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

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) grants Optional Practical Training (OPT) work authorization for those in lawful F-1 status who desire to work in the U.S. in a position related to their field of study. If approved for OPT, USCIS will issue for you an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) valid for specific dates and conditions of employment. BEFORE filing your OPT application with USCIS, an F-1 student must receive a new Form I-20 from a Designated School Official (DSO)/International Advisor at International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) with a recommendation for OPT. OPT may be authorized up to 12 months cumulatively for each higher degree level that a student completes in F-1 status in the U.S. Students who study English as a Second Language (ESL) are not eligible for OPT based on their ESL study. A 17-month extension after the initial 12 months is available only for certain eligible students who study in designated STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and meet other employment criteria.

OPT ELIGIBILITY:

1. You must have been enrolled on a FULL-TIME basis at a DHS-approved college, university, conservatory, or seminary 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" over 20 hours a week) for more than 12 months cumulatively in the current degree level.

TYPES OF OPT:

A. **Pre-Completion OPT (work takes place before you graduate):**
   - **Part-time** while enrolled in your degree program, when the OPT takes place during the academic semester.
   - **Part-time (up to 20 hours per week) or Full-time (over 20 hours per week)** during your annual vacation time (during summer session time, winter break, and spring break), if you are eligible, and intend to register the next available regular semester (fall and spring semesters).
   - **Full-time with thesis pending: Plan A Master's and PhD student only,** after the completion of **ALL degree requirements excluding thesis or dissertation –** *It is strongly recommended that you have an advisory meeting with an International Advisor if you choose this option*;

B. **Post-Completion OPT(after your program completion):**
   - **Full-time** after completion of **ALL DEGREE requirements for your degree**.
   - **Full-time with thesis pending: Plan A Master's and PhD student only,** after the completion of **ALL degree requirements excluding thesis or dissertation –** *It is strongly recommended that you have an advisory meeting with an International Advisor if you choose this option*;

***ATTENTION: Thesis/Dissertation-Pending Students ***

A student in a graduate-level program who has completed all program requirements, aside from thesis or equivalent, can apply for either pre-completion OPT 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*;

Pre-Completion OPT (until the degree completion date)	Post-Completion OPT (Before or after the degree completion date)
(1) You may have unrestricted days of unemployment. (2) May work full-time (more than 20 hours/week). (3) Cannot apply for STEM extension. (4) Not eligible for H-1B Cap Gap extension (5) May extend academic program if extra time is needed. (6) May not hold a Graduate Assistantship.	(1) Restricted to 90 days of unemployment. (2) May work full-time (more than 20 hours/week). (3) Can apply for STEM extension. (4) Eligible for H-1B Cap Gap extension. (5) Cannot extend academic program if you have not finished thesis/dissertation by end of your program. (6) May not hold a graduate assistantship.

Please be advised that if you choose to apply for post-completion OPT while you are working on your thesis/dissertation, you *must* complete all degree requirements at latest by your post-completion OPT end date. There is no option to extend your stay in F-1 status if you don't complete degree requirements by the OPT end date.

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OPT APPLICATION PROCEDURES:

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1. **Submit OPT application to ISSS**:
   Submit the following to ISSS. A DSO/International Advisor at ISSS will review and process your OPT request. After processing, <u>you will receive a new I-20 with OPT recommendation on page 2</u>:

   a. Completed Form I-765 (available at www.isss.uconn.edu)
   b. Completed "Practical Training Application Form (IS 357)" (available at www.isss.uconn.edu)
   c. Full-time enrollment certification for your entire time at UConn issued by the Registrar's Office, Wilbur Cross Building (Storrs Campus). Law School students should request the Full Time Enrollment Certification from the Law School Registrar. Other regional campus students can call the Storrs campus registrar to request the Full Time Enrollment Certification (860-486-3331), or can print their own through Student Admin. If you print your own enrollment certification from Student Admin, it MUST include all semesters enrolled at UConn, not just the current semester.

   Tips for completing Form I-765

   o Type the form using the online fillable pdf. After completion, print and sign in blue ink.
   o "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 17-month extension application for your current OPT.
   o Item 3: Your Receipt Notice and EAD will be mailed to the address you provide. If you are not sure that you will be at your current residence a few months into the future, you may use International Student and Scholar Service's office address: 2011 Hillside Rd., Unit 1083, Storrs, CT 06269. If you will move soon, note that the U.S. Government will not forward this mail, even if you file a change of address request form with the U.S. Postal Service.
   o Item 10: Use the number from your I-94 card, which can be printed at www.cbp.gov .
   o 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 is not authorized through USCIS. Check "no" if you have received CPT authorization, but no other categories of employment authorization through USCIS (such as previous OPT authorization, Severe Economic Hardship employment authorization, etc.)
   o Items 12, 13, 14, 15: Use the information from your I-94 card. In some cases you may have made recent short trips to Canada or Mexico, which are not reflected by your current I-94 card. This is standard and it will be fine to use the information from your I-94 card anyway. If you have changed to F-1 status within the U.S., include a copy of your Approval Notice (I-797). 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)
  - 17-month extension for STEM degree recipients: (c)(3)(C)
- Certification: Sign the form in blue ink.

2. **File your OPT application with USCIS:**
   After ISSS reviews your documents you will receive the following forms from ISSS:
   1) I-20 with OPT recommendation on page 3,
   2) I-765 with any suggested revisions, and
   3) Instruction sheet for filing, which includes USCIS mailing address

You can then send the following documents to USCIS <u>by certified mail receipt request, or any other means by which you can track your packet</u>:

1. Two color passport style photographs (print your name, date of birth, and SEVIS number (starting with N00xxxx, located in the upper right hand corner of your I-20) in pencil on the back of each photo).
2. $380.00 in the form of a personal check or money order made to **U.S. Department of Homeland Security** (a personal check is preferable)
3. Completed I-765, typed and printed and signed in blue ink. Download form at www.uscis.gov > Forms.
4. Photocopy of the SEVIS I-20 with OPT recommendation on page 2. <u>Make sure that you sign the bottom of your form before making a photocopy</u>
5. Photocopy of all previous I-20's (all pages). Make sure that you signed all previous I-20's.
6. Print out of I-94 (from 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 attached to an I-797 approval notice (if you changed to F-1 from a different visa type within the U.S.)
7. Photocopy of any previous Employment Authorization Documents (EAD's), if applicable
8. Photocopy of your most recent visa stamp (the visa can be expired and/or of a different visa category other than F-1)
9. 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 <u>before</u> you submit your OPT application
10. Optional: Form G-1145, if you would like to receive emails/text messages with your application status. This form can be found at www.uscis.gov > Forms.

Note: Please be sure to make a photocopy of all your paperwork for your records before mailing your application.
Mail the entire application materials to an appropriate USCIS Lockbox facility (based on **your** mailing address on your I-765):

USCIS Phoenix and Dallas Lockbox facilities

If you live in:	Mail your application to:
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 Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands.	**USCIS Phoenix Lockbox** For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries: USCIS PO Box 21281 Phoenix, AZ 85036 For Express mail and courier deliveries: USCIS Attn: AOS 1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S

	Suite 100 Phoenix, AZ 85034
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	**USCIS Dallas Lockbox** For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries: USCIS PO Box 660867 Dallas, TX 75266 For Express mail and courier deliveries: USCIS Attn: AOS 2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business Suite 400 Lewisville, TX 75067

3. **Receive an I-797 (Receipt Notice):**
   The USCIS Lockbox will forward your application to a USCIS Service Center for processing. Within a few weeks of 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 on the I-797. If it is not, contact a DSO/International Advisor at ISSS immediately.

   * E-Notification: If you want to receive an e-mail and/or a text message that your Form I-765 has been accepted at a USCIS Lockbox facility, complete **Form G-1145**, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance and clip it to the first page of your application. Form G-1145 can be found at www.uscis.gov

4. **Receive an 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.

5. **Receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD):**
   You will receive an EAD separately in the mail from USCIS. This is your proof of employment authorization.

6. **Submit completed "OPT Information Form" to ISSS along with a copy of your EAD:**
   It is mandatory that you report your address of residence, approved OPT information and employment address and status to ISSS as soon as you receive your EAD, so that a DSO/International Advisor can report the information in SEVIS. This is a regulatory requirement and failure to comply is a violation of your F-1 status. **Failure to update ISSS with your employment information will lead to termination of your SEVIS record/end of your F-1 status.**

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***ATTENTION: Post-Completion OPT applicants
who currently have GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS***

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If you have a GA/RA/TA and plan to submit your dissertation/thesis in the middle of the semester, you need to **FULLY** understand UConn's policies on the timing of degree completion and the GA contract before applying for Post-Completion OPT. Please contact the Graduate School to learn more.