

POST-COMPLETION OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) GUIDELINES

Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) is available to eligible F-1 students interested in engaging in employment in the U.S. directly related to their major field of study after their degree completion. F-1 students are eligible for an initial 12 months of OPT per higher degree achieved.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To be eligible, F-1 students:

- Must have maintained valid F-1 status for at least one academic year with in-person courses.
- Must not have had 12-months of OPT authorization for the same degree level.
- Must not have accrued 12 months of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) authorization for the same degree level.
- Must be completing a UCLA degree program in the next 90 calendar days.
- Must be within the U.S. with F-1 status while their OPT application is pending with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).
- USCIS must receive OPT application materials before the 60-day grace period ends. The 60-day grace period begins after your “program end date” listed on page 1 of the OPT I-20.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

Step 1: Review the [OPT Workshop](#) document on the Dashew Center website

Step 2: Pay the \$340 Dashew Center OPT [Administrative Processing Fee](#)

Log in to your DCISS account and click on the “OPT Administrative Processing Fee” to pay fee. Include a copy of your email payment confirmation with your OPT I-20 Request documents.

Step 3: Request an OPT I-20 from the Dashew Center

Students must submit via email to dcissf1unit@saonet.ucla.edu their completed [OPT I-20 Request Form](#), signed [Verification of Degree Completion Form](#), and a copy of their \$340 OPT Administrative Processing Fee payment receipt. If you would like the OPT I-20 shipped, please provide a completed [F-1 Document Shipping Request Form](#).

Step 4: Receive OPT I-20 with OPT recommendation on page 2 from the Dashew Center

Step 5: Prepare and complete OPT application forms and supporting documents by following the [OPT Application Submission Instructions](#)

Step 6: [Submit OPT application](#) materials to USCIS for processing

APPLICATION TIMELINE

All documents listed in the OPT Application Checklist (on the [OPT I-20 Request Form](#)) must be emailed to the Dashew Center to request an OPT I-20 before an OPT application can be submitted to USCIS for processing. The Dashew Center requires up to 10 business days to issue an OPT I-20.

OPT applications may be submitted to USCIS for processing as early as (but no earlier than) 90 days before a student's program end date and up to 60 days after a student's program end date.

USCIS must receive your completed OPT application materials within 30 days of your OPT I-20 issuance date (listed 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.

USCIS must receive your completed OPT application materials before your 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.

Please note that USCIS may require at least 3 months to adjudicate an OPT application, so it is highly recommended that students request their OPT I-20 from the Dashew Center around 90 days before their degree completion date. You may check [USCIS case processing times here](#).

If you would like information about USCIS' Premium Processing of OPT applications, please visit the USCIS website [here](#).

AFTER SUBMITTING AN OPT I-20 REQUEST TO THE DASHEW CENTER

- After you submit your OPT I-20 request documents to dcissf1unit@saonet.ucla.edu, an F-1 Counselor will review and issue your OPT I-20 with the OPT recommendation on page 2 and send it to you.
- Once you receive your OPT I-20, please print and sign (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.
- Prepare your OPT application materials for submission to USCIS by following the [OPT Application Submission Instructions](#).

IMPORTANT NOTES:

- **USCIS must receive your completed OPT application materials within 30 days of the issuance date listed 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.**
- **USCIS must receive your completed OPT application materials before your 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.**
- **Notice of Action Receipt Notice:**
 - Shortly after submitting your application online, you will be issued an application receipt number and will be able to access your application receipt notice through your MyUSCIS account.
 - For applications submitted by mail, you will receive a *Notice of Action* receipt in the mail (to the 'Mailing Address' you provided on your I-765 Form) from USCIS approximately 3-4 weeks from the date your OPT application was received by USCIS. This receipt notice will include your application receipt number.

To check the status of your OPT application, please log in to your [MyUSCIS](#) account or use the [USCIS Case Status](#) page.

- If OPT is approved, you will receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card in the mail at the mailing address provided on your I-765 Form in about 2-3 weeks after receiving the approval notice.

OPT REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

1. PDF copies of the front and back of the EAD card must be emailed to the Dashew Center at OPT@saonet.ucla.edu.
2. Within 72 hours of the OPT start date listed on the EAD card, you should receive an email with instructions to activate your SEVP Portal. The SEVP Portal activation link will only be active for 14 days.
3. You must report the following information to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) no later than 10 days after the change during your OPT period through their [SEVP Portal](#) account:
 - **OPT Employment Status**
 - **Change of Address**

OPT EMPLOYMENT TIMELINE

F-1 students on OPT have a total of **90 calendar days** (including weekends and holidays) of allowed unemployment during their initial 12-month OPT period that begins on the start date of their OPT (as indicated on their EAD card). You may not begin employment until you have received your EAD card and until the start date of your OPT (as indicated on your EAD card) has been reached. Employer approved time off does not count as unemployment time. (Examples: Sick leave, vacation time, holiday closures)

OPT EMPLOYMENT TYPES

All OPT employment must be directly related to your major field of study and appropriate for your degree level.

Paid Employment: A student may work part time (at least 20 hours per week), or full-time.

Multiple Employers: A student may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the student's degree program. Employment for 1 employer must be at least 20 hours per 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.

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 the student's degree program. Employment must be at least 20 hours per week.

Employment Through an Agency or Consulting Firm: A student on OPT must be able to provide evidence showing they worked at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.

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.

NOTE: *If requested by U.S. Department of Homeland Security, students must be prepared to provide evidence of OPT employment. The Dashew Center recommends obtaining job verification documentation for all employment (dates, hours, duties, and other pertinent information)*

TRAVELING ABROAD DURING OPT

If OPT application is Pending with USCIS: Dashew Center does not recommend traveling outside of the U.S. once their 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**
- **Endorsed OPT I-20** (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.)
- **EAD Card**
- **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)

NOTE: Students who have received their EAD and are engaging in OPT are still considered F-1 students and must travel with a valid F-1 visa to re-enter the U.S. in valid F-1 OPT status. Students with an expired F-1 visa must apply for a new F-1 visa from an overseas U.S. Consulate or Embassy during their next trip abroad to re-enter the U.S. in valid F-1 OPT status. To minimize possible difficulties when applying for a new F-1 visa during OPT, we recommend that students secure OPT employment before applying for a new F-1 visa. F-1 visa applications for students on OPT may require additional time for approval. For F-1 visa application requirements, please visit <http://travel.state.gov>

Additional Questions?

Please review the [OPT Workshop](#) document or attend an [OPT Webinar](#).