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 online

Some important notes before you begin:

- You can file for OPT by mail or online. Do NOT do both.
- You can only file the I-765 online from within the United States. Don't file for OPT if you are outside the country.
- Online Filing for OPT speeds up the process only at the initial stages. It does not mean that your application will be processed faster than those submitted by mail.
- Once you've submitted the application, you cannot go back to make changes or additions. If you realize after hitting the submit button that you've make a mistake, contact International Services and we can discuss your options.

Gather the materials you'll need. These should be scans in pdf or some other digital format so you can upload them when you get to that part of the application process.

- *A new I-20* from International Services with your OPT recommendation on page 2. This is very important – don't start until you have this in hand. You ==cannot== use an old one.

- One digital passport style photo of yourself, taken within the past 30 days. Don't try to scan a paper copy – it's much easier to get the photo in digital format and upload it.
- Your most recent I-94
- Scan of your passport identification (photo) page
- Scan of any EAD you might have from previous OPT or other work authorization
- Scans of all I-20s you have showing any periods of CPT and/or OPT you have done in the past.

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

Create an account at USCIS - https://myaccount.uscis.gov/users/sign_up

Start with 'File a form online' under the section labeled 'Select what you want to do' or under the 'My Account' tab.

➢ Select 'I-765' and click 'Start Form'

We've provided the most common responses to the questions. Most of them should be straightforward, so some are not answered here. If you find that any fields are not applicable to you, leave them blank.

What is your eligibility category?

You will almost certainly be applying for post-completion OPT, even though you're applying before you have completed your program. The code for *pre-completion* OPT is (c)(3)(A). If you think it should be different, check with International Services before proceeding.

Reason for applying

Initial permission to accept employment

Have you previously filed I-765?

This should only be yes if you have applied for OPT in the past. CPT or on-campus employment does NOT count. Upload your earlier EAD when asked to do so.

Is someone assisting you with completing this application?

Most likely the answer will be 'no', unless you have an immigration lawyer helping you.

What is your current legal name?

Enter your name as it appears on your passport.

Have you used any other names since birth?

This refers to names that might be found on formal documents. Your maiden name, other naming formats, or aliases, but not what your sister called you when you were growing up.

What is your current U.S. mailing address?

This should be the address where you'd like your EAD and any other related mail to be sent. Remember that official mail from USCIS will NOT be forwarded, so if you are going to move within the next several months (like, six) and don't yet know your new address, you should either use a friend or family member in the U.S. or the International Services address. You can list either Remy Allen or John Lorch in the 'in care of' field. We'll notify you when anything arrives in the mail.

Is your current mailing address the same as your physical address?

These next several questions should be easy enough to answer. Let us know if there's anything you're not clear on. Remember to use the U.S. date format (MM/DD/YYYY)

Place of arrival

Choose a port of entry from the drop-down menu. This is asking where you went through immigration or 'preclearance', so it could be a place outside the U.S.

Status at last arrival

This will most likely be F-1, unless you entered in a different status and changed status within the U.S.

What is the passport number of your most recently issued passport?

If you have more than one passport, use the newest one, even if your visa is in an older one.

What is your travel document number (if any)?

If you have a passport, this will not apply to you.

What is the expiration date of your passport or travel document?

What country issued your passport or travel document?

What is your current immigration status or category?

This should be F-1 – Student, Academic or Language Program

What is your Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) number, if any?

This is found on the top left corner of your I-20, starting with 'N00…'

What is your A-Number?

If you have a pending green card application, you will have an A number. Enter it here. Most students will check 'I do not have or know my A-Number'

What is your USCIS Online Account Number?

If you used this system before and were sent a receipt in the mail, you can find the number at the top of the notice. Most students, though, won't have one yet.

Has the Social Security Administration (SSA) ever officially issued a Social Security card to you?

Do you want the SSA to issue you a Social Security card?

Check yes *only* if you don't already have a Social Security Number (SSN) and want one. Remember that an SSN is yours for life once it's been issued. You can't use this option to get a new copy of a card that you have lost. You can request a free replacement of your SS card through SSA if you have lost it.

Evidence

This is the section where you upload documents that are asked for as part of the application. Here's what you'll need:

OPT I-20 - NEW

This is where you'll upload the copy of your new I-20 with the recommendation for OPT on page 2. <mark>THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT.</mark> Make sure you sign and date it on page 1, and that all the information is correct. Be sure to submit this no more than 30 days after the I-20 is issued by International Services, *not* from when you pick it up. You do not need to have a travel signature on page 2 when you apply for OPT.

Passport-style photo (Digital)

A digital version of a new passport style photo will be needed. It should be new, or at least not the same photo that you used for your passport or visa. It seems that you'll have fewer problems uploading a photo that is strictly digital as opposed to a paper photo that you scanned and then edited.

If you have problems, try using the Department of State's Photo Tool here: https://tsg.phototool.state.gov/photo

Passport photo page

Include a copy of the photo and/or information page of your current, unexpired passport.

I-94

You'll need your most recent I-94 - https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home . The travel history is not needed, although it won't hurt anything if you include that.

Old EAD(s)

If you had OPT before, based on an earlier degree, upload a copy of the EAD (authorization card) for that.

Old I-20s

If you were approved for any periods of CPT or OPT, upload the I-20 with the authorization for that period on page 2. Do this even if it was for an earlier degree at a different school.

Additional Information

This section is where you can add any additional information that doesn't fit in the previous parts of the form. The most common use will be for those who have done CPT or OPT in the past to list the dates of their employment, or for previous SEVIS IDs if you have those.

Be sure to list the type of employment (CPT, OPT, economic hardship); part-time or full-time; the start date and end date; and the degree you were pursuing at that time.

Sample:

CPT
Part-time, 2/22/2021 – 4/15/2021l, Master's

OPT
Post-completion OPT, 6/6/2018-6/5/2019, Bachelor's

Previous SEVIS ID Numbers

N0001234567, Bachelor's, F-1
N0098765432, J-1 Trainee

Carefully review your application before you submit it. Be sure that you've answered all the relevant questions, since it will allow you to submit even if some of the fields are blank.

- Check the 'Applicant's Statement'
- Check that you've read and agree to the 'Applicant's Statement'
- Provide your digital signature in the space provided.
- Pay and submit

    You'll be taken to another window to complete your payment. You can either enter your credit card information or bank account data. USCIS will not process your application without payment.

After submitting your application

A receipt notice will be sent to the email address you give them. This will have information on how you can check the progress of your OPT application online. You will also receive a paper receipt notice via regular mail at the address used 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 via regular mail. 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.