

# 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: Certain circumstances allow for you to apply to extend OPT for an additional 24 months

### Who is eligible?

To be eligible for OPT, you must:

- 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.

### What are post-completion OPT requirements?

- Maintain F-1 status by being employed (instead of enrolled)
- Report employment to the International Center (tracks your unemployment period)
- Work full-time (21+ hours per week)
- Maintain paid or unpaid employment with one or multiple employers (can switch employers)
- Part-time, incidental course work 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 an online document request ([drms.missouri.edu](https://drms.missouri.edu)).

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

### APPLYING FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

Before applying for OPT, you should review the International Center website and attend an OPT workshop. You may then submit the following to the center:

- OPT online document request
- OPT workshop review
- USCIS form I-765 — use (c)(3)(b) as the eligibility code
- OPT adviser verification form
- Copies of immigration documents: previous I-20s, I-94, visa, passport biographical page
- Copy of job offer letter (if you have one)
- Previous off-campus employment history documentation

### International Center's role

While an international student adviser can recommend OPT in SEVIS, USCIS must approve your application. After you submit your documents to the International Center, your adviser will:

- Verify you are in lawful F-1 status
- Create a new I-20 with OPT recommendation
- Review the rest of your OPT application materials and return the application to you with mailing instructions

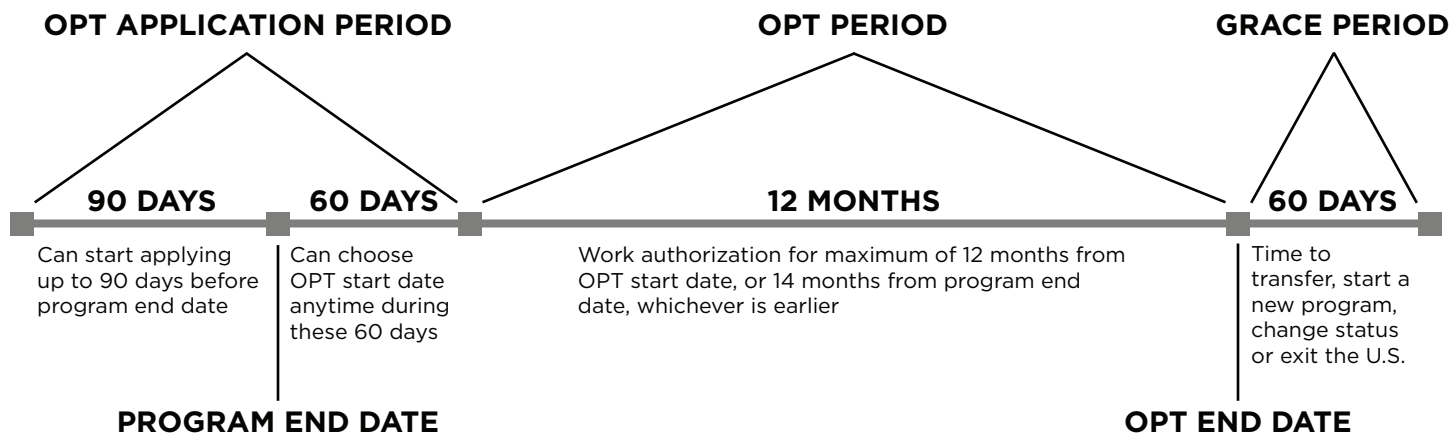
**Mailing the application to USCIS is your responsibility.**

### 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
- Copy of new OPT I-20
- Copies of previous I-20s
- Copies of I-94, visa, previous EADs, passport page
- Job offer letter (if you have one)
- G-1145 (optional)



## OPT TIMELINE



### OPT timing tips

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

### After mailing your application to USCIS

In two to three weeks, you will get a receipt from USCIS to let you know they have received your application and are processing it. You can check the status of your application through the USCIS website using your receipt number (in the upper left-hand corner of receipt notice). 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 program 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 third page shows OPT dates even though date on first page has passed
- F-1 status is now dependent on employment — up to 90 days allowed for unemployment 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 Document Request System ([drs.missouri.edu](http://drs.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

