

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) GENERAL INFORMATION

What is OPT?

Optional Practical Training, also known as OPT, is defined in the regulations as “temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student’s major field of study.”

Who is eligible for OPT?

An F-1 student must have been “lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis in an approved college, university or conservatory or seminary for one full academic year” to be eligible for OPT. ESL and language learning program students do not qualify for OPT. *(Pacific Union College does not currently have an ESL program.)*

How long is the duration of OPT?

Optional Practical Training can be authorized for a maximum aggregated period of 12 months per education level. *(Students with STEM degrees on OPT might be able to apply for STEM extensions.)*

Legal Note: A student becomes eligible for 12 months of OPT when the student changes to a higher education level; this student needs to be in this new level for another full academic year before becoming eligible for another OPT for this new education level.

Legal Note: The regulation states “authorization to engage in practical training employment is automatically terminated when the student transfers to another school or begins study at another education level.”

When should you apply for OPT?

You can apply for OPT before your program end date, but not sooner than 90 days from the last day of classes.

Can I travel out of the country after applying for OPT?

It is recommended by Student Life / International Student Advising that you do not leave the country after you have applied for OPT and have received an employment authorization document (EAD) card in the mail.

Can I travel after I get my card?

Yes, you may travel temporarily out of the country after you get your EAD. You need to make sure that your *I-20 has a valid signature; each student is valid for six months at a time. You would need a valid F-1 visa in your passport in order to re-enter the United States.

*Legal Note: A student, who had been issued an EAD for Optional Practical Training, might have an I-20 whose program completion date has passed. If this is your case, your stay in the country is still legal as long as you have a valid EAD.

You may travel with the expired I-20 as long as you follow the guidelines explained above.

When can I start working?

You may not start working off campus until you have received your Employment Authorization Card (EAD), and you may not start working before the beginning date on your end.

What will happen after I apply for my EAD?

If you have requested electronic notification (e-Notification) from USCIS, you will receive an email and/or text message within 24 hours after USCIS accepts your application. This service is available for applications filed at a USCIS Lockbox facility.

How long will it take for me to get my card?

Depending on which immigration service you are applying at, it might take from 90-120 days for you to get your card.

What should I do if I don't get my card by the 90th day and I need to start work?

If your Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization, has been pending more than 75 days, you may contact the National Customer Service Center (NCSC) at 1-800-375-5283 and ask that they create a service request.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding OPT, please do not hesitate to contact Student Life / International Student Advising at isa@puc.edu or (707) 965-7362. For international F-1 students currently enrolled at Pacific Union College, please see the detailed OPT PowerPoint Presentation in Canvas.