

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Definition of OPT:

Optional Practical Training 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. However, F-1 students who have one year or more of cumulative full-time curricular practical training authorization (CPT) are not eligible for OPT for that particular degree.

How long is the duration of OPT?

Optional Practical Training can be authorized for a maximum aggregate period of 12 months per educational level.

Legal Note: A student becomes eligible for another 12 months of OPT when he or she changes to a higher education level (e.g. bachelors to masters or masters to doctorate), 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 regulations state that “authorization to engage in practical training employment is automatically terminated when the student transfers to another school or begins study at another educational level.”

When should you apply for OPT?

For Pre-completion OPT you must apply before your program end date. For Post-completion OPT you can apply as early as 90 days before your program end date and as late as 60 days after your program end date. OPT processing takes an average of 3 months. The sooner you apply the more likely you will receive your OPT card by the time you need to start working. Employers will not allow you to start work until you have received your OPT card.

Where do I mail my application?

Once you have submitted your OPT application documents, we will assemble the application packet and return it to you for mailing. You will need to mail the application packet to USCIS to one of the following addresses *(depending on which method of mail service you choose). There is no preference for the mail method, but we recommend that you have the ability to track your mailing:

For U.S. Postal Service deliveries:

**USCIS
PO Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036**

For Express mail and courier deliveries:

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

*These address are those who are using a California mailing address on their I-765 form.

What will happen after I apply for my OPT?

You will get a receipt from USCIS in about 2 weeks after mailing in the OPT application.

How long will it take for me to get my Employment Authorization Document (EAD) [“OPT card”]?

Depending on which immigration service you are applying at, it usually takes an average of 90 days from your application receipt date, for you to receive your card.

Legal Note: As long as you are on F-1 student status or F-1 status engaged in OPT, you are required by law to inform us of your address change on an AR-11 form within 10 days of the change. This form is available online at: <http://uscis.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/AR-11.htm>

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

Yes, you may travel temporarily out of the country after you have applied for your OPT. However there is a high risk of being denied entry upon your return, so we do not recommend travel unless it is an emergency.

What do I need to be able to get back in the country if I do travel out?

You need to make sure that your I-20 has a valid signature. Each signature is valid for 6 months at a time for traveling purposes. You would need a valid F-1 visa in your passport (unless you are a Canadian or Bermudian citizen. A letter from your employer stating they are waiting for your return or a letter from a prospective employer stating you will return to start your employment with them. Or some type of proof of your employment status. You will also need to have your EAD card if you have received it.

Failure to fulfill any one of the requirements stated above will greatly decrease the chances of being able to get back into the U.S.**When can I start working?**

After completing your program, you may not start your work on or off-campus until you have received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD card), and the beginning date on the card has been reached.

Do I have to report my employer information?

Yes, you may report your employment to LLU ISSS Office or using the SEVP Portal. As of 2008, immigration regulations state that a student in OPT is allowed to be listed on their SEVIS record as “unemployed” for up to 90 days throughout their whole 12-month OPT period. On your OPT start date (which is listed on the OPT card) your SEVIS record will automatically list you as “unemployed.” If your record is left as “unemployed” for longer than 90 days your OPT will automatically cancel and you will fall out of status. In order to prevent the cancelation of your OPT you must report your employer name and address to LLU International Student Services as soon as you begin employment, if not sooner, so that we may keep the employer information up-to-date on your SEVIS record. You must report all changes in employer information to our office within 10 days after a change is made.

You may contact our office at 909-558-4955 or IntlStdSrv@llu.edu to submit all employer updates.