



TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

# OPT TRAINING



**International Student Affairs**



# Types of Practical Training

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- Curricular Practical Training (On Campus)
- Optional Practical Training



# OPT Overview

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- What is Optional Practical Training?
- OPT is off-campus work authorization that allows a student to work off campus in their major field of study for a maximum of 12 months
- Students in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) majors may also be eligible for an additional 24-month extension for OPT.
- Work authorization for OPT is the Employment Authorization Document or EAD card, issued by USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services)
- If approved, USCIS will issue an Employment Authorization Document (EAD).
- OPT authorized begins on the employment start date shown on your EAD card
- Student may not begin working before the start date on the EAD.
- If you complete a degree at a higher educational level, you may be eligible to apply for another 12 months of OPT.
- Example: If you are applying for OPT now on the basis of your Bachelor's degree, and if you later obtain a Master's degree, you will be eligible to apply for another 12 months of OPT on the basis of the Master's degree. You only get 12 months of OPT per degree level.

# Types of OPT



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- Pre-Completion OPT: Any portion of OPT used *before* the student's Program End Date. It may be part-time or full-time.
  - Post-Completion OPT: Any portion of OPT used *after* the student's Program End Date.
  - OPT STEM extension (24 months) For students who majored in designated Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) degrees approved by DHS.

# OPT Eligibility

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- Be in valid F-1 status at the time of application, in good academic standing, and have been enrolled on a full-time basis for one full academic year (two full academic semesters/9 months)
- Each subsequent application for a new Post-Completion OPT, must be for a higher degree level –OPT may only be granted once per degree level, and only if moving upward in degree level
- F-1 students with one year or greater of Full-Time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) are no longer eligible for OPT with the current degree program
- Part-Time CPT does not affect OPT eligibility

# Who is NOT Eligible?

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You are NOT eligible to apply for OPT if...

- You used 12 months or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
- You have NOT been enrolled on a full-time basis for one full academic year (two academic semester/9 months)
- You are 'out of status' (violated your immigration status)  
Common reasons for students to become "out of status"
  - Failure to pursue a full course of study (i.e. 12 credits for undergraduates; 9 credits for graduates) without an authorized reduced course load
  - Failure to follow immigration transfer procedures when changing schools
  - Working without proper authorization

# OPT Application Procedures

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- **Deadline:** Your application must be received and receipted by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) within 30 days of the DSO's recommendation of the printed OPT I-20, and within your 60 day grace period.
- Application filing window: F-1 students may apply for Post Completion OPT from 90 days prior to the degree program completion, and up to 60 days after the program end date
- Apply as early as possible for OPT

# OPT Approval Procedures

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Student submits application package:

- I-765 application form (typed) Include apartment # if applicable
- Transcript (unofficial or official)
- \$410 check or money order (payable to Department of Homeland Security)
- Copy of I-94
- All previous I-20's
- Copy of Passport page –it must be 6 months current
- 2 Immigration type photos
  
- Students sends application package and I-20 to the USCIS (**Make sure to sign your OPT I-20**)
- Work can only begin after receiving the EAD card issued by the USCIS, on or after the start date on the EAD card.



# Pre-Completion OPT

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- Part-time OPT is deducted from the 12 month limit at 50%. Thus, 2 months of part-time OPT would count as 1 month deduction from the available 12 months
- During vacation periods: OPT may be either full-time or part-time
- Full-time or part time employment can be requested for pre-completion OPT for students who have completed all requirements for their degree except for thesis or dissertation. Students must be registered each semester for thesis or dissertation status.

# STEM EXTENSION OPT

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- A one-time extension of 24 months (for a total of 36 months of OPT) is available to certain STEM degree recipients.
- Employment is a requirement for the 24 month STEM OPT extension
- The limit on unemployment is a combined number of no more than 120 days, for the entire 36 month period of post-completion OPT
- Employer must be an E-verify company

# Issues to Consider

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- OPT requires authorization from United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which typically takes 3 to 5 months to obtain.
- You may apply for post-completion OPT up to 90 days *before* your program end date of course of study (last day of class), and up to 60 days *after* your program end date.
- OPT Application must be received by USCIS no later than 30 days after the DSO updates SEVIS with the OPT recommendation.
- The limit of unemployment days is a combined number of no more than 90 days for the 12 month period of post-completion OPT

# Issues to Consider Cont.

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- You must report "any change of name or address, employment or interruption of employment within 10 days to the ISA office for the duration of the authorized training.
- Time spent outside the United States during an approved period of post-completion OPT counts as unemployment against the 90/120-day limits.
- Authorized to engage in optional practical training employment is automatically terminated if you begin a new program of study
- OPT ends the day your I-20 is transferred to another school

# Travel

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- If you intend to travel abroad around the time you will complete your studies, you must apply for OPT before you leave the United States.
- If you depart the United States after you complete your studies and have not applied for OPT, you are no longer eligible to apply.
- Ensure you have provided a correct U.S. address both to ISA and on the OPT application.
- You possibly may not be able to re-enter the United States while a request for post-completion OPT is pending
- If you have a job, you may travel and reenter to resume work at the same job or you have a written offer for another job.

# Travel cont.

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- If USCIS approves your OPT application while you are traveling, you will be expected to have your EAD, Form I-20, valid passport, visa and a letter of employment if you have one, in hand to re-enter the United States. USCIS can only send the EAD to your U.S. address.
- If you exceed the limits of unemployment while outside the United States, you will not be eligible to re-enter the United States in F-1 status."
- **Traveling outside the US is risky!**

# Cancelling or Withdrawing a nd OPT

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- If you decide not to pursue OPT because you will not complete your educational program as expected, you must extend the I-20 program end date before the end date is reached. After the end date is reached, your program cannot be re-authorized.
- If the employment application has not yet been adjudicated by USCIS, you may withdraw the application by notifying the Service Center where the application was filed.
- If the employment authorization application has already been approved, the DSO must extend your programs end date to the appropriate date. You may work part time while enrolled in courses to complete the requirements for your program and full time during breaks and vacation. After successful completion of all the program requirements, you may work full time.

# Cancelling or Withdrawing a nd OPT Cont.

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- However, even if your program end date was extended, because the OPT was granted as post-completion OPT you are still subjected to the 90-day limitation of unemployment.
- SEVP strongly recommends that if you feel you may not be able to successfully complete all program requirements on time defer applying for post-completion OPT until after your programs end.





## Withdrawing your still pending application:

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- If your I-765 OPT application has already been filed with USCIS but has not been adjudicated you must contact the Service Center directly to have your I-765 application withdrawn.
- DHS regulations allows an application to be withdrawn at any time until a decision is issued.
- A withdrawal may not be reversed or appealed.
- Withdrawal of an application before it is adjudicated does not necessarily preclude the filing of a new application with a new fee later, provided you remain eligible for the benefit.

# Work Permit

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- OPT authorization begins on the employment date shown on the student EAD.
- For post-completion OPT, the work must be for at least 20 hours per week.
- You may work or volunteer for multiple employers as long as it is directly related to your program of study.
- SEVP requires you obtain a signed letter from the your supervisor, manager or the employer hiring official stating how your degree is related to the work permitted. The letter should be sent to your DSO.
- You should keep documentation showing that the OPT employment is directly related to your degree program.
- You may not be unemployed for a combined 90 days or more. (This include weekend days.)

# Work Permit Cont.

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- The use of part-time CPT does not count towards the 12 months of full-time CPT that eliminates eligibility for OPT. For example, 24 months of part time CPT does not count as the equivalent of 12 months of full-time CPT, for purpose of determining eligibility for OPT...it is not counted at all.
- You may not request a start date that is more than 60 days after the student program end date. This restriction is related to the requirement that all standard post-completion OPT must be completed within 14 months of the completion of study.

# Grace Period on OPT



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- You have a 60-day grace period after your EAD expires. During this time, you may:
    - Remain in the U.S. and prepare to *exit before* the end of the grace period
    - Apply to continue your education at TSU or transfer to another SEVP certified school. You must have been accepted into a new level of study or transferred to another school before the 60 day grace period ends
    - Change visa categories. Qualify for change of status to a particular nonimmigrant category and follow change of status procedures for that category. If the new category has a particular start date (e.g. H-1B status), the start date requested for the new category must be no later than the end of your 60 day F-1 grace period.
  - **Please note that during your grace period, you cannot work and you cannot leave and re-enter the U.S.**
  - If you exceeded the 90 days of unemployment on OPT (or total of 120 days while on STEM), you do not have a grace period.
  - If you have been granted a STEM extension or Cap-Gap extension, these extensions begin immediately after the date your OPT expires, without a 60-day grace period in between. You need to apply for either of these extensions before your EAD expires.

# F-1 Student Alert!

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- Unauthorized employment is a serious violation of your F-1 status. Unauthorized employment may result in deportation!



# OPT Application Should be Mailed

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(Certified Mail with return receipt)

USCIS Texas Service Center  
P.O. Box 660867  
Dallas, TX 75266

(Express Mail and Courier Deliveries)  
Attn: AOS  
2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business  
Suite 400  
Lewisville, TX 75067