



Optional Practical Training for Students In F-1 Status

Optional Practical Training (OPT) allows international students to engage in temporary employment in their field of study both before and after completion of studies. The following information on OPT concerns international students who are in F-1 immigration status and are either progressing towards their degree program or are graduating from their degree program.

Definition of “Optional Practical Training”

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a 12 month work permit designed to provide you with an opportunity to gain actual employment experience in your chosen profession. Its purpose is to “round off” or compliment your academic work.

Eligibility Requirement

The work must be **directly related** to your major field of study and must be appropriate for someone with your level of education. The work may be full-time or part-time (must be at least 20 hours per week), and may occur anywhere in the United States. To be eligible to apply for OPT, you (1) must have been in lawful student status for at least nine months (academic year) and (2) must submit your application during a 120-day period based upon the date you complete all program requirements (see next section).

Application Deadline

You must first submit an application to the International Coordinator preferably within the 90-120 days before you wish to begin your OPT. Applications may be accepted up to 60 days after graduation (grace you wait to apply, be advised that you may not receive the full 12 months of practical training or may face delays in receiving the card. If the International Coordinator recommends that you be allowed to participate in OPT, you must then submit an application for an “Employment Authorization Document” (EAD) to the USCIS office having jurisdiction over the place you are living at that time. USCIS must receive this application before the end of your 60 day grace period.

Application and Authorization Procedures

Your permission to begin OPT does not begin until you have received an “Employment Authorization Document” (EAD) from USCIS and the start date has passed.

To apply for OPT, Make an appointment with an International Coordinator. They must make a recommendation for OPT in the SEVIS system. To obtain your card, you will need to submit the following materials to the Immigration Advisor:

- Form I-765 (go to www.uscis.gov to download a copy of the form) or you can create a portal and do an electronic E-file application. (If e-filing, all documents should be saved a Pdf and brought on a USB for upload)
- Copy of Form I-20 (All your I-20s, even from previous schools, if you have them)
- Copy of I-94 card (front and back) or I-94 printout from the CBP website
- Check for \$520 for paper filing and \$470 for online e-filing (effective April 1, 2024). Checks or money orders must be made payable to “Department of Homeland Security)
- 2 photographs (Passport style – White background) – if E-filing, you will need a digital copy not a physical copy
- Copies of important passport pages (biographical page, visa page, and expiration page, if applicable). If e-filing, make sure you have all documents and photos on a USB or accessible digitally.

Once USCIS receives your application, they will send you a “Notice of Action” stating that they have received your application. The EAD will begin either on the day requested recommendation on your I-20, or the date the EAD is issued, whichever occurs later. Students who do not apply in a timely manner may not receive the full period of OPT.

Pre-completion & Post-completion

Regulations updates since April 2008 have separated pre-completion and post-completion work authorization. For example, if you wish to take work authorization related to your field of study while still enrolled you may do so, but this takes away from the total year available to you. This is a complicated issue and should be discussed with the International Coordinator. Your lawful F-1 status expires 60 days after the date you graduate and you are expected to leave the country by that date, unless you file a timely application for OPT or make arrangements to lawfully remain in the U.S. in another visa status.

Making a Decision Regarding Participation in Optional Practical Training

Only One 12 Month Period Per Degree Level. You are allowed only allowed one year of OPT per level in your time as an F-1 (i.e. one for Associates; Bachelor's and one for Master's). You are permitted to use your year in increments if you wish to pursue more than one degree at the same level. For example, if you intend to pursue two degree programs at the Associates level, you may choose to do 6 months of OPT after each program. **Please Note:** Only two types of F-1 students have practical training rights restored after they have been used: (1) students who spend at least one year outside the U.S. and then return in F-1 status; and (2) students who change from F-1 to another status, spend at least a year in the other status and then change back to F-1 status. After completion of your Associates degree, you would be entitled to OPT again after your Bachelor's/Masters/Phd (per higher level).

OPT allows for 12 months of employment. OPT may be requested after the (9) month enrollment requirement has been met. If the student applies for OPT to begin after the completion of their program, the full 12 months is recommended. Students also have the option to request OPT during their annual vacation, upon completion of course requirements (excluding thesis/dissertation), or on a part-time basis during the academic year. Part-time employment will subtracted at a one-half rate from the 12-month allotment.

Unemployment During OPT

You cannot have more than 90 days of aggregate unemployment during your OPT year. These 90 days begin after the start date on your OPT card. If you are still enrolled, then you don't begin accruing these 90 days until after you graduate.

Actual Date OPT May Begin

You may not begin work until the following requirements are satisfied: (1) you have obtained your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from the USCIS; (2) the beginning date on the card has passed

Notification of Employment

All students on OPT must notify the International office of their employer information. Email international@jeffstateonline.com with the name of your employer, supervisor, physical address, and phone of employer. Any changes of your personal address, employer, or visa status should be submitted to the International Coordinator within 10 days.

Change of Employer After Optional Practical Training Has Been Authorized

You may change employers after you have begun authorized employment provided the new job is (1) directly related to your major field of study and (2) appropriate for someone having your level of education. Notification must be made to the International Coordinator so it can be appropriately reported to SEVIS>

Travel Outside the United States.

In order to reenter the U.S., you must present (1) a recently signed I-20; (2) a letter from your employer; (3) your OPT Card; and 4) a valid F-1 visa. Be sure to consult with staff in the International Coordinator when contemplating travel outside the U.S. and reentry to continue OPT. Visa renewal is not recommended while on OPT.

Future Planning: 17-Month Extension (Only For STEM Majors-Bachelors/Masters/Phd)

Not Applicable to Associates Degree!! After completing a Bachelors/Masters/or Phd program and apply for OPT, and you are in a Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM) field you may be eligible for a one-time 17 month extension of your OPT if your employer is in the E-verify program.

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