

F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT) Information & Instructions

Definition

Optional Practical Training is work authorization for professional employment in the student's field of study that is not part of the academic curriculum. It can be granted at four different times in a student's academic career:

1. During summer or winter break when school is not in session;
2. After the completion of all course requirements for the degree, but before completion of the thesis;
3. Part-time during an academic term (20 hours/week or less);
4. After completion of the degree (Post-Completion OPT)

Maximum Time Allowed

A **maximum period of twelve months (full-time)** Optional Practical Training can be granted **per degree level**. Students are eligible for an additional twelve months with each higher degree level.

OPT may either be full-time (more than 20 hours per week) or part-time (20 hours or less per week). Part-time OPT is deducted from the total amount of available OPT at one-half the full-time rate. For example, two months of part-time OPT is equal to one full-time month.

Any part-time **Curricular** Practical Training (CPT) will not be deducted from the **Optional** Practical Training period available to students. **However, if a student uses twelve months of full-time Curricular Practical Training, no additional Optional Practical Training is permitted.**

Eligibility/When to Apply

To be eligible, a student must be in valid F-1 status and have been maintaining F-1 status for a **minimum of nine consecutive months**.

For pre-completion Optional Practical Training (before graduation): Students can apply up to 120 days before the beginning of the employment.

For post-completion Optional Practical Training (after graduation): Students can apply up to 90 days before or within 60 days after the completion of the degree. The application for OPT must be received by the U.S. CIS before the end of the 60 days following the degree completion date.

Current processing times can be more than 3 months, so it's best to apply early.

How to Apply

1. Have your academic faculty advisor complete the *OPT Recommendation Form for F-1 Students* (printable form available at the International Programs website).
2. Submit the completed *OPT Recommendation Form* to the Office of International Programs. If you are eligible, the office will process a new SEVIS Form I-20 with an Optional Practical Training endorsement and schedule an appointment to meet with you.

(continued on next page)

How To Apply, continued

3. Employment cannot begin until the USCIS issues an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card.

File your OPT application online with the USCIS - *DO NOT file the online OPT application or make a payment until you've received your new OPT I-20!*

After the Office of International Programs has reviewed your documents, the OIP will update your Form I-20 with OPT recommendation.

After receiving your updated Form I-20, [create an online USCIS account](#) and file your STEM OPT application online, including:

- Completing the online Form I-765
- Paying the filing fee (by credit card, ACH/bank withdrawal or debit card).

In general, you will need to upload the following:

- One passport-style photograph *taken within 30 days* ([US passport photo guidelines](#))
- Photocopy of new I-20 with recommendation for OPT (signed on page 1 by OIP & you) – **must be receipted by the USCIS within 30 days of the OPT recommendation**
- Photocopy of passport page(s) showing your name, photo, and expiration date
- Photocopy of F-1 visa
- Photocopy of most recent [Electronic I-94](#) printout
- If applicable: Photocopies of previously issued EAD(s); front and back

****Always keep copies of all documents sent to and received from the U.S. CIS****

Change of address: If you change your address while the OPT application is in process, you need to update your address at: www.uscis.gov/addresschange

IMPORTANT! Your I-20 end date will be changed to match your program end date. If you **do not complete your degree** when expected, you **must apply for a program extension before your new OPT I-20 expires**.