

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ) ABOUT OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

What is optional practical training?

OPT is off-campus employment that is related to your major field of study.

Who is eligible for OPT?

Students who are in F-1 status and have been enrolled full-time for at least one full academic year are eligible for optional practical training:

1. After completion of a course of study
2. Before completion of studies if engaged in thesis or dissertation research and all other courses are completed
3. During the summer or over winter break
4. During the regular academic year (on a part-time basis, deducted from the 12-month maximum at a proportional rate)

You are not eligible to apply for OPT after you graduate.

When can I apply?

The ISS suggests applying for OPT approximately 3-4 months before you expect to begin your OPT employment; however, you MUST apply BEFORE you graduate.

Do I need a job offer in order to apply?

No.

How do I apply for OPT?

1. Read this FAQ.
2. Follow the instructions for completing the OPT documents.
3. When the forms are completed, bring the completed practical training packet to our office so that we may review them for you.

Can I go in person to an USCIS office to apply for OPT?

No. OPT applications must be submitted to the USCIS by mail, as the instructions in this packet indicate. (The ISS *recommends* OPT permission; the USCIS must *approve* it.)

When can I start to work under OPT?

You may only begin employment when you have received the EAD card *and* the beginning date of employment authorization (shown on the EAD) has arrived.

What's the difference between OPT and Curricular Practical Training (CPT)?

CPT permits employment *before completion of required coursework only*. CPT requires the offer of a specific job.

If I had CPT, can I still have OPT?

Yes, as long as you did not have full-time CPT for more than one year.

Can I take classes if I have OPT?

According to federal regulations, students should contact the International Student Services office regarding this issue.

Can I change employers if I have OPT?

Yes. There is no immigration-related procedure required for doing so. As long as the *employment* is related to your field of study, you can work for any employer.

Can I travel outside the USA if I have OPT?

In order to re-enter the U.S. after you have applied for OPT, you must have your I-20 signed by the International Student Advisor within the last six months, a valid F-1 visa, a valid passport and your EAD card. It is also wise to carry a letter from your employer, confirming that you are working under the terms of OPT employment.

Is OPT a different visa?

No. A person with OPT authorization is an F-1 student holding an EAD for OPT. You still need a signature from the International Student Advisor on your I-20 if you want to re-enter the United States during your time on OPT. The signature should be no more than six months old at the time you re-enter.

How long can I stay in the United States after my OPT expires?

Sixty days.

Can I return to school after completing OPT?

Yes. You need to obtain an I-20 for the next program of study, and complete the USCIS procedure for moving to a “new level of studies” (if you resume studies at SIUE) or the procedure for school transfer (if you go to a different school). Please note that you are only allowed to remain in the U.S. for up to 5 months between the time your OPT ends and the new program of studies is to begin; if the time period is greater than 5 months, you will be required to leave the U.S. and can only re-enter within 30 days of the start of your new program of study.

If I have OPT for a year and return to school for another degree, can I have another year of OPT?

You will be eligible for another year of OPT if your new degree will be at a HIGHER level of study. For instance, if you obtained a Master's degree, did 12 months of OPT, then enter a PhD program, you will be eligible for another 12 months of OPT following the PhD program.

If I apply for OPT and then decide not to use it, can I get my OPT time back?

If the USCIS has not yet sent you an EAD at the time you decide you do not want OPT, you may request to withdraw your application. Please make an appointment with the International Student Advisor by telephoning 650-3785. If the EAD card has been issued, it is not possible to cancel and the USCIS will consider you to have used up your OPT even if you did not work. Hence, decisions to cancel MUST be made early before the EAD has been issued.

Must I remain in contact with the ISS while I am participating in authorized OPT?

Yes, the USCIS regulations now require the ISS to report certain information on students participating in OPT. You will need to notify USCIS or SIUE **within 10 days** if any of the following changes occur:

- **Change of name or address** (post office box not acceptable). This can be done directly on the USCIS website. <http://www.uscis.gov>.
- **Termination of OPT employment**, which includes changing to another employment status such as H-1B, or OPT employment that ends early.