

OPT FAQs

1. When can I start working?

You must wait until you receive your EAD card from USCIS and your start date has arrived to begin working. Once you complete your degree, you cannot work on-campus.

2. What counts as employment?

OPT is intended to enhance your academic program by providing a means to gain experience in your field of study. Work NOT related to your program of study is a violation of F-1 status. Students must work at least 20 hours a week in either a paid or unpaid position to qualify as employment.

3. What happens if I cannot find a job?

During post-completion OPT, students may not accrue a total of more than 90 days of unemployment. Students can volunteer to stop the unemployment day clock, but you must have your EAD card before beginning a volunteer opportunity.

4. What is my status while I am on OPT?

Students on OPT or with a pending OPT application are still in F-1 status and must maintain their F-1 status by following the employment and contact information reporting requirements. OPT is a benefit of F-1 status; it is not a new visa type or status.

5. Can I travel while I am on OPT?

Yes, travel on OPT is possible if your application has been approved and you have not exceeded 90 days of unemployment. Go to our [Travel on OPT](#) website to see what documents you will need to re-enter the United States. We do not recommend travelling while your OPT application is pending.

6. What about health insurance?

Students who complete their program of study are no longer eligible for the student health insurance plan administered by SIUE. We highly recommend you stay insured. Many employers offer health insurance plans, or you may want to purchase your own health insurance from an online marketplace.

7. What else do I have to do while I am on OPT?

You must submit an [OPT reporting form](#) to report your employment and contact information. All changes should be reported within 10 days. Changes will be reflected in your SEVP Portal within a few hours after the update has been made.

8. Can I change my start dates?

If you have already submitted your online application to USCIS, you cannot change your OPT start date recommendation. If you have not submitted your online application, then you may ask your ISSS advisor to cancel the previous OPT recommendation. You will then have to provide your international advisor with a new start date so they can recommend your OPT again and re-issue a new OPT I-20.

9. What can I do if I've been waiting more than 150 days for my OPT authorization?

After 150 days, you can submit a case for inquiry for "[Outside Normal Processing Time](#)" on the USCIS website. Do not submit this inquiry before a full 150 days has passed. If you are unsure, check your I-797C receipt for the date your application was received.

10. What happens if I exceed the 90-day unemployment limit?

After 90 days of unemployment, an F-1 student in the post-completion period loses valid immigration status. While ISSS does not report the violation or terminate the SEVIS record, students are encouraged to depart the United States or change status.

11. Can I change employers during OPT?

Yes. As long as the employment is directly related to your field of study, you can work for any and all employers you would like. You must report any change in employers by submitting an [OPT reporting form](#) within 10 days of the change.

12. How long can I stay in the U.S. after my post-completion OPT end date?

There is a 30-day grace period following the end of the OPT period.

13. May I ask USCIS to expedite processing of my OPT?

Yes, premium processing is available for students applying for the first time and those who have a pending application. The cost is \$1780. Students can log into their USCIS account, select Form I-901 and pay this additional fee. USCIS should make a decision within 30 business days, but it is not guaranteed.

14. Should I create a SEVP Portal Account after my OPT is approved?

Yes. You should receive an email to create your SEVP Portal Account within 1 to 2 days after your approved OPT start date. It may go to your spam/junk folder. Use your SEVP Portal account to verify your SEVIS record is accurate. Submit an [OPT Reporting form](#) to the ISSS Office to report any changes in your U.S. address, employer or immigration status.