



Applying for Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Optional practical training (OPT) is defined in the regulations as "temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student's major area of study."

Three kinds of OPT

1. Pre-completion OPT
 - "During the student's annual vacation and at other times when school is not in session, if the student is currently enrolled, and is eligible for registration and intends to register for the next term or session" or
 - "While school is in session, provided that practical training does not exceed 20 hours a week while school is in session". Student must maintain a full course of study during the period of employment.
2. Post-completion OPT ****most commonly used at CIIS****
 - "After completion of the course of study, or, for a student in a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree program, after completion of all course requirements for the degree (excluding thesis or equivalent)...."
3. Extensions of post-completion OPT for certain Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) students (STEM-eligible degree programs at CIIS are ACTCM programs only).

Filing the OPT application with the USCIS

- An applicant for *pre-completion* OPT can file a Form I-765 "up to 90 days before being enrolled for one full academic year, provided that the period of employment will not start prior to the completion of the full academic year."
- An applicant for *post-completion* OPT can file a Form I-765 "up to 90 days prior to his or her program end-date and no later than 60 days after his or her program end-date". The student must also file the Form I-765 with USCIS within 30 days of the date the DSO enters the recommendation of OPT into his or her SEVIS record."

Preconditions

- Student must have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis at an SEVP-approved school for one full academic year before being eligible to begin OPT.
- Available both before and after completion of the educational objective, but different rules apply to pre- and post-completion OPT.
- Students in English language training programs are not eligible for OPT.
- Part-time F-1 "border commuter students" are eligible only for CPT and post-completion OPT. OPT must be "directly related to the student's major area of study."
- Use of 12 months of full-time Curricular Practical Training eliminates option for OPT.

Hours per week

- 20 hours/week limit for pre-completion OPT; Full-time employment can be requested for pre-completion OPT done during official school breaks, and for students who have completed all requirements for their degree except for thesis or dissertation.
- For standard post-completion OPT, a student must be adequately employed to avoid limits on unemployment. Please review the CIIS OPT FAQ document for details.



Applying for Optional Practical Training (OPT) Page 2

Location

- Students may engage in OPT for any employer in the U.S. for the duration of OPT authorization as long as the employment qualifies under OPT standards.

Duration

- Standard OPT is available for a cumulative maximum of 12 months per educational level;
- Use of pre-completion OPT impacts availability of post-completion OPT: Full-time OPT is deducted from the 12-month cumulative limit at the full-time rate; Part-time pre-completion OPT is deducted from the 12-month cumulative limit at a 50% rate.

Field/level of work

- Must be directly related to the student's major field of study.

Offer of employment

- No offer of employment is required to apply for standard OPT, but the student is expected to work during the OPT EAD validity period. Students on post-completion OPT are limited to an aggregate maximum of 90 days of unemployment. OPT for the STEM extension **does** require a job offer.

Plan Ahead!! It takes approximately 90 to 120 days to process a request for Optional Practical Training and an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). **You may not begin working until you have received your EAD card.**

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Please visit [MyCIIS, Student Affairs, International Students](#) for questions about maintaining your F-1 student visa while on OPT, travel on pending and approved OPT and employment requirements. You can access this information as an alumna.

Check Your Application Status online at: <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp>, or by calling 1-800-375-5283. You will need to have your 13-character application receipt number. It is a 10 digit number preceded by three letters.



Optional Practical Training (OPT) Request Form

Application process and checklist

- 1) International Student Advisor at CIIS determines student's eligibility to apply for OPT.
 - ✓ **Student reviews information about I-765 Application for Employment Authorization:**
<https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>
 - ✓ **Make an appointment** with the International Student Advisor to go over any questions.
- 2) International Student Advisor recommends OPT in SEVIS and provides updated I-20 form to student.
 - a. **Send CIIS OPT Request Form** to the International Student Advisor in the allowable timeframe to apply for OPT. Request form is on MyCIIS International Students, Documents section.
 - b. **Receive updated I-20 from International Student Advisor;** student to print and sign.
- 3) Student fills out I-765 application online and uploads support documentation, including the updated I-20 form showing the request for OPT, before submitting the application.
 - a. **Start a USCIS account to file the I-765 online:** <https://myaccount.uscis.gov/>
 - b. **Form I-765**, the Application for Employment Authorization, marked with the code:
(c) (3) (A) at item 27 for pre-completion OPT and **(c) (3) (B) for post-completion OPT.**
 - c. **Documents to upload include all or some:**
 - 4) **Updated I-20 showing request for OPT on page 2.**
 - 5) **Copies of your passport and visa** (entry stamp in passport for Canadians)
 - 6) **A copy of your I-94 form.** To retrieve this number electronically, visit:
<http://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors/i-94-instructions>
 - 7) **A copy of all previous I-20s** showing any CPT, if applicable.
 - 8) **A copy of previous I-20s** from previous universities, if applicable.
 - 9) **A copy of any previous Employment Authorization Documents (EADs)**, if this is your first application for work authorization in the U.S. you will not have an EAD card.
 - 10) **I-765 application fee** *OR*
 - 11) **Form I-912, Request for Fee Waiver** (See information about the Fee Waiver on MyCIIS International Students, Documents section.) Students may be required to file paper forms if requesting a Fee Waiver. Fee waivers are sent along with the request for OPT, are not guaranteed and can add approximately 30 days to the OPT processing time. The decision is made by the USCIS and if denied your entire packet will be returned. You can then re-apply for OPT again with further documentation in support of the fee waiver request or pay the fee. Please discuss this option with the International Student Advisor.
- 4) Work can begin only after receiving EAD issued by USCIS, and on or after the start date on the EAD.