F-1: Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a benefit of F-1 status that allows students to work off-campus in a field related to their major or area of study. A student does not need to have a specific job offer to apply for OPT. A student is eligible for a 12 month period of OPT at every level of education, for example, 12 months for a Bachelor’s degree, an additional 12 months for a Master’s degree, and an additional 12 months for a Doctorate degree.

Applying for OPT is a two-step process which begins first with a recommendation for OPT from the students’ Class Dean and International Student & Scholar Advisor (ISSA) and second, with approval of the application by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). In order to maintain F-1 status while on OPT, the student must be employed, report address changes, and report the employer name and address to USCIS through the ISSA. Review this information carefully and speak with an ISSA if you have any questions.

Eligibility

To be eligible for OPT you must be in valid F-1 status and have maintained full-time student status for at least one academic year before applying.

OPT Limits

There is a limit of 12 months of full-time OPT per degree level. OPT may be used before completion of studies (pre-completion OPT), after completion of studies (post-completion OPT), or a combination of both time periods. OPT may be full-time or part-time, but any pre-completion OPT is limited to part-time during the school year.

- **Part-time OPT (20 hours per week or less)** is deducted at half of the full-time rate (two months of part-time OPT = one month of full time OPT) before completion of studies. After completion of studies, part-time OPT is counted at the full-time rate.

- **Full-time OPT** (more than 20 hours per week) can only be granted during official college breaks or after the completion of degree requirements.

OPT Application Instructions

1. **Consider the timing of your application**
   OPT applications may be filed up to 90 days before the completion of all degree requirements, and up to 60 days after the completion of all degree requirements. The completion of studies date may not necessarily be the same as the official graduation date. After you attend an OPT Workshop, it may take approximately one week for the ISSA to process an OPT recommendation. Your application must be submitted to USCIS within 30 days of when OPT is recommended. USCIS processing time for this type of application is approximately 2-3 months.

2. **Sign up for an OPT Workshop (REQUIRED)**
   OPT workshops are offered regularly in the spring. To sign up, contact Kelly Webber.
   Attend an OPT workshop about three months prior to your anticipated employment start date. During the workshop an ISSA will answer questions and review your OPT application. You must bring completed forms and all required documents in order to participate in the workshop.

   **Note:** If you arrive to a workshop unprepared or did not register in advance, you may not be able to participate and will need to sign up for a future OPT workshop.
3. **On the day of your OPT Workshop, bring with you:**

- Form I-765, completed and signed
  
  The Form I-765 can be completed online, saved, and printed. This is helpful to eliminate the difficulty of reading handwriting and leads to more accuracy. Please go to [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov), click on the “Forms” tab, and scroll down to Form I-765. Complete the Form, save it for your records, and print out a copy to sign in **blue ink**. If you wish to complete the form by hand, please write in **blue ink**.
  
  - Under section 16, write either (c) (3) (B) for post-completion OPT, or (c) (3) (A) for pre-completion OPT or (c) (3) (C) for STEM extensions.
  
  - Carefully consider the address you use to complete this form. You should use an address where you will be in 2-4 months, when your EAC will be mailed. You may use the Slater International Center address: c/o Karen Pabon, Slater International Center, 106 Central St, Wellesley, MA 02481.

- Copies of all previously issued Form I-20s (pages 1 & 3); include forms from previous U.S. schools (if applicable)

- Copy of automated Form I-94

- Copy of your F-1 visa (unless you are Canadian, or were approved for a change of status to F-1)

- Copy of your passport photo page and make a copy of your passport expiration date page (if different from your passport photo page)

- Have 2 photographs (see *Photo Specification Handout*). Lightly write your name and SEVIS ID# on the back

- Write a personal check or obtain a money order made out to **U.S. Department of Homeland Security** for $380.
  
  - Write your SEVIS ID # on the front of your check in the memo section. **Do not write on the back of the check.**

- Make a copy of any previously issued EAC (if applicable)

- Form G-1145 (if you wish to receive an e-mail and/or text message confirming that your application has been accepted at a USCIS Lockbox facility)
  
  - Go to [www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf](http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf) to download, complete and print form

4. **Meet with ISSA to review your OPT application**

   If the ISSA determines that you are eligible for OPT, you will be issued a new Form I-20 with the appropriate recommendation. You will be contacted by the ISSA via e-mail to pick up your new Form I-20 and complete OPT application the new Form I-20 should be used for future international travel; however, you must still keep all Form I-20s that were previously issued to you for your records.

5. **Mail your OPT Application to USCIS**

   Your OPT Application should include the items below in the order listed:

   - Original Form G-1145 (if you wish to receive an e-mail and/or text message confirming that your application has been accepted at a USCIS Lockbox facility)
   - Personal check or money order made out to **U.S. Department of Homeland Security** for $380 (Be sure your name and SEVIS ID# are on the front of the check.)
   - 2 photographs to USCIS specifications (name and SEVIS ID number written on the front of each photo)
   - Original Form I-765, typed and signed in blue ink
   - Copy of new Form I-20 with OPT recommendation
   - Copy of all previously issued Form I-20s (from newest to oldest)
   - Copy of automated Form I-94
   - Copy of F-1 visa (unless you are Canadian) or Change of Status Approval Notice
   - Copy of passport page(s) which show your name and the expiration date of your passport
   - Copy of any previously issued Employment Authorization Cards (EACs)

**Note:** We strongly advise you to make a copy of your entire application before mailing.
Send your application packet to the appropriate address by priority mail (USPS) with delivery confirmation.

By U.S. Postal Service
(USPS):
USCIS
PO Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

By Express Mail or Courier Service
(FedEx, UPS, etc.):
USCIS
Attn: AOS
2501 S. State Hwy. 121
Business Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 7506

After mailing your OPT Application you will receive:

- **E-mail and/or text message (if you submitted Form G-1145):**
  Within 24 hours of its arrival, you should receive confirmation that your application was accepted at a USCIS Lockbox facility.

- **Notice of Action:**
  Within one month, you should receive a “Notice of Action” indicating that your application has been received by USCIS and is being processed. Check the Notice of Action to verify that your name is spelled correctly. Provide Slater International Center with a copy of this notice if you receive it directly. Use the EAC number on the Notice to check the status of your application online at: [https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp](https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp)

**Request for Evidence (if applicable):**
If you receive a notice indicating that additional documentation is required for your application, contact your ISA for assistance.

- **Employment authorization Card (EAC):**
  If there are no problems with your application, you should receive your EAC in approximately 2-3 months from the date your application was received. A separate Approval Notice will be sent a few days before the actual EAC. Please follow these guidelines:
  1. Inspect your card for accuracy and contact the USCIS Customer Service Center at 800-375-5283 if there are errors.
  2. Make 2 photocopies of your EAC. Send one to Slater International Center and keep the other copy in a safe place.
  3. You are authorized to work only within the dates specified on the EAC
  4. If you lose your EAC you must apply for a replacement by submitting a new Form I-765, another $380 check, two photographs, and a copy of your previous application to the USCIS.

**Note:** If you do not complete your degree by the date originally specified, contact your International Student Advisor (ISA) for assistance. You may not be eligible to work with the EAC you receive.

**Maintaining F-1 Status During OPT**

OPT is an extension of F-1 status. While you are on OPT, you must follow the regulations to maintain your status.

- You must be employed while on OPT. If you are unemployed for more than a total of 90 days during the 12 month OPT period, you will no longer be maintaining your F-1 status.

- You must report personal and employment information using the OPT Audit Form to inform Slater International Center of any changes:
  - Report any change of your legal name or U.S. residential address.
  - Report the name and address of your employer and any changes to your employment (including new employment, periods of unemployment, departure from the U.S.)
Travel and Re-entry to the United States

You must have a valid travel signature on your Form I-20 to travel and re-enter the United States in F-1 status. While on OPT the travel signature is valid for only 6 months.

- Pre-Completion OPT
  If you have not completed your degree requirements and you have pre-completion OPT, you may travel and re-enter the United States with a valid passport, Form I-20 (with a valid travel signature), a valid F-1 visa and financial documentation.

- Post-Completion OPT
  If you apply for post-completion OPT you must consider your future travel plans to determine what you will need to do. **Before** you complete your degree you may travel while your post-completion OPT application is pending. **After** you have completed your degree your OPT application must be approved and you must have proof of a job offer or employment in order to re-enter the U.S.

Documents REQUIRED to Re-Enter the U.S. While on OPT:

- Valid F-1 visa - If your F-1 visa has expired and you must travel outside of the U.S., you will need to apply for a new visa at a U.S. Consulate outside of the U.S. *(You may remain in the U.S. with an expired visa as long as your EAC, Form I-9, and passport are valid.)*
- Valid passport *(must be valid at least six months into the future.)*
- Valid EAC - The EAC is marked, “Not valid for re-entry.” This simply means that the card alone is not sufficient for re-entering the U.S.
- Form I-20 with OPT recommendation *(Your travel signature is valid only for six months during OPT.)*
  - Proof of employment – A letter from your current or prospective employer which indicates that you have a temporary job offer and that you will be employed.

Note: If you re-enter the U.S. in visa waiver or tourist status during your OPT authorized period, you are no longer eligible for OPT.

Cap-Gap Extension of OPT

F-1 students who are engaged in a period of post-completion OPT and have applied for a change of status to H-1B may benefit from an automatic provision which extends duration of status and OPT work authorization to October 1st. You may request an update Form I-20 by emailing a copy of your H-1B petition receipt notice or approval notice to kpabon@wellesley.edu. The duration of status and work authorization extensions would automatically terminate upon the rejection, denial, or revocation of the H-1B petition filed on the student’s behalf.

Note: Students are strongly recommended not to depart the U.S. during the period of their cap-gap extension until they qualify for travel in H-1B status.

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS

Social Security numbers are unique identification numbers assigned by the U.S. Federal Government. They are required for those who are employed in the United States. If you do not already have a Social Security number, you may obtain one once you have received your Employment Authorization Card (EAC). For more information please review the “Obtaining a Social Security Number” handout available at Slater International Center.

Revised: November 2013