

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:

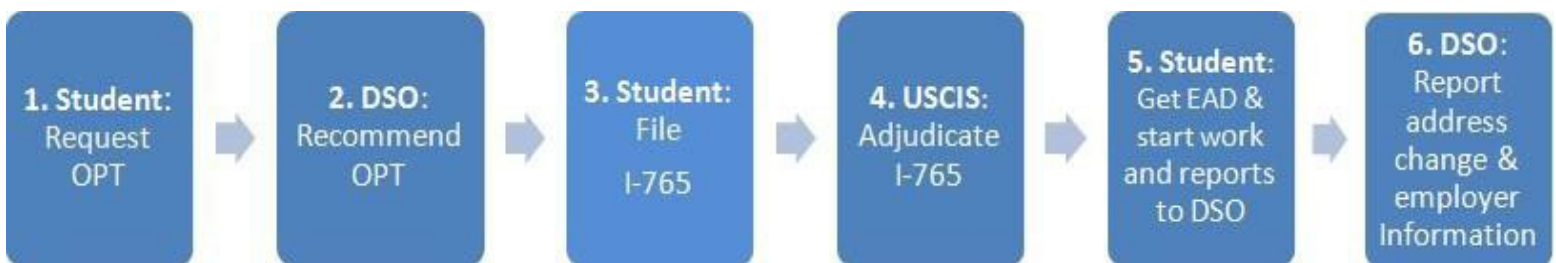
Students are granted one 12-month period per degree level. One at the Bachelor's level, one at the Master's level and one at the Doctoral level. (Example: someone who obtains two master's degrees will only be given one period of OPT post-completion for their degree).

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 Process: What to Expect

The basic OPT application process consists of a DSO recommendation in SEVIS, the production of a new Form I-20, the student's filing of Form I-765 **online** with USCIS (with fee, the OPT I-20, and other supporting documentation), and receiving an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS. Here is how SEVP maps the process:



Application Dates & Deadlines

Students can apply for Post-Completion OPT as early as 90 days before their graduation date and up to 60 days after their graduation date. It may take approximately 60 to 90 days for USCIS to process an OPT application and issue an EAD card (Employment Authorization

Document); therefore, it is important to apply early.

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 date 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 16, 2022 can choose a start date as early as December 16, 2022, and as late as February 14, 2023 (around 60 days after the date of graduation).

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 less 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 can only 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.

Unemployment while on post-completion OPT

- A student on post-completion OPT can be unemployed for a total of 90 days.
- A student whose SEVIS record lacks employer information is considered unemployed.
- SEVIS can auto-terminate a student’s record when he/she accrues 90 consecutive days of unemployment.

Checklist for OPT Application Review to be emailed to opt-cpt@louisiana.edu

Student emails to opt-cpt@louisiana.edu the documents listed below to receive an I-20 recommending for post-completion OPT. Do not create an USCIS online account until we have issued an I-20 recommending you for OPT.

1. Completed [Undergraduate OPT application](#) or [Graduate OPT application](#).
2. Completed [I-765](#). (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 SEVIS I-20.
4. Copy of previous OPT Employment Authorization Documents (EAD), if any.
5. [Most Recent I-94](#) printout.
6. Copy of valid passport.
7. Copy of F-1 student visa.

Once the following documents are emailed to opt-cpt@louisiana.edu, the OIA will review the student's application to determine the student's eligibility for OPT. If the student is eligible for OPT, the OIA will issue the student an I-20 recommending post-completion OPT. Do not create an USCIS online account until we have issued an I-20 recommending you for OPT. It will take the Office of International Affairs staff approximately 3 business days to finish processing a student's OPT application. The OIA will email the student informing them that they may pick up from our office their I-20 recommending post-completion OPT application.

Next Step after Signing I-20 Recommending for Post-Completion OPT

1. Once the student signs and picks up their I-20 from the Office of International Affairs, the student will receive an email with an **Online Filing Guide** with detailed instructions on how to create a USCIS account, complete the I-765 form online, upload evidence which includes a **passport photo** (photo must be exactly 2" x 2") and submit OPT filing fee using your credit/debit card.
2. Once you successfully submit the payment, your I-765 form is automatically submitted to USCIS for processing. **Students must submit their OPT online application to the USCIS within 30 days from the date the OPT I-20 was issued. OPT applications will be denied by the USCIS if a student submits their application past 30 days from the date the I-20 was issued.**

What to Expect After Submitting your OPT Application to USCIS online

Email/Text Confirmation from USCIS: After submitting your OPT application online 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: Upon receipt of the I-765, USCIS issues a Receipt Notice (Form I-797) that contains the receipt number assigned to the case. Through an interface with USCIS, the status of the OPT request in SEVIS changes to Pending. When you 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.

If USCIS needs more information, the student will receive a Request for Evidence, which states what information is needed and the deadline for submitting it. The student must respond by the deadline.

How to Check your OPT Application Status

Once you receive your I-797 receipt notice, 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.

EAD (Employment Authorization Document):

If your OPT application is approved, USCIS issues an EAD and the OPT Request status in SEVIS changes to Approved. If the Form I-765 is denied, the OPT Request status in SEVIS changes to Denied.

You will receive your EAD in the mail at the address you provided in your I-765 application. We recommend you choose an address that will be good for AT LEAST 4 months from the date you turn-in your OPT application. Please check that your name and other information on the EAD is correct. Take a picture of the front and back of your EAD and email it to opt-cpt@louisiana.edu so that the OIA can assure your SEVIS record is updated accordingly.

Reminder: You cannot begin work until:

- 1.) you have received your EAD card and
- 2.) the begin date listed on the card.

Please report the employer information by completing 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)**.

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 opt-cpt@louisiana.edu as you will need the appropriate documents to reenter the U.S.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. I'm not sure which address to choose to have my EAD card mailed to?

The address that you put on your form I-765 is the address where USCIS will mail your EAD card. We recommend you choose an address that will be good for AT LEAST 4 months from the date you turn-in your OPT application. It is very difficult to change the EAD card mailing address once your application is submitted to USCIS and can cause potential obstacles to you receiving the card on-time. It does not need to be your address but can be someone else, such as a family member or friend.

2. I'm confused by the 60-day, 90-day timeframes.

After your date of graduation, you have a 60-day window of days where you can choose ANY day within that 60-day window to start OPT. That date will show on your EAD card as your start date (Example: Graduate on May 12 and then start date can be between May 13 – July 11). DURING the 12 months of OPT you cannot have more than 90 days, aggregate total, of unemployment. AFTER your EAD card expires, your OPT ends and you have a 60-day “grace period” to remain in the US, transfer to another school or change to a new visa category.

3. What is my visa status after I file for OPT and am waiting for the card to arrive? Up until graduation, you are an F-1 student and will travel as you normally do. Filing for OPT has no effect on this. After your graduation date, you are viewed as an F-1 who will be doing or is doing OPT. There is NO GAP IN F-1 STATUS no matter how long it takes for the card to arrive. However, once you graduate, you will need the EAD and an offer or employment letter for re-entering along with the normal documents you traveled with as a student.

4. **I worked full-time for two months under curricular practical training last summer. Do I only have nine months left of optional practical training (OPT) available to me after I graduate?**
The only way that CPT affects OPT is when a student has completed a total of 12 months, full-time CPT. Part-time periods of CPT have no effect. Anything less than 12 months of full-time has no effect, as well. So, if you did three months full-time CPT, you would still have the entire 12 months of OPT available for use.
5. **Can I work as a volunteer or an internship during OPT?** Yes. Your employment can be paid or unpaid as long as it is an average of 20 hours per week and meets the criteria of appropriate to degree focus and level earned. An internship can be paid or unpaid and could count as OPT employment. It is important that you keep a detailed listing of employment activities and projects with which you were engaged and specify the number of weekly hours that you were engaged in each of the activities or projects identified. Copies of company daily time and attendance records that document your affiliation with the company, including start and end date are also important.
6. **What if I want to travel outside the United States during OPT? Do I need to have health insurance while on OPT, and do I have to pay taxes on income earned?** Since medical costs are so high in the U.S., it is recommended that you have medical insurance. Regarding taxes, you are liable to pay applicable federal, state and/or local taxes on any income earned in the United States.
7. **Can I travel outside the United States while on OPT?** The best general advice is that an F-1 student on OPT, who has received the EAD card and has to travel abroad, should make sure that there is documentation from his or her employer confirming the employment, or the job offer. Otherwise, the student assumes a risk that he/she may not be allowed to re-enter the United States. For those students who have not received the EAD card yet, we recommend you wait to leave the U.S. until you have the card in hand to take with you.
8. **Can a person keep two jobs while on OPT, if both jobs are in the same field of study?** You can work more than one job while on OPT. However, any job must be related to your major field of study and appropriate to your degree level.