Optional Practical Training (OPT) Online Workshop

Table of Contents

Introduction to OPT

Application Overview

Dashew Center OPT I-20 Request

USCIS OPT Application

Employment Authorization Document

OPT Employment

OPT Reporting Requirement

International Travel

What is OPT?

- Optional Practical Training (OPT) is temporary employment authorization, approved by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), that is **directly related to an F-1 student's major area of study at UCLA**. Eligible students can apply to receive up to 12 months of OPT employment authorization after completing their academic studies.

- F-1 students may be eligible for an initial 12 months of OPT per higher degree level achieved.

- Applicants do **not** need an employment offer to apply for OPT.

Visa Status During OPT

- F-1 students engaging in OPT will still hold F-1 status in the U.S.

- The Dashew Center will maintain an F-1 student's SEVIS record during their approved OPT period.

- F-1 students may continue to request services from the Dashew Center such as advising appointments, support letters, and travel authorization during their approved OPT period.

- F-1 students engaging in OPT are still required to obtain a travel signature from the Dashew Center on their I-20 to re-enter the U.S. in valid F-1 status after traveling abroad.
  - *Each travel authorization signature is valid for 6 months from the date it was last signed and must be valid at the time of entry to the U.S.*

Eligibility Requirements

- Must have maintained valid F-1 status for at least one academic year.

- Must **not** have had 12 months of OPT authorization for the same degree level.

- Must **not** have accrued 12 months or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) authorization for the same degree level.
  - *Part-time CPT authorization does not affect OPT eligibility.*
  - *Heavy CPT usage (either part-time or full-time) can cause your OPT application to be subject to additional scrutiny from USCIS.*

- Must be completing a UCLA degree program in the next 90 days.

- USCIS must receive the complete OPT application by the end of the 60-day grace period after degree completion date.

- You must file Form I-765 while in the United States.

- The Dashew Center does NOT recommend traveling outside of the U.S. once the OPT application has been submitted to USCIS as it can cause delays or denials of your application.

Final Term Requirements

- Students must maintain the required number of course units during their final quarter (12 units for Undergraduate; 8 units for Graduate).
  - *If Summer term is your final term, you must be enrolled full-time.*

- If you do not require a full-time course load to complete your degree requirements, all students must submit a final quarter Reduced Course Load (RCL) request in MyBruin International.

- Only one online course can be counted towards students' full-time enrollment. If enrolled in only one course in the final term, the course must be in-person.

- Students who are requesting CPT in their final term should first receive CPT authorization from the Dashew Center before submitting their OPT I-20 request.

Application Process

HOW TO APPLY

1. Review this entire OPT Workshop PDF on the Dashew Center website

2. Pay the Visa Services Fee and SEVIS Maintenance Fee on the Dashew Center website

3. Submit OPT I-20 request through MyBruin International, under F-1 Student Services option

4. Receive the OPT I-20 from the Dashew Center

5. Prepare and complete OPT application forms and supporting documents
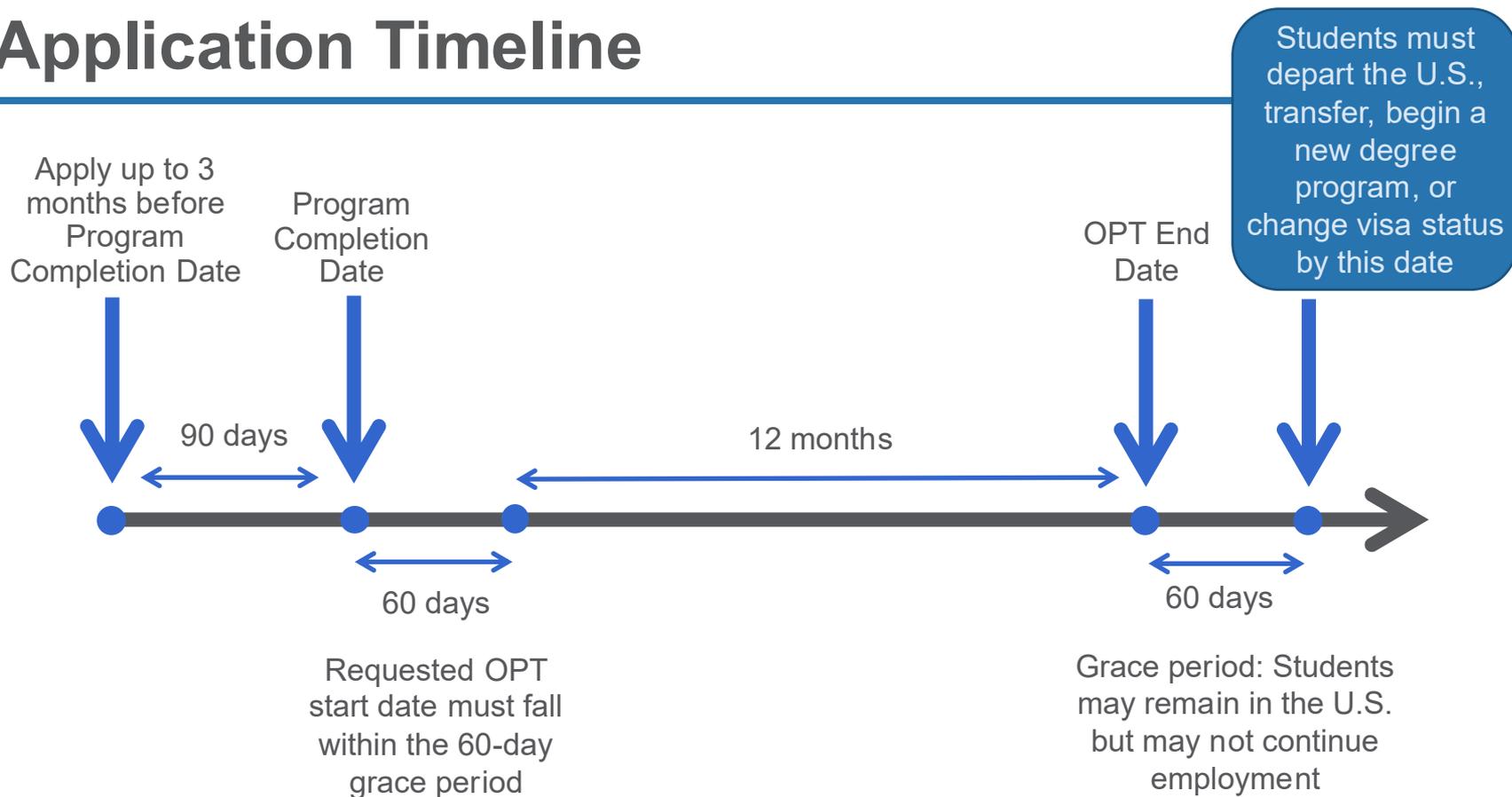
6. Timely submit OPT application materials to USCIS for processing

Application Timeline

WHEN TO APPLY

- Students may request an OPT I-20 from the Dashew Center as early as 90 days before their program completion date (as confirmed on their Verification of Degree Completion Form).

- It is *highly recommended* that students apply early and submit their OPT I-20 request to the Dashew Center 90 days before their program completion date.

- USCIS requires approximately 3+ months to approve an OPT application. You can check recent processing times on USCIS's website.

Application Timeline

Apply up to 3 months before Program Completion Date

Program Completion Date

OPT End Date

Students must depart the U.S., transfer, begin a new degree program, or change visa status by this date

90 days

12 months

60 days

60 days

Requested OPT start date must fall within the 60-day grace period

Grace period: Students may remain in the U.S. but may not continue employment

OPT I-20 Request Procedures

To request an OPT I-20, please:

- Update your email address in MyUCLA (make sure that you will have access to this email address after graduation, because it will be listed in your F-1 SEVIS record and used to create your SEVP Portal account)

Submit the OPT I-20 request via MyBruin International and upload the following:

- Visa Services Fee and SEVIS Maintenance Fee payment confirmation

- Verification of Degree Completion Form (signed by department Academic Advisor or Student Affairs Officer)

Your OPT I-20 request will be processed within 10 business days of a completed and correct submission request.

OPT Start and End Dates

- Students must input their requested OPT start and end dates when submitting their OPT I-20 request in MyBruin International.

- Requested OPT start date must fall within the 60-day grace period, based on the program completion date listed on your Verification of Degree Completion Form.

- Graduate students must consult with their Student Affairs Officer (SAO) to select an appropriate program completion date based on their *defense date, filing date, or the official quarter/semester end date*.

- Once the OPT application is submitted to USCIS, it is not possible to change your requested OPT start and end dates.

OPT Start Date Selection

Degree Completion	Program End Date	OPT Start Date Window
Fall 2025 (earliest submission to Dashew: 09/13/2025)	12/12/2025	12/13/2025 – 02/10/2026
Winter 2026 (earliest submission to Dashew: 12/20/2025)	03/20/2026	03/21/2026 – 05/19/2026
Spring 2026 (earliest submission to Dashew: 03/14/2026)	06/12/2026	06/13/2026 – 08/11/2026
Summer 2026 – Session A (earliest submission to Dashew: 05/02/2026)	07/31/2026	08/01/2026 - 09/29/2026
Summer 2026 – Session C (earliest submission to Dashew: 06/13/2026)	09/11/2026	09/12/2026 - 11/10/2026
Fall 2026 (earliest submission to Dashew: 09/12/2026)	12/11/2026	12/12/2026 - 02/09/2027

OPT I-20 Request

After you log into MyBruin International, click "F-1 Student Services" and then click "Initial 12-Month OPT I-20 Request."

When completing the OPT I-20 Request, you must indicate your requested OPT start and end dates.

Verification of Degree Completion

- This form must be completed by an Academic Adviser / Student Affairs Officer (SAO), who must confirm your expected program completion date.

- Dashew Center staff cannot complete this form.

- Electronic / digital signatures will be accepted.

Visa Services Fee and SEVIS Maintenance Fee

WHAT DOES THE VISA SERVICES FEE AND SEVIS MAINTENANCE COVER?

Visa Services Fee covers expenses related to duties performed by the university for visa services provided to students during the post-graduation and OPT periods.

SEVIS Maintenance Fee is covered for currently enrolled UCLA students by the university on annual basis except for self-supporting professional programs. Since students will not be enrolled at UCLA during their OPT, they will be charged the SEVIS Maintenance Fee in advance and for each 12 months, as SEVIS record maintenance is still required by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) during a student's OPT and STEM OPT Extension periods.

Students are required to pay the Dashew Center Visa Services Fee and the SEVIS Maintenance Fee each time they apply for Post-Completion OPT or STEM OPT Extension per degree level.

Visa Services Fee and SEVIS Maintenance Fee

See below instructions how to pay for Visa Services Fee and SEVIS Maintenance Fee

To pay the fee:

- Log in to your Dashew Center account

- Click on the Pay button for 'F-1 OPT: Initial 12-Months'

- Follow the instructions on the payment site to pay for Dashew Center Visa Services Fee and SEVIS Maintenance Fee by debit or credit card.

Opt Payments

OPT/Academic Training Administrative Processing Fee

OPT Administrative Processing Fee

The DCISS OPT Administrative Processing Fee is required to maintain your visa status and SEVIS record at UCLA after graduation. The fee is intended for Post-Completion OPT purposes only. Please submit the payment only if you are applying for Post-Completion OPT.

F-1 OPT: Initial 12 Months::		Pay
F-1 OPT: STEM Extension::		Pay

Visa Services Fee and SEVIS Maintenance Fee

- A receipt of your payment will be sent by UCLA Corporate Financial Services to your email address reported in MyUCLA.
  - Please be sure that your email address is written correctly and valid.

- If you cannot locate the payment receipt email, please provide a screenshot of the payment history screen from your Dashew Center account.

- A copy of your payment receipt or screenshot of payment history is required for your OPT I-20 Request.

After Receiving OPT I-20

- After you submit the OPT I-20 Request in MyBruin International, an F-1 Counselor will review and issue your OPT I-20.

- You must print, sign, and date (**with wet-ink signature only**) the student attestation section at the bottom of page 1 of the OPT I-20. Next, make a copy of pages 1 and 2 to include with your OPT application materials.

- Prepare your OPT application materials for submission to USCIS.

USCIS MUST RECEIVE YOUR OPT APPLICATION:

➢ Within 30 days of your OPT I-20 issue date (as indicated on page 1 of your OPT I-20). Applications received by USCIS later than 30 days from the issuance date on page 1 of the OPT I-20 will be denied.

➢ Before the 60-day grace period ends. The 60-day grace period begins after your program end date listed on page 1 of your OPT I-20. Applications received by USCIS after the 60-day grace period will be denied.

USCIS Online Filing

FOR STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO FILE YOUR OPT APPLICATION ONLINE WITH USCIS, PLEASE SEE OUR I-765 ONLINE FILING GUIDE.

Students can file their OPT application online. Here are some of the benefits of filing online:

- Receive receipt notice of your application immediately and track application status

- Receive USCIS notices and respond to a Request for Evidence (RFE) online

- Pay fees online

- Send USCIS secure messages about your case

- Upload additional documentation to application after submission

If you would like information about USCIS' Premium Processing of OPT applications, please visit the USCIS website.

U.S. Style Passport Photos

PASSPORT PHOTO REQUIREMENTS

When filing online, please follow the instructions provided in the I-765 / MyUSCIS application portal.

You can also reference the Department of State passport photo tool.

Options to have your passport photo taken near UCLA:

- On-Campus
  - Campus Photo Studio (Ackerman Union A-Level) 310-206-8433
- Off-Campus
  - FedEx Office (1520 Westwood Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90024) 310-475-0789
  - CVS (1001 Westwood Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90024) 310-209-9141

After OPT Application Submission to USCIS

- Applicants will receive an I-797 Notice of Action Receipt Notice from USCIS after the OPT application was received by USCIS.

- Applicants can check the status of their OPT application online via their MyUSCIS Account.

- Applicants will receive a notice from USCIS with the decision approximately 3+ months from the date their OPT application was received by USCIS.

- If OPT is approved by USCIS, the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card will be mailed to the U.S. mailing address you provided in your online I-765 Form. Applicants will receive First Class mail containing their EAD card in about 2-3 weeks after receiving the approval notice.

Cancellation and Withdrawal

- It is your responsibility to submit your OPT application to USCIS on time. If you have **NOT** yet submitted the application to USCIS and no longer wish to apply, you can cancel the OPT request by contacting the Dashew Center.

- If you have already submitted the OPT application to USCIS and unable to complete degree as anticipated and want to withdraw you MUST first contact the Dashew Center.

Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

After you receive your EAD card, submit PDF copies of the front and back of your card via MyBruin International.

Address and Mailing of EAD Card

We recommend that you provide a U.S. mailing address for your OPT application that will be valid for at least 4 months from your application submission date to USCIS.

- If you move before receiving the EAD card, you risk losing your EAD card in the mail, even if you file a change of address with USCIS after submitting your OPT application to USCIS for processing.

- Check your address using the USPS Address Tool.

- U.S. Postal Service (USPS) may not forward federal mail, even if you request mail forwarding services from USPS.

- If you need to change your address, you can do so in your MyUSCIS account.

Lost, Stolen, or Destroyed EAD Card

- If you did not receive an EAD card that USCIS mailed, you should contact USCIS and USPS to attempt to locate the card. You can also submit an <u>inquiry on non-delivery of a card</u>.

- If unable to locate the EAD card, you can request a replacement EAD card from USCIS online, which will require a new Form I-765, USCIS filing fee, and supporting documents.

- If your EAD card is lost, stolen, or destroyed after you received it, you must request a replacement EAD by filing a new Form I-765 and USCIS filing fee — unless a fee waiver is requested and approved by USCIS.

- For more information about lost, stolen, or destroyed EAD cards, please see the <u>USCIS EAD card website</u>.

- For other EAD card issues, please contact us at: <u>dcissf1unit@saonet.ucla.edu</u>.

EAD Card Restrictions

- Students may not begin employment until they have received their Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card and the start date as indicated on the EAD card has been reached.

- Students cannot continue working beyond the end date of the EAD card.

Exception: Students with a timely filed, pending 24-month STEM OPT Extension application with USCIS, or a valid Cap-Gap I-20 may continue employment beyond their OPT end date without receiving a new EAD card. For more information, please review the STEM OPT Extension workshop.

OPT Employment Requirements

OPT Employment Must Be:

- **At least 20 hours per week**

- **Directly related to your major at UCLA (major area of study)**

Who determines if my OPT employment is directly related to my degree?

- U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) leaves this discretion to students to determine. Should DHS audit your OPT employment and find that your employment is not related to your UCLA major, your F-1 status will be terminated.

- Working in a field that is not related to your UCLA major is considered unauthorized employment and is a serious violation of your F-1 status, which can negatively impact current and future immigration benefits from USCIS.

- You may refer to UCLA General Catalog or your department's website to check the description and learning outcomes of your major.

OPT Employment Types

- **Paid Employment**: A student must work at least 20 hours per week.

- **Multiple Employers**: A student may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the student's UCLA major. The multiple employments must add up to at least 20 hours per week. (Example: Employment Alpha is 15 hours and Employment Beta is 5 hours for a total of 20 hours a week.)

- **Short-term Multiple Employers**: A student, such as a musician or other type of performing artist, may work for multiple short-term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration. Employment must be at least 20 hours per week.

- **Work for Hire (Contractual)**: This is commonly referred to as 1099 employment, where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than employment relationship. If requested by DHS, the student must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract period and the name and address of the contracting company. Employment must be at least 20 hours per week.

OPT Employment Types (Continued)

- **Self-Employed Business Owner**: A student on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. The student must be able to prove that they have the proper business licenses and are actively engaged in a business related to their UCLA major. Employment must be at least 20 hours per week.

- **Third-Party Employers**: Employment must constitute a bona fide employer-employee relationship. A student must be able to provide evidence showing they worked at least 20 hours per week while employed by the third-party employer (e.g., staffing agency, talent agency, consulting firms).

- **Unpaid Employment**: A student may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern, where this practice does not violate any U.S. labor laws. The work must be at least 20 hours per week. A student must be able to provide evidence acquired from the student's employer to verify that the student worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.

The Dashew Center recommends obtaining job verification documentation for all employment (dates, hours, job duties, and other pertinent information).

SEVP Portal Account

Within 72 hours of the OPT start date listed on the EAD card, you should receive an email with instructions to access your SEVP Portal for the first time.

Note: The SEVP Portal activation link will only be active for 14 days.

If you do not receive an email from SEVP **after** the start date on the EAD card, please submit an SEVP Portal Reset request in MyBruin International, under F-1 Practical Training option.

OPT Reporting Requirements

Submit a copy of the front and back of the EAD Card to the Dashew Center in [MyBruin International](#).

To maintain valid F-1 status, students on OPT are required to report the following information within 10 days of any change through the [SEVP Portal](#). It is the student's responsibility to ensure that their SEVP Portal is accurate at all times:

1. OPT Employment Status
    *   Job title and detailed description of how the job is related to your major
    *   Start and end dates of employment
    *   Part-time (up to 20 hours/week) or Full-time (more than 20 hours/week) employment
    *   Company name, address, and phone number

2. Contact Information
    *   Verify current U.S. residential address and U.S. telephone number

Note: Failure to report your OPT employment information to SEVP Portal in a timely manner will result in termination of your F-1 status.

OPT Unemployment

- Students on OPT have a total of **90 cumulative calendar days** (including weekends and holidays) of allowed unemployment time during their 12-month OPT period that begins on the start date of their EAD card if employment has not been reported in the SEVP Portal.

- **How to calculate your days of unemployment**: Add all of the days you have been unemployed from the start date of your OPT (including holidays and weekends) as stated in the SEVP Portal. This is your total unemployment time.
    - Employer approved time off does not count as unemployment time. (Examples: Sick leave, vacation time, holiday closures)

- Exceeding 90 days of unemployment will end the OPT period and you must depart the U.S. Please schedule an appointment with an F-1 Counselor or contact us prior to this happening to discuss options.

Updated I-20 Requests

- Students may request an updated I-20 from the Dashew Center after they receive their EAD card in the mail. An updated I-20 is not required to maintain F-1 status but is highly recommended if a student will be traveling internationally.
  - The updated I-20 will show a student's OPT status as 'APPROVED' on page 2 and will include employment information that the student has reported through the SEVP Portal.

- To request an updated I-20, please submit an I-20 Update Request via MyBruin International, under F-1 Student Services option, and select "OPT/STEM OPT Approved or Updated" as the reason for request. You may be asked to submit the copies of the front and back of your EAD card.

Cap Gap: Transition to H-1B

- Cap Gap – a period in which a student's F-1 status and OPT authorization is automatically extended by USCIS to bridge the gap between the end of their F-1 status and the start of their H-1B status.

- The most common situation occurs when a student's OPT ends in the Spring or Summer and their F-1 status expires 60 days later, leaving a gap of several months before the start of the student's H-1B status.

- **If granted by USCIS**, the Cap Gap automatically extends a student's F-1 status and OPT authorization without requiring a new EAD card. The Cap Gap must be reflected in SEVIS before the Cap Gap I-20 can be issued by the Dashew Center.

Cap Gap I-20 Request

- The Cap Gap is available to F-1 students in all fields of study engaging in OPT with pending or approved cap-subject H-1B petitions (granted by USCIS).

To request a Cap-Gap I-20:

1. Report any/all OPT employment through the SEVP Portal

2. Submit the Cap-Gap I-20 Request via MyBruin International in the "F-1 Practical Training" menu. You will be asked to upload the following:
   - Copy of the H-1B Approval Notice or Receipt Notice from USCIS (Form I-797)
   - Copy of front and back of EAD Card

International Travel

IF OPT APPLICATION IS PENDING WITH USCIS

The Dashew Center does NOT recommend traveling outside of the U.S. once the OPT application has been submitted to USCIS.

AFTER OPT APPLICATION IS APPROVED BY USCIS

Documents required to re-enter the U.S. in valid F-1 status after OPT has been approved and EAD card received:

- Valid Passport *(with at least 6 months validity from re-entry date)*

- Valid F-1 Visa *(except Canadian citizens)*

- OPT I-20 endorsed for travel *(each travel authorization signature is valid for 6 months from the date it was last signed and must be valid at the time of entry to the U.S.)*

- Original EAD Card from USCIS

- Proof of Employment or Offer Letter *(Verification document from an employer verifying your job title, job duties, duration and start date of employment written on company letterhead)*

Friendly Reminder: Beware of Employment Scams

- Scammers may attempt to contact you with offers for employment or placement in internship or job opportunities for a fee.

- Be suspicious of unsolicited employment offers, especially if you did not submit an employment application to work for that employer.

- More information about potential scams can be found on the Dashew Center Scams and Safety page.

BE AWARE OF SCAMS AND FRAUD

Dashew Center OPT Resources

- [Biweekly OPT Webinar](#)

- [OPT Online I-765 Submission with USCIS](#)

- [Schedule an appointment](#)

- Contact us at dcissf1unit@saonet.ucla.edu