



Office of International Programs
331 Martindale
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Optional Practical Training

Revised 6/22/17

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a benefit of F-1 status which allows degree seeking students to apply for work authorization in order to gain employment experience that is directly related to their field of study. OPT applications are specific in that they have start and end dates, are authorized for either part time or full time work and are considered either pre-completion or post completion (of study) petitions. Applications for OPT involve the student, the academic department, the Office of International Programs (OIP) and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS). When an application is approved, USCIS mails the student an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) which contains the student's photograph, OPT category and the dates of authorized employment.

Pre-Requirements for making application

- Be a degree seeking student in F-1 status
- Possess a valid passport
- Have one academic year (two semesters) of full time study completed before the requested OPT begin date (Note: students may apply 90 days prior to the requested start date as long as the required academic year of study will be completed during that 90 day period)
- Not have used 12 months or more of full time Curricular Practical Training

Part time/ Full time and Pre-Completion vs. Post-Completion OPT

Pre-Completion OPT is for work authorization which will begin and end before the program end date listed on the student's I-20. While school is in session, a student may apply for part time (up to 20 hours per week) pre-completion OPT while also enrolling in the required hours to be a full time student. Full time pre-completion OPT may be requested for breaks such as summer when the student is not required to enroll or when a student has completed all course requirements and only lacks completion of the thesis or dissertation.

Post-Completion OPT is for work authorization that will start after the program end date on the I-20. Post-completion OPT must be full time. Students who have completed all course requirements except for the thesis or dissertation may apply for post-completion OPT although it may require the I-20 end date be shortened. The International Student Advisor can advise you on the impact of your choice as it affects the ability to extend your I-20 and receive the 24 month OPT extension for those in approved STEM fields.

Separate applications are required for each type of OPT, thus it is not possible to request a period of part time pre-completion OPT immediately followed by full time pre or post-completion OPT in the same petition.

Time Limits

A period of twelve months of full time Optional Practical Training is available for each higher level program in which a student enrolls. For example, a student would be eligible for 12 months at the master's level and another 12 months at the doctoral level, but would not get OPT for doing another bachelor's program even if OPT had not been previously used at the bachelor level. Students who participated in full time CPT for twelve months or more are not eligible for OPT at the same level in which the twelve months or more of CPT was used.



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The use of part time OPT is deducted from the 12 month limit at half the rate so a person who has done 10 months of part time OPT would still be eligible for 7 months of full time OPT.

Employment Dates

For undergraduates, the requested authorization period may begin as early as the date of graduation ceremonies and as late as sixty days following the graduation ceremony. For graduate students, it may begin as early as the date requested after degree requirements are completed, or as late as 60 days after the Graduate School's final acceptance of thesis or dissertation. The starting date for the OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD) will be the date requested by the student or the date OPT is approved at the USCIS Service Center, whichever is later. The student will also request an end date which is no more than 12 months later than the start date.

Filing Deadlines

Post-completion OPT petitions may be submitted **up to 90 days prior** to degree completion and must be received by USCIS no later than **60 days after** the degree completion date or 30 days after the I-20 with OPT recommendation is made, whichever is earlier.

Types of Work appropriate for pre-completion and post-completion OPT

SEVP Policy Guidance 1004-03

Work must be related to the student's degree program and can include:

- Multiple employers. A student may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the student's degree program and, for pre-completion OPT, cannot exceed the allowed per week cumulative hours.
- Short-term multiple employers (performing artists). A student, such as a musician or other type of performing artist, may work for multiple short term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration.
- 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.
- 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.
- Employment through an agency or consulting firm. A student on post-completion OPT must be able to provide evidence showing he or she worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.
- Paid employment (at least 20 hours per week for post-completion OPT)
- 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 student's employer to verify that the student worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.



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Unemployment Limit

Students with post-completion OPT are limited to 90 days of unemployment beginning with the start date of the OPT card. Unemployment is considered to be every day (including weekends and time spent out of the country) that the student does not have a qualifying work arrangement for OPT as described in the types of work appropriate for OPT section of this handout.

Processing Time for OPT Application

Once mailed to USCIS, a receipt will be sent to the address on the I-765 to confirm the arrival of materials at USCIS. A decision for the petition takes approximately 90 days. Students may check the status of their case online once the receipt notice has been received. Employment may begin only after the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) is received and the start date is reached.

Reporting Responsibilities while on OPT

All students with OPT must report the following to the Office of International Programs:

- Any change in name
- Residential address
- Name and address of their employer
- Any change to the name and address of the employer
- Any interruption of such employment

Cancellation of Optional Practical Training

If one decides to cancel OPT, it is sometimes possible to do so. Once the EAD has been processed by USCIS, OPT may **not** be cancelled if the start date on the EAD Card has already passed. To cancel OPT please contact the OIP advisor who assisted in filing your application.

Travel during Optional Practical Training

Re-entry to the U.S. requires that F-1 students present the following documents:

- SEVIS Form I-20 endorsed for travel by F-1 advisor within the last six months;
- OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card or receipt if application is still pending;
- Valid F-1 visa; and
- Confirmation of employment from employer is highly recommended especially if the OPT card has already been issued.

On-Campus Employment Restrictions

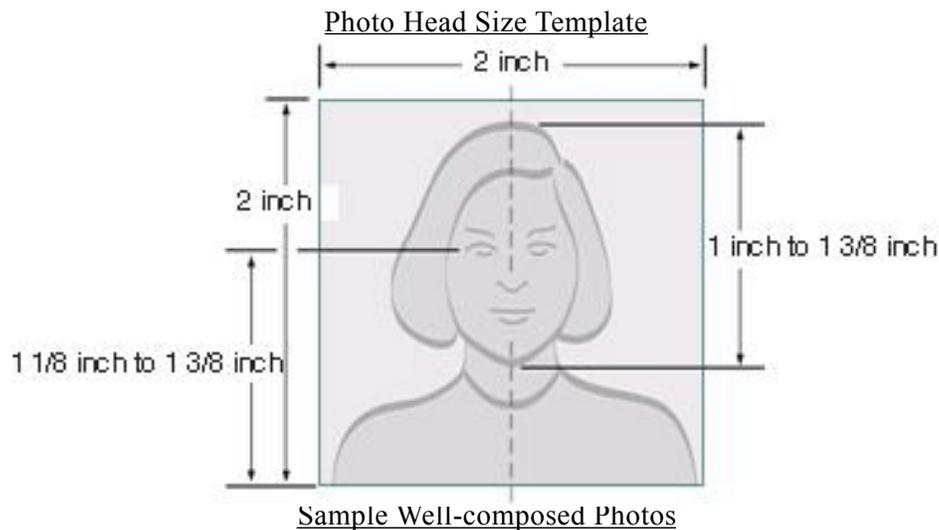
While school is still in session, students who have not yet completed coursework and are still enrolled may work part time on campus. However, once a student has completed the degree or the EAD beginning date is reached, whichever is earlier, the employment is restricted to a student's major field of study at a level commensurate to the degree earned.

Departure from the U.S. after Optional Practical Training

An F-1 student in OPT is allowed 60 days grace period after the authorization of employment ceases to change status, acquire an I-20 for a new academic program, or depart the United States.

Photo Checklist

- You must submit two identical color photographs of yourself taken within 30 days of filing your application.
- The passport-style photos must be 2" by 2".
- The photos must be in color with full face, frontal view on a white to off-white background.
- Photos must be printed on thin paper with a glossy finish, and be unmounted and un-retouched.
- Head height should measure 1" to 1 3/8" from top to bottom of chin, and eye height is between 1 1/8" to 1 3/8" from bottom of photo.
- Your head must be bare unless you are wearing headwear as required by a religious order of which you are a member.
- Make sure the photo presents the full head from the top of the hair to the bottom of the chin
- Center the head with the frame
- The person in the photo should have a neutral expression and be facing the camera
- Finally, use a pencil to lightly print your **name**, **date of birth**, and **Alien Receipt Number** (if you have one) on the back of each photo.



(Remember, yours must be in color; Visit <http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/general/photos/photopage.html> to view good and bad sample images and try out the Photo Tool.)





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Post-Completion OPT Agreement

I understand that I am responsible for the following should USCIS approve my post-completion OPT petition:

- Reporting to the Office of International Programs within 10 days of a change in:
 - My residential address
 - Name and address of my employer
 - Change to my employment status
- Pursuing work opportunities that are directly related to the program listed on my I-20
- Being aware of and not exceeding the unemployment limits (90 days)
- Keeping my passport valid six months into the future
- Requesting a signature on I-20 from OIP for out of country travel
- Complying with U.S. tax laws

I understand that:

- on-campus student employment positions are not appropriate while in post-completion OPT status
- if I am no longer enrolled and wish to continue health insurance coverage I may do so by completing the enrollment form and submitting payment directly to the company
- extensions to the end date on my I-20 are not possible once the end date has passed
- the issuance of a new I-20 for transfer to a new school or a new program of study will invalidate the OPT authorization
- I have 60 days beyond the expiration of my OPT to either depart the U.S., transfer to a new school, have an I-20 issued for a new program or apply for a change to another immigration classification

Signature: _____

Print name: _____

Date: _____



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OPT Department Recommendation Form (Must be filled out by department)

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Please complete the following to assist in the completion of this request for OPT status:

Student's Name: _____

ID Number: _____

Degree Level: _____ Major: _____

Expected Completion Date: _____

Signature of Academic Advisor or Department Chair:

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____



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OPT Student Application Form

Family Name _____ First Name _____

Ole Miss ID # _____ SEVIS ID # _____

Degree Level _____ Date of completion/graduation _____

Major _____

Previous CPT or OPT approved for this degree level. List dates and type (full or part time).

I am applying for : _____ Pre-completion OPT Part-time Full-time
_____ Post-completion OPT (must sign post-completion statement)

Requested Start Date _____ Requested End Date _____

Signature: _____

Phone _____

Permanent Email _____

(Please do not list @go.olemiss.edu address. Check this email often for updates.)

Required Documents Checklist to Accompany Application (bring to OIP):

- Completed Form G-1145 (to receive receipt notice by text and email)
- Completed Student Application Form
- Completed Form I-765 **use black ink** (see attached)
key: question 16, for pre-completion OPT use code (c)(3)(a) or for post-completion OPT use code (c)(3)(b)
- Completed Department Recommendation Form (**completed by department**)
- Completed Post-OPT Agreement form
- Photocopies of passport info page, most recent visa, and I-94 arrival document (**print from cbp.gov/i94**)
- Copies of all I-20s issued for the current degree program
- Unofficial transcript of all coursework at The University of Mississippi
- Two passport-style photos (see attached directions and dimensions)
- Check or money order for \$410 made payable to **Department of Homeland Security**
(Checks must have preprinted name and address)

If mailing OPT application yourself, please see an OIP advisor for instructions.

The International Student Advisor will review the materials and produce an I-20 with the OPT recommendation. You will be sent an email requesting that you come to sign the new I-20. The petition and supporting materials, which include a copy of the signed I-20, must be received by the USCIS Processing Center no later than 30 days after the date the I-20 was produced or 60 days after completion of the program, whichever is earlier.