Optional Practical Training
Temporary Work Authorization for F-1 Students

Optional Practical Training (OPT), granted by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), allows an F-1 student in the US to be authorized for temporary work, or training, directly related to his/her major area of study. OPT can be authorized before or after completion of studies. The total period of authorization cannot exceed the equivalent of 12 full months during a program of study. Part-time practical training (20 hours a week or less) is subtracted from the available 12 months at half the full-time rate; full-time authorization is 21 or more hours a week.

**Pre-completion OPT - For Use Before Completion of Program of Study**

- When classes are not in session you may request full-time or part-time work authorization.
  - For semester vacation periods (e.g., Spring Break) you must be enrolled full-time during the term.
  - Authorization during winter and/or summer vacation periods require that you 1) were enrolled full-time during the past semester, and 2) enroll full-time for the next semester.
- While school is in session, a full-time student working on course requirements may be eligible for part-time work authorization. Total employment, including on-campus work and any OPT, cannot exceed 20 hours per week.
- If you are a graduate student who has completed all coursework, and you are just working on your thesis or dissertation, you are eligible to apply for either part-time or full-time authorization. Please note, unless you have full-time OPT authorization, you are subject to the 20 hours per week limitation noted above.

**Post-completion OPT - For Use After Completion of Program of Study**

- This is available after completion* of all degree requirements.
  - Authorization is only available on a full-time basis.

*Completion of studies occurs when you complete all the requirements for your degree; this is designated by a **date of completion**. For undergraduates or course-work-only Masters students, the completion date is the date of your last exam or graduation date; for Masters students with thesis, it is the date of your defense; and, for Ph.D. students, it is the date you deposit your dissertation with the Graduate School. *Your completion date is not the date you receive your diploma.*

**Eligibility**

If you are currently in lawful F-1 status and have been a full-time student for a full academic year (even if part of that time was in another non-immigrant status which does not prohibit full-time study), you are eligible to apply for Optional Practical Training. If you have previously been granted a full 12 months of OPT, you are eligible for further authorization if you resumed studies at a higher educational level. You are not eligible for OPT if you have been authorized for 12 months or more (in aggregate) of FULL-TIME CPT authorizations during your current program of study.

**Job Offer**

An offer of employment is **not required** for Optional Practical Training. However, many students choose to find an employer first when applying for OPT to work before the completion of their program of study. **Note:** Once authorized by USCIS for work authorization, the time period is deducted from your total eligibility regardless of whether or not it was used.

**When to Apply for Optional Practical Training**

- Pre-completion OPT: you can apply for this authorization up to 90 days in advance of the begin date of your proposed employment. ISS recommends applying as early as allowed.
- Post-completion OPT: you can apply for this authorization up to 90 days in advance of your degree completion date. The deadline for USCIS to receive a post-completion OPT application is no later than 60 days after degree completion or you will lose your OPT opportunity. ISS recommends applying as early as allowed.

Processing time at USCIS can vary. Students are encouraged to apply for OPT well in advance (see above) of the proposed employment begin date or the expected date of completion. **Note:** Please be certain about the proposed employment dates and/or your date of completion as it may be difficult or impossible for ISS to alter or cancel an OPT recommendation once it has been entered into your SEVIS record.

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**Dates of Employment Authorization**

On your OPT application, you will designate your proposed begin and end date of the work authorization. USCIS will authorize your begin date as either the date you stated on your application or the date the Employment Authorization Document (EAD card) is approved, whichever is later.

- If you apply for OPT to work before the completion of your program of study, your end date will be as designated on your application.
- If you apply for OPT to work after the completion of your program of study, the authorization will be for the time period (i.e., duration) requested on your application. However, the end date will be no later than 14 months from your date of completion.

You may not begin working until you receive the valid EAD card, and its begin date has commenced. However, if you were granted OPT based on working after the completion of your studies, and you were delayed in your completion of studies, you must wait until you officially complete your studies before beginning employment.

**How to Apply**  
**Applying for the OPT Recommendation from ISS:**
- Attend an OPT Workshop. Held every Monday at 4pm in the Media Room of the Red Gym when the UW is open.
- Submit the Optional Practical Training application to ISS.
- ISS will review your application and prepare the OPT recommendation. You will be notified when it has been completed or if you are ineligible.

**Submitting Your Application to USCIS:**
- Detailed instructions regarding the application procedures for submitting your request to USCIS are provided at the OPT Workshop.
- You will mail your application packet to USCIS. Their processing time for OPT requests is generally two to four months.

**Travel Issues**

Before completing your studies, you may continue to travel internationally provided you have a valid travel endorsement.

Departing the US after completing your studies but before you receive your EAD card may be possible, but it is not recommended. Please visit ISS to speak with an advisor if you plan to do this.

After completing your studies and once you have received the EAD card granting your OPT work permission, you must obtain a travel endorsement from ISS for re-entry into the US. You must provide a photocopy of your EAD card to ISS in order to obtain the travel endorsement. Travel endorsements while on OPT are only valid for six months from the date of signature. Besides the travel endorsed I-20, make sure you have a valid passport, F-1 visa stamp, and the EAD card for re-entry into the US; proof of employment is recommended. If you are applying to renew your F-1 visa stamp while on OPT, proof of employment is required at the US Embassy/Consulate.

**Information Updates Are Required While on OPT**

You are required to update ISS regarding the information listed below while you are on OPT. To do so, please complete the Information Update for Students on OPT from available on the ISS website. Failure to do so is a violation of your F-1 status.

1) **Name Change:** Inform ISS if your name changes (i.e., you change your name in your passport),
2) **Address Changes:** Inform ISS of changes in either your US residential or foreign addresses within 10 days of moving, and
3) **Employment:** Inform ISS of the name and address of your employer. Inform ISS of changes in your employment status, such as if you cease working for an employer or you change employers. If you are unemployed for 90 days or more in aggregate, you are no longer in valid F-1 status and are expected to depart the US.

**Resuming Study**

If you plan to resume studies during the period when your EAD card is valid, please consult ISS regarding this process. If you plan to attend a different educational institution and you would like your SEVIS record transferred, please complete the SEVIS Record Release form available on the ISS website.

**Expiry of EAD Card**

If you intend to return home after your post-completion OPT, you have a 60 day grace period to depart the US. If you are not leaving the US by the end of the grace period, you should have applied to obtained an alternate status by the end of your grace period. If you have applied for or have an approved H1-B application, you may remain in the US and work after your EAD card expires until the H1-B takes affect.