



F-1 OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING GUIDELINES

The following are preliminary eligibility requirements to file for OPT.

1. I have been a full time student at Cal State LA for at least nine months prior to my completion of studies.
2. I have been in the degree program stated on my I-20.
3. I have maintained my F-1 status.
4. I have a valid passport, and it will be valid for 6 months into the future.
5. I have attended the mandatory OPT workshop.

If you are out of status, you must be reinstated prior to applying for OPT. (See an International Student Adviser for details on reinstatement.)

International students on F-1 status have the opportunity to engage in paid employment related to their field of study. Such employment is called “Optional Practical Training” (OPT) and students are eligible for a maximum of one year. All OPT taken prior to completion of studies will be deducted from the one-year maximum entitlement. For students who have taken a total of 12 months or more of full time Curricular Practical Training during the course of study, OPT will NOT be available.

Students are allowed one year of OPT for each degree completed. For example, a student may receive one year of OPT after receiving a bachelor’s degree, another year of OPT after receiving a master’s degree, and one additional year after receiving a Ph.D. degree. Each OPT period must be used after each degree.

If you are eligible for OPT, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) will accept applications as early as 90 days BEFORE and up to 60 days AFTER you have completed your program.. Your program of study is completed when you have fulfilled all requirements for the degree. It is not dependent on the Grad Check or Commencement Ceremony. It is the end of your last enrolled term. All previously approved employment must end when you complete your program of study.

We highly recommend you to apply during the early period as it usually take from 3 to 4 months to obtain approval from USCIS, and there is NO procedure to expedite your application.

If, by the time you have completed your course of study, you have not received the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS, you are still eligible to stay in the U.S. **NOTE: You should not travel outside the U.S. You cannot begin employment prior to receiving the EAD.**

You do not need to have an employer before requesting OPT.

PERIODS WHEN OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING MAY BE TAKEN

1. **Pre-Completion:** During your annual vacation or after completion of all course requirements, while working on your thesis or comprehensive exam (for a maximum of 20 hours while school is in session); or
2. **Post-Completion:** After completion of your course of study.

Each period authorized is deducted from the 12-month total allocation for Optional Practical Training, at the rate of one week for each one week authorized, even if you never find an employer.

DUTIES AND OBLIGATIONS WHILE ON OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING:

1. You must update your U.S. residence within 10 days if you move (including telephone number and email). You must update your U.S. residence on GET as well;
2. Your employer information (name and address of employer, and brief description of your duties) must be updated every three months and in between where there is a change by submitting an OPT reporting form - www.calstatela.edu/international;
3. Your I-20 must be signed by the International Office when traveling outside of the U.S.;
4. You must provide a copy of your EAD to the International Office upon receipt; this is a requirement to verify the approval in SEVIS.
5. You must notify the International Office if you leave the U.S. with no intention of returning to continue the OPT;
6. You must notify the International Office if you file an application to change your non-immigrant status or for permanent residence;
7. You are required to maintain valid medical insurance coverage;
8. Your employment must be related to your field of study;

OPT APPLICATION CHECKLIST AND INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1: Submit the following documents to the International Office.

- a. Form I-20 (2 copies of all Cal State LA I-20s issued to you);
- b. Form I-765 (completed and signed), can be downloaded at www.uscis.gov;
- c. \$410.00 check or money order made out to Department of Homeland Security; (check www.uscis.gov for the most recent fee)
- d. 2 Passport style photos;
- e. 2 photocopies of your I-94 record;
- f. 2 photocopies of your passport (biographical page and expiration date);
- g. 2 photocopies of F-1 visa;
- h. 2 photocopies of any previous EAD (front and back, if applicable);
- i. Optional Practical Training Request Form

STEP 2: After submitting the complete package, return to the International Office within 7 business days to sign your new I-20 with the OPT recommendation and pick up the OPT package.

STEP 3: You will need to mail out the OPT package to the appropriate USCIS office. The address for USCIS is provided with the package. **NOTE: You must mail the package out within 30 days of the new I-20 issuance.**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

When can I apply for OPT?

If you have maintained a valid F-1 status, you may apply up to 90 days prior to and 60 days after your completion date. Your completion date is usually the end of your last enrolled term.

How do I apply for OPT?

You must attend one of the OPT workshops held during the year. Submit all required documents to the International Office for review. A new I-20 will be issued. You must return to the International Office to sign the new I-20. After signing the new I-20, you must mail the OPT application out to the appropriate USCIS office. **The OPT application must be sent within 30 days of the issuance date on the new I-20.**

How will I know if my OPT application has been approved?

After USCIS has evaluated and approved your application for employment authorization, they will send an Approval Notice notifying you that the application has been approved. This Approval Notice is NOT a work permit. Two to four weeks later, they will send the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) to you. The EAD is a small photo identification card that states the type and the period of employment authorized. When you receive this card, check to make certain all the information is correct. If there are any errors, please contact the International Office immediately. This is a crucial document: be sure you keep it in a safe place.

How do I show employment is directly related to my degree program?

You should maintain evidence that you held a particular position, proof of the duration of that position, the job title, contact information for the student's supervisor, or manager, and a description of the work.

If it is not clear from the job description that the work is related to your degree, you should obtain a signed letter from the employer's hiring official, supervisor, or manager stating how your degree is related to the work performed.

Can I begin working before I get the EAD?

No, you may not begin employment before you receive your EAD from USCIS, even if your requested start date has passed. Working before OPT has been authorized by the USCIS constitutes illegal employment and will jeopardize your legal status in the U.S. **NOTE:** Be careful about 'volunteering' prior to receiving your work permit. Immigration defines illegal employment not only as receiving payment without a proper work permit, but also 'volunteering' in a normally paid position. You cannot volunteer for a normally paid position.

If you are participating in an official volunteer position in your field of study, this time will NOT count towards the 90-day unemployment period.

Can I travel abroad and re-enter the U.S. before I receive my EAD?

Yes, if you are applying for post-completion OPT and will re-enter the U.S. before completing your studies for the degree in progress. To re-enter the U.S., you will still require a valid travel signature on your I-20 and a current F-1 visa.

No, if you have completed your studies but have not received your EAD card. If you leave the U.S. after your completion date (item #5 on your I-20) and before you receive your EAD, you may be denied entry into the U.S. Departing the U.S. prior to the approval means you are abandoning your OPT application.

Can I travel abroad while I am on OPT?

Yes, you may travel outside the U.S. while on OPT, provided:

1. you hold a valid EAD card;
2. you have a job, offer of employment, or have documentation of your job search; and
3. The International Office has signed page 3 of your I-20, permitting re-entry to the U.S. The International Office will sign your I-20 only after seeing your valid EAD card.

Who decides if I am approved for OPT?

The USCIS adjudicates the Form I-765 and issues your EAD on the basis of International Office's recommendation unless USCIS finds the student otherwise ineligible. USCIS will notify the applicant if OPT is denied and will give the reason(s) for the denial.

What if I cannot complete my studies as I had indicated and I already submitted the OPT application?

If you discover you are unable to complete your degree program as you had indicated in your OPT application, notify the International Office immediately to discuss your options regarding your OPT application and F-1 status.

How is the 90 days of unemployment calculated?

The 90 day unemployment starts counting from the start date of your EAD. If you have not received the EAD but your requested start date had already passed, this does not count towards the 90-day unemployment.

You are permitted a 10-day grace period between jobs. For example, if your last date of work for Company A is October 1st and your new employment with Company B starts on October 5th, the 3 days of unemployment between October 1st and 5th does not count toward the 90-day unemployment period.

How does travel outside the United States impact the period of unemployment?

If the student whose approved period of OPT has started travels outside the United States while unemployed, the time spent outside the United States will count as unemployment.

If the student travels while employed (either during a period of leave authorized by an employer or as part of their employment), the time spent outside the United States will not count as unemployment.

Termination of OPT

Authorization for practical training is automatically terminated when you transfer to another school or begin study at another educational level. You cannot reapply for any lost time.

International Office - Golden Eagle #217

www.calstatela.edu/international

international@calstatela.edu

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INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LOS ANGELES

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING REQUEST FORM

An academic advisor or graduate advisor must confirm the completion of your program. This is necessary for Post-completion OPT. Discuss your graduation plans with your academic advisor and obtain an approval on this form.

STUDENT INFORMATION

Family Name _____ First Name _____

Major _____ CIN _____

Email Address _____ Telephone Number _____

OPT requested start date:

Month Day Year

OPT requested end date: (for pre-completion OPT only)

Month Day Year

I verify that I have read the Optional Practical Training Guidelines and understand my obligations as an F-1 student during the OPT period.

Student Signature _____ Date _____

Academic Department/Advisement Center:

I have reviewed the student's academic record and confirm the student has completed or will complete all degree requirements by (circle one):

Fall | W-Intersession | Spring | S-Intersession | Summer Year _____

Department _____

Advisor's Name _____ (Print Name) Phone Extension _____

Signature _____ Date _____

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