

F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT) Graduate Application

Eligibility

OPT provides authorization for F-1 students to be employed in a job related to their major field of study. OPT does not require a job offer before application. OPT may be authorized at each academic level (i.e., bachelor's, master's, PhD) for a total of **12 months**. Once approved, students will receive the EAD (Employment Authorization Document). Please review the following to determine if you are eligible for OPT:

- F-1 student, lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for at least **one academic year** and currently maintaining student status.
- Completed **12 months or less** of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT).
 - Ineligible if completed **12 months or more** of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT).
- All coursework and program requirements are completed, prior to application request.
 - Verify your program completion date with your academic advisor.

OPT Types

Post-completion OPT (authorized after completion of your academic program) is the most common type of OPT.

- Full-time after completion of all degree requirements; or
- Full-time for graduate students after completion of required coursework (except for thesis/dissertation) *.

Pre-completion OPT (used while still enrolled in your academic program). This is uncommon, as most students use alternate work authorization during their programs, such as CPT. Pre-completion OPT is available:

- Full-time during official school breaks (e.g., summer break) as long as the student was enrolled the previous semester and plans to continue the following semester;
- Part-time during the academic semester while maintaining full-time enrollment;
- Part-time or full-time for graduate students after completion of required coursework (except for thesis/dissertation).

Duration

Although students may engage in both pre-completion and post-completion OPT, the **maximum** amount of time that can be granted for all OPT combined is **12 months per educational level**. Thus, if a student used 6 months of pre-completion OPT during his summer breaks while doing his bachelor's program, he would be eligible for only 6 months of standard post-completion OPT after finishing the bachelor's degree.

A student with a STEM degree may be eligible for a 24-month STEM extension of their OPT. Students apply for the STEM extension within their last 90 days of post-completion OPT.

When/Where to apply

The International Center will recommend OPT if eligibility requirements are met. However, students must also apply to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to receive authorization in the form of an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). *It is your responsibility to ensure that USCIS receives your completed) OPT application (I-765) according to the filing requirements.* The USCIS current processing time(s) for the I-765 can be verified at <https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/>, and is subject to change at any time. Students may file the I-765 by mail by from <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765> or creating a USCIS account and completing the I-765 application online at www.uscis.gov/file-online.

- Students may file an I-765 application **no earlier than 90 days before the program completion date or within 60 days after the program completion date.** (See I-20 for program dates, if graduating sooner than the end date indicated, an immigration advisor will adjust the end date on the I-20 to the current graduating term, upon notification from student.) Please plan to make your OPT I-20 request to the International Center **10 days before your intended I-765 submission date to USCIS, to allow for sufficient processing time.**
- The I-765 must be submitted **within 30 days** of issuance of OPT recommendation I-20.
- Please access all forms from our website at <https://www.uakron.edu/international/>, (Forms> Employment Authorization>select OPT application for your academic level).
- **If the I-765 is submitted prior to receiving the OPT I-20 from the International Center, it is likely to be denied by USCIS.**

How to Obtain the OPT Recommendation I-20 from the International Center

To receive the OPT recommendation I-20 from our office, download, complete, and submit the following documents as PDF attachments by email to immigration@uakron.edu, subject line- (UA ID number-Post-completion OPT application):

1. **OPT application with advisor recommendation** (see page 4).
Once your EAD dates are entered into SEVIS, it is unlikely that you can successfully change the dates of your employment authorization. It is important to discuss the beginning and ending dates of your employment authorization with an immigration advisor. **Dates are generally selected within the 60 day grace period.**
 - a. Thesis/Dissertation students may choose the assistantship end date or confirmed thesis defense end date as the I-20 program end date. Please confirm these dates with your faculty advisor/graduate school first and finalize any additional requirements for this adjustment with an immigration advisor. *
 - b. **Example: I-20 program end date is May 12, 2022. Request dates can be selected between May 13 and July 11 of 2023. OPT start date: June 2, 2022, to End date: June 1, 2023 (end date must be one day less than start date).**
2. Review and sign the **OPT Guide (pages 5-7)**.
3. Complete the **OPT module** available on Brightspace.
 - a. Log in to Brightspace and find “Immigration Information for international students” under the ALL tab.
 - b. Complete the OPT module.
 - c. If you cannot access or locate the module, please contact an immigration advisor or email immigration@uakron.edu for assistance.

OPT I-20 application submissions to the International Center require at least 10 days processing time, especially during peak periods of the academic year; please plan ahead.

After all documents have been submitted and verified, you may choose to book an appointment with an immigration advisor to review the I-765 prior to submission to USCIS or email the I-765 draft to an immigration advisor for review (*please allow at least 3 business days for draft review*). If all documents are correct, and the student has no further need for review or questions, the **OPT I-20 will be sent by email**. Students should submit the OPT I-20 with the I-765 application for USCIS adjudication.

OPT(I-765) APPLICATION CHECKLIST

To be submitted to USCIS (either by filing online or mailing documents)

- USCIS [Form I-765](#), Application for Employment Authorization. To file by mail, the I-765 must be completed in **black ink**. Be sure to use the latest edition. If a required field does not apply to you, then indicate “not applicable” or “N/A” in that field. Eligibility category C3B. If you had more than one SEVIS number while in the US, or if you were authorized for any CPT or OPT in the past, then you must complete page 7, **Part 6 Additional Information**. Indicate Page Number 3, Part Number 2, Item Number 27 when providing information in this section. To access the form (for mailing the I-765): <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>. **To file online:** www.uscis.gov/file-online
- Form I-765 Filing fee of \$470. When applying by mail, send check or money order made payable to the **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**. You have the option to pay with a credit card. If you wish to pay by credit card, complete [Form G-1450](#), Authorization for Credit Card Transactions. <https://www.uscis.gov/g-1450>. **To file online**, pay by credit or debit card, or electronic withdrawal from savings or checking account. Form G-1450 is not needed.
- [Form G-1145](#), E-Notification for Application/Petition Acceptance. If you want to receive an email and/or text message that your I-765 has been accepted at a USCIS Lockbox facility, then you can complete this form. <https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145>. **If filing online**, this form is not needed.
- Copy of your OPT I-20. If you did CPT or OPT previously, then submit copies of these I-20’s in addition to your OPT I-20.
- Copy of your passport picture page and passport expiration date (your passport must be valid); copy of your most recent F-1 visa; and copy of your most recent I-94. You may print your I-94 record from <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94>.
- Two passport-style photos. Lightly print your name and A-Number (if any) on the back of each photo if filing by mail. **Submit one photo if filing online**--photographs must be recent. Photos must be 2x2 inches in size, with full frontal face position, identical, in color, with a white or off-white background; between 1 inch and 1 & 3/8 inches from the bottom of the chin to the top of the hair. *Follow the passport photo requirements on the U.S. Department of State website:* <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/requirements/photos.html>.

APPLICATION FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

Your Name: Last _____ First _____

Student ID# _____ Date of Birth _____ E-mail Address _____ Phone# _____

Your Current Major _____ Level of Education (B.S., M.S., etc) _____

Please list all previous Curricular/Optional Practical Training (if applicable):

CPT start/end dates _____ Major/Level of Education: _____

CPT start/end dates _____ Major/ Level of Education: _____

CPT start/end dates _____ Major/Level of Education: _____

OPT start/end dates _____ Major/ Level of Education: _____

OPT start/end dates _____ Major/ Level of Education: _____

OPT for Thesis/Dissertation Students when all coursework is completed:

Pre-Completion OPT:

Part-time Full-time

Starting date _____ Ending date _____

Starting date _____ Ending date _____

Post-Completion OPT:

Full-time after completion of all degree requirements. **The starting date should be within 60 days after your program is completed.** *
(See page 2, "How to obtain the I-20 from the International Center" for example.)

Starting date _____ Ending date _____

Student Certification: I understand that I must be enrolled in school until all program requirements are met. If for some reason I cannot complete the program by the I-20 expiration date, I will contact the International Student Advisor. I understand that my Practical Training must be directly related to my current program. I have received and read the GUIDE FOR POST-COMPLETION OPT. It is my responsibility to maintain my F-1 status while on OPT.

Signature _____ Date _____

OPT-ACADEMIC ADVISOR RECOMMENDATION

Student's Name: Last, First _____ Student ID# _____

Student's Program: Major _____ Level _____

Student's starting semester in this program: _____

Thesis/Dissertation defense date: _____

Date of coursework completion: _____
(All program curriculum requirements are completed)

Expected Date of Program Completion
(The last day of the final semester
of enrollment, unless completed earlier): _____

Note: The student must be enrolled until all program requirements have been met.

Comments: _____

I verify that the above-named student is in good academic standing. I recommend that the student be granted Optional Practical Training in the field indicated on this form and for the period requested by the student.

Academic Advisor's Name and Title

Signature Date

Phone E-mail

Department Zip Code + 4

GUIDE FOR POST-COMPLETION OPT

MANAGING YOUR F-1 STATUS AFTER APPLYING FOR OPT

File your application with USCIS either by mail or online.

- You must file while you are in the US.
- The Form I-765 and the OPT I-20 and other supporting documents must be received by USCIS within 30 days of the DSO's recommendation of OPT in SEVIS (refer to the date the I-20 is issued).
- You may file an OPT application no earlier than 90 days before your program completion date or within 60 days after your program completion date.

Finish your program on time.

Your I-20 and SEVIS record has been shortened to reflect your program completion date.

- If you will not successfully complete your studies in the semester for which you have applied for OPT, contact our office.
- Your F-1 status may be in jeopardy if you wait to notify us of this situation.

Check your case status online.

If OPT is approved, you will receive an OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD). The processing time for USCIS is approximately three months; however, it may take longer.

You may check your status at <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do>.

Check for errors!

Review the information on your USCIS I-797 Receipt Notice and Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card. Speak with an International Student Advisor if you find any errors.

End student employment.

Student employment, including CPT and on-campus employment, including TA/RA employment, must end on or before your program end date (this is the program end date listed on page 1 of your I-20). You may not lawfully begin or resume employment until after you receive your OPT EAD card AND the OPT start date listed on your EAD has been reached.

Search for appropriate OPT employment.

Acceptable employment during OPT can include standard employment, contract employment, self-employment and unpaid positions, if the activity does not violate any labor laws. If you are considering an unpaid position, please review the guide, "Volunteering and Unpaid Internships for F-1 and J-1 Students" available on our website

www.uakron.edu/international/forms.

- All employment must average at least 20 hours per week to count as "full time" for purposes of OPT.
- All employment must be directly related to your major and educational level that is on your current I-20. You and the employer make this determination.
- You may change employers as long as each job is directly related to your current major and educational level.

Stay within unemployment limits.

Students on post-completion OPT may have up to 90 days of unemployment.

- Each day (including weekends) during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that you do not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment.
- OPT authorization begins on the employment start date shown on your EAD.

Required reporting.

Submit the OPT Reporting Form within 10 days of changing your legal name or employment. The first time you submit the form, attach a copy of the front and back of your EAD card to the International Center. These can be scanned and emailed to immigration@uakron.edu. The OPT Reporting form may be found at <http://www.uakron.edu/international/forms/index.dot>. You may also use the SEVP Portal to update your contact information and employment. For more information on the portal, please go to <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/create-an-sevp-portal-account>. Contact us to print your updated I-20.

Change of address. You are required to update your MyAkron account with your home and mailing address within 10 days of the change. You may also update the SEVP Portal. If you move while your OPT application is pending, contact our office for further guidance.

Document your job search and keep employment records.

You may be asked for detailed proof of OPT employment or job search activities for future immigration applications or interviews including:

- Copies of job-specific cover letters and resumes, job descriptions, and offer letters;
- Any letter or email that contains info about interviews, testing, or information sessions; and
- Timesheets, paystubs, or logs of hours.

Learn what is needed to re-enter the U.S. after travel abroad.

Do not attempt to reenter the U.S. on a B visa or visa waiver while awaiting OPT processing, as this will forfeit your OPT.

- **Before** the program end date and while you are still taking classes or completing thesis/dissertation research, while your OPT application is pending:
 - Valid passport
 - Valid F-1 visa
 - OPT I-20 signed for travel within 6 months of your expected reentry date to the U.S.
 - Copy of receipt notice from USCIS (Form I-797C)
 - Job offer letter (recommended)
- **After** the program completion date present all of the following documents upon re-entry:
 - Valid passport
 - Valid F-1 visa**
 - OPT I-20 signed for travel within 6 months of your expected reentry date to the U.S.
 - Valid OPT EAD**
 - Proof of employment (for example, pay stubs, letter from your employer indicating where you work, your position, the hours you work, etc.)
 - If you have a pending petition before USCIS such as an H-1B petition, consult with legal counsel.

**We recommend that you do not travel after your program completion date if:

- You will need to renew your F-1 visa, or
- Your OPT application is pending.

Attending classes.

You may not take classes toward a new degree while on OPT. You may take part-time classes that are avocational or recreational in nature if you are not pursuing a degree. We urge you to discuss your plans with an International Student Advisor.

If you wish to begin a new degree program, you will need to request a new I-20 for the new degree program (if you will be studying at UA) or request the transfer of your SEVIS record (if you will be studying at another school). Even if the EAD card still appears valid, your OPT authorization will end when you begin the new academic program at UA or when UA releases your SEVIS record to the new institution.

Health insurance.

Once you are no longer enrolled as a student, you will not have or be required to have UA health insurance. We strongly advise you contact oop-insurance@uakron.edu to purchase a private health insurance plan or contact our office for information on other insurance companies. If you have UA’s international student health insurance plan, you will not qualify for extension of the plan during OPT if you have a gap in dates of coverage.

Determine if you are eligible for the 24-Month OPT Extension.

The U.S Department of Homeland Security (DHS) limits this benefit to selected programs. Download our application for the STEM extension at <http://www.uakron.edu/international/forms/index.dot> for additional information.

Learn options available at the end of OPT.

After the OPT end date, there is a 60 day grace period in which you can:

- Start another academic program at UA,
- Transfer to another school, or
- Leave the U.S.

During your grace period, you may not work and you may not leave and re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status. Please *notify our office* of your departure by submitting an OPT Reporting form so that a note can be placed in your immigration record.

H-1B Cap-Gap Extension.

The cap gap extension allows certain students with pending or approved cap-subject H-1B petitions to remain in the U.S. until the start date of their approved H-1B employment period, even if the OPT authorization or F-1 grace period would have otherwise expired before October 1.

You are eligible for the cap-gap extension if:

- Your employer files a cap-subject H-1B petition on your behalf and requests a change of status to H-1B to begin October 1, and
- The employer files the H-1B petition on your behalf within your OPT authorization period or the 60-day grace period.

If your employer files your application during your OPT period, then you will have an extension of employment authorization until September 30. If your employer filed the application during your grace period, then you will only have an extension of F-1 status (not employment authorization) until September 30. Contact an International Student Advisor if you have questions or need to request a new I-20 listing your cap-gap extension. Please note that only your employer can provide accurate, official updates regarding your H-1B application.

Disclaimer: The International Center is able to provide you with general guidance. However, any advice provided to you by our office, as well as the information in this packet, should not be construed as legal advice. Additionally, due to the fluid nature of governmental interpretation, the USCIS may change its interpretation of these immigration laws/regulations and eligibility requirements for benefits, at any time. We will do our best to provide you with the most current guidance. Each case is fact-specific and it is advised that you contact an experienced immigration attorney if you have questions regarding your situation.

Student Certification:

I have read and understand the information in this guide. It is my responsibility to maintain my F-1 status while on OPT.

Signature

Date

Important Links

OPT Application:

<https://www.uakron.edu/international/forms/docs/opt-application.pdf>

Guide for Post-Completion OPT (Managing your F-1 status after applying for OPT):

<https://www.uakron.edu/international/forms/docs/OPT-guide.pdf>

Study in the States:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/training-opportunities-in-the-united-states>

STEM Application

<https://www.uakron.edu/international/forms/docs/stem-opt-app.pdf>

Where to Mail OPT Packet - Paper Filing:

Students should mail their OPT packets to the Chicago Lockbox:

USCIS Chicago Lockbox

U.S. Postal Service (USPS):

USCIS

PO Box 805373

Chicago, IL 60680

FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries:

USCIS

Attn: I-765 C03

131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor

Chicago, IL 60603-5517

Please note: As USCIS can make unexpected changes, this link will have the most up-to-date and accurate information regarding the USCIS filing address: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses>

Filing for OPT online:

Tips:

- Be sure to obtain your OPT I-20 before submitting your application!
- Submit all the documents at the time of filing.
- Once payment is accepted, your application is considered filed.
- File at least one or two days before the deadline to ensure timely filing.

Resources:

File online: www.uscis.gov/file-online

Create online account: www.myaccount.uscis.gov

Form I-765: www.uscis.gov/i-765

I-765 evidence checklist: www.uscis.gov/forms/filing-guidance/checklist-of-required-initial-evidence-for-form-i-765-for-informational-purposes-only