

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

INFORMATION FOR F-1 STUDENTS

WHAT IS OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING?

OPT is employment authorization for international students in F-1 status for work experience that is directly related to your major field of study. You may use OPT for paid or unpaid work experience, and it is typically done for a period of 12 months. There are three types of OPT:

- Pre-completion: Start and finish before program end date
- Post-completion: Start and finish after program end date
- 24-month STEM extension: Students in qualified fields are eligible to extend OPT for an additional 24 months

Eligibility

- Be in lawful F-1 status for one academic year prior to applying for OPT
- Have a passport valid for at least six months after you apply for OPT
- Not have used more than 364 days of full-time CPT

If I had CPT, can I still have OPT?

Yes, if you did not have CPT full time for 12 months or more. Part-time CPT has no effect on OPT eligibility.

Post-completion OPT requirements

- Maintain F-1 status by being employed (instead of enrolled)
- Report employment to the International Center
- Work full-time (21+ hours/week)
- Maintain paid or unpaid employment with one or multiple employers (can switch employers)
- Part-time, incidental coursework is allowed, but not required

24-month stem extension

To be eligible, you must:

- Have a degree in certain STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, mathematics)
- Have a job related to your major and an employer that is registered with the E-verify employment verification system
- Apply before initial OPT ends

To apply for the 24-month STEM extension, complete a request through myStatus (mystatus.missouri.edu).

- Maximum authorization is for 12 months (with exceptions)
- Allowed up to 90 days of unemployment during the 12-month period

APPLYING FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

Step 1: Attend OPT workshop and prepare documents

Before applying for OPT, you should attend an OPT workshop. Then prepare the following documents:

- USCIS form I-765 — use (c)(3)(b) as the eligibility code
- Copy of I-94
- Copy of passport biographical page
- Copy of visa
- Copies of all previous I-20s
- Copy of any previous EAD cards

Step 2: Submit application to International Center

Complete the OPT request in myStatus (mystatus.missouri.edu) and upload your documents or bring them to the center. You will also provide:

- OPT workshop review
- OPT adviser verification
- OPT processing fee (\$75)

An international student adviser will process your application within five business days.

Step 3: Mail application to USCIS

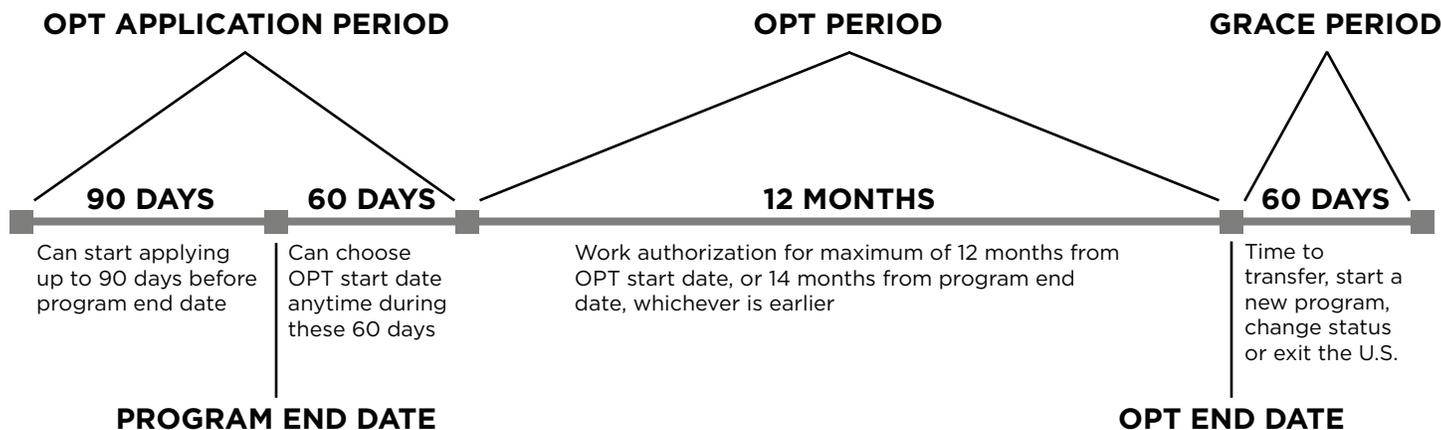
Gather all necessary items and submit your entire application to USCIS in the pre-paid envelope provided by the International Center.

Items to submit to USCIS

- Check or money order for \$410 payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security"
- Two passport-style photos, taken recently (available from the International Center)
- Original I-765, signed and dated
- Copy of new OPT I-20
- Copies of previous I-20s
- Copies of I-94, visa, passport biographical page, any previous EADs
- G-1145 (optional)



OPT TIMELINE



OPT timing tips

- Application must be received by USCIS before the grace period ends
- OPT will end no more than 14 months after program end date, regardless of processing time
- OPT typically takes 90 days to be approved
- Can only begin working once you have your EAD card in-hand and employment start date has arrived
- Cannot cancel OPT after your application is approved
- OPT will be ended if you begin a new academic program or transfer to a new school

After mailing your application to USCIS

In approximately two weeks, you will get a receipt from USCIS confirming they have received your application and are processing it. You can check the status of your application through the USCIS website (egov.uscis.gov/casestatus) using your receipt number. Your application will be in initial review for most of the processing time — this is a good sign. Once your EAD card arrives and your start date has passed, you may begin working somewhere in your field of study. If your EAD card is approved after your requested employment start date, the start and end dates will be adjusted to give you the full benefit of your authorized period of employment.

WHEN APPROVED FOR OPT

- You are still in F-1 student status and using a benefit of that status
- Your I-20 is still valid — the second page shows OPT dates even though date on first page has passed
- F-1 status is now dependent on employment — up to 90 days of unemployment are allowed or you are out of status
- Report employment information to the International Center within 10 days of starting or ending a job or changing employers
- Use myStatus (mystatus.missouri.edu) to report employer's name and address (any and every time you are employed or switch employers)

TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE U.S.

Traveling before graduation

If you leave, carry with you a letter from your department stating that you have not yet graduated. You will also need the usual travel documents (I-20 with travel signature, passport, visa).

Traveling after graduation with pending OPT

You may re-enter the U.S. while your OPT application is pending in order to resume searching for a job. You will need:

- Valid passport and visa
- I-20 signed for travel within the past six months
- OPT receipt notice (proof of pending OPT)

Traveling after graduation with OPT approval

You may re-enter the U.S. if you have proof of employment. You will need:

- Valid passport and visa
- I-20 signed for travel within the past six months
- EAD card (it will say “Not valid for re-entry” — but don't worry)
- Letter from employer stating that you need to return to the U.S. to resume working

