
Optional Practical Training

International Student Services Office of Admissions and Records

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is temporary work authorization granted to F-1 students. The purpose is to allow the students to receive practical training through employment in their field of study for a total of 12 months per degree level (e.g. B.S., M.S., etc). OPT used prior to the completion of studies is subtracted from the 12 month total. Students who graduate with a degree in selected fields who work for an E-verify employer are eligible to apply for a one-time 17 month OPT extension to start upon the completion of their initial 12 month period. **The following information pertains to the application procedures and eligibility requirements for the initial 12 month period of OPT only.** Students who may be eligible for the 17 month extension should discuss it with a DSO following the approval of their initial 12 month period.

Eligibility Requirements

- Student must be in valid F-1 status.
- Student must have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for at least one academic year.
- All OPT employment must be directly related to the major field of study on the I-20.
- OPT application must be properly filed and receipted by the USCIS before the completion of your academic program.
- Each period of OPT requested requires a recommendation from a Designated School Official (DSO) made in SEVIS, a completed I-765 and a required fee to obtain an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Immigration Status While on OPT

Although students on OPT will no longer be pursuing coursework, they are still considered by the U.S. government to be in F-1 student visa status under the authority of the OU Health Sciences Center. For this reason, students need to report the following events to the OUHSC so that their SEVIS record may be maintained properly:

- *Within 10 days of any changes to address or legal name*
- *Within 10 days of any change in employment (change in employer, change in employer's address, losing a job, finding a job, adding a second job, etc)*
- Upon change of immigration status
- Upon enrolling in a new educational program

Students whose status has been extended to bridge the "cap-gap" between the end of their OPT and the beginning of their authorized H-1b period are still considered to be in F-1 status, and must therefore comply with all reporting requirements until the H-1b period begins.

Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

Upon approval of your OPT application, USCIS will issue you a form I-766 Employment Authorization Document (EAD), a small card featuring your photo, type and dates of employment authorization. This document is to be used as verification of your employment authorization for I-9 purposes. You may not begin employment until you have received your EAD card and you may only be employed for the dates listed on the EAD card.

When to apply

Students may apply for OPT up to 90 days before and up to 60 days after the end of their program. OPT applications must be adjudicated by USCIS. Processing times can vary, but typically range between 60 – 120 days. For this reason, we recommend that you apply at least 90 days prior to your desired start date. Due to the length of processing required, we do not recommend that you apply after the completion of your program unless you are unsure of when you will graduate.

Dates

The dates on your application will be submitted to USCIS as the dates for your OPT employment. These dates will be noted on your EAD card as the approved dates for your period of authorized employment. No other dates will be valid. If you have any questions about which dates you would like, please consult with a DSO. **You may not begin employment until the first day of authorization (as indicated on the EAD) has been reached, and you have actually received the EAD card.**

You may only work until the end date listed on your EAD card with only two exceptions:

- If you have applied and received approval for a change of status to H-1b which must start at the beginning of the next fiscal year (October 1). In this case, immigration regulations provide employment authorization during the time between the end of your authorized OPT and the beginning of your approved H-1b status.

- If you have submitted an application for a 17 month OPT extension prior to the end of your current period of OPT, your employment authorization will be extended until the application is adjudicated. Once adjudicated, the OPT extension period will start immediately upon the completion of the initial period of OPT, regardless of the date of adjudication.

Do not assume that your employment authorization has been automatically extended unless you have verified your status with a DSO at the OUHSC.

Date of completion of program – For undergraduate students, this is the last day of coursework during the final semester. For graduate students, this is the date the thesis/dissertation is successfully defended or the last day of coursework during the final semester.

Students may not work on campus after the date of completion as certified on the OPT application!

If the Program End Date (item xx) on your I-20 is in the future, the end of your program is considered to be the date of completion of your program, not the end date as listed on your I-20. The Program End Date on your I-20 will be adjusted to match the date of completion of your program.

Students may begin employment any time within the 60 day grace period following the completion of studies. The earliest OPT may begin is the day after the completion of your program and the latest you may begin OPT is 59 days after the completion of your program.

OPT is automatically terminated when a student begins a new program of study or when there is a change in level of study.

Application Procedures

Step 1

Meet with your academic advisor to verify that you will be meeting the requirements for graduation and have him/her complete the Final Semester Verification Form.

Step 2

Bring the following documents to the Office of Admissions and Records, 200 BSE, to have the OPT recommendation made in SEVIS:

- 2 copies of Passport, I-94, Visa
- Current Form I-20 with OPT dates on 3rd page
- Passport (must be valid at least 6 months in the future)
- Visa
- Form I-94
- Completed OPT Request Form
- Final Semester Verification Form signed by your academic advisor
- Prior EAD cards (if applicable)
- Completed form I-765 (using the OUHSC Office of Admissions and Records address), you will be notified upon receipt of the EAD Card.
 - Item #16 should include the following codes:
 - Pre-completion OPT: (c)(3)(A)
 - Post-completion OPT: (c)(3)(B)
 - Item #17 only applies to STEM extensions, and should be left blank

- Two passport sized photos
- Required application fee – a check or money order for \$380 made payable to Department of Homeland Security

Step 3

A DSO will recommend OPT in SEVIS and issue another I-20 noting the OPT. The DSO will assemble all of the documentation to be mailed to USCIS in order to receive your EAD card.

Step 4

Your EAD card will be mailed to the Office of Admissions and Records, who will forward it to you upon receipt. You may not begin employment until you have received your EAD card.

*****Note:** You may submit your OPT request to USCIS up to 90 days prior to degree completion. Processing may take 60-120 days, and is impossible to predict. It is highly recommended that you apply for OPT early!

Requirements while on Optional Practical Training

- ✓ OPT authorization is date-specific. Beginning employment prior to the authorization date or continuing employment after the end date of the authorization will be considered unauthorized off-campus employment and the student will therefore be considered out-of-status.
- ✓ OPT is ___not employer specific. You may change employers at will during your period of OPT; however, you must report all changes in employment to a DSO within 48 hours of the change. This includes the name and address of your employer, addition of a second employer, loss of employment, change of employer, periods of unemployment, etc. Failure to do so may result in the loss of your status as an F-1 student pursuing OPT.
- ✓ F-1 status while on OPT is employment-based. Regulations allow students to have gaps in employment of no more than 90 days during the initial 12 month OPT period or 120 days aggregate for students who have received the 17 month extension. Further periods of unemployment may result in the termination of your status. All periods of unemployment must be reported to a DSO at the OUHSC.
- ✓ OPT employment must be in the area of study as listed in SEVIS and printed on the I-20. Students who have double majors may seek employment in either area of study. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the employment is in a field related to his/her field of study. If immigration officials determine that a student's employment is unrelated to the field of study, it may result in a loss of the student's status.
- ✓ F-1 visa holders on OPT must receive travel authorization from a DSO prior to travel for the duration of the OPT period. During the period of OPT, the DSO endorsement on page 3 of the I-20 is only valid for 6 months, unlike the one year period of validity during the course of study. Students should receive a travel endorsement prior to each period of travel outside the US.
- ✓ Travel while on OPT is somewhat riskier than travel during the field of study. Students are encouraged to discuss risk factors with a DSO prior to any travel abroad while on OPT.
- ✓ Regulations permit one year of OPT per educational level. Students pursuing a second degree at the same educational level (i.e. a second M.S.) who were granted 12 months of OPT at the first educational program may not be authorized for additional OPT for the second degree. Students may receive an additional year of OPT at a higher educational level, however, students may only receive one 17 month extension per lifetime and may not receive an additional extension at a higher educational level.
- ✓ Students remain in F-1 status for the duration of their OPT and during the cap-gap period, and are required to report the changes or updates to the following to a DSO:
 - ✓ Address
 - ✓ Phone number
 - ✓ E-mail address
 - ✓ Legal name
 - ✓ Immigration status
 - ✓ Employer name
 - ✓ Employer Address
 - ✓ Employment status
 - ✓ Addition or termination of a secondary employment
 - ✓ Loss of employment
 - ✓ All dates of unemployment
- ✓ The OUHSC ISS office will contact all students on OPT regularly to request verification of status. It is the student's responsibility to respond to these requests in addition to reporting other changes as outlined above. Failure to do so may result in loss of immigration status.
- ✓ ***Students applying for post-completion OPT will have their program end dates changed to reflect program completion prior to the beginning of OPT. Students may not work on campus following the program end date on the new I-20 bearing OPT authorization, even if they do not complete their academic program on that date. Students who do not complete their academic program by the authorized program end date must discuss their options with a DSO as soon as possible.***

Student Certification

I have read and understand the above requirements pertaining to my period of authorized OPT. I agree to comply with all reporting requirements associated with my period of authorized OPT and to ensure that the International Student Services office at the OU HSC has current contact information for me at all times so that they may keep me up-to-date with regulatory updates and reporting requirements. I understand that failure to comply with reporting requirements may result in the loss of my status as an F-1 non-immigrant visa holder and authorization for Optional Practical Training. I understand that once I reach the program end date listed on my OPT authorized I-20 that I will no longer be eligible for on-campus student employment.

Sign Name

Print Name

Date

For more information or to make required reports to a DSO, students should contact:

International Student Services
Office of Admissions and Records
941 Stanton L. Young Blvd., BSEB 200
Oklahoma City, OK 73104
(405) 271-2359

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