



# International Student OPT Application Packet



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# Overview

## Office of Graduate Studies

## Optional Practical Training

### Step 1: Learn about OPT

Learn about OPT, Read the Frequently Asked Questions section in this guide. [OPT Frequently Asked Questions](#).

### Step 2: Apply for OPT

The first step in this process is for the student to make an appointment with his/her academic adviser in the degree program department to determine the timeframe your academic program will end. Following this advisement session, your adviser will complete and sign the [Academic Adviser's Statement of Program Completion Form](#). This form gives assurances the advisor has met and discussed particular details with the advisee as it relates to the OPT application process and validating program completion. The student is advised to email this form to your Graduate Studies DSO and request an appointment to complete the process. You should also inform your DSO of your desired OPT start date.

In planning for this OPT appointment the student should bring the required documents listed on the checklist for your OPT application so your DSO can review them for completeness and accuracy. The [ASU OPT Checklist](#) has a list of everything you need. Included on this list are the following forms:

- Academic Advisor's Statement of Program Completion Form
- Application for Optional Practical Training
- Offer Letter of Employment (optional)
- [Form I-765](#) - provides USCIS with information about yourself. You will need to use your local or personal address for line 3. If you have questions about filling out the remainder of the form, see the document provided for guidance on the USCIS website.
- Copies of previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) cards (if available)
- Copy of passport (current F-1 visa stamp)
- Copy of I-20 with OPT request (keep the original for yourself)
- Printout of SEVIS CPT page (if applicable)
- Two passport photos (recent)
- Check or money order for \$410 to "Department of Homeland Security" (Always check the USCIS website to verify fee changes)

The Graduate DSO will check your application materials and answer any questions you might have. It is advised to use a secondary staff member as an additional checker to ensure your

documents are accurate and assist in giving guidance for mailing out your application materials.

### **Step 3: Wait for your EAD Card**

The USCIS office will send your **employment authorization document (EAD)** card to the address given on your I-765 form. It is critically important then that you keep USCIS informed of any address changes. You can do so at the [USCIS website](#). Remember: you can't start working until you have your EAD card and until the start date on the EAD card.

### **OPT STEM Extension**

To apply for the OPT STEM extension, submit to your counselor via email the following documents. Unfortunately, only students with degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) are eligible for this extension:

- The **OPT STEM Extension Application Form** (filled out by you)
- The **OPT STEM Extension Employer Verification Form** (filled out by your employer and all future OPT employers)
- A new **OPT STEM I-765 Form** (completed by student and checked for accuracy)

Once the Office of Graduate Studies receives these documents we will send you a new I-20 with the OPT STEM extension dates along with instructions to apply for the extension.



## Optional Practical Training - Checklist

In order to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT), please make an appointment to see your Designated School Official. The following documents are needed as part of the OPT application process.

*For Graduate Studies Office Use:*

- Academic Advisor's Statement of Program Completion Form
- Application for Optional Practical Training
- Unofficial Transcript (available from Banner Online Services)
- Job Offer Letter

Once you've requested an OPT approval from the DSO in Graduate Studies and received your new I-20, you will need to prepare and submit the following list of items to USCIS:

*For Submission to USCIS Office:*

- Form I-765
- Copies of previous EAD cards (if available)
- Copy of passport (current F-1 visa stamp)
- Copy of I-20 with OPT request (keep the original for yourself)
- Printout of SEVIS CPT page (if applicable)
- Two passport photos (recent)
- Check or money order for \$380 to "Department of Homeland Security"

### **If you change your mind**

If after requesting an OPT I-20 from the Graduate DSO, you decide not to send your application to USCIS, you must notify your DSO. Please send an email to [graduatestudies@alcorn.edu](mailto:graduatestudies@alcorn.edu) informing us that you do not plan to apply for OPT and indicating the date you intend to leave the U.S. (must be within 60 days of I-20 completion date). If you do not notify us, we will be unable to adjust your SEVIS record to accurately reflect your situation.



## International Student Services Academic Advisor's Assurance of Program Completion Form

Directions: The student's graduate academic advisor should complete this form and have the student submit it to the Office of Graduate Studies International Student Services. Submission of this form gives assurances that the student in F-1 status has employment authorization that is related to his/her Program of Study. The completion date is generally established as the last day of the last month of the final term in which the student will register to complete academic requirements (e.g. December 31 for fall, May 31 for spring, August 31 for summer).

Student's Information:

|                  |        |       |           |
|------------------|--------|-------|-----------|
| _____            | _____  | _____ | _____     |
| First            | Middle | Last  | ASU ID    |
| _____            |        |       | _____     |
| Program of Study |        |       | Contact # |

Assurances:

I acknowledge the above named student has met with his/her Academic Advisor or Graduate Program Coordinator to request an OPT recommendation.

I assure to the best of my knowledge this student will complete his/her academic program on the following date: \_\_\_\_\_ (month/day/year).

I attest to the fact that this date does not go beyond the current semester.

The name student has assured that his/her OPT will start within 60 days of the date given above. The start date the student would like to start his/her OPT is \_\_\_\_\_ (month/day/year).

Approval for Type of OPT:

**Pre-completion OPT** - Employment begins and ends before the completion of the academic program.

**Post-completion OPT** - Employment begins after completion of academic program.

Advisement Conference with student has consisted of the following:

***Earliest time to apply:***

- Student informed of timeline to apply if a full academic year has not been completed: 90 days before completion of full academic year
- Student informed of timeline to apply if completed a full academic year: 120 days before OPT start date

***Three types of Pre-completion OPT:***

*Type A: During the student's annual vacation*

- Student must communicate intent to register for the next term
- Student informed OPT may be part- or full-time

*Type B: While school is in session*

- Student must be registered full-time
- Student informed OPT may be part-time only

*Type C: After completion of all course requirements (excluding thesis/research project)*

- After completion of all course requirements excluding thesis/research project
- If Type 'C' OPT is part-time, student must be registered full-time
- If Type 'C' OPT is full-time, student need not be registered

**Post-completion OPT**

Student informed employment begins after completion of academic program.

***Earliest time to apply:***

- Up to 90 days before program end date

***Deadline for Application to be received by USCIS:***

- Up to 60 days after program end date
- Within 30 days of date DSO recommends in SEVIS. You can judge this by the date on your OPT recommendation I-20
- If you plan to travel outside the U.S. after your completion date, you must submit the I-765 first (even if you plan to return within 60 days) and obtain the Receipt Notice in order to re-enter

Advisor's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor's Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel/Ext. #: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# FAQs - F-1 Optional Practical Training Basics

## 1) What is F-1 Optional Practical Training?

Practical training is the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in your degree program to off-campus work in your major field. OPT is authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This authorization can take 2 to 3 months to obtain. The maximum amount of time granted to work on F-1 OPT status is 12 months per degree level plus a possible H1B cap gap extension OR a 17 month extension for those who qualify (see below). You may use some or all of the available 12 months of practical training during your course of study (pre-completion OPT) or save the full twelve months to use after you graduate (post-completion OPT).

## 2) What are the Eligibility Requirements for F-1 OPT?

To be eligible to apply for optional practical training, you must: (1) have been a full time enrolled student in the U.S. for at least one academic year by the requested start date of your OPT, and (2) be in F-1 status when you apply.

## 3) If I complete one degree program, take 12 months of practical training, and then begin a second course of study, am I eligible for an additional 12 months of practical training?

Yes, you are eligible to apply for another 12 month period of Optional Practical Training after changing to a higher degree level. This does not apply to a second degree at the same level.

## 4) How can I use OPT while I am still in my program?

You may use OPT while you are still in your degree program as follows: (1) part-time while school is in session, (2) fulltime during annual vacation periods, and/or (3) full-time after you completed all course requirements for the degree and have a thesis requirement remaining. These periods of OPT used before you graduate will be deducted from the total allowable period of 12 months. Part-time OPT will be deducted at one-half the full-time rate.

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

Authorization for OPT is granted by USCIS and can take up to 3 months or more to obtain. Therefore we strongly advise that you apply 3 months before the date you wish to start working.

## 6) Do I need to have a job to apply for Optional Practical Training?

You do need to have a job offer before applying for the first 12 months of optional practical training. If your field qualifies you for the STEM extension, you do have to have a job to apply for the extension.

## 7) Do I need to have a job while I am on Optional Practical Training?

Yes. The regulations require that you do have employment while on your POST-graduation OPT period. You are only allowed to have a total of 90 days of unemployment in your 12 month period of OPT or 120 days if you apply for and receive the 17 month extension. The job has to be related to your field of study.

**8) Does the job I have while on OPT have to be paid employment, or can it be unpaid?**

The employment does NOT have to be paid employment. Therefore, a student who is self-employed (including performance majors with regular "gigs"), interning or volunteering in a position directly related to the academic field would be considered "employed" for the purposes of OPT employment. If you are "self-employed," keep careful records of all the work you do—it is supposed to be at least 20 hours per week. It is your responsibility to maintain records of your employment for OPT for future review in applications to Homeland Security.

**9) Can I begin working before I receive the Employment Authorization Document?**

You may not begin employment before you receive your EAD from USCIS; working before practical training has been authorized by the USCIS constitutes illegal employment that will jeopardize your legal status in the U.S.

**10) What are my reporting duties to Graduate Studies while I am on OPT?**

Immigration regulations require that while you are on post-completion OPT, you must report your employment and address information to the Office for entry in SEVIS.

**11) Can I extend my OPT after the 12 months?**

There are two types of extensions available: 1) a 17 month extension for those in certain fields (discussed below) and 2) an "H1B Cap Gap Extension" which extends your work authorization through to the start of your cap subject H1B visa if your OPT ends after your cap subject company has applied for a H1B for you but before the H1B starts on the following October 1st. This cap gap extension is available to all F-1 students using OPT in any field, as long as you have a pending or approved "cap subject" H1B application and the employer applied for in with a request for change of status as part of the application. The extension is automatic, you do not have to do anything at all to get the extension. "Cap Subject" refers to any H1B application that must be counted against the quota on H1B applications.

**12) What do I do when my EAD card expires?**

Within 60 days, you must: leave the country, get a new I-20 for a new program of study, or do a Change of Status to a different immigration status

**13) Can I study while on OPT?**

You can take classes that are "recreational" in nature. Starting a new program of study with a new I-20 will end your current OPT privileges.

**14) What is the 17 month STEM extension of OPT?**

The "STEM Extension" allows F-1 students on OPT who have received a degree in the fields listed below, referred to as "STEM" fields (science, technology, engineering, or mathematics), to apply for a one time 17-month extension of their regular 12 month OPT period. You will NOT apply for 29 months up front. The 17 month extension will allow students to have extended work authorization in case they do not get an H1B visa in their first year after graduating.



**15) I think I qualify, how do I apply for the 17 month extension?**

If you meet the following criteria, you can apply through the ISSS office for your 17 month extension of your OPT during your first 12 months of OPT:

Your employer must be enrolled in the "E-Verify" program (see information links below). You must have graduated in and be working in one of the fields listed below referred to as "STEM" fields. You must have maintained status while on OPT

If you meet the criteria, our OPT page has instructions on applying for the OPT STEM extension.

**16) What are the "STEM" fields?**

The official list can be found on the USCIS [website](#).

Your major as listed on your I-20 needs to match one of the majors on the list in order to qualify for the extension

**17) What is "E-Verify"?**

E-Verify is an Internet-based system operated by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in partnership with the Social Security Administration (SSA). E-Verify is currently free to employers and is available in all 50 states. E-Verify provides an automated link to federal databases to help employers determine employment eligibility of new hires and the validity of their Social Security numbers. More information is available at: [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov).

**18) Are there any other requirements while I am on the 17-month extension?**

In addition to filling out the OPT report form for changes in address or employment, students on the 17 month extension of OPT will have to complete a report to the school every six months while on the 17 month extension. You can contact your school DSO for this information.

**19) I applied for my STEM extension but have yet to get my new EAD card and my current EAD card expires soon. Will I have to quit my job and wait until I get the new EAD card?**

If their post-completion OPT expires while the 17-month extension application is pending, students who timely filed their STEM extension applications with USCIS will receive an extension of employment authorization after their current employment authorization expires, but for no more than 180 days.

**20) I applied for my STEM extension but have been offered a job with another company. Can I update my application to reflect the new employment?**

Yes. However, if the 17-month extension period has started, the employer must also be an E-Verify employer. The student must report the change in employment to his or her DSO. The DSO must update the student's employer information in SEVIS and the student should submit an amended Form I-765 to the appropriate Texas Service Center (USCIS; P.O. Box 660867; Dallas, TX 75266), providing the new employer's E-Verify number and a copy of the USCIS receipt notice for the first Form I-765. A brief letter explaining the submission should also be included. There is no fee associated with submitting the amended Form I-765.

**21) Now that I've turned in my application, can I travel outside the U.S. while I wait for the card to come?**

We strongly encourage students not to travel until they have their EAD card in hand.

**22) What documents do I need to re-enter the U.S. while on OPT?**

While on OPT do not travel outside of U.S. borders without your current I-20 signed by your international student counselor, a valid U.S. entry visa, an employment letter, pay stubs, and your EAD card. You must be returning to "resume employment" to be granted re-entry by Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

**23) What if I have applied for the 17 month extension but I have not yet received the card, can I travel out of the U.S.?**

USCIS advises that while you are waiting for the approval of the 17 month extension, you should NOT try to re-enter the country until you receive the new OPT card.

**24) The visa stamp in my passport has expired, but I need to travel outside the U.S. while on OPT. Do I need to get a new visa stamp at an embassy?**

If you are going to Canada or Mexico, and staying for less than 30 days, you could (with certain limitations) re-enter the U.S. on the same visa through the Automatic Revalidation program.

If you are traveling elsewhere, you will need to go to a U.S. embassy or consulate and seek a new visa stamp, but the risk of denial is much higher in this situation. In such a scenario you should contact an ISSS counselor to discuss your case.

**25) Do I still need a travel signature on my I-20 if I travel outside the country while on OPT?**

Yes, while on OPT you need to have a current travel signature for reentry. If you are not in Lubbock, mail the original I-20 to the ISSS office for our signature, leaving plenty of time for mailing delays both ways.

**SAMPLE I-765 Form to Apply for 12-Month Initial OPT; Follow these instructions:**

1. Go to <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf>
2. Type information on the form and print; do not use handwriting.

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

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

**Do not write in this block.**

|  |              |           |
|--|--------------|-----------|
| Remarks  | Action Block | Fee Stamp |
| A#   |              |           |
| Applicant is filing under §274a.12 _____   |              |           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Application Approved. Employment Authorized / Extended ( <i>Circle One</i> ) until _____ (Date).<br>Subject to the following conditions: _____ (Date).<br>Application Denied.                   |              |           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Failed to establish eligibility under 8 CFR 274a.12 (a) or (c).<br><input type="checkbox"/> 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:

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

|   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
| 1. Name (Family Name in CAPS) (First)   | (Middle)   | Which USCIS Office?                                    | Date(s)   |
| 2. Other Names Used (Include Maiden Name)   |  | Results (Granted or Denied - attach all documentation) |   |
| 3. Address in the United States (Number and Street)                               | (Apt. Number)  | 12. Date of Last Entry into the U.S. (mm/dd/yyyy)      |   |
| (Town or City)  | (State/Country)  | (ZIP Code)   | 13. Place of Last Entry into the U.S.   |
| 4. Country of Citizenship/Nationality   |  | 14. Manner of Last Entry (Visitor, Student, etc.)      |   |
| 5. Place of Birth (Town or City)  | (State/Province)   | (Country)  | 15. Current Immigration Status (Visitor, Student, etc.)   |
| 6. Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy)   | 7. Gender<br><input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female |  |   |
| 8. Marital Status   | <input type="checkbox"/> Married   | <input type="checkbox"/> Single                        | 16. Go to <b>Part 2</b> of the Instructions, Eligibility Categories. In the space below, place the letter and number of the category you selected from the instructions (For example, (a)(8), (c)(17)(iii), etc.).  |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed   | <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced                      | Eligibility under 8 CFR 274a.12 ( ) ( ) ( )   |
| 9. Social Security Number (Include all numbers you have ever used) (if any)       |  |  | 17. If you entered the Eligibility Category, (c)(3)(C), in item 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. |
| 10. Alien Registration Number (A-Number) or I-94 Number (if any)                  |  |  | Degree: _____   |
| 11. Have you ever before applied for employment authorization from USCIS?         |  |  | Employer's Name as listed in E-Verify: _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (If yes, complete below) <input type="checkbox"/> No |  |  | Employer's E-Verify Company Identification Number or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number _____  |

**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 Instructions in **Part 2** and have identified the appropriate eligibility category in **Block 16**.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_