

OPT recommendation I-20 request Form



CONCORDIA
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CENTER

Application Checklist: The following actions must be completed before turning in OPT recommendation I-20 form.

- ☐ Understand the eligibility, requirements and the process of OPT Application (OPT Workshop also available)
- ☐ Complete OPT recommendation I-20 request form (all items must be filled in) – **Academic Advisor's Signature Required.**
- ☐ Prepare all of the following documents:
 - Open USCIS account for [Form I-765](#) & [Form G-1145](#)
 - Copy of all immigration documents: A copy of Passport (old and current), A copy of all I-20s (Old and current), A copy of I-94, A Copy of F1 Visa, A Copy of EAD (if applicable)
 - Two(2) US Passport Size Photos
 - Fee \$410
- ☐ **Processing time is minimum 7 business days.**

NOTE: You must contact to the PDSO for your OPT I-20 recommendation before you apply I-765 from online.

SECTION I: TO BE COMPLETED BY STUDENT

Student's Name: _____ **E#:** _____

Phone No.: _____ **Email:** _____

Major: _____ **Degree Level:** ☐ BA ☐ MA ☐ OTHER _____

Expected Graduation Date: _____ (Semester and year)

Have you been authorized for OPT in the past? ☐ No ☐ Yes (From _____ to _____)

If you have been authorized for OPT in the past, on which degree level was it based?

☐ BA ☐ Master's ☐ OTHER _____

I am requesting to begin Optional Practical Training (OPT):

Check one and enter the corresponding code in item 16 of the I-765 Form

- ☐ Pre-Completion OPT - (C)(3)(A) for
☐ PT (20 hrs. or less) ☐ FT (21 hrs. or more) - Must verify completion of coursework
- ☐ Post-Completion OPT* (after graduating & Full-Time only) - (C)(3)(B) *earliest you can submit this application is 3 months before you graduate.
- ☐ 24-Month STEM extension of OPT-(C)(3)(C) – Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics major only

Requested OPT Authorization Date:

Start Date*: _____ **End Date:** _____

**Start date must be within 60 days of your program completion date*

IMPORTANT NOTE: The OPT start date cannot be earlier than the program end date on your I-20. If you will finish your academic program before the end date listed on your current I-20, you must request to shorten your I-20 before submitting the OPT Application. (Submit - I-20 Request Form for Current CUI F1 Students with Academic Advisor's Letter)

"I understand the responsibilities required for maintaining F-1 status during my period of OPT authorization as stated on the OPT Packet"

Student's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

SECTION II: TO BE COMPLETED BY ACADEMIC ADVISOR

Student has completed all required coursework: ☐ Yes ☐ No If no, explain: _____

Expected Completion Date: _____

(This is the date by which ALL degree requirements will be fulfilled, not necessarily the date of graduation)

Level of Study: ☐ Bachelor's ☐ Master's ☐ Ph.D. Has student applied for graduation? : ☐ Yes ☐ No

Students request for employment authorization under Optional Practical Training is recommended: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Optional Comments: _____

By signing below, "I confirm that the information provided in this section is true and correct. I would like to recommend that this student be allowed to obtain Optional Practical Training in order to secure a position in his/her field of study."

Advisor Name

Advisor Signature

Date

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a temporary employment benefit of the F-1 student's status. It allows students to have work authorization for off-campus employment in their fields of study.

OPT Eligibility Requirements & Important Notes

- ☐ Student must have been in F-1 status for one academic year, and maintained immigration status.
- ☐ One year of OPT is available after completing each degree program at a higher level. BA, MA
- ☐ OPT is available both before or/and after completing a degree program.
- ☐ **Twelve months or more of full time CPT makes students ineligible for OPT**
- ☐ A job offer is not required to apply for OPT.
- ☐ The employment may occur anywhere in the U.S.
- ☐ **The OPT recommendation I -20 has 30-days grace period. You must apply to I-765 form online within 30-days of the OPT start date recommended by the DSO on your OPT I-20.**
- ☐ **Employment must be related to the degree program noted on your I-20.**
- ☐ **More than 90 days of unemployment during OPT is a violation of F-1 status.**
- ☐ During the OPT period, a student remains in F-1 status.
- ☐ **Students are required to report of any changes i.e., name, residential address, employer name, employer address, employment status to P/DSO within 10 days of any change**

Before OPT Application Checklist:

- ☐ Attend OPT Workshops
- ☐ Contact your Academic Advisor to request a signature and recommendation for OPT recommendation I-20.
- ☐ Prepare all of the following prior to your scheduled appointment with PDSO/DSO:
 - Open USCIS account for filing I-765 form (<https://myaccount.uscis.gov/>)
 - Immigration Documents
 - Passport (old and current)
 - I-20s (Old and current)
 - I-94
 - Visa (F1)
 - Other US Immigration documents (if available)
 - Two(2) US Passport Size Photos – (Refer to OPT Packet for specifications)
 - Fee \$410
- ☐ [Schedule an appointment with your PDSO](#) to submit your OPT recommendation I-20 from to request an OPT I-20.
- ☐ If all the requirements are met, you will be contacted by your PDSO to receive a new I-20 with OPT recommendation for filing I-765 form.

After OPT Application Checklist:

- ☐ Receive a notification receipt from the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) indicating that your OPT Application has been received for processing. Note: usual time to receive receipt is within two weeks of application.
 - If you have not received the receipt after one month from your application, call the NCSC, National Customer Service Center at 1-800-375-5283.
- ☐ Receive an approval notice from USCIS indicating that your OPT Application has been approved.
- ☐ Receive your OPT Card – also Known as the Employment Authorization Document(EAD) – within 90 days of the application
 - **Submit EAD to the PDSO to be copied**
 - If you haven't received the EAD after 90 days your application, call the NCSC at 1-800-375-5283 and provide your receipt number

During OPT Checklist:

- ☐ Notify by submitting **Employment Reporting Form** to your school PDSO, and update any changes to your status;
 - Employment information Change – Resubmit Employment Reporting Form
 - Change of status (i.e., H-1B, R-1, Permanent Resident, etc.)
 - If you decided to leave the country or apply to another school

IMPORTANT: Contact your PDSO on or around the end date on your EAD so that your immigration record will be updated accordingly

- ☐ Do not accrue more than 90 days of employment from your OPT start date and throughout the OPT period. The 90 days is cumulative and does not reset the moment you are employed

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is Post-Completion Optional Practical Training?

Post-Completion OPT is temporary employment available to F-1 students following completion of the course of study. It can be either in a paid or a volunteer position.

2. What can of jobs can I accept?

The employment must be directly related to the student's field of study as listed on the Form I-20 and commensurate with their education level.

3. What are the Eligibility Requirements for F-1 Post-Completion Optional Practical Training?

To be eligible to apply for optional practical training, you must: (1) have been in full time student status for at least one academic year by the requested start date of your OPT, and (2) be maintaining valid F-1 status at the time of the application.

4. When can I apply for Post-Completion Optional Practical Training?

You can apply as early as 90 days prior to your completion or as many as 60 days after you complete. Your application must be at the USCIS before the 60th day following completion.

5. Can I apply for post-completion OPT after I complete my academic program of study?

Students are eligible to apply for Post-Completion OPT during their 60-day grace period following the completion of their academic program as long as USCIS receives the application before the grace period ends. There is a risk that you will not receive the full 12 months of OPT since USCIS can take up to 3 months to process an OPT application. You are permitted to remain in the U.S. while your OPT application is pending, even it is still pending beyond the 60-day grace period following your Letter of Completion date. For most students, obtaining a Letter of Completion is NOT a preferable option, as it limits your time period to apply for and begin your OPT employment.

6. Can I renew my F-1 visa if it expires after I have applied for, or during my OPT?

NO, probably not. The advice we have received is that renewing an F-1 visa (a visa intended for study only) in order to work (even on OPT) would be virtually impossible and definitely risky. You would need to convince the consular officer that you have ties to your home country, which may be difficult to do if you are returning to the US solely for work. The only exception is when international travel is required by your OPT employer. The employer must then write a letter supporting renewal of your visa.

7. What date should I use as the starting date for my OPT?

That can vary according to your degree completion date plans. However, the OPT must begin no later than 60 days following your program completion date.

8. Do I need a job offer to obtain work authorization for OPT?

No. You can apply for OPT work authorization without a specific job offer.

9. How long can I work on OPT?

You are eligible for up to twelve months of OPT. However, if you were authorized for 12 months (365 days) of full-time curricular practical training (CPT) during this program of study, you will be absolutely ineligible for OPT. In addition, Cap Gap and STEM extensions are available in some circumstances.

10. What is a "Cap Gap" extension?

If an employer petitions for an H1-B visa for you before your F-1 status ends, AND your F-1 status ends prior to the effective date of your H1-B visa, you may be eligible for a Cap Gap extension. Students on OPT may continue to work during this extension. Students who are not on OPT may have their student status extended, but are not authorized to work.

11. What is a STEM extension?

Students whose degrees are in STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) may qualify for a 24-month extension of work authorization if their employer meets certain requirements. Students may have only one STEM extension, no matter how many periods of OPT they have authorized.

12. Can I apply for 12 months of Optional Practical Training at the end of a new degree program?

Yes, F-1 students are eligible for 12 months of optional practical training for EACH higher level of education, that is, a Bachelor's student gets 1 year of OPT after the BA degree, and would be eligible for another after a Master's. A person with a Master's degree, however, would not get an OPT if s/he returned for a second Bachelor's degree, even if s/he didn't use it after the first Bachelor's degree.

13. I am finishing my second Bachelor's, can I apply for another OPT?

No. You are eligible for 12 months of OPT at the end of each level. If you have already completed 12 months of OPT at the end of your first bachelor's degree, you are not eligible to apply for OPT at the end of your second bachelor's degree.

14. How much time does it take to process my OPT application at the USCIS?

Processing time at the USCIS varies. It can take between 45-90 days. The majority take 90 days.

15. What if I receive an EAD card for OPT, but I do not find a job so I do not use it?

Once the OPT application is approved by the USCIS and your EAD card is issued, you will not be able to cancel the OPT. Therefore, any unused time will be lost. You may accumulate only 90 days of unemployment on OPT before you lose your F1 status.

16. I just found a job, but I do not have my EAD card. Can I start working?

No. It is against the law for a business or company to employ and/or pay you before you have your EAD card in hand. You can't work before the date on the card even if you have the card in hand.

17. I just saw on the USCIS Case Status website that my OPT was approved. Can I start working?

No. It is against the law for a business or company to employ and/or pay you before you have your EAD card in hand.

18. What should I do once I receive the EAD card?

You need to scan/email a copy to your P/DSO. P/DSO MUST have a copy of your EAD in your file.

19. Can I work for more than one employer with an EAD card?

Yes. You can work for more than one employer or change employers, provided that the job is directly related to your area of study.

20. What if I receive my EAD card, but my graduation is delayed? Can I still work?

Yes. But you need to see the PDSO, immigration advisor. You are limited to 20 hours a week until you complete your program of study.

21. Can I travel outside the United States while my OPT application is pending but I haven't completed my program?

Yes. You may travel abroad and reenter while your OPT application is pending without your departure canceling your OPT application, only if you are still enrolled in classes and have not reached the program end date on your I-20. To reenter, you need a valid passport, valid F-1 visa stamp, and a valid I-20 with a signature that is less than 1 year-old.

22. Can I travel outside the United States while my OPT application is pending and I have already completed my program?

Officially, if you have an Optional Practical Training application pending with USCIS, you are not supposed to leave the country. If you do, USCIS may consider this departure as an abandonment of the application. Therefore, the P/DSO recommendation is that you DO NOT travel outside of the US while your OPT application is pending.

23. What if I have to travel out of the country for an emergency?

If the student does need to leave the country during this time, the most common arrangement is for the student to ask a trusted friend or relative in the U.S. to pick up the OPT card for him/her and mail it him/her via courier. This would allow the student to re-enter the U.S. with all required documents. Additionally, students cannot re-enter the U.S. without a job offer letter. There are several risks involved in this scenario.

24. Can I travel outside the United States after I receive my EAD card?

Yes. To-re-enter the U.S. a student must have a valid passport, a valid F-1 Visa, a valid EAD card, an OPT I-20 signed with the last 6 months and proof of employment (a letter from your employer verifying that you have a job). However, if you have an EAD card but no job offer you should not travel. Without a letter from your employer identifying you as having a job, you will not be able to re-enter the U.S. If you leave the country you will lose your OPT opportunity.

25. What is the impact of a transfer to another school if I am on OPT?

Your authorization for OPT ends on the transfer release date. Authorization for OPT is not transferable. If you wish to complete OPT, the transfer-out must set the release date for a date after the OPT ends. You may transfer during the 60-day grace period following post-completion OPT, as long as the transfer release date occurs within the grace period.

26. Can I get a Cap Gap extension if I'm not on OPT?

Yes. If an employer has filed for an H1-B you may request a "Cap Gap" extension even if you are not on OPT. This extension would allow you to stay in the US legally until your H1-B visa becomes effective, but it would not authorize you to work before the effective date of the H1-B.

27. What if I've applied for OPT and don't finish all the courses for my degree on time?

You should make an appointment to see P/DSO as soon as you find out you won't be completing your degree as planned. If your OPT application is still pending, you should ask the P/DSO to withdraw it. Your application fee will not be refunded. If your application has already been processed, you may work part time while you complete your course work If the job is related to your major. If you are not working, you will begin accumulating unemployment days and will likely exceed the allowed number before you complete your degree.

28. Is every day of unemployment counted?

You begin counting unemployed days on the date your EAD card becomes effective. Weekends and holidays are counted. The only days that are not counted are periods of up to 10 days between jobs. If eleven days separate the two jobs, all eleven days are counted.

29. Can I count volunteer work as OPT?

Yes, as long as it's related to your degree program and you're volunteering at least 20 hours or more a week. You need to keep good records and still report the information to the P/DSO so that the P/DSO can update SEVIS. If P/DSO do not update SEVIS you will still be accruing days of unemployment.