

Office of International Students

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POST-COMPLETION OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a 12-month period of work authorization given to an F-1 status student who has completed their program of study. OPT is meant to help students to gain practical work experience directly-related to their field of study.

An F-1 status student on a period of post-completion OPT is authorized to work in both paid and unpaid positions as well as for multiple employers, self-employment and freelance/contract employment. However, all employment during the initial period of OPT must be in positions that are directly-related to the student's field of study.

When on a period of OPT, the student must work at least 20 hours per week (total combined employment) or they will accrue days of unemployment. There is a limit of 90 days of unemployment during the initial 12-month period of OPT. A day of unemployment is any day in a week in which the student on OPT does not work 20 hours, including Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.

The student's expected completion date determines when they may apply for OPT and what date they may ask for as a starting date of the OPT. The completion date is the date on which all requirements for the degree will have been completed. (For a doctoral student it is usually the date of dissertation deposition; for a master's student it may be the completion of a capstone project or thesis submission.)

Please Note:

There is a 150-day range in which to apply for OPT. The earliest an application can be received by the USCIS is 90 days before a student's completion date. The latest an application can be received by USCIS is 60 days after a student's completion date. We recommend applying as early as possible. [Link to OPT Date Calculators](#) (Excel Workbook).

The requested starting date may be from the day after a student's Program End Date up until 60 days after a student's Program End Date.

If a student has completed one year of full-time Curricular Practical Training, they are not eligible to apply for OPT.

While on OPT, students are still attached to the Office of International Students (OIS) at the Graduate Center for immigration-related matters.



APPLICATION PROCESS FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

We recommend that students start learning about the application process for post-completion Optional Practical Training by reviewing this handout, attending an OPT Workshop, and/or reviewing the OPT Workshop slides. We recommend that students start reviewing such materials at least four months prior to when they expect to complete their program of study.

STEP 1: Complete and Return the Optional Practical Training Request Form to the OIS.

The [Optional Practical Training Request Form](#) is a fillable PDF form that the student who is applying for OPT and their academic advisor or Executive Officer complete. This form replaces the individual letters from the student and academic program that were previously required by the OIS as part of an OPT application. The Optional Practical Training Request Form is not submitted to USCIS with the OPT application. It is used by the Office of International Students to update the student's SEVIS record with the student's expected completion date and to issue an updated Form I-20 with the new Program End Date and the OPT recommendation.

STEP 2: Complete the Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization and submit it to OIS.

The Form I-765 is the most important part of an application for OPT. An International Student Counselor in the Office of International Students will review your I-765 to ensure its completeness and accuracy.

[Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization](#)

Documents required by the USCIS to be submitted with I-765:

- Two 'passport style' color photographs taken within the past 30 days
- Payment of \$410.00 must be included with the application:
 - You may pay by check or money order made out to:
 - US Department of Homeland Security
 - On the memo line in the lower left corner, write your I-94 and SEVIS numbers
 - You may pay by credit card using [Form G-1450](#)
- Copy of the updated I-20 with the OPT recommendation
- Print out of the electronic I-94 Record or a copy of the I-94 Card (Front & Back)
- Copies of all previously-issued I-20's and/or DS-2019's
- Copy of any previous EAD card (Front and Back)
- Copy of passport identity page (passport should be valid 6 months into the future)
- Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application
- You must submit two identical color photographs of yourself **taken within 30 days** of filing your application.

The photos must have a white to off-white background, be printed on thin paper with a glossy finish, and be unmounted and unretouched. The passport-style photos must be 2" by 2". The photos must be in color with full face, frontal view on a white to off-white background. Head height should measure 1" to 1 3/8" from top of the head to the bottom of the chin, and eye height is between 1 1/8' to 1 3/8" from bottom of photo. Your head must be bare unless you are wearing headwear as required by a religious order of which you are a member. Using pencil or pen, lightly print your name and I-94 number, and SEVIS number on the back of the photographs.

STEP 3: Obtain an updated Form I-20 with an OPT Recommendation.

The Office of International Students' main role in the OPT application process is to make a recommendation for OPT in the SEVIS system and to issue an updated Form I-20 with the OPT request.

To obtain the recommendation and an updated Form I-20, send an International Student Counselor the completed OPT Request Form and I-765. The counselor will review your submitted forms and set an appointment with you to review all your application materials, update your SEVIS record with your anticipated Program End Date and issue an updated Form I-20 with the OPT recommendation.

STEP 4: Organize and Mail Your Application.

OPT APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Submit the following items to the USCIS in your post-completion OPT application:

- 1. Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization: Eligibility Category (c) (3) (B)
- 2. The required fee, currently \$410.00
- 3. Two color photographs
- 4. A copy of your updated Form I-20 with the OPT recommendation
- 5. A copy of your most recent I-94
- 6. Copies of all previous I-20 forms (pages 1 & 2, one-sided) (pages 1 & 3 old style form)
- 7. A copy of any previous EADs (I-766)
- 8. A copy of your passport identification page (should be valid at least 6 months into the future)
- 9. Form G-1145

Please Note: Paper-clip all documents at the top of all the forms and letters. Photos and check should be clipped to the left-side, front of the I-765.

MAILING YOUR APPLICATION

Send the application to either the Dallas Lockbox or the Phoenix Lockbox. If using the U.S. Postal Service, you can send the application to the PO Box address of the lockbox. If using a courier service (FedEx, UPS, DHL, etc.), you must use the street address of the lockbox.

[FOLLOW THIS LINK TO THE ADDRESSES OF THE LOCKBOXES](#)

Please Note: The application cannot be received by the USCIS more than 90 days prior to the completion date. The application cannot be received by the USCIS more than 60 days after the completion date. The application must be received by the USCIS within 30 days of the date the updated Form I-20 with the recommendation for OPT was issued.

WHILE THE OPT APPLICATION IS PENDING

If the G-1145 has been submitted, the student will receive a text or email notification of the receipt of their application.

The student will receive a paper Receipt Notice within two weeks to one month of submitting the application. The Receipt Notice will give a case number and a Received Date for the application.

USCIS processing time is between 60 and 90 days after the Received Date of the application. Often processing times reach or exceed 90 days, so we recommend applying as early as possible.

The OIS does not recommend traveling between the completion date and the approval of the OPT application.

OPT REPORTING

Once you begin your OPT employment, please complete and return the [OPT Reporting Form](#) to the Office of International Students. The reporting form is a fillable PDF. Download the form and complete it using Adobe. Don't use Preview, it will corrupt the form (particularly on a Mac).

While on your period of OPT, you are required to report the start and finish of all employment as well as changes in your contact information (address, phone, email, name, etc.). Changes must be reported within 10 days of the event.

Remember, you may work at any job that is related to your field of study and commensurate with your level of study. You may work for multiple employers in both paid and unpaid positions. But, you must be working at least 20 hours per week or you will be accruing days of unemployment. During your 12-month period of OPT, you are limited to 90 days of unemployment.