Optional Practical Training (OPT) is temporary employment authorization that is related to an F-1 student's academic program; students are eligible for 365 days of OPT per higher degree level. Post-Completion OPT (Post-OPT), takes place after the completion of your degree program (graduation), and the application process can take approximately 3 to 5 months to be processed and approved.

All OPT employment must be directly related to the student's major field of study and commensurate with the degree level and can only be used once per higher degree level, even if student has multiple degrees per level (e.g., Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD). 12 months of OPT must be used all at once, it cannot be broken up, or saved for later.

What is Post-Completion OPT (Post-OPT)?

- OPT completed after program completion end date/graduation
- Must work at least 20 hours or more per week
- All previous periods of OPT at the same level are deducted from the 12-month total
- Part-time OPT is counted at a half-rate (e.g., Four months part time OPT is subtracted from the total as two months)

OPT Eligibility Requirements:

In order to be eligible for OPT, the following must be true:

- I have maintained my F-1 status
- I have been enrolled full-time for at least two consecutive semesters
- I have at least a 3.0 GPA if I am a graduate student or a 2.0 GPA if I am an undergraduate student
- I have not been approved for OPT in the past at the same degree level or at a higher degree level.
- I have not used 12 months of full-time CPT
- I agree to report to ISS via the OPT Reporting Form within 10 days of any change in address or employment

OPT Application Timeline

The earliest you can apply for OPT is 90 days before your program end date. It will take the USCIS Service Center up to 3-5 months to process your application, so it is recommended that you apply early. You cannot start employment until you receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card. The absolute latest you can apply for OPT is 60 days after your program end date. You can start OPT the day after you graduate or up to 60 days after graduation

NOTE: students who wait to apply 60 days after their program ends may be rejected by USCIS and will lose time on their OPT authorization. It is recommended to apply before program end date/graduation.

Post-Completion OPT
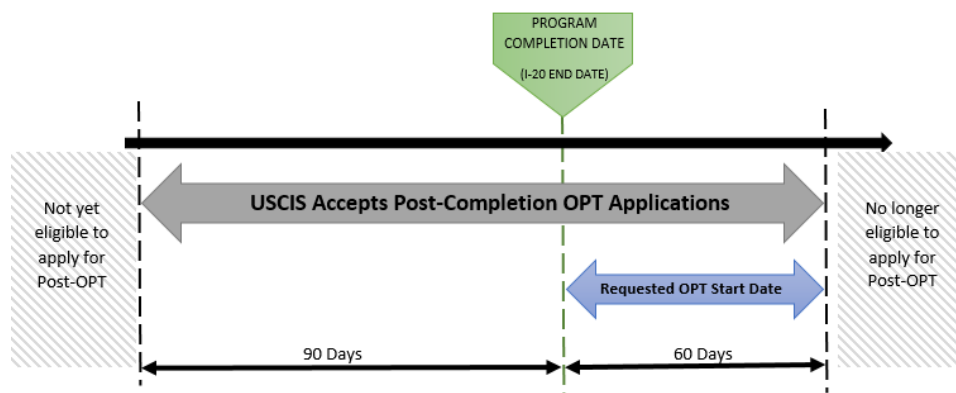
Post-OPT Reporting Requirements

Once your EAD card is received and you have accepted employment, you must submit an OPT Reporting form to confirm or update your address and employment information. While on post-OPT, you may use the SEVP Portal to review your information for accuracy and report any discrepancies to your DSO.

If you do not comply with the OPT reporting requirements or/and you accumulate more than 90 days of unemployment while on OPT your SEVIS record will be terminated, and you will no longer have valid immigration status; SEVIS termination can have serious consequences that affect future immigration benefits.

All students on OPT must report within 10 working days of any of the following changes to:

- Their name, phone, email address and/or residential address (use Opt Reporting Form)
- Their employer's name and address, 9-digit EIN and their supervisor's name and email address
- Their job title, starts and/or end dates (termination) of employment
- Any periods of unemployment and change to immigration status
- Volunteer employment(paid or unpaid)

Types of Employment Allowed?

Employment must relate to the degree program. If the relationship between the job and field of study is called into question by USCIS, the burden of proof is on the student to demonstrate the relationship.

The types of employment allowed during the initial 12-month period of OPT include (not applicable to the STEM OPT) :

- **Paid employment:** Students may work part time (at least 20 hours per week when on post-completion OPT) or full time in a job related to their field of study.
- **Multiple employers:** Students may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the student's degree program.
- **Work for hire:** Commonly referred to as 1099 employment where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company.
- **Self-employed business owner:** Students may start a business and be self-employed. In this situation, the student must work full-time (at least 20 hours/week). The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to the student's degree program.
- **Employment through an agency:** Students must be able to provide evidence showing they worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.
- **Volunteer/Unpaid employment:** Students on the initial 12-month OPT may work as volunteers or unpaid interns, where this does not violate any labor laws. The work must be at least 20 hours per week. These students must be able to provide evidence from the employer that the student worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.
- **Unemployment:** You can have up to 90 days of unemployment during the 12-month post- OPT period

It is recommended that students maintain evidence for each job: the position held, duration of that position, the job title, contact information for the student's supervisor or manager, and a description of the work. Students must always report employment to ISS through the OPT reporting Form.

Immigration regulations does not specify what documents are "proof of employment"; examples include:

- Payment records

- Offer letter from your employer

- Letter from your supervisor on official letterhead confirming continued employment

- If the connection between your field of study and employment/practical training is not obvious, it might be helpful for the letter to explain how the practical training relates to your studies.

- Timesheet/activity log for unpaid practical training

Traveling During OPT

You may travel while on OPT. However, please keep in mind that you are still in F-1 status and need proof of your status when traveling. Your F-1 visa must be valid upon entering the US.

- **Traveling while OPT application is pending:** If your OPT application is currently pending with USCIS, **we strongly recommend that you do not travel outside of the US**. In cases of emergency, you should travel with the following documents:

  o Valid F-1 visa

  o Valid passport

  o Valid travel signature from your immigration advisor on your most current I-20 (within 6 months of re-entry)

  o I-797 receipt notice

  o Letter from your employer indicating that you currently hold a job in your field of study and will be returning to the U.S. to resume employment

- **Traveling while OPT application is approved:** If your OPT application has been approved and you have a job offer or are currently working, you should travel with the following documents:

  o Valid Passport

  o Valid Visa

  o Valid travel signature from DSO on current I-20 (within 6 months of re-entry)

  o Valid EAD card (Employment Authorization Document)

  o Letter from your employer indicating that you currently hold a job in your field of study and will be returning to the U.S. to resume employment