



OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

University Center for International Studies
University of Pittsburgh

Pre-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) Information

What is Pre-Completion OPT?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is defined as temporary employment directly related to a student's field of study. 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 (USCIS), the student receives an Employment Authorization Document (EAD), which authorizes employment for a specific time period.

Pre-completion OPT occurs during a student's course of study (before the I-20 program end date).

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.

When is Pre-Completion OPT a good option?

- You were offered employment that does not qualify for [CPT](#):
 - You can't receive academic credit for the internship that contributes towards your overall degree requirements.
 - You choose not to enroll in an internship course.
 - You are a PhD student in the writing stage of your program, and the internship is not related to data collection for your dissertation.
- Other possible factors:
 - You are sure that you will begin a new academic program in the U.S. at a higher degree level, and do not plan to use all 12 months of OPT eligibility at your current degree level.
 - You know you will receive additional OPT authorization in the future because you qualify for the [STEM OPT extension](#).
 - You are sure that you will not use 12 months of post-completion OPT after you graduate.

Examples of Pre-Completion OPT in Use*:

- An undergraduate student in Psychology cannot earn credit for an internship unless it is with a Pitt affiliated organization. Since the student cannot receive credit for an off-campus internship, they do not qualify for CPT authorization. The student instead applies for pre-completion OPT because it does not require enrollment.
- GSPIA Students only have one required internship to fulfill degree requirements. Pre-completion OPT can provide the authorization to participate in a second beneficial off-campus experience before graduation.

*Pre-completion OPT is not limited to these examples. Speak to your [Immigration Specialist](#) if you have questions.



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Pre-completion OPT Guidelines:

- During the Fall / Spring terms, pre-completion OPT is part-time only (less than 20 hrs per week).
 - Note: PhD students can apply for pre-completion OPT on a full-time basis at any time if they have completed all coursework, and will be enrolled in dissertation credits.
- During official school breaks, pre-completion OPT can be part-time or full-time (20+ hrs per week).
 - A proposed full-time pre-completion OPT interval from August 1 to October 1 would not be possible for most students, because the Fall semester begins in September.
- Choose your pre-completion OPT start and end dates based on the employment opportunity dates and/or the academic term you wish to participate.
 - Your [Immigration Specialist](#) can help determine the timing of your pre-completion OPT.
- IMPORTANT!** Any pre-completion OPT authorization period is deducted from the student's 12 months of post-completion OPT eligibility at their current degree level.
 - Part-time pre-completion OPT will be deducted at a 50% rate.
 - Full-time pre-completion OPT will be deducted at a 100% rate.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) vs. Pre-Completion OPT:

	CPT		Pre-Completion OPT	
Cost	No Fee		\$410 (USCIS)	
Timeline	2 - 4 weeks		2 - 4 months	
Enrollment Required?	Yes		No	
Job Offer Required?	Yes - submit offer letter to OIS		No job offer required	
Hours per week: Part Time (PT) or Full Time (FT)	Fall/Spring: PT only	Summer: PT or FT	Fall/Spring: PT Only	Summer: PT or FT
PhD - FTD Specific	Work must contribute to dissertation/ thesis		Work must be directly related to field of study	

How to Apply

OPT is authorized by USCIS, but first OIS must issue the OPT I-20. If you have any questions after reviewing this fact sheet, please schedule an appointment with your [Immigration Specialist](#).

Here is a general overview of the OPT application process:

- Step 1: Work with OIS at least 90 days before your desired employment start date.
 - Meet with your [Immigration Specialist](#) to discuss pre-completion OPT.
 - Submit the online "OPT Request" in [My OIS](#).
 - You will receive a new I-20 after OIS approves your request.
- Step 2: Submit application to federal government (USCIS).
 - Information about the [online Form I-765](#) and our OPT Application [Checklist](#).
 - You must indicate **(c)(3)(A)** as the type of OPT on the application.
 - Note: USCIS must receive application within **30 days** of date that OPT I-20 was created.
- Step 3: USCIS reviews OPT application.
 - USCIS makes final decision in about **2 to 4 months**, or longer.
 - Check USCIS' [current processing times](#).