Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)

What is Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

Standard Post-Completion Optional Practical Training, or "OPT", is off-campus work authorization for F-1 international students in their field of study. This benefit can be utilized after completion of all degree requirements. If granted by USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) the authorization full time employment for a maximum of 12 months.

Who is eligible for OPT?

Students who will complete their degree requirements within 90 days and have been in full time status for two consecutive semesters by the program completion. **Please note that your program may complete before the end date on your I-20.**

You are ineligible for OPT if you:

- Completed one year of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) are your current level of study
- Have already applied and been approved for OPT after completing a different degree at your current level of study

What is my program completion date?

The program completion date is the last day of your **final program requirement,** which can be the last day of the semester; the end of a summer or winter session; or after completion of a modular or Saturday course. Please check your course registration to determine the end date of your final course.

When should I apply?

You can apply for OPT up to 90 days before your program end-date. The latest that you can apply is 60 days after your program end-date. If they receive the application packet more than 90 days before the requested start date, it will be denied and the application fee will not be refunded.

We recommend that you apply at least 3 months before you plan to start working to allow for document processing. You must file your application to USCIS no more than 30 days past the date of issuance on your I-20. If it is past the 30 days, it will be denied

How long does it take USCIS to approve my application?

Processing times take on average 3 months.

How do I choose my OPT dates?

Immigration allows you to begin working *up to* 60 days after the completion of your program. You must choose a start date between the day after program completion and 60 days later.

With processing times up to approximately 90 days, you want to allow time for the OPT card to arrive. You cannot begin working until both the card arrives <u>and</u> are within the authorized dates of employment listed on the card.   We recommend you choose your dates accordingly.

How many hours can I work on Post-Completion OPT?

The minimum number of hours is 20 hours per week. There is no maximum amount.

Do I need a job before I apply?

No, a job is not needed.

What work can I do?

All OPT employment must be related to your field of study. Your OPT employment may include:

- Multiple employers: You may work for more than one employer, but ALL employment must be related to your major program of study.
- Work for hire (commonly referred to as 1099 employment)
  - You may perform a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship
  - You must be prepared to provide evidence to the U.S. government, if called upon to do so, showing the dates and duration of the contract periods, and the name and address of the contracting company.
- Unpaid employment
  - You may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern, so long as your work does not violate any labor laws (for example, it is not a position normally associated with wages.)
  - You must work at least 20 hours per week, and must be able to provide to the U.S. government, if called up to do so, evidence from the volunteer/internship supervisor of the hours you worked.

What happens if I am unemployed during OPT?

- You are permitted a total of 90 days of unemployment of OPT, which will begin based on the start date on your EAD card. If you travel outside the U.S. while unemployed during OPT, the time you spend abroad counts towards your 90 days of unemployment.
- You must report all employment/unemployment to International Student Services at RCC. We will not terminate your record if you exceed the 90 days of unemployment. We are only required to report any changes in address or program/employment in SEVIS.

When can I apply for a Social Security Number?

If you do not have a Social Security Number already, the I-765 Form allows you to apply for a SSN while filing for OPT (see section 10 on I765 form.)

What if I would like to TRAVEL after I have applied for OPT?

Because your recommendation for OPT will be clearly stated on page 2 of your I-20, you will be asked by an Immigration Official to produce your Employment Authorization Card upon entry of the United States. You will also be asked to show a letter stating that you have secured employment in the USA, and you are returning to resume employment.   We *strongly* recommend that you travel outside of the US only if you have a job in the US to return to. Travel with your OPT card, as well as all immigration documents (see below). (Your OPT card states that it is not valid for entry to the US. Don't panic! This means that the OPT card alone is not enough to enter the country, you need *all* immigration documents.) You may wish to bring copies of a pay check from your employer as evidence that you are engaging in practical training.

If you choose to travel outside the U.S. while on OPT, make sure you have the following documents:

- EAD Card

- All SEVIS I-20s including the current I-20 with **travel signature** on page 2 that is **less than 6 months old!** It is very important that your OPT I-20 has been signed by a DSO less than 6 months before the date you plan on re-entering the U.S.

- Valid F-1 Visa for re-entry to the U.S.

- Letter from your employer stating that you are re-entering the U.S. to resume employment. It is also helpful to bring with you any pay stubs as additional proof that you have secured a job.

What do I do when my Post-Completion OPT ends?

USCIS states that you have 60 days from the end date of the authorized Post-Completion OPT period to:

- Be in the process of changing to another immigration status.

- Have an I-20 for the next upcoming semester to begin a new academic program.

- Leave the United States.

I have been admitted for another degree program and it starts before my OPT ends. Is this ok?

Once you start a new degree program, your OPT is cancelled.

What are the steps to apply for Post-Completion OPT?

1. **Apply for the Post-completion OPT I-20 from ISS:**
   a. Submit a Post-Completion OPT Request Form, signed by both yourself and your academic advisor
   b. Pick up your I-20, check it over, and mail it with the rest of the required items no more than 30 days after the issuance date on the I-20.

2. **Send your application and all required documents to USCIS:**
   a. G-1145 Form. This will provide with E-notification that your file was received. (Free and optional)
   b. A check or money order for $410.00 made out to the **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**. (DO NOT WRITE ON THE BACK OF THE CHECK!) Your name and address must be on the check. Write your I-94 # on the bottom left hand of the check (in the "memo" or "for" section.)
   c. Two passport style photographs taken within the last 6 months. Each photo must be cut to 2 inches by 2 inches with your name and I-94 # printed lightly on the back in pencil. Photos must have been taken within the past 6 months. Place the photos and check/money order in an envelope. Write your name and I-94 # on the outside of the envelope as well.
   d. Complete form I-765 **online** using the PDF version located at the following website http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf you will need Acrobat Reader to open the file.
      i. **Be sure to enter (c) (3) (B) in step # 20. Print completed form I-765 and sign in BLUE INK.**
      ii. Double check your address. Will you be there in 3 months? If unsure, you can use ISS's address.
   e. All I-20s, Visa, Passport, I-94 card/electronic print out.

3. **Make a copy of your completed I-20 application for your records.**

4. **Make an appointment with ISS to bring in your application to be reviewed by an advisor.**

5. **Mail your entire packet by certified return receipt mail (allows you to track the package.)** If you are staying with the New York/New Jersey area, all packets mailed by USPS should be sent to:

   USCIS
   PO Box 660867
   Dallas, TX 75266

Once I receive my EAD card, what should I do?

- Make sure to check the dates are correct on the card.
- Make a copy of the card and bring it to ISS for our records.
- You must inform ISS of any employment you receive and if you change your address.
- You cannot start working until you receive your EAD card and the start date on the card has arrived.

Post-Completion OPT USCIS Application Checklist

You must submit all the following items to USCIS. Please put the packet together in the following order.

❑ Fee of $410. Make check payable to the "US Department of Homeland Security." You may send a money order or personal check drawn on a US bank, NO CASH. Your name and address must be on the check. Write your I-94 # on the bottom left hand of the check (in the "memo" or "for" section.)

❑ G-1145. Use this form if you wish to receive email or text confirmation (within 1 week) of your receipt number from the Lockbox facility. Clip the form to the front of the OPT application. Find the form at: www.uscis.gov.

❑ Two "passport" photos. Print your name and write your admission number (I-94#) on the back of each photo. Use powder to prevent glaring and be sure there are no shadows in your photos! You may put the photos and check in an envelope and attach carefully to the front of the I-765 (do not staple photos!).

❑ Original I-765 form (follow instructions on how to complete form included in this packet).   Make sure to sign it in blue ink.

❑ A copy (NOT original) of page 1 and 2 of the new post-completion I-20 from ISS with the recommendation for OPT on page 2. Sign the new I-20 in blue ink. This I-20 cannot be more than 30 days old when it arrives at USCIS or OPT will be denied!

❑ A copy of ALL previously issued I-20 documents dating back to beginning of F-1 status (signed in item #11).

❑ A copy of your I-94 record.
   o Both sides of your I-94 card (front and back - even if the back is blank) OR
   o Printout of the electronic I-94 record from www.cbp.gov/i94

❑ A copy of the photo page (identification page) and expiration date page of your passport.

❑ A copy of the most recent F-1 visa page in your passport (even if expired).

❑ A copy of any previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) OPT card, if you have had one.

Form I-765 Instructions for Post-Completion OPT

❑ **Download the form I-765 from www.uscis.gov and complete it as a form-fillable pdf.** Do NOT complete the form by hand. A machine-readable scanner reads the form.

❑ **Check the first box: "I am applying for: permission to accept employment."**

❑ **Complete lines 1 through 16:**
- **#1 Name:** Type your family/last name in all capital letters and your first name in sentence case.
  - **If your full name does not fit, a separate paper will need to be included to fit your entire name.**

- **#3 U.S. Mailing Address:** This must be an address at which you can receive mail for at least the next 90 days. You cannot put in a forwarding order on this address - the immigration service's envelopes state "Do Not Forward." If the EAD is sent to an address with a forwarding order, or if you cannot receive mail at the address you use, your EAD will be returned to the immigration service. If you want to use a friend's address, you need to make sure your name is on the mailbox. If you want your department to receive mail for you, check with your department first. You may use ISS to collect your mail – but we are unable to track the progress of your case. If you choose to use ISS as your mailing address, put the address as:

  Rockland Community College
  International Student Services
  145 College Road, Suffern, NY 10901

  NOTE: If you use the ISS address, you will receive an email as soon as your card arrives in the office.

  If the mailing address you indicate on the I-765 is not located in New York/New Jersey, refer to the I-765 instructions (www.uscis.gov) for the proper mailing address for your application.

- **#9- 13 Social Security Information**: If you need a SSN, please be sure to complete steps 10-13 with the appropriate information. You will receive your SSN approximately 10 business days after your OPT is approved.

- **#14 Alien Registration Number:** Use your I-94 number either found on the upper left side of the I-94 card that you received when you entered the US (small white card in your passport) or taken from www.cbp.gov/i94. It is usually an 11-digit number – sometimes the last two digits are separated by a space.

- **#15 Previous Employment Authorization:** The answer is "no" unless you have previously applied for an EAD (OPT card) at this or any other institution. It is "no" even if you have had CPT or an H-1B visa.

- **#20 Eligibility Categories:** For F-1 Post-Completion OPT, fill out as follows:
  - **For post-completion Optional Practical Training: (c) (3) (B)**

- **Skip #21-23**

- **Certification:** Sign and date the I-765 in **dark blue ink using a ballpoint pen**. Sign WITHIN the 2 lines.

You may not change your OPT dates once you have filed the application with USCIS!
You may not begin work until you have received the EAD card and are within the start and end date.

Post-Completion OPT Request Form

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE STUDENT:

First Name: _____ **Last Name:** _____

RCC ID: _____ **Major:** _____

Email: _____

Address: _____
        (Street)   *(City/State)*   *(Zip Code)*

❑   Check here if you have a secondary MAJOR

OPT Start Date: _____ **OPT End Date:** _____

Passport Expiration: _____

Have you applied for OPT before (Circle one):   NO   YES

If YES, please indicate for which education level: Associates   Bachelors   Masters

TO BE COMPLETED BY AN ACADEMIC ADVISOR ONLY:

The above-named student is applying for permission to engage in employment for OPT as provided in the immigration regulations for F-1 students. OPT is employment in a job related to the student's field of study and is intended to enhance and supplement the formal, classroom education. US Immigration and Citizenship Services (USCIS) will authorize OPT.

- International Student Services (ISS) must have a statement from the student's academic advisor indicating the date the student is expected to complete all degree requirements or the expected date of completion. The date of completion is not necessarily the end of the term or the graduation date, but the date all requirements for the degree are fulfilled.
- This date must accurately reflect the actual completion date of his/her program. Students may not continue working on campus after the end date that you confirm below until they have OPT from USCIS.

Please complete the information below and return it to the student so we may process the student's request. Should you have any questions, call ISS at ext. 4193.

I certify that the above student will complete All the requirements for their degree on: _____
                                                                  (mm/dd/yyyy) please be accurate)

Major: _____ **Degree to be received:**_____

Advisor Name: _____ **Advisor Signature:** _____

Date: _____