Information about Optional Practical Training (OPT)

If you are an F-1 student, you have the option of [training in the United States](#) by engaging in practical training during your program or after it ends. Practical training can provide valuable work experience by sharpening and adding to the skills you are learning in school. There are two types of practical training available for F-1 students: curricular practical training (CPT) and optional practical training (OPT).

This handout deals with **Post-completion OPT**, the most common type of OPT; it is used after your I-20 and degree are finished.

General rules about Post-Completion OPT:

- [OPT](#) must relate to your major or course of study.

- You can apply for 12 months of OPT at each education level, (i.e., you may have 12 months of OPT at the bachelor's level and another 12 months of OPT at the master's level).

- Your DSO will provide you with a new Form I-20 that shows the DSO recommendation for this employment.

- For [work authorization](#), you must mail a completed application for work authorization Form I-765, "Application for Employment Authorization," with to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and paying a filing fee within 30 days of the DSO's recommendation in SEVIS.

- Once you send your OPT application materials to USCIS, you cannot change the requested dates.

- USCIS will send you a Form I-766, "Employment Authorization Document," (EAD) upon approving your Form I-765. Once USCIS has approved your OPT, you will receive an EAD (Employment Authorization Document) card that lists the dates of the OPT period and shows your picture.

- **Do not** start work until after you receive your EAD and/or before the start date on your EAD card.

- After your OPT end date, you will have a 60-day grace period from the date your OPT expires to leave the U.S. or you must apply for a change of status, or transfer your I-20 to another school.

Are you eligible for OPT?

Before proceeding with the OPT application process, please ensure that you meet the eligibility criteria listed below:

- Be in lawful full-time F-1 status for full academic year

- Be in good academic standing with the university

- Have a valid passport

- Have not had more than 12-months of full-time CPT

- Have not previously had 12 months of post-completion OPT for the same level of degree.

- Must be physically present in the U.S., in F-1 status, to apply to USCIS

When to apply:

F-1 students may apply for post-completion OPT <u>up to 90 days before their program end date</u> (graduation) and <u>up to 60 days after their program end date</u>. We recommends that students apply as soon as possible within 90 days of their program end date as it often takes time for OPT to be approved. In addition, the full application must be properly filed within 30 days of the date SFA recommends OPT in the SEVIS immigration system (when a new I-20 is created).

OPT must finish within 14 months of the student's program end date. Applying late will shorten the amount of OPT time you have – for example, if you graduate on 5/12/20 and apply for OPT on 7/12/20, receive your work authorization on 9/12/20, you will only be able to work for 10 months (7/12/21).

Your OPT start date can be as early as the day after graduation or as late as 60 days after graduation. You request your start date in your application. Depending on when you mail your application, you might or might not receive your requested OPT start date.

What to do when you are ready to apply:

Make an appointment! Give International Programs at least three days advance notice of when you would like to come by to apply for OPT.

> ### DO NOT file your Form I-765 through any online websites/companies.
> **Failure to do so may result in the loss of your $410 filing fee
> and any fees that you have paid the company (usually at least $180).**

Before your appointment, you will need to complete all of the items on the list below. Once you have compiled all of the required documents, bring them to your appointment with Lerin to have a new I-20 with your OPT request created and your OPT packet finalized. Please allow at least 45 minutes for your appointment.

1. **Completed Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization. This form can be found at www.USCIS.gov.**

     a. Item 16 of Form I-765 should be marked with one of the following codes:

          i. Pre-completion (starting work before graduation): "(c)(3)(a)"

          ii. Post-completion (starting work after graduation): "(c)(3)(b)"

          iii. STEM extension: "(c)(3)(c)"

2. **Copies of all prior Forms I-20.**

3. **Copy of Biographical pages from passport.**

4. **Copy of Visa page from passport.**

5. **Copy of Form I-94. If you do not have your most recent I-94, print a copy from www.cbp.gov/i94**

6. **Two passport size photos. Photos must have been taken within the last 30 days. Please print your first and last name on the back of each photo.**

7. **Check or Money Order payable to "Department of Homeland Security" in the amount of $410.00. This fee may change in October 2020 – please make sure you have the latest information.**

8. **Form G-1145 – to receive notification by email/text about your application https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145**

**24-Month STEM OPT Extension—For certain STEM majors—Skip if you are not STEM

All F-1 students who are currently on a regular period of OPT and are eligible for a STEM OPT extension must apply for the 24-month STEM OPT extension. If you think you will qualify for this extension, please talk with you international student advisor.

Some Frequently Asked Questions:

What happens if I move after I mail my OPT application?

The U.S. Postal Service will not forward mail from USCIS if the address on the envelope does not match the name on the mailbox. Consider using the OIP address on the I-765 application. We will send you an email when the card arrives.

How long does it take to get approved for OPT?

Approximately three months from the date USCIS receives your application, though it can be faster depending on the time of year.

If I change my mind and decide not to work, can I cancel my OPT authorization?

This depends on your situation. If you were issued a new I-20 with the OPT recommendation but have not yet mailed your application to USCIS, you must notify your International Student adviser of your change in plans. OIP can cancel the OPT recommendation.

If you have already mailed your application to USCIS, a request can be submitted to USCIS to halt processing. Your application fee will not be returned and we cannot guarantee that your request will be honored. If you have received your EAD card and wish to cancel authorization, contact your advisor. Cancellation in this situation is highly unlikely.

I didn't submit my OPT application early enough, and I realize I might not get the OPT start date I requested. How do I know what date USCIS will authorize?

Unfortunately it is difficult to estimate. This depends on when the application arrives and the workload at USCIS. If they process your application after your requested start date, they might defer the start date to their day of processing, up to 60 days after your program end date. However, there is no way to predict which date it will be.

How long does it take to get the Receipt Notice/Notice of Action (NOA)?

Approximately two-to-three weeks after USCIS receives your application. You might verify with your bank whether your check has been cashed. If so, the NOA is likely on the way.

When I receive my EAD card, should I give a copy to OIP?

Yes, if you requested your EAD be mailed to you directly, submit a photocopy to OIP. If your EAD is mailed to OIP first, we will make a photocopy before you pick up the EAD.

What if I lose my EAD card?

If you lose your card, you must apply and pay for a replacement. Complete a new I-765 Form and resubmit it to USCIS with all supporting documents, including the fee. Contact your OIP adviser for an updated I-20. We recommend you keep your EAD at home (not in your wallet) because of the expense and time in applying for a replacement.