This guide is provided by the UT Dallas International Student Services Office to UT Dallas students considering applying for 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) is temporary employment that is directly related to an F-1 student's major area of study and educational level. Eligible students can apply to receive up to 12 months of OPT employment authorization after completing their academic studies. You may request an OPT I-20 from the ISSO. You will then use that OPT I-20 to apply for OPT authorization from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

STEP 1. Verify your Eligibility
- Lawfully enrolled full-time for one academic year immediately prior to applying for OPT.
- Currently in valid F-1 status.
- Eligible to complete degree in the current semester, including maintaining good academic standing.
  - If completing two programs in the same semester, you may request that both programs be listed on your OPT I-20.
- Authorized for no more than 364 days of full-time CPT at current educational level.
- No previous OPT authorization at the current educational level.

STEP 2. Attend a mandatory OPT workshop
- In-person workshops are held weekly. Schedule is available on the Comet Calendar. The event title is “OPT Workshop for F-1 Students.”
- Online workshop available in iComet (https://icomet.utdallas.edu).

STEP 3. Decide.
- Should I apply for OPT?
  - The ISSO strongly recommends waiting until you are certain you will graduate in the current semester before applying for OPT. If you are unsure whether you will graduate, you should wait to apply. If you apply for OPT and then do not graduate as expected, your F-1 status could be jeopardized.
  - When you apply for post-completion OPT I-20, your SEVIS record and any CPT authorization will be shortened to reflect program completion. You must end all employment by this date, including assistantships and on-campus employment.

- When can I 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 immigration purposes, your program completion date is EITHER the last day of final exams for the full-term session of the semester in which you are graduating OR your thesis or dissertation defense date.

- What should I request as my OPT start date?
  - The earliest date you may request is the day after your program completion date. The latest date you may request is 60 calendar days after your program completion date.
  - USCIS may give you a different start date, especially if they process your application after your requested start date. You will not know your official start date until you receive your EAD card.
What mailing address should I use?
- All of the correspondence from USCIS will be sent to the mailing address you indicate on your I-765. You may use your personal address or the ISSO address.
- If you will move before you receive your EAD card, we do not recommend using your personal address. The U.S. Postal Service will not forward mail from USCIS. USCIS will destroy EAD cards returned as undeliverable by the U.S. Postal Service after 60 business days.
- If you use the ISSO address, there will be a delay between the time that the post office delivers your EAD to the university and when it arrives at the ISSO office. You will need to wait until you receive confirmation from the ISSO that your EAD card is ready for pick up.

STEP 4. Apply for your OPT I-20.
- Pay the $100 Practical Training Fee at utdallas.edu/isso/optfee
- Submit your Post-Completion OPT Request at icomet.utdallas.edu
  - Fill out the eForm completely.
  - Upload a copy of your completed Form I-765. The advisor will review it and return a “DRAFT” copy to you. Do NOT send the “DRAFT” copy to USCIS.
  - Upload copies of any previous EAD cards, if any.
- The ISSO will notify you by email when your OPT I-20 is ready.

STEP 5. Apply to USCIS for OPT authorization.
- Compile the following documents for your application to USCIS. Detailed mailing instructions will be included with your OPT I-20.

  - Form G-1145 (optional)
  - Two passport photos (No Glasses)
  - $410 filing fee, paid by check, money order, or Form G-1450 for Credit Card Payment.
  - Original I-765 form
  - Copy of OPT I-20, Page 1 and 2
  - Copy of passport ID page
  - Copy of I-94
  - Copy of F-1 visa
  - CPT page (provided by ISSO with your OPT I-20)
  - Copies of previous EAD cards (front and back) and OPT I-20 for any previous periods of OPT

DO NOT BEGIN OR CONTINUE EMPLOYMENT UNTIL YOU HAVE THE EAD CARD AND THE START DATE ON THE EAD CARD HAS ARRIVED.

MAINTAINING STATUS ON POST-COMPLETION OPT

Limits on Unemployment
Students on post-completion OPT may accrue up to 90 days of unemployment. It is your responsibility to keep track of how many days of unemployment you have remaining during your period of post-completion OPT.

Each day (including weekends) during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that the student does not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment.

Your OPT authorization begins on the employment start date shown on your EAD card. This start date may be different from your requested start date. You may not know your exact start date until your receive your EAD card. Remember, your days of unemployment begin accruing on the start date listed on your EAD card.
Reporting Requirements
Students on post-completion OPT must report the following information to the ISSO within 10 days of a change:

- Your current U.S. address
- Start or end of employment
- Change of your employer’s name
- Change of your employer’s address
- Change of your legal name

Follow the reporting instructions at utdallas.edu/isse/opt-reporting/.

Travel
If you have applied for OPT but have not yet received your EAD card, it is risky to travel after your program completion date. You will not be able to re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status until you receive your EAD card.

- If you are travelling before your program completion date and are still taking classes, you should carry the following documents:
  - Valid passport
  - Valid F-1 visa
  - OPT I-20 endorsed for travel within the past 12 months
- If you are travelling after the program completion date you must 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 (pay stubs or letter of employment)

Options after Post-Completion 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.

If you are in a STEM eligible major and you wish to apply for the 24-month STEM OPT extension, you must submit your application to USCIS within the final 90 days of your current period of OPT. USCIS will accept applications for the STEM OPT extension up to 90 days BEFORE your OPT end date listed on your EAD card, and no later than the OPT end date listed on your EAD card.

ISSO CONTACT INFORMATION
The ISSO provides advising services in person, over the phone, and by email. For current advising times and services offered, please see the ISSO webpage: https://www.utdallas.edu/ic/issonadvising/