

Optional Practical Training (OPT) Initial 12-Month OPT

What is OPT?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is an employment benefit authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for students in the F-1 visa category. Students who have maintained their status will have an opportunity to get authorization to work in the U.S. for 12 months related to their major.

Who can apply for OPT?

- You must be an international student in current F-1 status.
- You must not have used 12-months of CPT at your current degree level.
- You do not need to have a job offer to apply for OPT.

How long does OPT last?

- OPT is for 12 months for each degree level.
- If you are studying certain degrees in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math (STEM), you may be able to apply for an additional 24 months of OPT for a total of 36 months of OPT. The list of STEM degrees is at the website below. Your Degree code is listed on your I-20.
<http://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2014/stem-list.pdf>

When should you apply for OPT?

You need to plan ahead to use OPT. It usually takes around 3 months (90 days) for the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to approve your OPT application and for you to get your EAD (OPT card). It can be a little longer than three months in some cases.

- The earliest date you can apply for OPT is three months (90 days) before you graduate.
- The latest date USCIS will accept your application is 60 days after you graduate.
- If you delay applying, you may lose some employment time because OPT must be completed within 14 months after your graduation date.

When can you start your OPT work period?

You will request a start date for your OPT employment when your OPT request is entered in SEVIS by an international office official.

- The earliest date you can choose is the day after your graduation.
- The latest date you can choose is 60 days after you graduation.

- For example, if you graduate on May 11, the earliest date you can choose is May 12, and the latest date you can choose is July 10, 2018.

How do I apply for OPT?

The information below is to apply for an initial 12-month period of OPT. Every student who applies for OPT begins with a 12-month OPT period.

I. Gather and prepare the required items for your OPT application.

- Complete the OPT Recommendation Form (See the last page.)
- Two U.S. passport/visa photos (The main Pittsburg Post Office is recommended.) The photograph requirements are available below.
- Check or money order for \$410 payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security.
- Check or money order for \$50 payable to Pittsburg State University.
- Completed I-765 <http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/i-765.pdf>
- Completed G-1145 <http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/g-1145.pdf>
- Copy of new I-20 (You will get this at a meeting with a student advisor.)
- Copy of your passport
- Copy of your F-1 visa
- Copy of your I-94 record <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home>
- Copies of your previous I-20's at the current degree level
- Copy of previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD), if you had one

II. Make an appointment with an advisor in IPSO to review your materials, request your OPT in SEVIS, and receive a new I-20 that you will need in order to apply.

Appointments can be made with the following:

- ipsostudent@pittstate.edu
- 620-235-4680

If you have done CPT previously, we will print out a letter verifying your CPT employment and a copy of your CPT record from your SEVIS record.

III. Mail your application to USCIS. USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of the OPT I-20 date.

We recommend to mail your application packet by certified or registered mail.

U.S. Post Office		Express Mail (Fed Ex., etc.)
USCIS		USCIS, Attn. AOS
P.O. Box 21281	or	1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S, Ste 100
Phoenix, AZ 85036		Phoenix, AZ 85034

What happens after I apply for OPT?

After you apply, you will receive:

- an electronic receipt from USCIS 2-3 weeks after application.
- a paper receipt from USCIS 3-4 weeks after application.

As soon you receive your receipt notice, please check for any errors in name and date of birth. You will need to notify USCIS of any error immediately.

You can use your receipt number to check your case status at

<https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard/CaseStatus.do>

- you receive EAD (OPT card) from USCIS within 3 months after application.

Contact us if you:

- do not receive the receipts within the timelines above.
- see mistakes on your EAD
- get a request for information or a denial from USCIS

Apply for a Social Security number after you get a job if you don't have one.

What do I need to report when I get or change a job during OPT?

Within 10 days report the following:

- a copy of your OPT card
- name and address of employer (Send a job offer letter if you have one.)
- start date of new employment
- number of hours worked per week
- end date of previous employment
- brief description about how your job is directly related to your degree (2-3 sentences is fine)
- name and contact information of supervisor

You can complete this information on the OPT Data Form and send it to

ipsostudent@pittstate.edu

What else should I report while on OPT?

Within 10 days, report any of the following:

- change in address, phone number, or email address

- change in name
- decision to leave the US permanently
- return to school full time
- application to change immigration status

You can email this information to ipsostudent@pittstate.edu or update information using the **SEVP Portal**. Beginning on March 23, 2019, students on F-1 visa completing post-completion OPT or STEM OPT can report changes to their contact information and employer information (post-completion OPT only) online. Students will receive an email from do-not-reply.sevp@ice.dhs.gov to create a portal account. Students should contact their advisor if they did not receive an email from SEVP to create account or if they have questions.

Traveling and OPT

Students are not advised to travel out of the U.S. while OPT application is pending. After approval of OPT, students may travel out of the U.S. with the following:

- (1) A valid travel signature on their I-20 by the DSO
- (2) A valid F-1 visa to re-enter
- (3) OPT/Employment Authorization Card (EAD)
- (4) A letter of employment from their employer

Cap-gap Extension and Cap-gap OPT

Students whose OPT and grace period expires before their H-1 B OPT start date has begun are automatically given extension by the USCIS of their post completion OPT.

STEM OPT Extension

Students who are majoring in one of the STEM fields are eligible to apply for an extension of their OPT for an additional 24-month period. You must submit a copy of your degree reflecting the conferred degree as well as your major field of study. In addition, the employer with whom you are seeking the 24-month OPT extension must be registered in E-Verify. Accordingly, you must list the employer's E-Verify Company Identification Number or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number in Item 17 of the Form I-765

Unemployment time

Under the new rules, students on post completion OPT are allowed to be unemployed for more than 90 days during their authorized OPT period. Work may be full-time, part-time, or a volunteer position, as long as the work is in the student's field of study.

What is considered Employment?

- All OPT employment is required to be related to the student's degree program (major) and at their educational level.
- A student must work at least 20 hours a week in a qualifying position to be considered employed. If it is a position with a variable schedule, within a month, it should average out to at least 20 hours a week.

Types of employment allowed:

- Paid Employment- at least 20 hours a week or full time.
- Multiple Employers
- Short-term employers
- Work for hire
- Self-employed business owner
- Employment through an agency or consulting firm
- Unpaid employment- can work as volunteers or unpaid interns, as long as it doesn't violate any labor laws. The work must be at least 20 hours a week.

Grace period

Students are given a 60-day grace period after their OPT ends. During this time, they may prepare to depart the U.S., change their status or be admitted to another program to continue their education either at another school or at the same school.

F-1 Optional Practical Training Recommendation Form

Section A: Completed by Student

Family Name: _____ First Name: _____

PSU ID#: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____

Current Address: _____
(street address) (Apt #)

_____ (city) (state) (postal/zip code)

I am requesting OPT from (start date) _____ to (end date) _____

Previous employment (Check one of the boxes below.)

- I have never done OPT or CPT before at PSU or any other university or college.
- I have previously done OPT or CPT at PSU or another university or college.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Section B: Completed by Degree Checking or Graduate & Continuing Studies:

Office: _____ Degree Checking _____ Graduate & Continuing Studies

Educational Level: _____ Bachelors _____ Masters _____ ED.S

Major: _____

Expected date of completion of degree requirements (mm/dd/yy): ____/____/____

Please check on of the statements below:

_____ The student will complete or has completed all course requirements, excluding thesis, comprehensive exams, or other non-course degree requirements.

_____ The student will complete or has completed all degree requirements.

Name typed/printed: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Extension: _____