

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: OPT

What is OPT?

OPT stands for Optional Practical Training. It is a government authorized program that allows F-1 students to participate in up to one year of practical training in a job related to their major area of study. You do not need a job offer in order to obtain OPT. OPT can be done in two ways: Post-completion or Pre-completion. Pre-completion has three subsets and requires special permission. Most students choose post-completion OPT.

Who is eligible for OPT?

You must have completed one academic year (fall and spring semesters) as a full-time student directly prior to and be in F-1 status at the time of your application. Students entering the U.S. under a new SEVIS ID # must wait to complete one full academic year as a full-time student before they are eligible to apply for OPT (certain exceptions allowed for students traveling abroad for a change of status).

When should I apply for OPT?

In your final semester when you are certain that you will complete all your degree requirements. You may apply for OPT 90 days before the completion of your studies but no later than 60 days after the completion of your studies. Since the application process may take up to 90 days and employment cannot begin until you have received your EAD card, applying early is recommended. Your application must be properly filed with USCIS and be officially receipted before the 60th day after the completion date of your degree program.

How should I apply for OPT?

The first step is to schedule an appointment with ISSSO for an OPT workshop. It is imperative that you follow the directions found on our website here: <https://uh.edu/oisss/opt-details/how-to-apply-for-opt/> Once you complete the workshop and submit the required documents to the ISSSO counselor, they will provide you with a new I-20 that includes an OPT recommendation on page 2. This new form I-20 is required to have prior to submitting an application to USCIS. If you submit an application without the updated I-20, your application will be denied and your payment forfeit.

When will my OPT begin?

Your employment authorization dates will be located on the approved EAD card that you receive from USCIS. For post-completion OPT, you may choose any date between your date of completion (usually the official closing of the semester) and up to 60 days later.

How is OPT different from Curricular Practical Training (CPT)?

With OPT, the student receives an EAD from USCIS. With CPT, the authorization is granted by a Designated School Official (i.e. International Student Counselor at ISSSO) and is indicated on page 2 of the student's I-20. Participation in CPT does not affect your future OPT as long as you work less than one year full-time under the CPT program. If one year or more of CPT is used, the student is no longer eligible for OPT at that degree level.

What should I do if I am not going to complete my degree as expected after applying for OPT?

You should report to our office for guidance. You may need to do a program extension to cover your additional course(s), be required to apply for reinstatement for violation of status, or withdraw your OPT application. If you are a doctoral student finishing your dissertation or a master's student working only on your thesis, you cannot extend your program of study. You would have to maintain your status on OPT while also be required to complete your dissertation/thesis.

What should I do if I never got the email to report work on the SEVP portal and now I've passed the 10 days to report?

You will have to email sevis@central.uh.edu and request ISSSO to resend the SEVP portal link to you. Once you receive the link, you can register your portal account to report your work. If you exceed your 10 days to report, you would have to report your work with a current start date and then email sevis@central.uh.edu to adjust your start date for the job.

Do I get another year of OPT if I complete a new degree?

You are allowed another year of OPT at the completion of another degree at a higher level (e.g. bachelor's to master's or master's to Ph.D.). Students who have received a bachelors, masters, or doctoral degree in a field on the Department of Homeland Security STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) Designated Degree Program List may be eligible for a 24 month extension to their Post-Completion OPT. There are additional requirements and qualifications for this extension. More information can be found on our website on how to apply.