



Office of International Education
Delaney Hall B-25, 920 Grant Street
Indiana, PA 15705-1070
(724) 357-2295
www.iup.edu/international

F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT) Application

Eligibility

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is available to F-1 students who have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for an academic year and have maintained their F-1 student status. OPT provides authorization for F-1 students to be employed in a job related to their major field of study. OPT does not require a job offer before application. Students who have completed 12 months or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) are not eligible. Students can apply no earlier than 90 days prior to their graduation date or their last day of classes whichever is later.

Duration of OPT

A student may be authorized for 12 months of OPT at each academic level (i.e., bachelor's, master's, PhD). Although students may engage in both pre-completion and post-completion OPT, the maximum amount of time that can be granted for all OPT combined is 12 months per educational level. Thus, if a student used 6 months of pre-completion OPT during his summer breaks while doing his bachelor's program, he would be eligible for only 6 months of standard post-completion OPT after finishing the bachelor's degree. A student with a STEM degree may be eligible for a 24-month STEM extension of their OPT. Students apply for the STEM extension within their last 90 days of post-completion OPT.

Authorized by USCIS

The Office of International Education will recommend OPT if eligibility requirements are met. However, the student must also apply to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to receive authorization in the form of an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). It is your responsibility to ensure that USCIS receives your completed OPT application according to the filing requirements.

EAD Dates

Once your EAD dates are entered into SEVIS, it is unlikely that you can successfully change the dates of your employment authorization. It is important to discuss the beginning and ending dates of your employment authorization with an immigration advisor.

Completion Date

It is critical that you do not apply for OPT until your completion date is certain. You can discuss this date with an immigration advisor. This will be the new ending date on your I-20.

OPT Application Checklist

(Once the OIE approves your documents and issues an OPT I-20 – you can mail documents to USCIS in this order).

- Completed [form G-1145](#) E-Notification for Application/Petition Acceptance & [form I-765](#). If you want to receive an email and/or text message that your I-765 has been accepted at a USCIS Lockbox facility, then you can complete the G-1145.
- Form I-765 Filing fee - view www.uscis.gov/i-765 to view current fees. Pay by check, money order or credit card (use form G-1450) pay to U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Two passport-style photos. Write on the back of your 2 photos Name, SEVIS Number (N_____), I-94 Number, and Date of Birth.
- Copy of your OPT Processing Fee payment confirmation (Pay the IUP OPT Processing Fee of \$100 via [IUP Market Place](#))
- Copy of your passport picture page and passport expiration date. Your passport must be valid.
- Copy of your most recent F-1 visa.
- Copy of Form I-94, front and back. You may print your I-94 record from <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94>.
- Any previously issued Employment Authorization Document (EAD), if applicable.
- Evidence of any previous OPT and/or CPT, if applicable.
- All I-20s ever issued from IUP and previous schools.
- Letter from department recommending OPT (See Example on Page 6).

Copy of your IUP transcript (your unofficial transcript can be printed from MyIUP)

Note: Processing time for USCIS is between 3 to 5 months. You may file an OPT application no earlier than 90 days before your program completion date or within 60 days after your program completion date. You must also file your application

within 30 days of issuance of your OPT Recommendation I-20. Please plan accordingly.

IUP OPT Application

Family Name: _____	Given Name: _____
IUP Banner ID: _____	I-20 Program End Date : _____
Email address you will use after graduation: _____	Telephone: _____
Have you been authorized for OPT in the past? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes - From: _____ To: _____	
If you have been authorized for OPT in the past, on which degree level was it based? <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's <input type="checkbox"/> Master's <input type="checkbox"/> Ph.D.	
When do you expect to graduate? Semester: _____ Year: _____	Are you currently employed on campus? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Until: _____
Requested OPT Authorization Dates: _____ *Start Date : _____ End Date : _____ *Start date must be within 60 days of your program completion date.	
<input type="checkbox"/> I have fully read all slides in the OPT Guide : I understand OPT application procedures and the responsibilities required for maintaining F-1 status during my period of OPT authorization as stated in this form, in the OPT Tutorial. I understand I am solely responsible for submitting a proper & timely OPT application and for maintaining my F-1 student status during OPT.	
Student Signature Here: _____ Date: _____	

Write and sign the following statement below: I must file OPT application within 30 days of receiving it. I must report OPT employment to the OIE within 90 days of my EAD start date. I can work only during the dates on my EAD card. I must notify the OIE if I move.

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Mail your application to: USCIS Chicago Lockbox	U.S. Postal Service (USPS) USCIS PO Box 805373 Chicago, IL 60680	FedEx, UPS, and DHL Deliveries USCIS Attn: I-765 C03 131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor Chicago, IL 60603-5517	Remember to: Get a tracking number for your application packet. Double check the filing location and the filing fee on the USCIS.gov website as both are subject to change.
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Received _____ Scanned to Student _____ Last Modified: _____

IUP OPT Student Responsibility Statement

Reporting Responsibilities: I understand the following:

- My address must be updated within 10 days of moving. This information can be updated through my IUP International Portal or by completing the Reporting OPT Employment for SEVIS Record online form. This must be my residential address, not the address of my employer or friend.
- I am required to update any changes of employer names, address, or interruption of employment to the OIE by using the Reporting OPT Employment for SEVIS Record Online Form. If I am employed off-site, I should report my physical location of employment to the OIE as well as my company's address. (www.iup.edu/international/students/current/forms). I understand that just updating my SEVP Portal with employment information is insufficient and I must complete the OIE Form.
- If my immigration status changes, I am required to send the OIE copies of my new documents within 10 days of the change.
- I will provide the OIE with a legible copy of the front and back of my EAD card when I receive it.
- Failure to do the above could result in loss of my legal non-immigrant status and that if this occurs, I may have to stop working and/or leave the US.

General Responsibilities: I understand the following:

- In order to apply for OPT, I must first complete the application and submit it to the OIE and request an OPT recommendation.
- It is my responsibility to properly file my application in a timely manner. My OPT application must be received by USCIS within 30 days of the OIE issuing a new I-20 with the OPT recommendation on the 2nd page.
- It is my responsibility to sign and date my OPT Application. OPT is a benefit of my F-1 status and not a right. There is no guarantee that my application will be approved.
- Once my EAD is approved I may have to be available for USPS delivery signature. (This is a new process being implemented - we're not sure of the exact date this will start).
- My authorization to engage in OPT is automatically terminated if I transfer to another school or begin a new degree or certificate program.
- DHS regulations require me to seek employment directly related to my major area of study and commensurate with my education level. Even if I am doing volunteer work, it must be related to my field of study.
- The first day I'm eligible to work is the Start Date listed on my EAD card. I cannot work until I physically have the card.
- I cannot accrue 90 days or more of unemployment at any time during OPT. If I do not report my employer information to the IUP OIE, unemployment will continue to accrue. SEVP may automatically terminate my SEVIS Record if no employer is listed.
- If I decide to travel while on OPT I must have a valid I-20 signed by a DSO within six months before reentering the U.S., an unexpired EAD card, a valid passport, a valid employment letter, and a valid F-1 visa stamp to be readmitted to the U.S. The employment letter should contain a statement that the employment is temporary and verification that I will be employed after returning from travel. Even with all this it can be a risk to travel outside the US while on OPT.
- It is my responsibility to stay informed about changing federal regulations that may impact my OPT or F-1 status.
- Failure to follow F-1 regulations and the above statements could result in the termination of my F-1 status.

My signature confirms that the information provided on this form is true and accurate and that I read and understand the Student Responsibility Statement listed above (electronic signatures not permitted). I understand the rules and regulations concerning my engagement in Optional Practical Training (OPT) and agree to all conditions listed above.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Frequently Asked Questions

What is "OPT"?

Answer: Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a 12-month work benefit allowed to international students in F-1 immigration status who are enrolled in, or completing a degree program in the U.S. This employment card can be used pre-completion of studies, over the annual vacation or leave term, or post-completion of studies, after the student finishes the degree. Work can be done at one or several locations for any amount of hours at any rate of pay. Note that post-completion OPT must be full-time. OPT is an extension of F-1 status and is not a 'work visa' and does not require you to remain at one company for the entire OPT period.

What is the difference between CPT and OPT?

Answer: In short, CPT is employment that is required to successfully complete a course or internship. OPT is employment that is directly related to the student's major but not part of the student's curriculum and is typically used after graduation.

To be eligible for OPT, students must...

- be in full-time F-1 status for at least one academic year. *Some students who have changed their visa status to F-1 and who have been continuously enrolled in a full-time degree program for at least 1 academic year may qualify for OPT prior to 1 year in F-1 status. See an OIE adviser for more information.*
- be seeking employment in the major field of study listed on their current I-20.
- be completing their program of study at IUP. See IUP's OPT tutorial video for more information.
- be physically present in the United States at time of the application to USCIS.
- NOT have used more than 1 year of full-time CPT during their current degree level (part-time doesn't count).

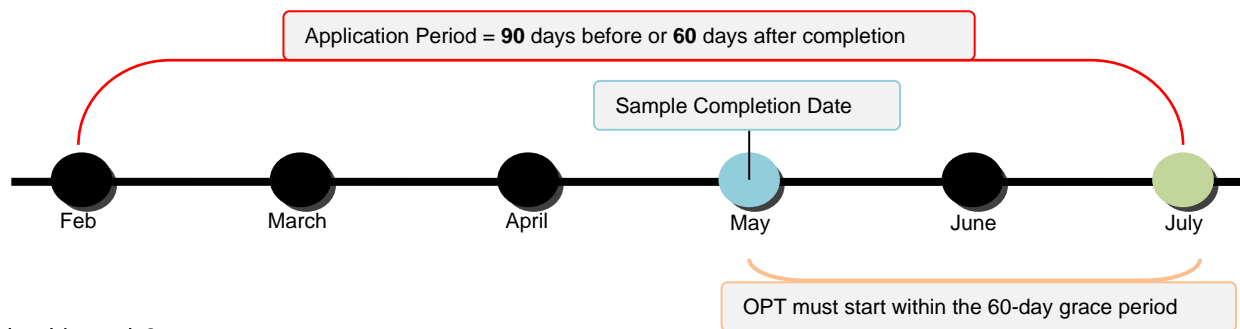
Am I eligible for OPT?

Answer: F-1 students who have been enrolled in legal status for a minimum of 9 months are eligible for up to 12 months of OPT work authorization by the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS). Employment under OPT must be directly related to a student's field of study and appropriate to the level of education.

When can I apply for OPT?

Answer: The earliest you may apply for OPT is 90 days (3-months) prior to the completion of studies, and the latest you may apply for OPT is 60 days following program completion. It can take several months to receive the OPT work card, so we recommend that you apply at least 90 days prior to the beginning of your intended job opportunity. See the timeline below for additional information.

Sample Application Timeline. The dates on this sample may not correspond with the dates you will apply for OPT:



When should I apply?

Answer: Apply early! It takes about three to five months to receive your EAD from the USCIS. Expedites are not available.

- The earliest USCIS can receive the application is 90 days before the date of your program completion.
- The latest USCIS can receive the application is the 60th day following your completion date, assuming you do not leave the U.S.
- It can take up to two weeks to prepare the OPT application before sending to USCIS (especially for busy students!)

How long does it take to get authorization for OPT and when should I apply?

Answer: Authorization for OPT is granted by USCIS can take 3-5 months to obtain. Therefore, it is important that you apply 3 months before you finish your last final. You may apply for post-graduation OPT up to 90 days before your completion date and the immigration service must receive your application no later than 60 days beyond your completion date or 60 days beyond the end date of your I-20 (whichever is earlier) or, if you are an advanced graduate student, no later than 60 days beyond the last day that you are

registered as a student or the end date of your I-20 (whichever is earlier). You cannot apply more than 120 days before the start date you choose. USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of getting a new OPT I-20 from the OIE.

Do I need a job to be eligible to apply for OPT?

Answer: No, you do not need a job offer prior to applying for OPT, and your job may be anywhere in the United States. You may also change jobs during the course of your OPT period, but you must notify Office of International Education of any interruption or change to your employment status so your SEVIS record can be updated.

What if I don't file within 30 days of getting my OPT I-20? What if I file and get an RFE or application rejection?

Answer: Contact the OIE immediately.

What is my "completion date"?

Answer: The "completion date" for OPT purposes is defined as follows:

- For **undergraduates**: the last day of final exams of the semester in which degree requirements are fulfilled.
- For **Master's/Ph.D**: the day on which all degree requirements are fulfilled, such as filing the thesis/dissertation in the Graduate Division.

Changing your completion date can cause serious complications for your OPT application. If for some reason you need to change your completion date after the OPT I-20 is created, speak to an Advisor at the OIE as soon as possible.

What dates should I choose?

Answer: Your OPT start date must be within 60 days after your completion date. Your OPT end date will be 12 months later. See diagram below.

When can I start working?

Answer: You must wait until you receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS and your start date has arrived to begin working. Once you complete your degree, you cannot work on-campus or off-campus until you receive the EAD and your start date has arrived.

What counts as employment?

Answer: OPT is intended to enhance your academic program by providing a means to gain experience in your field of study. Work NOT related to your program of study is a violation of F-1 status. Students on post-completion OPT must work over 20 hours a week in either a **paid or unpaid** position to qualify as employment. More than one position can be reported to meet full-time requirements.

What happens if I cannot find a job?

Answer: During post-completion OPT, students may not accrue a total of more than 90 days of unemployment. See "What counts as employment?" question above on what you can do to satisfy the employment requirement.

What is my status while I am on OPT?

Answer: Students on OPT or with a pending OPT application are still in **F-1 status** and must maintain their F-1 status by following the employment and address reporting requirements. Students may remain in the U.S. while their OPT Application is pending.

Can I travel while I am on OPT?

Answer: Generally, yes, travel on OPT is possible, but students will need to time their re-entry and carry the correct documents upon re-entry to the U.S. Please refer to the OPT Application Guide for details and things to consider depending on the timing of your re-entry.

What if my visa has expired?

Answer: Students who plan to travel outside the U.S. will need a valid F-1 visa to re-enter the U.S. The OPT Application Guide discusses important points and instructions on applying for a visa while on OPT. Applying for a visa while on OPT is very risky.

What else do I have to do while I am on OPT?

Answer: You must **report your employment** and current residential address via [Reporting OPT Employment Form](#). Any changes should be reported within 10 days. Reporting employment through the SEVP Portal is not adequate and does not count as maintaining status.

What about health insurance?

Answer: Students can purchase OPT health insurance from the many plans available to international students during their OPT period.

What are the available OPT extensions?

There are two available OPT extensions—the H-1B Cap-Gap Extension and the STEM Extension.

Am I eligible for the 24 months OPT STEM extension or the H 1B cap gap extension in the future?

Answer: Only eligible post completion OPT students may apply for these two extensions. If you plan on applying for either of these extensions in the future, you must have at least part of your original 12 month OPT remaining to use as post completion OPT.

H-1B Cap-Gap Extension.

The cap gap extension allows certain students with pending or approved cap-subject H-1B petitions to remain in the U.S. until the start date of their approved H-1B employment period, even if the OPT authorization or F-1 grace period would have otherwise expired before October 1.

You are eligible for the cap-gap extension if:

- Your employer files a cap-subject H-1B petition on your behalf on or after April 1 and requests a change of status to H-1B to begin October 1, and
- The employer files the H-1B petition on your behalf within your OPT authorization period or the 60-day grace period.

The length of your extension will depend on the dates of your OPT authorization or grace period. It will also depend on whether your H-1B petition has been filed, selected for receipting, or approved. Contact the OIE if you have questions or need to request a new I-20 listing your cap-gap extension.

STEM Extension:

If you are an F-1 student whose OPT is based on a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree in a [STEM field](#) (as defined by the Department of Homeland Security [DHS]), you may be eligible for an extension of post-completion OPT authorization. The STEM Extension must be filed while you on OPT and you must file with a specific employer. You are permitted to change employers while on STEM OPT, but additional paperwork is required before you can start working. Contact your OIE Advisor for more information.

Sample Department Letter

USE IUP LETTERHEAD

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Date: .../ ... /.....

To whom it may concern:

This is to verify that Ms. Ann Winslow, an undergraduate student in the Department of Marketing will complete her degree in May 2020.

As an international student it would be beneficial for Ann to acquire practical experience in her field as a complement to her theoretical knowledge. Participating in the one year Optional Practical Training (OPT) would serve her well.

If you require any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Dr. Eric Jones
Chair