

Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 Students

What is Optional Practical Training?

The Department of Homeland Security authorizes practical work experience under certain circumstances for international students. Optional Practical Training (OPT) allows for training that is *not required* as part of a degree program, but is *related* to a student's major and commensurate with the degree level. Students may engage in OPT while pursuing a full course of study (*pre-completion OPT*) or after graduation (*post-completion OPT*).

Who is eligible for OPT?

Students who wish to participate in OPT must have been lawfully enrolled as an F-1 student in the United States for one academic year and must be in valid F-1 status at the time of application. The proposed training experience must also be directly related to the program of study and commensurate with the student's degree level. *Please note: Students who have completed a total of 12 months of full-time CPT are ineligible for OPT. Part-time CPT does not affect eligibility for OPT.*

Do I need permission to begin OPT?

An International Student Advisor must recommend OPT in SEVIS and update your I-20. Students must then apply for and receive permission from United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), a division of the Department of Homeland Security, to begin OPT. If permission for OPT is granted, you will receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) in the mail. You may NOT begin work until the authorized date on your EAD.

When can I apply for OPT?

Students may apply for pre-completion OPT no earlier than 90 days prior to completion of one academic year as a full-time student in the United States. For post-completion OPT, students may apply up to 90 days *before* the program end date and up to 60 days *after* the program end date. Students are advised to begin the application process early. The International Center suggests students begin the application process three months prior to the date they wish to begin OPT.

How many hours a week can I work during OPT?

Students may pursue pre-completion OPT part-time (defined as 20 hours or less per week) while continuing to maintain a full course of study. OPT taking place during the summer session may be full-time. Post-completion OPT must be pursued full-time (defined as more than 20 hours per week).

How long may I pursue OPT?

A maximum of 12 months of OPT may be authorized at each education level (Bachelor's, Master's, etc.). Students who have been awarded STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) degrees may be eligible for a 24 month OPT extension. A degree is classified as STEM if its CIP code appears on a list published by Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Do I need a job offer to apply for OPT?

No. However, students must work during the OPT period as indicated on the EAD. Students on post-completion OPT are limited to a maximum of 90 days unemployment (120 days for STEM extension students).

How do I apply for OPT?

Make an appointment with an International Student Advisor. Bring the following to your appointment:

1. Completed [Academic Advisor's Verification of Enrollment Form](#) (only if applying for Post-Completion OPT).
2. Completed Form I-765, available at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>
3. Check or money order for the required amount payable to **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**. A check may be preferable since you will have a record of when it was cashed (you can find the required amount at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>).
4. Two passport style photos with your name and I-94 number written in **pencil** on the back of each photo. For information on photo requirements, see the I-765 instructions.
5. I-94 card/electronic (printable/electronic version found at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home#section>)
6. Copies of previous I-20's.
7. A copy of your passport (valid for at least six (6) months beyond requested OPT start date).
8. A copy of your F-1 visa
9. Complete Form G-1145, available at <https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145>
10. A copy of your previous EAD (front and back - if applicable).

I have applied for OPT and I recently completed my program of study. I have not received my EAD card. May I travel outside of the United States?

The International Center does not recommend travel by students outside of the United States whose post-completion OPT applications are pending. Students who do so risk their application being cancelled by USCIS.

I have received my EAD card but have not found a job yet. May I travel outside of the United States?

The International Center does not recommend that you travel. Students who do so risk being denied re-entry into the United States.

I am working under OPT. What documents should I carry with me when I travel internationally?

You must carry your:

1. EAD card
2. I-20 (endorsed by an International Student Advisor within the past six months)
3. Valid passport
4. Valid student visa.

It is also advisable to carry a letter from your employer verifying your employment.

Do I have any reporting requirements while working under OPT?

Yes. You must inform the International Center within 10 days if any of the following changes: your legal name, your address, your employer, your employer's address, start and end dates of employment, and if you decide not to use OPT and depart the United States. This information is used by Department of Homeland Security to determine if you are maintaining status. The International Center will periodically contact students on OPT via e-mail in order to keep SEVIS records accurate. You must respond to these e-mails, even if none of your information has changed since you last reported.

Do I need Medical Insurance Coverage while on Post-Completion OPT?

As an international student who is participating in post-completion Optional Practical Training, you are not required by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to have medical insurance. However, because of high health care costs in the United States, the International Center strongly encourages all F-1 students to make sure they always have adequate insurance coverage. Please speak with the Business office if you would like information on continuing with the College's policy while on OPT. We urge you to protect yourself financially by purchasing health insurance during your post-completion OPT period. A major illness or accident in the United States can be financially devastating if you do not have adequate coverage. If you have questions or would like further information, please consult an International Student Advisor at the International Center.