Optional Practical Training (OPT) Information Packet
For F-1 students seeking to apply for paid off-campus employment eligibility

GENERAL INFORMATION

Optional Practical Training (OPT) authorization allows students in valid F-1 status to accept paid off-campus employment, directly related to their field of study, for a period up to 12 months, at their current educational level. No job offer is needed to apply. All students are encouraged to meet with the international student advisor in the Office of Academic Affairs or attend an OPT information session for advisement prior to submitting an OPT application.

Approved optional practical training can be used pre and/or post completion of degree requirements according to the following guidelines. Most students elect to use this type of work authorization after completion of studies to allow for a full year employment experience once a degree has been obtained. Students with less employment eligibility may have a more difficult time finding employment.

	POST-Completion of Studies	PRE-Completion of Studies
Description	• Work authorization for the period after academic program is complete, up to 12 months total.	• Work authorization while completing degree requirements. • Pre-completion OPT is deducted from the 12 months of employment eligibility available post-completion. • Pre-completion OPT authorization ends upon program completion.
Employment Type	• Full-time employment (21+ hrs/week). • The type of employment must be directly related to the student's field of study.	• Part-time only (maximum 20 hrs/week) while classes are in session. Students may work full-time during official College break periods (winter, summer break). • The type of employment must be directly related to the student's field of study.
Eligibility Requirements	• Completion of one full academic year of study. • Must be in valid F-1 status. • Have not used more than 12 months of full-time CPT at the current degree level. • Have not used more than 12 months of pre-completion OPT at the current degree level.	• Completion of one full academic year of study. • Must be in valid F-1 status. • Have not used more than 12 months of full-time CPT at the current degree level. • Have not used more than 12 months of pre-completion OPT at the current degree level.
Job Offer & Unemployment	• A job offer is not required to apply for OPT. • Once post-completion OPT is approved, a student cannot exceed a total of 90 days of unemployment.	• A job offer is not required to apply for OPT. • Unemployment provisions do not apply for pre-completion OPT.

APPLICATION GUIDELINES
RECOMMENDED APPLICATION TIMELINE & EMPLOYMENT START/END DATE GUIDANCE

In general, students are advised to apply 3 months prior to their desired employment start date to allow for often lengthy application processing times. Most OPT applications take 90+ days for adjudication through USCIS. See the OPT Application & Advisor Recommendation form for a chart to determine your application deadlines and requested employment start and end dates.
- May graduates are advised to submit their POST-Completion OPT application materials in early February.
- December graduates are advised to submit their POST-Completion OPT application materials in early October.

OPT

APPLICATION CHECKLIST
1. ☐ **Complete USCIS Form I-765.** Form and instructions available for download at <u>U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services</u>.
   a. For Item 16 on Form I-765:
      • Enter Eligibility Category **(c)(3)(B)** if applying for POST-Completion OPT.
      • Enter Eligibility Category **(c)(3)(A)** if applying for PRE-Completion OPT.
2. ☐ **Complete OPT Application & Advisor Recommendation Form**. Form available for download on the <u>International Student Services</u> website.
3. ☐ **Assemble Required Application Materials**:
   a. ☐ One photocopy of your I-94 Arrival-Departure Record card (front and back).
   b. ☐ One photocopy of the visa page of your passport (if applicable).
   c. ☐ One photocopy of the passport photograph page of your passport.
   d. ☐ Two identical passport photos (your full name and I-94 number should be lightly printed in pencil on the back of each photograph). See Form I-765 instructions for passport photo requirements.
   e. ☐ One photocopy of previous EAD card(s), both sides, if previously authorized for employment.
   f. ☐ Application filing fee (current fee available on I-765 application instructions at <u>U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services</u>).
   g. ☐ New I-20 with OPT recommendation from the international student advisor (see next step for more information).
4. ☐ **Request OPT I-20.** Once you've assembled all of the materials listed in Items 1-3 above (with the exception of 3.g.) and are prepared to submit your complete OPT application, contact the Office of Academic Affairs to schedule an OPT application appointment with the international student advisor. Bring all application materials listed above. At this appointment, the international student advisor will issue you a new SEVIS I-20 with OPT recommendation (item 3.g. above), the last required item for a complete application.
5. ☐ **Mail Application Materials within 30 Days.** Mail completed application materials to the appropriate service center listed below (certified mail recommended). Applications submitted with an OPT I-20 older than 30 days may be denied without refund of fees or application materials, therefore, it is not advisable to request your OPT I-20 until you are prepared to submit your complete OPT application.

For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries:	USCIS PO Box 660867 Dallas, TX 75266	For Express Mail and Courier Deliveries:	USCIS Attn: AOS 2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business Suite 400 Lewisville, TX 75067

IMPORTANT APPLICATION & EMPLOYMENT NOTES
• Travel outside of the U.S. while a POST-completion OPT application is pending is not recommended and can adversely affect reentry. A job offer is required to travel once an OPT application is approved. See the international student advisor prior to making any travel arrangements while applying for or working on OPT authorization.
• A student approved for OPT may NOT begin employment until receiving his or her EAD card and NOT until the official start date listed on the card. Working outside of the approved start/end dates listed on the EAD card is a serious violation of status.
• Once authorized for OPT, a student may accept employment anywhere in the United States as long as the job is directly related to the student's degree level and field of study.
• After submitting an application, students will receive a notice of filing from USCIS and may track their application status at <u>U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services</u>.
• Once approved by USCIS, the EAD will be mailed to the student at the address provided on the I-765 application. Government mail *cannot* be forwarded, so if a student anticipates moving within 3 months of filing the application, he or she is advised to consider listing the Office of Academic Affairs as the mailing address.
• Once authorized, OPT cannot be cancelled, whether or not employment is obtained.
• Students must obtain a Social Security card to earn wages in the United States.
• Transfer to another college/university or beginning a new program of study invalidates an OPT work authorization upon transfer. Students must speak with the international advisor prior to transferring to another college or program.
• Students must end employment by the expiration date on the EAD card.