

This guide is provided by the UT Dallas International Student Services Office to current UT Dallas students considering requesting Optional Practical Training. The information is not intended as legal advice. For legal issues, please consult an immigration attorney.

WHAT IS POST-COMPLETION OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

Optional Practical Training (OPT) allows up to one year of work authorization per educational level. It is a possible benefit of F-1 student status. Graduating students may apply for OPT after obtaining an OPT I-20 from ISSO and then applying to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for employment authorization.

STEPS TO APPLY FOR POST COMPLETION OPT

Step 1. Verify your eligibility.

- Valid F-1 status at the time of application.
- At least one academic year of full-time enrollment immediately prior to the OPT application.
- Completion of a UT Dallas degree.
 - If completing two programs in the same semester, you may request when submitting your OPT application to the ISSO that your second major be listed in the remarks of your I-20.
- May not have exceeded 364 days of full time CPT, or 12 months of OPT, at the current educational level.
- Must apply during the application period (up to 90 days before program completion date, and up to 60 days after).

Step 2. Attend a mandatory OPT workshop in person at Student Services Building (SSB), 3rd Floor, Room 3.107 or eLearning session if you have applied for graduation. More workshop dates and information may be found at: <https://www.utdallas.edu/isso/opt/>

Step 3. Decide:

- **Whether you should apply for OPT.**
 - Your I-20 and SEVIS record will be shortened to reflect the completion of your academic program.
 - Apply for OPT if you will complete your program requirements by this program completion date. If you are not sure whether you will successfully complete your program the ISSO strongly recommends that you wait to apply for OPT until after you are certain that you have completed your studies.
 - Apply for OPT if you intend to reside in the U.S. during the OPT period for the purpose of seeking and maintaining employment directly related to the degree which you just completed.
- **Your requested OPT start and end date.**
 - The earliest date you may request your OPT to begin is the day after the program completion date. The latest you may request your OPT to begin is 60 calendar days after the program completion date.
 - The date for which you are approved to start/end OPT may be different from the dates you request.
- **When you should apply for OPT.**
 - The earliest date that you may apply for OPT is 90 days prior to the program completion date. The latest date on which USCIS must receive your OPT application is 60 days after the program completion date.
 - For SEVIS purposes, your program completion date is the last day of final exams for the full-term session, or the date you complete all requirements for your thesis/dissertation. You may want to wait until you are certain that you do not need to enroll another semester before you apply.
- **Which address you will use to receive your OPT correspondence from USCIS.**
 - The address you use on the I-765 will be used for all OPT related letters and correspondence from USCIS. You may use your local address, or the ISSO address.
 - We do not recommend the use of your local address if you will move before you receive the EAD as the U.S. service will not forward mail from USCIS.
 - If you use the ISSO address there will be a delay of approximately 5 business days from when the USCIS indicates that the EAD has been received, and when ISSO notifies you that your EAD is ready to collect.

Step 6. Compile the documents listed below.

Pay the \$100 Practical Training fee *before* submitting this form or your I-20 will be delayed. Pay online at: utdallas.edu/isso/ptfee.

- OPT I-20 Request Form.
- Completed I-765 Form.
- Copy of any previous EAD cards (only if you have received an EAD in the past).

Step 7. Submit your documents to the UT Dallas ISSO.

- In person: Submit to the ISSO during office hours, SSB 3.4. Monday - Thursday, 8:30am to 6pm. Friday, 8:30am to 5pm.
- By e-mail: Submit to ISSODocuments@utdallas.edu. Verify that the total size of attachments in one e-mail is not larger than 5MB. Do not send files in compressed formats, such as .rar or .zip. Instead, use a PDF, JPEG or DOC format.
- Processing time is about 3 business days. You will receive an email from ISSO when your request has been processed.

Step 8. Pick up your OPT I-20 from the UT Dallas ISSO. Compile the documents listed below.

- Form G-1145 (Optional). Authorizes USCIS to send you application processing updates via email/text. If this is desired, paperclip completed form on top of application packet.
- Original Form I-765.
- 2 U.S. size passport photos. No glasses allowed. Lightly write name and I-94 number on back of each photo. Attach photos to top, left corner of Form I-765 (a plastic bag is supplied for your convenience).
- \$410 check or money order. Make payable to "Department of Homeland Security," write I-94 number at top. Staple check midway down the left edge of Form I-765.
- Copy of OPT I-20. Pages 1 and 2. I-20 must be less than 30 days old, signed by you and an ISSO advisor.
- Copy of passport ID page. Showing picture and expiration date.
- Copy of I-94. Front and back of paper I94, or electronic I-94 print out.
- Copy of F-1 visa. Most recently issued visa, valid or expired.
- CPT printout. Provided by ISSO.
- Copies of any former OPT EADs.

Step 9. Mail the application to USCIS. Mailing instructions will be provided with the OPT I-20 and are also available at <https://www.utdallas.edu/isso/forms/>

Step 10. Wait for USCIS to process your request. Check case status online at <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do>. If approved, you will receive an OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD). The normal processing time for USCIS is three months, however it may take longer.

Step 11. Do not begin, or continue, employment until you have the EAD card and the start date on the EAD card has arrived.

Step 12. Maintain F-1 status while on OPT. To maintain F-1 status during OPT you must comply with U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) employment and reporting requirements. Refer to more information at <http://www.utdallas.edu/isso/opt-reporting/>

MANAGING YOUR F-1 STATUS AFTER APPLYING FOR OPT

Graduate on time. Your I-20 and SEVIS record has been shortened to reflect your program completion date.

- If you will not successfully complete your studies in the semester for which you have applied for OPT, obtain an I-20 with an extended program completion date. Speak with an ISSO Advisor regarding your options to withdraw your OPT application.
- Your F-1 status may be in jeopardy if you wait until after your program completion date to request an extension.

Check your case status online. <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do> If OPT is approved, you will receive an OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD). The normal processing time for USCIS is three months, however it may take longer.

Check for errors! Review the information on your USCIS I-797 Receipt Notice and Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card. Speak with an ISSO Advisor if you find any errors.

End student employment. Student employment including CPT, and on campus employment including TA/RA employment, must end on or before your program end date. You may not lawfully begin or resume employment until after you receive your OPT EAD card, and the start date of your OPT authorization has arrived.

Search for appropriate OPT employment. The Department of Homeland Security instructions regarding acceptable OPT employment may be found at <http://www.utdallas.edu/isso/opt-reporting/>

- All employment must average at least 20 hours per week.
- All employment must be directly related to your major and educational level that is on your current I-20. You and the employer make this determination.
- You may change employers as long as each job is directly related to your current major and educational level.

Document your job search and keep employment records. You may be asked for detailed proof of OPT employment or job search activities for future immigration applications or interviews including:

- Copies of job-specific cover letters and resumes.
- Any letter or email that contains info about interviews, testing, information sessions.
- Timesheets, paystubs, logs of volunteer hours

Apply for a Social Security Number if you don't already have one. If you do not already have a Social Security Number (SSN) you may apply for one after you receive the EAD. The Social Security Administration will not process your request before your OPT start date.

Learn what is needed to re-enter the U.S. after travel abroad.

- Before the program completion date and while you are still taking classes:
 - Valid passport
 - Valid F-1 visa
 - OPT I-20 endorsed for travel within the past 6 months
- After the program completion date present all of the following documents upon re-entry:
 - Valid passport
 - Valid F-1 visa
 - OPT I-20 endorsed for travel within the past 6 months
 - OPT EAD
 - Proof of employment (for example, pay stubs, employment verification letter)

Learn OPT Reporting procedures. Information regarding OPT requirements and links to the OPT Reporting form may be found at <http://www.utdallas.edu/isso/opt-reporting/>

MANAGING YOUR F-1 STATUS WHILE ON OPT

Submit the OPT Reporting Form to the ISSO. Information regarding OPT requirements and links to the OPT Reporting form may be found at <http://www.utdallas.edu/isso/opt-reporting/>.

Stay within unemployment limits. Students on post-completion OPT may have up to 90 days of unemployment.

- Each day (including weekends) during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that you do not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment.
- OPT authorization begins on the employment start date shown on your EAD.

Engage in appropriate employment. The Department of Homeland Security instructions regarding acceptable OPT employment may be found at <http://www.utdallas.edu/isso/opt-reporting/>

Determine if you are eligible for the 24-Month OPT Extension. The U.S Department of Homeland Security (DHS) limits this benefit to selected programs. Visit <http://www.utdallas.edu/isso/opt-extension/> for additional information.

Learn options available at the end of OPT. After the OPT end date, there is a 60 day grace period in which you can:

- Start another academic program at UT Dallas
- Transfer to another school
- Change to another visa category
- Leave the U.S.

*Notify the ISSO of your departure by submitting an OPT Reporting form so that a note can be placed in your immigration record.