Optional Practical Training (OPT)

What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is an F-1 student benefit that allows you to gain employment experience in your field of study for up to 12 months. Its purpose is to complement your academic work. You may apply for OPT during or after each level of study (Associate’s, Bachelor’s, Professional, Master’s, and Doctorate).

Am I Eligible for OPT?

Students must have met all of the following requirements in order to apply for OPT.

- You must currently be in lawful F-1 status, holding a valid passport and I-20.
- You must have maintained lawful F-1 status for a minimum of nine months leading up to your OPT application.
- You must not have previously exhausted your 12-month OPT benefit for your current degree.
- You must not have engaged in Curricular Practical Training (CPT) for more than 11.5 months.
- Your department must verify your intended program completion date and must recommend you for OPT (form letter provided in this packet).
- It is advisable that you attend a Global Engagement employment workshop or meet with an immigration advisor the semester before you plan to apply for OPT.

Two Types of Optional Practical Training

1. Pre-Completion OPT (Before completion of the degree)
   - Employment will take place while studying: Students may apply for part-time optional practical training which permits them to work up to 20 hours per week. Part-time OPT is deducted from the 12 month limit at 50%. Thus, 2 months of part-time OPT would count as 1 month deduction from the available 12 months of post completion OPT.
   - During vacation periods: OPT may be either part-time or full-time.
   - After completion of all course requirements for a degree (except thesis or dissertation): OPT may be either part-time or full-time. Students must be registered each semester on thesis or dissertation status.

2. Post-Completion OPT (After completion of the degree)
   - Employment will take place after completion of the degree, OPT must be authorized full-time (but you may work part-time or full-time).

Applying for OPT

When applying for post completion OPT, regulations permit students to apply as early as 90 days prior to the program end date, and no later than 60 days after the program end date. We recommend that you apply as soon as you are eligible.

There are also USU Global Engagement departmental regulations related to when graduate students may apply. See the department recommendation forms at the links below. For information on when you can apply for pre-completion OPT, please meet with your immigration advisor.

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Please follow these steps when applying for OPT.

1. Before your final semester, meet with an immigration advisor to discuss OPT and your graduation timeline
   - Verify that your major is correct on your I-20
   - Verify that your program completion date is correct
2. When within 90 days of completing your program, submit the Department Recommendation form
   - Undergraduate: [https://globalengagement.usu.edu/files/F-1_OPT_UG_Post_Completion_Auth.pdf](https://globalengagement.usu.edu/files/F-1_OPT_UG_Post_Completion_Auth.pdf)
   - Graduate: Without job offer: [https://globalengagement.usu.edu/files/ISS_F-1_OPT_Grad_Post_Completion_Auth.pdf](https://globalengagement.usu.edu/files/ISS_F-1_OPT_Grad_Post_Completion_Auth.pdf)
3. Once the Department Recommendation form is complete, make an appointment with your immigration advisor.
4. Checklist for OPT appointment:
   - Completed Departmental Recommendation form mentioned above
   - Completed I-765 form. Can be found here: [https://www.uscis.gov/i-765](https://www.uscis.gov/i-765)
     - Use the Office of Global Engagement address on the I-765 if you are not sure where you will be living after graduation
       9545 Old Main Hill
       Logan, Utah
       84322-9545
   - All I-20s ever issued to you, including those from previous schools. Please bring copies and originals
   - Passport, and a copy of biographical page
   - F-1 Visa, and copy
   - I-94 and copies
   - Any employment authorization cards you may have previously received (OPT, economic hardship, etc.).
   - Two passport-style photographs taken no earlier than 30 days prior to submitting your application to DHS. Passport photos must be taken at a location that takes official passport photos. Speak to an advisor for recommendation on where to get the photos.
   - Check or money order in the amount of $410.00 made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security.
   - If you would like to be notified by USCIS via email and/or text message that your Form I-765 has been accepted, simply complete an E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (Form G-1145), and attach it to the first page of your Form I-765 application.
5. The immigration advisor will check all your documents, then will prepare an I-20 requesting OPT. This process could take 3-4 business days, but is usually faster.
6. Schedule an appointment with your advisor to obtain your new I-20 and have your OPT request packet reviewed.
7. Mail your application packet to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, address below. We recommend sending it certified mail.
   - U.S. Department of Homeland Security
   - U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
   - PO Box 21281
   - Phoenix, AZ 85036

Please understand that it takes DHS 90 days or more, on average, to process an OPT application. However, this process can legally take up to 120 days. Your application must be received by DHS within 30 days of the date on which your new I-20 was printed. Failure to meet this deadline could result in denial of your OPT application.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

How do I fill out the check or money order?
You may obtain a money order from the Post Office, bank, or other outlet. Below is a sample money order:

![Sample Money Order]

How do I fill out item 20 on the I-765 form?
- Enter (c)(3)(A) for pre-completion OPT
- Enter (c)(3)(B) for post-completion OPT

Are there any limits to OPT?
You may have less time or have exhausted your OPT benefit if you participated in Curricular Practical Training (CPT), see CPT packet for details. OPT is permitted for 12 months. Those who are in a STEM degree may apply for a 24-month extension when within 90 days of completing their initial OPT.

How long will it take for my OPT to be approved?
It usually takes DHS between 90 and 100 days to process and approve an OPT, but it can take up to 120 days.

What Else Do I Need to Know?

1. **STATUS MAINTENANCE**: During the OPT application process, your department will have verified your program completion date. Your immigration advisor will then make sure that your I-20 completion date matches the date verified by your department.

   ! If you then fail to complete your program as planned, your I-20 will expire and you will fall out of status. Therefore, if you apply for OPT and then later realize that you will not complete your program by the date indicated in your application, you MUST speak with an immigration advisor BEFORE the expiration date on your I-20.

2. **Employment related to major**: OPT employment must be directly related to your major field of study and it must be appropriate for someone having your level of education. Your major is determined by the primary major and CIP code listed on your I-20.

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3. **Obligation to inform**: During your OPT employment, you will remain as an F-1 student sponsored by Utah State University. F-1 Regulations require student to report the following:
   - Initial employment and any updates or changes (complete the OPT Reporting form on our website)
   - Any change in your address (within 10 days of the change)
   - Any change in your visa status
   - Any plan to add dependents to, or remove dependents from, your SEVIS record
   - Any changes in employment

4. **Employment authorization dates**: Your OPT employment is considered temporary and is only valid for the dates indicated on your OPT employment authorization card (EAD). It is your sole responsibility to restrict your employment to these authorized dates. Additionally, it is your sole responsibility to postpone your employment until your EAD card has been delivered to you.

   **Be aware that all employment you hold will be recorded on U.S. tax records and that working before or after your authorized dates is one of the most serious immigration offenses you can commit.**

5. **OPT completion**: After you have completed the initial 12-month OPT work authorization you will:
   a. Have a 60-day grace period to depart the country. You may not be employed during this period OR
   b. Be admitted and matriculate to another education degree level, receive a new I-20 OR
   c. Be eligible to apply for STEM OPT, receive a new OPT STEM request I-20

6. **What if I Want to Travel Outside the United States after Applying for the OPT Card?**
   When traveling outside the United States, you must carry your OPT (EAD) card, a valid passport, current visa, and valid I-20 signed for travel no more than six months prior to your departure. A letter from your employer on company letterhead is recommended as proof of your employment. We do not recommend that you travel while your OPT application is pending AND before you have received your EAD card.
   According to immigration regulations, you must be employed or be actively seeking employment during your authorized OPT period. If you must travel outside the U.S. after you have submitted your OPT application to DHS but before you have received your EAD card, please consult an immigration advisor for the most recent travel advice. Please also consult with your immigration advisor if you wish to travel and have received your EAD card, but have not obtained employment. Travel outside the U.S. under these circumstances is very risky and your reentry into the U.S. is not guaranteed. Therefore, you are strongly advised to avoid such travel whenever possible.

7. **Reporting Employment**
   Remember that you must report employment no later than 90 days after the start date on your EAD card. If you do not report work and have exhausted the unemployment period, you must leave the country immediately. Please report employment by completing the OPT Reporting form on the Global Engagement website: [https://globalengagement.usu.edu/files/F-1_OPT_Reporting_Form.pdf](https://globalengagement.usu.edu/files/F-1_OPT_Reporting_Form.pdf)

   If you are planning to apply for a STEM OPT extension, you must be employed by an e-verify company.