

F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT) Application

Please Read through this packet to understand the basics of OPT. You can apply by following the Application Instructions on how to prepare and submit your materials to the Office of International Education for review and a Recommendation for OPT and how to file with USCIS.

What is "OPT"?

Answer: Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a 12-month work benefit allowed to international students in F-1 immigration status who are enrolled in, or completing a degree program in the U.S. This employment card can be used pre-completion of studies, over the annual vacation or leave term, or post-completion of studies, after the student finishes the degree. Work can be done at one or several locations for any amount of hours at any rate of pay. Note that post-completion OPT must be full-time. OPT is an extension of F-1 status and is not a 'work visa' and does not require you to remain at one company for the entire OPT period.

What is the difference between CPT and OPT?

Answer: In short, CPT is employment that is required to successfully complete a course or internship. OPT is employment that is directly related to the student's major but not part of the student's curriculum and is typically used after graduation.

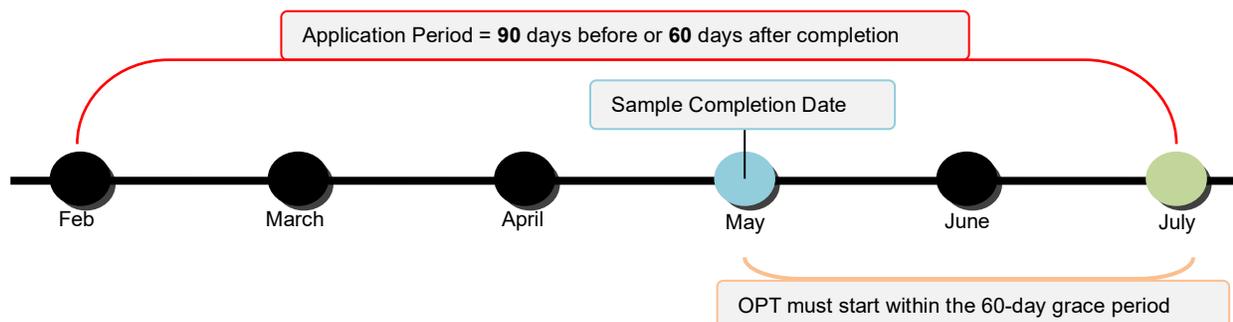
To be eligible for OPT, students must...

- be in full-time F-1 status for at least one academic year. *Some students who have changed their visa status to F-1 and who have been continuously enrolled in a full-time degree program for at least 1 academic year may qualify for OPT prior to 1 year in F-1 status. See an OIE adviser for more information.*
- be seeking employment in the major field of study listed on their current I-20.
- be completing their program of study at IUP. See IUP's OPT page for more information.
- be physically present in the United States at time of the application to USCIS.
- NOT have used more than 1 year of full-time CPT during their current degree level (part-time doesn't count).

When can I apply for OPT?

Answer: The earliest you may apply for OPT is 90 days (3-months) prior to the completion of studies, and the latest you may apply for OPT is 60 days following program completion. It can take several months to receive the OPT work card, so we recommend that you apply at least 90 days prior to the beginning of your intended job opportunity. See the timeline below for additional information.

Sample Application Timeline. The dates on this sample may not correspond with the dates you will apply for OPT:



When should I apply?

Answer: Apply early! It takes about three to five months to receive your EAD from the USCIS. Expedites are not available.

- The earliest USCIS can receive the application is 90 days before the date of your program completion.
- The latest USCIS can receive the application is the 60th day following your completion date, assuming you do not leave the U.S.

- It can take up to two weeks to prepare the OPT application before sending to USCIS (especially for busy students!)

How long does it take to get authorization for OPT and when should I apply?

Answer: Authorization for OPT is granted by USCIS can take 3 or more months to obtain. Therefore, it is important that you apply 3 months before you finish your last final. You may apply for post-graduation OPT up to 90 days before your completion date and the immigration service must receive your application no later than 60 days beyond your completion date or 60 days beyond the end date of your I-20 (whichever is earlier) or, if you are an advanced graduate student, no later than 60 days beyond the last day that you are registered as a student or the end date of your I-20 (whichever is earlier). You cannot apply more than 120 days before the start date you choose. USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of getting a new OPT I-20 from the OIE.

Do I need a job to be eligible to apply for OPT?

Answer: No, you do not need a job offer prior to applying for OPT, and your job may be anywhere in the United States. You may also change jobs during the course of your OPT period, but you must notify Office of International Education of any interruption or change to your employment status so your SEVIS record can be updated.

What if I don't file within 30 days of getting my OPT I-20? What if I file and get an RFE or application rejection?

Answer: Contact the OIE immediately.

What is my "completion date"?

Answer: The "completion date" for OPT purposes is defined as follows:

- For **undergraduates**: the last day of final exams of the semester in which degree requirements are fulfilled.
- For **Master's/PhD**: the day on which all degree requirements are fulfilled, such as filing the thesis/dissertation in the Graduate Division.

Changing your completion date can cause serious complications for your OPT application. If for some reason you need to change your completion date after the OPT I-20 is created, speak to an Advisor at the OIE as soon as possible.

What dates should I choose?

Answer: Typically the OPT start date must be within 60 days after your completion date. Your OPT end date will be 12 months later. Talk with your international advisor when selecting dates.

When can I start working?

Answer: You must wait until you receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS and your start date has arrived to begin working. Once you complete your degree, you cannot work on-campus or off-campus until you receive the EAD and your start date has arrived.

What counts as employment?

Answer: OPT is intended to enhance your academic program by providing a means to gain experience in your field of study. Work NOT related to your program of study is a violation of F-1 status. Students on post-completion OPT must work over 20 hours a week in either a **paid or unpaid** position to qualify as employment. More than one position can be reported to meet full-time requirements.

What happens if I cannot find a job?

Answer: During post-completion OPT, students may not accrue a total of more than 90 days of unemployment. See "What counts as employment?" question above on what you can do to satisfy the employment requirement.

What is my status while I am on OPT?

Answer: Students on OPT or with a pending OPT application are still in **F-1 status** and must maintain their F-1 status by following the employment and address reporting requirements. Students may remain in the U.S. while their OPT Application is pending.

Can I travel while I am on OPT?

Answer: Generally, yes, travel on OPT is possible, but students will need to time their re-entry and carry the correct documents upon re-entry to the U.S. Please refer to the OPT Application Guide for details and things to consider depending on the timing of your re-entry.

What if my visa has expired?

Answer: Students who plan to travel outside the U.S. will need a valid F-1 visa to re-enter the U.S. The OPT Application Guide discusses important points and instructions on applying for a visa while on OPT. Applying for a visa while on OPT is very risky.

What else do I have to do while I am on OPT?

Answer: You must **report your employment** and current residential address via [Reporting OPT Employment Form](#). Any changes should be reported within 10 days. Reporting employment through the SEVP Portal is not adequate and does not count as maintaining status.

What about health insurance?

Answer: Students can purchase OPT health insurance from the many plans available to international students during their OPT period.

What are the available OPT extensions?

There are two available OPT extensions—the H-1B Cap-Gap Extension and the STEM Extension. Only eligible post completion OPT students may apply for these two extensions. If you plan on applying for either of these extensions in the future, you must have at least part of your original 12 month OPT remaining to use as post completion OPT.

H-1B Cap-Gap Extension.

The cap gap extension allows certain students with pending or approved cap-subject H-1B petitions to remain in the U.S. until the start date of their approved H-1B employment period, even if the OPT authorization or F-1 grace period would have otherwise expired before October 1.

You are eligible for the cap-gap extension if:

- Your employer files a cap-subject H-1B petition on your behalf on or after April 1 and requests a change of status to H-1B to begin October 1, and
- The employer files the H-1B petition on your behalf within your OPT authorization period or the 60-day grace period.

The length of your extension will depend on the dates of your OPT authorization or grace period. It will also depend on whether your H-1B petition has been filed, selected for receipting, or approved. Contact the OIE if you have questions or need to request a new I-20 listing your cap-gap extension.

STEM Extension:

If you are an F-1 student whose OPT is based on a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree in a [STEM field](#) (as defined by the Department of Homeland Security [DHS]), check to see if the CIP (major code) on the STEM list matches the major CIP code on your I-20. We cannot change the CIP code on the I-20 it is what IUP has selected for your major. The STEM Extension must be filed while you are on OPT, and you must file with a specific employer. You are permitted to change employers while on STEM OPT, but additional paperwork is required before you can start working. Contact your OIE Advisor for more information.

SAMPLE DEPARTMENT LETTER FOR OPT APPLICATION

USE IUP LETTERHEAD

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Date: .../ ... /.....

This is to verify that *Student's Name*, an *undergraduate/graduate* student in the Department of ---, will complete their degree in *Month Year*.

It would be beneficial for this student to acquire practical experience in their field. Participating in the one-year Optional Practical Training (OPT) would serve them well.

If you require any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Name
Chair/Academic Advisor/Graduate Coordinator

Step 1: Prepare OPT Application Materials

Begin by completing this application and the list of documents below which are part of the OPT application that will be submitted to USCIS for processing. See Step 2 for how to submit the documents to the Office of International Education for an OPT recommendation. .

Family Name: _____

Given Name: _____

IUP Banner ID: _____

I-20 Program End Date : _____

Email address you will use after graduation: _____

Telephone: _____

Have you been authorized for OPT in the past? No Yes - From: _____ To: _____

If you have been authorized for OPT in the past, on which degree level was it based? Bachelor's Master's Ph.D.

When do you expect to graduate? Semester: _____
Year: _____

Are you currently employed on campus?
 No Yes - Until: _____

Requested OPT Authorization Dates: *Start Date : _____ End Date : _____

*Start date must be within 60 days of your program completion date.

Here is a list of documents required for the OPT Application:

- Complete the IUP OPT Application and sign IUP OPT Student Responsibility Page (page 4-5 in this application)
- Complete USCIS [form G-1145](#) E-Notification for Application/Petition Acceptance & [form I-765](#). Use the link to the form and complete the PDF. Do **not** submit an online or paper I-765 application until you have the new I-20 recommending OPT from OIE.
- Submit two passport-style photos. Write on the back of your 2 photos Name, SEVIS Number (N_____), I-94 Number, and Date of Birth. You can check your photos here <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/how-apply/photos.html>
- USCIS OPT Fees and Payment Options can be [found online](#). Submit a check or money order made payable to the "U.S. Department of Homeland Security."
- Copy of your passport picture page and passport expiration date. Your passport must be valid.
- Copy of your most recent F-1 visa.
- Copy of your most recent I-94, front and back. You may print your I-94 record from <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94>.
- Any previously issued Employment Authorization Document (EAD), if applicable.
- Evidence of any previous OPT and/or CPT, if applicable.
- New I-20 recommending OPT and copy of pages 1 and 2 of all I-20s ever issued from IUP and previous schools.
- Letter from department recommending OPT (See Example on Page 3).
- These do not get submitted to USCIS – but are required for OPT processing:
 - Pay the IUP OPT Processing Fee of \$100 via [IUP Market Place](#) and submit a receipt of this fee with your application.
 - Copy of your IUP transcript (your unofficial transcript can be printed from MyIUP)

IUP OPT Student Responsibility Agreement

I have fully read all slides in the [OPT Guide](#) : I understand OPT application procedures and the responsibilities required for maintaining F-1 status during my period of OPT authorization as stated in this form, in the OPT Tutorial. I understand I am solely responsible for submitting a proper & timely OPT application and for maintaining my F-1 student status during OPT. It is my responsibility to sign and date my OPT Application. OPT is a benefit of my F-1 status and not a right. There is no guarantee that my application will be approved.

Write and sign the following statement below: I must file OPT application within 30 days of receiving it from my advisor. I must report OPT employment to the OIE within 90 days of my EAD start date. I can work only during the dates on my EAD card. I must notify the OIE if I move.

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

I understand that:

- I must receive a new I-20 from OIE showing "OPT Requested" before filing with USCIS, or USCIS will deny my OPT application.
- Once my EAD is approved I may have to be available for USPS delivery signature. (This is a new process being implemented - we're not sure of the exact date this will start).
- I will provide the OIE with a legible copy of the front and back of my EAD card when I receive it.
- DHS regulations require me to seek employment directly related to my major area of study and commensurate with my education level. Even if I am doing volunteer work, it must be related to my field of study.
- The first day I'm eligible to work is the Start Date listed on my EAD card. I cannot work until I physically have the card.
- I cannot accrue 90 days or more of unemployment at any time during OPT. If I do not report my employer information to the IUP OIE, unemployment will continue to accrue. SEVP may automatically terminate my SEVIS Record if no employer is listed.
- My address must be reported to the IUP OIE within 10 days of moving. This information can be updated by completing the [Reporting OPT Employment for SEVIS Record online form](#). This must be my residential address, not the address of my employer or friend.
- I am required to update my employment or any changes of employer names, address, or interruption of employment to the OIE by using the [Reporting OPT Employment for SEVIS Record Online Form](#). If I am employed off-site, I should report my physical location of employment to the OIE as well as my company's address. I understand that just updating my SEVP Portal with employment information is insufficient, and I must complete the OIE Form to maintain my status.
- If I decide to depart the U.S. and not use all of my OPT or if my immigration status changes (to H1B or other status), I am required to inform the OIE (send copies of departure flight or copies of new status within 10 days of the change).
- Failure to do the above could result in loss of my legal non-immigrant status and that if this occurs, I may have to stop working and/or leave the US.

TRAVEL AND END OF OPT:

- If I decide to travel while on OPT I must have a valid I-20 signed by a DSO within six months before reentering the U.S., an unexpired EAD card, a valid passport, a valid employment letter, and a valid F-1 visa stamp to be readmitted to the U.S. The employment letter should contain a statement that the employment is temporary and verification that I will be employed after returning from travel. Even with all this it can be a risk to travel outside the US while on OPT.
- My authorization to engage in OPT is automatically terminated if I transfer to another school or begin a new degree or certificate program.

My signature confirms that the information provided on this form is true and accurate and that I read and understand the Student Responsibility Statement listed above (electronic signatures not permitted). I understand the rules and regulations concerning my engagement in Optional Practical Training (OPT) and agree to all conditions listed above. It is my responsibility to stay informed about changing federal regulations that may impact my OPT or F-1 status. Failure to follow F-1 regulations and the above statements could result in the termination of my F-1 status.

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Step 2: Submit your OPT Application to your International Advisor for Review

Submit your entire OPT application to the IUP International Portal: <https://international.iup.edu> click on UPLOAD DOCUMENTS and find the OPT section to upload documents. As of February 2022, USCIS accepts electronic or mailed applications. Choose how you will apply and upload the appropriate documents. USCIS strongly encourages electronic filing. Each document has to be submitted as a separate file the meets these requirements: JPG, JPEG, PDF, TIF, or TIFF / no encryption or password-protection / under 6MB / file name only includes English characters. Email your advisor once your documents are submitted. If you cannot access the portal, email your international advisor, and we will help you register for your portal account. OIE International Advisor will review your files and respond to you via email or a zoom appointment. When your application is complete, you will receive an OPT I-20 recommendation and filing instructions.

The screenshot shows the IUP International Portal interface. The top navigation bar includes 'IUP Indiana University of Pennsylvania', 'Information', 'Upload Documents', 'Visa Status Information', and 'Welcome, Sara Baker'. The main content area is titled '3. OPT Request (if eligible)' and indicates '11 documents required'. Below this, it shows 'Requirement Type: Document' and 'Requirement Status: Needs Submission', with a 'Submit for Approval' button. A 'Documents' section contains an 'Add new document' button and a table with columns for 'Document Type', 'Document Name', 'File Name', and 'Document Status'. The table currently displays 'No Documents Found'.

Step 3: Submit you Application to USCIS - Mail or File Electronic I-765

If you are filing online, follow steps in electronic I-765 guide. If you are filing by mail, once you receive an OPT I-20 and edits for your OPT Application – make sure to check all documents carefully. Print all documents and sign them with an original signature – not a digital signature.

- Put documents in this order:
 - Photos and money (money order- recommended, check, or credit card form)
 - Completed G1145 and I765 (signed by hand in black ink)
 - Copy of all pages of OPT I-20 and previous I-20s.
 - Copy of your passport picture page, F-1 visa, and I-94.
 - Copy of any previously issued Employment Authorization Document (EAD), if applicable.
- Mail to this address – use tracking #.

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>U.S. Postal Service (USPS) USCIS Chicago Lockbox USCIS PO Box 805373 Chicago, IL 60680</p> | <p>FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries: USCIS Attn: I-765 C03 131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor Chicago, IL 60603-5517</p> |
|--|---|

- Within 30 days – students will receive an email with your USCIS Receipt # and a Mailed receipt from USCIS. You can track your case online here: Once your case is approved, you will receive an OPT Card in the mail.
- Refer to page 5 with what your responsibilities during OPT.