



F-1 Optional Practical Training

In General

IMPORTANT NOTE: You do not need to have an employer before requesting Optional Practical Training (OPT).

International students on F-1 status have the opportunity to engage in paid employment related to their fields 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, no OPT will be available.

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

Eligibility

You must have attended Cal State L.A. in your current degree program for at least nine months prior to your completion of studies. You must also have maintained your F-1 status. If you are out of status, you must be reinstated prior to applying for OPT. (See Immigration Counselor for details on reinstatement.)

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** your date of completion. Your program of study is completed when you have fulfilled all requirements for the degree. **IT IS NOT DEPENDENT ON THE GRAD CHECK. (For graduate students who have completed all course requirements, this is the date when you file your thesis or take the comprehensive exam. For all others, 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 should not travel outside the U.S. **You cannot begin employment prior to receiving the EAD.**

Periods When Optional Practical Training May Be Taken

1. **Pre-Completion:** During your annual vacation, if you are eligible and intend to register for the next term; or
2. **Pre-Completion:** After completion of all course requirements if you are working on your thesis or dissertation (for a maximum of 20 hours while school is in session); or
3. **Post-Completion:** After completion of the course of study you are engaged in.

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.

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Application Procedure

- Student must attend one of the mandatory information workshops offered by International Programs and Services (IPS); and
- Submit the required documents to IPS.

IPS must review and certify all applications for OPT that are submitted to the USCIS.

The following are required documents for the OPT application:

1. Form I-20 (2 copies of all CSULA I-20s issued to you, Pages 1 and 3);
2. Form I-765 (completed and signed), can be downloaded at www.uscis.gov;
3. \$340.00 check or money order made out to **US Citizenship and Immigration Services**;
4. 2 Passport style photos;
5. 2 photocopies of the front and back of your I-94 Arrival/Departure Record Card (make sure the entry stamp is legible);
6. 2 photocopies of your passport (biographical page and expiration date);
7. 2 photocopies of F-1 visa;
8. 2 photocopies of any previous EAD (front and back, if applicable);
9. Planned Graduation Form;
10. Employment Supplemental Form.

Duties and Obligations while on Optional Practical Training:

1. You must promptly update International Programs and Services (IPS) regarding the following information within 10 days of the change:
 - a. Your U.S. residence (including telephone number and email address);
 - b. Your employer information (name and address of employer, and brief description of your duties);

This information MUST be provided to IPS and reported to SEVIS. Students on OPT cannot exceed 90 days of unemployment during the 12 months of OPT employment. Failure to provide this information can result in the termination of OPT employment authorization and the F-1 status.
2. Your I-20 must be signed by IPS when traveling outside the U.S.;
3. You must provide a copy of your EAD to IPS upon receipt; **this is a requirement to verify the approval in SEVIS.**
4. You must notify IPS if you leave the U.S. with no intention of returning to continue the OPT;
5. You must notify IPS if you file an application to change your non-immigrant status or for permanent residence;
6. You are required to maintain medical insurance coverage;
7. Your employment must be related to your field of studies;

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 IPS for review. A new I-20 will be issued. You must return to IPS to sign the new I-20 **within 3 weeks** of submitting your OPT application prior to IPS mailing out the OPT application to USCIS. Applications without the student's signature on the new I-20 will NOT be mailed out. **I-20 with OPT recommendation must be sent in within 30 days of the issuance date.**

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

Four to six weeks after IPS submits your application, you will receive a Notice of Action (Form I-797) from USCIS. Keep this letter; you will need it. Your Notice of Action will tell you to expect to wait about 80 days to receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD). 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 is any errors please contact IPS 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 evident 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 the student's 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 desired 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 studies, 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. IPS signed page 3 of your I-20, permitting re-entry to the U.S. IPS 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 IPS' 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. *The student may not appeal the decision.*

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 Immigration Counselor 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 as your work authorization may not have been approved.

You are permitted a 10-day grace period between jobs. For example, 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.



OPT Supplemental Form

Name: _____ CIN: _____
Family/Last First Middle

Major: _____ Completion Date: _____

SEVIS ID: _____

OPT Starting Date: _____

Brief Description of your intended employment: _____

Current U.S. Residence:

Street Apt. #

Telephone

City State Zip Code

Email Address

Permanent Address (must be abroad):

Street

Telephone

City State/Province

Country Postal Code



Planned Graduation Form

Name: _____ CIN: _____
Family/Last First Middle

Major: _____

In order to graduate, I have _____ units in my major program and _____ units in general education/electives left to be completed (include classes currently taking).

I have/ have not submitted my Graduate Check form.

Undergraduates:

I plan to complete my studies by _____ of _____.
Quarter/Month Year

Graduates: (complete one of the following)

My comprehensive exam is scheduled for _____ (MM/DD/YY).

I plan to submit my thesis on _____ (MM/DD/YY).

I am/will enroll in a required major/elective course and will complete the program by:

_____ of _____.
Quarter/Month Year

Student's Signature

Date

Academic Department:

I have reviewed the student's plan and verify that the listed requirements are correct, and the student should complete his/her degree at the time he/she indicated.

Department: _____

Academic Advisor: _____
(Print)

Phone Ext.: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____