

Optional Practical Training (OPT) FAQs

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WHAT IS OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)?

OPT is a period of United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) authorized employment 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.

WHEN CAN I USE OPT?

OPT is most often used after completion of a degree. There is also a pre-completion option. Students interested in applying for work authorization for an internship should apply for Curricular Practical Training (CPT).

HOW MUCH OPT CAN I USE?

You may be authorized for a maximum of 12 months depending on your major, for each level of education you complete. OPT time used before completion of a program is deducted from the 12 month period of post-completion. Part-time OPT will be deducted at half the full-time rate. Time will be counted by weeks granted, not by hours worked. Students in some fields may be eligible for a 17 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. You may change employers while on OPT. 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 17 month extension, you may accumulate no more than 120 days of unemployment during the 17 month extension.

WHEN CAN I APPLY?

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 up to 90 days for an application to be approved. Your completion date is the last day of final exams if you are an undergraduate. The completion date for graduate students is when you pass your written exams or file your final thesis/dissertation. **Applications should be filed as soon as possible since it may take 3 to 4 months for USCIS to process an application.**

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 advisor about eligibility requirements.

CAN I CANCEL MY OPT AFTER I HAVE APPLIED?

Yes. However, if your OPT application has been approved by USCIS, it cannot be cancelled.

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 OPT card and until the dates on the OPT card become valid.

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

Yes, once you submit an online application, you can print out a confirmation receipt with a WAC #. You can use this WAC # to track the status of your application online at <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp>.

IT HAS BEEN 3 MONTHS AND I STILL HAVE NOT RECEIVED MY OPT CARD. CAN I APPLY FOR A TEMPORARY CARD?

No. Local USCIS offices are no longer issuing temporary OPT cards. If your OPT card does not arrive in 90 days, you may have to apply for a replacement card with the California Service Center.

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

You can travel outside U.S. while waiting for your OPT card as long as you have the following documents:

- 1) A **valid United States entry visa** & a passport that is valid for 6 months from the date you plan to reenter the United States;
- 2) OPT receipt notice; and
- 3) A travel endorsement on your I-20 Form that is less than 5 months old.

If your OPT card is approved while you are abroad, you must have the above documents **and** a job offer or employment letter otherwise the border officer may not let you reenter the U.S. If you have further questions, please consult with an advisor.

Note: If you do not possess a valid visa at the time of travel, you may encounter difficulty obtaining a new visa.

CAN I TRAVEL ONCE I RECEIVE MY OPT CARD?

You can travel outside U.S. after receiving your OPT card as long as you have the following documents:

- 1) A **valid United States entry visa** & a passport that is valid for 6 months from the date you plan to reenter the United States;
- 2) Your OPT card;
- 3) An employment letter. If you do not have a letter, the immigration officer **may not permit you to reenter the U.S.;** and
- 4) A travel endorsement on your I-20 Form that is less than 5 months old.

Note: If you do not possess a valid visa at the time of travel, you may encounter difficulty obtaining a new visa.

CAN I EXTEND MY OPT?

NO. However, students in certain fields---Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM fields) may qualify to apply for a 17 month extension of your OPT after you are authorized for the initial 12 months. This extension must be applied for before your first OPT authorization expires. In order to qualify for this provision certain conditions must be met. One such condition is that you must have employment with an employer that uses the E-verify system. Please contact the advisor for more information. In addition, there are work visas (such as an H-1B) that an employer may petition on your behalf to allow you to work beyond OPT. You must be in good standing on OPT.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR OPT?

- 1) Call the IEC at 951-827-4113 to sign up for an OPT application workshop. Pick up an OPT packet at the workshop or download the application packet at our website under the Employment/OPT section;
- 2) Turn in completed forms and supporting documents to the IEC for processing;
- 3) Student will receive an email at his/her webmail account indicating that the OPT I-20 is ready for pick up at IEC;
- 4) Schedule an appointment to pick up OPT I-20 and prepare OPT application packet with an advisor;
- 5) Mail application packet to USCIS. Student will receive an instructions after meeting with an advisor ; and
- 6) Bring in copy of OPT receipt notice and OPT card to IEC when available.

WHAT DOCUMENTS ARE REQUIRED FOR AN OPT APPLICATION?

- 1) Completed Academic Advisor Certification form, OPT Dates Form and Form I-765 (in OPT packet).
- 2) \$340 check or money order made out to "Department of Homeland Security."
- 3) Two U.S. style passport photos with white background. Your name and I-94 admission number should be printed lightly, in pencil, on the back of each photo. You can have your photos taken at any Costco or at U.S. Post Office.
- 4) Copy of your OPT I-20 Form (previous I-20s only required if at UCR in F-1 status for less than one year);
- 5) Copy of Form I-94 departure record front and back (white card usually stapled in your passport).
- 6) Copy of your passport picture page with validity date and a copy of your most recent visa.
- 7) Copy of your last OPT Card (front and back), if you have ever received one.
- 8) If you changed your status in the U.S. to F-1, you must include a copy of your approval notice.

F-1 OPT Academic Advisor Certification

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FOR ACADEMIC ADVISOR TO COMPLETE:

To Whom It May Concern:

Today's Date: _____

1. _____ is a/an _____ student in _____.
(student's name) (degree level) (name of department/school)

2. This student has been registered full time since _____ and is in good standing.
(quarter/year)

3. S/he expects to complete her/his program requirements by _____.
(month/day/year)

4. S/he would like to apply for a period of Optional Practical Training in _____.
(major field of study)

5. This training would be most valuable to her/him in her/his future career by providing actual practical experience to supplement her/his academic studies.

Sincerely,

Printed Name: _____ Signature: _____

Title: _____

Extension: _____ Email: _____

FOR STUDENT TO COMPLETE:

Student Name: _____ ID # _____ Non-UCR email: _____

Current residential address: _____

General Employment in _____ Are you on filing fee status? _____ Yes ___ No
(major)

Requested OPT Start Date: _____ End Date: _____

Please note: The start date can be any day from the day after your program end date until 60 days after your program ends.

Are you currently employed on campus? ___ Yes ___ No Is this pre-completion OPT? ___ Yes ___ No

List all periods of previously authorized employment for curricular or optional practical training (if any):

<u>CPT or OPT</u>	<u>Part Time or Full Time</u>	<u>Dates</u>