Optional Practical Training (OPT) Application Tutorial

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3 Types of OPT
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What is Optional Practical Training?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is immigration-authorized employment in your field of study for students in F-1 status.

OPT is initially authorized for up to 12 months.

Who is Eligible for OPT?

- F-1 students who have been in lawful full-time status for at least 1 academic year.
- F-1 students who do not have 12 months or more of full-time curricular practical training (CPT).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of OPT</th>
<th>Who is eligible?</th>
<th>When does OPT start/end?</th>
<th>When can it be used?</th>
<th>How long does it last?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-Completion</strong></td>
<td>F-1 students who have completed all their coursework but have not yet completed their program (graduated) yet.</td>
<td>Your start date would be approximately 90 days in the future from when you apply. Your end date cannot be later than your program end date on your I-20.</td>
<td>During annual vacation (summer) Part-time while school is in session After completion of course requirements, but before completion of program.</td>
<td>A maximum of 12 months of full time OPT for each level of education you complete. Any pre-completion OPT you use counts towards the total of 12 months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TIP:</strong> Check if you are eligible for CPT as an alternative to pre-completion OPT. For most students CPT is a better option.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Post-Completion</strong></td>
<td>F-1 students who have completed or will complete their program of study.</td>
<td>Your start date must be within 60 days after your program end date. Your end date cannot be later than 14 months after your program end date.</td>
<td>After completion of your program.</td>
<td>A maximum of 12 months of full-time OPT for each level of education you complete unless you are eligible for an extension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>17-Month Stem Extension</strong></td>
<td>F-1 students who are currently using their initial 12-month period of OPT and have both: 1) an eligible STEM degree 2) employment with an E-verify employer</td>
<td>Dates fixed: start date is the day after your initial OPT is authorized and end date is 14 months in future</td>
<td>Fixed to be used only following an approved 12-month period of OPT</td>
<td>Adds 17 months to the initial 12 months for a total of 29 months.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q: Do I have to have a job offer to apply for OPT?
A: No, a job offer is not necessary. However, any employment that you accept must be related to your degree.

Q: When should I start looking for a job?
A: We recommend you begin looking for a job as soon as possible so you are ready to begin working once you have the required approval from USCIS.

Q: What if I can’t find a job?
A: You are allowed a maximum of 90 days of unemployment during your 12 months of OPT.

Q: How is the unemployment counted?
A: Each day during OPT that you do not have qualifying employment counts as a day towards the 90 day limit.
Q: What will happen if I accumulate more than 90 days of unemployment during OPT?
A: It could be considered by the Department of Homeland Security as a violation of your immigration status.

Q: What is included as “qualifying employment?”
A: **Paid Employment** (20-40 hours per week)

- Multiple employers (all employment must be related to your degree)
- Short-term multiple employers (primarily for performing artists having “gigs”)
- Work-for-hire (contract work where you are performing a service which may not constitute formal career employment)
- Self-employed business owner
- Employment through an agency

**Unpaid employment** (20-40 hours per week)

Note: In all cases, you must be able to provide some form of proof of your employment including dates, duration, names of employer/contract, companies/agencies that can verify the job you did. If you are self-employed, you must be able to show proof of proper business licenses (if necessary) and active engagement.
Q: Can I work on-campus after my completion date while I wait for my OPT approval?
A: No. You cannot work after your I-20 end date on-campus without USCIS approval. Please note that your I-20 end date may change if the original date does not match your actual completion date. The I-20 end date must reflect your actual completion date.

Q: When can I start working?
A: If your request for OPT is approved, USCIS will send you an employment Authorization Document (EAD).

• The EAD will indicate the date on which you may begin work.

• You may not work before you receive your EAD card.

• The EAD is the only proof of your legal right to work in the United States.

Q: Can I travel while I am waiting for my EAD?
A: Yes, but you will need to have your receipt notice indicating the CSC has received and is processing your OPT application. You should also have a valid visa, passport and your I-20.

If you need to travel, please make an appointment with an ISRC advisor.
Q: Can I travel once I receive my EAD?
A: Yes, you can travel if you have:
   • A valid EAD card
   • A letter from your employer
   • A travel endorsement on your I-20 Form that is less than 6 months old
   • A valid United States F-1 Visa—if you do not have a valid visa at the time of travel, you may encounter difficulty obtaining a new visa.
   • A passport that is valid for 6 months from the day you return to the U.S.

Q: Can I cancel my OPT after I have applied?
A: If your OPT has been approved, you cannot cancel your application and you will not be eligible to apply for OPT for the same educational level in the future.

   If your OPT has not be processed (approved/denied) by USCIS, you can cancel your application in writing and you may be eligible to apply for the same educational level in the future.

Q: Can I track the progress of my application?
A: USCIS will send you a receipt notice of receiving the application within 2-3 weeks.
On the receipt notice, there will be a number assigned to your class. In California, this number is referred to as a WAC #.

   You can use this number to track the status of your case online.
Things to Remember:

- You may file your application 90 days before the program completion date or 60 days after, though we recommend you apply as early as possible—90 days before your completion date.

- The USCIS must receive your application no later than 30 days after your OPT I-20 has been issued. The OPT I-20 issue date can be found next to your advisor’s signature on the first page of your I-20.

- It takes an average of 90 days for the USCIS to process and issue your EAD card.

- The OPT start day can only occur within the 60-day period after the program completion date. You should also think about whether you have a job offer or will need time to find a job.

- The start date on your EAD card is the day you can begin working legally on OPT. Although you may receive your EAD card before your start date, you cannot begin working until the start date has arrived.

- The start date cannot be changed once your application has been sent to USCIS.

A note about the completion date:
Your completion date may not necessarily be the quarter end date, graduation date, or even your current I-20 expiration date. Your completion date is:

For undergraduate students: the last day of finals for your last quarter.

For graduate students: the date you complete all course requirements (submitting a thesis/dissertation, doing your oral defense or completing a comprehensive exam). Consult your advisor regarding the most appropriate and accurate date.
1. Attend an OPT application workshop or complete the online module

2. Prepare an OPT application on My Forms

3. Attend a review appointment with the advisor who issues your OPT I-20

4. Mail in your completed packet to USCIS

5. Report updates in employment, address and status to the ISRC
Any student wishing to apply for OPT must either attend an OPT workshop or complete the OPT module on I-Learn. The ISRC workshop schedule is sent out via email at the start of each term; reminders and registration information is sent out in the ISRC weekly email.

Students wishing to complete the online module may access it [https://ilearn.ucr.edu](https://ilearn.ucr.edu).

- Choose the “UCR International Student Community” under My Courses.
- Select “OPT Workshop” from the left hand sidebar.
- Complete the Online OPT Workshop.
- After completing the workshop in its entirely, take the OPT Test.
- After completing the online module and receiving 100% on the online exam, you may submit your OPT request via My Forms and prepare your supplemental application materials as instructed.
2. Prepare your OPT application

APPLICATION MATERIALS

1. Form I-765
2. Document copies
3. OPT application on My Forms
4. 2 passport-sized photos
5. Check for $380 made payable to “Department of Homeland Security”
## Completing the I-765 Form

If you plan to apply in the future, please make sure you use the most current version of the I-765 form. The I-765 form can be found online at: [http://www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov). The I-765 should be typed or completed using black ink. The form must be signed using black ink.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department of Homeland Security</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services</td>
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</table>

### Do not write in this block.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applicant is filing under 274a.12</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attachment Approved, Employment Authorized / Extended (Circle One) until</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Date), (Date).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject to the following conditions:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Application Denied:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Failed to establish eligibility under § 274a.12 (a) or (b)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Failed to establish economic necessity as required in § 274a.12 (c) (4), (18) and § 214.2 (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am applying for:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Permit to accept employment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Replacement (if lost employment authorization document)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acceptance of my permission to accept employment (attach previous employment authorization document).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1. Name (Family Name in CAPS): (First), (Middle), (Last) |

### 2. Other Names Used (Include Maiden Name): |

### 3. Address in the United States (Number and Street) (Apartment Number): |

### 4. City or Town (State/Province) (ZIP Code): |

### 5. Citizenship/Nationality: |

### 6. Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy): |

### 7. Gender: |

### 8. Marital Status: |

### 9. Social Security Number (Include all numbers you have ever used): |

### 10. Alien Registration Number (A-Number) or I-94 Number (if any): |

### 11. Have you ever before applied for employment authorization from USCIS? |

### Certification:

I certify, under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America, that the foregoing is true and correct. Furthermore, I authorize the release of any information that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services needs to determine eligibility for the benefit I am seeking. I have read the Instructions in Part 2 and have identified the appropriate eligibility category in Block 16.

| Signature: |
| Telephone Number: |

### Signature of person preparing form, if other than above:

I declare that this document was prepared by me at the request of the applicant and is based on all information of which I have any knowledge.

| Print Name: |
| Signature: |

### Remarks:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Receipt</th>
<th>Resubmitted</th>
<th>Relocated</th>
<th>Recll</th>
<th>Seat</th>
<th>Approved</th>
<th>Denied</th>
<th>Returned</th>
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Form I-765 (Rev. 04/08) N
## Completing the I-765 Form

### Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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**I-765, Application For Employment Authorization**

**Do not write in this block.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remarks</th>
<th>Action Block</th>
<th>Fee Stamp</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A#</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Applicant is filing under §274a.12**

- [ ] Application Approved. Employment Authorized / Extended (Circle One) until ______________________ (Date).
- [ ] Subject to the following conditions: ______________________
- [ ] Application Denied.
  - [ ] Failed to establish eligibility under 8 CFR 274a.12 (a) or (c).
  - [ ] Failed to establish economic necessity as required in 8 CFR 274a.12(c)(14), (18) and 8 CFR 214.2(f)

**I am applying for:**

- [X] Permission to accept employment.
- [ ] Replacement (of lost employment authorization document)
- [ ] Renewal of my permission to accept employment (attach previous employment authorization document).

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*This is for USCIS use only.*

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Make sure “Permission to accept employment” is checked.
COMPLETING THE I-765 FORM

<p>| | | |</p>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Name (Family Name in CAPS) (First)</td>
<td>(Middle)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Other Names Used (Include Maiden Name)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Address in the United States (Number and Street) (Apt. Number)</td>
<td>(Town or City) (State/Country) (ZIP Code)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Country of Citizenship/Nationality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Place of Birth (Town or City) (State/Province) (Country)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy)</td>
<td>7. Gender</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Marital Status</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Single</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Social Security Number (Include all numbers you have ever used) (if any)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Alien Registration Number (A-Number) or I-94 Number (if any)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Have you ever before applied for employment authorization from USCIS?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes (If yes, complete below)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. The address you enter **must be valid for at least 3-4 months** and **must be an address in California**. This is the address where USCIS will mail your EAD card. It must be valid throughout the OPT application processing time. If you will move out of California, you may use a friend or family member’s address.

9. If you have never been issued a Social Security Number, leave this blank. After receiving your EAD, you will be able to apply for a Social Security Number with the SSA.

10. As an F-1 student, you will enter the most recent I-94 number.
COMPLETING THE I-765 FORM

11. If you have had previous work authorization and received an EAD card, check yes for Item 11. If you have never applied for work authorization from USCIS, check no. If you checked yes, fill in the information about your previous work authorization. You must also attach a copy of your EAD card and previous I-20. If this EAD card is lost, write “Lost EAD.”

12. Date of Last Entry into the U.S., on or about: (mm/dd/yyyy)

13. Place of Last Entry into the U.S.

14. Status at Last Entry (B-2 Visitor, F-1 Student, No Lawful Status, etc.)

15. Current Immigration Status (Visitor, Student, etc.)

16. Go to the “Who May File Form I-765?” section of the instructions. In the space below, place the letter and number of the eligibility category you selected from the instructions. (For example, (a)(3), (c)(17)(iii), etc.):

17. If you entered the eligibility category, (c)(3)(C), in Question 16 above, list your degree, your employer’s name as listed in E-Verify, and your employer’s E-Verify Company Identification Number or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number in the space below.
COMPLETING THE I-765 FORM

Your signature should fit between the lines. Since this is the signature USCIS will use on your EAD card, please make sure the signature does not cross the two lines. If the USCIS cannot scan your signature for your card, they may request another one, which could delay your application. Make sure to sign in BLACK ink only.

Certification

Your Certification: I certify, under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America, that the foregoing is true and correct. Furthermore, I authorize the release of any information that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services needs to determine eligibility for the benefit I am seeking. I have read the “Who May File Form I-765?” section of the instructions and have identified the appropriate eligibility category in Question 16.

Signature: [Your Signature Here]

Telephone Number

Date

Signature of Person Preparing Form, If Other Than Above: I declare that this document was prepared by me at the request of the applicant and is based on all information of which I have any knowledge.

Print Name

Address

Signature

Date

Remarks

Initial Receipt

Resubmitted

Relocated

Completed

Received

Sent

Approved

Denied

Returned
2 Prepare your OPT application

All applicants should scan the following documents:

• **Passport photo page** (and any extension pages)
• **Most recent F-1 visa stamp** (if applicable)
• **I-94 print-out or front and back of I-94 card**
• **Previous I-20s from same degree level.** These should be scanned and uploaded together in one document.
• **Your I-765** (For review; make sure to keep the original handy.)

If you’ve applied for an EAD in the past you should also include:

• Copy of your EAD card if you were approved OR
• Copy of denial or withdrawal notice if the application was denied or withdrawn

If you’ve changed your status to F-1 you should also include:

• Copy of your I-797 approval notice
• Your official UCR transcripts if your I-20 was issued for less than one year. (Note: this will not be scanned. The original should be submitted to USCIS.)
Log on with your Net ID & password at myforms.ucr.edu.
Prepare your OPT application

MY FORMS APPLICATION

http://graduate.ucr.edu/deadlinedates.html

Grad students: Select end of quarter or “in between” quarters.

Requested OPT Dates *
Start Date: ___ End Date: ___

Expected Program Completion Date
End of Fall Quarter □ 2015 □

Please visit http://graduate.ucr.edu/deadlinedates.html to determine the date your program should be extended to. Please note that in addition to a deadline for each academic quarter, there is a deadline between each quarter. Students graduating during this “in between” time will have their degrees conferred for the following quarter, but will not be required to enroll or pay fees for that quarter.

Previously authorized employment for CPT or OPT (if any):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CPT or OPT</th>
<th>Part Time or Full Time</th>
<th>Dates (Month to Month)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OPT □</td>
<td>Part Time □</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2 Prepare your OPT application

MY FORMS APPLICATION

Upload your document copies (PDF) and submit your form.
Items are reviewed and processed in the order received. Make sure to note the current processing time window.

After receiving the notification email, call the ISRC front desk at 951.827.4113 to schedule an OPT review appointment with the advisor who processed your application.
PASSPORT-STYLE PHOTOS

- Frame subject with full face, front view, eyes open
- Make sure photo presents full head from top of hair to bottom of chin; height of head should measure 1 inch to 1-3/8 inches (25 mm to 35 mm)
- Center head within frame (see Figure 2 below)
- Make sure eye height is between 1-1/8 inches to 1-3/8 inches (28 mm and 35 mm) from bottom of photo
- Photograph subject against a plain white or off-white background
- Position subject and lighting so that there are no distracting shadows on the face or background
- Encourage subject to have a natural expression

Examples of Well-Composed Photos
OPT REVIEW APPOINTMENT

Make sure to bring the following to your OPT review appointment:

1. Original, signed (black ink) I-765
2. Check or money order for $380 made payable to “Department of Homeland Security”
3. 2 passport photos
4. Any other documents listed in the email from the advisor

During the OPT review appointment, we will:

1. Sign and copy your OPT I-20
2. Finalize your OPT packet
3. Provide you with the address to mail your packet
4. Review regulations and OPT reporting requirements
When mailing your application, please keep in mind that

The USCIS must receive your application no later than 30 days after your OPT I-20 issue date.

The OPT I-20 issue date is located next to your advisor’s signature on the first page.

The USCIS has different addresses for regular and express mails. This is because express mailing services like UPS and FedEx don’t generally deliver to P.O. boxes.

EXPRESS MAIL
Please mail to:
USCIS
Attn: AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S
Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ. 85034

REGULAR MAIL
Please mail to:
USCIS Phoenix Lockbox
PO Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ. 85036
5 After filing your application

- Receiving your Notice of Action
- Receiving your EAD Card
- Keeping ISRC updated
5 After filing your application

Receiving your Notice of Action (or Receipt)

You should receive your Notice of Action 2-3 weeks after your application is received by the USCIS. Please scan & email a copy of this receipt notice to internationalcenter@ucr.edu.

The Notice of Action contains important information about your application. You will also need this document to travel out of the country while you are applying for OPT.

The Receipt Number on the Notice of Action can be used to track the status of your application online at: www.uscis.gov

Receiving your EAD Card

Your EAD card should arrive no later than 90 days after the USCIS receives your application.

After receiving your EAD card, please scan and email a copy of the card to internationalcenter@ucr.edu.

Please Keep Us Updated

During the process of your OPT application, it is important that the ISRC has your updated contact information.

If there are any changes to your contact information and address, please notify the ISRC through email or by filling out a Change of Address Form.
Request for Further Evidence (RFE)

Occasionally the California Service Center may issue a Request for Further Evidence (RFE) via regular mail if they require more documentation for your application.

The most common reasons for an RFE: 1) the photos do not meet the specific passport-style requirements or 2) the signature is too large or too small or illegible on the application. There are many other reasons, but these are the most common.

If you receive an RFE, you should read it very carefully and, if necessary, consult our office so we can assist you with ensuring you submit all the requested information.

Make sure you note the specific deadline listed on the light blue cover sheet. It must be strictly followed. Failure to submit the requested items by the deadline could result in a denial of your application.

If you move while your application is pending:

You should call the 1-800 customer service number on your receipt to report your new address or your OPT card may be mailed to your old address, which could cause a delay for you to begin working. You should also complete the ISRC address update form.

If you travel while your application is pending:

Make sure you have:
1) Your OPT I-20 with valid travel signature
2) Your valid passport
3) A valid F-1 visa
4) Your OPT receipt

NOTE: If your card is approved while you are out of the U.S. you may have to make arrangements for someone to send it to you wherever you are or you could encounter problems re-entering.
Where we are located:
University Village, Suite 204
Riverside, CA 92521

Phone: 951-827-4113
Fax: 951-827-3778

Hours of operation:
Monday through Friday
8:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Who to contact:

Becky Kyles
International Student Advisor
Becky.kyles@ucr.edu

Kristin Kelley
International Student Advisor
Kristin.kelley@ucr.edu

Wendy Hernandez
International Student Program Coordinator
Wendy.hernandez@ucr.edu

Kelly Eldridge Hinosawa
Associate Director
Kelly.hinosawa@ucr.edu