

Pre-Completion OPT General Information

Eligibility

F-1 students may be eligible for up to 12 months of work authorization before completion of their course of study known as pre-completion Optional Practical Training, or OPT.

The following F-1 students are **NOT** eligible for pre-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 already used **12 months of full time CPT** during their course of study

A job offer is NOT required to apply for pre-completion OPT, but it is highly recommended.

Please note that you will still be required to maintain a full course of study while school is in session during your period of pre-completion OPT.

Important Note: Be sure to read our information about **CPT**, or Curricular Practical Training. It may be a better choice for you. It's free, much faster than OPT, and doesn't subtract from the total amount of post-completion OPT.

Determining your start date

You will need to request a specific date when you want your OPT to begin. Bear in mind that processing times for OPT are variable and unpredictable, so you should apply as far in advance as possible. Two to three months ahead of time is recommended. We recommend that you arrange an appointment to discuss the options and issues if you are interested in pre-completion OPT.

Instructions for filing for pre-completion 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:

- 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 the 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) (**This form is optional**)

If you are eligible for Pre-Completion OPT, International Services will issue you a new I-20 with an OPT recommendation on page 2. Include a copy of this I-20 with your application.

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

An electronic 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 receipt to the mailing address you list on the I-765 form. If you did not submit a G-1145, you will only receive a paper receipt notice via regular mail at the address on the I-765.

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.

Reporting requirements during pre-completion OPT

While on OPT, you are required to changes in your 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 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)
- **Students approved for pre-completion OPT MUST maintain full time enrollment, unless otherwise authorized by International Services.**

Appropriate employment on pre-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 you 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 description that the work is related to your degree, obtain a signed letter from your hiring official, supervisor, or manager stating how your degree is related to the work performed.

If you cannot show that your employment was appropriate for pre-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.

Time deducted from 12 month total OPT allowance

ALL pre-completion OPT authorized time is deducted from the total 12 months of OPT available, including post-completion OPT, available following degree completion. Part time pre-completion OPT (20 hours per week or less) is counted against the total OPT time available at half rate (i.e., two months of part-time OPT means that one month is deducted from the 12 month total). **Students who have used 12 months of pre-completion OPT are NOT eligible for post-completion OPT.**

STEM Extension

Students with approved post completion OPT who have a STEM eligible major and an employer who participates in E-verify may also be eligible for an additional 24 months of OPT following their initial post-completion OPT authorization. We recommend that you apply for a STEM extension 90 days **before** the expiration of your standard OPT period. You may not apply for a STEM extension if your initial post-completion OPT period has already expired.

A student who has used all 12 months of OPT as pre-completion is not eligible for standard post-completion OPT, and would therefore also be ineligible for a STEM extension.

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