

Texas A&M University

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General Information & Daily Life

During the fall semester 2016 I went on exchange to Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas and had one of the most amazing times of my life. Texas A&M is nothing like EUR, everything is much bigger, as you would expect in Texas. The university is located in the Bryan/College Station area. These are basically two adjacent small cities, which together make up a population of about 185,000 people, of which at least a third are students, as Texas A&M has more than 60,000 enrolled students. The campus is located in College Station and makes up most of the city. It is definitely the biggest campus I have ever come across. It is a classic college town where you will definitely have the American college life experience you are probably looking forward to. Furthermore, the fact that the weather conditions are exceptionally great will make your exchange even more enjoyable. Nevertheless, I needed some time to adapt to the climate. In August and September, the sun is shining non-stop and temperatures can easily rise above the 40 degrees. But you will get used to it pretty quickly. The remainder of the time, the temperatures are between 15 and 30 degrees, even though it can get “cold” in December.

Texas A&M students are called “Aggies” as the university used to be centred on agriculture a long time ago, but don’t worry, it is not anymore. Being an Aggie doesn’t only mean attending A&M, it is a life style, everything is about A&M. The Aggies are a very proud community. Moreover, the term “Aggies” also refers to the universities sports team which play at the highest level of the NCAA, the national university sports league. The most important sport is American football. The home games are played on campus, in the enormous Kyle Field. The stadium has a capacity of about 105,000 people, which is bigger than any stadium in Europe and makes it the 6th biggest stadium in the world, which is quite impressive for university sport. The stadium is nearly always sold out and the atmosphere is amazing. On game days, the whole city is concentrated on football and everyone wears the university colours. Before the game, there is the so-called tailgating where people install tents all around campus, to barbecue and drink in order to prepare for the game. As I am not the biggest American football enthusiast, I only went to the stadium once but I attended

most of the tailgates, as they are the most enjoyable part of game days. Furthermore, you can also attend basketball or baseball games, but the experience is nothing like for football. Though, these games are cheaper to attend, as football tickets can easily go up to 50\$ per game if you don't have a sports pass. A sports pass enables you to visit all games of the season but costs about 250-300\$.

In addition to sports stadiums, the campus consists of libraries, lecture and tutorial buildings, a huge student centre and various sports facilities that are free for exchange students. The sports facilities include a big gym, indoor and outdoor swimming pools and various basketball, football, soccer and tennis pitches. Since the campus is so big, I definitely recommend you to get a bike or use the various free of charge buses that drive around the campus and the whole Bryan/College Station area.

Nightlife is of course a big part of "college life". The main place to go is called "Northgate". It is a small district next to the campus and consists of several bars and small clubs which are very diverse, and for the most part open every day. Keep in mind that the drinking age in the US is 21 and that they are very strict on that. Furthermore, there is a state law which prohibits the sale of alcohol after 2AM, which makes the bars and clubs close relatively early. In general, Americans are not the most outgoing people in terms of clubbing or going to bars and therefore you will probably encounter lots of house parties, which are a fun way to meet different people than those you are taking courses with.

Finally, even though there are several things to do in College Station, I can definitely recommend you to travel around Texas and the United states in general. I went all around Texas, Louisiana and Las Vegas. Texas has a lot of big cities like Houston, Dallas, Austin and San Antonio. They are all worth visiting but my personal highlight is Austin. Furthermore, you can travel to the beach, to the desert, and to several natural parks. Since public transport is nearly inexistent in Texas, you will have to travel by car. Renting a car can be pretty expensive if you are under 25 but most students own a car, so that should not be a problem, unless you want to travel alone. You can also use Zimride, which is the American equivalent of Blablacar. Most classes have compulsory attendance which can make travelling a little difficult.

Preparation

Once you have been selected you will be contacted by Texas A&M to officially apply for your exchange. The application is done through a portal and is pretty straight forward; you will have to upload various documents, including a proof of vaccination for bacterial meningitis, which you can do at the Travel Clinic Rotterdam. If you have any question about your application you can contact Ben Petty, the exchange coordinator, which is always happy to help.

After being admitted by A&M, you'll have to apply for a student visa. A&M will send you some documents for the visa, but there are also additional documents you will have to provide yourself. To apply for the visa, you will have to make an appointment at the American Embassy. Finding all the documents and scheduling an appointment is really time-consuming, so I'll recommend you to do it as soon as possible. Once you have your appointment, you have to go to the embassy for a personal interview, which takes a few minutes. Keep in mind that electronic devices, even switched off, are not allowed in the embassy. I had to find a café and ask the waitress if she could keep my phone during the interview. Once you receive your visa, which takes about 2-3 weeks, you are pretty much good to go. You'll only have to email your travel plans to the university and complete an online orientation.

Moreover, I can recommend you to book your flight as soon as possible. I waited until I had my visa to book a flight and paid the according price. Since, you are going to get your visa with 99% chance, it is worth booking your flight in advance as you can save a couple hundred euros.

Finally, you will have to look for housing. There are basically two options, on or off-campus housing. Both have their advantages. In both cases, I would try to arrange housing as soon as possible. On-campus housing is convenient as you will be close to all university facilities. There are two options for on-campus housing, dorms and apartments. The dorms are situated in the heart of the campus and are the cheapest housing option. That is because you share a room with someone else and the cooking possibilities are very limited. You will have to buy a meal plan which enables you to eat at several places around campus. The

second option is university apartments. They are situated at the edge of the campus and thus not in walking distance to class. The flat is shared among 3 or 4 people and includes a kitchen and a living room. The apartments are pretty expensive. Nevertheless, I chose for the apartments as I wanted to have my own room.

The other option is to live off-campus, the off-campus apartments themselves are comparable to the university ones and are in general slightly cheaper. Furthermore, they are situated in apartment complexes just for students, which for the most part include swimming pools, hot tubs and gyms. These are very nice complexes, they pretty much look like holiday resorts. The only problem is that not all complexes offer rooms for only one semester, and some complexes are not very central. But if you have a bike, you'll be fine.

Arrival

Depending on where you arrive in Texas, there are different possibilities to reach your place. You can fly straight to College Station and in that case, you can take an Uber or a taxi to your apartment, as there is no public transport reaching the airport. If you fly to Houston, there is a shuttle which brings you from the airport straight to your place for about 35-40\$. I do not recommend you to fly to Dallas, as there is no public transportation going to College Station. If you live on campus, you will have to get your keys from your resident advisor (RA). If you want to move-in before the beginning of the introduction week, you can ask for an early move-in, which is usually no problem for exchange students. Class starts the first week of September but you'll need to attend the introduction week in the end of August, which is a great way to meet people.

Courses

After your arrival, you will have to meet your assigned study advisor in order to register your courses. ESE requires you take 12 ECTS in Economics, Business or Maths and you can choose any courses for the remaining 12 ECTS (1 American credit = 2 ECTS). In general, my impression was that the courses were less challenging than at EUR, in terms of content, but not necessarily in terms of workload. Midterms and assignments account for the most part of the grade and finals only count for about 25-30%, which spreads the workload through

the whole semester. All of this makes it relatively feasible to obtain satisfying grades. I took the following courses:

- **Sports Economics (ECON 315, 3 credits):** Very interesting course and great professor. This is basically a traditional Economics course. The only difference is that it applies economic theory to sports rather than to more classical industries. This course mainly focused on game theory, pricing strategies, imperfect information and labour economics. Nevertheless, some parts of the course overlapped with economic theory that was already covered in the first two years of IBEB.
- **Economic Development (ECON 330, 3 credits):** I really enjoyed this course since the professor was really passionate about his course. This course is about the functioning of developing economies. I found it really interesting since different models and theories are applied to the developing world than those that are taught in “classical” Economics courses.
- **Foundations of Sports Management (SPMT 217, 3 credits):** If you like sports, it is a really interesting course. This course gives insights into the development and the functioning of the sports industry. Even though this course was interesting, it was poorly organised. The professor did not upload his slides and the exams were only about remembering facts rather than understanding, so it was not very challenging. Furthermore, it focused mainly on the American sports industry.
- **Beginning Italian I (ITAL 101, 4 credits):** Beginners Italian course. If you are interested in languages, A&M offers courses in nearly every language. Nevertheless, the course was a little bit slow in my opinion, but it is also due to the fact that Americans generally have more difficulties with foreign languages than Europeans (in my opinion).

Finances

A&M requires you to have at least around 7,000\$ on your account when you go there. Personally, I thought I would spend way less money than that. In the end, I spend even more than that a little less than what they recommended, excluding the flight. Do not underestimate the costs, going on exchange in the US can be pretty expensive, especially if

you want to travel. Furthermore, I would say that daily living costs are a little higher than in the Netherlands.

- **Flight:** 700-1000\$ depending on how early you book
- **Visa + Sevis fee:** ± 300\$
- **Housing:** 3600\$ (for the White Creek apartments, dorms are cheaper)
- **Insurance:** ± 900\$
- **Sports facilities:** 0\$
- **Football game:** ± 50\$ per game, ± 300\$ for a season ticket
- **Travelling:** depends how much you travel
- **Going out:** ± 3\$ a beer, ± 5\$ other drinks
- **Food:** between 10-20\$ a day depending on whether you eat out or not
- **Deposits:** 400\$ (University + accommodation)
- **Phone plan:** 20-25\$ (if you get a family plan with other people, otherwise 35-40\$)
- **Bike:** 100\$