Office of International Affairs
Optional Practical Training Information Guide
Email: oia@louisiana.edu / Phone: 337-482-6819

Office of International Affairs Application Document Checklist:

1. Completed Office of International Affairs OPT Application (www.oia.louisiana.edu)
2. Completed I-765. This form must be typed (In Part 2 on Item 27, please enter (c)(3)(B). Complete Part 6 **only** if you have been approved for CPT or OPT in the past or if you have ever used a different SEVIS ID in F-1 status).
3. Your current I-20.
4. Copy of all previous CPT and OPT I-20's including any previous OPT Employment Authorization Documents (EAD), if any.
5. Most Recent I-94 Printout.
6. Copy of valid passport.
7. Copy of F-1 visa.
8. Completed G-1145.

Application Dates & Deadlines

Students can apply for Post-Completion OPT as early as 90 days before their graduation date and up 60 days after their graduation date. It will take approximately 90 days for USCIS to process an OPT application and issue an EAD card (Employment Authorization Document); therefore, it is important to apply early.

Earliest date USCIS will accept an OPT applications for students graduating in Fall 2021:

- **September 18, 2021**

Latest date USCIS will accept an OPT applications for students graduating in Fall 2021:

- **February 15, 2022**

Applying Too Early/Too Late: If a student submits a Post-Completion OPT application and it is received and receipted by USCIS too late or too early, USCIS will deny the application.

Choosing a begin date for OPT Post-Completion

Students can request the begin date for their Post-Completion OPT Please note that this is a request, USCIS may choose a date that is earlier or later than the date requested.

The earliest start day a student can request for their OPT to begin is the day of graduation. The latest start date a student can request is 60 days after graduation.

Example: A student who graduates on December 17, 2021 can choose a start date as early as December 17, 2021 and as late February 15, 2022 (exactly 60 days after the date of graduation).

Understanding OPT Post-Completion

Optional Practical Training (OPT) gives F-1 students completing an undergraduate or graduate degree in the U.S. an opportunity to gain employment experience in their field of study. OPT authorization allows students to accept paid off-campus employment directly related to their field of student for a period of 12 months. Some important points to note:

- Students are granted one 12-month period per degree level. One at the Bachelor's level, one at the Master's level and one at the Doctoral level. (Example: someone who obtains two master's degrees will only be given one period of OPT post-completion for their degree).

Eligibility requirements for OPT Post-Completion

- Must be in valid F-1 status at the time of application.
- Have not used more than 12 months of full-time CPT at the current degree level.
- Must have been registered full-time throughout their program, unless it is the student's graduating semester.
- Must be completing a course of study at the end of the term for which they are applying. Graduate students can apply the semester in which they will complete all coursework required for their program, excluding thesis/dissertation.

OPT Regulations

Unemployment: Once a student's post-completion OPT is approved and the EAD card is received, a student cannot exceed a total of 90 days of unemployment from the OPT begin date listed on the EAD card.

Employment Must be Related to Field of Study & Must be Appropriate to Degree Level:
SEVP advises that students on OPT maintain evidence, for each job, of the position held, proof of the duration of that position, the job title, contact information for your direct supervisor and a description of the work.

It is strongly advised to obtain a signed letter from your hiring official which explains how your degree is related to the work you are performing.

Part-Time or Full-Time Employment Allowed:

- Part-Time: 20 hours or more per week
- Full-Time: 21 hours or more per week

Cannot Begin Employment Until EAD Card is Received:
Students cannot begin work until they receive their EAD card and not until the begin date listed on the EAD card.

OPT Reporting Requirements

During the period of approved post-completion OPT, students must report any changes listed below within **10 days** to the Office of International Affairs:

Any legal name changes
Change in residential or mailing address
Employment information of your first and any subsequent OPT employers
Any period of unemployment
If you decide not to use OPT and depart the U.S. to return home
If you change to another immigration status (H-B, E-3, Permanent Resident)

How to Report Changes in Personal or Employment Information While on OPT:

Option 1: Students can complete a "***Report OPT Employer Information***" form located on the Office of International Affairs website. Visit https://oia.louisiana.edu and under the **Current Student** tab, click on the link labeled **Practical Training (CPT, OPT, STEM)**.

Option 2: Students can log onto the SEVP Portal by visiting https://sevp.ice.dhs.gov/opt. The SEVP Portal allows students on OPT the ability to report address, telephone and employer information. You will only be access the SEVP Portal once your OPT application is approved by USCIS. You will receive a link to create a SEVP Portal Account once USCIS approves your application.

Types of Employment Allowed on Post-Completion OPT

- **Regular paid employment** – This is the most common type of OPT employment.
- **Work for Hire** – This is commonly referred to as 1099 employment where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship.
- **Short-Term Multiple Employers** – A student, such as musician or other type of performing artists, may work for multiple short term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration.
- **Self-Employed Business Owner** – Students on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to his or her degree program.
- **Employment through an Agency or Consulting Firm:** A student on post-completion OPT must be able to provide evidence showing they worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.
- **Volunteer or Unpaid Internships:** Students may work as volunteers or unpaid interns. The work must be at least 20 hours per week. The student must be able to provide evidence from the employer that they worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of unemployment.

USCIS Application Document Checklist

Approximately 3 business days after a student submits their OPT application documents to the Office of International Affairs, the student will receive an email stating their OPT application is available for pick-up

Once the student picks up their OPT packet from the OIA the student will then need to mail their OPT application to USCIS for processing.

IMPORTANT: Students must mail their OPT application to USCIS **within 30 days** of the OPT I-20 issue date. **Your OPT application will be denied if you mail your OPT application to USCIS past 30 days of the OPT I-20 issue date.**

USCIS Application Checklist:

1. Completed Form G-1145.
2. Completed Form I-765.
3. Most Recent I-94 Printout.
4. Copy of I-20 issued by the OIA recommending Post-Completion OPT.
5. Copy of all previous CPT and OPT I-20s including any previous OPT Employment Authorization Documents (EAD), if any.
6. Copy of Passport.
7. Copy of F-1 Visa.
8. Two identical passport photos (lightly write your full name and I-94 number on the back of each photo in pencil). Photos should be exactly 2” x 2”.
9. $410 personal check or money order made payable to the “United States Department of Homeland Security.”

Mail your application to either the USCIS Dallas or Phoenix Service Center depending on where you live. Please find the mailing address to the USCIS Dallas and Phoenix Service Center on page 5 of this OPT application guide.

Mail your OPT application to the USCIS Chicago Lockbox Facility

Mail your application to:
USCIS Chicago Lockbox For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries: USCIS PO Box 805373 Chicago, IL 60680 --- For Express mail and courier deliveries (UPS, FedEx): USCIS Attn: I-765 C03 131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor Chicago, IL 60603-5517

What to Expect After you Mail your OPT Application Documents to USCIS

Email/Text Confirmation from USCIS: Within approximately 1 – 2 weeks after mailing your OPT application documents to USCIS, you should receive an email and/or text message confirming that your OPT application has been accepted for processing. The email or text message will contain your OPT application receipt number, which you can use to check your case status online at https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/.

I-797 Receipt Notice: Within approximately 3 – 6 weeks after mailing your OPT application documents to USCIS, you will receive an I-797 receipt notice in the mail confirming the date your OPT application was received by USCIS and your receipt number. Keep this I-797 receipt notice in a safe place as it is official proof that your OPT application was submitted and received by USCIS. Be sure to check that your name is spelled correctly.

I-797 Approval Notice and EAD: Within approximately 90 days after mailing your OPT Application documents to USCIS, you should receive your I-797 approval notice and EAD in the mail. These can come separately or at the same time. Check that you name and other information on the EAD is correct. Take a picture of the front and back of your EAD and email it to oia@louisiana.edu so that the OIA can assure your SEVIS record has updated accordingly.

How to Check your OPT Application Status

Once you receive your I-797 receipt notice in the mail, you can visit https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/ and enter your receipt number to check on the status of your OPT application. Please note that your application status will likely stay in "received" status for the entirety of the processing time until it is approved.

Update USCIS if your Mailing Address Changes

USCIS will only mail the I-797 receipt notice, I-797 approval notice and EAD to the mailing address that you listed on the I-765 form. If you change your mailing address, it is very important that you **immediately** update USCIS by completing an online form at https://uscis.gov/addresschange. The U.S. Postal Service cannot forward your EAD to your new address.

Travel Outside of the U.S. while OPT Application is Pending

The OIA does not recommend traveling outside of the U.S. while your OPT application is pending with USCIS as it poses certain risks.

Please contact the OIA at oia@louisnaa.edu as you will need the appropriate documents in order to reenter the U.S.