

Optional Practical Training for F-1 Students

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Optional Practical Training?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is benefit given to F-1 students that allows you to work off-campus in a job related to your field of study. This training must be approved by U.S. Citizenship and Immigrations Services (USCIS).

Am I eligible for OPT?

You will be eligible for OPT if:

- you are currently in valid F-1 student status **and**
- you have been in full-time status for at least one academic year (2 semesters)

When can OPT be used?

Optional Practical Training can be used during the following times:

- during the semester (up to 20 hours per week)
- during annual vacations (up to 40 hours per week)
- after completion of all course requirements for the degree while working in your thesis dissertation (full-time employment only)
- after completion of study (full-time employment only)

How long is OPT authorized for?

Optional Practical Training may be authorized for a total of 12 months **and** must be completed within 14 months following completion of your course of study.

- **Note:** Full-time Optional Practical Training that is authorized prior to completion of studies is deducted from your 12 month period.
- **Note:** Part-time Optional Practical Training that is authorized prior to completion of studies is deducted at a rate of one day for every two part-time days of OPT.
- **Note:** You will be eligible for another 12 months of OPT if you change to a **higher** degree level **and** meet the above requirements again.

When can I begin my off-campus employment through OPT?

You must have authorization from USCIS before you can begin work. This means you are not able to begin any employment on OPT until you received your Employment Authorization Card (EAD). You are only eligible to work during the dates approved on your Employment Authorization card.

Can I change employers while on authorized OPT?

Yes, as long as the employment is related to your field of study **and** you continue to have authorization to work as indicated on your EAD card.

When can I apply for OPT?

- It is recommended that you apply **90-120 days** prior to the completion of your program to allow sufficient time for USCIS processing.
- If you have not completed a full academic year in full-time student status – then you are able to apply up to 90 days prior to being enrolled one full academic year – provided your period of employment will not take place prior to your program completion.

How long is the OPT application process?

Processing times at the USCIS vary widely depending on the time of year your application is submitted and the current workload at the Service Center. Typical processing times can be checked on the USCIS website - <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/jsps/ptimes.jsp> .

NOTE: You are not able to begin work until you have received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS and the OPT start date becomes effective.

Other Reminders while on OPT:

- You **must continue to report** any change of address to the ISSO within 10 days of your move. Failure to do so may place your status in jeopardy.
- You **must continue to report** your employer information. This is a result from the new rule on optional practical training that went into effect on April 8, 2008.
- Employment may not begin until your EAD card has been received.
- OPT will allow you to work only in a job related to your major area of study.
- Once authorized – you may accept employment anywhere in the United States – provided the employment is within your field of study.
- While on OPT – you must get your I-20 signed every six months
- If you transfer to another University to enter another degree program – your OPT authorization will automatically be terminated.
- Review the FAQ's on travel while on OPT.

Ready to apply for OPT? – See the procedures at
www.clarkson.edu/isso