

Optional Practical Training (OPT)



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OPT is recommended by an ISSS Advisor but authorization is granted through a USCIS Service Center. Official authorization comes in the form of an ID card known as an **Employment Authorization Document (EAD)**.

A student completing an Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's or Ph.D. who has been in valid F-1 status for at least one academic year is eligible for 12 months of full-time OPT. Students on OPT should only engage in employment which is directly related to their field or academic program and which is commensurate with their degree level. If, after completing 12 months of OPT, a student enters a new program and completes a second degree at a HIGHER EDUCATIONAL LEVEL, he or she becomes eligible for another 12 months of OPT. OPT approval corresponds to the current or most recently completed degree and all employment under this authorization must be related to that degree (e.g. if you apply for OPT after your MBA but you already have a Bachelor's degree in computer science, you must be employed in jobs related to business and would not be eligible to take a job related only to computer science).

OPT work authorization can be granted either before or after a student completes his or her program (a student can apply for Pre-Completion OPT or Post-Completion OPT), but it is more commonly used after completion of the degree.

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If you wish to apply for Pre-Completion OPT:

- You will be limited to working part-time (20 hours/week or less) during the academic year (fall and spring semesters) unless you are a graduate student completing thesis or dissertation credits only. You may work full-time during the summer semester.
- **Graduate students completing thesis or dissertation:** You may apply for **full-time** Pre-Completion OPT only if you have permission from University Graduate School. You are not eligible for Pre-Completion OPT if you are receiving funding from the school in the form of a graduate assistantship.
- Any OPT used before completion of your degree will be deducted from the 12 month total (for example, if you use 6 months of full-time OPT before graduating you will be eligible for 6 months of OPT after you graduate).
- Part-time Pre-Completion OPT will deduct time from the 12 month total at a half-time rate (for example, if you use 6 months of part-time OPT before graduating you will be eligible for 9 months of OPT after you graduate).
- Your work authorization for Pre-Completion OPT may not extend past the end of your program; if you wish to use any remaining OPT after graduation, you will need to submit a second OPT application to USCIS in order to get authorization for Post-Completion OPT.
- You must **continue to maintain valid F-1 status**, including full-time enrollment in the fall and spring semesters. Failure to do so automatically invalidates OPT authorization.
- Once you have met the eligibility requirements, you may apply at any time; there is no specific deadline (however, you should take into account that it may take USCIS anywhere from 30 to 120 days to process your application).

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If you wish to apply for Post-Completion OPT:

- You will be eligible to work part-time or full-time for the duration of the authorization period. The 12 months of OPT must be completed within a 14-month period following completion of your degree.
- **OPT will NOT be recommended by ISSS advisors if you have outstanding incomplete courses** (e.g. courses with “IF”, “IP” or “NR” grades) from previous semesters.
- Students enrolled less than full-time in their last term **MUST have an “Academic Advisor’s Certification of Completion of Degree Requirements for Reduced Course Load Approval” or “Advancement to Thesis or Dissertation Segment” approved by ISSS** and retained in their files PRIOR to any OPT application.
- Upon submission of your OPT application, your program information in SEVIS will be updated if necessary; the program may be shortened to reflect the end date of your completion term.
- You must apply during or after your final semester and submit your application by a specific deadline posted by ISSS.

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APPLICATION PERIOD for Post-Completion OPT

ISSS will schedule a Post-Completion OPT appointment no earlier than the third week of classes of the semester in which a student expects to complete his or her program. The official deadline set by USCIS is no later than the end of the 60 day grace period after the student's program end date; however, ISSS recommends submitting Post-Completion OPT applications no later than the last day of the semester in which they complete degree requirements. Students may apply during the 60 day grace period, **provided they have not left the USA.**

Applications must be received at USCIS prior to the end of the 60 day grace period; therefore, students must submit their applications no later than two weeks before the end of the 60 day grace period.

Check with the ISSS Office for the official application deadline each semester

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IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

- You must apply for OPT within a 150-day period that is 90 days before and 60 days after your program end date, which is the end date of your completion term.
- When you apply for OPT, your I-20 will be updated to show the correct program end date (in item 5 on page 1 of the I-20), corresponding to the end date of your completion term.
- Your completion term is the semester in which you complete all degree requirements and finish all academic work, regardless of whether you officially graduate in that term.
- Your completion term is not necessarily the term in which you will participate in a graduation ceremony.
- If you do not officially graduate in your completion term due to processing delays or an administrative error, this will not affect your OPT period.

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IMPORTANT INFORMATION (cont'd)

- **Summer A Completion:** If you will take your last class during the Summer A term, your OPT application period will be based on a June program end date, regardless of the fact that you will not officially graduate until August. OPT applications for students completing Summer A will be accepted starting in March and should be submitted no later than the middle of August.
- If you do not complete all degree requirements in your completion term as expected or you do not graduate due to a failed class or unfinished thesis or dissertation, see an ISSS advisor immediately to apply for a program extension and to discuss your options. You may or may not be able to cancel your

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DURATION OF OPT PERIOD

- Once the EAD (OPT card) is issued, your **OPT may not be canceled or rescinded, and you will not be able to have the OPT period changed.**
- Employment is limited only to the dates specified on the EAD.
- OPT is **automatically terminated when a student begins a new educational program or transfers to another school.**
- Once any period of OPT is granted, you must “use it or lose it”; any remaining time during the authorization period indicated on the EAD that is lost due to a school transfer, change of visa status or departure from the U.S. cannot be made up at a later time or after a subsequent degree program.

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OPT EXTENSION

There are only two ways to extend the OPT period:

1.STEM Extension

You may be eligible to extend your OPT for an additional 24 months if you have majored in one of the STEM areas of study (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). You can view the list of STEM fields by visiting the **STEM OPT Extension section** of the ISSS Website. You are eligible to apply for the extension only if your employer is participating in the USCIS E-Verify program. Your application must be received at the appropriate USCIS service center prior to the expiration of your original OPT period.

2.Cap-Gap Extension

If your OPT expires between April 1 and October 1 and your employer properly files an H-1B petition and change of status request before the expiration of your OPT, you may be eligible for a short extension of your OPT. If your H-1B petition is approved, your OPT will be automatically extended until September 30 (until your H-1B status becomes effective on October 1).

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THE EAD, OPT AND F-1 STATUS

USCIS processing times may vary during the year. Students usually receive the EAD (OPT card) between 30 and 60 days after the application is receipted by USCIS. However, during peak periods, processing may take up to 120 business days. **There is NO WAY to expedite USCIS approval of OPT applications. Students must plan ahead.**

The OPT and STEM OPT sections of the ISSS Website will provide the most updated information- check those sections periodically!

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THE EAD, OPT AND F-1 STATUS (cont'd)

- You **MUST NOT** begin employment until you are in possession of the EAD from USCIS. Pursuing practical training without an EAD is unauthorized employment, which is a deportable offense.
- Your OPT begins on the start date indicated on the EAD, regardless of when the OPT is approved and regardless of when you receive the card.
- You must request a specific OPT start date at your OPT appointment with ISSS. For students applying for post-completion OPT, the requested start date can be any day within the 60 day grace period after the end date of your completion term. In most cases, this is the start date granted by USCIS, which will appear on your EAD.
- You will remain in legal F-1 status throughout any period between your program end date and the start of your OPT, and for the duration of time your OPT application is pending (even if it takes USCIS more than 60 days after your program end date to adjudicate the application).
- While on OPT and during the 60 day grace period following the expiration date on your OPT card (if you choose to stay in the US during this time), **YOU WILL REMAIN IN F-1 STATUS**. OPT approval and work authorization does not change your visa status. To comply with F-1 regulations, you must continue to report information to the ISSS office so ISSS advisors can keep your SEVIS information up to date. Be sure to report any changes in name, address, employment, and dependent information (if applicable).
- If you travel abroad with an expired F-1 visa, you will need to get your F-1 visa renewed to return to the US and continue working on OPT. Your EAD alone is not sufficient to enter in F-1 status. **DO NOT enter under any other visa status if you plan to continue working on OPT.**

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EMPLOYMENT WHILE ON POST-COMPLETION OPT AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Students on post-completion OPT must engage in practical training related to their degree program to maintain their F-1 status. Students on post-completion OPT are allowed a total of 90 days of unemployment within the authorized OPT period. A student who has exceeded **90 days of unemployment** is considered in violation of his or her status and is expected to depart the U.S. immediately.

- Employment while on OPT can be paid or unpaid.
- A student may be employed in the form of an internship or volunteer work, as long as the student is working at least 20 hours per week and the work performed can be viewed as giving the student practical training that is related to his or her field and commensurate with his or her degree level.
- ISSS recommends that you keep records of your job search as well as documentation for each job held – proof of the duration of employment, job description, contact information for your supervisor, and a signed letter from your employer stating how the work performed is related to your degree (if it is not clear from the job description).

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EMPLOYMENT WHILE ON POST-COMPLETION OPT AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

You MUST visit THE OPT and STEM OPT sections of the ISSS Website for instructions on how to report during your OPT or STEM OPT periods.

- Once you begin working, you must report the **name and address of the employer and the employment start date.**
- Report any periods of unemployment and any change of employer; include specific dates.

REPORT-REPORT-REPORT!

Failure to report may result in the termination of your status.

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UNEMPLOYMENT AND TRAVEL

SEVP has implemented a policy on F-1s traveling abroad and reentering during their Post-Completion OPT period:

Citing 8 CFR 214.2(f)(13)(ii), SEVP's new policy makes ***F1s on Post-Completion OPT who are unemployed or do not have a job offer ineligible for readmission/reentry into the U.S.***

ISSS recommends that F-1s on approved Post-Completion OPT travel with an employer's letter verifying employment that is (1) related to degree just completed and (2) valid for the period granted on EAD. ***Traveling without this letter poses a great risk.***

If you are actively in the job search stage, you should document your employment applications, especially those submitted online.

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TRAVEL DURING AUTHORIZED OPT

To reenter the U.S. after a temporary absence, a student must be in possession of the following:

- 1.Unexpired EAD**
- 2.SEVIS I-20 endorsed by ISSS Advisor with the OPT recommendation on page 3**
- 3.Valid machine-readable passport**
- 4.Unexpired F-1 visa stamp, unless otherwise exempt from visa requirements**
- 5.Employer's letter or proof of job offer**

If already working, the student should bring an employer's letter verifying employment for the period of authorized OPT and present such letter **only if requested by a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (USCBP) Inspection Officer.**

A student on authorized Post-Completion OPT with an EXPIRED F-1 visa stamp who wishes to travel abroad must do the following:

- 1.Have a SEVIS I-20 stating dates of OPT authorization.**
- 2.Apply at a U.S. consulate in his/her country of citizenship (or permanent residence).**

The consulate may still require financial documents to prove available funds for living expenses during the OPT period. If already employed, the student may bring an employer's letter which states the type of employment (related to the degree completed), that it is only for the period of authorized OPT, and the salary.

Applying for OPT



IMPORTANT:

If applying for Post-Completion OPT, you must apply for graduation before your appointment at ISSS. Application for graduation will be verified in your university record by an ISSS advisor and if this requirement has not been met, your new OPT I-20 will NOT be processed.

YOU MUST FOLLOW THE APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS ON THE OPT SECTION OF OUR WEBSITE:

issf.fiu.edu

6 Important Considerations When Applying for OPT



1. It is your responsibility to monitor your progress toward graduation and ensure you will graduate this semester.
2. If you suspect that you may not graduate, you **MUST** contact ISSS immediately and take action to request an extension of stay before program end date.
3. You **MUST** follow the instructions on the [Steps for OPT Process Link](#) on our ISSS Website at all times while on OPT in order to comply with all the ISSS and Governmental Reporting requirements and obligations.
4. You **MUST** comply with OPT reporting requirements while actively engaged in OPT. It is **YOUR RESPONSIBILITY** as an F-1 student to report employment in the [SEVP Portal](#) and FIU ISSS Portal.

6 Important Considerations When Applying for OPT



5. Failure to report employment or failure to acquire employment within 90 days of the start date of your OPT will be deemed a violation of your F-1 status and will result in USCIS terminating your legal status in the U.S. Visit [ISSS Website](#) for more information.
6. USCIS is the agency that will be processing your application. It is your responsibility to comply with all the application requirements. I understand that unforeseen consequences are beyond the administrative scope of ISSS

After I have applied for OPT



1. USCIS processing takes **3 to 5 months**- be patient and prepared to wait!
2. Access USPS to confirm receipt of your certified mail
3. USCIS will send you receipt confirmation via email (Form 1145)
4. You will receive a form called I797 Notice of Action – within 2-3 weeks of USCIS email receipt. Make sure this form
 1. *Has your case number on it*
 2. *Has your name spelled correctly*

Errors?– contact USCIS customer service – number provided on I797

5. Follow up on application status via uscis.gov website. *(Please do not call ISSS- we have no control)*. You can access <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do>
6. After 90 days – if you have not received your card- you may submit an e-request here: <https://egov.uscis.gov/e-request/Intro.do>

ALWAYS CHECK THE OPT SECTION OF THE ISSS WEBSITE FOR UPDATES!

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PLEASE NOTE

- All correspondence from USCIS including the OPT card will be sent to the address listed on the Form I-765. Be sure to list an address at which you will be able to receive mail for at least three to four more months. If you want to list an address that is not in Florida, check the Form I-765 instructions or speak with an ISSS advisor before mailing to make sure the application is sent to the correct lockbox facility.
- At the time you apply for OPT, if you will be moving off campus or changing addresses where you live within the following 3-5 months, you must decide what address you want your OPT card mailed to. ISSS is not responsible for lost or undelivered USCIS materials. The address you choose must be stated on Form I-765.
- When **Form I-797 (Notice of Action: Receipt Notice)** is obtained, you must keep it in a safe place as it contains the reference number for the application. Submit a copy of Form I-797 to ISSS as soon as possible.
- Once you receive the EAD, you must check the personal information on it. **If there are any errors, notify ISSS immediately.**
- You must also submit a copy of the EAD to ISSS following instructions on the OPT Section of the ISSS Website.**

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Take the OPT Quiz

The confirmation email you receive upon completion of this Quiz is one of the requirements for your application.

