

F-1 students wishing to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT) should read this guide and follow the instructions carefully. This guide will explain eligibility for OPT and what procedures need to be followed to apply for and obtain OPT.

If you have questions or concerns after reviewing this packet, please call the Office of International Services (OIS) at 210-567-6241 to schedule an appointment with an International Advisor. An appointment is not necessary if you do not have questions but would like to submit your application.

What is OPT?

Optional Practical Training is defined as “temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student’s major area of study.” It allows for work authorization granted by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for up to 12 months per degree level, for the purpose of gaining practical experience **directly** related to their program of study. An F-1 student who has maintained lawful F-1 visa status for at least one academic year is eligible to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT). OPT may be granted before or after completion of a program of study; however, limitations apply.

How long is OPT work authorization?

The maximum amount of time for which OPT may be granted is 12 months* full-time per degree level. This means if you have previously completed a Bachelor’s degree and used 12 months of OPT and subsequently complete a Master’s degree, you may apply for another 12 months of OPT. If you completed two Master’s degrees you will only receive one 12-month period of OPT. Part-time pre-completion OPT is deducted from the total OPT period at half rate. For example, if you work part-time using pre-completion OPT for 6 months, you will have used 3 months of your total available OPT work authorization.

What is STEM OPT?

Students in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields may apply for a 17-month OPT extension if certain criteria apply. Please refer to the [STEM OPT Extension Packet](#) for further details.

When should an F-1 student apply for post-completion OPT?

Students applying for post-completion OPT may apply for and submit their OPT applications to USCIS as early as 90 days before the program end date indicated on the I-20 form and NO LATER THAN 60 days after the program end date. Once a student has completed all degree requirements, regardless of whether the date of graduation is weeks or months later, that student is considered to have finished their program. OPT applications must be **received** by USCIS no later than 60 days from this date. Late applications will be rejected by USCIS. Also, USCIS **must** receive your application for post-completion OPT within 30 days of the post-completion OPT recommendation issued by your OIS International Visitor Advisor on your I-20 form. The USCIS may grant a later start date for OPT than you originally requested depending upon the timing of the processing of the application.

When is my program end date?

Your program end date can be:

- Thesis/dissertation defense date
- Official end date of the semester in which you will complete your degree requirements (whether it be course requirements or thesis/dissertation)

There is some flexibility in determining your program end date depending on the type of program in which you are completing. If you have additional questions about this, please contact your International Visitor Advisor.

How long will it take for my OPT request to be approved?

OIS requires 5-10 business days to process your I-20 form recommending OPT.

USCIS takes 2-3 months to approve your OPT and mail you an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card. They have up to 90 days to process OPT applications. **You cannot begin working until your OPT is approved and you have your EAD in hand. Also, you cannot continue any on-campus employment after the program end date indicated on your I-20 form. Therefore, applying for OPT requires careful planning on the student's part.**

Workshop/Advising Session Requirement

All F-1 students must attend an OPT Workshop led by OIS International Visitor Advisors before they may apply for OPT. These workshops are held each semester and detailed information, including dates, times and RSVP information, is sent out to all to all students to their HSC e-mail. If you are unable to attend an OPT Workshop, you must schedule an advising appointment with your International Visitor Advisor. **OPT applications will not be processed by OIS until this requirement has been met.**

Invalidation of OPT

Your post-completion OPT will no longer be valid if you:

- Start a new program of study
- Transfer out to a new university
- Change your visa status
- Enter the U.S. using any visa status other than F-1
- Violate your F-1 visa status (Example: Failing to notify OIS of any changes in address within 10 days of moving.)

If any of these situations occur, please consult immediately with your International Visitor Advisor.

Social Security Numbers

If needed, students can apply for a Social Security Number as of the start date on the EAD. Please keep this in mind when determining your requested OPT start date.

Please submit to OIS the following documents as part of your OPT application packet to request I-20 form with OPT recommendation from OIS:

- OPT Recommendation Form (attached) completed and signed by your Academic Unit
- Completed and signed OPT Attestation (attached).
- Form I-765 completed and signed by the student
- Form G-1145, E-notification of Application/Petition Acceptance
- 2 passport-style photographs that meet USCIS specifications (<http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/general/photos.html>)
- Copies of: passport biographical page with expiration date, F-1 visa stamp, and most recent I-94 Arrival Record (can be downloaded at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/>) or if last arrival to the U.S. prior to April 2013 copies of the front and back of I-94 card
- Copies of all I-20 forms that have been issued to you by all schools previously attended
- Check or money order in the amount of \$410 made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Any previous work authorization cards (EADs) you may have ever been issued by USCIS

OPT Attestation Form

Please initial to the left of each statement to verify your understanding, and sign at the bottom.

____ I understand that I must attend an OPT workshop and/or individual advising session before I am eligible to apply for OPT through OIS.

____ I understand that while on OPT I am still considered to be an F-1 student and as a result, it is my responsibility to notify the OIS of any change in the information listed below:

- Change of residential address
- Change in employer's address and ANY change to employment status such as number of hours worked per week, position title, unemployment, etc.) using our [OPT Reporting Form](#)
- Change of phone number and/or e-mail address
- Change of immigration status (i.e. H-1B, J-1, Permanent Resident, etc.) A copy of the approval notice must be submitted to the OIS
- Transfer of F-1 record to another school. A copy of the new I-20 form must be submitted to OIS.

____ I understand that if after submitting the post-completion OPT application, I discover that I will not be able to complete all requirements for the degree completion, I must notify my International Visitor Advisor immediately, as this may negatively affect my OPT application.

____ I understand that I must mail my OPT application to the USCIS Service Center (address provided in this packet) based on my state of residence and that I am fully responsible for timely mailing my OPT application:

- No earlier than 90 days before my program end date; AND
- No later than 60 days after my program end date; AND
- Within 30 days of issuance of my I-20 form with OPT recommendation

____ I understand that I must submit a copy of my EAD to OIS as soon as it is received.

____ I understand that I cannot begin working until I physically receive my EAD.

____ I understand that I must stop any on-campus work by the program end date indicated on my I-20 form if I have not received my EAD.

____ I understand that OIS must endorse my I-20 form for travel prior to my departure and that travel signatures are valid for only 6 months while on OPT.

____ I understand that unemployment on OPT cannot exceed 90 days and that if I am unemployed for more than 90 days, I am considered to be in violation of my F-1 student visa status.

____ I understand that once OPT has been granted, I cannot cancel it and use it later.

I understand that it is my responsibility to abide by these requirements and that failure to do so may violate my F-1 visa status and threaten my ability to remain legally in the U.S.

Student's signature

Date

Student's printed name

OPT Recommendation Form

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

Name: _____ E-mail: _____

Requested OPT Start Date: _____ End Date: _____ Full-time Part-time

Please be aware it can take USCIS up to 90 days to issue the OPT EAD and you will not be able to work until you receive the EAD card

I am requesting the following:

- Pre-completion OPT – OPT will take place prior to completion of all my degree requirements. Please indicate (c)(3)(A) in question #16 of Form I-765
- Post-completion OPT – OPT will take place after I have completed all of my degree requirements. Please indicate (c)(3)(B) in question #16 of Form I-765

Signature: _____ Date: _____

THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED AND SIGNED BY STUDENT'S ACADEMIC ADVISOR OR EQUIVALENT (UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS), CHAIR OF COMMITTEE ON GRADUATE STUDIES (GRADUATE STUDENTS) OR PROGRAM DIRECTOR (PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS/DENTAL RESIDENTS/INTERNS)

The student referenced above is applying for permission to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT), an employment authorization from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). OPT is for employment in a job related to the student's major field of study and is intended to provide practical experience. Authorization for OPT is first officially recommended by a Designated School Official, (i.e. an International Visitor Advisor in OIS) and then approved by the USCIS.

Before this authorization can be granted, OIS must have a statement from the student's Academic Unit indicating the date of completion of the student's degree requirements. Please note that the date of completion is not necessarily the end of the term or the graduation date, but is the date on which all requirements for the degree have been fulfilled.

Please complete this form and return it to the student. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact an OIS International Visitor Advisor at 210-567-6241 or international@uthscsa.edu.

Type of degree or certificate expected: BS MS PhD Major: _____

Other: _____

Date the student will complete academic requirements to obtain degree/certificate (MM/DD/YYYY): _____

This date represents: Masters/PhD Dissertation/Thesis Defense Date

(please check one) End date of Last Semester of Academic Studies/Research to Complete Degree/Certificate

Signature: _____ Title: _____

Printed Name: _____ Date: _____

E-mail: _____ Phone: _____

OPT Mailing Instructions

Students must submit the complete OPT application packet to the correct USCIS Lockbox Facility for processing and adjudication. OIS will not submit the OPT application packet to USCIS for you. Where to mail the application depends on the mailing address you indicate in Item 3 of the Form I-765. Use the USCIS address below that corresponds with the state of your mailing address (as indicated on Item 3 of the form I-765).

Please note that separate addresses are used for delivery by express mail and courier services such as UPS, FedEx, and DHL. All deliveries by U.S. Mail, including Priority, Express or other accelerated mail services provided by the U.S. Postal Service, must be addressed to the U.S. Postal Service address.

OIS advises all students to always check the USCIS website for the most up-to-date filing addresses and other filing updates for the Form I-765: <http://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses>.

USCIS Phoenix and Dallas Lockbox facilities	
If you live in:	Mail your application to:
Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Guam, or the Northern Mariana Islands.	USCIS Phoenix Lockbox For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries: USCIS PO Box 21281 Phoenix, AZ 85036 For Express mail and courier deliveries: USCIS Attn: AOS 1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S Suite 100 Phoenix, AZ 85034
Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, U.S. Virgin Islands, or West Virginia	USCIS Dallas Lockbox For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries: USCIS PO Box 660867 Dallas, TX 75266 For Express mail and courier deliveries: USCIS Attn: AOS 2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business Suite 400 Lewisville, TX 75067

USCIS processing time for OPT applications is 90 days.

Documents That Student Needs to Submit to USCIS for OPT EAD

- Form I-765 completed and signed by student
- I-20 form with OPT recommendation issued by OIS Advisor within 30 days and signed by student
- Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance
- 2 passport-style photographs that meet USCIS specifications
(<http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/general/photos.html>)
- Copy of passport biographical page
- Copy of F-1 visa stamp
- Copy of most recent I-94 Arrival Record or front and back of I-94 card
- Copies of all I-20 forms that have been issued to you by all schools previously attended
- Check or money order in the amount of \$410 made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Any previous work authorization cards (EADs) you may have ever been issued by USCIS