

# Applying for OPT

Optional Practical Training is defined as temporary employment directly related to the student's major area of study. Please read this instruction checklist over and make an appointment with a DSO. Bring all discussed documentation below with you to your DSO appointment.

## What the student must do:

- Meet with your DSO, prior to completion of your program to verify you are eligible.
- Complete Form **I-765** Application for Employment Authorization (marked with the proper code at item 16)
  - Standard Post-completion OPT **(c)(3)(B)**
  - **Student must sign the Form I-765 inside the signature block not crossing lines as this is used for the EAD card.**
- Write a check or money order for the I-765 filing fee, made payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security". Please check the USCIS website for the fee amount as it changes periodically.
- Obtain 2 Passport style photos taken within 30 days of filing form I-765
- Make photocopies of:
  - All prior I-20's
  - Both sides of your I-94 (white card) or a print out from the online website.
  - Any previous employment authorization cards (if applicable)
- Your Passport and Visa ID pages (including renewal page if original expired, etc.)
- It is *your* responsibility to make the photocopies and mail these documents as soon as they have been reviewed.

## What the DSO must do:

- Review the information provided by the student.
- Verify the student's eligibility for OPT, including whether the student has been in full-time status for at least one academic year, and the dates of prior periods of CPT or OPT previously granted.
- Before the student completion date is reached, update the student's SEVIS record with the employment start and end date, whether the OPT is full or part-time and how the work that is planned is relevant to the student's course of study.
- Print and sign an I-20 from SEVIS with OPT recommendation of page 3 (sign page 1 and initial and date page 3 next to OPT recommendation).
- Have student sign and date page 1 of OPT I-20 and make a file copy (original to student, one copy to file).
- Remind student to mail OPT package immediately. (certified if possible)

## What & Where to send:

- Form I-765 (marked with the proper code at item 16)
  - Post-completion OPT **(c)(3)(B)**
  - **Student must sign the Form I-765 inside the signature block not crossing lines as this is used for the EAD card.**
- Check or money order made out to "**U.S. Department of Homeland Security**"
- 2 passport style photos
- Copy of I-20 with your DSO's recommendation for OPT
- Copies of all prior I-20's
- Copy of both sides of I-94 (white card) or a print out from the online website.
- Copies of your Passport and Visa ID pages (including renewal page if original expired, etc.)
- Mail all of the above to:

### US Postal Service

**USCIS  
Attn: I-765 C03  
P.O. Box 805373  
Chicago, IL 60680-5374**

### Express Mail (FedEx, UPS, DHL)

**USCIS  
Attn: I-765 C03 (Box 805373)  
131 South Dearborn – 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Chicago, IL 60603-5517**

<b>Preconditions</b>	Student must have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis at a DHS-approved school for one full academic year before being eligible for OPT. Available both before and after completion of the educational objective, but different rules apply to pre- and post- completion OPT. Students in English language training programs are not eligible for OPT. Part-time F-1 "border commuter students" are eligible only for CPT and post-completion OPT. OPT must be "directly related to the student's major area of study."
<b>Location</b>	Students may engage in OPT for any employer for the duration of OPT authorization; as long as the employment qualifies under OPT standards.
<b>Duration</b>	Standard OPT is available for a cumulative maximum of 12 months during any uninterrupted stay in F-1 status per education level. Part-time OPT is deducted from the 12 month limit as 50%.
<b>Hours per week</b>	20 hours/week limit for pre-completion OPT done while school is in session and student still has coursework to complete.  Full-time employment can be requested for pre-completion OPT done during official school breaks, and for students who have completed all requirements for their degree except for thesis or dissertation.  For post-completion OPT, according to SEVP guidance a student must be adequately employed to avoid limits on unemployment.
<b>Field/level of work</b>	Must be directly related to the level of the student's course of study (major).
<b>Offer of employment</b>	No offer of employment is required, but the student is expected to work during the OPT EAD validity period. Students on post-completion OPT are limited to a maximum of 90 days of unemployment.
<b>Effect on other work</b>	Prior uses of full-time CPT for one year or more eliminates eligibility for OPT.
<b>Approval Process</b>	DSO recommends OPT in SEVIS Student files I-765 for EAD with USCIS Lockbox facility Work can begin only after receiving EAD issued by USCIS, and on or after the start date on the EAD.
<b>Misc.</b>	If doing pre-completion OPT, must maintain a full course of study during the period of employment (unless done during school breaks).  In addition, the I-765 must be received by USCIS no later than 30 days after the DSO submits the OPT recommendation to SEVIS to avoid denial and loss of filing fee.  <b>Once your DSO issues your new I-20 with OPT recommendation, you must mail/file immediately.</b>