

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 have to be counted toward course credit unlike Curricular Practical Training. OPT may be used during a degree program (pre-completion OPT) and/or 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 up to 90 days prior to the graduation date and within 60 days after the 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. Complete the online Blackboard OPT Workshop → Bring copy of quiz score.
2. Bring the following to the International Student Services (ISS):
 - OPT Request Form:** available at <http://international.utsa.edu/forms/optional-practical-training-forms/>
 - Completed Form I-765:** available at: <http://www.uscis.gov/i-765>
 If you wish to receive the EAD card through the ISS, please fill in Section 3 with the OIP address below:
 OIP/UTSA, One UTSA Circle, MB 1.210
 San Antonio, TX 78249
 - Check or money order for \$410** made payable to: *The 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 passport-style photos** taken within the past 30 days 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 or felt pen on the back of the photos.
 - Letter from the academic advisor** stating your academic standing and expected 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 identity pages, photo page, page with passport validity dates including renewal page if original has expired, and pages showing amendments such as name changes, corrections, etc.
 - o Passport visa page, if applicable
 - o All previous I-20 forms
 - o Previous Employment Authorization Card (EAD), if any
3. Pay the \$100.00 ISS OPT processing fee ([UTSA ASAP](#) or at Fiscal Services)
4. International Student Services will issue 2 new I-20s reflecting OPT (one for your personal record and the other for USCIS Service Center). Pick up your new I-20s at the ISS. Assemble the OPT application packet, make a copy for your reference, and mail it according to your delivery method. **Your OPT application must be sent to USCIS no later than 30 days after the date of I-20 issuance.**

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.

5. 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.
6. USCIS will issue an Employment Authorization Document if they approve your application. USCIS reports that the processing time for an EAD is up to 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 Employment Authorization Document, you must bring its copy to International Student Services.** Please do not forget to check your Employment Authorization Document for any errors. If you find any errors, please call USCIS Customer Service listed on your Receipt Notice.
7. If you do not have a Social Security number (SSN), you can apply for an SSN upon receipt of your Employment Authorization Document. For more information about an SSN go to:<http://international.utsa.edu/living-in-san-antonio/social-security-number/>.

MAINTAINING YOUR F-1 VISA STATUS WHILE ON OPT

You must comply with U.S. Department of Homeland Security employment and reporting requirements to maintain your F-1 status during OPT.

F-1 STUDENTS' RESPONSIBILITIES

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

- Legal name
- U.S. residential address
- Email address
- Telephone number
- Employment/Unemployment Status (including employment start/end date)
- Employer name, address and telephone number
- Departure from the U.S. (permanent leave)

Failure to report these changes will be considered as a violation of your visa status and may lead to termination of your F-1 visa status and revocation of your future benefits.

HOW TO REPORT

You can report these changes by going to the International Gateway and completing the OPT Update Form at <http://international.utsa.edu/forms/opt-update-address-employer-form/>.

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 the U.S. Department of Homeland Security determines that the student has exceeded the limitations on authorized unemployment, the student's record will be terminated and she or he may be denied future immigration benefits that rely on the student's valid F-1 status.

ACCEPTABLE EMPLOYMENT

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security 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
Students may work for multiple employers as long as it is directly related to the student's program of study.
- Work for hire (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.

Early Departure from the U.S. while on OPT

Students must inform International Student Services if they plan on departing the U.S. permanently while on OPT. Email the following information to internationalprograms@utsa.edu:

- Full name
- SEVIS ID Number
- End date of your employment, if applicable
- Date of departure
- Subject line should indicate: Early completion of OPT

Your SEVIS record will be updated to reflect your departure from the U.S.

Transferring to Another School or Beginning New Academic Program

If you plan on transferring to another school, you will need to speak to an international student advisor at International Student Services to coordinate the release of your SEVIS record. You may request to have your SEVIS record released while you are on OPT or during your 60-day grace period. Once the SEVIS record is released, you cannot continue working on OPT.

Also, if you plan to begin a new academic program at UTSA, you will need to contact International Student Services concerning your employment end date and new I-20 for the new program.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Students who have completed their academic program are no longer eligible for UTSA health insurance. If you wish to extend your UTSA health insurance, please contact Academic Health Plan before you graduate at (855) 247-2273 or www.ahpcare.com/UTSystem.

24-MONTH OPT EXTENSION ELIGIBILITY

A student with a degree in a STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) field can apply for a 17-month extension of their post-completion OPT. In order to qualify, a student must meet all of the following requirements:

- The student is already participating in approved post-completion OPT and working in a job directly related to the student's major area of study;
- The student has earned a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree listed on the STEM Designated Degree Program List (visit <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/> for the STEM degree list);
- The student has accepted a job offer or is already working for a U.S. employer registered in the government's E-Verify employment verification program (visit: www.uscis.gov for information about E-Verify);
- The employer agrees to report the termination or departure of an OPT employee to the UTSA International Student Services;
- The student has not previously received a 24-month OPT extension after earning a STEM degree; and
- The student has maintained F-1 visa status.

For more information please refer to our STEM OPT handout on our website:

<http://international.utsa.edu/forms/optional-practical-training-forms/>.

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 H-1B petition requesting an employment start date of October 1 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 H-1B petition filed on the student's behalf.

TRAVEL

PRE-COMPLETION OPT PERIOD

Students on Pre-completion OPT follow the same procedures for visits abroad and re-entry required of full-time students.

Required documents are

- Valid passport
- I-20 with a valid signature from an international student advisor from International Student Services 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 on Post-completion OPT 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 International Student Services within the preceding 6 months
- Valid F-1 visa
- Valid Employment Authorization Document
- 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. International Student Services does **not recommend** that you travel outside the U.S. while your OPT application is pending.

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 Employment Authorization Document to them, so that they 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: Your card might get lost in the mail or 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 Employment Authorization Document and an I-20 recently signed by an international student advisor. 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 F-1 visa renewal when you are on OPT is higher than while you are in your degree 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 F-1 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 International Student Services
- Employment Authorization Document
- 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.