

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 may be granted four 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. during an academic term, part time (20 hours/week or less);
4. after completion of the degree (called 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.

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. A student requesting PRE-COMPLETION Optional Practical Training can apply up to 120 days before the beginning of the employment. A student requesting POST-COMPLETION Optional Practical Training 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 between 2-3 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. See an international student advisor with the completed OPT Recommendation Form. The advisor will determine eligibility. If you are eligible, the advisor will process a **new SEVIS I-20** with an Optional Practical Training endorsement.
4. **Employment may not begin until a student is issued an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card by the U.S. CIS.** To obtain an EAD, you must apply directly to a regional U.S. CIS service center within 30 days of the international student advisor's recommendation on the new I-20 document.

(please turn over)

- Materials:**
- 1) **\$380 fee** (check or money order made payable to **Department of Homeland Security**)
 - 2) **2 passport-type photos** with name and I-94 number printed on back – must be taken within 30 days of applying for OPT
 - 3) Completed and signed **I-765 form** (Fillable form is available on-line at: <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf> and directions are available at: <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765instr.pdf>) or you can complete the form using the **E-Filing system** at <https://efiling.uscis.dhs.gov/efile/>

Important note: If you choose to use the E-Filing system for the I-765, **the Office of International Programs must first issue the I-20 with OPT endorsement**, or your OPT application may be denied.

****Eligibility categories (for question #16): Pre-Completion OPT – (c)(3)(A);
Post-Completion OPT – (c)(3)(B)**

- 4) Photocopy of **new SEVIS I-20** with OPT endorsement
- 5) Photocopy of the faculty advisor's completed **Recommendation Form**
- 6) Copies of your **F-1 visa, I-94 card** (front and back) or **electronic I-94** (<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov>), **passport photo/identity page** and passport expiration date
- 7) **Documentation** of any previously issued EAD cards (i.e. for Severe Economic Hardship) and/or periods of CPT (Curricular Practical Training)

It is recommended, but not required, that you also submit:

- Transcripts verifying full-time enrollment throughout academic program

Note: If you choose to **E-File**, once you have paid the fee, the U.S. CIS will provide you with an electronic confirmation receipt that includes your receipt number and:

- Tells you where to mail the required supporting documents listed in the Materials section below. If you do not send the required documents to the address listed on the confirmation receipt, your application may be delayed or denied.
- USCIS will mail you a Form I-797, Notice of Action. This is the notice you should use as evidence that you filed this application.
- You will be mailed an appointment notice to have your photograph and/or fingerprints taken in Kansas City at the Application Support Center (ASC).

If you do not use E-File, send the required materials above to this address:

**U.S. CIS
P.O. Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036**

It is recommended that you mail your application by either **certified mail or return receipt** to have proof of sending your application.

****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: <https://egov.uscis.gov/coa/displayCOAForm.do>

****IMPORTANT!**** If you do not complete your degree when expected, you **must apply for a program extension before your new OPT I-20 expires.**

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