



## Guide to Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)

### What is Post-Completion Optional Practical Training?

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Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a benefit available to those in valid F1 student status. F1 students must have been in status (not terminated) for at least one full year before they can be eligible for OPT.

OPT is **12 months** of work authorization granted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) to F1 students for the purpose of **gaining practical experience directly related to their program of study**.

The Center for International Programs and Services (CIPS) recommends OPT and then the student applies to USCIS for work authorization which is in the form of an **Employment Authorization Document** (EAD card). Post-OPT takes place after the program completion date (the end of the program and study, not necessarily the date of graduation).

### When should I apply for Post-Completion OPT?

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You may apply for OPT work authorization 90 days (3 months) prior to your program completion and it must be received by USCIS up to 60 days (2 months) after program completion.

Graduation Month:	Earliest time to apply for OPT:	Latest Time to apply for OPT:
December	September 21 <sup>st</sup>	February 21 <sup>st</sup>
May	February 19 <sup>th</sup>	July 19 <sup>th</sup>
June	March 27 <sup>th</sup>	August 19 <sup>th</sup>
August	May 22 <sup>nd</sup>	October 19 <sup>th</sup>

### Processing Times

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USCIS generally requires 90 days (3 months) to process an EAD card.

USCIS will not expedite nor take any inquiries until 182 days (6 months) of processing time have passed (as of 09/09/20).

If you do not receive your EAD card after 182 days, call USCIS Customer Service at 1-800-375-5283. If you receive your EAD card and there is an error, please call the USCIS Customer Service line to rectify any mistakes. You can also file an inquiry at <https://egov.uscis.gov/e-Request/Intro.do> with your receipt number.



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### Am I Eligible to Apply for Post-Completion OPT?

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You may apply for Post-OPT only if all of the following criteria have been met:

- ✓ You have maintained valid F1 student status for at least one full year
- ✓ You have studied full-time at Fisher College for at least one academic year
- ✓ You have completed fewer than 365 days of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
- ✓ You have completed ALL of your coursework and are on track to graduate this semester

Students can apply for the 12 months of Post-OPT upon completion of each higher degree level. If you plan on pursuing a second Bachelor's or Master's degree, you have three options: split the OPT time between the two degrees, take the full 12 months after this degree completion or choose to defer the 12 months accrued to the second degree completion.

### Important Reminders

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- ❖ USCIS must receive the OPT application within 30 days of OPT recommendation by CIPS.
  - If the application is not *received* by USCIS within 30 days, the application **will be denied**.
- ❖ USCIS must **not** receive the OPT application more than 90 days before your program end date or more than 60 days after your program end date (see chart for approximate dates).
  - If the application is received before or after those dates, it **will be denied**.
- ❖ Do not submit the OPT application to USCIS prior to obtaining the I20 with OPT recommendation from a member of CIPS.
- ❖ Do not wait for a job offer before starting the OPT application process.
  - As mentioned previously, USCIS processing time is *at least* 90 days and no action can be taken on our end until 182 have elapsed since receipt.
- ❖ Make sure that the address on your OPT application is valid for receiving mail at all times during the processing of OPT.
  - This address **CAN NOT** be Fisher College's address.
- ❖ CIPS can facilitate the sending of your OPT application through the service eShipGlobal.
  - Instructions for that process are attached.
- ❖ You can also send the application on your own through US Certified Mail or FEDEX.



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### How can I apply for Post-Completion OPT?

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**OPTIONAL Step 1a: Make an appointment with a CIPS advisor. The first meeting generally takes 20 minutes.**

**Step 1: Gather ALL of the following:**

- Copy of passport identity page
- Copy of F1 visa(s if you have multiple) from passport
- Copies of ALL previous I20s
  - If you do not have access to all of your previous I20s, make sure you have the I20s that contain any employment authorization (CPT, OPT, off-campus hardship) and any initial I20s after a termination or leave of absence
- Copy of previous EAD card (if applicable)
- Check, money order, or bank check made payable to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for \$410.00 (pricing may change, this is as of 2/5/2021)
  - It must be written out as indicated above; DHS will not be accepted
- 2 “passport photos” taken within the past 30 days
  - CVS, Rite Aid, Walgreens, many drug stores have this as one of their settings when you go in to take a picture – this is the preferred method
  - If taking the photo yourself, make sure the background is white, you are not wearing any glasses or hats, and it is approximately 2 inches by 2 inches
  - Lightly print your SEVIS ID number and name on the back of the pictures
- Printed i94 entrance record
- i765 – application for employment authorization
- G1145 – e-notification of application/petition authorization

**Step 3: Decide what day you want your OPT to begin and notify CIPS of this start date.**

**Step 4: Send (preferably via certified mail or FEDEX) to USCIS Dallas Lockbox.**

FEDEX:  
USCIS  
Attn: I-765 C03  
131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor  
Chicago, IL 60603-5517

USPS:  
USCIS  
PO Box 805373  
Chicago, IL  
60680



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### What happens after I submit my documents to USCIS?

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- ❖ You should receive a **RECEIPT** notice from USCIS. This may take anywhere from 2 weeks to 2-3 months.
  - If you have filled out the G1145, you should receive an email or text message.
- ❖ Check your progress using your receipt number at [egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do](http://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do)
- ❖ Let CIPS know when you receive your receipt notice. This is the address where they will deliver your approval, any RFE notices, and eventually the EAD card.
- ❖ You should receive an **APPROVAL** notice from USCIS. Again, let CIPS know.
- ❖ After the approval, you should receive your **EAD Card** within 1 month (and your SSN card if you applied for that concurrently).
  - You may NOT work until the start date on the EAD Card and you may not work after the end date on your EAD card.
  - You must send CIPS a copy of your EAD card.
- ❖ If there are any errors on your EAD card, notify the CIPS office and then call USCIS Customer Service at 1-800-375-5283.
- ❖ Create your SEVP Portal account with the hyperlink sent to you after your approval.

### 90 Day Unemployment Rule

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During the authorized Post-OPT dates on your EAD card, you are allowed to be unemployed for up to 90 days. The unemployment begins accruing on the first day of your authorization and only ends after you enter your details into the SEVP Portal. You also accrue at least one day when you change employment. Keep this in mind when changing jobs.

**If you exceed 90 days of unemployment you are considered out of status; there is no additional grace period after these 90 days.**

**If employment is not updated in the SEVP portal within 90 days of the start date on the EAD card, your SEVIS record may be auto-terminated.**

**In both of these situations, you begin to accrue unlawful presence as soon as you are out of status. Enough unlawful presence and you may be barred from the United States for anywhere from 5 to 20 years.**



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### Types of Employment

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*It is the responsibility of the student to determine if the accepted employment is related to their program of study.*

The following criteria must be met when you engage in work during Post-Completion OPT:

- ✓ You **must** work a minimum of 20 hours per week.
- ✓ All work must be **directly** related to your program of study.

When considering work opportunities, you may engage in the following accepted forms:

- ✓ Paid or unpaid employment
  - If UNPAID, the position must be unpaid for all. You may not accept an unpaid internship that is normally paid.
- ✓ Multiple employers
  - You may work for multiple employers as long as all hours add up per week to more than 20 hours a week.
- ✓ Work for hire
  - Often referred to as 1099 employment: you can contract yourself out to a company. This is similar to working as a freelancer.
- ✓ Self-employed/business owner
  - You may start your own business but please talk to a lawyer in order to find out what is needed to start a company.
- ✓ Employment through an agency or consulting firm
  - You may work for a placement agency or consulting firm. This experience will usually involve temporary or contract work.

What does **NOT** count as work:

- ✓ Part-time employment that does not relate to your field of study
- ✓ Voluntary positions that are not related to your field of study
- ✓ Any work that does not have you working a cumulative 20 hours per week
- ✓ Work that is “under the table” or all cash based with no employment record



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### Reporting Requirements

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The following **must** be updated in the SEVP Portal within 10 days of change:

- ❖ Address updates
  - The address in the SEVP Portal must always be current, not just mailing
- ❖ Employment updates
  - Name of employment
  - Address of employment
    - If multiple addresses or if there is one main office, input the address of the physical location where you are conducting your work
  - Start date of employment
  - Description of how it is related to your course of study/major
  - Unemployment – if you become unemployed, you must put your end date of employment

*It is the responsibility of the student to update employment information in the SEVP Portal. If no employment information is provided within the first 90 days of activity on the EAD card, the student's SEVIS record may be terminated automatically.*

### Additional Information that Must be Reported to CIPS

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- ❖ The decision to discontinue OPT and depart the United States
  - Submit an email to CIPS along with a copy of your flight itinerary indicating you have/will depart the US
- ❖ Change of status to a status other than F-1
- ❖ Decision to begin a new program of study at Fisher College or transfer to another school in the US

### Invalidating Your OPT

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**Your Post-OPT will be invalidated if you:**

- ❖ Start a new program of study
- ❖ Transfer out to a new college or university
- ❖ Change of status
- ❖ Enter the US using any visa status other than F-1
- ❖ Violate your immigration status



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### Can I Travel While on OPT?

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Students on Post-OPT can travel abroad. In order to re-enter the United States, the following documents are required:

- ✓ A passport that is valid for 6 months from the date of your return to the United States
- ✓ A valid F-1 student visa stamp
- ✓ A valid I20 with OPT recommendation and a valid travel signature on page 2
  - OPT must reflect your employment and approval on the second page
  - Travel signatures are valid for 6 months
- ✓ A valid EAD card
- ✓ Proof of employment (an offer letter may be used)

*Given the information above, traveling outside the US before an EAD card has been approved and received is not advisable. Please note that if you depart the US before your OPT application has been filed, received, and receipted by USCIS, you become ineligible to apply for OPT if your program end date has passed.*

### Social Security Numbers and Taxes

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If you do not already have a SSN from your CPT, you may apply for one concurrently with your EAD card in the i765.

All students must submit the appropriate tax documents. Please be aware the CIPS does not give tax advice. We have resources we may give you if asked.