OPT Tutorial

Please note that this tutorial is for instructional purposes only and that you are still encouraged to physically attend an OPT workshop.

An OPT application to USCIS is your own personal application. You alone are responsible for timely filing with full documentation, understanding F-1 rules regarding OPT, and properly maintaining F-1 status.

Please review the entire tutorial and contact International Services if you have any questions. Additional OPT guidance can be found on our website.
Understanding OPT

➢ Optional Practical Training (OPT) is defined as “temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student’s major of study.”
➢ OPT is a benefit of the F-1 visa and is approved by USCIS. USCIS can deny an OPT request if the applicant is found to have violated their status.
➢ OPT allows the opportunity to apply the knowledge you have acquired in your degree program in a real-life work environment.
➢ Post-completion OPT can extend your active F-1 record for up to 12 months.
➢ There are three types of OPT
  ○ Pre-completion OPT
  ○ Post-completion OPT
  ○ STEM OPT
Pre-Completion OPT

For most students, curricular practical training (CPT) can be used. It allows for off-campus work authorization in your current field of study without using any of the 12 months of OPT times.

For more information on pre-completion OPT, please contact International Services.
OPT Eligibility

Students must complete one full academic year to be eligible for OPT. An academic year would be enrollment for consecutive:

- Fall-Spring semesters
- Spring-Fall semesters
- Spring-Summer semesters
- Summer-Fall semesters

F-1 students are eligible for post-completion OPT at each education level higher than the previous degree earned. For example, you cannot participate in post-completion OPT at the Master’s level and then complete another Master’s degree and participate in post-completion OPT again. You also cannot participate in OPT at the PhD level and then participate at the Master’s level.
OPT Eligibility

➢ If you have used one year or more of full-time curricular practical training (CPT) during your current degree level you do not qualify for OPT.

➢ Part-time CPT does not count against OPT eligibility.

➢ Heavy use of part-time or full-time CPT can cause your OPT application to be subject to additional scrutiny. Be prepare to provide evidence of all prior CPT I-20s with your OPT application.
Understanding Your Responsibilities on OPT

➢ Work must be related to your current field of study.
➢ You must work a minimum of 20 hours per week.
➢ You are limited to 90 days of accrued unemployment.
Unemployment

➢ You are permitted 90 days of unemployment throughout the 12-month OPT authorization period.

➢ The time between your program end date and your OPT start date does not count as unemployment days.

➢ Unemployment days begin accruing on the OPT start date listed on your EAD card.
Types of Qualifying Employment

The types of employment allowed during the initial 12-month period of OPT include:

- Paid employment
- Multiple employers
- Work for hire (1099 employment)
- Self-employed business owner
- Employment through an agency
- Unpaid/Volunteer employment
Work Must Be Related to Your Field of Study

➢ The position, job description, and required skills must align with your current field of study. The burden of proof is on you to demonstrate the relationship between your current field of study and your employment.

➢ OPT is not just a work authorization; it is a practical training authorization in your current field of study.

➢ You are eligible to participate in volunteer work or unpaid employment as long as you are meeting the requirements of OPT.
  ○ It is recommended that you obtain a letter from your supervisor regarding your volunteer agreement.
Students are not required to have a job offer when applying for post-completion OPT. The request is based on program completion, not a specific employer. Students applying for pre-completion OPT and STEM OPT must have a job offer at the time of the request.
When Can I Apply for OPT?

Up to 90 days before your program end date

No later than 60 days after your program end date

AND

Program end date: graduation date, defense date, or coursework completion date
Master’s and PhD Students

Master’s and PhD students who have completed all degree-required coursework are eligible to apply for post-completion OPT and may begin working full-time while completing their thesis or dissertation.
**Please note: you are ineligible to begin working/ volunteering until your EAD card has arrived and the start date listed on your EAD card. This includes on- and off-campus employment.**
OPT Application
Application Process Overview

1. Complete Post-Completion OPT Request e-form within the iStart Portal

2. IS will review your request and issue new I-20 Form with OPT dates requested

3. Student collects new I-20 Form from IS and mails OPT packet to USCIS within 30 days of the OPT recommendation
   a. Review documents to ensure you understand the corrections
   b. Check dates on page 2 under “Authorization Section”

4. USCIS issues receipt notice within 2-3 weeks with the case number

5. Student must wait about 1-5 months to receive a response to the OPT request and the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card from USCIS

6. Student receives their EAD card and can begin working once the start-date on the EAD has occurred. The student must update IS with their employment and residential address details.
Request your OPT I-20

To initiate the process of requesting your OPT I-20, students should complete the F-1 Post-Completion OPT Request through the iStart Portal. As part of the request, students will need to submit completed copies of the Post-completion OPT Request Form, I-765, G-1145, visa, passport, and I-94.
Choosing Your OPT Start and End Date

➢ Your OPT start date is the date that your 12 months of work authorization begins.
➢ Your OPT start date must be within the 60-day grace period after the program completion date.
➢ You have 14 months to complete the 12 months of work authorization.
   ○ The 14 months begins on your program end date and means that your OPT end-date will not be later than 14 months from your program end-date.
   ○ There is potential for you not to receive the full 12 months of OPT authorization if you apply later and you receive your EAD more than 60 days after your program end-date.
➢ The requested start & end dates will be noted on page 2 of the new OPT I-20.
➢ Once USCIS receive the OPT application, the requested start date cannot be changed.
Choosing Your Program End Date

➢ For undergraduate students and non-thesis/non-dissertation track students, the program end date will be the same as the graduation date.

➢ Thesis and dissertation track students can use either their graduation date, defense date, or course completion date as their program end date.
  ○ If the course work completion date or thesis defense date is selected as the program end date, the student will not be able to continue in an on-campus position until OPT is approved.
Section III of the Post-completion OPT Request Form verifies that the student is eligible for post-completion OPT. This section must be completed by the academic advisor. Academic Advisors should either list the date that the student will complete all coursework or check the box confirming that the has completed all of their coursework and only has a thesis/dissertation remaining.
Completing the I-765
Part 1. Reason for Applying, pg. 1
Check the “1a” box for “Initial Permission to accept employment.”
Part 2. Information About You, pg. 2

U.S. Mailing Address
This is where you would like the Receipt Notice and the EAD card to be mailed.

The address should be valid for at least 1-5 months, the length of time it will take to process the application. If you have plans to move during this time, use the address of International Services or a reliable friend or family member.

If your mailing address is different from your physical address you must also list your physical address in items 7a.-7e.
#13a Has the Social Security Administration (SSA) ever officially issued a Social Security card to you?

- [ ] Yes
- [x] No

NOTE: If you answered “No” to Item Number 13.a., skip to Item Number 14. If you answered “Yes” to Item Number 13.a., provide the information requested in Item Number 13.b.

#13b. Provide your Social Security number (SSN) (if known).

#14. Do you want the SSA to issue you a Social Security card? (You must also answer “Yes” to Item Number 15, Consent for Disclosure, to receive a card.)

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

NOTE: If you answered “No” to Item Number 14, skip to Part 2, Item Number 18.a. If you answered “Yes” to Item Number 14, you must also answer “Yes” to Item Number 15.

#15. Consent for Disclosure: I authorize disclosure of information from this application to the SSA as required for the purpose of assigning me an SSN and issuing me a Social Security card.

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

NOTE: If you answered “Yes” to Item Numbers 14. - 15., provide the information requested in Item Numbers 16.a. - 17.b.

**Father's Name**
Provide your father's birth name.

- **Family Name** (Last Name): Xi
- **Given Name** (First Name): John

**Mother's Name**
Provide your mother's birth name.

- **Family Name** (Last Name): Patel
- **Given Name** (First Name): Sally

**Part 2, pg. 2 continued**

#13a-17b Social Security Number

#13a-13b. Check “Yes” if you have been issued a SSN and enter one number in each box.

Check “No” if you do not have a SSN.

#14. Check “Yes” if you want a new or replacement Social Security card and complete questions 15-17.

If you check “No” for question 14, skip to question 18.
Part 2. pg. 3 continued

#23 Place of Last Arrival into the U.S
Name of the Port of Entry city from your most recent entry. This information can be found on your passport admission stamp, I-94, or the travel history section of your I-94.

#24. Immigration Status at Last Entry
Status in which you entered the U.S.

#25. Current Immigration Status
Current status should be “F-1 Student”
Part 2, pg. 3 continued
#27 Eligibility Category
Use code (c)(3)(B) for post-completion OPT
Applicant’s Signature

#7a-7b Sign your name by hand in black ink and provide the date of the signature. Your signature must fit inside the box as it will be scanned directly onto your EAD card.
Part 6 pg. 7
Additional Information
#1a-1c. Provide your name again as listed in part 2
#3d-7d. Provide all previously used SEVIS numbers and any previously issued CPT or OPT and the academic level for which they were issued.
I-765 Page Seven

The most common reasons students complete page 7, part 6 are the following:

➢ Most recently entered the US on a passport that is no longer valid and you have a renewed passport
➢ Have previously had other SEVIS IDs
➢ Have ever been authorized for CPT, OPT, or STEM OPT Extension

This is not a complete list of reasons to complete page 7. If you have question regarding page 7 of the I-765, please contact International Services. Page 7 must be included with your application USCIS, even if it is blank.
How to complete page 7, part 6 if you: most recently entered the US on a passport that is no longer valid and you now have a renewed passport.

**Part 6, Additional Information, pg. 7**

#1a-1c. Provide your name again

#3a-3c Reference the corresponding page number, part number, and item number

#3d. Write an explanation that clarifies that you have two passports: one that you used for entry but is no longer valid, and one that is currently valid.

#3d. Include copies of both passports and your I-94 with your application.

3.d. I most recently entered the US on MM- DD-YY with passport ###### and was issued I-94 ######. Since this date, I have renewed my passport. The number of my new passport is ######. See the attached copies of both passports and the I-94.
I-765 Page Seven

How to complete page 7, part 6 if you: have previously had other SEVIS IDs

Part 6, Additional Information, pg. 7

#1a-1c. Provide your name again

#3a-3c Reference the corresponding page number, part number, and item number

#3d List all previously used SEVIS numbers, including from all previous F-1/F-2, J-1/J-2, or M-1/M-2 programs in the U.S., including high school, short stays, language training schools, community colleges, or previous I-20s at Clemson University
How to complete page 7, part 6 if you: have ever been authorized for CPT, OPT, or STEM OPT

Part 6, Additional Information, pg. 7

#1a-1c. Provide your name again

#3a-3c Reference the corresponding page number, part number, and item number

#3d If you have had previous CPT and/or OPT authorization list the type of employment authorization, the dates of authorization, and the academic level that it was authorized at. Copies of all previous CPT and OPT I-20s and EAD cards should be with your application.
Prepare & Mail Your Application Materials
Documents for OPT Application

- I-765
- G-1145
- Two passport photos
- Check, money order, or Form G-1450 for I-765 fee
- I-94
- Copy of visa
- Copy of passport
- Copy of OPT requested I-20
- Copies of previous CPT I-20s
- Copy of previous EAD cards
Passport Photos

Passport Photo Requirements

The photos required to use for the OPT application must meet the specifications of the U.S. style passport photos. To see a full description of these specifications, go to the U.S. Department of State website.

Submit 2 identical color passport photos taken within 30 days of filing your application. The photos must have a white to off-white background, be printed on thin paper with a glossy finish, and be unmounted and unretouched. The passport-style photo must be 2” by 2”. **Glasses must also be removed in the photos.**

Using a pencil or felt tip (soft) pen, lightly print your name and I-94 number on the backs of the photos. Do not damage the photo by pressing hard while writing.
OPT Payment

➢ **USCIS Payment Methods:** Check/Money order or credit card payment for the I-765 fee
➢ **Check/Money Order** should be made payable to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security”. Money orders can be purchased at banks, post offices, and some local grocery stores. Make sure a name and address are printed on the check.
   ○ Do not use “temporary checks”. These are what are often issued by the bank when opening a new account. These checks have no name or address in the upper left hand corner
➢ **For credit card** payment, submit form [G-1450](#). You may only use a credit card account with a U.S. billing address.
➢ Most OPT denials are due to bad payments. If you use a check or a credit card make sure you maintain sufficient funds in the account.
Form G-1145

➢ Attach G-1145 to the top of the OPT application packet
➢ Use this form to request text and email notification(s) regarding your application.

**WARNING**

USCIS will rarely contact you by phone regarding the status of your OPT application.

If you receive a phone call from a person claiming to work for USCIS or any other government agency, do not provide your personal information to them. Note the person’s name, phone number, and email address, and contact an International Services advisor before responding.
Mailing the OPT Application from South Carolina

Now that you have received your 1-20 requesting OPT, you must mail this form along with the 1-765 packet to the USCIS Service Center.

For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) First-Class and Priority Mail Express Deliveries:
USCIS
PO Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

For overnight/courier deliveries (non-USPS):
USCIS
Attn: NFB AOS
2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business
Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067
Mailing the OPT Application from Outside South Carolina

If living in....

Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Guam, or the Northern Mariana Islands. Please review the USCIS website here for confirmation.

Mail your application to...

For U.S. Postal Service (USPS):
USCIS
P.O. Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

For FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries:
USCIS
Attn: NFB AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S
Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034
Mailing the OPT Application from Outside South Carolina

If living in...

Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, U.S. Virgin Islands, or West Virginia. Please review the USCIS website here for confirmation.

Mail your application to...

For U.S. Postal Service (USPS):
USCIS
P.O. Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

For FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries:
USCIS
Attn: NFB AOS
2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067
Top 3 Most Common OPT Denial Reasons

➢ Payment problems
  ○ Check or credit card payment: Money is not in account at the time of processing
  ○ Incorrect fee amount
  ○ Check, money order, or credit card form not completed properly

➢ Copy of OPT I-20 is too old
  ○ New applications: USCIS must receive you complete OPT application no later than 30 days after the OPT I-20 issue date on page 1 of the I-20
  ○ Resubmission after OPT rejection or denial: If your OPT is rejected or denied please notify International Services. In some cases you will need to request a new OPT I-20 recommendation from International Services before you resubmit your OPT application. USCIS must receive your new, complete OPT re-application no later than 30 days after the OPT issue date on page 1 on the I-20

➢ I-765 problems
  ○ Incomplete or incorrect form fields
  ○ Not signed
After Filing Your Application

Receiving your Receipt Notice (I-797C)
You should receive your receipt notice by mail within 2-4 weeks after mailing your OPT application.

The I-797C is necessary if you want to inquire about the status of your OPT application.

Receipt Number
The receipt number is the case number for your OPT application at USCIS. Check the status of your case on the USCIS website at https://www.uscis.gov

Address Information
Verify that your name, date of birth, and address are listed correctly on the I-797C.

Receiving your EAD Card
Review your EAD card to make sure the information is accurate.

Present your EAD card to employers as proof of your legal work authorization in the US.
After Submitting the OPT Application
What If I Do Not Graduate?

Non-Thesis/Non-Dissertation Track
➢ If you are unsure of when you will graduate, it is best to wait to apply for OPT until after you know your graduation date.
➢ If you apply for OPT and later realize you will not graduate that semester, notify International Services immediately.

Thesis/Dissertation Track
➢ You can continue working on your thesis or dissertation while you are on OPT.
Maintaining Status: OPT Reporting Requirements

You must report the following updates:

➢ Employer information
➢ Address changes
➢ Change of employer
➢ Name changes

All changes must be reported within ten days of the change or every six months if no changes occur.
Maintaining Status: How to Update Your Information

iStart Portal (Required)
Use the Post-Completion OPT Employment Update e-form in the iStart Portal to update IS of reporting requirements and request a reprinted I-20.

SEVP Portal (Optional)
Governmental portal that students can use to report changes in employment and personal information and monitor employment authorizations.
SEVP Portal Access

Please note that you will receive an automated email from SEVP regarding the SEVP Portal as soon as your OPT is approved. **You are ineligible to begin employment until you physically receive your EAD and the start date on the card has occurred.**
Traveling on OPT

Travel after program completion, but before the EAD card is received

➢ There is a higher risk associated with travel and return while your OPT is pending after the program completion date. If there are any problems with your application, you may not be able to respond to USCIS in a timely manner, which could delay processing of your EAD.

➢ If your OPT application is denied while outside the U.S., you will not be able to re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status and will not be able to reapply for OPT.

Travel after the EAD card is received

➢ Avoid long absences from the U.S. during the OPT period. Time spent outside of the U.S. while unemployed by a U.S. employer counts toward your 90 days of unemployment.

➢ Attempting to re-enter the U.S. close to the expiration date of your OPT can be risky.

➢ You must not enter the U.S. in a status other than F-1. This may result in the loss of your OPT eligibility.
Maintaining Status: International Travel Requirements

You will be required to provide all four items below to re-enter the US after a temporary departure:

➢ Non-expired F-1 visa
➢ I-20 with OPT approval on page 2 & a travel signature no older than 6 months
➢ Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card
➢ Job offer letter or continuing employment letter
Renewing Your Visa on OPT

If you are traveling abroad and your F-1 visa has expired, you must obtain a new F-1 visa before returning to the U.S.

Check the U.S. Department of State website for more information about getting a visa and specific requirements at the local embassy or consulate at www.travel.state.gov.
After OPT
What happens after OPT?

➢ 60 day grace period to exit the country after the OPT end date
  ○ Not eligible to work after OPT end date

➢ Transfer to new degree program
  ○ OPT authorization ends on the SEVIS transfer release date

➢ Change of status

➢ 24-Month STEM OPT Extension
Completing OPT & Grace Period

➢ You have a 60 day grace period following the end of the OPT EAD
➢ If you intend to apply for the OPT STEM Extension, you must do so before the expiration of your 12 month OPT.
➢ The only additional extension of OPT available is the OPT Cap Gap Extension, for students who have an accepted cap-subject H1-B application.

If you do not extend your OPT, and your EAD expires, you have the following options before the end of the 60 day grace period:

➢ Exit the US within 60 days
➢ Continue your F-1 status and studies: Transfer your SEVIS record to continue studies at another school or request a change of education level to begin a new academic program at Clemson University
➢ Work with immigration legal counsel regarding a change of status application to a new visa category. You will need to check with your legal counsel regarding your allowed period of stay or required exit date if you have a pending change of status when your grace period ends.
24-Month STEM OPT Extension

Students in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields may be eligible for an additional 24 months of OPT following the 12-month period of post-completion OPT for a total of 36 months of OPT.

To verify, check CIP code on I-20 with CIP code list.
STEM Extension

➢ Must study in a STEM field
➢ May begin application process 90 days before the OPT end date
➢ Must complete I-983 Training Plan with employer
➢ Application must be received and receipted by USCIS prior to your OPT end date
➢ Must request authorization from IS through iStart Portal via the 24-Month STEM OPT Request e-form
➢ May continue to work 180 days after OPT end date as long as the application for the extension has been received and is pending with USCIS
➢ Must work for an E-verify employer while on the extension
➢ Must be paid employment
➢ Additional STEM guidance on our website
Post-completion OPT vs. STEM OPT

Post-completion OPT

➢ Do not need a job or job offer to apply
➢ Can be unpaid
➢ 90 days of unemployment allowed
➢ Employer is not required to be E-verified
➢ Available after each degree earned that is higher than the previous degree

STEM OPT

➢ Must have a paid position to apply
➢ Must work for a E-Verified employer
➢ Must complete the I-983 to update employment information
➢ 6 month validation reports
➢ Annual self-evaluations
➢ No more than 150 days of unemployment during the entire 36 months of OPT
➢ Available twice per student’s lifetime
Clemson University International Services

For more information on OPT contact Clemson University International Services.

➢ Advising Hours: Monday-Friday 1-4pm
➢ Office Location: 108 Long Hall
➢ Email: is@clemson.edu
➢ Phone Number: 864-656-3614
➢ OPT Resources
➢ STEM OPT Resources