

General OPT information

Eligibility

F-1 students may be eligible for an initial 12 month period of work authorization following completion of their course of study known as Optional Practical Training, or OPT. (This includes graduate students who have completed all formal coursework and are working on a thesis/dissertation.) OPT before completion of your program is called Pre-Completion OPT – more information on that can be found on our website here:

https://www.lsuhsu.edu/administration/academic/ois/pre_completion_opt.aspx

The following F-1 students are **NOT** eligible for post completion OPT:

- Students who have been enrolled for **less than one academic year** (Fall and Spring semester, can include time spent in a different status which also permits full time study)
- Students who have received **12 months of Full Time Pre-Completion OPT** during their course of study at the same educational level (including a degree from a different institution.)
- Students who have received **12 months of Post Completion OPT** at the same educational level (including degree from a different institution)
- Students who have used **12 months of full time CPT** during their course of study

A job offer is NOT required to apply for Post completion OPT.

Confirmation of eligibility

To confirm the date you will be completing your program, get a letter or memo on departmental letterhead addressed to Remy Allen, Designated School Official, from your faculty sponsor, advisor or program coordinator. This should confirm the expected date of program completion.

A sample text would be:

“This is to confirm that Dr./Mr./Mrs./Ms. (xx) is expected to complete the requirements of the academic program in (xx) at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, School of (xx) on (date).”

Once we receive this, we will adjust the ‘program end date’ listed on your I-20, if needed.

Determining your start date

You will need to request a specific date when you want your OPT to begin. This may be as early as the day after your program completion, but no later than 60 days after the end date listed on your I-20. We will be happy to discuss your date options if you would like, but you will need to make the final decision for the date yourself.

For instance, if your end date is May 18, you can request OPT starting as early as May 19, or as late as July 17.

Timeframe for filing your application

You can file your application for OPT within a 5 month window. It can be received at USCIS as early as 90 days before the program end date on your I-20, or as late as 60 days after that date.

If your end date is May 18, your application can be received as early as February 17 or as late as July 17.

If it's received earlier, your application will be rejected and sent back to you, you will still be eligible to apply again, but your OPT may need to be recommended in SEVIS a second time, and a new I-20 issued. If it's received after 60 days beyond your end date, it will be denied, and you will have lost your eligibility for OPT based on the degree you just completed.

Instructions for filing for OPT by mail

Gather the materials you'll need. These should be copies of the materials you'll send in with your I-765 form.

Arrange an appointment with International Services. We will review your materials and answer any questions you have. If you'd like we can help with the online filing process.

Bring the following items to the scheduled appointment with International Services:

- Confirmation of eligibility (on departmental letterhead)
- Completed draft form I-765 (<https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>, under Forms and Document Downloads)
- Two passport style photos, taken within the past 30 days (name, DOB and SSN# on back)
- Check or money order payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security in the amount of \$410 (this fee may change without notice – check USCIS website for current fee)
- Copy of your passport photo page, visa, and latest I-94
- G-1145 e-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (so USCIS will send you an email confirming your application was received)

If you are eligible for Post Completion OPT, International Services will issue you a new I-20 with an OPT recommendation on page 2.

Sending in your application

Once you have completed your I-765, you will need to mail it to USCIS, either by U.S. Postal Service or another delivery service such as FedEx or UPS. Make sure that you pay for a delivery that includes confirmation of delivery. If you send it by USPS, send it to

USCIS
Attn: I-765 C03
P.O. Box 805373
Chicago, IL 60680-5374

If you send it by FedEx, UPS or DHL, send it to

USCIS
Attn: I-765 C03 (Box 805373)
131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor
Chicago, IL 60603-5517

After submitting your application

A receipt notice will be sent to the email address you list on the G-1145. This will have information on how you can check the progress of your OPT application online. You will also be sent a paper copy to the mailing address you list on the I-765 form.

Approval

Once your application has been approved, you will be sent an Approval Notice and an EAD, or Employment Authorization Document. Check that carefully for any errors. If you find any, contact International Services ***before*** you contact USCIS.

You must have the physical card in your hands, and reached the start date listed on the card, before you start your practical training.

Travel while your OPT application is pending

If you have completed your studies and leave the United States **before your OPT is approved and you have received your EAD**, you *may* not be able to reenter the U.S. in F-1 status. Therefore, we recommend that you do not exit the U.S. before you have received your EAD and have a job identified. If you do not have a job identified, you may also be denied reentry to the U.S.

Practical training may not begin until the Employment Authorization Document has been received or before the start date noted on the EAD.

Reporting Requirements during Post Completion OPT

During OPT, you are required to maintain updated information with International Services. You are required to report/provide:

- Any change in employer. (Name, mailing address and start date, previous employer and end date, if applicable)
- Any interruption in employment. Students on standard Post Completion OPT are permitted a total of 90 days of unemployment during their standard OPT authorization period. Exceeding this limit may impact your eligibility for future immigration benefits and may result in termination of your SEVIS record. If at any point you are within 45 days of this limitation, contact International Services immediately!
- Any change in your name, address or contact information. (A current physical and/or mailing address is required.)
- Any travel plans.
- Any updated documents (Passport, I-94, entry visa, replacement EAD)

Appropriate Employment on Post Completion OPT

Work done for OPT must be "directly related to the student's major area of study." Employment based on an OPT EAD that is not directly related to the major area of study would be considered a status violation. The employment must also be commensurate with your educational level.

Documenting that your OPT employment is appropriate is **your** responsibility, not that of International Services. We recommend that you maintain evidence for each job documenting the position held, proof of the duration of that position, the job title, contact information for your supervisor or manager, and a description of the work. If it is not clear from the job title that the work is related to your degree, we recommend that you get a signed letter from your hiring official, supervisor, or manager explaining how your degree is related to the work performed.

According to SEVP policy guidance, "a student must work at least 20 hours per week in a qualifying position to be considered employed. If a student has a variable schedule, within a month, it should average out to at least 20 hours per week".

If you cannot show that your employment was appropriate for Post Completion OPT, as applied for, you may be considered to have violated your status, which may require that you leave the United States and/or make you ineligible for future immigration benefits.

STEM Extensions

Students with a STEM degree major and an employer who participates in E-verify may also be eligible for an additional 24 months of OPT following their initial authorization. It is recommended that a STEM extension be applied for 90 days **before** your year of OPT expires. A STEM extension may not be requested if the initial OPT period has already expired.

More information on STEM Extensions and how to apply is available from International Services.

Cap Gap Extensions

(not applicable to LSUHSC-New Orleans employees)

If your OPT period ends before October 1, and your employer is considered to be subject to the H1B cap, and that employer has filed a petition to change your status to H1B in a timely manner, your work authorization and your F-1 status will be automatically extended until a decision is made on your H1B petition. If it is approved, your authorization will continue until September 30. If the H1B petition is denied, revoked or withdrawn during the cap gap period, your OPT will end on the day the petition was denied, revoked or withdrawn. At that point you will still have a 60 day grace period to leave the country, change status or begin a new academic program