

Optional Practical Training for Students on F-1 Visas

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is permission for off-campus employment directly related to a student's major field of study, granted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS). OPT enables students to gain work experience in their field of study. 12 months of OPT is available per degree level (e.g. Bachelor's, Master's, PhD, etc.) for students of any major as long as the subsequent degree is at a higher educational level. OPT may be used before or after completion of a program. Students with certain majors in science, technology, engineering or math may be eligible for a 24 month extension of post-completion OPT. International Student Services (ISS) must recommend OPT for a student. USCIS then provides final approval and issues an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). Individuals must have an EAD before they can begin OPT employment. **OPT authorization granted by USCIS cannot be changed, voided, or canceled.**

Eligibility Requirements:

- Completed one full academic year of full-time study
- Maintained Valid F-1 status
- Employment must be in the student's major field of study. You do not need a job at the time you apply.
- Have not been authorized for 12 months or more full time CPT (Curricular Practical Training) at the educational level for which the student will apply for OPT
- Have not regained legal status through reentry during the previous academic year
- Have passed the OPT quiz administered by ISS

NOTE: You lose your OPT eligibility if you depart the U.S. during your grace period following the completion of your degree and USCIS has not received your OPT application prior to your departure.

OPT Categories

1. *Pre-completion*
 - a. Academic Year
During fall and/or spring semesters and student has not completed required coursework. On- and off-campus work combined may not exceed a total of 20 hours per week.
 - b. Vacation Period
Authorization may be part-time or full-time.
2. *Post-completion*
 - For students who do not need to complete a master's degree Plan A or Plan B paper or a Ph.D. thesis, the date of completion is the final day of the last semester of required coursework, as indicated on the University's academic calendar.
 - For students who need to complete a master's degree Plan A or Plan B paper or a Ph.D. thesis, the date of completion is the student's choice of either (a) completion of all required classroom credits (including thesis credits); (b) the day the student has completed all requirements for the degree, including submission of the final paper or thesis; or (c) the last day of the month that the student

submits the final paper or thesis. Students may not postpone the completion date by "holding" a completed thesis. Once defense and thesis revisions are completed, the thesis must be submitted within a reasonable time after defense.

When to Apply:

- Pre-completion Applications can be submitted to ISS 100 days before your requested employment start date.
- Post-completion Applications can be submitted to ISS 100 days before your expected date of completion

Step 1: Request an OPT Recommendation from ISS

ISS must process a recommendation for your OPT request and prepare a new I-20. Allow 5 working days for ISS to complete this process. Please submit the following items to the ISS adviser. ISS cannot accept your application for processing unless all these items are completed. Please submit:

- Student Request/Academic Adviser Verification Form
- Draft Form I-765*
- OPT Quiz (contact an ISS advisor for a link to the quiz)

*Form I-765 and instructions for completing Form I-765 can be found on the USCIS website (go to "FORMS"): <http://www.uscis.gov> (please also see links below for additional I-765 instructions).

Step 2: Submit the Following Items to USCIS

- For instructions on submitting the online I-765 application:
 - <https://z.umn.edu/Online-I-765>
- If you prefer to submit a paper I-765 application and mail it to USCIS, contact an ISS advisor.
- Do NOT submit more than one OPT application to USCIS (e.g. only submit the online form or only submit the paper form, do not submit both).

Step 3: Wait for EAD to be mailed from USCIS

- It usually takes approximately 2.5 to 5 months for USCIS to process your request and mail your EAD to the address on Form I-765.
- You should receive a receipt notice (Form I-797) from USCIS (online or via mail depending on how you applied).
- If you change your address during this time, you must file form AR-11 online, call USCIS to update the address, AND update it in your MyU.
- If there is a problem with your application, you may receive a request for evidence from USCIS. If you do, bring the RFE and a copy of your OPT application materials to ISS for assistance.
- You may not begin OPT employment until you have received your EAD, even if your requested start date has passed.

- You may not continue student employment (including assistantships) after the completion date in section 3 ("Program of Study") of your OPT I-20, even if you have not yet completed your degree. Any on- or off-campus employment after this completion date must be with OPT authorization.
- The EAD will reflect the dates of your employment authorization.

Step 4: Requirements while you are on OPT

- During OPT you are still in F-1 status at UMD
- ISS is required to have a copy of your EAD. Upon receipt of the EAD, go to MyISSS (<https://myissss.umn.edu/>) and upload a copy of the front and back of the EAD card.
- If you have applied for post completion OPT before you finish your final paper or thesis, you must complete all degree requirements by the OPT end date. A program extension is not possible after this date.
- Official admission to a new degree program or transfer to a new school during OPT will void any remaining time on your EAD. This time cannot be re-captured at a later date.
- Enrollment "for administrative purposes" (Grad 999) is allowed.
- You must continue to update your Current Mailing address through your MyU
- As a person on an F-1 visa at UMD, you are required to have the University health insurance at all times. If you have an employer-sponsored group health plan, you may request a waiver. Talk to your ISS advisor about how to continue your insurance.
- You must report to ISS the following information by completing the OPT Employer Report Google Form:
 - Name of your employer, your address, and your employment start date
 - Any changes in your employer and their address
 - Any interruption in your employment or periods of unemployment.
- You may not accumulate more than 90 days of unemployment during the 12 month period of initial post-completion OPT. Employment must be 20 hours per week or more. Volunteer work or unpaid internships in your field at your degree level count as employment. Keep written documentation of all employment.
- If you have accumulated 90 days of unemployment, you will no longer be in F-1 status. If you contact ISS to report this information before your status expires, you will have a 15 day grace period to depart the U.S. If your F-1 status expires, you are required to leave the U.S. immediately. You will not be granted a 15 day grace period if you do not report to ISS.
- Notify ISS if you decide to permanently depart the U.S. during your OPT
- Notify ISS if you change your visa status during your OPT.
- Students should also report their employment information to ISS every time there is a change (change in employer, unemployment, change in location, hours, etc.)

Travel during Post-completion OPT

- Under normal circumstances, a student who has both (1) an EAD for post-completion OPT and (2) a job or job offer should not experience difficulty reentering the U.S. If either of these two conditions is missing, then the student is assuming risk.
- Travel signatures are only valid for 6 months.
- When you have completed your degree, your expenses and source(s) of funds might have changed. Please complete the Financial Certification for Students on OPT Google form to update your finances. Once you have applied for post-completion OPT, ISS will only produce a new I-20 if you have provided ISS with a photocopy of your EAD

Disclaimer

- ISS is able to provide you with general guidance. However, any advice provided to you by our office, as well as the information in this packet, should not be construed as legal advice. Additionally, due to the fluid nature of governmental interpretation, USCIS may change its interpretation of these immigration laws/regulations and eligibility requirements for benefits, at any time. We will do our best to provide you with the most current guidance. Each case is fact-specific and it is advised that you contact an experienced immigration attorney if you have questions regarding your situation.

Additional Information

USCIS Case Status

- Once you receive your receipt number from USCIS, you can check your case status online: <https://egov.uscis.gov/caststatus>

SEVP Portal Account

- If your OPT is approved and your approved start date has passed, you will receive an email from SEVP inviting you to make an SEVP Portal account.
- Having an SEVP Portal account is not required, but can be a good way to make sure your reported information is up to date and accurate.
- Please Note: When creating an account, it will use your UMD email address minus the d. (i.e. x500@umn.edu)
- You can update your employer information by completing the ISS OPT Employer Report Google form or by updating the information through your SEVP Portal account.

Optional Practical Training—Student Request and Academic Adviser Verification

STUDENT REQUEST – Student will complete this portion.

1. Student Name _____
Family name First name Middle Name

2. UMD Student ID# _____ 3. SEVIS ID# _____

4. Email _____ 5. Phone _____

6. Academic Major on I-20 _____ 7. Degree Level on I-20 (e.g., BA, BS, MA, MS, PhD) _____

8. Students completing a master’s program, check on: Plan A Plan B Plan C or coursework only

9. I-20 expiration date _____ Passport expiration date _____ Visa expiration date _____
Month/Day/Year Month/Day/Year Month/Day/Year

10. Type of optional practical training: Pre-completion part-time / full-time
 Post-completion. All coursework finished by completion date.
 Post-completion. All program requirements will be completed.

11. Read below, and write your date of degree completion here _____
Month/Day/Year

- The date written here will be the new end date indicated in section 3 “Program of Study” on your OPT I-20. Any work, on- or off-campus, after this end date will require OPT authorization. Previously authorized CPT will be expired.
- For students who are NOT completing a Master’s degree Plan A or Plan B paper or a Ph.D. thesis, this is the final day of your last semester of required coursework, as indicated on the University’s academic calendar.
- For students completing a Master’s degree Plan A or B paper or a Ph.D. thesis, this date is either (a) the day you complete all required classroom credits (including thesis credits); (b) the day you complete all requirements for your degree, including submission of your final paper; or (c) the last day of the month you submit your final paper or thesis.
- Once you have applied for post-completion OPT, you are no longer eligible for a program extension.

Note: Employment (including assistantships) is not possible after the date of degree completion written above, even if you have not completed your degree until the start date on your EAD. You may not delay completion of your degree to pursue on- or off-campus employment.

12. I want my OPT to begin on _____ and end on _____
Month/Day/Year Month/Day/Year

Note: These dates cannot be changed once your application is sent to USCIS.

13. Describe proposed employment _____

STATEMENT: I have read the information on the attached cover pages regarding optional practical training and fully understand the implications of the authorization during and after my program of study. The information I have provided is true and correct.

Student signature _____ Date _____

ACADEMIC ADVISER VERIFICATION – Academic adviser will complete this portion.

- Please **do not sign this form** if the “Student Request” section above has not been completed.
 - Optional Practical Training (OPT) is work authorization that allows F-1 students to gain practical work experience in their field of study.
 - Most often, students will use OPT to work for one year after completion of their degree, known as “post-completion OPT.”
 - Students are not required to have an employment offer to apply.
 - Review the “Student Request” section (above) and indicate below whether the information is correct (you agree) or incorrect (you disagree).
 - If you have questions, please call an ISS adviser at 218-726-7305
- I agree with the information above. I disagree with the information above.

Academic adviser signature _____ Date _____

Name (please print) _____ Phone _____

Department or college _____

FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISER USE ONLY

ISS ADVISER TASKS

- Discuss steps 1-4 with student
- Previous OPT at this degree level?
- More than 12 months full-time CPT?
- Program Plan/Holds/Registration
- Financial Information
- Travel discussed
- Check Assistantship end date, if any
- One Academic Year Met

Date I-765 Reviewed _____

Opt Quiz completion date _____

90 days prior = _____

Date additional OPT info sent = _____

Date submitted to ISS _____

Adviser Comments:

OPT SUMMARY

Type of OPT

- Pre-completion
- Post-completion. All coursework finished by completion date.
- Post-completion. All program requirements will be completed.

Completion date: _____ # of Months: _____

OPT dates: _____ - _____