Students who live off-campus must arrange their own housing. The off-campus housing website for Texas A&M can be accessed at <http://studentlife.tamu.edu/agoss> or at <http://aggiesearch.tamu.edu> if you are seeking a roommate. Visit these websites to help locate an affordable place to live in the College Station area. Note that many apartment complexes are located on Texas A&M bus routes.

9. Health Insurance. All exchange students must be covered by health insurance which meets both the requirements of the J-1 (or F-1) visa program as well as university requirements for the duration of the student's stay in the United States. Exchange students are required to purchase the approved Texas A&M health insurance for international students (see page 16).

10. Immunizations: To check current health requirements for students at Texas A&M, visit this link: <http://shs.tamu.edu/preventivemedicine>. This site contains the information you need about the following issues:

10.1. TB screening (T-Spot or Quantiferon Gold Blood Test) is required for many students coming to Texas A&M from outside the United States. A list of countries is found on the Tuberculosis Screening form located at the above website. If the country where you were born, reside, or traveled to is listed, you are required to get a TB blood test. Students from these are required to have a TB blood test administered upon your arrival at Texas A&M. A chest x-ray from outside the U.S. will not be accepted.

- If you do need a TB blood test, you have two choices. You can get the TB blood test after you arrive at Texas A&M for approximately US\$70 or you can have the blood test done before you come to the U.S. If you have the test before you come to the U.S., your healthcare professional must enter the results on the Immunization Record exactly as requested. The blood test must be within the 12 months immediately preceding the start of classes at Texas A&M, the more recent the better.

10.2. Bacterial Meningitis Vaccination

- **IMPORTANT Medical Requirement:** Any student under age 22 applying to Texas A&M University as an exchange student must have the Bacterial Meningitis vaccination and complete the report form attached to the exchange application.

Students must provide signed documentation of receipt of vaccination before students can be admitted to the university. Documentation must show:

- Date vaccine is administered and
- Proper signature(s).
- Students should complete the Bacterial Meningitis Vaccination report form included in the application documents.

11. PACKING SUGGESTIONS

Clothing

- T-shirts (many)
- Shirts/blouses
- Jeans (multiple)
- Shorts (many pairs)
- Casual clothes & shoes
- Sweaters/Sweatshirts
- Business attire (1) + shoes
- Underclothing
- Swimsuit
- Sport shoes
- Jackets (2-3)
- Coat (medium to heavy)
- Gloves / Scarf

Personal Items

Except for prescription items, these things can be easily and inexpensively purchased in College Station and then you don't have to pack or carry them.

- Razors/shaving cream
- Shampoo/conditioner
- Toothbrush/toothpaste
- Soap
- Deodorant
- Brush/comb
- Sunglasses
- Towels/washcloths
- Contact lens solutions (+ extra lenses and your prescription)
- Special or prescription medication (make sure you have proper documentation for prescription medication & that it's legal in the U.S.; check with the U.S. Consulate)
- Bed Sheets (do NOT bring from home; they are likely a different size/shape in the U.S.)

Miscellaneous

- Camera
- Umbrella
- Voltage converter & adapter for electrical sockets (voltage in the U.S. is 110)
- Photos of home, family, and friends
- A few items which represent your home country

NOTE ON LUGGAGE: Make sure that your luggage is checked all the way to College Station's Easterwood Airport (CLL) if you are arriving at CLL to avoid problems at a transfer point along the way. You will still have to collect your luggage at the port of entry when you go through customs and immigration, but you can then return it to the luggage service.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION FOR TRAVEL PLANNING & ARRIVAL

Please make your flight reservation all the way to College Station's Easterwood Airport (CLL). If you make your reservation to a different airport, you might have difficulty getting to College Station or you might have to pay extra money to add the flight to College Station later. A round trip ticket from Dallas or Houston to College Station can cost over \$300, but when that is included in the original reservation, it usually makes very little difference in the total cost. Getting to College Station from a major airport in the surrounding areas of Texas can be difficult and costly. Public transportation is almost non-existent and renting a car can be difficult if under age 25.

Flying into Houston or Dallas

Texas has many airports including two major international airports: Dallas/Ft. Worth Airport (DFW) and Houston Intercontinental Airport (IAH). If you choose to fly into an airport other than the one in College Station, you will be responsible for making your own arrangements to get to College Station. There is ground shuttle service from Houston to College Station and also from Austin to College Station. However, getting to the A&M campus is not always simple or cheap.

Connecting Flights to College Station

The first U.S. airport at which you arrive on an international flight is where you will clear customs and immigration. If you are taking a connecting flight to College Station, after completing customs and immigration, you will return your luggage to the baggage check area and proceed to your flight for College Station.

You should allow plenty of time between your international flight and the domestic leg of your journey because the immigration and customs processing can sometimes be lengthy. For example, if students are asked to undergo additional security screening, it could take several hours. Don't expect that one hour is enough time. Plan in advance what you will do if you miss a connecting flight.

Arrival at Easterwood Airport in College Station

When you arrive at Easterwood Airport (CLL), the first thing you will likely notice is the size of the airport—it is very small. Thus, the airport is very efficient and easy to navigate. Some student organizations also help with student pick-up. Students living in dorms should make arrangements before arrival for key collection so that you can get into the dorm when you arrive.

Should your flight arrive very late or for some reason no one is available to pick you up, you can get a taxi from the airport. Signs are posted at the airport and usually taxis are at the airport when flights arrive. Uber or Lyft are sometimes also available to students who have the apps.

Due to safety concerns, you should not spend the night at any airport. Make your travel arrangements in advance and allow for travel delays to avoid waiting overnight at an airport for a connecting flight or shuttle.

Arrival Date

For students starting at Texas A&M in the fall or spring semester, you are required to attend orientations for both international students and for exchange students the week prior to the start of classes. If you are delayed and absolutely cannot arrive earlier, you should arrive no later than the Friday before classes begin and will have to make-up the sessions you missed.

Students who need to arrange housing after they arrive will probably want to arrive earlier to give adequate time to make off-campus arrangements.

Upon arrival on campus, students can begin completing the list of check-in procedures. University offices are open Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Students should have with them their passports, visas and DS-2019s. Students will need to have these items readily available for the first week or so.

MONEY ISSUES

When You Arrive

We suggest that you bring a minimum of US\$500.00 in cash with you to College Station for miscellaneous purchases. In addition to this you should make arrangements to pay the following costs immediately after you arrive:

- **On campus dorm rent for the whole term** (amount depending on the style of dorm for which you apply; we recommend corridor or balcony style dorms because bathroom access is better and the rooms cost less. <http://reslife.tamu.edu>)
- **Texas A&M Health Insurance for International Students is required for all international students.** Approximate cost is US\$1,000.00 per semester.
- **General Deposit Fee.** All students must pay the US\$100.00 deposit upon arrival. It is reimbursed at end of your exchange study.
- **Meal plan.** Students who chose a meal plan at the university must pay for it before they can use it (although you could add a meal plan later in the semester). <http://www.dineoncampus.com/tamu>
- **Sports Passes.** Many students choose to get a sports pass of some kind because it can be much less expensive than buying tickets for individuals games, particularly for students who want to attend the football games (fall semester) which are a major part of Texas A&M traditions.
- **Other potential initial costs**
 - **Rental of U.S. Post Office box** (if you live on-campus): US\$25/semester
 - **Household items** (sheets, blankets, towels, dishes, utensils, etc.): US\$150
 - **Bicycle:** US\$70-100 <http://transport.tamu.edu/alternative/bicycles/services.aspx>

- **Texas A&M University accepts all major credit cards, except Visa credit card. Texas A&M's Student Business Services does NOT accept Visa credit card for paying fees. Visa credit cards can be used at other venues on campus, such as cafeterias, canteens, bookstore, etc.**

NOTE: If you do not pay fees on time, you will be charged late fees and are responsible for paying all late fees.

Banking

After arrival, exchange students must open a local bank account. Local banking for students is often free of charge and is necessary to facilitate university refunds, such as a housing deposit and the general deposit fee.

Some students choose to get money while in the U.S. from the bank account in their home country via ATMs (automated teller machine), but this can be expensive. The stateside ATM bank (as well as the home bank) will likely charge for the service, and there are almost always limits on the amounts permitted for withdrawal, such as US\$400 per day and US\$1000 per week. Direct deposit from overseas banks is also available.

International Wire Transfers

These take a minimum of one week (7-10 business days) to process and could take longer. Please take this into consideration when making financial arrangements to pay housing fees, meal plans, etc. If you are not able to pay on-time, you could be charged late fees.

You may transfer funds from a bank in your country to a bank in the United States. In addition to a local bank account, you must have a mailing address and telephone number and have the information with you to set up a bank account in the U.S.

Western Union is a popular company for wire transfers and allows people to send and/or receive money through Western Union agents. Check with your financial institution for details on cost, time, and other issues involved in money and wire transfers.

Credit Cards

Many credit cards are available and accepted in the United States, most commonly Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Discover (remember Visa credit card is not accepted at Texas A&M University for payment of housing, and meal plans—or any other fees levied by the Student Business Services of Texas A&M University).

You will likely receive many offers to apply for credit cards from many different sources. Many students find credit cards convenient—until the bill is due. In most cases, the complete

Remember: Visa credit card is not accepted at Texas A&M University for payment of housing, fees, and meal plans.

bill does not have to be paid each month, but the credit card holder is charged finance fees based on interest and a percentage of the monthly balance or a minimum needs to be paid each month. Interest rates usually start around 20% and can be much higher. Be careful in your choices and make sure you can afford what you choose to do. Credit cards can be a huge temptation and source of debt for students. If you choose to use a credit card we recommend that you pay off the balance each month to avoid late fees and finance charges.

Traveler's Checks

Traveler's checks are issued by financial institutions such as American Express and Thomas Cook and must be paid for in advance. Because of this, traveler's checks issued in U.S. dollars are almost always accepted as cash at most businesses in the United States. This means that you may use them directly and you do not need to go to a bank to cash them first.

If you have traveler's checks in a currency other than U.S. dollars, you will have to get them changed for U.S. dollars before you can use them here. Traveler's checks from a less well-known company might be a problem and need to be cashed at banks.

If you choose to use traveler's checks we suggest that you purchase traveler's checks in U.S. dollars because they are easy to use and, in most cases, if you lose them or they are stolen, you can contact the company which issued them and get them replaced. Cash cannot be replaced if it is lost or stolen.

LEGAL AGE FOR ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

In the U.S. **you must be age 21 in order to legally consume alcoholic beverages.** This means that every time you want to order any alcoholic drink, you will be required to show photo identification proving that you are at least 21 years of age. Many restaurants, bars and clubs in the Bryan/College Station area do NOT accept passports as identification. The best solution for photo identification while you are here is to get a Texas State ID card. A state ID also saves you from carrying your passport everywhere and decreases the chance that you will lose your passport. For additional information about obtaining a Texas State ID, please refer to the following website: <https://www.dps.texas.gov/driverlicense/applyforID.htm>

HOUSING AND DINING

The Study Abroad Programs Office recommends that exchange students live in residence halls or dormitories (dorms) on campus because we feel that the experience of living on-campus with a roommate is the best opportunity for you to fully immerse yourself in the university culture of the United States. To take a virtual tour of the residence halls at Texas A&M as well as extensive information about other aspects of housing, check out this link: <http://reslife.tamu.edu/>. As reciprocal exchange students you can choose which type of residence hall you prefer. Costs are different according to the type/style of residence hall. Please refer to the website above.

Exchange students must apply online for on-campus residence halls and remit appropriate housing application and room deposit fees before arrival (housing application instructions are included in your welcome packet of information). Rent for the full semester is also due at the

Reminder:
In the U.S. you must be 21 in order to legally consume alcoholic beverages.

beginning of the semester after you arrive. Please come prepared to pay the full semester rent during the first week after arrival.

Please note that on-campus residence halls are partially furnished including items such as a bed, desk and closet. You will be responsible, however, for supplying your own towels, pillows, sheets for a single bed, eating utensils and other such personal items (refer to packing list suggestions on page 9).

As is typical of living in a college dorm in the U.S., you will be sharing your room with another student and toilet/shower facilities with a group of students. A telephone outlet is already in the room with local telephone service included in the rent.

If you want to use the phone to make long distance phone calls, you can easily set up service for yourself with a telephone code so that your calls are charged to your personal bill and you do not have problems splitting the phone bill with your roommate. All dorm rooms also have internet connections. Skype is a good method for keeping in touch with family and friends back home.

If you are interested in living in the Global Living Learning Community (LLC) please be sure to indicate this in your incoming exchange student application. You can learn more about this opportunity at <http://reslife.tamu.edu/living/llps/available/global>.

Recommendations as you plan for on-campus residence hall living:

- Do not bring bed sheets (they may not fit U.S. beds; purchase after arrival).
- There are NO COOKING facilities in most dorms. In each room, students are allowed to have two major appliances such as a microwave or small refrigerator or television. Otherwise, there are few cooking facilities available.
- It is possible to rent a microwave/refrigerator. You should check the cost of purchasing them, however, because it can be cheaper to buy them than to rent them for a semester and then you can sell them when you leave.
- It is a good idea to confer with your roommate before purchasing/bringing items as your roommate may already have such items.

Cell Phones

The major cell phone service providers in College Station are

- AT&T (<http://www.wireless.att.com/cell-phone-service/welcome/index.jsp>)
- Sprint (<http://www.sprint.com/index.html>)
- T-Mobile (<http://www.t-mobile.com/>)
- Verizon (<http://www.verizonwireless.com/b2c/index.html>)

Exchange students who wish to live off-campus must arrange their own housing for the length of their stay in the U.S. We strongly urge you not to sign a lease that goes beyond your exchange dates. For more information about off-campus housing, please visit the following web sites

- <http://studentlife.tamu.edu/agoss>
- <http://aggierearch.tamu.edu/>

Electrical Appliances

Voltage in the United States is 110. You may need to bring a voltage converter if the voltage is different in your home country and you intend to bring electrical appliances (small appliances such as hairdryers, electric shavers, etc.).

If the electrical outlets are different in the U.S. from those in your home country, you will need an adapter to adapt the plug on your appliance to the outlets in the U.S.

You may need both a converter and an adapter. It is much easier to purchase both adapters and converters in your country for travel abroad. (Usually what you find in the U.S. are converters and adapters for U.S. appliances going outside the U.S.)

Meal Plans

Anyone can purchase a meal plan, whether you live on or off campus. Meal plans, however, cannot be shared because they are put on one person's student ID card. For students in the on-campus residence halls, a meal plan can be a very good idea since a microwave and refrigerator are all you have for preparing food.

Many different options are available and are listed online at <http://dineoncampus.com/tamu>. Please note that vegetarian and various ethnic meals options are available in the dining halls.

Tourist Information & Visits

If your friends or family from your home country plan to visit you or you need a place to spend a night or two when you first arrive, the local Visitors' Bureau website is a good resource <http://www.bryan-collegestation.org/>. **There are also a multitude of websites through which you can make a hotel or car rental reservation** among other things. Please note that local and state taxes must be added to the base rates for hotel rooms and rental cars as well as most other purchases.

HEALTH INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS

All international students studying at Texas A&M University are required to be covered by health insurance in the event of an illness or accident.

As an international student on a J-1 or F-1 visa, the U.S. government also requires you to carry insurance valid in the U.S. for the duration of your time in the U.S. This insurance must meet the government's minimum requirements for the J-1 or F-1 visa program.

All exchange students admitted to Texas A&M University are required to purchase the approved Texas A&M University student health insurance for international students in compliance with Texas A&M University and United States federal regulations governing the J-1 visa program.

IMPORTANT: The Texas A&M insurance fee will be posted to your student account each semester. It is then the responsibility of the exchange student to pay the insurance fee which can be done by one of the following methods:

- Online payment by credit card (except VISA credit card) via your student account on Howdy (You can activate your Howdy student account only after you have registered for classes upon your arrival to the A&M campus.)
- In person (debit or credit card) at Student Business Services located in the General Services Complex, West Campus.

How health insurance works:

When you purchase medical insurance, your premium (the money you paid for the coverage) is combined with the premiums of other policy holders to form a pool of money. That money is then used to pay medical bills of the participants who need healthcare. Your coverage is only valid as long as your premiums are paid.

Once you purchase insurance, the company will provide you with an insurance identification card to use as proof of your coverage when you are seeking healthcare from a hospital or doctor. The company will also provide you with written instructions for reporting and documenting medical expenses (filing a claim); usually the company will also provide customer service representatives who can help you personally with any questions or problems you have.

The company will evaluate any claim that you file and make the appropriate payment based on the coverage that your policy provides. In some cases, the insurance company will pay the doctor or hospital directly. Some companies require that the policy holder (the student) pay the medical bills first and then the insurance company will reimburse the policy holder later.

ACADEMIC ISSUES

Registration

You will register for semester courses after you arrive on campus. You will meet with your assigned academic advisor who will assist with course selection and registration. In some academic colleges, the courses fill to capacity very quickly. Because of this we highly recommend that you come prepared to be flexible and with a variety of courses that you would like to take and fit into your degree plan at your home institution.

Syllabus

A syllabus is a detailed plan for the course, including information about exams, assignments, grading policies, course requirements, materials needed for class (such as textbooks), an academic calendar, the attendance policy and dates of major assignments and exams. Some syllabi are extremely detailed and others are minimal. **ALWAYS READ THE COURSE SYLLABUS CAREFULLY AND COMPLETELY.**

Grading System

Generally the grading scale used at Texas A&M is as follows:

A (Excellent: 90-100%)

B (Good: 80-89%)

C (Satisfactory: 70-79%)

D (Passing: 60-69%; NOTE: This is not considered passing in every situation.)

F (Failing: Below 60%)

Exams

Most exams in the U.S. are in-class exams. Many are considered “objective exams” which means there is one right answer and no room for interpretation; often this is a multiple choice or true-false format. If the exam is an essay exam, it will also usually be limited to a single class period, so it is important to practice timed writing before the exam. Course material organization and the practice of quick outlines on important topics likely to be included on the exam are good methods of preparing for any exam.

Textbooks

Be prepared to spend up to \$500 USD or more on textbooks per semester, as listed in the cost estimates on the Declaration & Certification of Finances form in the application packet.

Often waiting until after the first day of class to buy your books is best because the instructor might change a book or you might change your mind about a class. **If you need to return any books**, note that you will have only a very short window of time to take textbooks back for a full refund and you will need to provide the original receipt. New and used textbooks can also be purchased online.

Laboratory Courses

Courses that require a lab session usually require an extra fee. Extra fees for labs are included in the exchange; you are not personally responsible for any such fees.

Class Attendance

Attending class is mandatory in the Texas A&M University System. You will be expected to attend every class meeting unless you have a certified reason for missing, such as a visit to the doctor with proof. Ultimately, each instructor decides the role of attendance in determining your final grade. Some instructors have surprise or “pop” (unscheduled) quizzes to encourage attendance.

Academic Advisors

You will be assigned an academic advisor in your major academic area. You will have the opportunity to meet this person during pre-semester orientation activities. This person will help you register for classes and make sure that your courses are appropriate. Please note that you will likely not be able to register yourself for coursework because your major of “REEP” will not be recognized by upper-level courses that are only open to students with a specific major and/or because you did not take the prerequisite courses at Texas A&M University. In both cases, your academic advisor can verify your academic credentials and assist you with enrolling in appropriate courses.

Adding & Dropping Classes

“Add/Drop” is a period of time at the beginning of the semester during which students can freely change the classes for which they are registered, subject to course availability. The fifth (5th) day of class is the last day to add or drop a course. All adds and drops are done by your academic advisor.

Q-Drop

A “Q-Drop” is a special type of course drop that students can use after the regular drop period is over. Q-Drops do appear on transcripts. All Q-Drops must be started and approved by your academic advisor. Then, the Q-Drop form is signed by the Exchange Associate Director at the Study Abroad Programs Office. See the advisor for reciprocal exchanges in the Study Abroad Office for more information. Please remember that per J-1/F-1 visa regulations you are required to be a full-time student during your academic exchange program as per definitions on page 4.

Texas A&M Vacation Dates

During the Texas A&M academic year, there are approximately 40-days on which no classes are held. Take these breaks as a chance to travel and visit other places in the U.S.!

NOTE: If you need or choose to travel **outside the U.S.** for any reason during your exchange program at Texas A&M, *even to your home country*, you will need to complete an immigration travel form and have it certified by International Student Services (ISS). Travel outside the U.S. could affect your immigration status.

You should apply for international travel as early as possible, usually 3 weeks before you plan to take longer than four days, so please plan well in advance to complete all necessary procedures.

CAMPUS SERVICES AND FACILITIES

Mailing Address

If you live on campus, your mailing address will NOT be the same as your dorm name and room number. All dorm residents need to rent a post office box available in or near the Northside and Southside residence halls.

A&M Bookstore

The Texas A&M Bookstore, located in the MSC (Memorial Student Center), is a convenient place to purchase school supplies such as paper, writing utensils, envelopes, exam supplies, as well as A&M souvenirs. The bookstore also sells all textbooks required for courses at Texas A&M. The store is very convenient, but is most likely expensive relative to other stores, particularly for items such as paper, pencils, backpacks, etc.

Libraries

The main library is the Sterling C. Evans Library, located in the middle of the main campus. A smaller library, Cushing Memorial Library is adjacent to the main library. Additionally, there are three libraries on the West Campus; the Medical Sciences Library, Policy Sciences and Economics Library, and the West Campus Library. Tours of the libraries are available to help you better use the resources available. Library hours vary for holidays, finals, etc.

Religious Groups & Facilities

The All Faiths Chapel is an on-campus, non-denominational religious forum for Texas A&M students. Additionally, many other religious organizations are active in this community and a large number are very close to campus. Most of the organizations near campus have student groups. For those that are further away, it is likely that you can arrange to ride with another student. The variety of religious organizations is great and includes many student groups on campus as well as community groups.

Laundry

Washers and dryers are available in each dorm and in most apartment complexes. Dry cleaners are available within walking distance of campus and the A&M bus lines. Costs vary greatly per business and per item.

Student Health Center

Beutel Health Center is open 8am-5pm Monday-Friday, except for university holidays. The student health center is capable of dealing with the majority of health problems, but it is not a hospital. Serious medical cases or surgeries will be referred to hospitals or physicians who are better equipped to deal with them.

All students can make appointments at Beutel Health Center. Services are also provided on a walk-in basis, but an appointment is advised to avoid excess waiting time.

Ask first to find out what charges there will be for your appointment and for what you want or need. The charge is almost certainly less than it would cost you to go to a private doctor. Services include unlimited visits during regular business hours, urgent-care calls to the evening and night doctors on duty, simple X-rays, routine lab tests, some physical therapy prescribed by clinic physicians and more. Extra charges apply for prescription medications, immunizations, copies of outside lab-work, X-rays, orthopedic appliances and physical exams among others.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

While many people are aware of the different types of sexually transmitted diseases that exist, please remember that diseases do not discriminate. STDs can affect any person in any country in the world—in your country, in the U.S. or in another country. Please take all appropriate and necessary precautions. Staff in the Beutel Health Center can provide you with more information and advise you on how to protect yourself. You can also schedule an appointment with a healthcare professional there to discuss any questions you might have and to get more information.

Filing a Federal Tax Return in the USA

As of 1993, **ALL** foreign students who study in the United States are required to file an income tax return. *THIS APPLIES TO YOU.* Even if you did not earn or receive any money while in the U.S. except money from your home country, you **MUST** file an income tax return for the U.S. The 1993 *U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens* the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) states the following on page 34:

Nonresident Aliens

All nonresident aliens required to file annual U.S. income tax returns must file the Form 1040NR. Even if you have left the U.S. and filed a Form 1040-C on departure, you must still file the annual return.

You may also have to file an information return if you move currency or other securities into or out of the United States.

You can obtain tax information at the website for the U.S. Internal Revenue Service which administers the federal tax system in the USA: www.irs.gov. There are additional resources on the ISS website: <http://iss.tamu.edu/taxinfo/taxes.asp> International Student Services (ISS) at A&M will keep you informed of this obligation.

Tax Year & Deadlines

The U.S. fiscal year for taxes is the same as the calendar year (1 January – 31 December). You must wait until the tax year is completely over before you can file your tax return. The deadline for filing a U.S. tax return is **15 April** of the following year in most cases. So, between 1 January and **15 April** you need to complete the correct tax documents and send them to the Internal Revenue Service. Again, International Student Services (ISS) will provide this information.

TRADITIONS AT TEXAS A&M

Texas A&M has an amazing number of traditions. The most obvious is one you have probably already encountered—all people who are currently taking courses at Texas A&M or have attended Texas A&M in the past are called “Aggies.” This is also the name of the sports teams, although the mascot is a collie dog named Reveille. The majority of Aggie traditions are remnants of the school’s history as a military institution. Many of them have a distinct military flavor and structure to them. Although Texas A&M is not and has not been a military university since the 1960s, Aggies take these ceremonies and traditions very seriously. Not all are somber; many are fun and social with a goal of showing Aggie unity. Here are brief descriptions of some of the Aggie traditions.

Silver Taps

Held on the first Tuesday of every month, Silver Taps honors any current students who died in the previous month. They are remembered with three rifle volleys of seven shots each by the Ross Volunteer Firing Squad. After this, buglers play “Silver Taps” three times from the dome of the Academic Building where the ceremony takes place. All lights are extinguished on campus for about 30 minutes for this ceremony.

Yell Practice

Enthusiasm and spirit for an upcoming athletic event, particularly for football games, is built up at Yell Practice. The A&M Yell Leaders, elected by the A&M student body, lead thousands of Aggies in the songs and cheers to demonstrate their pride and unity.

Muster

Muster is an annual event celebrated around the world on April 21. On this day all Aggies who died during the past year, including those who were no longer active students at the time of their death, are honored in a ceremony reminiscent of Silver Taps but on a much grander scale. Of course, the largest Muster is held on-campus at Texas A&M and is an amazing sight. A list of the names of the students who died during the previous year is read out loud; this is the Muster. Someone present at the ceremony answers “here” for each person listed. This truly embodies the spirit that a person is an Aggie forever and each individual is a lasting part of Aggie tradition.

Memorial Student Center (MSC) & Grass

The Memorial Student Center and the grass areas surrounding it are in memory of the Aggies who died in defense of freedom. *The grass is a living memorial so please do not walk on it. Also, please do not wear hats inside the building; take them off before you enter.*

AGGIE SPORTS AND LEISURE

NCAA

Texas A&M University is a member of the National Collegiate Athletic Association and has a wide variety of sports for Aggies to play and watch. The most popular of these is football; the stadium holds more than 102,000 spectators. Among other sports are soccer, tennis, golf, baseball, softball, basketball, track, cross country, volleyball, equestrian and more! Within the NCAA, Texas A&M belongs to the SEC (Southeastern Conference).

Intramural Sports

The Intramural Sports program provides students with opportunities to participate in a wide variety of sports with other students on campus. Texas A&M has one of the largest intramural sports programs in the country. It is administered by the Student Recreation Center (the Rec). You can organize your own teams as well.

Student Recreation Center

This is also known as “the Rec.” In addition to coordinating the intramural sports program, the Rec provides students with wonderful facilities for sports and exercise. It has a climbing wall, three swimming pools, an indoor track for walking and running, indoor and outdoor basketball and volleyball facilities, badminton, racquetball, squash, weights, workout equipment and more! Tours are available and you should take one: It’s an amazing place.

TAMU Outdoors

As part of the Rec, TAMU Outdoors organizes activities for sports that cannot be done in such a controlled setting as the Rec itself. Weekend or day trips of kayaking, canoeing, hiking, climbing, horseback riding and more are organized throughout the year. Instructional workshop such as kayaking techniques, outdoor cooking, basic climbing skills and safety, etc., are also offered. Students can also rent sport, camping, kayaking, and other equipment.

Check out the Student Recreation Center (Rec) website: <http://recsports.tamu.edu/> for more information the about the Rec itself, intramural sport, TAMU Outdoors, the golf course and more!

Student Organizations

There are more than 1,000 recognized organizations on campus offering a myriad opportunities for students at Texas A&M. These include academic, recreational & sports, and hometown clubs as well as organizations based on religious beliefs, honor societies, social sororities and fraternities, and international groups. See the Student Activities website for specific information: <http://studentactivities.tamu.edu/>

International Student Services (ISS)

In addition to the services available to all Texas A&M students, as international students you also have access to the services provided by International Student Services (<http://iss.tamu.edu>). ISS staff can help you with immigration regulations, social security numbers, employment information, personal advising, community involvement and other issues. Their goal, as well as ours in Study Abroad, is to help make your transition into life at Texas A&M smooth and easy.

Memorial Student Center (MSC)

Known as the MSC, this is one of the busiest buildings on campus. The building is a sort of campus community center, housing art galleries, meeting rooms, food services, the bookstore, a convenience store, a small hotel and many lounges for meeting friends and studying. At the center of this is the MSC Flag Room, a community room with a piano and flags from around the world as well as tables and couches for people to sit together. In the basement you can find pool tables, video games, and additional food options. There is also a Starbucks in the book store.

The Battalion

This is the student newspaper at Texas A&M. It is published Monday through Friday, except during student holidays, and is available all over campus at no cost. Coverage includes events and student life and news at Texas A&M, local area news, U.S. and international news, editorials and advertisements including coupons for restaurants and businesses as well as classified ads.

The George Bush Presidential Library and Museum

The library and museum holds official and personal records of President George H. W. Bush. There are also often lectures, film screening, and special exhibitions. For more information, see <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/>.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Bryan/College Station

Bryan and College Station are next-door neighbors and it is not always clear where one town ends and the other begins. The combined population of the two cities is more than 250,000 residents, without counting the Texas A&M students. By car, Bryan/College Station is located about 2 hours northwest of Houston, 2 hours northeast of Austin, 3½ hours northeast of San Antonio and 3 hours south of Dallas. The web site for the Bryan/College Station community is <http://www.visitaggieland.com>.

Climate

The climate is very humid and very hot during the summer, but it can get cold (20°F ~ -7°C) for brief periods of time between December and February. Here's a brief overview of temperatures for the area:

| | Average High Temperatures | | Average Low Temperatures | |
|---------|---------------------------|------|--------------------------|------|
| January | 14°C | 58°F | 4°C | 39°F |
| April | 26°C | 79°F | 14°C | 58°F |
| July | 34°C | 94°F | 23°C | 74°F |
| October | 28°C | 82°F | 15°C | 59°F |

Shopping

The Bryan/College Station area has many stores and shopping centers in addition to a mall.

Eating Out

There are many restaurants in the area with a fairly wide selection of prices and types of food.



Campus Safety

Texas A&M tries to provide a safe environment for the university community but students must be aware that open access to the campus means that virtually anyone can come and go as s/he pleases.

With this in mind, we recommend that everyone walk in groups at night if at all possible. Please try not to walk alone because it could make you look more vulnerable. If you must go somewhere and need someone to walk with, the Corps of Cadets provides free escort service for students anywhere on campus, for male and female students 24 hours a day. Dial-a-Ride (979-847-7433) is also available; this is bus or van service available at night for on-campus.

CARPOOL (979-693-9905) is a student-run non-profit organization serving the Bryan/College Station area and offers free rides home every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from 10pm to 3am.

TRANSPORTATION

Texas A&M Buses

Texas A&M buses have service between on-campus locations as well as off-campus. Bus service is provided without an extra charge to students, faculty and staff. Bus schedules and routes are available on-line at <http://transport.tamu.edu>. Always feel free to ask drivers or other students about the buses and bus routes; they will be happy to help you as best they can.

Pedestrian Safety

As you will do much walking on campus, it is important for you to know something about the rules for crosswalks and such. Please only cross roads at marked crosswalks; it is illegal to cross other places and you could be ticketed (and fined!) as well as be injured. IMPORTANT: Even when you have the right of way to cross the street, remember to check for cars as sometimes drivers are not paying attention or cannot see you. This is a community that does not have a large number of pedestrians and does not always watch closely for people on foot.

Local Public Transportation

Bravos Valley Transit is the local public transportation system. It is very limited as to the routes as well as the times it runs. If you need more information about it, you can call 979-778-0607.

Bicycles

Bicycles are most likely the least expensive and most flexible transportation option. Sometimes it is possible to find a good used bike, but you can purchase a new bicycle at US\$100 on the average. A good lock will cost about \$15-20; a helmet is about \$25. For additional information, refer to this website: <http://transport.tamu.edu/alternative/bicycles/services.aspx>

Cars

While most students at Texas A&M own a car, a car is usually not the best option for exchange students as cars can be quite expensive and involve many hassles—even if you find a reasonably priced used car. Insurance is mandatory and quite expensive, especially for nonresidents. You would need a Texas driver's license to get insurance and that means taking the written and behind-the-wheel driving exams. To take the behind-the-wheel portion, you must provide the car so you would need to have a friend who allows you to borrow his/her car for the test which means someone would need to drive you to Dept. of Public Safety in the car. Additionally, if you wanted to park the car at the university, you would need a parking pass which generally costs \$275 or more per semester.

Motorcycles

See **Car** above, except you need a special designation on your driver's license for a motorcycle. You should also know that different states have different laws for motorcycles (such as helmets) so be careful if you take the motorcycle into a different state. Ignorance of the law is not an excuse for breaking it.

Renting a car

If you wish to travel and do not want to or cannot fly, renting a car might be an option. Be aware that the required car insurance for you could be rather expensive and, that in many cases, people under the age of 21 are not allowed to rent cars; sometimes the minimum age is 25. You will generally be required to use a credit card to make the reservation. Prices can vary greatly from company to company. You will need an international driver's license if you don't have a U.S. driver's license.

TRAVEL WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES

Leaving the USA

You **MUST** get permission from an advisor in International Student Services (ISS) **BEFORE** you leave, if you are leaving the United States and need to return to complete your exchange study. An advisor needs to check your academic status and sign your DS-2019 giving you permission to re-enter the U.S. as a student.

This is true for ALL situations in which you must leave the U.S., including visiting your home country or going to Canada or Mexico for a day trip. You could be denied re-entry to the U.S. if your documentation is not in order.

To get this permission, you must turn in your request to ISS three weeks before your departure.

Travel within the USA

Some students rent cars, others fly, and still others travel via Greyhound Bus Lines. Whichever works best for you, we recommend that you purchase a travel guide or use online services for travel guide information about the place you are visiting in regard to accommodations, tourism, local transport while there, restaurant information and cost guidelines.

All Travel

You should always have your passport and other travel documents with you any time you travel outside of the College Station area. Please also have the following information with you when traveling:

TAXI SERVICE (in College Station or Bryan)

- AAA University Taxi: 979-268-8189 or 979-846-2233
- Aggieland Cab Services: 979-693-5532 or 979-846-2285
- Advantage Taxicab Service: 979-779-8030

Telephone Information

To get telephone numbers for local individuals and businesses: 979-555-1212

For other areas around the United States: Change the area code (the first three numbers, 979 in College Station) or search online.

Local Telephone Information

For local telephone information wherever you are, use the following numbers.

On-campus: 9-411

Off-campus: 411 (If this does not work, dial "1" first; there is a charge if you must dial "1.")

Ground A=Shuttle

Van service between the Intercontinental and Hobby airports in Houston, the Austin airport, and College Station/Bryan: <http://www.groundshuttle.com> or reservations@groundshuttle.com. Use the web site to register. You'll receive a confirmation e-mail.

Documents Required to Enter the U.S. as an Exchange Student

- Valid Passport
- J-1 Visa in passport
- DS-2019 Certificate of Eligibility

When you clear immigration upon arrival in the U.S. at the airport (or other port of entry), please make sure that the immigration officer correctly stamps your DS-2019 form and the I-94 card. If not properly stamped, you will have to return to a U.S. Immigration Office, at your own expense, to have it properly stamped.

HOUSING INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS

Housing Contract

If you apply for on-campus housing, you will be required to sign a housing contract for a full academic year, even if you are staying at A&M University for only one semester. Students studying on exchange for only one-semester will cancel housing before departing the A&M campus without penalty.

If you are studying on exchange for the full academic year (fall and spring semesters), please note that the on-campus residence halls close immediately after final exams in mid-December and re-open in mid-January. Students will be responsible for finding alternate off-campus housing accommodation during this time period of mid-December through mid-January. Students will not need to move personal items from the rooms during the semester break, but will be required to vacate the residence halls.

Application for On-Campus Housing: Graduate and Undergraduate

International Exchange students should apply online for On-Campus Residence Halls at <http://reslife.tamu.edu/> and follow the instructions for applying for housing. Students must be admitted to the university and have an assigned University Identification Number (UIN) before applying for on-campus housing. Students will receive the UIN in the Welcome Packet upon admission to the exchange program.

For a list of available residence halls and rental rates visit <http://reslife.tamu.edu>. *Please note that exchange students should not apply for Corps of Cadet Residence Halls.* At time of online application, you must remit a Housing Application Fee of \$50.00 USD. **Online payment by credit/debit card or electronic check is required as part of the application process.**

Please read the terms of the housing contract carefully. Note that if your exchange program is for 2 semesters and you apply for on-campus housing but later decide to cancel and move off-campus for the second semester, per terms of the Housing contract, you will be charged 50% of the second semester housing fee.

Off-Campus Housing

Exchange students who wish to live off-campus must make their own arrangements for off-campus housing. The following websites can provide information to assist exchange students in locating an affordable place to live in the College Station area:

- <http://studentlife.tamu.edu/agoss/>
- <http://aggiesearch.tamu.edu> (if you are seeking a roommate).

Other options include

- First Street Guest House is an option for close-to-campus housing accommodations: Email firstst@live.com
- Students may contact University Apartments where many international students are housed: <http://reslife.tamu.edu/apartments>

YOUR 1ST AGGIE QUIZ

This quiz is mostly objective. Test how carefully you have read this handbook by answering these questions. Then check your answers by looking on the page number following the question. Contact Study Abroad if you have any difficulties or problems.

1. How do you meet the Texas A&M health insurance requirement? (p. 17)
2. In order to register for classes, all you need to do is check in at Study Abroad and everything will be taken care of. (p.6, pp. 18-19)

TrueFalse
3. List the documents that you will need to have in order to enter the U.S. as a J-1/F-1 student. (p. 7)
4. If you arrive at an airport other than the one in College Station, it could be very difficult to get to College Station. (pp. 10-11)

TrueFalse
5. How long do banks generally need to process an international wire transfer? (p. 13)
6. Is class attendance considered important or are only assignments important? (p. 22)
7. What is the minimum number of credit hours J-1 student visa requirements mandate that you take per semester while you are at Texas A&M on your exchange program? (p. 6)
8. If you plan to leave the U.S. during your exchange program, even to visit your home country, what do you need to do in advance of your departure? How much before your departure should you do this? (pp. 28-29)
9. As an exchange student in the U.S., you are required to file a U.S. federal tax return for the fiscal year during which you studied in the U.S. (p. 22)

TrueFalse
10. Which credit cards are accepted by the university, according to this handbook? (As an exception, Housing currently accepts other credit cards for the housing deposit.) (p. 13)
11. Which major credit card does Texas A&M University NOT accept? (pp. 12-13)
12. What is the legal age for the consumption of alcoholic beverages in the U.S.? (p. 4)