

F-1 STUDENT: OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is employment that is directly related to your field of study. It is designed to complement your academic work by providing you an opportunity to obtain actual work experience in your field of study. As an F-1 student you are allowed up to 12 months of OPT for each educational program you pursue. You can use part of your 12 months of OPT before completing your degree (i.e., during the summer breaks) or, as most students do, you can save the full year of OPT to use after you graduate. You are allowed 12 months of OPT for each degree program level. For example, if you take 12 months of OPT after completing your Bachelor's degree, you are eligible for another 12 months of OPT if you later go on to complete a higher level degree program – i.e., Master's, Ph.D. In order to be eligible for practical training you must be in lawful F-1 student status for at least one full academic year (three quarters) and submit the application materials to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in a timely manner.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

Please read carefully the following application instructions. The USCIS has specific requirements and deadlines for OPT applications that are strictly enforced. The OPT application requires a recommendation by the school but the actual authorization is granted by the USCIS. The application must be **RECEIVED by the USCIS office no earlier than 90 days BEFORE you graduate but no later than 60 days AFTER your graduation.**

To apply for OPT you must attend an OPT Advising Session. OISS will process the necessary sections of the forms and recommend OPT in SEVIS, which can take up to two weeks. OISS will contact you when your completed OPT application packet is ready for you to pick up at the front desk. You are responsible for mailing the packet to the USCIS (we suggest by Certified Mail – “Return Receipt Requested”). The USCIS mailing address and instructions will be given to you by OISS.

The USCIS can take up to 90 days, or sometimes longer, to process the OPT application. Your application may be processed earlier than 90 days, depending on the workload of the USCIS at that time; however, there is no mechanism to expedite this process. You should therefore make plans with the assumption that the USCIS will take the full 90 days. We suggest applying for OPT well in advance, rather than later, because you cannot begin OPT employment until it is approved. When your application is approved the USCIS will send OISS an Employment Authorization Document (EAD card) for you. The EAD card will have your picture, your name and the dates of your OPT authorization period. OISS will contact you once we receive your EAD card. You should review the card to make sure that all the information is correct. The EAD card is the document you will present to potential employers indicating that you have legal authorization to work in the U.S., under the guidelines of OPT.

Once your OPT is authorized you must find employment within 90 days of the Begin Date on your EAD card. It is also very important to remember that any period of unemployment during the course of your approved OPT, must be reported to OISS.

NOTES:

- You are not required to have a job to apply for OPT. However, after it is approved the USCIS expects you to be engaged in practical training during the authorized period. If you travel during the OPT period, the USCIS may ask you for a letter from your OPT employer at the airport when you re-enter the U.S.
- While on OPT you are still in F-1 student status. Therefore, if you travel outside of the U.S. you will need to have your I-20 form signed by OISS, a valid F-1 visa, the OPT approval (EAD), a valid passport, and a letter from your OPT employer in order to reenter. If your F-1 visa has expired, applying for a new F-1 visa stamp while on OPT may be extremely difficult. You should consult OISS.
- USCIS states that you may travel out of the U.S. after your graduation date and while your OPT application is still pending. However, when returning to the U.S. you will need the OPT receipt notice from the USCIS, a current travel signature on your I-20 form, a valid F-1 visa and passport, and you should have a letter from your OPT employer.
- Once the OPT period is authorized by the USCIS it cannot be cancelled.

CHECKLIST FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING APPLICATION

Please read the following information carefully. Many of your questions are answered below.

- Attend OPT Application Review Session**
- I-765 Form (obtain from OISS or download from <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf>).**
 - ◆ Print or type your name and the address carefully. Be sure that it can be easily read to avoid errors.
 - ◆ **Item #3:** You should list the address as:
 - UCSB, OISS – MC 7150** (under “Number and Street”)
 - Santa Barbara, CA 93106-7150** (under “Town”, “State/Country”, “Zip Code”)
 - ◆ **Item #10:** 11-digit admission number found on your latest I-94 card.
 - ◆ **Item #11:** Only list Off-Campus Employment authorization requests submitted to the USCIS. Do not list CPT.
 - ◆ **Item #16:** (C) (3) (B) is the code for Optional Practical Training.
 - ◆ **Item #17:** Should be completed ONLY by students applying for OPT extension.
 - ◆ **Signature:** *IMPORTANT* Your signature must be in black ink and fit completely between the lines provided. The USCIS must be able to clearly scan your signature from the form; therefore, it is recommended to leave enough white space around your signature. If the signature cannot be scanned the USCIS will return the application to you, delaying your OPT approval.
- Optional Practical Training Request Form**
 - ◆ Complete the top section and sign the form.
 - ◆ The bottom section is to be completed and signed by an Academic Advisor. For graduate students this is typically the chair of your committee or major advisor. For undergraduate students this person is your academic advisor in your College (Letters & Science, Engineering or Creative Studies).
- Form G 1145 E-Notification of Acceptance**
 - ◆ Complete as directed.
- Photocopies of I-20 Form(s)**
 - ◆ All previously issued I-20 forms from schools attended in the U.S. while in F-1 status.
 - ◆ New SEVIS I-20 form: After meeting with the advisor, OISS will issue a new SEVIS I-20 form with the OPT recommendation. You will need to sign the bottom of the new SEVIS I-20 form before sending it to the USCIS.
- Photographs (2)**
 - ◆ Two (2) recent (within the past 30 days) passport-style color photographs of specific dimensions –specifications can be obtained at http://travel.state.gov/visa/visaphotoreq/photocomptemplate/photocomptemplate_5330.html
 - ◆ Print your name in pencil on the back of each photograph.
- Photocopy of Passport**
 - ◆ Clear photocopy of information pages of passport including your picture, passport expiration date, and all visa stamps.
- Photocopy of I-94**
 - ◆ Either white card or printout from <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/>
 - ◆ Clear photocopy of the front and back of the I-94 card or full page printout; make sure date stamp and notations are readable.
- \$410 Personal Check (preferred), Money Order or Cashier’s Check**
 - ◆ Payable to the “U.S. Department of Homeland Security” (not “USDHS” or “DHS”)
 - ◆ Personal checks must have the name of the account owner printed on the check.
- OPT Processing Fee Paid to OISS http://oiss.sa.ucsb.edu/payment/OPT/OPT_Payment**
 - ◆ **\$150 processing fee** for initial OPT applications. There is a **\$300 processing fee** for STEM OPT Extensions.

Please note that the USCIS will not process an OPT application that is incomplete and will request that you submit the missing documents or information. This will delay the issuance of your OPT authorization.