

# OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) GUIDE

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT F-1 OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION

### WHAT IS IT?

**Optional Practical Training (OPT) is off-campus employment authorization that lets F-1 students get work experience in their major field of study.** The amount of work you are permitted is a maximum of 12 months of *full-time* employment for each *higher* educational level you pursue in the U.S. You can use it during or after your studies. You can work for any employer, anywhere in the country.

**Think of it as an OPT bank account!** In that account are 12 months of full-time optional practical training for your current program of study. Let's say you'd like to work full-time for three months after your sophomore (second) year in your bachelor's degree. That's a three-month withdrawal of full-time employment, leaving you 9 months left to spend during your bachelor's degree. During your junior year, you decide to work *part-time* (less than 20 hours a week) for two semesters or nine months. Since part-time employment counts at half the full-time rate, you've made a withdrawal of four and a half months of full-time employment. This leaves you with four and a half months of full-time employment still in your account to use after you graduate.

If you decide to spend all of your OPT after you complete your degree, you must request all of it at once, that is the full year. You cannot use it in pieces.

If you decide to go on for your Master's degree after completing your OPT for your Bachelor's, your bank account will be *full again* with another 12 months available to you!

### HOW CAN IT BE USED?

- ✓ **Summer vacation and semester break** - *either part-time or full-time employment*
- ✓ **While school is in session** - *part-time employment only*
- ✓ **After completion of all course requirements for a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree, excluding the thesis or equivalent** - *part- or full-time employment*
- ✓ **After completion of ALL requirements for the course of study** - *full-time employment only*

### HOW CAN YOU QUALIFY FOR IT?

- ❶ You must have been enrolled full-time for at least one academic year.
- ❷ You must be able to describe how the type of work you are seeking directly relates to your major. You do not have to have a job offer to apply for OPT. If you are applying for Pre-Completion of studies OPT, however, it is wise that you be as sure as possible of a job so that you don't waste any of your OPT "account."
- ❸ If you are seeking Post-Completion OPT, you must apply for graduation in CUNYfirst. You may apply for Post-Completion OPT up to 90 days before your completing your program of study, but not later than 60 days after. If you apply within the 60 day period after completion, you are likely not to receive your full 12 month OPT benefit due to USCIS processing times.
- ❹ You cannot already have used 12 months of full-time *Curricular* Practical Training.

### **HOW DO YOU APPLY?**

Complete an Application for F-1 Optional Practical Training Employment Recommendation and return it to ISS. When you return it, we will review your application to make sure it is complete and that you qualify. If everything is in order, we will issue a new Form I-20 recommending your OPT and contact you when the I-20 is ready. We will also provide you with instructions on how to submit your application to USCIS and track its progress.

### **HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?**

After your application is filed at USCIS, it can take **three months** minimum for your EAD (Employment Authorization Document) to be returned to you from USCIS. It could take less or more depending on their workload and any security clearances.

**It's important to take USCIS processing time into consideration when planning the date you want to start working! YOU CANNOT BEGIN TO WORK UNTIL YOU HAVE YOUR EAD CARD!!**

### **WHAT IF YOU WANT TO TRAVEL BEFORE STARTING POST-COMPLETION OF STUDIES OPT?**

Contact your international student advisor before making any travel plans if your OPT is still pending USCIS authorization. DHS regulations require that you have your EAD card and a job or job offer to return to the U.S.

### **HOW CAN YOU EXTEND YOUR OPT?**

You can extend Pre-Completion OPT by filing another application. You may not continue to work until it has been authorized by USCIS.

Only qualified "STEM" graduates (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) may qualify for an extension of their Post-completion OPT for an additional 24 months.

### **STUDY AND POST-COMPLETION OPT**

DHS regulations state that, "Authorization to engage in optional practical training employment is automatically terminated when the student transfers to another school or begins study at another educational level." Therefore, you should not continue your U.S. studies until after your OPT has ended. Students may pursue incidental or non-degree studies (continuing education) while on Post-Completion OPT.

**APPLYING FOR DSO RECOMMENDATION  
FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING**

**❶ COMPLETE THE ATTACHED FORMS:**

**1. DSO Recommendation Request Form:**

Item 1: Expected date of Completion of studies: The earliest your application may be submitted to the government for Post-Completion of Studies OPT is 90 days before this date.

Item 2: Indicate what type of OPT you are applying for and the dates you want to work.

Item 3: If you previously have been authorized for Pre-Completion OPT for your current education level, tell us when it was authorized and the start and end dates as they appear on your EAD(s).

Item 4: Describe how your proposed employment for practical training is directly related to your major and appropriate for your level of education.

Item 5: Complete the Academic Information and Other Requirements

Item 6: Read and sign the Acknowledgment of Understanding.

**2. F-1 STUDENT STATUS RESPONSIBILITIES WHILE ON POST-COMPLETION OF STUDIES OPT**

(if that is the type of OPT for which you are applying)

**3. Form I-765:** APPLICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION. Go to <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765> to complete the form online. We recommend completing and submitting the I-765 form online.

**4. Form G-1145:** E-NOTIFICATION OF APPLICATION/PETITION ACCEPTANCE. Go to [uscis.gov](https://uscis.gov), complete, print out the MOST RECENT Form G-1145 available. If you are completing the I-765 online, you do not need to complete the G-1145.

**5. Form G-1450:** AUTHORIZATION FOR CREDIT CARD TRANSACTION. Go to [uscis.gov](https://uscis.gov), complete, print out the MOST RECENT Form G-1450 available. You only need this form if you are mailing in the application.

**② ATTACH THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS TO YOUR APPLICATION:**

- ✓ **Two Passport Type Photographs.** Print your name and SEVIS ID number on the back in pencil. If you are submitting the application online, you can upload your picture.
- ✓ **Forms I-20.** Photocopies of all previous Forms I-20 issued by us and other schools you have attended.
- ✓ **Photocopy of Form I-94 and Photocopy of any previous EAD Card(s).**
- ✓ **Photocopies of your passport identification pages, and visa or change of status approval**
- ✓ **Fee** payable by credit card using the Form G-1450, Authorization for credit card transactions. For applicants submitting online, you can pay the fee online or by ACH debit transaction.

**INFORMATION ABOUT APPLICATION PROCESSING**

- 1. If everything is in order, we will issue you a new Form I-20 with our recommendation on it.**  
We will contact you on how you can receive the I-20.
- 2. We will provide you with information about how and when to send your application to USCIS.**
- 3. You cannot begin working until you have received your EAD Card.**

**OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING  
DSO RECOMMENDATION REQUEST FORM**

**1. PERSONAL AND PROGRAM INFORMATION:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Last

First

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Emplid: \_\_\_\_\_

Local address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

SEVIS ID#: \_\_\_\_\_

Degree Program: \_\_\_\_\_ Major: \_\_\_\_\_

Expected Semester of Completion of Studies: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. TYPE OF OPT YOU ARE REQUESTING:**

- ☐ **Pre-Completion of Studies: Full-time.** Available during vacation periods or after completion of all of coursework except for comprehensives, thesis, or dissertation **only**.  
**Starting on** \_\_\_\_\_ **and ending** \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ **Pre-Completion of Studies: Part-time.** (20 hours or less per week)  
**Starting on** \_\_\_\_\_ **and ending** \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ **Post-Completion of Studies:**  
**Starting:** \_\_\_\_\_  
*Your start date may be any date after you complete your studies up to 60 days later. (If you choose a date within the 60 day period following completion of your program, you will likely not receive the full 12 month OPT benefit due to USCIS processing delays.)*  
**Ending:** \_\_\_\_\_  
You must apply for all of the 12-month benefit you have remaining for this program of study unless you have plans for further study at the same education level, e.g., a second master's degree.

**3. PREVIOUS OPT:** If you have previously received OPT employment authorization for your current education level, indicate the date(s) it was authorized and the start and end dates on your EAD(s):

Starting on \_\_\_\_\_ and ending \_\_\_\_\_

**4. DESCRIBE YOUR PROPOSED EMPLOYMENT AND EXPLAIN HOW IT RELATES TO YOUR MAJOR.**

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**5. ACADEMIC INFORMATION (Undergraduate and Graduate students)**

- a. Will you complete your program of study this semester? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- b. Have you checked your degree audit? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- c. Have you applied for graduation? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- d. Do you have a pending petition to change a grade? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- e. If you were admitted to BC as a transfer student and are eligible for transfer credits, did you complete the transfer evaluation process? ☐ Yes ☐ No

**6. OTHER REQUIREMENTS (Graduate students only)**

- f. Have you completed all your course work for your program? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- g. Is there a thesis required for your program? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- h. If yes, was your thesis ☐ certified ☐ NOT certified ☐ waiting for results
- i. Is a comprehensive exam required for your program? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- j. If yes, did you pass your comprehensive exam? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- k. Does your program require a state project or class other than a thesis or comprehensive exam? ☐ Yes ☐ No

**7. STUDENT'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING**

Everything I submit above is accurate and factual to the best of my knowledge. I understand that I am requesting the DSO's recommendation for Optional Practical Training Employment authorization. The ISS will advise and assist me with reviewing my application for completeness and eligibility. Once the school has recommended the OPT, the application will be returned to me for filing it at the USCIS. I understand that I am completely responsible for properly filing my OPT application with the USCIS and tracking its processing through the USCIS Case Status Online System at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov). I understand that I may be asked to submit proof of passing exams, thesis, etc. and that if I do not pass I must inform ISS immediately. If I do not inform ISS it may affect my status in the United States.

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My Signature

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My Name (please print)

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Date Signed

## **HOW TO FILE YOUR OPT APPLICATION**

**I- Be sure that your application contains all of the following documents:**

1. Form I-765 (Properly completed and signed in black ink if mailing)
2. Form G-1145 E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance if you are mailing in your application. You do not need it if you are filing online.
3. Fee by credit card or by ACH debit card (if paying online).
4. Form G-1450 Authorization for Credit Card Transactions if paying by credit card
5. Your newly issued Form I-20 with your DSO OPT recommendation
6. Photocopies of all previous I-20's
7. Two passport format photos with your name and SEVIS ID# printed on the back in pencil. If you are submitting online, you can upload your pictures.
8. Photocopies of all the following:
  - a. Previous EADs
  - b. Passport Identification page
  - c. Visa
  - d. Form I-94 or copy of change of status approval notice

**II- Make a photocopy of all the above documents for your records.**

**III- Make sure that the Form G-1145 E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance and G-1450 Authorization for Credit Card Transactions are paper-clipped (not stapled) to the top of your complete application if you are mailing it in to USCIS.**

**IV- Your complete application (see I above) must be received at USCIS within the following deadlines:**

1. Within 30 days of the DSO's OPT Recommendation on your Form I-20, that is, Signatures on pages 1 and 2.
2. For students applying for Post-Completion OPT, your application may not be received at the USCIS Lockbox later than 60 days after you have completed your program of study.
3. It is strongly recommended that you send your application by some type of courier service that will provide you with proof of timely receipt. Filing online is the quickest way to submit your application.

**V.** File your complete application with delivery tracking to the lockbox. Please visit [uscis.gov](http://uscis.gov) to verify the correct address.

**VI. Email evidence of timely filing and acceptance of your application to [iss@brooklyn.cuny.edu](mailto:iss@brooklyn.cuny.edu) and keep copies for yourself.**

Please note: If your complete application is returned to you, for any reason, that means that it *has not been accepted*. Contact our office immediately for information about your options.

**VII. Track the progress of your application through the USCIS Case Status Online System at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov).**

**VIII. Provide us with a photocopy of your EAD Card if it is being sent directly to you.**

## **F-1 STUDENT STATUS RESPONSIBILITIES WHILE ON POST-COMPLETION OF STUDIES OPT**

During your period of authorized Post-completion of Studies OPT, you are continuing in your F-1 Student Status and have legal responsibilities. Below is a list of these responsibilities. Please read them carefully and sign the Acknowledgement below that you understand them.

1. You will be sent a link from SEVIS to create a portal account. You are responsible for updating your employment and personal information within 10 days.
2. Only work in your major field of study and within the dates that you have been authorized on your EAD.
3. According to DHS regulations, students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment. You are required to report interruptions of OPT employment to our office. Students that accrue more than 90 days of unemployment will be notified by Homeland Security and may be at risk of deportation.
4. It is strongly recommended that you keep a record and supporting evidence of all your OPT-related activities such as:
  - Details of job searches: correspondence with prospective employers, interviews, etc.
  - Employment information: dates, name/location of employer, position, part/full-time
  - Volunteer work: dates, name/location/type of volunteer work, part/full-time. Please note that federal law requires that a volunteer may not assume a normally paid position or displace a U.S. worker.
5. You are required to report the following information to our office:
  - Change of name (You must bring proof of your updated passport noting the change)
  - Change of address
6. Beginning a new course of study or transferring U.S. schools automatically terminates OPT employment.
7. Obtain a DSO's endorsement to travel every six months.
8. Employment authorization is automatically suspended in the event of a strike or other labor dispute involving work stoppage at the place of employment [8 CFR 214.2(f)(14)]

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES WHILE ON POST-COMPLETION OPT**

I have read and understand my F-1 student status responsibilities while I am on Post-Completion OPT. \_\_\_\_\_

My Signature

My Name (please print)

**GUIDE TO APPLYING FOR DSO RECOMMENDATION FOR PRE- AND POST- OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING: APPENDIX 1**

Go to [uscis.gov](http://uscis.gov), complete items parts 1-3, print out and sign it in black ink if you are planning on mailing the application. We recommend completing and submitting the application online.

**Start here:** Begin your entries in Part 1. Leave the top portion blank as it is for USCIS use only. If a section does not apply to you, please write in N/A unless otherwise directed.

**Part 1:** Select box 1.a.

**Part 2:**

**Items 1.a.-1.c.:** Your full legal name should match the name on your passport.

**Items 2.a.-4.c.:** Enter any other legal names including maiden names, aliases, or nicknames.

**Item 5.a.:** Your U.S. mailing address is where USCIS will mail your EAD card after your OPT is approved. If you will not receive mail at this address for at least 5 months in the future, use another address. Item 5.a. is an optional field. If you are using someone else's address, write their name in this field. Otherwise, leave it blank.

**Item 6:** If you answered 'yes' to this question, then skip items 7.a.-7.d.

**Item 7.a.-7.d.:** Enter your current physical address at the time of application. USCIS will not mail the EAD card here if there is another address in the mailing address.

**LEAVE ITEMS 8 & 9 BLANK.**

**Items 10-11:** Choose the appropriate choices.

**Item 12:** Select "no" if you never applied for EAD. Select "yes" if you have previously applied for an EAD and were either Approved, Denied, or Rejected.

**Item 13.a.:** If you have a SSN, answer "yes", then complete item 13.b. If you would like a replacement card, answer "yes" to items 14 and 15 and complete items 16-17.

If the answer is "no" to 13.a., skip 13.b. and complete items 14-17.b.

If you do not need a replacement card, select "no" for item 14 and skip to 18.

Items 18-20: Enter the appropriate information

Item 21.a.: Type your 11-digit I-94 number from your most recent I-94. The I-94 can be found at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94>.

Item 21.b.-21.e. You can find this information on the bio page of your most recent passport.

Item 22: Indicate the last date you entered the U.S. as listed on your I-94 record

Item 23: This is where you last entered the U.S. and received your entry stamp from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). List the City and State. If there is more than one airport in that city, please specify which airport. (For example: JFK, New York, NY)

Item 24 and 25: Enter the status were when you entered and F-1 Student as your current status.

Item 26: Your SEVIS number is on the top left of your most recent I-20.

Item 27: If you are applying for Pre-completion OPT, enter (c)(3)(A).  
If you are applying for Post-completion OPT, enter (c)(3)(B).

**LEAVE 28-31.b. BLANK.**

**Part 3:**

Item 1.a: Check this box

**LEAVE ITEM 1.b. BLANK.**

Item 2: If someone has helped you fill out the form, enter their name in this field.

Item 3: Provide a U.S. phone number. You may add a cell phone number to item 4, or type it here if is your only U.S. phone number.

Item 5: Please use a current e-mail address.

Item 7.a-7.b: Sign in BLACK ink, and put the date. USCIS will deny e-signatures. Fit your entire signature within the box. It must not touch the lines of the box. Do not use the electronic signature feature.

LEAVE PART 4 and 5 BLANK UNLESS SOMEONE HAS ASSISTED YOU WITH FILLING OUT THE FORM.

**Part 6:**

Students must complete page 7, part 6 if they have had any of the following:

Approved OPT or CPT in the past.

Used a different SEVIS ID or passport while in F-1 status in the U.S.

Items 1.a.-1.c.: List your family name, given names, and middle name. You must list names exactly as they appear on your passport.

Item 2: Enter N/A

**Previous CPT**

Please list your CPT approvals. We suggest this format:

Items 3.a. – 3.c.: Page Number 3, Part Number 2, Item Number 27.

Item 3.d.: CPT Authorizations (as a title to the section).

Employer Name;

Start date – End date;

Part-time or Full-time;

Degree level (Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD).

You can find your CPT details on the I-20 that was approved for each period of CPT.

**Previous OPT**

Please list your past OPT approvals. We suggest this format:

Items 4.a. – 4.c.: Page Number 3, Part Number 2, Item Number 27.

Item 4.d.: OPT Authorizations (as a title to the section).

Full-time or Part-time

Start date – End date;

Degree level (Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD)

You can find your OPT details on the I-20 that was approved for each period of OPT or on the previously approved EAD card.

You must send all 7 pages of the I-765 if you are applying by mail.