International Student Office  
F-1 Optional Practical Training Guide

What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

OPT is a benefit authorized by USCIS that extends the F-1 student status to allow you to work in the U.S. in order to gain practical training in your major field of study.

Eligibility Requirements

Students in their last semester of their program of study who have been in lawful, full-time student status for at least one full academic year are eligible for a total of 12 months of OPT. A job offer is not required to apply for OPT. However, the work must be directly related to the student’s major area of study.

Note: Only students pursuing a degree are allowed Optional Practical Training. Associate Degree, Certificate Program or University Transfer Certification students are eligible to apply for this opportunity.

Application Deadlines

⇒ US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) must receive your OPT application 90 days prior to and no later than 60 days after completion of program of study.

Failure to comply with this deadline will result in loss of the entire OPT benefit. All post-completion OPT must begin within 60 days after the program completion date.

OPT processing times can take as long as 4 months, therefore, it is recommended that you apply as soon as possible to ensure that you receive the employment benefit on time. Students are not permitted to begin employment until they receive the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and until the start date listed on the EAD.

How to Apply

Make an appointment (949-582-4637) with the International Student Program Specialist at least three weeks before you plan to submit your application to the USCIS. Complete the following items for the appointment:

1. Call the International Student Office (949-582-4637), let them know that you are applying for OPT and that you need to make an appointment to meet with the international academic counselor. During your appointment with the international counselor, ask he/she to complete the “International Contact Form” and give you approval for Optional Practical Training. Make sure the counselor includes the completion date of your degree and degree type.

2. Your current I-20 form and any previous I-20 forms (from both Saddleback College and other schools).

3. Your valid passport (containing the I-94 card and F-1 visa).

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   You must download this from the USCIS website. www.uscis.gov

5. 2 identical passport photos, less than 30 days old
   (see http://travel.state.gov/passport-guide/composition/composition_874.html for more information).

The International Student Program Specialist will process a new SEVIS I-20 with OPT recommendation. After one week, you must pick up this I-20 form from the International Student Office and mail the following documents certified with receipt to the USCIS Phoenix Lockbox:

If you currently live in:

Mail your application to: USCIS Phoenix Lockbox:

For regular U.S. Postal Service (USPS) or Express/Priority deliveries (USPS):
USCIS
PO Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

You cannot send to this address by Fed-Ex, UPS or DHL but must use U.S. Postal Service.

E-Notification: If you want to receive an e-mail and/or a text message that your Form I-765 has been accepted at a USCIS Lockbox facility, complete Form G-1145 found at http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf and clip and clip it to the first page of your application.

Checklist of documents to be mailed to USCIS:

- 2 photos (put your name and I-94 number in pencil on the back of each photo)
- Original completed I-765 form
- Copy of SEVIS I-20 form with OPT endorsement and signature (ISO will provide, remember to sign it)
- Copies of any previous I-20 forms, 1st & 3rd page for SEVIS forms, front & back for older forms
- Copy of any previous Employment Authorization Documents (EAD cards)

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- Copy of F-1 Visa and I-94 card (front and back)
- Copy of identity pages in passport
- A written job offer on company letterhead (optional)

NOTE: The complete application must be mailed and received at the Service Center within 30 days from the date the International Student Program Specialist issued the recommendation and the OPT I-20.

Travel While on Post-completion OPT

Any and all travel must be approved through the International Student Office as if you were currently attending school and must accompany a letter from your employer that states you are employed.

Travel while on OPT is not restricted. However, in order to reenter the US after you complete your degree and during the entire OPT period, you should be in possession of your EAD card, OPT I-20 with travel signature, a valid F-1 visa, a valid passport, and a letter from your employer verifying employment. If you are missing any one of these documents you risk being denied entry and losing your OPT. While on OPT the travel signature on the I-20 form is valid for only 6 months.

Note: The ISO recommends that once you graduate you do not travel outside of the U.S. until you have received the EAD.

Periods of Unemployment While on OPT

After completion of degree, your F-1 status while on post-completion OPT depends on your employment. You are not permitted to accumulate more than a total of 90 days of unemployment for the entire period of 12 months of OPT. As of April 8, 2008 all students on post-completion OPT begin accumulating unemployment time if they are not employed in a job related to their major field of study (qualified employment).

What constitutes qualified employment?

- Paid employment, part-time or full-time that is for multiple employers, short-term multiple employers (performing artists), contracting work, self-employed (starting a business), employment through an agency (must be at least 20 hours/week).
- Unpaid employment as volunteer, intern that does not violate labor laws and is at least 20 hrs/week.

Important: Accumulating more than 90 days of unemployment is a violation of your immigration status that could trigger termination of practical training. You may be required to apply for a reinstatement and lose the eligibility for OPT extension.

Reminders

Optional Practical Training is tied directly to your SEVIS I-20, Saddleback College and your student F-1 Visa.

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• You will need to maintain health insurance coverage while working under this benefit. If your employer does not provide the coverage, you can purchase the international student plan from Saddleback College.

• At all times the college must have accurate and current employer information (company name, supervisor name, address and phone #). Once you are approved for this benefit you have the option of changing jobs, as long as you provide us with current information to update your SEVIS record.

• Practical Training is for a maximum period of twelve (12) months and fulltime employment only (40 hours weekly).

After OPT Options

Please plan three (3) months ahead of the expiration date on your employment authorization document (EAD card) for the following options.

a) You can apply for a different Visa
b) You may apply to another educational level and Institution
c) Your may return to your home country.

If you have any questions, contact your International Student Program Specialist at 949-582-4637.