

Optional Practical Training

What is Optional Practical Training?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is an F-1 status benefit that grants temporary employment authorization in the field of academic study. F-1 students may use some or all of the available 12 months of practical training during their course of study (less than 20 hours/week) or save the full twelve months to use after completion of studies. Authorization for OPT is granted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) and can take several months to obtain. It is important that you apply for the authorization at the earliest possible date.

Who is eligible for F-1 Optional Practical Training?

- F-1 students who have been enrolled full time at a qualified institution for at least one full academic year
- Students who are in valid F-1 status at the time of the application.

When should I apply?

- If you are a student applying for pre-completion OPT the earliest you can submit the application is 90 days prior to the date you complete your first academic year or up to 90 days prior to the start date you request for your OPT.
- If you are applying for post-completion OPT you may apply either 90 days prior to, or within 60 days following, the completion date on your I-20. (This is different than your graduation date.)

How do I apply for OPT?

The OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card is approved for specific begin and end dates. You must identify those dates on the OPT Request Form. For post-completion OPT the beginning date can be no later than 60 days after the I-20 completion date and must end no later than 14 months after the I-20 completion date. You may not begin employment until you have received your EAD and its start date has come to pass.

Contact the International Student Advisor if you will not or do not complete your degree requirements before the requested OPT start date.

To begin the application process, submit a completed OPT Request Form to the International Student Advisor. If eligible, a new I-20 recommending OPT will be issued for you. Your OPT application must be submitted to USCIS *within 30 days* of the issuance of the I-20 citing the OPT recommendation.

The option to file Form I-765 online is only available to F-1 students filing Form I-765 for OPT. If an applicant submits Form I-765 online to request employment authorization on or after April 15, but is eligible for a different employment authorization category, USCIS will deny the application and retain the fee. As USCIS continues to transition to paperless operations, the agency will work to expand online filing for Form I-765 to additional categories.

Online filing allows applicants to submit forms electronically, check the status of their case anytime from anywhere, and receive notices from USCIS online instead of waiting for them in the mail. USCIS is using innovation and technology to meet the needs of applicants, petitioners and employees. Regardless of the paper or electronic format of an application or petition, USCIS is committed to ensuring a secure and efficient process for all.

Individuals can file 11 USCIS forms online, which can all be found on the [Forms Available to File Online](#) page. To file these forms online, individuals must first create a USCIS online account at myaccount.uscis.gov. This free account allows them to:

- Submit their forms;
- Pay their fees;
- Track the status of their case;
- Communicate with USCIS through a secure inbox; and
- Respond to Requests for Evidence.

USCIS continues to accept the latest paper version of these forms by mail.

You can apply via mail or you can apply online. If you want to apply online please find the link here to apply virtually <https://myaccount.uscis.gov/>

An OPT application contains the following:

- Complete [Form I-765](#). In Section 16 the category of employment you are seeking is (c)(3) (B).
- 2 passport format photos (refer to page 7 of the [I-765instructions](#) for details)
- Personal check or money order for \$410 made out to “Department of Homeland Security”
- Copy of all of your I-20s
- Copy of the identity and validity page(s) of your passport
- Copy of your visa and I-94 document

Where do I file my OPT application?

Standard Mail:

USCIS
PO Box 660867 Dallas, TX 75266

Express Mail or Courier Service

USCIS

Attn: AOS

2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business Suite 400 Lewisville, TX 75067

When filing Form I-765 at one of the USCIS Lockbox facilities, you may elect to receive an email and/or text message notifying you that your application has been accepted. You must complete an E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance ([Form G-1145](#)), and attach it to the first page of your application.

You can apply via mail or you can apply online. If you want to apply online please find the link to apply virtually <https://myaccount.uscis.gov/>

F-1 Student Reporting Obligations:

Throughout your period of OPT you are required to report changes in name, address and employment to the DSO within 10 days of the change. This includes adding or changing employers and periods of unemployment. You are allowed to accumulate a total of 90 days of unemployment during your 12 month OPT period and Cap-Gap OPT period combined.

Failure to report information changes as noted above or accruing more than 90 days of unemployment may result in loss of F-1 student status and benefits.

Cap-Gap OPT Extension

A limited number of H-1B visas is made available as of October 1 each year. Cap-subject employers may file H-1B petitions up to 6 months prior to the Oct. 1 start date (April 1) to claim one of the limited number of H-1Bs available with an employment start date of October 1. The limited number of October 1 start H-1Bs are often claimed soon after April 1. The Cap-Gap Extension is a period during which an eligible F-1 student's status, and OPT benefit, is extended. To be eligible, the F-1 student must be in status and have participated in post-completion OPT. There are two means of applying Cap-Gap Extension:

1. If the F-1 student is in the 60 day grace period following post-completion OPT when an employer files an H-1B petition with an October 1 start date, and the H-1B petition is accepted and receipt notice issued by USICS, the student's F-1 status can be extended to September 30. This allows the student to remain in the US but does not extend the OPT employment benefit.
2. If the F-1 student is in a valid period of authorized post-completion OPT which ends before Oct. 1 and an employer files an H-1B petition with an October 1 start date, and the H-1B petition is accepted and receipt notice issued by USICS, the OPT period can be extended to September 30. This H-1B petition must be filed prior to the expiration of your OPT period.

If you are eligible for a Cap-Gap Extension please provide either the I-797 Receipt Notice of your H-1B petition or the I- 797 Approval Notice of your H-1B petition to the International Student Advisor. A new I-20 with annotation of your Cap- Gap extension will be issued and sent to you. You will not receive another EAD nor will your I-20 will not be extended. The Cap-Gap extension automatically terminates upon the rejection, denial, or revocation of the H-1B petition filed on your behalf.

Please note, you cannot travel outside of the US during your Cap-Gap OPT period.

24 Month STEM Extension

The 24 Month STEM Extension allows F-1 students are eligible to apply for an extension of their post-completion OPT. To be eligible F-1 students must have earned a bachelor's degree or higher in the U.S. in a designated science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM) program included in the [list of government designated STEM degrees](#). Unfortunately, none of the degree programs offered by the Institute are included on the STEM degree list. Therefore F-1 students at the Institute are eligible for the 24 month STEM Extension

Optional Practical Training Request Form

This Request Form gathers information required to allow the Designated School Official to recommend Optional Practical Training (OPT) to the student noted below. Please have both sections completed before submitting to International Student Services.

Part 1 – to be completed by the student:

Name:

Major:

Local Address:

I request OPT to begin on and end on for hours/week

My signature below confirms my understanding of the following:

- Optional Practical Training is strictly for employment within my field of study.
- I cannot begin employment until I have a valid Employment Authorization Card for OPT.
- I will report all changes in name, address, employment information and periods of unemployment to the International Student Advisor at the Institute within 10 days of the change as required by USCIS.

Signature:

Date:

Part 2 – to be completed by the student's Academic Advisor or Department Chair:

Immigration regulations require that Optional Practical Training be used by F-1 students for employment related to the student's field of study. Please return the completed form to the student. Any questions can be directed to International Student Services.

Academic program in which the student is participating:

Date the student will complete all degree requirements:
(Not the date of graduation ceremonies.)

The degree expected is:

Name:

Department:

Signature:

Date: