
Experiential Education – Building Professional Experience

The TEXASiSchool encourages experiential learning and all students have the option to conduct a Professional Experience Project (PEP) to meet their capstone course requirement. Additionally, the majority of international students at the iSchool find opportunities to build professional experience through internships, class projects, and independent studies/research. Review pertinent rules and programs on the International Student and Scholar Services page at <https://world.utexas.edu/iss>.

Internships

Internships are the best way to build professional experience while you are a student. You can find general information about internships on our website by reviewing the [Internship FAQs page](#).

However, the internship and job search for international students can be challenging due to F-1 Visa restrictions and a more limited selection of viable companies/organizations. Internships with companies are **not guaranteed**, but you will be fully supported by the Career Development Office during your time at the iSchool. We recommend starting your search early and communicating with us regularly so we can support you in your efforts.

I. Rules – During your first academic year (fall and spring semesters) you may only work on campus. After one full academic year of full-time student status, you may apply for authorization to work off-campus (CPT).

II. Searching – All employers and postings on the iCareers system have been vetted by our office to protect students. iCareers, UT Career Fairs, and company-specific sites are the safest venues to interact with employers.

On-campus jobs - To view all the on-campus jobs we have posted in various departments, run an Advanced Job Search on iCareers: select 'More Filters' and in the Employer box enter "**UT Austin**". Make sure you complete the [iSchool Funding Application](#) every semester to be eligible for GRA or TA positions at the iSchool.

Be aware that some organizations try to take advantage of international students. Postings on external sites such as Indeed.com have not been verified. If a job posting notes "prefer international students", that is typically a sign that the job may not be valid. You should not be asked to produce work for an employer unless it is part of a standardized interview exercise. [Contact the Career Development Office](#) with any questions you may have about an employer.

See the [Student Employment Guide](#) for more information and links to job searching sites.

III. Receive an Offer – CPT Application Process (<https://world.utexas.edu/iss/students/work/cpt>)

Once you have been offered a paid internship, you must apply for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) through the University International Office (<https://world.utexas.edu>) to be authorized to work off campus. To get your CPT approved, you will need to register for a course and have the iSchool's graduate advisor review and sign the CPT Recommendation Form (note: the iSchool's graduate advisor is not the same as a faculty advisor).

Career Development Office | University of Texas

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Schedule Career Advising at <https://ischoolcareer.youcanbook.me>

You have one of three options for meeting the CPT course requirement, depending on your preference as well as your progress through the master's program:

- **Internship Course:** The iSchool offers an Internship course that you can be enrolled in to meet the CPT requirement (INF 188T, 288T or 388T), but you will **not** receive credit hours toward your master's degree for this course. You can choose this course for 1-3 credit hours (depending on how many hours you may need to maintain full-time student status). This option has the benefit of being fast and flexible. Note: you will need to complete a new [x88T Internship Course Application](#) for this option, which needs to also be signed by the internship supervisor at the employer.
- **Individual Study:** You can pursue and enroll in an Individual Study for academic credit (INF 181, 281 or 381) that is related to the work you are doing for the internship. This option **requires a faculty sponsor/supervisor**, and the faculty member decides whether you will receive 1-3 credit hours, depending on the scope of work. The study should result in a scholarly product, such as a published paper, presentation or report. For this option, you will need to complete the [Individual Study Proposal Form](#) and have it signed by the faculty member who will sponsor the project as well as the iSchool's graduate advisor. This option has the benefit of providing additional learning as well as academic credit toward your degree.
- **Capstone:** If you have completed **at least 27 hours in the program** and you are eligible to enroll in the Capstone course (INF 388L), this course can meet the CPT course requirement IF your Capstone project work is related to the work you are doing at the internship (though please remember that your Capstone project must be above and beyond the day-to-day tasks of your internship).

Below are the items you will need to prepare for the iSchool graduate advisor:

1. A [CPT Recommendation Form](#) with the student section complete
2. An Individual Study Proposal Form signed by the faculty sponsor **IF** you plan to enroll in the Individual Study to meet the course requirement (if not, then skip this step)
3. An Internship/Job Offer Letter from the employer (on the company letterhead) that includes the following:
 - Employer/company name
 - A specific start date (mm/dd/yyyy), which must be a future date from the date it will be approved **
 - A specific end date (mm/dd/yyyy)**
 - A job title
 - A brief job description
 - A physical work site address where you will conduct the job
 - Number of hours to be worked per week
 - A signature of the employer

**The start date can be as early as the day after graduation for the previous term and the end date often must be no later than the graduation date for the semester you are away working (if you enrolling in the CPT course in the fall, then the end date is the day before classes begin in the fall) – see the [UT Calendar](#) for specific dates.

After the iSchool graduate advisor has approved and signed the CPT Recommendation Form, you will provide this signed form as well as the employer letter and a copy of your [I-94 Record](#) to the International Office (the I-94 proves your legal visitor status in the US). You can either schedule an appointment with the International Office to review and approve your application or you can use the new [Online CPT Application](#) (allow five business days to process; if your work starts sooner than 5 days, make an appointment).

Remember: You must have a **Social Security Number (SSN)** before you can be paid.

Full-time Jobs

Finding a full-time job in the U.S. is very challenging and frustrating for many international students. There is **no guarantee** that you will be able to find a position that will sponsor you to remain in the U.S. after graduation, but you will be supported by the Career Development Office.

Optional Practical Training (OPT) (<https://world.utexas.edu/iss/students/work/opt>)

Your F-1 Visa includes Optional Practical Training (OPT), essentially a 12-month extension to your visa (if you apply for it), which allows you to stay legally in the U.S. to work in your field post-graduation. You start the OPT process by attending the required OPT Workshop with the International Office. After the International Office has given you a new I-20 showing your recommendation for OPT, you apply for your [Employment Authorization Document \(EAD\)](#) from USCIS.

You must have your EAD card in hand before you can start working. The OPT approval process can **take up to three months (90 days) to process**. Pay close attention to the expiration dates of your I-20 and F-1 Visa during this process. When to apply is a bit of a gamble as you can apply for OPT as early as 90 days before graduation (best if you already have a job lined up) or as late as 60 days after graduation (buys you a little time for a job search, but also means that you are not ready to go to work immediately when you meet an employer who wants to hire you).

STEM Extensions

If you are hired for a **technical role** you may also be eligible for the **24-month STEM** extension or a total of 36 legal months post-graduation. The School of Information is classified as a STEM program. There is a similar application process to obtain the [STEM extension](#).

Conversion to H1-B Visa

OPT is the temporary work authorization given to you by the U.S. government, but an F-1 Visa is strictly a student visa that will eventually expire. To remain working legally in the U.S. past the 12- or 36-month OPT extension, the F-1 Visa must be converted to an H1-B Visa, which requires sponsorship from a company.

The Company's Perspective

The process to file for conversion from an F-1 Visa to an H1-B Visa is time consuming and expensive. Each year there are a limited number of H1-B visas allotted by the federal government and there are no guarantees that a company will 'win' an H1-B Visa even if it spends the money to go through the conversion process on behalf of an international student. If a company hires an international student, it is taking a risk because there is no guarantee that the F-1 Visa will be converted to the H1-B Visa. Many companies do not want to hire an international student who may have to return to his or her home country in 12 months. However, other companies (namely large technical companies such as Microsoft and Google) have a proven track record of H1-B conversions. Some small tech companies are also willing to pursue the H1-B for the right candidate.

Be aware that some companies hire international students as contractors. Often, if you are hired as a contractor the position is temporary and will only last as long as your OPT permits you to work in the U.S. A few contracting agencies such as Computer Task Group will pursue an H1-B for a contractor. It is your responsibility to ask when a company or employment agency makes an offer to you if they are going to file for your H1-B Visa.

Securing a Job is Easier for Students Who:

- Have **skillsets** that are **both in demand** and **in short supply** among American citizens (for example, software engineering, web development, quantitative data analysis, data science, and similar roles). The majority of international students who are hired for post-graduate full-time positions possess technical skillsets.
 - Web design (interaction design/UX) skills are typically in hot demand, however, there are many U.S. citizens with design skills so this is an example of a skillset that is in demand, but NOT in short supply among citizens.

- Have **professional expertise** in a field, especially a growing area such as interaction design or UX. International students who already had multiple years of professional experience before pursuing their master's are often successful in finding H1-B sponsorship. It is an advantage to work in your home country for a large well-known company before pursuing graduate education in the U.S.
- Have an impressive **online portfolio**. Employers like to see evidence of your work products. Create your portfolio early on and document all of your school and work-related projects both visually and with written descriptions. Employers want to see your thought process so be sure to save ideas/brainstorm sessions, preliminary wireframes, design strategies, etc.
- Have **English** and American culture fluency. Being able to communicate effectively in English matters. Often the more successful international students have superior English abilities both orally and in written form. Take time to learn the language and the cultural standards for professionalism.
- Make the most of their time in the iSchool by seeking challenging coursework, projects, internship opportunities, career development activities and professional networking.

Handouts:International Students:International Student Employment Guide4_2018.docx

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