Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Topics Covered

- Optional Practical Training (OPT) Defined
- Eligibility & Requirements
- Deadlines and Timelines
- How to Complete I-20 OPT Request Form
- How to Complete I-765 Form
- 90 Days Rule of Unemployment
Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Topics Covered

• Types of Employment
• Traveling Abroad during OPT
• Status change
• STEM Extensions
• Contact Information
Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is temporary employment that is directly related to an F-1 student’s major area of study. Under the prior rules, an F-1 student could be authorized to receive up to a total of 12 months of practical training either before (pre-) and/or after (post-) completion of studies.

• Pre-completion OPT:

An F-1 student may be authorized to participate in pre-completion OPT after he or she has been enrolled for one full academic year. The pre-completion OPT must be directly related to the student’s major area of study. Students authorized to participate in pre-completion OPT must work part-time while school is in session. They may work full time when school is not in session.

• Post-completion OPT:

An F-1 student may be authorized to participate in post-completion OPT upon completion of studies. The post-completion OPT must be directly related to the student’s major area of study.

Return to “Topics Covered”

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

OPT Eligibility & Requirements

Students Eligibility:

- Maintained valid F-1 student status.
- Studied full-time for at least 1 academic year.
- Only one Post-OPT application is allowed per each academic degree level.
- Students are eligible to apply for 12 months of OPT authorization upon completion of each higher degree level.

Students Requirements and Checklist:

- Complete I-765 (Click here to download the form).
- OPT request form (Link to the form).
- OPT I-20 (signed by the student & the Director of International Student Office).
- Printout of your electronic I-94 information. Click here to access the website.

Return to “Topics Covered”
Optional Practical Training (OPT)

OPT Eligibility & Requirements (cont.)

- Photocopy ID pages of passport (biographical and F-1 Visa).
- Copy of most recent F-1 student visa stamp or change of status approval notice.
- $380 check or money order payable to: “U.S. Department of Homeland Security” the fee required for form I-765.
- Obtain two passport style photos (Click here to see specifications).
- If graduating, sign agreement to keep ULM Int’l Student office informed of current address for duration of OPT.
- If you do not have a social security card, you may apply 10 days after the EAD (OPT) card is received.
- Copy of previous EAD card, front and back (if applicable).
Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Deadlines & Timeframes

- A Form I-765 for standard post-completion OPT can be filed up to 90 days before the program end date and up to 60 days after the program end-date, provided that is filed within 30 days of the date the DSO enters the OPT recommendation into SEVIS.

- Ideally you should receive your receipt for the $380 within 10 days and if approved, the OPT card in around 6 weeks to 3 months. But, sometimes the delay is much longer so you should consider this when picking your dates of employment.

- USCIS authorization takes approximately 2 - 3 months

Return to “Topics Covered”
How to Complete I-765 Form

Section 1: Name as it appears on passport/I-20

Section 3: Use our address: 700 University Avenue Lib 201-D, Monroe, LA 71209-1160

Section 11: Select “No” if no previous OPT or Pre-OPT or worked on Co-op; Select “Yes” if you have applied for OPT before

Section 16: Students must enter code (c)(3)(A) for pre-completion OPT or (c)(3)(B) for standard post-completion OPT or (c)(3)(C) for extension OPT

If this is your first application for OPT check here

If “Yes” in Section 11: complete this part of the form. Contact Office of International Student with any questions.

Student signature, phone number and date here

Return to “Topics Covered”
Important: 90 days Rule of Unemployment

- While on OPT, you are allowed a total of 90 days of unemployment.
- The 90 days of unemployment are cumulative.
- Students are considered out of status once they accumulate more than 90 days of unemployment.
- Your OPT will be cancelled or invalidated if you start a new program of study, transfer to a new school, change your status, enter the U.S. using any visa other than F-1, or violate your F-1 non-immigration status.
Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Important: 90 days Rule of Unemployment (cont.)

- All employment must be within the student’s field of study and appropriate to their degree level.

- Begin OPT Employment only after the EAD card has been received. Students may work only within the dates indicated on the EAD card. Working before or after these dates is prohibited.
Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Important! Types of employment

Types of employment allowed for OPT:

1. **Multiple employers**: A student may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the student’s degree program.

2. **Work for hire**: This is also commonly referred to as 1099 employment, where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. If requested by DHS, the student must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract period and the name and address of the contracting company.

3. **Paid employment**: A student may work part time (at least 20 hours per week when on post-completion OPT) or full time.

Return to “Topics Covered”
Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Important! Types of employment (cont.)

4. **Self-employed business owner:** A student on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to the student’s degree program.

5. **Employment through an agency or consulting firm:** A student on post-completion OPT must be able to provide evidence showing that he or she worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.

6. **Unpaid employment:** A student may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern, where this practice does not violate any labor laws. The work must be at least 20 hours per week for a student on post-completion OPT. A student must be able to provide evidence acquired from the student’s employer to verify that the student worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.

Return to “Topics Covered”
Important! Travelling abroad

For travelling outside the US after program completion date and/or during OPT period you will need the following:

- Passport valid for an additional 6 months beyond the date of return to the US.
- Valid F-1 student visa.
- I-20 with OPT recommendation on page 3 (travel signature must be less than 6 months old on the date of return to the U.S.).
- EAD card.
- Proof of employment (generally offer letter is used).
- Don’t leave the U.S. if your program has ended and you have not applied for OPT.

For more information click here
Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Important! Status change

The following changes must be reported to the Office of International Student within 10 days:

- Address update for students on OPT
- Employment update for students on OPT: Name of the company
- Address of the company
- Start date with the company
- Copy of EAD card (front & back)
- Unemployment
- Decision to discontinue OPT and depart the U.S.
- Change of status
- Return to school full-time / transfer

Return to “Topics Covered”
Optional Practical Training (OPT)

STEM: 17-Month Extension

Eligibility criteria:

- Major of study must be in the STEM-Designated Degree Program List. (Click here to find out if your major qualifies).

- Work for company enrolled in E-verify. (Click here to confirm company).

When to apply for STEM Extension:

- Application may be submitted no earlier than 120 days prior to the post-OPT end date.

- Application must be received by USCIS before original OPT period ends.

For more information go to: www.uscis.gov.

Additional employment reporting requirements apply.

Return to “Topics Covered”
Optional Practical Training (OPT)


Return to “Topics Covered”
Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Contact Information

Office of International Student Programs and Services:
700 University Avenue, Lib 201-D.
Monroe, LA 71209-1160.
Phone: 318.342.5225
Fax: 318.342.6766
Email: international@ulm.edu