Optional Practical Training

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a benefit that gives F-1 students 12 months of "temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student's major area of study."

There are two types of OPT available to F-1 students: (1) Pre-completion OPT and (2) Post-completion OPT. It is highly recommended to use Port-completion OPT, which begins after completion of your degree program.

OPT does not require a job offer. An F-1 student may be eligible for a new 12-month period after completing a new degree program at a higher education level.

The Office of International Student Relations (ISR) recommends F-1 students for OPT, and the U.S. Government (USCIS) approves OPT applications. OPT is a benefit, not an entitlement, therefore a recommendation from the ISR Office does not guarantee USCIS approval.

OPT Eligibility Requirements

OPT is available to F-1 students who:

1) Have been lawfully enrolled in a full-time student status for at least one academic year in the United States.
2) Are currently active in their F-1 student status.
3) Are physically present in the United States during the time of their OPT application.
4) Have not used more than 12 months of full-time CPT.
5) Apply within the allowed time period for their OPT.

When to Apply

- You can apply for OPT as early as 90 days prior to your expected program completion date on your Form I-20.
- USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of when a DSO recommends you for OPT on your Form I-20.

- USCIS must receive your complete OPT application no more than 60 days after your program end date.

How to Apply

To apply for OPT you must follow these steps which involve YOU, your academic department or college, the ISR Office, and ISCUS. The OPT application to USCIS is your own personal application that YOU alone are responsible for filing timely, correctly, and with full documentation.

Steps to apply for OPT:

1. Attend OPT Workshop through the ISR Office at ORU.

2. Prepare OPT application materials.

3. Complete the OPT Request Form with ISR Office, including OPT start date, academic advisor letter, and upload of all application materials for review.

4. Receive updated I-20 with DSO recommendation via email from ISR Office.

5. Create your USCIS account and file your OPT application (I-765 online form) within 30 days of DSO recommendation.

6. USCIS Adjudicates your OPT Application.
   a. You can check the status of your case here: USCIS Case Status page.

7. If approved, you will receive an approval notice and your EAD work authorization card.

8. Begin Work.

9. Update SEVP Portal with employment information.

Maintaining F-1 Status on OPT

After you begin OPT, the ISR Office will still monitor your SEVIS status, and students must still work to maintain their F-1 visa status. It is the student's responsibility to report information related to their post-completion employment and to continue to maintain their F-1 status while on OPT.

An SEVP portal will be available to students once approved for OPT and after they receive their EAD cards. The SEVP portal will be where you update your employment information and maintain your updated personal contact information.

You will receive an email to set up your SEVP portal account from USCIS to your email address in the SEVIS system. It is important you create your SEVP portal account within 14 days after your OPT approval date.

Videos and Tutorial Resources

As a disclaimer, these videos and tutorial resources are for educational purposes only and should not be considered legal advice. If you require personalized legal advice, please consult a licensed and experienced immigration attorney.

- How to Apply for OPT – Complete Step Guide for F-1 Visa Students
- How to Create a USCIS Online Account
- SEVP Portal

Frequently Asked Questions