OKLAHOMA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING APPLICATION GUIDE

This guide will provide basic information about Optional Practical Training, the application process, reporting requirements, and other rules to be aware of while seeking employment.

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is "temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student's program of study." OPT provides F-1 students the opportunity to gain up to 12 months of work experience for their degree program.

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible to apply for OPT, you must be **lawfully enrolled full-time at an SEVP-approved school for at least one academic year**. Time spent enrolled in a full course load under a different valid immigration status before changing to F-1 can be counted towards this requirement. You can also transfer accumulated time from a previous school, provided that you maintained F-1 status under the same SEVIS ID.

Please note: You do not have to be enrolled full-time during your final semester to meet this requirement.

No offer of employment is required to apply or be approved for OPT.

TYPES OF OPT

TYPES OF OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING	
Pre-Completion OPT	Available during the student's program of study. Only part-time hours (20 hours or less) are permitted while school is in session.
Post-Completion OPT	Available after the student has graduated. The student must work at least 20 hours per week.

Please note: All periods of pre-completion OPT are deducted from the available period of post-completion OPT.

APPLICATION DEADLINES

APPLICATION DEADLINES FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING	
Pre-Completion OPT	OPT applications may be submitted up to 90 days prior to completing the one academic year requirement, as long as employment begins after the academic year requirement has been met.
Post-Completion OPT	OPT applications may be submitted up to 90 days prior to your program end date and until 60 days after your program end date. **IMPORTANT:** Students with a GPA requirement who are unsure if they will be eligible to graduate should wait to apply for OPT until they receive their final semester grades.

Please note: Due to processing times, you should submit your application as early as possible.

ALLOWED EMPLOYMENT

During OPT, you are required to seek employment that is **directly related to your major area of study**. You will be responsible for explaining how your work relates to your degree program.

You may change employers at any time and even work for multiple employers simultaneously, as long as each job is directly related to your program of study.

ALLOWED TYPES OF EMPLOYMENT	
Paid Employment	For post-completion OPT, students must work at least 20 hours per week.
Short-Term Gigs	The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration.
Contract Work	The student should maintain evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company.
Self-Employment	The student should be able to prove that they have the proper business licenses and are actively engaged in a business related to their degree.
Unpaid Work	Any volunteer work or unpaid internships must not violate any labor laws. For post-completion OPT, students should be able to prove they are working at least 20 hours per week.

Please note: Students should keep documentation of every instance of employment during OPT, like pay stubs, W-2s, and offer letters of employment.

OPT START DATE

As part of the OPT application process, you are required to choose a start date for OPT authorization. A DSO will enter this start date into your SEVIS record.

HOW TO CHOOSE AN OPT START DATE	
Pre-Completion OPT	The OPT start date can be any day after the academic year requirement has been met. You will also need to provide the day you want your OPT authorization to end.
Post-Completion OPT	The earliest OPT start date you can pick is the day after your program end date, and the latest date you can pick is the final day of your grace period (60 days after your program end date). **Please note**: The program end date listed on your I-20 should be the day that you expect to complete your program requirements. If the program end date showing on your most recent I-20 is not accurate, it will be corrected by a DSO during the OPT application process. You may need to contact your academic advisor to confirm your anticipated program completion date before choosing an OPT start date.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Students are required to maintain accurate personal and employment information in SEVIS during OPT participation. Students must report the following information to international.records@oc.edu within **10 days** of any change:
- Personal address
- Employer's name and address
- Change in employment
- Start and end dates of any period of unemployment

To update your employment in your SEVIS record, you must contact international.records@oc.edu and submit your new offer letter of employment. Once your employment has been updated in SEVIS, you will receive a new I-20 with updated employment information listed on page 2.

You may also update your employment in SEVIS by using the SEVP Portal. For more details about the SEVP Portal, please see the SEVP Portal Student User Guide.

Please note: Students using the SEVP Portal to report their employment will still need to contact International Records to submit their offer letter and request an updated I-20.

OPT APPLICATION PROCEDURE

1. **Fill out OC's OPT Request Form**. If you are a graduate student, you must also work with your academic advisor to complete the Recommendation by Academic Advisor form.
2. **Pay the OC OPT Application Fee**. Before you submit your OPT Request form to the International Records office, you must pay the OC OPT Application Fee:
   - Go to: https://orgpay.oc.edu/
   - Click Sign In.
   - Scroll down to the University section and click on International OPT Fees.
   - Choose OPT Fee and then Purchase. **Please note**: Do not choose "STEM OPT Fee" as that is for STEM OPT Extension applications only.
   - Complete Payment Information and click Continue.
   - Save a copy of your receipt.
3. **E-mail the following documents to international.records@oc.edu**:
   - Completed OPT Request Form
   - Completed Academic Advisor Recommendation form (graduate students only)
   - Copy of your OC OPT Application Fee payment receipt
4. **Receive a new Form I-20 with an OPT endorsement.** You are required to submit your OPT application to USCIS within 30 days of receiving this I-20. **IMPORTANT:** Do NOT submit your OPT application without first receiving this I-20. USCIS may deny applications submitted before receiving an OPT endorsement from the DSO.
5. **Fill out Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization.** Form I-765 is required by USCIS to request employment authorization and an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). You may complete this form online or using the physical paper form.

FORM I-765 ELIGIBILITY CODES	
Pre-Completion OPT	Use eligibility code **(c)(3)(A)**
Post-Completion OPT	Use eligibility code **(c)(3)(B)**

6. **Gather all of the required documentation for the OPT application.** A complete checklist of required documentation can be found on the Checklist of Required Initial Evidence for Form I-765 page.
   - Copy of your OPT-endorsed I-20 (issue date must not be older than 30 days)
   - Copy of your valid passport (must be valid for at least six more months)
   - Copy of your F-1 visa (an expired visa is acceptable)
   - Copy of your most recent Form I-94
   - Passport-style photo (photo must be recent)
   - Copy of prior EAD card/CPT I-20s (if applicable)
   - Check or money order payable to Department of Homeland Security (if filing through mail)
7. **Submit your OPT application to USCIS.** Before submitting your OPT application, make sure that your application is complete and that you've included all required documentation. **Please note**: If applying through mail, make sure your application has enough time to be received by USCIS before your deadline.

WHERE TO SEND YOUR APPLICATION

You have the option to submit your OPT application either online or by mail.

Applying Online	You will need to create a [myUSCIS online account](#).
Applying Through Mail	You can find the appropriate mailing address to send your application on USCIS's [I-765 Direct Filing Addresses](#) page. Navigate to "Foreign students", then find the eligibility category "F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT)."
	Please note: If you choose to send your OPT application through the mail, International Records will not mail this application on your behalf.

If you would like to use the International Records mailbox on OC's campus to receive mail from USCIS, you may use the following mailing address in your application:

13800 Benson Road Suite 102
Edmond, OK 73013

AFTER APPLICATION SUBMISSION

After you submit your OPT application, you will be mailed a **Form I-797 Receipt Notice** to confirm that USCIS has received your OPT application and has begun the review process. On the notice, you will be given a **receipt number** that you can use to track your application status on USCIS's [Case Status Online](#) page.

When you receive this receipt notice from USCIS, ***please check that your name is spelled correctly and is in the right order***. The way that your name is printed on this letter will be the way that it is printed on your EAD card. If you notice that your name is not showing correctly, please contact USCIS for a correction by submitting an [E-Request for a Typographic Error](#).

Please note: Processing times for OPT applications can vary and take longer than expected. You may check the current standard processing time for OPT applications on the USCIS [Processing Times](#) page. Please select the Service Center listed on your Form I-797.

AFTER OPT APPROVAL

Once your OPT application has been approved by USCIS, you will receive a **Form I-797 Approval Notice** in the mail. Your approval notice will list your official OPT start and end dates. USCIS will either grant you the OPT start date that you requested or the date your OPT application was approved, whichever date is later.

Please note: Your approval notice does NOT grant you any authorization to work. It only confirms that your application for OPT has been approved and your EAD card will be printed soon.

IMPORTANT: You must NOT begin any employment until you have received your physical EAD card in the mail AND your OPT start date has passed. Working before the OPT start date on your EAD card or without first receiving your EAD card are both serious visa violations and can result in a loss of status.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Does Curricular Practical Training (CPT) have any effect on OPT?
If you are authorized for full-time CPT for 12 months or more at a certain education level, you are no longer eligible for OPT at that same education level. Part-time CPT has no impact on OPT.

Can I apply for OPT again if I've previously been approved for OPT?
Students are eligible for 12 months of OPT at every HIGHER academic level. This means that:
- Students who have previously been approved for 12 months of OPT at a certain academic level are not eligible to apply for OPT again at that same academic level.
- Students are not eligible to apply for OPT at a lower academic level if they have previously been approved for OPT at a higher academic level.

Can I make changes to my OPT application after submitting it?
If you are applying for OPT online, you may upload any additional documents after the submission of your application as "Unsolicited Evidence" in the Documents menu. For any other changes to your application, you will contact USCIS using the USCIS Contact Center.

Can I withdraw my post-completion OPT application if I am unable to graduate?
You can withdraw your OPT application only if your program end date has not passed yet. If you must withdraw your application, you must contact international.records@oc.edu as soon as possible so your I-20 can be extended to a new program completion date. Be aware that you must pay USCIS the application fee again if you decide that you want to reapply later.

Please note: You cannot withdraw an OPT application once it has been approved.

IMPORTANT: If you are unable to graduate, have already applied for OPT, and the program end date on your I-20 has passed, then you must forfeit the authorized OPT for your current education level. Because of this scenario, it is recommended that students with a GPA requirement wait to apply for OPT until they receive their final semester grades.

Am I allowed to be unemployed while on OPT?

Yes. You are permitted 90 total days of unemployment during OPT. This is a cumulative amount that is counted in SEVIS and can be accrued at any point during the authorized period of OPT. To calculate how many days of unemployment you have after your OPT authorization starts, count down the number of days you've been unemployed from the start date on your EAD card.

IMPORTANT: If you exceed 90 days of unemployment, you will no longer be in status. Students who exceed the unemployment limit risk the termination of their SEVIS record and the denial of future immigration benefits.

Can I travel out of the United States while on OPT?

Yes. You may use an I-20 with a travel endorsement to travel internationally after you have received OPT approval. Make sure to keep these documents with you as you travel:
- I-20 signed for travel (signature must be less than 6 months old)
- EAD card
- Valid passport
- Valid F-1 visa
- Employment offer letter

Can I travel out of the United States while my OPT application is pending?

It is highly recommended that you do NOT leave the United States while your OPT application is still pending. It is possible that USCIS will see your departure as you abandoning your application. This may impact your OPT application decision.

Do I get a grace period after my OPT end date?

Yes. There is a 60-day grace period following the completion date of OPT. During this time, you will need to take action to extend your visa status or prepare to depart the United States. During your grace period you have the option to apply for a new program of study at OC or another SEVP-certified school.

Please note: You must start a new program within 5 months of your OPT end date in order to maintain F-1 status.

IMPORTANT: Be aware that you are NOT allowed to work during the grace period following your OPT authorization period. Working past your OPT end date is a status violation.

Can I apply for a change of status while on OPT?

Yes. However, depending on the visa type, you may be required to apply for the change of status before your OPT end date passes to be entitled to certain benefits. For example, if you are planning to apply for a change of status from F-1 to H-1B, you will need to apply before your OPT end date passes so that you can receive extended employment authorization until H-1B status begins.

Can I apply for the 24-month STEM OPT extension?

If you have earned a STEM degree, you may be eligible to apply for the 24-month STEM OPT extension. The STEM OPT extension allows students with STEM degrees to work in the United States for an additional 24 months after their post-completion OPT authorization expires.

Please note: Students are eligible to apply for STEM OPT up to 90 days before their OPT end date. You will not be able to apply for the STEM OPT extension once your OPT end date passes.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The information provided in this guide is not all-inclusive of the OPT process. While the International Records office is available to assist with students' needs and questions regarding OPT, it is the student's responsibility to conduct their own research. Please visit www.uscis.gov and www.studyinthestates.dhs.gov for additional information about OPT.