

Optional Practical Training

International Student Information and Request Form

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is work authorization available to international students who have been in valid F-1 status for at least one full academic year and who plan to seek employment in the U.S. in their field of study. OPT is recommended by the Office of International Affairs, but final approval is granted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS).

To obtain OPT, a student must:

- Be in valid F-1 immigration status for at least one academic year. One year of OPT is available at each level of education. During the period of OPT, a student continues in F-1 status, since OPT is considered to be part of the program of study.
- A job offer is not required to apply for OPT; however, once you find a job, you must notify the Office of International Affairs. The employment may occur anywhere in the U.S. It can take the USCIS three to five months to issue the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) that allows you to begin working on OPT. There is no way to expedite an application.
- If 12 months or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is used, a student forfeits OPT eligibility. Accrual of part-time CPT does not affect eligibility for OPT.
- Once the OPT application is submitted to the USCIS, it is very difficult to change or cancel the application.

Types of OPT

1) Pre-completion OPT

Pre-completion OPT allows students who have not yet completed a degree program to be authorized for off-campus employment. The application process for pre-completion OPT is the same as for other types of OPT and requires 2-3 months processing by USCIS. Students on pre-completion OPT are still required to meet the full-time enrollment requirement each long semester (fall and spring). Students on pre-completion OPT can only work part-time during school sessions. They can work full-time during official school vacations. Pre-completion OPT must end by the student's program completion date. Unlike post-completion OPT, students on pre-completion OPT are not required to limit days of unemployment and do not have reporting requirements, other than for changes of address. The amount of time you use for pre-completion OPT will be deducted from your 12-month allowance. Curricular Practical Training is a better option in most cases for working prior to your degree completion.

2) Post-Completion OPT

Post-completion OPT provides for up to one year of practical training authorization after completion of studies. Students can apply up to 90 days before and up to 60 days after program end date. It is recommended that students apply before completing their last semesters of enrollment to avoid additional processing time and the possible loss of days of employment availability. In addition, OPT applications must be submitted to USCIS within 30 days of receiving an OPT I-20 from the Office of International Affairs.

OPT Application Process:

1. **Read the information about OPT.**
2. **Request OPT by completing the form (pages 3 and 4)**
Forms should be turned in two weeks prior to desired appointment date.
3. **USCIS Application deadline**
Pre-completion OPT - USCIS Applications deadline is 90 days before your desired start date.
Post-Completion OPT – USCIS Applications can be accepted up to 90 days before and up to 60 days after program completion.
4. **Prepare the USCIS Application materials – please check USCIS website for updated listing.**
5. **Schedule an appointment with the Office of International Affairs to obtain new OPT I-20**
All USCIS Application materials should be brought to the appointment.
6. **Receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD)** It may take up to three months.
7. **Begin OPT once start date has arrived.**
8. **Report employment to the Office of International Affairs.**

Optional Practical Training

USCIS Application Materials - please check USCIS website for updated listing.

- Application Fee (Use a money order made payable to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security”)
- Form I-765
- Photocopies of your new OPT I-20 and all previous I-20s (Make sure all your I-20s are signed before copying them. Keep the originals for your records.)
- Photocopy of I-94 (This small, white card is usually stapled into your passport. Include a copy of both sides of the I-94, even though the back side may be blank.)
- Photocopy of Passport (Passport biographical information page)
- Photocopy of Visa
- Photocopy of past EAD cards if applicable.
- 2 Photos (OPT photos need to be a certain size. Write your name and I-94 number on the back of each photo in case they get separated from your application.)
- Form G-1145 Attach completed form to first page of I-756 application.

OPT Extensions

Students who have received a U.S. bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees in certain STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) fields are eligible for a one-time, 17-month extension of post-completion OPT (for a total eligibility of up to 29 months). Please contact the Office of International Affairs for more information.

Taxes

In general, F-1 students who have been in the U.S. for no more than five different calendar years are exempt from Social Security taxes. You should be sure to bring this to the attention of your employer because many employers are not familiar with this provision of the tax laws. Students in F-1 status are subject to all other taxes that may apply, including federal, state and local. For more information, please consult with a tax professional and/or Publication 519 of the Internal Revenue Service.

Comply with F-1 Status Regulations

F-1 students are responsible for complying with all immigration regulations, including employment regulations. Working without the proper authorization is a serious violation of nonimmigrant status in the U.S. If a student fails to comply, he or she may not be eligible for benefits normally granted to F-1 students and may jeopardize his or her stay in the U.S. Prior to accepting any employment in the US, students should consult with the Office of International Affairs.

- **Employment Related to Major.** OPT is intended to enhance an F-1 student academic program by providing a means to gain experience in his or her field of study. The USCIS considers working in a job that is not related to his or her major a violation of F-1 status.
- **Periods of Employment.** Once an F-1 student completes his or her degree, he or she cannot work on-campus or off-campus until he or she has the EAD and the start date has arrived.
- **Periods of Unemployment.** During post completion OPT, students may not accrue an aggregate total of more than 90 days of unemployment during any post-completion OPT carried out under the initial post-completion OPT authorization. No special permission is required to change employers or terminate employment.
- **Reporting Changes regarding Employment.** An F-1 student authorized by USCIS to engage in Optional Practical Training is required to report within 10 days of any change in the following: employer name, employer address and/or, periods of employment/ unemployment.
- **Update Local Address.** An F-1 student authorized by USCIS to engage in Optional Practical Training is required to report within 10 days of any change in the following: legal name, residence including changes from one residence hall to another or mailing address, employer name, employer address and/or, periods of employment/unemployment.
- **Maintain the validity of your immigration documents.** F-1 students should keep his or her passport valid for at least six months in to the future. F-1 students should keep his or her visa valid if traveling outside the U.S.
- **Copies of Immigration Documents.** F-1 students should keep copies of all immigration documents including: the passport photo page, the visa page of the passport, both sides of the I-94 Form (even if the back side has no writing), current I-20, all copies of any I-20 issued.
- **International travel before the completion of an F-1 student’s academic program.** F-1 students must have the third page of your I-20 form signed by a university designated school official (DSO) before traveling. The signature date on your I-20 is valid for only one year of travel; check to make sure the signature is and will be valid upon return. Before leaving you must check to make sure that your student visa will still be valid upon re-entry into the U.S. If not, a new visa will need to be applied for prior to your return to the U.S.

International travel after completion of an F-1 student’s academic program. The guidance for travel of students who have a valid visa is related to whether OPT has been approved or not yet. If post-completion OPT has not been approved yet - Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card still not yet issued by USCIS, and there is not a job or a job offer, an F-1

Optional Practical Training

student may leave and then re-enter the U.S. to continue to look for employment. If post-completion OPT has been approved - EAD card has been issued by USCIS and there is a job or a job offer, an F-1 student may leave and re-enter the U.S. in order to begin or resume employment. If your post-completion OPT has been approved and an F-1 student leaves the U.S. before getting a job or a job offer, OPT ends and the student may not re-enter the U.S. as an F-1 student.

Request Form

I. PERSONAL DATA:

Name: _____
(Last Name) (Middle Name) (First Name) (Preferred if different)

SEVIS ID Number: _____ Date of current I-20 expiration: _____ Level of Study: () Bachelor's () Master's

Major: _____ Second Major: _____

Minor: _____ Classification: _____

Fontbonne E-mail: _____ Preferred E-mail: _____

Current Address: _____
(Street name & number) (City) (State) (Zip Code)

Permanent Address: _____
(Street name & number) (City) (State) (Zip Code)

Phone Number: _____
(Area code & current number) (Area code & permanent number)

II. OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING INFORMATION:

The authorization dates you choose will be noted on your new OPT I-20 and noted on your EAD.

- The latest date you can request OPT is 60 days after the program end date.
- The start date is the day on which the EAD becomes valid and you can begin working. The "clock starts ticking" on the start date whether you have a job or not.
- The end date is usually 12 months later, unless you request a shorter period of time or your application is approved 61 days or more after your program completion date.

Type of OPT:

() **Pre-Completion OPT – Summer or Winter Break – Fall or Spring Semester**

Requested Start Date: _____ Requested End Date: _____

Applications deadline is 90 days before your desired start date. The amount of time you use for pre-completion OPT will be deducted from your 12 month allowance. Curricular Practical Training is a better option in most cases for working prior to your degree completion

() **Post-Completion OPT – After degree completion**

Requested Start Date: _____ Requested End Date: _____

You can submit your application to the USCIS up to 90 days before the completion date as long as you have not left the U.S.

Have you ever been authorized for OPT in the past? () NO () YES – From: _____ To: _____

If you have been authorized for OPT in the past on which degree level was it based? () Bachelor's () Master's () Ph. D.

III. EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION:

Do you already have a job offer in place? () YES – please fill out information below. () NO – please leave information below blank. A job offer is not required to apply for OPT; however, once you find a job, you must notify the Office of International Affairs.

Job Title: _____

Name of Company: _____

Company Contact (Manager): _____

Work Address: _____
(Street name & number) (City) (State) (Zip Code)

Optional Practical Training

Work Phone Number: _____
(Area code & current number) (Area code & permanent number)

IV. OPT REGULATIONS FOR MAINTAINING F-1 STATUS

You are responsible for complying with all immigration regulations, including employment regulations. Working without the proper authorization is a serious violation of nonimmigrant status in the U.S. If you fail to comply, you may not be eligible for benefits normally granted to F-1 students and may jeopardize your stay in the U.S. Prior to accepting any employment in the US, you should consult with the Office of International Affairs. If you are authorized by USCIS to engage in Optional Practical Training, you are required to report within 10 days of any change in the following: legal name, residential or mailing address, employer name, employer address and/or, periods of employment/ unemployment. OPT is intended to enhance your academic program by providing a means to gain experience in your field of study. The USCIS considers working in a job that is not related to your major a violation of F-1 status. Once you complete your degree, you cannot work on-campus or off-campus until you have the EAD in your possession and the start date has arrived. During post completion OPT, you may not accrue an aggregate total of more than 90 days of unemployment during any post-completion OPT carried out under the initial post-completion OPT authorization. No special permission is required to change employers or terminate your employment. However, you must notify the Office of International Affairs of your unemployment and/ or new employer's information.

I have read and understand the responsibilities for maintaining F-1 status during my period of OPT authorization as stated above and on page 2.

Signature

Date