

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENT & SCHOLAR SERVICES

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### F-1 Optional Practical Training Guidelines: 12 Month Standard OPT

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a benefit for students in lawful F-1 status who want to gain practical work experience in a position directly related to their field of study. Students are eligible for 12 months of OPT per degree level. After applying for OPT, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) will issue an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) valid for a specific period of time. The EAD is your work permit; you may work only during the dates indicated on the card. Students enrolled in full-time English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are not eligible for OPT. A 24-month STEM OPT extension may be available after the initial 12 months of OPT for students who are studying in designated STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and meet other employment criteria.

#### OPT ELIGIBILITY:

1. You must have been enrolled FULL-TIME in your current degree program for one full academic year (Fall/Spring semesters only, summer term at UConn does not count toward academic year requirement).
2. You must not have been authorized for full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) for more than 12 months cumulatively in the current degree level.
3. You have not already been approved for OPT based on a degree level that is higher than your current degree level.

#### TYPES OF OPT:

##### **A. Pre-Completion OPT (work takes place before you graduate):**

- During the academic semester when you are enrolled in coursework, OPT can only be part-time (up to 20 hours/week)
- During your vacation term (summer and winter breaks), OPT can be part-time (up to 20 hours/week) or full time (over 20 hours/week).
- **Plan A Master's and PhD student only**, after the completion of ALL degree requirements except for thesis or dissertation, may apply to do pre-completion OPT on a full-time basis even during the academic semester. *It is strongly recommended that you have an advisory meeting with an International Advisor if you choose this option.*

##### **B. Post-Completion OPT (work that takes place after your program completion):**

- Post-completion OPT must be full time (over 20 hours/week). You cannot apply for part-time post-completion OPT.
- **Plan A Master's and PhD students only**, may apply for post-completion OPT on a full-time basis, if all degree requirements have been completed except for Master's thesis or Doctoral dissertation. *It is strongly recommended that you have an advisory meeting with an International Advisor if you choose this option.*

#### **Thesis/Dissertation Students:**

A student in a graduate-level program who has completed all program requirements, aside from thesis or dissertation, can apply for either pre-completion OPT with thesis pending or post-completion OPT to begin full time OPT. The following table highlights the major differences between pre- and post-completion OPT and may help you decide which type of OPT you prefer. ***It is strongly recommended that you have an advisory meeting with an International Advisor before making your decision.***

Full Time Pre-Completion OPT – Thesis Pending	Full Time Post-Completion OPT – Thesis Pending
(1) There is no requirement to be employed. (2) Cannot apply for STEM OPT extension. (3) Not eligible for H-1B Cap Gap extension (4) May extend academic program if needed. (5) May not hold a Graduate Assistantship. (6) Must finish OPT before completing dissertation. (7) Must register full-time each semester in research credits unless it is your final semester.	(1) Restricted to 90 days of unemployment. (2) MUST work full-time (more than 20 hrs/week). (3) Eligible to apply for STEM OPT extension if otherwise meets requirements. (4) Eligible for H-1B Cap Gap extension. (5) Must finish thesis/dissertation by end of your OPT. (6) May not hold a graduate assistantship.

**OPT APPLICATION PROCEDURES:**

**Step 1 -Submit OPT application to ISSS:**

Submit the following documents to ISSS:

- a. Completed Form I-765 (download at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>). Tips for completing Form I-765 can be found below. We will return this to you.
- b. Completed “OPT Application Form (ISSS 357)” (available online at [www.issu.uconn.edu](http://www.issu.uconn.edu))
- c. Enrollment Verification for your entire time at UConn issued by the UConn Registrar. Storrs campus students may request this from the Registrar located in the Wilbur Cross Building. Law School students should request the Enrollment Verification from the Law School Registrar. Other regional campus students may call the Storrs campus registrar to request the Enrollment Verification (860-486-3331), or can print their own through Student Admin. If you print your enrollment verification from Student Admin, it MUST include all semesters enrolled at UConn, not just the current semester.
- d. Payment of 12 Month OPT SEVIS Maintenance Fee. This fee must be paid online through the UConn Bursar website: <http://bursar.uconn.edu/uconn-payment-store/>. After paying the \$150 fee, you must print a receipt and include this with your application documents to ISSS.

**Tips for Completing Form I-765**

- The form is available as a fillable form online at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>. Download and type the form online, then print and sign in **blue ink**.
- “I am applying for...” Check “Permission to accept employment” if this is an initial 12-month OPT application. Check “Renewal of my permission to accept employment” if this is a 24-month STEM OPT extension of your current OPT.
- **Item 3:** Your Receipt Notice and EAD will be mailed to the address you provide. If you are not sure where you will be living in the future months, you may use International Student and Scholar Service’s office address: 2011 Hillside Rd., Unit 1083, Storrs, CT 06269. If you will move to a new address, please note that the U.S. Postal Service will not forward this mail, even if you file a change of address form with the U.S. Postal Service.
- **Item 10:** Use the number from your I-94 admission record, which can be printed at [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov). If you have changed to F-1 status within the U.S., and have not traveled since, you may find your I-94 number on your I-797 approval notice. Include a copy of your Approval Notice (I-797).
- **Item 11:** This is asking if you have ever been issued an EAD by USCIS. Check “Yes” if you have been issued a past EAD through prior F-1 status or any other visa type held in the U.S. Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is not authorized through USCIS; check “no” if you have only received CPT authorization.
- **Items 12, 13, 14, 15:** Use the information from your most recent entry stamp in your passport. In some cases you may have made a short trip to Canada or Mexico, which is not reflected by your current entry stamp.

This is standard, and it will be ok to use the information from your entry stamp if you don't know the actual date of entry from your last trip. In item 15, write out "F-1 Student", not just "Student".

- **Item 16:** Use one of the three following codes:
  - Pre-completion OPT: **(c)(3)(A)**
  - Post-completion OPT: **(c)(3)(B)**
  - 24-month extension for STEM graduates: **(c)(3)(C)**
- **Item 17:** Degree, Major, Employer Name and E-Verify # **only if you are applying for STEM OPT Extension**, otherwise leave blank
- **Item 18:** Leave blank. This question is not for F-1 students.
- **Certification:** Sign the form in blue ink.

## **Step 2 - File your OPT application with USCIS:**

After reviewing the OPT Application, ISSS will give you the following documents:

- 1) Updated Form I-20 with OPT recommendation on page 2.
- 2) Form I-765 with any suggested revisions.
- 3) Instructions on filing your OPT application with USCIS, including a list of required application materials, and USCIS mailing address.

### **Documents to submit to USCIS:**

1. Form G-1145, if you want to receive email/text message application status updates. Get this form online at <https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145>
2. Two **recent** color passport style photographs (write name and SEVIS ID number softly in pencil or felt pen on back of photos). See I-765 Filing Instructions for further photo details <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>.
3. \$410.00 in the form of a personal check or money order made to **U.S. Department of Homeland Security** (a personal check is preferable).
4. Completed I-765, typed and printed and signed in blue ink. Download form at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>.
5. Photocopy of the Form I-20 with OPT recommendation on page 2. Make sure that you sign the bottom of your form before making a photocopy.
6. Photocopy of all previous Forms I-20 (all pages). Make sure that you signed all previous Forms I-20.
7. Print out of I-94 admission record (from [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov) website) OR photocopy of I-94 card (front and back) if you have a paper I-94 attached to your passport OR I-797 approval notice (if you changed status to F-1 within the U.S.) with attached I-94.
8. Photocopy of any previous Employment Authorization Document (EADs), if applicable.
9. Photocopy of your most recent visa stamp (the visa can be expired and/or of a different visa category)
10. Photocopy of biographical page(s) of the passport, with expiration date. If your passport will expire within 6 months from the time of filing your OPT application with USCIS, you should renew it with your home country's embassy or consulate before you submit your OPT application.

**Note: Please be sure to make a photocopy of all your paperwork for your records before mailing your application.**

Mail all application materials to an appropriate USCIS Lockbox facility (based on the mailing address on your I-765). The Lockbox will review your initial application for completeness, and forward it to a USCIS Service Center for processing:

## **Step 3 – After Filing Application with USCIS:**

**Receive I-797 (Receipt Notice):** The USCIS Lockbox will forward your application to a USCIS Service Center for processing. Several weeks after receiving your application, USCIS will send you a Receipt Notice (I-797). This will list the Service Center where your application is being processed, the date your application was officially received, and a case number in reference to your application. Carefully review the notice to make sure your name is spelled correctly

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on the I-797. If it is not, contact the National Customer Service Center (NCSC) number listed on your receipt notice, as well as a DSO/International Advisor at ISSS, immediately.

**Receive I-797 (Approval Notice):** After processing your OPT application, USCIS will send you an approval notice (I-797). This is a notification on your application status, NOT your work authorization/permission. USCIS processing time for OPT is up to 90 days.

**Receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD):** You will receive an EAD separately in the mail from USCIS. This is your proof of employment authorization. You may not start working until you receive your EAD and the start date becomes effective. EADs cannot be forwarded by the post office, so if you move or change your mailing address you MUST notify USCIS with the updated address for EAD mailing.

**Report OPT Employment Information to ISSS online by filling out the “OPT Information Form”:** Go to [www.issu.uconn.edu](http://www.issu.uconn.edu) and click on “Submit OPT Employment Information”, to fill out the OPT Information Form. All students on OPT and STEM OPT Extension must report their current address of residence, employer’s name and address and employment status to ISSS as soon as you receive your EAD, so that a DSO/International Advisor can report the information in SEVIS. **Students MUST submit this form every time their address or employment information changes.** This is a regulatory requirement and failure to comply is a violation of your F-1 status. Students must update ISSS to ensure that they do not accrue more than 90 days of unemployment. **Failure to update ISSS with your employment information will lead to termination of your SEVIS record.**

**Post-Completion OPT Employment Requirement:** For post-completion OPT, remember that you are required to have full time (more than 20 hours per week) employment in a position or positions that are directly related to your major field of study. All positions held during OPT must meet this requirement. From the time your EAD becomes valid, you may not accumulate more than 90 days of unemployment. If you have more than 90 days of unemployment, your F-1 status will no longer be valid, and you will need to make plans to change status, transfer to a new program or depart the U.S.