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 in their field of study.

An F-1 status student on a period of OPT is authorized to work in both paid and unpaid positions as well as for multiple employers at a time. However, all employment during 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 or they will accrue days of unemployment. There is a limit of 90 days of unemployment during the initial 12-month period of OPT.

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 period 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)

A starting date that is from the day after a student’s completion date up until 60 days after a student’s completion date may be requested.

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 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, reviewing the OPT Workshop PDF, and/or meeting with an International Student Counselor. We recommend that students start reviewing such materials at least four months prior to their expected completion date.

STEP 1: Complete and Return the Optional Practical Training Request Form to the Office of International Students.

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 Office of International Students 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 prepare a new Form I-20 with an OPT recommendation and to update the student’s SEVIS record with the expected completion date and the requested start date of the OPT.
Please Note: It is important to have a valid email address in your SEVIS record as students may receive important information from SEVP via email. SEVP will send the information to the email address that is in a student’s SEVIS record.

STEP 2: Complete the Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization.
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. The following are a few notes regarding the Form I-765:

- An OPT application cannot be received by the USCIS more than 90 days before or more than 60 days after the program completion date.
- Check the box marked “Permission to accept employment” at the top of the form.
- In item 1, write your surname under “Family Name” in all capital letters.
- For item 3, make sure the mailing address entered will be valid for the next 3-4 months. The U.S. Postal Service will not forward communications from the USCIS. (Our office can be used as the mailing address.)
- Use (c)(3)(B) as the “Eligibility Category” in item 20.
- Be sure to sign the application where it says “Applicant’s Signature.” We recommend using blue ink to sign.
- All pages in the application should be one-sided.
- Attach your check and photos to front of the Form I-765 using paperclips.

Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization
OPT Workshop PDF with Instructions for Completing the Form I-765

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. You may obtain the recommendation and an updated Form I-20 by appointment with an International Student Counselor.

Documents Required by the Office of International Students:
1. The completed Optional Practical Training Request Form
2. The completed I-765, Application for Employment Authorization
3. The completed Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance
4. An optional job offer letter from a prospective OPT employer
5. Your current I-94 Admission Record
6. Your passport
7. Copies of all previous I-20 forms (pages 1 & 2, one-sided) (pages 1 & 3, old style form)
8. Any previous Employment Authorization Card(s) (EAD – I-766)
9. Application fee of $410.00

Make check or money order payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security
On the memo line in the lower left corner, write your I-94 number and SEVIS number

10. 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.

Please Note: A counselor in the Office of International Students will review all your application materials, will update your SEVIS record with the OPT recommendation, and will issue a new Form I-20 with the OPT request.
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
___ 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, depending on where you live.

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.

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.