

General OPT information

Eligibility

F-1 students may be eligible for an initial 12 month period of work authorization following completion of their course of study known as Optional Practical Training, or OPT. (This includes graduate students who have completed all formal coursework and are working on a thesis/dissertation.) OPT before completion of your program is called Pre-Completion OPT – more information on that can be found on our website here: https://www.lsuhsc.edu/administration/academic/ois/pre_completion_opt.aspx

The following F-1 students are **NOT** eligible for post completion OPT:

- Students who have been enrolled for **less than one academic year** (Fall and Spring semester, can include time spent in a different status which also permits full time study)
- Students who have received **12 months of Full Time Pre-Completion OPT** during their course of study at the same educational level (including a degree from a different institution.)
- Students who have received **12 months of Post Completion OPT** at the same educational level (including degree from a different institution)
- Students who have used **12 months of full time CPT** during their course of study

A job offer is NOT required to apply for Post completion OPT.

Confirmation of eligibility

To confirm the date you will be completing your program, get a letter or memo on departmental letterhead addressed to Remy Allen, Designated School Official, from your faculty sponsor, advisor or program coordinator. This should confirm the expected date of program completion.

A sample text would be:

“This is to confirm that Dr./Mr./Mrs./Ms. (xx) is expected to complete the requirements of the academic program in (xx) at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, School of (xx) on (date).”

Once we receive this, we will adjust the ‘program end date’ listed on your I-20, if needed.

Determining your start date

You will need to request a specific date when you want your OPT to begin. This may be as early as the day after your program completion, but no later than 60 days after the end date listed on your I-20. We will be happy to discuss your date options if you would like, but you will need to make the final decision for the date yourself.

For instance, if your end date is May 18, you can request OPT starting as early as May 19, or as late as July 17.

Timeframe for filing your application

You can file your application for OPT within a 5 month window. It can be received at USCIS as early as 90 days before the program end date on your I-20, or as late as 60 days after that date.

If your end date is May 18, your application can be received as early as February 17 or as late as July 17.

If it's received earlier, your application will be rejected and sent back to you, you will still be eligible to apply again, but your OPT may need to be recommended in SEVIS a second time, and a new I-20 issued. If it's received after 60 days beyond your end date, it will be denied, and you will have lost your eligibility for OPT based on the degree you just completed.

Instructions for filing for OPT online

Some important notes before you begin:

- You can file for OPT by mail or online. Do **NOT** do both.
- You can only file the I-765 online from within the United States. Don't file for OPT if you are outside the country.
- Online Filing for OPT speeds up the process only at the initial stages. It does not mean that your application will be processed faster than those submitted by mail.
- Once you've submitted the application, you cannot go back to make changes or additions. If you realize after hitting the submit button that you've made a mistake, contact International Services and we can discuss your options.

Gather the materials you'll need. These should be scans in pdf or some other digital format so you can upload them when you get to that part of the application process.

- **A new I-20** from International Services with your OPT recommendation on page 2. This is very important – don't start until you have this in hand. You **cannot** use an old one.
- One digital passport style photo of yourself, taken within the past 30 days. Don't try to scan a paper copy – it's much easier to get the photo in digital format and upload it.
- Your most recent I-94
- Scan of your passport identification (photo) page
- Scan of any EAD you might have from previous OPT or other work authorization
- Scans of all I-20s you have showing any periods of CPT and/or OPT you have done in the past.

Arrange an appointment with International Services. We will review your materials and answer any questions you have. If you'd like we can help with the online filing process.

Create an account at USCIS - https://myaccount.uscis.gov/users/sign_up

Start with 'File a form online' under the section labeled 'Select what you want to do' or under the 'My Account' tab.

- Select 'I-765' and click 'Start Form'

We've provided the most common responses to the questions. Most of them should be straightforward, so some are not answered here. **If you find that any fields are not applicable to you, leave them blank.**

What is your eligibility category?

You will almost certainly be applying for post-completion OPT, even though you're applying before you have completed your program. The code for post-completion OPT is **(C)(3)(B)**. If you think it should be different, check with International Services before proceeding.

Reason for applying

Initial permission to accept employment

Have you previously filed I-765?

This should only be yes if you have applied for OPT in the past. CPT or on-campus employment does NOT count. Upload your earlier EAD when asked to do so.

Is someone assisting you with completing this application?

Most likely the answer will be 'no', unless you have an immigration lawyer helping you.

What is your current legal name?

Enter your name as it appears on your passport.

Have you used any other names since birth?

This refers to names that might be found on formal documents. Your maiden name, other naming formats, or aliases, but not what your sister called you when you were growing up.

What is your current U.S. mailing address?

This should be the address where you'd like your EAD and any other related mail to be sent. Remember that official mail from USCIS will NOT be forwarded, so if you are going to move within the next several months (like, six) and don't yet know your new address, you should either use a friend or family member in the U.S. or the International Services address. You can put International Services in the 'in care of' field. We'll notify you when anything arrives in the mail.

Is your current mailing address the same as your physical address?

These next several questions should be easy enough to answer. Let us know if there's anything you're not clear on. Remember to use the U.S. date format (MM/DD/YYYY)

Place of arrival

Choose a port of entry from the drop-down menu. This is asking where you went through immigration or 'preclearance', so it could be a place outside the U.S.

Status at last arrival

This will most likely be F-1, unless you entered in a different status and changed status within the U.S.

What is the passport number of your most recently issued passport?

If you have more than one passport, use the newest one, even if your visa is in an older one.

What is your travel document number (if any)?

If you have a passport, this will not apply to you.

What is the expiration date of your passport or travel document?

What country issued your passport or travel document?

What is your current immigration status or category?

This should be F-1 – Student, Academic or Language Program

What is your Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) number, if any?

This is found on the top left corner of your I-20, starting with 'N00...'

What is your A-Number?

If you have a pending green card application, you will have an A number. Enter it here. Most students will check 'I do not have or know my A-Number'

What is your USCIS Online Account Number?

If you used this system before and were sent a receipt in the mail, you can find the number at the top of the notice. Most students, though, won't have one yet.

Evidence

This is the section where you upload documents that are asked for as part of the application. Here's what you'll need:

OPT I-20 - NEW

This is where you'll upload the copy of your new I-20 with the recommendation for OPT on page 2. **THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT.** Make sure you sign and date it on page 1, and that all the information is correct. Be sure to submit this no more than 30 days after the I-20 is issued by International Services, *not* from when you pick it up. You do not need to have a travel signature on page 2 when you apply for OPT.

Passport-style photo (Digital)

A digital version of a new passport style photo will be needed. It should be new, or at least not the same photo that you used for your passport or visa. It seems that you'll have fewer problems uploading a photo that is strictly digital as opposed to a paper photo that you scanned and then edited.

If you have problems, try using the Department of State's Photo Tool here:

<https://tsg.phototool.state.gov/photo>

Passport photo page

Include a copy of the photo and/or information page of your current, unexpired passport.

I-94

You'll need your most recent I-94 - <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home> . The travel history is not needed, although it won't hurt anything if you include that.

Old EAD(s)

If you had OPT before, based on an earlier degree, upload a copy of the EAD (authorization card) for that.

Old I-20s

If you were approved for any periods of CPT or OPT, upload the I-20 with the authorization for that period on page 2. Do this even if it was for an earlier degree at a different school.

Additional Information

This section is where you can add any additional information that doesn't fit in the previous parts of the form. The most common use will be for those who have done CPT or OPT in the past to list the dates of their employment, or for previous SEVIS IDs if you have those.

Be sure to list the type of employment (CPT, OPT, economic hardship); part-time or full-time; the start date and end date; and the degree you were pursuing at that time.

Sample:

CPT

Part-time, 2/22/2021 – 4/15/2021, Master's

OPT

Post-completion OPT, 6/6/2018-6/5/2019, Bachelor's

Previous SEVIS ID Numbers

N0001234567, Bachelor's, F-1

N0098765432, J-1 Trainee

Carefully review your application before you submit it. Be sure that you've answered all the relevant questions, since it will allow you to submit even if some of the fields are blank.

- Check the 'Applicant's Statement'
- Check that you've read and agree to the 'Applicant's Statement'
- Provide your digital signature in the space provided.
- Pay and submit

You'll be taken to another window to complete your payment. You can either enter your credit card information or bank account data. USCIS will not process your application without payment.

After submitting your application

A receipt notice will be sent to the email address you give them. This will have information on how you can check the progress of your OPT application online.

Approval

Once your application has been approved, you will be sent an Approval Notice and an EAD, or Employment Authorization Document. Check that carefully for any errors. If you find any, contact International Services ***before*** you contact USCIS.

You must have the physical card in your hands, and reached the start date listed on the card, before you start your practical training.

Travel while your OPT application is pending

If you have completed your studies and leave the United States **before** your OPT is approved **and you have received your EAD**, you **may** not be able to reenter the U.S. in F-1 status. Therefore, we recommend that you do not exit the U.S. before you have received your EAD and have a job identified. If you do not have a job identified, you may also be denied reentry to the U.S.

Practical training may not begin until the Employment Authorization Document has been received **or** before the start date noted on the EAD.

Reporting Requirements during Post Completion OPT

During OPT, you are required to maintain updated information with International Services. You are required to report/provide:

- Any change in employer. (Name, mailing address and start date, previous employer and end date, if applicable)
- Any interruption in employment. Students on standard Post Completion OPT are permitted a total of 90 days of unemployment during their standard OPT authorization period. Exceeding this limit may impact your eligibility for future immigration benefits and may result in termination of your SEVIS record. If at any point you are within 45 days of this limitation, contact International Services immediately!
- Any change in your name, address or contact information. (A current physical and/or mailing address is required.)
- Any travel plans.
- Any updated documents (Passport, I-94, entry visa, replacement EAD)

Appropriate Employment on Post Completion OPT

Work done for OPT must be "directly related to the student's major area of study." Employment based on an OPT EAD that is not directly related to the major area of study would be considered a status violation. The employment must also be commensurate with your educational level.

Documenting that your OPT employment is appropriate is **your** responsibility, not that of International Services. We recommend that you maintain evidence for each job documenting the position held, proof of the duration of that position, the job title, contact information for your supervisor or manager, and a description of the work. If it is not clear from the job title that the work is related to your degree, we recommend that you get a signed letter from your hiring official, supervisor, or manager explaining how your degree is related to the work performed.

According to SEVP policy guidance, “a student must work at least 20 hours per week in a qualifying position to be considered employed. If a student has a variable schedule, within a month, it should average out to at least 20 hours per week”.

If you cannot show that your employment was appropriate for Post Completion OPT, as applied for, you may be considered to have violated your status, which may require that you leave the United States and/or make you ineligible for future immigration benefits.

STEM Extensions

Students with a STEM degree major and an employer who participates in E-verify may also be eligible for an additional 24 months of OPT following their initial authorization. It is recommended that a STEM extension be applied for 90 days **before** your year of OPT expires. A STEM extension may not be requested if the initial OPT period has already expired.

More information on STEM Extensions and how to apply is available from International Services.

Cap Gap Extensions

(**not** applicable to LSUHSC-New Orleans employees)

If your OPT period ends before October 1, and your employer is considered to be subject to the H1B cap, and that employer has filed a petition to change your status to H1B in a timely manner, your work authorization and your F-1 status will be automatically extended until a decision is made on your H1B petition. If it is approved, your authorization will continue until September 30. If the H1B petition is denied, revoked or withdrawn during the cap gap period, your OPT will end on the day the petition was denied, revoked or withdrawn. At that point you will still have a 60 day grace period to leave the country, change status or begin a new academic program.