

WHAT IS OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is temporary employment authorized by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) that allows international students to gain work experience in their field of study before or after completion of study.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

F-1 students who have been in lawful full-time status for one academic year are eligible to apply.

Applicants who have completed 12 months or more of full-time CPT are ineligible to apply.

WHEN CAN I USE OPT?

OPT is most often used after completion of a degree also known as Post-Completion OPT. There is also a Pre-completion option which is obtained during your program of study.

HOW MUCH OPT CAN I USE?

You may be authorized for a maximum of 12 months depending on your major, for each degree level you complete in succession. OPT time used before completion of a program (pre-completion OPT) is deducted from the 12-month period of post-completion. Part-time pre-completion OPT is deducted from the 12 month cumulative limit at a 50% rate. Time will be counted by weeks granted, not by hours worked. Students in qualifying STEM fields may be eligible to apply for a 24-month OPT extension after being authorized for the first 12 months.

DO I HAVE TO HAVE A JOB OFFER IN ORDER TO APPLY?

No. However, any employment that you accept while on OPT must be related to your degree and must be reported on the SEVP OPT Portal. While on OPT, you may change employers. Any changes in OPT employment must be reported within 10 days of the change. Prospective employers like to hear that you have applied for OPT and know when you are eligible to start work. However, you may accumulate no more than 90 days of unemployment while on post-completion OPT. If you qualify for a 24-month STEM OPT Extension, you may accumulate no more than 150 days of unemployment during the 24-month STEM extension (including Post-Completion OPT).

HOW IS THE 90-DAY UNEMPLOYMENT COUNTED?

The 90-day unemployment rule is counted from the start date of the EAD card, not the requested OPT start date on the I-20. Please do not accumulate 90 days or more of unemployment as it will be in violation of your F-1 status.

WHEN MAY I APPLY FOR OPT?

You are recommended to first attend an OPT workshop before applying for Post-Completion OPT

You can file an application for post-completion OPT as early as 90 days in advance of your completion date and up to 60 days after your completion date. However, we recommend that you file early as **it can take 3-5 months for an application to be approved**. Your completion date is as follows:

- Undergraduates & MBA Students: Last day of final examinations for the quarter in which you complete all coursework
- PhD & Master Thesis Students: Day you file your dissertation or thesis with the Graduate Division (Final deadline day is recommended)
- Master Comprehensive Exam & Project Students: Day you file your degree with the Graduate Division (Final Deadline day is recommended)

REMEMBER: You may NOT continue to work on campus after your program completion date.

Special note: *Pre-completion OPT applications should be submitted 90 days in advance of the day on which you would like to begin work. Please speak with an International Student Advisor about eligibility requirements.*

HOW DO I REQUEST MY OPT AUTHORIZATION DATES?

The OPT Request Form will ask you enter your OPT start date and OPT end date. Remember that your OPT start date must fall within your 60-day grace period. It may be as early as one day after your program completion date or as late as 59 days after your program completion date. Since standard OPT is authorized for up to 12 months, your OPT end date would be exactly 12 months after your OPT start date.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR OPT?

1. Attend an OPT workshop (Recommended). OPT workshops are held quarterly so, please look for workshop registration details in the ISS newsletter or Events Calendar.

2. Complete OPT Request Form (available at the ISS Office). This form must be completed by your Academic Advisor (for Undergraduate students) or by your Graduate Advisor (for Graduate students). OPT Document Checklist is also available at the front desk as well.
3. Download and complete the [USCIS Form I-765](#). Please type out the form except for the signature. **Sign the form using black ink.**
4. Bring the following documents to the ISS office in person or send in email to internationalstudents@ucr.edu:
 - a. OPT Request Form
 - b. [Form I-765](#)
 - c. [Form G-1145](#)
 - d. Copy of valid passport (including informational page)
 - e. Copy of F-1 visa stamp
 - f. Copy of I-94 (Downloadable at [I-94 Website](#))
5. Once your documents are received by the ISS office, an International Student Advisor will review your OPT application and issue you a new I-20 with recommendation for OPT. The International Student Advisor will also make recommendations on the documents that you submitted through the OPT Material Checklist. If there are any concerns regarding your application, you will be notified via your UCR email address. Processing time may take from 3-5 business days.
6. Once your OPT I-20 has been issued, you will receive an email in your UCR email notifying you that it is ready for pick up. Call the ISS Front Desk at (951)827-4113 to schedule the appointment if needed.
7. Mail your completed application packet to USCIS per the instructions given to you on the OPT Material Checklist. We recommend that you receive a tracking number when mailing your documents. NOTE: Your OPT application must be mailed to USCIS within 30 days of the OPT I-20 issue date.
8. Email or bring in a copy of OPT receipt notice and EAD card to the ISS office when you receive it.
9. Report any updates in employment, address, contact information, immigration status or departure from the U.S. within 10 days of the change through the SEVP OPT Portal. If you are on STEM OPT Extension, you will need to update changes to ISS office directly.

CAN I CANCEL MY OPT AFTER I HAVE APPLIED?

It depends. If your OPT application has been approved by USCIS, it cannot be cancelled or withdrawn. There is no refund given. Please remember that OPT is only granted for 12 months per degree level. Please schedule an appointment to meet with an International Student Advisor by calling the Front Desk at (951) 827-4113.

WHEN CAN I START WORKING?

The OPT card will indicate the date on which you may begin work. **You may not work before you receive your card.** This OPT card is the only proof of your legal presence in the U.S. Please keep it safe. **Authorization to engage in OPT is automatically terminated when you transfer to another school or begin study at another educational level.**

CAN I CONTINUE TO WORK ON-CAMPUS AFTER MY COURSE COMPLETION DATE WHILE WAITING FOR MY OPT?

No. You may not, under any circumstances, continue to work on-campus after your course completion date. You must wait until you receive your EAD card and until the dates on the EAD card become valid.

IS THERE ANY WAY FOR ME TO TRACK TO PROGRESS OF MY OPT APPLICATION?

Yes. You will receive an I-797C Receipt Notice with a receipt number (WAC#). You may track the status of your application by entering your receipt number in the box through the [USCIS Case Status Online](#) website.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO RECEIVE MY EAD CARD?

USCIS processing time may take 3-5 months to process OPT applications from the date of receipt.

CAN I TRAVEL WHILE I AM WAITING FOR MY OPT CARD?

Yes, you can. But, it is NOT recommended as USCIS may need to contact you for more information. However, if you must travel outside the U.S., while your OPT application is pending, please have the following documents upon your reentry:

1. Valid Passport (valid for at least 6 months)
2. Valid Visa
3. USCIS Receipt Notice
4. I-20 with travel signature (no older than 6 months)
5. Job offer letter or confirmation of job interview (supporting documents to show that you are actively searching for a job)

NOTE: If your OPT application is approved while you are abroad, you must have the above documents, EAD card, and a job offer or employment letter, otherwise the border officer may not let you reenter the U.S. If your OPT application is denied while you are abroad, you may not re-enter the U.S. and your F-1 status will end.