



Office of International Affairs

OPT – Optional Practical Application Guide

Understanding OPT Post-Completion

Optional Practical Training (OPT) gives F-1 students completing an undergraduate or graduate degree in the U.S. an opportunity to gain employment experience in their field of study. OPT authorization allows students to accept paid off-campus employment directly related to their field of study for a period of 12 months. Some important points to note:

- Students are granted one 12-month period per degree level. One at the Bachelor's level, one at the Master's level and one at the Doctoral level. (Example: someone who obtains two master's degrees will only be given one period of OPT post-completion for their degree).
- Types of employment allowed on OPT Post-Completion are very flexible. However, the employment must be directly related to the student's field of study, must be appropriate to the degree level and must work for at least 20 + hours per week.

When to apply for OPT Post-Completion?

Students can apply for OPT Post-Completion as early as 90 days before their graduation date and up 60 days after their graduation date. It will take approximately 90 days for USCIS to process your application and issue an EAD card (Employment Authorization Document); **therefore, it is important to apply early.**

Applying close to the deadline: It is strongly recommended that students do not apply close the 60 day period after graduation, as your application may not be delivered to the USCIS processing center on time.

Eligibility requirements for OPT Post-Completion

- Must be in valid F-1 status
- Have not used more than 12 months of full-time CPT at the current degree level
- Must have been registered full-time throughout their program, unless it is the student's graduating semester
- Must be completing a course of study at the end of the term for which they are applying

Employment requirements for OPT Post-Completion

A job offer is not required to apply for OPT Post-Completion.

Types of Employment: Must be related to field of study.

Unemployment: Once OPT post-completion is approved and the EAD card is received, a student cannot exceed a total of 90 days of unemployment.

Employment Begin Date: Students cannot begin work until they receive the EAD card and not until the official start date listed on the card.

Choosing a begin date for OPT Post-Completion:

Students can request the begin date for their OPT Post-Completion. **Please note that this is a request**, USCIS may choose a date that is earlier or later than the date requested.

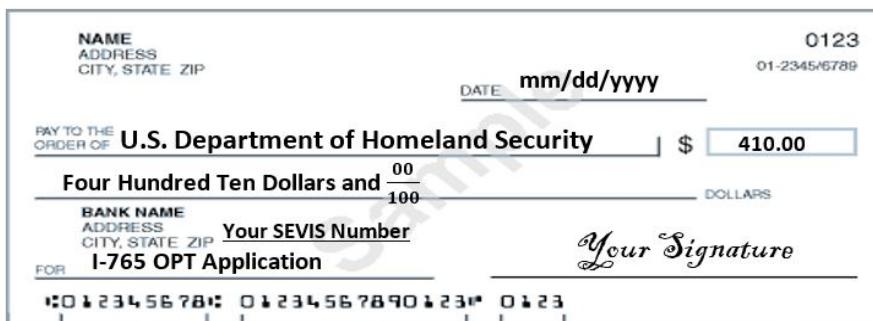
The earliest start day a student can request is the day after graduation. The latest start date a student can request is 60 days after graduation.

Example: A student who graduates on May 12, 2017 can choose a start date as early as May 13, 2017 and as late as July 11, 2017 (exactly 60 days after the date of graduation.)

Application Checklist:

Please submit the following documents to the Office of International Affairs to apply for OPT Post-Completion:

1. Completed Office of International Affairs OPT Application
2. Completed I-765 (In Section 17, please enter (c)(3)(B) This form must be typed)
3. Your current I-20
4. I-94 printout
5. Copy of Passport
6. Copy of Visa
7. Completed G-1145
8. \$ 410.00 personal check or money order made payable to the "United States Department of Homeland Security"
9. Two identical 2" x 2" passport photos (your full name and I-94 number should be lightly printed in pencil on the back of each photograph).



Approximately 3 business days after the OPT application is received by the OIA, the student will receive an email stating their OPT application is available for pick-up

Once the student picks up their OPT packet from the OIA, the student will then need to mail their OPT application to USCIS for processing.

Mailing your OPT Application to USCIS:

Once you pick-up your OPT application from the Office of International Affairs, make sure your application includes all of the following documents:

1. Form G-1145
2. Form I-765
3. I-94 printout
4. Copy of I-20 issued by the OIA recommending you for OPT Post-Completion
5. Copy of Passport
6. Copy of Visa
7. Two identical passport photos (lightly write your full name and I-94 number on the back of each photo in pencil). Photos should be no larger than 2" x 2".
8. \$410 personal check or money order made payable to the "United States Department of Homeland Security"

Mail your application to USCIS within 30 days from the date the OIA issued your I-20. Mail your application to the following address depending on which courier you choose. Recommended: Certified USPS.

**For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries,
mail application to:**

USCIS
PO Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

OR

**For UPS, FedEx or DHL deliveries, mail
application to:**

USCIS
Attn: AOS
2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business
Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067

Notifications from USCIS after you've mailed your OPT application:

1. USCIS will send you an email and a text message once your application has been received. You can expect to receive the email approximately 3 weeks after you've mailed your application to USCIS.
2. **Form I-797C** : USCIS will mail a Form I-797C *Notice of Action* to the address you listed on your I-765. You can expect to receive this form approximately 3 weeks – 4 weeks after you've mailed your application to USCIS. The **Form I-797C** is a receipt notice that will list your receipt number in the form (example: YSC12345678910). This form is not an approval notice. This is just a notice that your application has been received and is being processed.
3. **Form I-797: Approval notice.** USCIS will mail this form along with your EAD card attached approximately 90 days after you have mailed your application to USCIS. You may receive this earlier or later than 90 days. **This will be mailed to the address listed on the I-765.**

How long will it take USCIS to finish processing your application and mail your EAD card:

Currently, the entire process for receiving employment authorization will take up to 90 days.

You can USCIS website for processing times: <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/processTimesDisplayInit.do>

What to do once you've received your EAD card:

Once you mail your application to USCIS, you will receive your EAD card in approximately 90 days. Please note that USCIS may take longer than 90 days to process your application and issue you an EAD card.

Once you receive your EAD card in the mail, it is important to assure your name and date of birth are listed correctly on the card.



Sample EAD Card:

Reminder: You cannot begin work until: 1.) you have received your EAD card and

2.) the begin date listed on the card.

Traveling outside of the U.S.:

Traveling while an OPT application is pending: We generally recommend that you do not travel outside of the U.S. while your OPT application is pending (before you receive your EAD card). If you are considering traveling outside of the U.S. before you have received your EAD card, please contact the Office of International Affairs.

Travel after receiving EAD card, but before employment: If your post completion OPT has been approved and you leave the U.S. before getting a job, or job offer, you may have a difficult time re-entering. Again, we generally advise that you **do not travel** if you have received your EAD card, but have not found employment. Border officials might not allow someone in this situation to re-enter the U.S. Therefore, students who plan to travel and re-enter in this type of situation are taking a risk.

Traveling While Employed: If you have received your EAD card and are working for an employer, you should travel with the following documents:

- A valid passport
- Valid F1 visa
- I-20 (with a valid travel signature from the OIA on page 2)
- EAD card
- Employment letter (a sample of this letter can be found on page 7)

What to do once you've received your EAD card and have employment:

Within **10 days of your start date**, please email the following information to oia@louisiana.edu

1. EAD card (if you have not already scanned and emailed a copy)
2. In your email, please list the following regarding your employment:

1.) Your name	5.) Company name	10.) Your supervisor's complete name
2.) Your SEVIS ID	6.) Company's EIN (Employer ID)	11.) Your supervisor's phone number
3.) Your physical address	7.) Company's physical address	12.) Your supervisor's email
4.) Your telephone number	8.) Your Job Title	13.) Your employment start date
13.) Part-Time or Full-Time		
3. A brief explanation of how your employment is related to your course of study (If you do not know this information please speak with your employer.) This information must be entered into your SEVIS record.

Changes of address, phone number, legal changes to your name or change any aspect of your employment:

Notify the Office of International Affairs within **10 days** of any change to your name, address, phone number or any aspect of your employment.

Example 1: If you move, you must email the OIA with your new residential address within 10 business days of your move.

Example 2: If the work location of your employer changes, you must notify the OIA within 10 days of your work location change.

Example 3: If you change employers, you must notify the OIA within 10 days of your last day of employment, and list your last date of employment. Once you begin employment with a new company, you must notify the OIA within 10 days of your start date.

Unemployment while on OPT post-completion:

A student on post-completion OPT can be unemployed for a total of **90 days**.

A student whose SEVIS record lacks employer information is considered unemployed.

SEVIS can auto-terminate a student's record when he/she accrues 90 consecutive days of unemployment

Types of employment allowed on OPT Post-Completion:

Employment while on OPT must be directly related to the students field of study.

You must work for at least 20 hours per week.

Types of employment:

- **Regular paid employment** – This is the most common type of OPT employment.
- **Work for hire** – This is commonly referred to as 1099 employment where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship.
- **Short-term multiple employers** – A student, such as musician or other type of performing artists, may work for multiple short term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration.
- **Self-employed business owner** — Students on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to his or her degree program.
- **Employment through an agency or consulting firm**- A student on post-completion OPT must be able to provide evidence showing they worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.
- **Volunteer or unpaid internships**- Students may work as volunteers or unpaid interns. The work must be at least 20 hours per week. The student must be able to provide evidence from the employer that they worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of unpaid employment.

Post-Completion OPT Resources:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/working-in-the-united-states>

<https://uscis.gov>

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. I'm not sure which address to choose to have my EAD card mailed to?

The address that you put on your Form I-765 is the address where USCIS will mail your EAD card. We recommend you choose an address that will be good for **AT LEAST 4 months** from the date you turn-in your OPT application. It is very difficult to change the EAD card mailing address once your application is submitted to USCIS and can cause potential obstacles to your receiving the card on-time. It does not need to be your address but can be someone else, such as a family member or friend.

2. I'm confused by the 60 day, 90 day timeframes.

After your date of graduation, you have a 60 day window of days where you can choose ANY day within that 60 day window to start OPT. That date will show on your EAD card as your start date (Ex. Graduate on May 12, OPT start date can be between May 13 – July 11). DURING the 12 months of OPT you cannot have more than 90 days, aggregate total, of unemployment. AFTER your EAD card expires, your OPT ends and you have a 60-day "grace period" to remain in the US, transfer to another school or change to a new visa category.

3. What is my visa status after I file for OPT and am waiting for the card to arrive?

Up until graduation, you are an F-1 student and will travel as you normally do. Filing for OPT has no affect on this. After your graduation date, you are viewed as an F-1 who will be doing or is doing OPT. There is NO GAP IN F-1 STATUS no matter how long it takes for the card to arrive. However, once you graduate, you will need the EAD and an offer or employment letter for re-entering along with the normal documents you traveled with as a student.

4. I worked for three full-time months under curricular practical training last summer. Do I only have nine months left of optional practical training available to me after I graduate?

The only way that CPT affects OPT is when a student has completed a total of 12 months, full-time CPT. Part-time periods of CPT have no effect. Anything less than 12 months of full-time has no effect, as well. So if you did three months full-time CPT, you would still have the entire 12 months of OPT available for use.

5. Can I work as a volunteer or on an internship during OPT?

Yes. Your employment can be paid or unpaid as long as it is an average of 20 hours per week and meets the criteria of appropriate to degree focus and level earned. An internship can be paid or unpaid and could count as OPT employment. It is important that you keep a detailed listing of employment activities and projects with which you were engaged and specify the number of weekly hours that you were engaged in each of the activities or projects identified. Copies of company daily time and attendance records that document your affiliation with the company, including start and end date are also important.

6. What if I want to travel outside the United States during OPT? Do I need to have health insurance while on OPT, and do I have to pay taxes on income earned?

Since medical costs are so high in the U.S. system, it is recommended that you have medical insurance. Regarding taxes, you are liable to pay applicable federal, state and/or local taxes on any income earned in the United States.

7. The best general advice is that an F-1 student on OPT, who has received the EAD card and has to travel abroad, should make sure that there is documentation from his or her employer confirming the employment or the job offer. Otherwise, the student assumes a risk that he/she may not be allowed to re-enter the United States. For those students who have not received the EAD card yet, we recommend you wait to leave the U.S. until you have the card in-hand to take with you.

8. Can a person keep two jobs while on OPT, if both jobs are in the same field of study?

You are able to work more than one job while on OPT. However, any job must be related to your major field of study and appropriate to your degree level.

Sample Job Offer Letter

Acme Company, Inc.

123 Easy Street, Lafayette, LA 70504

(Tel) (000) 000-0000 (Fax) (000) 000-0000

Date:

To: Office of International Affairs

(student's name here) has been employed by our company since _____.

Physical location of student's job: 123 Easy Street / Lafayette, LA 70504

Number of hours worked per week: 20

Job title: Marketing Intern

Job duties: Student will assist in web site design/maintenance, development of company brochures, and development of marketing strategies.

Name of Supervisor: John Smith

Supervisor's Contact Phone Number: (000) 000-0000

Supervisor's E-Mail Address: jsmith@yahoo.com

Employer Identification Number (EIN): 00-0000000

Explain how employment is related to student's course of study.

Sincerely,

John Smith
President
Acme Company, Inc.