F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT) APPLICATION GUIDE

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Guide Overview

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What is OPT?

• Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a benefit of the F-1 student status.

• OPT is work authorization for employment in a position in your field of study.

• OPT is valid for up to 12 months (with a possibility of extension for STEM majors).

• During the OPT period, you maintain F-1 student status.
When am I eligible for OPT?

There are two types of OPT:

Pre Completion OPT
This type of OPT is used during a student's annual vacation and at other times when school is in session OR while school is in session provided that the training does not exceed 20 hours per week. However, it is recommended that students use Curricular Practical Training (CPT) instead of Pre Completion OPT. Learn more about CPT on the ISPO webpage, at cpt.ucsd.edu.

Post Completion OPT
1. You must have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for at least one academic year (3 quarters) on the same SEVIS number.
   - NOTE: You may count the time spent in a study abroad program toward the academic year requirement as long as time spent outside the USA was not more than 5 months. In addition, you may use time spent in another immigration status (e.g. E-2, H-4, etc...) to fulfill the academic year requirement.

2. You must be completing a higher degree level (BA/BS, MA/MBA, PhD) within the next 90 days OR you must not have completed your degree more than 60 days in the past.
What is required of my job while I am on OPT?

• A job offer is not required when you apply for OPT. However, you must find employment within 90 days of the start date of your OPT.

• Once you do get a job, it must be directly related to your major field of study.

• The employment can be full time or part time (no less than 20 hours per week) and it can be paid or unpaid.
  • You can have multiple employers at one time so long as your total working hours are not more than full time.
When do I apply for OPT?

The application for Post-Completion OPT must be **received** by USCIS:

- *No earlier than 90 days before* program completion
- *No later than 60 days after* your date of completion
## When do I apply for OPT?

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*If you are a PhD student, your expected completion date may be your defense date. Please view next few slides for more information.
Instructions: OPT Application Process

Request your OPT I-20

- Complete the OPT Request Form

- You will complete the top half of the request form and sign.
- Your academic advisor or graduate coordinator will complete the bottom half of the request form and sign.
- Confirm your expected completion date with your academic advisor (undergraduate students) or graduate coordinator (graduate students).
- Submit the completed and signed OPT Request Form by emailing to OPTRequest@ucsd.edu.

If you will be taking less than 12 units for your final quarter (Reduced Course Load for Half Time or Part Time Status), you must receive the RCL approval before applying for OPT.

**PhD students: If you will be on Filing Fee for your final quarter, you must submit your Filing Fee Approval with your OPT I-20 Request**
What is the “Requested OPT Start Date”? 

- This is the date you are requesting to begin your OPT.
- You may choose a start date anytime from the day after your graduation up to 60 days later.
- Please reference Slide 6 for exact dates based on your Expected Completion Date.
- The Requested OPT Start Date will be noted on page 2 of your OPT I-20.
- The Requested OPT End Date is one year (365 days) after your Requested OPT Start Date.

Once USCIS receives the OPT Applications, you are not able to adjust your Requested OPT Start Date.
What email should you use?

- You should use a personal non-UCSD email that you will continue to receive emails to during your duration of OPT.
- Not only will ISPO use this email to communicate to you while on OPT, but this is the email that will be associated with your SEVP Portal. Please reference “Maintaining F-1 Status During OPT: Steps” at opt.ucsd.edu for more information regarding the SEVP Portal.

**Email address (non-UCSD):** ________________

(*Must be an email that you will access during the duration of your OPT. This email will be used by SEVP and ISPO to communicate with you while you are on OPT.*

Do not use a UCSD email.)
What is the “Expected Completion Date”?  

- The “Expected Completion Date” is the date you will complete your academic degree.
  - Undergraduate Students: This is the last day of the quarter in which your academic requirements are completed.
  - Graduate Students: This is the last day of the quarter in which your academic requirements are completed OR the Comprehensive Exam or Thesis/Dissertation Defense date.

Your Program End Date on your OPT I-20 will be updated to reflect your accurate Expected Completion Date.
Instructions: OPT Application Process - Request your OPT I-20

Please be aware of the required processing times:

- ISPO processing time = 10 business days
- USCIS processing time = 90 days

Example: Spring 2018

You can submit your OPT Application to USCIS within this 5 month window: up to 90 day before your program end date and up to 60 days after your program end date. Any applications received outside of this 5 month window will be automatically denied.

Your OPT Requested Start Date must be within your 60 day grace period.
Instructions: OPT Application Process - Request your OPT I-20

Example 1: Aia is completing her program on 06/15/2018 (Spring 2018 Quarter). She submits her OPT Application to USCIS on 04/10/2018 with a requested start date of 08/01/2018. She receives her EAD Card 90 days later, on 07/10/2018. Aia cannot begin working until her official OPT Start Date of 08/01/2018. Her end date is 07/31/2019.

Aia can submit her OPT Application to USCIS within this 5 month window: up to 90 days before her program end date and up to 60 days after her program end date. Any applications received outside of this 5 month window will be automatically denied.
Example 2: Peter is completing his program on 06/15/2018 (Spring 2018 Quarter). He submits his OPT Application to USCIS on 06/05/2018 and requests the start date of 08/13/2018. He receives his EAD Card 90 days later, on 09/05/2018. Peter cannot begin working until he receives his EAD card on 09/05/2018. His end date is 08/12/2019 because the OPT End Date cannot be more than 14 months after the program end date. Therefore, Peter has 11 months of OPT instead of 12 months (09/05/2018-08/12/2019).
After 10 Business Days you will receive an e-mail to pick up your OPT I-20.

Check Your OPT I-20 for Accuracy

**Name and Country of Birth/Country of Citizenship**

Be sure your name is spelled and spaced exactly as it appears on your passport. Also confirm that your Country of Birth and Country of Citizenship reflect what appears in your passport.

**Education Level and Major(s)**

Confirm that your education level reflect the degree you are currently completing (ex: PhD candidate graduating with a Terminal Master’s). Also, confirm that your major(s) are most up to date.

**School Attestation**

Check for a ISPO advisor signature.

**Date Issued**

USCIS must receive your complete OPT Application within 30 days of this date.

**Student Attestation**

Remember to sign and date here.
Instructions: OPT Application Process - Request your OPT I-20

Check Your OPT I-20 for Accuracy

Start and End Dates
These are the dates that you wrote on the OPT Request Form. Your EAD Card will have these same dates when your OPT is approved unless USCIS does not complete processing your OPT Application by the requested start date. To ensure you receive your requested start date, apply at least 90 days before your request start date, if possible.

Status
The OPT I-20 issued by ISPO shows the requested OPT status because USCIS adjudicates (approves) your OPT Application request.

Full/Part Time
If you are applying for Post Completion OPT, this will show “Full Time” requested.

Type of OPT
Be sure the type of OPT is Post Completion OPT unless you have met with an advisor and discussed applying for Pre Completion OPT.

Travel Endorsement
Check for ISPO Advisor signature. Your Travel Signature is valid for 6 months during OPT instead of 12 months.
Instructions: OPT Application Process - Request your OPT I-20

- You will receive an information sheet with your OPT I-20 too. This information sheet is for you to keep. **Do not mail this information sheet to USCIS.**
- The information sheet has reminders and information for you regarding mailing your OPT Application and next steps, so please read it thoroughly.
Instructions: OPT Application Process

Prepare Your Application Materials

- 2 U.S. Passport photos
- Check for $410 Fee
- Original Form I-765
- Photocopy of OPT I-20
- Electronic I-94 record OR photocopy of paper Form I-94 (both sides)
- Photocopy of passport biography page
- Photocopy of most recent U.S. visa
- Optional: Form G-1145 to receive e-Notification of receipt from USCIS

All documents must be printed on standard 8.5”x11” white paper

**USCIS no longer requires students submit copies of all of their previous I-20s. (May 17, 2017)**
Instructions: OPT Application Process - Prepare Your Application Materials

- 2 U.S. Passport Photos
  - Photo must be taken within the last 30 days.
  - Photo must be 2”x2”. For exact specifications, visit the U.S. Department of State webpage.
  - Lightly print your full name (pen or pencil) AND your SEVIS Number (N000…) on the back of each photo.
  - Photos must be professionally taken. ISPO recommends having photos taken at Imprints in the Price Center.
Instructions: OPT Application Process - Prepare Your Application Materials

- Check for $410 Fee

  - Fee can be paid by a personal check, money order, or cashier’s check.
  - It is okay if the name or address in the top left is not the same as the applicant’s information.
  - The check should be made payable to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security.”

- The “memo” or “for” section should state “I-765 OPT Application.”

- Write your SEVIS Number anywhere on the front of the check.

![Check Example]

- [Image of a check with the memo line filled out as “I-765 OPT Application” and the SEVIS number written on it.]
The Form I-765 was updated on July 16, 2018. It is now 7 pages instead of 2 pages. ISPO staff is currently updating the OPT Application Guide to include visual instructions for the new Form I-765.

Updates will be published by Monday, July 23.

In the meantime, please reference the USCIS webpage. The second bullet point is text instructions for Form I-765.
Photocopy of OPT I-20

- Include copies of all three pages.
- Sign the original I-20 but mail the copy.
- Check requested OPT start and end dates on page 2.

Remember...

- USCIS must receive your OPT Application within 30 days of the Date Issued on page 1 of your OPT I-20.
- USCIS must receive your OPT Application within your 5 months window (no later than 60 days after your program end date).
Instructions: OPT Application Process - Prepare Your Application Materials

- Electronic I-94 record OR photocopy of paper Form I-94 (both sides)

  • You will have a card form of the I-94 if you have not travelled into the USA since April 2013 OR if you were inspected at a land border (such as the land port of entry at Tijuana).

  • You will have an electronic I-94 record if you travelled into the USA after April 2013 and entered by air or sea. Your I-94 record can be found here: www.cbp.gov/i94.
Instructions: OPT Application Process - Prepare Your Application Materials

- Photocopy of passport biography page
  - Be sure the entire MRZ Code is visible.

If your most current visa is in an old passport, please include copies of both passport biography pages AND a short letter to USCIS explaining the situation.
Instructions: OPT Application Process - Prepare Your Application Materials

- Photocopy of most recent U.S. visa
  - Visa does not need to be valid.
  - Visa may or may not have UC San Diego under “Annotation.”
  - Be sure the entire MRZ Code is visible.

If you were approved for a change of visa status within the U.S. (example: Change from E-2 to F-1) then you will not have the F-1 visa sticker in your passport. Instead, please include a copy of your I-797 receipt notice showing the approved change of status.
Instructions: OPT Application Process - Prepare Your Application Materials

Optional: Form G-1145 to receive e-Notification of receipt from USCIS

- Use this form to request a text message and/or email when USCIS accepts your form.
- Form G-1145 can be found on the USCIS webpage: https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145.
Thank you for reading the OPT Application Guide

Please return to the OPT Webpage (opt.ucsd.edu) for next steps.

iemployment@ucsd.edu
Office Hours: Monday-Friday 9am-4pm