

## FEATURES

## The 41: Don't Judge

Austin's historically affordable student mecca is getting a fresh coat and some new kicks

BY JORDAN GASS-POORÉ, FRI., AUG. 24, 2012



If the "mexican HEB" and "XXL Hookers" don't lure you, perhaps the "indian engineering students" or the "ultra poor students" will. Head south across Austin's water border and take a sharp left to the land simply known as "Riverside."

Those "XXL Hookers" may have clouded New York-based graphic designer and summer-Austinite Albert Bui's judgment when he created his notorious Judgmental Austin Map. But his ultra-meme hints at a few undeniable truths: A higher-than-average crime rate and affordable housing (the median rent in 2009 was \$674, compared to Austin's \$744 city median) have characterized this upticking student community for years.

Located southeast of Downtown Austin, the 78741 is home to an eclectic demographic, the majority of whom are 25 or younger. Just by virtue of its pocket locale, Riverside is an escape from the McMansions that dot Travis Heights, the clusterpit that is West Campus, and the group house vibe that is getting harder and harder to find in central East Austin

(thank you, landlords and soaring real estate market). Once known for its mushroom of cheap apartments and grub, Riverside now seems to be aiming to become every hipster's hideaway. This once-neglected area of Austin is now aglow due to the significant attention being shown by redevelopment interests. Seems you can't swing a backpack without hitting a construction crane.



Judgmental Austin Map by Albert Bui

University of Texas at Austin undergraduate Veronica Dueñas feels that Riverside is a diamond in the rough. Dueñas has lived at University Village in the Riverside student housing neighborhood for two, going on three, years. She made no mention of prostitutes or grocery stores taken over by neighboring countries. Her take on Bui's satirical map is that it's a bit off the mark, even judgmentally.

Despite what the statistics say, Dueñas attests that she has many friends who have had enjoyable, crimeless experiences living in apartment complexes off Riverside. Of course, this is anecdotal, but Dueñas says she jogs around her neighborhood at night and has never had a problem or felt unsafe. She also said she found the University Village "to be less restrictive than a UT dorm and the rent to be less expensive, while still being easily accessible to campus."

Even though the Longhorn senior has yet to check out the new venues at Emo's East or the Beauty Ballroom (see "**Eastern Rock**"), she says the large Riverside student community makes it easy to find weekend house parties and events where one can still get their jiggaay on. When she wants to get her om nom nom on instead, Dueñas heads to Taquerias Arandinas, the closest to the Mexican cuisine of her hometown of Laredo, Texas that she's found in Austin.

While Riverside may be underrated and misunderstood in a number of ways, its recreational options are inarguable. There's the hike and bike trail across from the strangely dystopian backdrop of the Holly Street Power Plant; the Riverside Golf Course; the Krieg Softball Complex; Secret Beach (don't ask us – we'll never tell); and Mabel Davis District Park

(which reopened in 2005 after a \$6 million restoration). Plus, there's a whole compound of intellectuals, who may not necessarily bleed orange, on ACC's Riverside Campus.

"Riverside has a good amount to offer," says Dueñas enthusiastically. Apparently way more than XXL Hookers and a Mexican H-E-B.

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