The following information pertains to a 12-month OPT. If you are interested in learning about the OPT extension available for certain Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) degree holders, please refer to the OPT Extension Handout for F-1 students.

General Information

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a temporary employment benefit extended to F-1 students who have been maintaining status. Its purpose is to give students the opportunity to gain work experience pre- or post-completion of their degree and is limited to 12 months total for each degree level in a field directly related to the student’s course of study.

Different ways to use OPT

» Part-time or full-time OPT during the student’s annual vacation, when school is not in session and the student intends to register for the next semester.
» Part-time OPT (no more than 20 hours per week) while school is in session.
» Full-time OPT for up to one year after completion of the student’s program.

Eligibility Requirements

» Students must be in valid F-1 status at the time of the application.
» Students must have been enrolled on a full-time basis for one academic year before making an application.
» Students registered in thesis or dissertation hours may apply and engage in OPT prior to completion of studies.
» Students are eligible for one year of OPT per level. This means you may apply for one year of OPT for the bachelor’s level, one year for the master’s level, and one year for the doctoral level.

How to apply

» Apply early! USCIS allows you to apply up to 90 days prior to your graduation date and up to 60 days after your graduation date, provided that it is received within 30 days of your immigration adviser issuing a new I-20 recommending OPT. Your application will not be considered by USCIS if received after 60 days from your graduation date.
» E-filing your OPT application is not recommended at this time.
» Make an appointment with an immigration adviser at ISC.
» Review the OPT checklist and bring all items to your appointment.
» You will need to select a start date for your OPT. This start date must be within 60 days after your graduation date.
» Ensure you use the correct eligibility category as listed on the instructions for I-765 application. (http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/I-765instr.pdf)
» Your immigration adviser will recommend OPT on your SEVIS I-20.
» Your application packet will be mailed for you via certified mail to the USCIS Service Center.
» The following are OPT application deadlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduating Semester</th>
<th>First Day to Apply</th>
<th>Application Deadline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2014</td>
<td>September 15, 2014</td>
<td>January 27, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
<td>February 9, 2015</td>
<td>June 20, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2015</td>
<td>September 21, 2015</td>
<td>January 30, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2016</td>
<td>February 8, 2016</td>
<td>June 18, 2016</td>
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</table>
After applying for OPT

» You cannot start employment until you receive your employment authorization document (EAD) card and by the “valid from” date listed on the card.

» USCIS will cash your application fee. When your check has cleared your bank, you will know that USCIS has begun processing your application.

» USCIS will send you a Receipt Notice. This notice will have the receipt number and receipt notice date. Once you have received this notice, you may check the status of your case online at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do. Your application is assigned to an immigration officer who will review the paperwork to approve OPT and production of EAD card. Once the card is made, it will be mailed to the address listed on your OPT application (I-765). Please ensure you list the address where you plan to reside 30 to 150 days from the submission of your application. The U.S. Postal Service will not forward mail from the federal government to a different address.

» If you have not received your card within 90 days of your receipt notice date, contact your immigration adviser at ISC for further assistance with your application.

» Review your card for errors. If there are any errors, please make an appointment with an immigration adviser at ISC, who will then determine whether or not you should send your card back for correction.

» Bring your card to the ISC office for copying.

» If you need to cancel or withdraw your application, contact an ISC immigration adviser immediately. Depending on the time of your request to cancel or withdraw, it may be possible to do so.

While on OPT

» You may only work within the dates authorized on your EAD card.

» You are allowed to work for more than one employer or change employers provided that employment is directly related to your field of academic study.

» Travel outside of the U.S. is permitted if you are employed. You will need your I-20 (endorsed for travel by an adviser at ISC), your EAD card, and a letter from your employer, as well as a valid passport and valid F-1 entry visa. If you are renewing your visa while on OPT, you may be subject to more scrutiny, as you will need to establish that your purpose in the U.S. is still temporary even though you have completed your studies. To obtain additional information on travel during OPT, please visit http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f2.htm#Toc81222041 or consult with an ISC immigration adviser.

» F-1 non-immigrant status becomes dependent upon employment. You cannot accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during any initial post-completion OPT. However, the first 10 days from the EAD start date as well as periods of up to 10 days when switching between the end of one job and the beginning of the next job are not counted towards the 90-day limit.

» You are required to report changes of address, legal name, employer’s name and address, and/or any interruption of employment within 10 days of the change. To report these changes, please visit http://www.intl.ucf.edu/formsnfiles/ and submit the OPT Status Form to the International Services Center.

» You may be degree seeking and enroll for up to 6 credits per semester. If you would like to study in excess of 6 credits, you must cancel your OPT and request a new Initial I-20.

» Graduates with certain Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) degrees may be eligible for a 17 months OPT extension. Students must contact an ISC immigration adviser to determine eligibility. OPT extension applications should be received by USCIS between 120 and 90 days before expiration of the EAD card.

Options after OPT

» You will have 60 days after your EAD card expires to make departure plans or other arrangements within the U.S.

» You may elect to do one of the following:

» Return to your home country.

» Request a new I-20 for a new program at UCF.

» Transfer to another institution within the U.S.

» Continue employment if approved for a 17 months OPT extension for STEM Program (application must be filed well before current EAD card expires).

» Apply for a nonimmigrant/immigrant status change.

» Note: Students who properly file an H-1B petition AND whose OPT expires prior to October 1 (H-1B start date), are eligible for a cap gap extension. Please note that although the extension is automatic for both employment and F-1 status, students must verify with their immigration adviser that their SEVIS record and I-20 is updated.