



Frequently Asked Questions about Optional Practical Training

Q. What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

A. OPT is a benefit available by application process to F1 students. The benefit allows a student to live and work in the U.S. while gaining hands-on experience in your academic field. It is an authorization for temporary employment for optional practical training directly related to the student's major area of study.

The week of April 7, 2008, the Department of Homeland Security published an Interim Final Rule, which makes changes to post-completion OPT. To view the changes, download and read [Optional Practical Training Updates](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/) at <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/>.

Q. When can I apply for OPT?

A. A student may submit an application for authorization to engage in Optional Practical Training within 90 days of program end date listed on active I-20. Student can request an OPT Start date of no more than 60 days after program end date. The period of employment will not begin until after the completion of the full academic year as indicated by the Designated School Official (DSO). Please allow 90 days for application processes after application is received by USCIS.

Q. What forms do I need to apply for practical training?

A. You'll need an *Advisor's Recommendation Form for Optional Practical Training (OPT)*. This form is available in the International Programs Office (MCC 224). There are additional items that must be sent to USCIS Dallas Processing Center. You will be provided with a checklist of those items at the time you pick up your application.

Q. How much practical training time am I eligible for?

A. If you have not been authorized for any previous practical training at the same degree level or at a higher level, you are eligible for up to 12 months once you have completed one academic year of your program of study. **Previous curricular practical training will not affect the 12 months unless the curricular training was full time and for more than 12 months.**

Q. May I apply for less than 12 months of practical training?

A. Yes, but you must be sure that you will not want more than the period that is less than 12 months. It is no longer possible to apply for additional time after the degree completion date deadline has passed.

Q. May I obtain 12 months of practical training after each degree?

A. Yes. The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) issued new regulations for OPT that took effect on January 1, 2003. A student is now eligible for 12 months of practical training for EACH change to a higher educational level. So a student in F-1 status who enters as a Bachelor's degree student is eligible for up to 12 months practical training upon completion of the Bachelor's and then ANOTHER 12 months upon completion of the next higher degree (Master's).

Q. How long does it take for the IPO to process my OPT application?

A. Presently it is taking 7-10 working days for the (IPO) to process OPT applications. This is due to the continuing high volume of applications and due to the batch system used by SEVIS to update or edit a student's SEVIS record. **Appointment is REQUIRED for all questions pertaining to OPT applications**

Q. How is my application processed by US Citizenship and Immigration Services?

A. To apply for your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card, you must mail your completed application and all required attachments to USCIS Service Center in Dallas.

Q. How long will the application approval process at USCIS take?

A. Processing time at USCIS Dallas Service Center is highly variable and difficult to predict. **Please allow for your application to take up to 90 days.** Therefore, you are urged to apply early to allow sufficient time for you to receive your EAD card.

Q. Can I apply in person at a USCIS District Office?

A. **No.** EAD cards for students are not accepted at USCIS District Offices. Cards are only processed by mail at an USCIS processing center.

Q. What about the OPT application fee?

A. The USCIS application fee for OPT is \$410.00.

Q. What is the deadline for sending in my application to USCIS Dallas Service Center?

A. The deadline is based on your degree conferral date. If you are applying for OPT to begin after graduation your application must be received at one of the 5 processing centers before your degree conferral date. **If your program end date is before the date of graduation, contact the International Programs Office.**

Q. What should I put as the start date for practical training?

A. That depends on your plans. Practical training **must** begin no later than 60 days following your program completion date.

Q. What if I apply for practical training and end up not using it? Perhaps I won't be able to find a job, or perhaps I decide to go back to school. What happens then?

A. Applying for practical training is a two-step process. You must first apply to the International Programs Office, and then mail your application to USCIS to obtain an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card. Once USCIS approves your OPT application, it is not possible to cancel the practical training authorization. **Therefore, any unused time will be lost.** You are not allowed more than 90 days of unemployment, therefore if you are going to return to school instead of using the OPT benefit you must contact the IPO to request the change.

Q. *I have a job offer but my EAD card has not arrived yet. Can I begin work?*

A. No.

Q. *Can I work at any job with OPT authorization?*

A. No. OPT authorization is only for employment related to your field of study. Working in an unrelated job is a serious violation of your F-1 status. Do not put your legal status at risk.

Q. *Once I receive my EAD card, is there anything else I should do?*

A. Yes, please bring your EAD card to the International Programs Office so that a photocopy can be made for your file. Please Note: Employment cannot begin until the date authorized for practical training on the EAD and you have your EAD card "in hand".

Q. *I have already received my EAD card. I will not graduate as expected. My OPT end date is later than the ending date on my I-20. Do I need to file for an extension since my OPT end date is after my new graduation date?*

A. Yes. You must file for an extension if you will not graduate before the program of study completion date on page 1, section 5 on your SEVIS I-20. The OPT end date is only related to the OPT employment authorization. These are two separate issues.

Q. *Do I need a job offer to obtain practical training?*

A. No. Proof of employment is not required to obtain practical training.

Q. *May I obtain insurance through the SUNY International Student insurance program if I'm on practical training?*

A. Yes. You may purchase the SUNY international health insurance at the student rate directly through the Student Service Center. This is very helpful if your employer does not provide health insurance coverage or if there is a several month waiting period before health insurance benefits will commence.

Q. *What about change of address or change of name while I am on post-completion OPT?*

A. While on OPT post graduation, students must continue to report any name or address changes to the International Programs Office, because the school continues to maintain the F-1 record until OPT ends. You can fill out the change of address form at the International Programs Office.

Q. *I am planning to travel outside of the United States. The signature on my I-20 is eight months old. Do I need a new signature?*

A. Yes, while you are on OPT you need a travel signature on page 3 of your I-20 that is less than six months old on the day of your re-entry.

Q. I may be moving while my application is pending. Can I use the International Programs Office as my mailing address?

A. **Yes.** US Citizenship and Immigration Services will mail EAD cards to an office address at a university. If you will be moving before you receive your EAD card then you will want to have the card sent to you at a friend or relative's address or at the IPO address.

To use a friend or relative's address, complete form I-765, by showing your mailing address like this:
c/o (the name of your relative or friend) Street Address
City, State Zip Code

To use the International Programs Office address show the mailing address like this:

3. U.S. Mailing Address (Street Number and Name)		(Apt. Number)
c/o Intl Office 34 Cornell Drive		FO 204
(Town or City)	(State/Country)	(ZIP Code)
Canton	NY <input type="text"/>	13617
4. Country of Citizenship/Nationality		

Q. What if I want to travel outside the United States during practical training?

A. An F-1 student who has timely filed an application for OPT post-completion of study may travel outside the United States while the OPT application is pending, provided that the F-1 student can present their USCIS Processing Center Receipt proving that the application has been filed.

However, once the EAD card for OPT is issued to the F-1 student, and the student decides to travel abroad, the student can only re-enter the United States to resume employment. The F-1 student does not need to have already begun actual employment before leaving as long as the student has a job offer to return to.

The best general advice is that an F-1 student on OPT, who has received the EAD card and has to travel abroad, should make sure that there is documentation from his or her employer confirming the employment or the job offer. Otherwise, the student assumes a risk that he/she may not be allowed to re-enter the United States. **Please note:** *If you will need to obtain a new F-1 visa such travel may be risky. There have been cases where students who had completed their degree program were denied a new visa and not permitted to reenter the United States. Even if your visa is still valid, USCIS regulations state that re-entry is permitted only "to resume authorized employment". Therefore, students who do not yet have jobs take a risk if they travel outside the U.S. Students are strongly encouraged to discuss their travel plans with International Programs Office staff.*