



OPT

Optional Practical Training

What is OPT?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is temporary employment authorization that allows F-1 international students to gain work experience directly related to their major field of study.

OPT is authorized by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and may be used:

- Before completing a degree program (Pre-Completion OPT)
- After completing a degree program (Post-Completion OPT)

Most students apply for **Post-Completion OPT** after graduation.

Students must receive:

1. OPT recommendation from their Designated School Official (DSO), and
2. Employment Authorization approval from USCIS

before beginning employment.

Benefits of OPT

OPT allows students to:

- Gain practical experience in their academic field
- Develop professional skills
- Explore career opportunities in the United States
- Build experience related to long-term career goals

Student Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for OPT, students generally must:

- Be maintaining valid F-1 status
- Have completed at least one full academic year in the United States
- Be physically present in the U.S. at the time of application
- Intend to work in a position directly related to their major field of study
- Apply within the permitted filing window
- Receive DSO recommendation prior to submitting the application to USCIS

STEM OPT Extension

Students with eligible STEM degrees may qualify for an additional 24-month extension if:

- Their degree is STEM-designated
- Their employer participates in E-Verify
- Additional reporting requirements are met

Required Application Materials

Students applying for OPT typically submit:

1. OPT Request/Application Form (SEVIS Release Form)

Completed according to institutional procedures.

2. Form I-765

Application for Employment Authorization submitted to USCIS.

3. Copies of Immigration Documents

Typically including:

- Passport identification page
- Visa
- Form I-94
- Previous Forms I-20

4. Passport-Style Photos

Per USCIS photo requirements.

5. Filing Fee

As required by USCIS.

Application Timeline

Students applying for Post-Completion OPT may generally apply:

- Up to 90 days before program completion
- No later than 60 days after program completion

Processing times vary, so early application is strongly encouraged.

Students may not begin employment until:

- They receive their Employment Authorization Document (EAD), and
- The authorized start date has arrived.

Faculty Advisor Responsibilities

Faculty advisors may be asked to:

- Verify a student's academic program or expected completion date
- Support students in understanding how employment connects to their field of study
- Assist with academic recommendations when appropriate

Faculty advisors do not authorize OPT. Final approval is granted by USCIS.

Important Reminders

- Students must receive approval from USCIS and their Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card before beginning work.
- Working without authorization may jeopardize F-1 status.
- Students on Post-Completion OPT are limited in the amount of unemployment time allowed.
- STEM OPT students have additional reporting and compliance requirements.

Questions?

Please contact your Designated School Official (DSO) for assistance regarding OPT eligibility, application procedures, and immigration regulations.