

Reflection on My Study Abroad Experience at Texas Tech

By Raaida Mahbub

Introduction

Studying abroad at Texas Tech University during Fall 2024 was an experience that profoundly shaped my personal, academic, and cultural perspectives. Before arriving, I was filled with both excitement and apprehension about navigating a new culture, making friends, and adapting to a different academic system. To my surprise, this journey would be full of unforgettable experiences—from cheering alongside thousands of passionate sports fans to participating in cutting-edge research and exploring the vast beauty of Texas. This reflection highlights the cultural immersion, campus life, academic growth, and personal transformation I experienced during my time at Texas Tech.



The 'Guns Up' gesture, a hand sign often shown by Red Raiders to symbolize Texas Tech pride

Adapting to a New Environment

One of the first things I noticed upon arriving in Lubbock, Texas was the warmth and hospitality of the people. The culture of saying "y'all" and the friendliness of strangers were new and heartwarming for me. A particularly memorable cultural experience was attending my first Thanksgiving dinner. I joined one of my roommates and her family and was welcomed as if I had always been part of their celebration. It was fascinating to learn about the traditions, food, and history behind this uniquely American holiday.



Another unforgettable moment was experiencing snow for the first time. Growing up in the UAE where snow isn't common, seeing the campus covered in a pristine white blanket felt magical. It also brought its own set of challenges, like walking across icy pathways, but it added to the novelty of my time there.

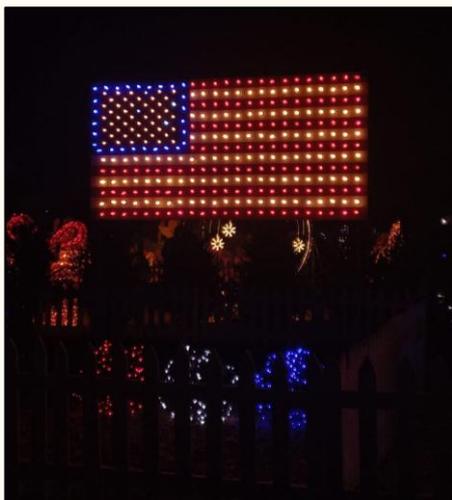


Social Connections

Adjusting to life with roommates and making new friends was initially daunting, but it turned out to be one of the most rewarding aspects of my semester. I shared an apartment with three American students, which gave me insight into their lives and perspectives. One of my favourite memories was late-night conversations with my roommates, where we shared stories about our cultures, joked about our daily lives, and became like family. Another fond memory is of our UNO games, which would often get quite intense and competitive!

Exploring Texas

Texas itself felt like a world of its own. I travelled to cities like Houston and Dallas and explored the unique landscapes of the state, from bustling urban centres to vast open plains. The sheer size of Texas was overwhelming, but it also made every journey feel like an adventure.



Campus Life at Texas Tech

Texas Tech's campus was unlike anything I had ever experienced. Its sprawling size made me feel like I was in a small city rather than a university. In fact, the city it is in – Lubbock – is a university town. Walking through the campus that was built inspired by Spanish architecture. I felt a sense of awe as I discovered the campus' rich history. It took me a while to navigate the campus confidently, but by the end of the semester, I had my favourite spots, like the Student Union Building and Urbanovsky Park where I could study or relax.



Joining multiple student organizations helped me feel connected to the university community. From tech-focused clubs, such as the GDSC (Google Student Developer Clubs), the ACM (Association for Computer Machinery) and IEEE-WIE (IEEE Women in Engineering Society), to cultural organizations, such as the MSA (Muslim Student Association), each group provided me with opportunities to meet like-minded people and explore my interests. I also participated in several campus events, which helped me appreciate the vibrant student life at Texas Tech.



Sports were a cornerstone of campus life, and attending my first football game was an unforgettable experience. The energy of the crowd, the school spirit, and the pageantry of the event left me speechless. I remember standing among thousands of passionate fans, shouting chants I barely understood but wholeheartedly enjoyed. It was during these games that I felt a deep sense of belonging to the Red Raider community.



Academic and Professional Growth

One of the most significant academic takeaways from my time at Texas Tech was the hands-on, project-based approach to education. Unlike traditional lecture-based learning, this style encouraged collaboration, critical thinking, and real-world problem-solving. Working on group projects not only enhanced my technical skills but also taught me the value of teamwork and effective communication.

Participating in the HackWestX 2024 hackathon was another highlight of my semester. This event was intense but incredibly rewarding, as it challenged me to develop innovative solutions under time constraints. I learned how to manage pressure, work efficiently in teams, and think creatively to solve problems.



In addition to hackathons, I worked as a research assistant in a professor's lab, which was an enriching experience. The lab's focus on semiconductor research allowed me to explore my field hands-on, which helped me realize my own interests and goals for the future. I gained valuable insights into the research process, from the methodologies of data collection to analyzing data. This experience solidified my interest in pursuing research and opened new possibilities for my academic journey.



Conclusion

Looking back, my semester at Texas Tech was a transformative experience that exceeded my expectations. It broadened my horizons, deepened my understanding of other cultures, and helped me grow academically and personally. The friends I made, the lessons I learned, and the memories I created will stay with me for a lifetime.

This experience has inspired me to approach future challenges with curiosity and an open mind. I am grateful for the opportunity to have been a part of the Texas Tech community, and I look forward to applying the skills and insights I gained to all aspects of my life moving forward.

