Optional Practical Training (OPT)

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Office of International Education

A Guide to Working Off Campus for F-1 Visa Holders

What is OPT?

Work experience in the U.S. related to an F-1 student's major to provide practical training during or upon completion of a degree program

What kind of work can I do with OPT?

Possible	Not possible
■ **Paid, unpaid or volunteer positions**	■ **Work unrelated to your major**
■ **Multiple employers**	■ **On-campus employment through Student Employment unless enrolled in a higher level degree program at UR for the next available term**
■ **Work for hire as contractor or consultant**	
■ **Self-employed business owner**	■ **Work for UR after graduation UNLESS the job is a faculty, staff or other professional position recruited through Human Resource Services**
■ **Agency or consulting firm**	

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How long is OPT?

- 12 month maximum at each higher educational level for non-STEM majors

- Cannot combine 12 month OPT periods

- 24-month extension for qualifying STEM majors

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When can I use OPT?

Pre-completion	Post-completion
- **Must be used BEFORE graduation**	- **Must be used AFTER graduation**
- **Job offer is REQUIRED**	- **Job offer is NOT REQUIRED**
- **Part-time during semester (20 hour per week maximum including on-campus employment); Full-time during official school breaks**	- **At least 20 hours per week or an average of 20 hours per week in 1-month for variable schedules**
- **Time will be deducted from 12 month maximum (part-time is calculated at full-time equivalent, e.g. 6 months part-time=3 months full-time)**	

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What is required for OPT?

- Valid F-1 status and good UR standing at time of application

- Physical presence in the U.S.

- Full-time enrollment in any status that does not prohibit full-time study for at least 1 academic year by employment start date

- Not having been approved for 12 months of OPT at same degree level

- Not having used 12 months or more of full-time CPT

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What is NOT required for OPT?

- A job offer for post-completion (except for 24-month STEM extension)

- Approval by the Office of International Education (USCIS approves OPT)

- Working in a particular U.S. location (work can be done anywhere in the U.S.)

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What is the earliest date I can apply for OPT?

Pre-completion	Post-completion

Pre-completion

- **90 days before completing 1st full academic year**

- **If you have completed 1st full academic year, 90 days before employment start date**

Post-completion

- **90 days before graduation**

- **Applications received 91 or more days before graduation will be rejected and you will have to re-apply with a new application form and fee**

- **Must apply separately for pre- and post- completion**

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What is the latest date I can apply for OPT?

- **December 1** in the fall semester

- **May 1** in the spring semester

- Although immigration regulations allow students to apply for post-completion OPT up to 60 days after graduation, the Office of International Education will NOT consider applications after the stated deadlines except by prior arrangement or personal hardship

- Application must be received at USCIS within 30 days of OPT recommendation and no later than the end of the 60 day grace period after your graduation

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How do I choose my OPT start and end dates?

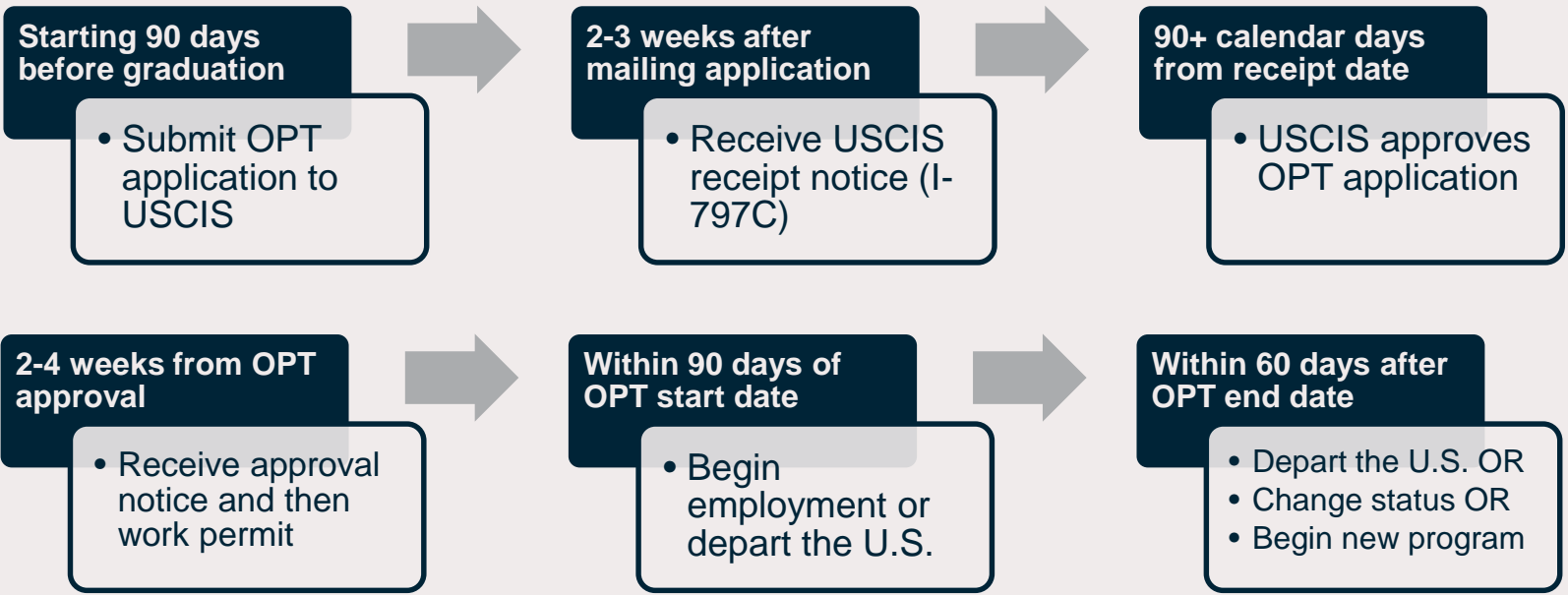| Pre-completion	Post-completion

Pre-completion

- **Known or estimated dates of employment**

Post-completion

- **Start date anytime from 1 to 60 days after graduation**

- **End date no more than 12 months from start date if you have not used pre-completion OPT**

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What is the timing of the OPT application and approval process?

Starting 90 days before graduation
- Submit OPT application to USCIS

2-3 weeks after mailing application
- Receive USCIS receipt notice (I-797C)

90+ calendar days from receipt date
- USCIS approves OPT application

2-4 weeks from OPT approval
- Receive approval notice and then work permit

Within 90 days of OPT start date
- Begin employment or depart the U.S.

Within 60 days after OPT end date
- Depart the U.S. OR
- Change status OR
- Begin new program

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When does my OPT start?

- **Must be in physical possession of EAD (Employment Authorization Document)**

- **Cannot work until EAD start date**

- **Employment must begin and end during authorized period**

When does my OPT end?

- On EAD end date UNLESS you have a pending H-1B petition, a 24-month STEM extension, or you have exceeded the 90 day unemployment limit

- If you transfer to another institution

- If you start a new degree program

- If you cancel your OPT (please consult the Office of International Education 1st) - **NO REFUND of USCIS fee!**

- If you do not graduate and your application is pending it must be withdrawn; if your application has already been approved, you can work part-time while completing your program and full-time upon program completion

- **60 day grace period after EAD end date** to change your visa, begin a new program, or depart the U.S.

24-month STEM Extension

- Apply up to 90 days before OPT end date

- 180 day automatic work authorization extension while application is pending

- Two 24-month extensions can be used after each higher degree level; Cannot be combined; Can be based on previous STEM degree obtained within 10 years of application date

- Work at least 20 hours per week in paid position for each E-Verify employer; No volunteering or self-employment allowed

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What are the requirements of OPT?

- **Cannot exceed 90 calendar days of unemployment** (150 days for 24-month STEM extension); employment travel and periods of authorized leave do not count as unemployment

- Cannot work during gap between end of semester (pre-completion) or graduation (post-completion) and EAD start date

- 10-day reporting requirements through **SEVP Portal** for 12-month post-completion OPT

- Additional reporting requirements for 24-month STEM extension including self evaluations

What happens if I exceed the unemployment limit?

- Department of Homeland Security calculates unemployment time in SEVIS and will auto-terminate records exceeding unemployment limit

- Date of record termination equals loss of F-1 status immediately – **NO GRACE PERIOD!!**

- Accrual of **unlawful presence** starts the day after unemployment limit is reached

- Unlawful presence can lead to 3-year, 10-year or permanent bars to re-entering the U.S. and adjustment of status to permanent residency

- Report all periods of employment and volunteering

- Keep documentation of your work history (e.g. paystubs, employment contracts, experience letters for volunteer positions)

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What is my status during post-completion OPT?

- You are **still in F-1 status** while your application is pending and after it has been approved

- If you filed by the end of the 60 day grace period after graduation, **you can remain in the U.S.** while your application is pending but you cannot work

- **Part-time study is permitted** during pending and approved periods of OPT but you cannot begin a degree program

Can I travel?

Pending application *before* graduation	Pending application *after* graduation
■ **Possible with or without a job if you re-enter the U.S. a few weeks before graduation**	■ **Possible with or without a job (but risky). Travel is NOT recommended near the time your EAD is supposed to be approved.**
■ **I-20 signed for travel every 6 months, passport, F-1 visa stamp (except for Canadians)**	■ **I-20 signed for travel every 6 months, I-797C receipt, passport, F-1 visa stamp (except for Canadians)**
	■ **Job offer letter for confirmed employment or proof of job search for unconfirmed employment (e.g. interview invitation)**

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Can I travel?

Approved application with EAD but no job	Approved application with EAD and job
■ Travel is **NOT** recommended	■ **Cannot enter the U.S. until EAD start date**
■ **I-20 signed for travel every 6 months, EAD, passport, F-1 visa stamp (except for Canadians)**	■ **I-20 signed for travel every 6 months, passport, F-1 visa stamp (except for Canadians), EAD, and contract letter (EAD alone is not valid for re-entry)**
■ **Proof of job search (e.g. interview invitation, job application submissions)**	■ **Not permitted during pending H-1B applications**
■ **Unemployed time abroad cannot be regained**	

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What happens if I leave the country without applying for OPT?

- Ineligible to apply for post-completion OPT

- May not be allowed to enter U.S.

How do I apply for OPT?

- Print out this confirmation page and bring it to the OPT workshop

- Print out OPT application materials from **https://international.richmond.edu/international-students/stay/employment/index.html** to bring to the workshop

- Attend a mandatory OPT workshop (times and dates will be sent via email)