

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

OPT is temporary employment authorization, which allows F-1 students to engage in off-campus employment **related to their major field of study**. The work performed does not count towards course credit; therefore, it is the student's option to apply for OPT.

OPT may be used during a degree program (pre-completion OPT) and after completion of the program (post-completion OPT).

PRE-COMPLETION OPT

Eligibility

- The student must have been in full-time status for one academic year at UTSA preceding the OPT application and must be in valid F-1 status at the time of application.
- Employment must be directly related to the student's area of study.
- No job offer is required.
- The student authorized to participate in pre-completion OPT is limited to 20 hours per week of OPT while school is in session. S/he may work full-time when school is not in session.

Duration of Employment

- A maximum aggregate period is 12 months per educational level.
- Part-time OPT is deducted from the 12-month limit at 50%. NOTE: Part-time employment is 20 hours per week and less; full-time employment is 21 hours per week and more.
- Pre-completion OPT is not subject to the unemployment provisions.

Dates of OPT Authorization

- Discuss with the International Student Advisor your preferred dates at the time of application.

When to apply

- The student who has already met the one academic year requirement may apply up to 90 days in advance of the requested employment start date.

POST-COMPLETION OPT

Eligibility

- The student must have been in full-time status for one academic year at UTSA preceding the OPT application and must be in valid F-1 status at the time of application.
- Employment must be directly related to the student's area of study.
- No job offer is required.

Duration of Employment

- A maximum aggregate period is 12 months per educational level.
- The student may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment.

Dates of OPT Authorization

- Discuss with the International Student Advisor your preferred dates at the time of application.
- The requested employment start date may not be more than 61 days after the student's program end date, and all post-completion OPT must be completed within the 14-month after the student's program end date.

When to apply

- The student who has met the eligibility requirements may apply 90 days prior to the graduation date and 60 days after your graduation date.
- The student must also file the OPT application with USCIS Service Center within 30 days after the International Student Advisor enters the recommendation for OPT into the student's SEVIS record.

Application Procedures for Pre- and Post-Completion OPT

1. Bring the following to the International Student Services (ISS):
 - Completed Form I-765** available at http://utsa.edu/intprograms/forms/Post_I-765.pdf
If you wish to receive the EAD card through OIP, please fill in Section 3 with the OIP address below:
OIP/UTSA, One UTSA Circle
San Antonio, TX 78249
 - Preferred dates of OPT authorizatio**
Beginning Date: _____ End Date: _____
Month/Day/Year Month/Day/Year
 - Check or money order for \$340** made payable to : U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Do not write or make corrections in the upper portion of the check. If using a personal check, make sure that you maintain enough money in your bank account.
 - 2 recent passport-style photos** on white background
The photos must be 2 x 2 inches. The image must be 1 inch from the hair to the chin and 1 ¼ inch from eye height to the bottom of the photo. Your name and I-94 number must be printed in pencil on the back of the photos.
 - Letter from the academic advisor** with specific graduation date (mm/dd/yyyy format) or completion of course requirements. If you are double-majoring, please be sure to bring a letter for each major.
 - Copies of the following:**
 - o I-94 Form (front and back)
 - o Passport name page with expiration date (passport must be valid)
 - o Copy of your passport visa page, if applicable
 - o First page of your current I-20
 - o Previous Employment Authorization Card (EAD), if any

2. ISS will issue 2 new I-20s reflecting OPT (one for your personal record and the other for USCIS Service Center). Pick the new I-20s at ISS and assemble the OPT application packet and mail it according to your delivery method.

For U.S. Postal Service deliveries	For Express mail & courier deliveries:
USCIS Dallas Lockbox USCIS, P.O. Box 660867 Dallas, TX 75266	USCIS, Attn: AOS 2501 S.State Hwy. 121 Business Suite 400 Lewisville, TX 75067

E-Notification: If you want to receive an email and/or a text message that your Form I-765 has been accepted at a USCIS Lockbox facility, complete Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance and clip it to the first page of your application.

3. USCIS will mail a Receipt Notice to the address listed on the Form I-765. The Receipt Notice will have a receipt number, the date of the receipt notice and USCIS website to check the status of your application.
4. USCIS will issue an Employment Authorization Document (EAD), if they approve your application. USCIS reports that the processing time for an EAD is 90 days after the receipt notice date posted on the receipt. If USCIS wants more information, they can send a request for evidence. If ineligibility is determined, USCIS should indicate the reason for denial in a written notice. **When you receive the EAD, you must bring a copy of the EAD to ISS.** Please do not forget to check your EAD for any errors. If you find any errors, please call USCIS Customer Service listed on your Receipt Notice.

MAINTAINING YOUR F1 VISA STATUS WHILE ON OPT

To maintain your F-1 Status during OPT, you must comply with U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) employment and reporting requirements.

F-1 STUDENTS' RESPONSIBILITIES

All F-1 students are required to report to ISS **within 10 days** any changes in the following:

- U.S. Personal Address
- Email address
- Telephone number
- Start or end of employment
- Change of your employer's address and telephone number
- Change of your employer's name
- Change of your official name

Failure to report these changes will be considered as a violation to your visa status and revocation of your future benefits.

HOW TO REPORT

You can report these changes by going to our website and completing the OPT UPDATE Form.

<http://utsa.edu/intprograms/forms/optupdateform.cfm>

UNEMPLOYMENT LIMITS

During any 12 month period of standard post-completion OPT, you may not be unemployed for an aggregate of more than 90 days. It is crucial that you report all periods of employment to avoid unnecessary accrual of unemployment days. If DHS determines that the student exceeded the limitations on authorized unemployment, the student may be denied future immigration benefits that rely on the student's valid F-1 status.

ACCEPTABLE EMPLOYMENT

DHS has ruled that the following activities are considered allowable employment on both pre-completion and standard post-completion OPT, **provided that the job is directly related to the student's program of study:**

- Regular paid employment
- Contract employment
- Self-employed business owner
The student should be able to prove that s/he has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to his or her degree program.
- Volunteers or unpaid interns
The student should be able to provide evidence, acquired from the student's employer, to verify the hours of week per week during the period of employment.

Please be aware that it is the student's responsibility to keep evidence of his or her employment records for future reference.

H-1B CAP-GAP EXTENSION

Duration of status and work authorization will be extended for a student on post-completion OPT who is beneficiary of a timely filed H1B petition requesting an employment start date of October 1st of the following fiscal year. The extension of duration of status and work authorization would automatically terminate upon the rejection, denial, or revocation of the H1B petition filed on the student's behalf.

TRAVEL

PRE-COMPLETION OPT PERIOD

The student follows the same procedures for visits abroad and reentry required of a full-time student. The required documents are as follows:

- Valid passport
- I-20 with a valid signature from an international student advisor from ISS within the preceding 6 months
- Valid F-1 visa
- Letter from your employer showing temporary employment in the authorized field of study

POST-COMPLETION OPT PERIOD

The student can temporarily be readmitted for the remainder of the authorized training period, provided that the student presents the following documents:

- Valid passport
- I-20 with a valid signature from an international student advisor from ISS within the preceding 6 months
- Valid F-1 visa
- Valid EAD
- Letter from your employer showing temporary employment in the authorized field of study

ISSUES RELATED TO TRAVEL

1. Travel outside the U.S. while the application is pending with USCIS

If you have an OPT application pending with USCIS, you are not supposed to leave the country. If you do, USCIS may consider this departure as an abandonment of the application. Therefore, ISS does NOT recommend that you travel outside the U.S. while your OPT application is pending.

However, it does happen that students do need to leave the country during this time period. The most common arrangement is that they ask a trusted friend or relative in the U.S. to mail the EAD to them, so that the student can re-enter the U.S. with all the required documents. If you are considering this path, please be aware that there is risk involved in this scenario, such that your card might get lost in the mail or that USCIS could send back your application due to some minor technicalities.

2. Travel outside the U.S. with an expired visa

If you are going to Canada, Mexico, or other contiguous territories (except for Cuba) and staying for less than 30 days, you could re-enter the U.S. on your expired F-1 visa stamp, with a valid passport, your EAD, and an I-20 recently signed by ISS. Be sure NOT to turn in your I-94 card. You must keep it in your passport to re-enter the U.S. on an expired visa. If you are traveling elsewhere, you will need to go to a U.S. Embassy or Consulate and renew your visa.

3. Visa Renewal

The risk of denial for a F1 visa renewal when you are on OPT is higher than while you are in your active student program, as the fact that the focus of your stay in the U.S. now is that of working rather than going to school, it may be seen as an avenue for adjustment of status to permanent residency. The F1 student visa requires that the applicant must intend to return to the home country at the end of the program, and if the embassy official is not convinced of your intention to return home, the visa application could be denied.

The following documents are needed for a F1 visa renewal:

- Valid passport
- I-20 recently endorsed by ISS
- EAD
- If you already have employment, an official offer of employment letter showing your salary, location of where you will be working, job duties, and beginning date. You should also be prepared to discuss how the job experience will apply to the job market in your home country and how you intend to apply it there.