



## OPT/Applying for Authorization to Work Off-Campus

To qualify for and maintain **optional practical training (OPT)** for the year after graduation, you must meet the following requirements:

### **READ THIS DOCUMENT IN ITS ENTIRETY**

#### **A. Requirements:**

- The proposed employment is in your field of study. However, you do not need to have a job offer to apply for OPT.
- You have been enrolled as a full-time student for at least one full academic year prior to applying (two full semesters).
- You have not completed twelve months of full-time curricular practical training (CPT). If you have used a full twelve months of CPT during your current course of study, you will not be approved for OPT.
- You may not work until you receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS.
- You must apply for OPT within the period of 90 days prior to graduation or up to 60 days after graduation. The card will be valid for up to one year.
- You must start work within 90 days of approval or lose your OPT and F-1 status. You may not be unemployed for more than 90 days during your OPT period.
- You must keep the HU International Office informed of your address, any name change, and any changes in your employment situation throughout the period of OPT, or risk cancellation.
- You cannot work earlier than the start date, but you can start working later.
- You must read and sign the OPT Statement of Understanding (Waiver).
- Applicants in certain degree programs such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics may extend their OPT for an additional 24 months. See sections F and G below.

**B. Update your file:** Before beginning your application, you must check with the HU International Office to make sure that your file is up to date. Federal regulations require the HU International Office to have the following items on file:

- a. Photocopies of the front of your current I-94
- b. Photocopies of your current I-20, with OPT status request
- c. Photocopies of the dates of validity and visa page of your passport
- d. Your current address and phone number. If you are graduating, you should also provide an unchanging U.S. address to which your new EAD and any other INS documents can be mailed for several months after you graduate. It may be the address of a relative, trusted friend or advisor who will alert you when any mail from USCIS is received. Please be advised that the U.S. post office does not forward government documents.

**Please note:** You will be required to keep your address and employment information updated throughout the period of OPT. Failure to do so could result in revocation of OPT, which puts you out of status and requires you to leave the country immediately.

#### **C. Application procedure:**

1. Log on to <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis> and click on Immigration Forms. Download the current instructions for filing the I-765 and the form itself.
2. Print out and complete the application form (I-765).

3. Bring the form with the following supporting documentation to the International Office Coordinator:
  - A signed statement from your dean or advisor stating that the optional practical training is necessary training in your field of study (please use the accompanying form).
  - The completed application form (I-765).
  - A check or money order for the application fees, made out to US Department of Homeland Security.
  - Photocopies of the front of your I-94 (see above).
  - Two photos, taken in accordance with the instructions for filing the I-765.
  - Any previous EAD that you have received.
  - A new I-20 will be issued for you and signed by the International Office coordinator. **You must also sign the I-20 in blue ink.** You must mail all documents to USCIS Dallas Lockbox. USPS: PO Box 660867 Dallas, TX 75266 or FedEx USCIS Attn: AOS 2501 S. State Hwy. 121, Business Suite 400 Lewisville, TX 75067
  - If you choose to use the Lockbox, you may submit Form G-1145, which allows you to receive electronic notification about when USCIS accepts your application. (This is not a requirement).
  - Please allow at least 80 days for processing. If you file electronically, you will already have your receipt number. If you file a paper application and pay by check, USCIS will send you a receipt number (it will also appear on the canceled check) and may follow up with a request for additional information.
  - Did you remember to provide an address that will be valid after you graduate and move out of the residence halls, so that someone will be available to receive the mail and immediately alert you to its arrival?

**D. After submitting the application:**

- Request for Additional Information (RFI): DHS may send a document requesting additional information with a deadline by which all requested documentation must be returned to them. See the Inbound Immigration Specialist for assistance in responding to the RFI.
- To check the status of your application, use the EAC number (receipt number) to check online.

### **E. After approval:**

- Notify the HU International Office and provide a copy of the EAD or any RFI as soon they are received. If SEVIS has not updated your record to show that OPT was approved, the HU International Office must make sure that is taken care of right away.
- If your address changes at any time after you submit Form I-765, you must notify USCIS of the change within 10 days of moving. You may also report your change of address to USCIS by calling the National Customer Service Center at 1-800-375-5283.
- **In addition to contacting USCIS, within 10 days of any change, notify the HU International Office of your new name, address and employment status to ensure continuation of your OPT status.**
- If you do not intend to carry out an entire year of OPT because you plan to begin graduate studies, check with the HU International Office to see how this will affect the duration of your OPT.
- OPT is automatically canceled when the HU International Office re-registers you for classes or on the date when your records are transferred to another U.S. institution.
- If USCIS checks with SEVIS or your employer and finds records indicating that you are not employed or have been unemployed for more than 90 days, you will have to prove you were actually employed or out of the country, in order to avoid cancellation of OPT status.

### **F. Extension of OPT:**

- OPT recipients with diplomas in STEM fields who are working for approved employers may apply for a renewal of their OPT for up to 24 months.
- All other OPT recipients must apply for a change of status at least 60 days before the end of F-1 status, or transfer to another degree program.
- Those who do not change status or transfer must leave the country within 60 days after expiration of OPT. F-1 status expires 60 days after the expiration of OPT.
- OPT recipients whose employers are applying to change their status to H 1-B may be eligible for an extension of F-1 status until the H 1-B is processed. Contact the HU International Office for information about reporting requirements and responsibilities during that period.

### **Definition of STEM OPT**

Practical work experience in your field of study, typically after completion of a degree for a maximum of 36 months (12 months of “regular” OPT with a 24-month extension possible).

### **Eligibility Criteria for the 24-month OPT extension**

Students who have already been approved for 12 months of post-completion OPT; **and** who have earned a bachelor’s or higher degree in a field included on the U.S. Government's list of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields within the last 10 years; **and** who are employed in a paid job directly related to his/her field of study; **and** who are working for an employer that is enrolled in the U.S. Government's E-Verify program.

***Please Note: All four of the above criteria must be met in order for a student to be eligible for the 24-month OPT extension.***

### **Application time frame for the 24-month OPT extension**

Students must apply for the 24-month OPT extension prior to the expiration of the first 12 months of “regular” OPT. The application must be received by USCIS prior to the expiration date of the first OPT period EAD in order to be properly (timely) filed. USCIS will not accept I-765 applications for STEM extensions any earlier than 90 days before the current EAD expiration date. \*Please note: you cannot apply during the 60 day grace period.

**Work authorization status while STEM extension is pending:**

If you successfully file the application for your 24-month OPT extension prior to the expiration of your current 12-month OPT period EAD, you may continue employment *even if your previous EAD card is expired* until your OPT extension is processed or until 180 days has passed, whichever is sooner.

**Important Do’s and Don’ts for the period after you submit your application:**

1. Do not travel outside the country with an expired visa while waiting for your EAD to arrive. Visa officials may decline to renew your F-1 visa if you do not have an EAD and offer of employment.
2. While waiting for the EAD, do not travel to locations where you cannot be reached by the person responsible for accepting your mail. If USCIS sends a request for further information, you must respond by the deadline or lose your opportunity for OPT.
3. Notify the HU International Office:
  - a. of any change in your mailing address, phone and email.
  - b. of the EAC receipt number as soon as you receive the receipt from the USCIS
  - c. A copy of the EAD as soon as it arrives so that we can make sure the SEVIS record is updated properly. Failure to do this may result in problems if you apply for a change of status.
  - d. Within 90 days, provide employment information or risk cancellation of your OPT.
4. You may look for work while waiting for the EAD, but you may not begin work until your EAD has arrived. You do not need to have a job offer to apply for OPT.
5. **Make photocopies of the EAD and keep the original among your important papers even after it has expired. It may be requested by the immigration authorities in the future.**

**G.** In order to process your OPT request/extension request in SEVIS, the International Office requires your:

- Job description and how it relates to your field of study
- Your job title
- Employer’s name
- Dates of intended employment
- Your supervisor’s phone number, name and email
- Your employers EIN number

## I. To apply for **optional practical training prior to graduation (not recommended)**:

- A. You must apply for OPT if the work you wish to do cannot be approved as Curricular Practical Training (CPT). Please consult the Inbound Immigration Specialist to see if it is worth your while to apply. The process is expensive and time-consuming. Therefore, OPT prior to graduation is not recommended.
- B. You must complete all of the steps above, including payment of the fee.
- C. You must apply at least 80 days prior to the date when you wish to start the optional work.
- D. Work is limited to 20 hours per week while classes are in session, unless you have completed all your coursework. OPT may be full-time during summer vacation. It is automatically canceled when you re-enroll in classes.

## II. **Curricular practical training prior** to graduation:

Curricular Practical Training is work for which you will earn credit (i.e. an internship or work study program, or a stated requirement for your degree). The application process is simpler and there is no charge. For further information, please make an appointment to see the Inbound Immigration Specialist and request a copy of the Curricular Practical Training information and application.

## III. **Severe Financial Hardship**

If you need to work because of an unforeseen event that severely restricts your ability to cover your expenses, please see the HU International Office for information and instructions about applying for an EAD for severe financial hardship. Please note: you must document the circumstances that have restricted your financial resources, the application procedure takes a minimum of 80 days and the immigration authorities charge a fee to review your application.

## **OPT Application Steps In Short:**

1. Student must request OPT from International Office
2. DSO recommends student for OPT, International Office updates form I-20
3. Student has 30 days to file form I-765
4. USCIS reviews form I-765
5. Student receives EAD and reports to DSO
6. Student continues to update DSO about address changes

## **Important Things to Remember:**

- Training must relate directly to the student's major area of study.
- OPT is authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), and the student is issued an Employment Authorization Document (EAD).
- OPT allows the student to work for any employer, as long as the training relates to the student's major course of study.
- OPT can occur *before* or *after* the student's program end date.
- Periods of OPT cannot overlap.
- Students are eligible for an additional 12 months of OPT authorization, when they change to a higher educational level.



### Optional Practical Training Eligibility Form

**To Be Completed By the Student Applicant**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Period of time requested: Month: \_\_\_\_\_ Year: \_\_\_\_\_ to Month: \_\_\_\_\_ Year: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Personal Email: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Area of Study (Major): \_\_\_\_\_

4. Expected Graduation Date: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Has any information has changed since your last I-20 was issued, if so what? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Dates of employment (if available): from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

- Full time (more than 20 hrs/week) or part time (20 hrs/week or less): \_\_\_\_\_
- Employer name (if available): \_\_\_\_\_
- Employer full address (if available): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. If you have ever been issued an EAD for OPT, please provide the degree level and start/end dates on past EAD card(s):  
\_\_\_\_\_

I agree to keep my address and employment information updated throughout my OPT.

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**To Be Completed By the Academic Advisor**

1. Please confirm the student's major program and expected graduation date:  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Briefly describe how student's major will relate to student's intended area of employment: (i.e. Is training necessary for certification or licensing? Is it valuable practical experience?)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. If applying prior to graduation, how many hours per week will the student work?

Academic Advisor Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Academic Advisor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Travel While on OPT

Please note that you will need to sign a waiver, acknowledging the recommendations that were made concerning your travel before/during/after OPT approval

Status	Travel Allowed?	Travel Risk Level	What You Need
Applied for OPT. Application is pending and you are still a student (end date on page one of 1-20 has not yet been reached)	Yes	None, as long as you reenter the country at least a couple of weeks before the end date on your 1-20.	Signature on your I-20 Valid passport & visa
Applied for OPT. Application is pending and you are no longer a student (end date on page one of 1-20 has been reached)	No	Moderate to high-if OPT application is approved while you are away, you may be denied re-entry into the country.	Signature on your 1-20 Valid passport & visa
Application for OPT is approved and you have your EAD card, but you do not have a job offer	No	High-if you decide to travel, you should take proof that you are actively looking for a position (i.e. proof that you submitted resumes, upcoming interviews, etc.). Even if you have this proof you may be denied reentry into the country.	Signature on your I-20 Valid passport & visa EAD card Proof that you are actively looking for a job
Application for OPT is approved, you have your EAD card and a job offer, but the position has not started	With caution	Moderate to Low-if you decide to travel, make sure that you take a job offer letter on official letterhead which should include your expected start date.	Signature on your 1-20 Valid passport & visa EAD card Job offer letter
Application for OPT is approved, you have your EAD card and you have begun work	Yes	Very Low-if you decide to travel, request a letter from your employer that says they approve your travel and listing and the date they expect you back	Signature on your 1-20 Valid passport & visa EAD card Letter from employer