



OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

University Center for International Studies
University of Pittsburgh

Optional Practical Training (OPT) Information

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is defined as temporary employment directly related to a student's field of study. F-1 students can receive up to 12 total months of OPT authorization per educational level.

During OPT, a student remains in F-1 status, their SEVIS record remains active, and the student must report changes in address and employment to OIS. When OPT is approved by US Citizenship and Immigration Services, the student receives an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) which authorizes employment for a specific time period. Below are some important points regarding OPT.

Pre-completion OPT:

- Students may apply for full-time pre-completion OPT provided all coursework has been completed and they are working full-time on a thesis or dissertation; otherwise, students may only apply for part-time OPT (20 hours or less) during the academic year.
- Students applying for pre-completion OPT during normal school breaks, may seek full-time OPT (more than 20 hours per week).
- Part-time pre-completion OPT is deducted from the overall 12-month limit at 50%.

Post-completion OPT:

- The standard OPT period is a cumulative maximum of 12 months.
- Post-completion OPT applicants must request full-time OPT (more than 20 hours per week).
- All post-completion OPT must be completed within 14 months after completion of the degree.
- Students may become eligible for another 12 months of OPT if they advance to a **higher** educational level.
- Students in STEM fields may be eligible for an [extension of OPT](#) after their post-completion OPT.

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for OPT, the student must:

- Be in valid F-1 status
- Have completed at least one academic year (two semesters) of full-time study
- Be present in the US at the time of filing the OPT Application
- **NOTE:** If an F-1 student has engaged in 12 months or more of full-time curricular practical training (CPT), they are ineligible for OPT. Part-time CPT does not affect OPT eligibility.

How to Apply

OPT is authorized by USCIS, but first OIS must issue the OPT I-20. Detailed information about OPT, including how to apply, can be found in OIS' [online tutorials](#). Review this information well before you plan to apply for OPT. If you have any questions after reviewing the online tutorials, please schedule an appointment with your [Immigration Specialist](#).

Here is a general overview of the OPT application process:

- Step 1: Work with OIS
 - Review OIS' online OPT [tutorials](#).
 - Submit the online "OPT Request" in [My OIS](#) and receive a new I-20 (OPT recommendation).
- Step 2: Submit application to federal government (USCIS)
 - Information about the [online Form I-765](#)
 - OPT Application [Checklist](#)
 - Note: USCIS must receive application within **30 days** of date that OPT I-20 was created.
- Step 3: USCIS Review
 - USCIS makes final decision in about **2 to 4 months**, but at times, final approval can take several months. Check USCIS' [current processing times](#).