

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. Applicants may not have completed over 12 months of full-time CPT.

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 qualifying STEM 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 MAY I APPLY FOR OPT?

You must first attend an OPT workshop or complete an online OPT module prior to applying for OPT.

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 as follows:

- Undergraduates & MBA Students: Last day of final examinations for the quarter in which you complete all coursework
- PhD & Master Thesis Students: Day you file your dissertation or thesis with the Graduate Division (Final deadline day is recommended.)
- Master Comprehensive Exam & Project Students: Day you file your degree with the Graduate Division (Final Deadline day is recommended.)

REMEMBER: You may NOT continue to work on campus after your program completion date.

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.*

HOW DO I REQUEST MY OPT AUTHORIZATION DATES?

The OPT My Forms will ask you to select your OPT start date and OPT end date. Remember that your OPT start date must fall within your 60 day grace period. It may be as early as one day after your program completion date or as late as 59 days after your program completion date. Since standard OPT is authorized for up to 12 months, your OPT end date would be exactly 12 months after your OPT start date.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR OPT?

1. Attend an OPT workshop or complete the online OPT module via ilearn. You may find workshop registration information in the ISRC weekly email.
2. Download and complete the [USCIS form I-765](#). It is recommended that you type the form. If you choose to hand-write the form, make sure to use black ink. **Sign the form using black ink.** After you complete the form, save it or scan it to a PDF file.

3. Scan the following documents to PDF files:
 - a. Your passport photo page
 - b. Your most recent F-1 visa stamp
 - c. Your current I-94
 - d. Copies of your previous I-20s
4. Complete your portion of the OPT application on My Forms, including uploading your PDF documents.
5. Your application will then be routed to your academic advisor (undergraduates) or graduate advisor (graduates) for review and certification of your program completion date. Once your program completion date has been certified, your application will be routed to the ISRC.
6. An international student advisor at the ISRC will review your OPT application and issue you a new I-20 with a recommendation for OPT if your application is complete. If there are any concerns regarding your application, you will be notified via your UCR email address. Application processing time may vary; it may take up to two weeks for your application to be processed during peak times.
7. Once your OPT I-20 has been issued, you will receive an email in your UCR email requesting you to make an OPT review appointment. Call the ISRC front office at 951.827.4113 to schedule the appointment after you receive the email.
8. Bring two passport sized photographs, your original I-765 and a check for [the current I-765 processing fee](#) with you to your OPT review appointment.
9. Mail your completed application packet to USCIS per the instructions given to you at the OPT review appointment.
10. Email or bring in copy of OPT receipt notice and OPT card to ISRC when available.
11. Report any updates in employment, address, contact information, immigration status or departure from the U.S. to the ISRC within 10 days of the change.

CAN I CANCEL MY OPT AFTER I HAVE APPLIED?

Yes. However, if your OPT application has been approved by USCIS, it cannot be cancelled. There is no refund given. Please remember that OPT is only granted for 12 months per degree level.

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. You will receive a receipt notice with a receipt number. You may track the status of your application by entering your receipt number in the "Case Status" box at www.uscis.gov.

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.