

F-1 Optional Practical Training Information

What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

- ◆ Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a benefit that comes with maintaining F-1 immigration status whereby students can apply to US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for up to 12 months authorization to work in paid and/or unpaid positions that relate directly to the student's major field of study.
- ◆ Students may engage in OPT **prior** to or **after** completion of studies. Though most students choose to use the OPT benefit after graduation as it extends their F-1 immigration status and allows full-time employment.

Type of OPT	Explanation	Limitations	When to apply	Date OPT Ends
Pre-Completion OPT	Pre-completion OPT is authorized part-time employment (may be off campus) during studies which is related to the student's current major. OPT will be authorized up to 12 months on a <i>part-time</i> basis. Student must continue to pursue a full course of study.	Limited to 20 hours per week while school is in session, and up to 40 hours per week while on a school break (spring break, summer vacation or other authorized vacation period).	An application for OPT may be submitted as early as 90 days prior to completing one academic year.	The OPT will automatically end on the day the student transfers to a different school, earns his/her degree or after 12 months, whichever is soonest.
Post-Completion OPT	Post-completion OPT is used after a student earns his/her degree at WOU and after the completion of the course of study. "Completion of studies" refers to the date on which the student completes all Western Oregon University degree requirements (may be before the completion of a thesis or cumulative exam). It may not always be the date of graduation.	OPT must be full time or over 20 hours a week. A student cannot accumulate over 90 days of unemployment or else their OPT will automatically end (see below).	The application may be submitted as early as 90 days before the end of the term and the latest day for USCIS to receive the application is 60 days after. Applying too early or too late may result in denial. Applying as soon as possible is highly recommended.	Any OPT authorization ends on the transfer release date for a student who requests a transfer to another school or changes their education level (continues to get a masters degree, etc.). It may also end on the OPT end date or after accumulating 90 days of unemployment.

How long is OPT?

- ◆ The total duration of OPT is 12 months. The start date for post-completion OPT must be within the 60 days following the completion of study (Program End Date). Therefore, OPT must be completed within 14 months of graduation.

- ◆ Students with Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math (STEM) degrees may apply for an additional 24 more months of OPT

Who is eligible to apply for OPT? ¹

- ◆ You are eligible for OPT if you have maintained your immigration status, and have been enrolled full time (or on an authorized Reduced Course Load) in a USCIS-approved school for at least one full academic year (9 months). If you changed from a J-1 to F-1 status, time in your J-1 program will be counted towards this requirement.
- ◆ You may apply for OPT during studies (pre-completion), or after program ends (post-completion). Certain STEM approved degrees are eligible to apply for an additional 24 month extension.
- ◆ You may only apply for OPT on a current major or degree (not on a minor of study).
- ◆ You are not eligible for OPT if you have already been granted 12 months of full-time Curricular (CPT) or Optional Practical Training (OPT) at your current degree level.

What types of employment are allowed for Pre and Post completion OPT?

- ◆ All OPT employment must be in a job that allows the student to get practical training related to what was learned in the degree program. It is ultimately up to the student to describe how the employment is related to his/her major. Types of employment can be any of the following: paid employment, employment by multiple employers, short-term multiple employers (such as performing artists doing gigs), self-employed business owner, employment through an agency, and unpaid employment such as volunteering or an unpaid internship.

What are the limits on periods of unemployment?

- ◆ Students on post-completion OPT can remain unemployed for a total of 90 days until their OPT is void. Once a student accumulates 90 days of unemployment they are required to leave the United States or change their status (transfer, change, visa status, etc) immediately.
- ◆ Each day during the period when OPT authorization begins (the start date on the EAD card) and ends that the student does not have qualifying employment, counts as a day of unemployment. The only exception is the 10 days between the end of one job and the beginning of the next job that will not be included this calculation.

What are my options if I accrue over 90 days of unemployment?

If you have over 90 days of unemployment you have violated your status unless you take one of the following actions. You may be denied future immigration benefits unless action is taken.

- ◆ Continue your education by changing education levels or transferring to a program at a SEVIS approved school.
- ◆ Depart the United States immediately.
- ◆ Take action to otherwise maintain legal status (such as changing immigration status).

What documentation should be kept for jobs held?

- ◆ Evidence of employment (such as a job offer), or jobs applied to should be kept in your possession. You may be asked to provide information on the jobs, job duties, and contact information of your supervisor for the positions you held previously.

How long will it take to get my OPT authorized?

¹ 8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(ii)

- ◆ It usually takes about 1-3 months to get a response of approval or denial from USCIS. Processing takes especially long for students that graduate spring or summer term and it is recommended that they apply as early as possible.

When can I begin working?

- ◆ You may not engage in employment until you have actually received the **Employment Authorization Document (EAD)** and the **start date of the employment authorization has arrived or passed.**
- ◆ You will still need to obtain a social security card from the Social Security office if you do not already have a social security number. More information here <<http://www.ssa.gov/>>.

May I travel while on OPT?

- ◆ It is **highly** recommended that you do not travel outside the United States while your OPT application is *pending*. The I-94 information you entered in the I-765 form will be inaccurate and your OPT application may be canceled if you exit the US for reasons of abandonment.
- ◆ Once you have been *approved* for OPT, when you travel and reenter the U.S. you will need to provide your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card, a confirmed job offer from the company you will work at, and a travel signature on your I-20, a valid passport and a valid US visa. Days of unemployment still accumulate while out of the country unless you are taking an authorized vacation break at a current job.

What are my responsibilities to maintain status while on Optional Practical Training?

While on OPT, your SEVIS record and I-20 are still maintained by Western Oregon University's Office of International Education and Development. You will need to follow immigration rules while on OPT and continue to update your information with the international student advisor in the OIED office.

- ◆ You must **find a job or volunteer work** within the limited time of unemployment days.
- ◆ You must give a **copy of your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card** to the OIED after approval from USCIS.
- ◆ You must continue to update the WOU international advisor with your **employment information** and any **dates of unemployment**. Contact the international student advisor through e-mail with the following information for every job held while on OPT:
- ◆ Your current physical/living address in the U.S.; Name of employer; Address of employer; Your supervisor's name and contact information; Your job title and a brief statement of how the job relates to your degree; date that the employment started, and when your last job ended
- ◆ You must continue to notify the WOU International Advisors of any **address or name changes** within 10 days of any change.
- ◆ You must get a **travel signature** from a WOU international advisor if you plan to travel outside the U.S.
- ◆ You must continue to keep your **passport valid** (extend it at least 6 months before it expires).
- ◆ Immediately (within 10 days) notify the WOU International Advisors if you **discontinue Optional Practical Training** for any reason (transfer, change education levels, exit the U.S., etc).

F-1 Optional Practical Training Post-Completion

Type of OPT	Post-Completion OPT
Explanation	Post-completion OPT is used after a student earns his/her degree at WOU and after the completion of the course of study. "Completion of studies" refers to the date on which the student completes all Western Oregon University degree requirements (may be before the completion of a thesis or cumulative exam). It may not always be the date of graduation.
Limitations	OPT must be full time or over 20 hours a week. A student cannot accumulate over 90 days of unemployment or else their OPT will automatically end (see below).
When to apply	The application may be submitted as early as 90 days before the end of the term and the latest day for USCIS to receive the application is 60 days after. Applying too early or too late may result in denial. Applying as soon as possible is highly recommended.
Date OPT Ends	Any OPT authorization ends on the transfer release date for a student who requests a transfer to another school or changes their education level (continues to get a masters degree, etc.). It may also end on the OPT end date or after accumulating 90 days of unemployment.

Applying for Post-Completion OPT:

To apply for Optional Practical Training, the I-765 application must be sent to USCIS for review and a decision. If OPT is granted, the applicant will receive an **Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card** which will be proof that the student is legally allowed to work in the U.S. during the dates noted on the card.

Read the following instructions and collect all the necessary documents **BEFORE** making an appointment with an international student advisor in the Office of International Education and Development (OIED). General application process is as follows:

- ◆ Complete the attached "OPT Application FORM" and turn it in to OIED.
- ◆ Schedule a meeting with an international student advisor.
- ◆ The advisor will review the documents and answer any questions you have at that time.
- ◆ A new OPT I-20 which is required to apply will be made at this appointment.
- ◆ Make sure you write your full name on ALL documents submitted.

The required application documents are listed below. Prepare them as completely as possible before meeting an advisor. Make any copies at the library, WUC or other location.

1. **I-765 Application for Employment Authorization Form.** Download form from <https://uscis.gov/i-765>
 - ◆ Instructions on how to fill out the form are also available via the above link. ("General Instructions" on filling out the I-765 form start on page 14 of the instructions.)
 - ◆ The form is read by a machine. It is best to type in your answers. If not, please use black ink.
 - ◆ Question 27 on the I-765 will generally be (c) (3) (B) for POST Completion OPT. Refer to "Who May File" on page 1 of the I-765 instructions if you are unsure of your eligibility category.
2. **I-94:** This will be electronic. Go to <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html> enter your information and "**Get Most Recent I-94**". You do not need to get a travel history.



3. **Photos: 2 recent** (taken within the last 30 days) **2”by 2” passport style photos** meeting the specifications noted in the instructions for the I-765 form. Write your name and SEVIS number on the back.
4. **Application Fee:** Check or money order for **\$410** (four hundred and ten dollars) payable to: **“U.S. Department of Homeland Security”**.
5. **Identification:** Make a *photocopy* of your **identification page** and **visa page** from your **passport**.
6. **Old I-20(s):** Copy past I-20s which prove that you have maintained status for at least one academic year and/or past OPT authorization I-20s.
7. **New OPT I-20:** Will be made by an international student advisor when you meet to review your application.
8. **G-1145 E-Notification Application:** Not required, but highly encouraged. Download from <https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145>. Easy and free to do.

After collecting all the documents named above, you should make an appointment with an international student advisor in the OIED office for review. Please answer all questions to the best of your ability. If you are unsure of how to answer a question, leave that one blank and your advisor can help you find the correct information.

Once you have completed all the steps, you will mail your completed application to the appropriate USCIS Lockbox facility. Below are the locations for mail from Oregon. Please see the I-765 instructions for lockbox mail locations if you are sending your application from another State.

When sending via the US Post Office, mail to:

USCIS
PO Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

When sending via the Express Mail Carriers, mail to:

USCIS
Attn: AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S
Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034

Please remember to write your return address in the top left corner of the envelope and to affix any postage/stamps in the top right corner.

You are encouraged to send the package with tracking so you are able to confirm if the envelope was received or not. KEEP COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS SENT. Within 14 days you should receive a receipt from USCIS at the address on the I-765 form. You will be able to check the status of your application at <http://www.uscis.gov> by using your receipt number in the **CASE STATUS** section. USCIS customer service can be reached at 1-800-375-5283 if you do not receive a receipt number, or if you have any other questions or issues with your OPT application.

Continuing Health Insurance While on OPT:

- ◆ Students on OPT that wish to continue their current health insurance during their OPT employment need to send an e-mail to Ambre Plahn at **plahna@wou.edu** at the beginning of EVERY academic term you wish to receive coverage. The bill will need to be paid at the WOU Cashier in the Administration Building, or through WolfWeb.