

General Information and Checklist for F-1 Students -- Optional Practical Training --

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is one of the two types of temporary employment available to students in legal F-1 visa status. It was established for the purpose of allowing students to gain some practical experience in their fields of study while pursuing their educational objective. OPT is defined in the Code of Federal Regulations as: “temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student’s major area of study.” [8 CRF 214.2(f)(10)(ii)]

CPT is available to students who are in F-1 status and have been in legal and full-time status for at least one academic year. It does not require a job offer from the prospective employer; however, there is a time limit on how long a student can be out of work. A student may be eligible for a new 12 month period once the student has completed a new degree at a higher education level.

Three Types of OPT:

- Pre-Completion OPT
 - Is defined as OPT that has been authorized prior to the student’s completion of studies.
 - Form I-765 can be filed 90 days before the student has been enrolled for a full academic year.
- Post-Completion OPT
 - Is defined as OPT that has been authorized after the student’s completion of studies.
 - Form I-765 can be filed 90 days prior to the student’s completion of studies or up to 60 days post completion of studies.
- 24 month extension of post-completion OPT – total of 29 months (for specific STEM degree holders only):
 - For degree holders in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. Students must have specific majors on their I-20. Please see <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm>.
 - Additional requirements in order to be eligible:
 - Must currently be on authorized OPT and working in a job that is directly related to the field of study.
 - Employer must be registered in E-Verify and agree to report to the DSO in the OISS when the STEM student has either been terminated or leaves his/her place of employment.
 - STEM student must report to the DSO in OISS periodically.
 - Form I-765 can be filed 90 days prior to the student’s end date on the Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

Employment may be:

- Full time (more than 20 hours per week) after completion of studies,
- Full time (more than 20 hours per week) during summer vacation (summer) and while the school is not in session;
- Part time (20 or fewer hours per week) during the academic terms.

The employment period may be split so that the entire 12 months are not used all at once for each degree program. After OPT is authorized, the requested amount of OPT will be counted toward the 12 month limit, whether or not the student actually decides to work during the authorized period.

Please be aware that after spending a total of 12 months in full-time employment on Curricular Practical Training (CPT), a student will NOT be eligible to apply for the one-year period of OPT. However, part-time CPT does not affect OPT eligibility.

Students must submit their completed I-765 application for employment authorization for post-completion OPT to USCIS no earlier than 90 days prior to his or her academic program end dates and no later than 60 days after the program academic end date. Therefore, it is suggested that students plan ahead and meet with OISS before graduation.

Application Checklist:

- Form I-765; for question 27: (c)(3)(b) for Post-Completion. www.uscis.gov
- Final Semester Form, if applying for Post-Completion OPT, signed by your academic advisor
- OPT Request Form
- Two passport-style photos. Write in pencil: name & admission number from I-94 on the back.
- Make 2 photocopies of your passport, I-94 card, visa, all previous I-20s, and previous EAD card(s), if any
- A check for \$410.00, payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security."
- Obtain a new I-20 from OISS with OPT recommendation and new completion date.
- G-1145
- AFTER VISITING WITH OISS and obtaining your I-20 with OPT recommendation**, mail the application materials to:

(Regular USPS Mail)

USCIS
PO Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

(Express mail or courier deliveries)

USCIS
Attn: AOS
2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067

Your completed packet can be mailed after all materials have been reviewed and you've obtained a new I-20 with the OPT recommendation and the new completion date from the Designated School Official (DSO).

You have your EAD card and have found a job, what next?

- Once you have received your EAD card, you will need to send a copy of the front and back to the International Office. This is extremely important.
- The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) requires schools to maintain employment information. Once you have been offered employment, you must report the following information to OISS: company name, address, and phone number.

Important Information:

- **Periods of unemployment:** "During post-completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment. Students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during any post-completion OPT carried out under the initial post-completion OPT authorization. Students granted a 24-month OPT extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the total OPT period comprising any

post-completion OPT carried out under the initial post-completion OPT authorization and the subsequent 24-month extension period.” [8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(ii)]

- Rules for calculating days unemployed:
 - Periods between jobs – As long as you are not unemployed for more than 10 days, these days will not count toward time accrued during unemployment.
 - Unemployment while outside the United States – any time spent that is spent outside the United States will count toward the 90/120 aggregate during the EAD validity period. However, should the student be employed and has been approved for a leave of absence, then the time will not count as unemployment.
 - Holidays and Weekends do not count toward the 90 day limit as long as the student is employed during this time. If the student does not have employment, holidays and weekends DO count toward the 90 day aggregate: “Each day during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that the student does not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment.”
- You cannot begin your OPT employment until the actual start date that is indicated on your EAD card issued by USCIS.