

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) GENERAL INFORMATION

Disclaimer: PUC OISS has prepared this guide to provide you with general guidance. However, any advice provided to you by our office, as well as the information in this document, should not be construed as legal advice. PUC international staff will provide regulatory and practice information as it stands at the time of the consult. Due to the fluid nature of governmental interpretation, individuals must understand that the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) office may change its interpretation of established immigration laws/regulations and eligibility requirements for benefits at any time. For legal advice, you may consult with an immigration attorney.

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, 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.*)

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

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. Due to USCIS processing times, it is recommended students apply as early as possible.

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 signature on the travel endorsement page of the I-20 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.

*Note: Student, who has 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 EAD.

What will happen after I apply for my EAD?

If you have requested electronic 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 3-4 months, shorter or even longer, for you to get your EAD card.

What should I do if I don't get my card at 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 (also known as USCIS Contact Center) at 1-800-375-5283 and ask that they create a service request. Students can view their case status online using their receipt number, which can be found on notices they may have received from USCIS, can sign up to receive automatic case status updates, and view processing times on USCIS's website (www.uscis.gov).

Optional Practical Training (Quick Points)

- Training relates to the student's major area of study.
- DSO recommends OPT in SEVIS.
- Student does not have to secure training before the DSO can recommend OPT.
- Authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), and the student is issued an Employment Authorization Document (EAD).
- Allows the student to work for any employer, as long as the training relates to the student's major course of study.
- Can occur *before* or *after* the student's program end date.
- Periods of OPT cannot overlap.
- Students are eligible for an additional 12 months of OPT authorization, when they change to a higher educational level.

Regulations applicable to OPT:

<https://www.ice.gov/sevis/practical-training>

<https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov> (Search for F-1 Optional Practical Training)

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