

12 MONTH OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

Temporary Work Authorization for F-1 Students

Optional practical training (OPT) is authorization for employment in the U.S.A. issued by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for temporary work directly related to your major area of study. It may be used before or after completion of your studies. You will receive a total of 12-months of optional practical training for each higher degree.

Eligibility

If you have been enrolled as a full-time student for at least one academic year and are in lawful F-1 status, you may be eligible to apply for optional practical training. If you were previously granted less than 12 months of optional practical training in this same degree program, you may apply for the remaining time available.

Part-Time or Full-Time Work

Work for 20 hours per week or less is considered part-time. More than 20 hours per week and up to full-time is “full-time” for immigration purposes.

When can I use OPT?

You may apply for optional practical training:

- During vacation when school is not in session if (1) you are currently enrolled and eligible, and (2) intend to register for the next semester. You may request full-time or part-time work authorization.
- While school is in session and you have not completed course work. This type of practical training authorization is limited to part-time employment (up to 20 hours a week). You may not hold any other type of employment at the same time.
- While school is in session and you have completed all course requirements for the Master’s or PhD degree. This is for students in master’s or doctoral programs who are working on a thesis or equivalent. You may request full-time or part-time authorization.
- Post-degree practical training. This is available after completion of all degree requirements, including submission of a thesis. This is issued for full-time only.

Your total period of authorization for optional practical training cannot be more than the equivalent of 12 months of full-time work. Part-time practical training (20 hours a week or less) will be deducted from the available 12 months at *half* the full-time rate. *Curricular practical training is different from the optional practical training category. See separate handouts from International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS).*

If I want to apply for part-time OPT for my last semester and full-time OPT after I graduate, can I do it all in one application?

You will need to submit two applications – one for the part-time OPT and one for the full-time OPT. There will be a fee for each.

I am a PhD dissertator and would like to use some full-time OPT before I complete and the rest of the time after I complete. Can I do this?

In this case, it may be possible to do it as one application. Please see an advisor.

I used my OPT after my Bachelor’s degree. Now I am in the Graduate School completing my Second Bachelor’s. Can I apply for another 12 months of OPT?

No. Immigration only allows you to apply again after a higher degree. Since they are both Bachelor’s degrees, you would not be eligible. You will be eligible after your Master’s degree.

Must I have a job to apply for OPT?

An offer of employment is not required to apply for optional practical training. However, a job is required to continue in OPT. Only a total (aggregate) of 90 days of unemployment is allowed during the 12 months.

WHEN TO APPLY FOR POST-DEGREE PRACTICAL TRAINING

How early can I apply for OPT?

You can submit your application to USCIS up to 90 days before you complete your course of study or before the beginning date of your proposed employment.

How late can I apply for OPT?

If you are applying for post-degree practical training you must submit your application before the end of your 60 day grace period following the completion of your degree requirements. Processing time at USCIS varies, and is usually about 3 months, so students are encouraged to apply early.



12 Month OPT, Continued

“Completion Date”

Your completion date is the date you complete all the requirements for your degree. In the case of undergraduates or course-work-only Masters Candidates, it is normally your graduation date; in the case of graduate students with a thesis or dissertation requirement, your completion date is the last date of your **required** registration. Please check with an advisor if your case varies.

I am finishing in May, but I am going to graduate in August. I do not have to take any courses this summer. Can I use August as my completion date?

No. Immigration considers only the date you complete the last requirement for your degree. They do not count the cap and gown day.

I didn't register for graduation in time for the December graduation. My diploma will say May graduation. Can I stay for May graduation and use that as my completion date?

No. As stated above, it is the completion date that immigration considers.

My company says I have to start work, and I applied for the EAD card a long time ago. If I don't start working, I will lose my job offer. Can I start working?

You may not begin work until you receive the EAD card (Employment Authorization Document) or before the start date listed on your EAD. For permission following your degree, you must also have completed all requirements for your degree.

You can check on line to see if the OPT request has been adjudicated and approved. On the www.uscis.gov website you can do the on-line case status check if you have your receipt from the service center with your SRC number. If the OPT has been approved, and if the begin date has arrived, you are legal to work. However, your employer may want you to wait until he can see your EAD card.

Do I have to have a Job?

New regulation only allows you 90 days of unemployment during the 12 months of OPT. You must report the start and end dates of employment to ISSS.

Travel outside the U.S.

If you have completed your course of study, you must have your practical training authorization, EAD card, before temporarily leaving the U.S.A. Upon re-entering you must present to the border officials the EAD card *and* a valid I-20 endorsed for travel. That signature is valid for multiple entries, and is valid for 6 months.

If I travel while on OPT, can I come back to the U.S.?

The regulations state that you can reenter the U.S. “to resume employment”. Please carry with you proof of employment.

How long can I stay home on my visit and still come back to my OPT?

Technically, if you are outside the U.S. for 5 months on an F-1, you end your status. However, if you stay a long time, you will have a hard time convincing the port of entry official that you are returning “to resume employment”. Please use good judgment.

My visa has expired, and I really want to go home for a visit. Can I get a new visa while I am on OPT?

Technically, this is possible. However, it is very difficult. It may be a good idea for you to plan travel at a different time. Please see an advisor to discuss your situation and options, and to assess your priorities.

What is an OPT Case Management Fee and why do I have to pay it?

While you are on OPT, ISSS is still responsible for maintaining your immigration record as well as continue to provide you services after graduation. The OPT Case Management Fee is a substitute for the International Student Fee and is used to subsidize the costs of the mandatory case management for students on OPT.

NOTIFICATION RESPONSIBILITIES

You are required by Immigration to report any change of address to ISSS within 10 days. You must also notify ISSS of any change in employment. This also means that you must report any end to employment.



HOW TO APPLY FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

STEP 1 International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) Procedures

- Go through the online OPT workshop located here: <http://international.unt.edu/ISSS/opt-workshop-presentation>. Take the quiz and answer all questions correctly to be able to apply to for your OPT I-20.
- Submit a completed Optional Practical Training application for a new I-20 and your completed quiz to the ISSS office.
- ISSS will review your application and prepare a recommendation (New I-20) to USCIS. This may take up to 10 working days.
- During this time, it is advised that you begin **STEP 2** below.
- ISSS will notify you via email when your OPT I-20 is ready to pick up.
- Pay the OPT Case Management Fee here: <https://international.unt.edu/ISSS/iss-store> before you can pick up your I-20.

STEP 2 Prepare your Application for USCIS

Assemble your documents in this order:

- \$410 check or money order payable to *Department of Homeland Security* OR signed [G-1450](#) Authorization for CC Transactions
 - Two (2) color passport style photos
 - o Guidelines: Color photos with a **white background** taken no earlier than 30 days before submission to the USCIS. The photos should be 2X2 inches, and a full frontal pose. Your head should be bare unless you are wearing a headdress as required by a religious order to which you belong. A photographer familiar with "passport photos" can help you. For additional information see the Guide Sheet on the Department of State website for details.
 - o Lightly print your name and your I-94 number, if known, on the back of each photo with a pencil. We recommend you place both photos in a small plastic bag or envelope so they don't get lost in the rest of application.
 - Completed Form I-765 form (check www.uscis.gov for most recent version)
 - o Respond to Q. #20 by writing (c)(3)(B) within the parentheses.
 - If not applying for standard Post-completion OPT, please see an advisor for #20 answer.
 - Photocopy of pages 1 and 2 of the I-20 showing the OPT recommendation.
 - o Make sure to sign the I-20 (the "STUDENT ATTESTATION" on page 1) before you make a copy.
 - o I-20 must be issued within the last 30 days.
 - o [USCIS will not return your I-20, so we advise that you send only a copy.]
 - Photocopy of both sides of your I-94 card (if you have one, it will be a white paper card in your passport), or if you've travelled since April 2013, print out your I-94 card online at <http://www.cbp.gov/i94>.
 - Photocopy of your passport identity, expiry and visa pages.
 - Photocopies of Previous EAD Cards* (If applicable)
 - CPT Screen Shot* (Required only if you have had CPT at this degree level)
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- G-1145: This form will allow the Lockbox facility to send you an email or text message when they receive your application. You do not have to send it. You can download the form at www.uscis.gov*

****You may bring your completed packet to ISSS for an advisor to review before mailing the application.****

STEP 3 Mail your Application to USCIS

- Make a copy of the entire packet for your records
- Mail your complete packet to the Dallas Lockbox:

USPS Deliveries (Mail Certified mail, Return receipt requested)	For Express Mail and courier service Deliveries (UPS, FedEx, DHL, etc.)
USCIS PO Box 660867 Dallas, TX 75266	USCIS Attn: AOS 2501 S. State Highway 121, Business Suite 400 Lewisville, TX 75067

USCIS will send a receipt letter (mailed to ISSS) several weeks after they receive it. The estimated time at USCIS is 90-120 days, although this varies.