

## OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) FOR F-1 VISA STUDENTS

Optional Practical Training is a temporary employment authorization for F-1 students who have been maintaining status. The purpose of OPT is to give students the opportunity to gain work experience (either pre- or post-completion) and is limited to 12 months **per degree level** in a field directly related to the field of study. OPT must be recommended by the Center for International Education (CIE) and approved by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

### I. OPT Eligibility Requirements:

- You have been a full-time F-1 student in good standing for at least 1 full academic year (2.0 GPA undergraduate, or 3.0 GPA graduate)
- You are currently maintaining lawful F-1 status
- Your intended employment is directly related to your major field of study

### II. When OPT can occur:

#### Prior to Degree Completion (Pre-completion OPT):

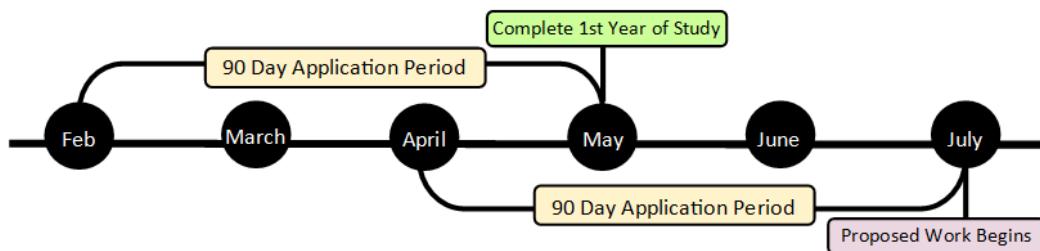
- Part-time or Full-time: During vacation when school is not in session and you intend to register for the next semester.
- Part-time: Up to 20 hours per week while school is in session.
- Full-time: For grad students, after completion of all course requirements EXCEPT thesis, dissertation or equivalent.

#### After Degree Completion (Post-completion OPT):

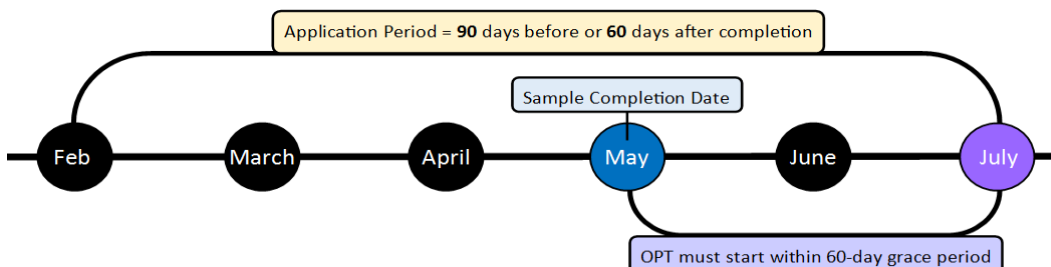
- Full-time: Up to 12 months after completion of all course requirements for your degree. Any pre-completion OPT will be deducted from the available 12-month limit at a 50% rate.

### III. When to Apply:

#### Pre-completion OPT



#### Post-completion OPT



## Program Completion Date:

The Program End Date on your Form I-20 is crucial for the OPT application timeline. This is the date that you complete all of the program requirements for your degree. Your completion date will be specified by your academic department on the OPT Request Form that you must submit as part of the OPT application process.

### PROGRAM OF STUDY

<b>EDUCATION LEVEL</b> BACHELOR'S	<b>MAJOR 1</b> Electrical and Electronics Engineering 14.1001	<b>MAJOR 2</b> None 00.0000
<b>NORMAL PROGRAM LENGTH</b> 36 Months	<b>PROGRAM ENGLISH PROFICIENCY</b> Required	<b>ENGLISH PROFICIENCY NOTES</b> Student is proficient
<b>PROGRAM START DATE</b> 14 JANUARY 2013	<b>PROGRAM END DATE</b> 15 MAY 2015	

You must depart the U.S. within 60 days of your Program End Date, unless you file an OPT application in a timely manner. Your 60 day grace period will take place after OPT.

## IV. Applying for OPT:

### Step 1: Attend the Center for International Education OPT Workshop

### Step 2: Read all of the OPT information included in this document

### Step 3: Prepare your application

- Complete and submit the Center for International Education's OPT Request Form <http://www.sonoma.edu/cie/international-students/forms/opt-request-form.pdf>

#### Prepare the documents required for the USCIS application:

- Check for \$410 payable to the "U.S. Department of Homeland Security"
- Two 2 x 2 inches passport style photographs taken within the past 30 days with your name and I-94 number written gently on the back of your photos
- Completed and signed Form I-765 [https://www.uscis.gov/system/files\\_force/files/form/i-765.pdf?download=1](https://www.uscis.gov/system/files_force/files/form/i-765.pdf?download=1)
  - Filling in item 16 (Eligibility Category):
    - For Pre-Completion OPT: (c)(3)(A)
    - For Post-Completion OPT: (c)(3)(B)
    - For 17-Month STEM OPT Extension: (c)(3)(C)
- One clear photocopy of your current SEVIS I-20 (with recommended OPT dates on pg. 2)
- Clear photocopies of all of your previous SEVIS I-20s (including pg. 1 and 2)
- If you were issued an EAD card previously, include a photocopy of both sides of your EAD
- One clear photocopy of your passport
- One clear photocopy of your visa
- Printout of your I-94 Record <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94>

#### Optional documents:

- Submit Form G-1145 with your OPT application to USCIS if you would like to receive email and/or text message notification that USCIS has received your application [https://www.uscis.gov/system/files\\_force/files/form/g-1145.pdf?download=1](https://www.uscis.gov/system/files_force/files/form/g-1145.pdf?download=1)

### Step 4: Meet with your DSO in the Center for International Education

1. Set up an appointment with the International Student Coordinator at the CIE
2. Bring **ALL** of the documents listed above with you to your appointment
3. DSO will recommend OPT and issue you a new I-20 within 1-3 business days
4. DSO will assist you prepare your application packet for shipping

### **Step 5: Mail your application to USCIS**

Once you have completed all of the above steps, you may mail your completed OPT application packet to the USCIS Phoenix Lockbox:

#### **For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) First-Class and Priority Mail Express deliveries:**

USCIS  
P.O. Box 21281  
Phoenix, AZ 85036

#### **For overnight/courier deliveries (non-USPS, i.e. UPS, FedEx, DHL):**

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

### **After Applying for OPT**

#### ➤ **Confirmation from USCIS**

USCIS will send an application receipt to you in the mail within 2-3 weeks of receiving your application. It will note the date your application was received and the date the receipt was mailed. In the top right-hand corner, the receipt will also include an "EAC number." This number can be utilized to check the status of your case.

#### ➤ **EAD Card**

USCIS work authorization is issued in the form of an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). The EAD is a photo identity card that indicates the start/end dates for employment. If your application has been received by USCIS, you should receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD Card) in the mail within approximately 90-120 days. Submit a photocopy of your EAD card to the Center for International Education.

#### ➤ **Social Security Number (SSN)**

Employers in the U.S. require that you have an SSN before you may receive wages. It could take several weeks to receive your

SSN, so start the process as early as possible.

Complete a Social Security Application Form SS-5 (<https://www.ssa.gov/forms/ss-5.pdf>). Bring this form, your Passport, I-94, I-20, and EAD to the Social Security Office. The closest office is located at 2099 Range Ave., Santa Rosa, CA 95401 (Building A).

#### ➤ **Employment Start Date**

You may not begin work until all three of the following requirements are satisfied:

- 1) You have obtained an EAD from the Immigration Service
- 2) The date is reached for which the EAD authorizes employment to begin
- 3) You have actually completed all requirements for your program of study (if applying for post-completion OPT).

#### ➤ **Reporting Requirements during OPT**

You must report any of the following changes to your DSO within 10 days while on OPT:

- 1) Change of employer, provided the new job is directly related to your major field of study and is appropriate for someone with your level of education

- 2) Change of name
- 3) Change of address

Use the CIE Document Request Form to update any of the information above with your DSO:

<http://www.sonoma.edu/cie/international-students/current/forms/>

#### ➤ **Traveling During Post-Completion OPT**

If your post-completion OPT has been approved (EAD card has been issued by USCIS) and you have a job or a job offer, you may travel and re-enter the U.S. in order to begin or resume employment. If you leave the U.S. before securing employment, your OPT ends and you may not re-enter the U.S.

Bring the following documents for re-entry:

- Passport (valid for six months after you plan to re-enter the U.S)
- Valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport (N/A to Canadian citizens)
- I-20 (with a travel signature <6 months old)
- EAD card
- Evidence that you already have a job in the U.S. or that you have a job offer.

If your post-completion OPT has not been approved and you do not have a job or a job offer, you may travel and re-enter the U.S. to resume seeking employment. Instead of the EAD, be sure to travel with your I-765 receipt notice (Form I-797). However, if the OPT is approved while you are traveling, you will be held to the above-mentioned requirements.

#### ➤ **STEM Extension**

A 24-month extension of post-completion OPT (for a total of 36 months) may be available to certain STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math) graduates. Contact CIE for more information on the STEM extension.

#### ➤ **Taxes**

In general F-1 students who have been in the U.S. less than five years are exempt from Social Security (F.I.C.A) taxes. Your earnings are subject to applicable federal, state and local taxes. Students must file a tax return on or before April 15, each year which will determine if any of the withheld taxes can be refunded.

#### ➤ **Working Without Authorization**

Working without authorization is a serious status violation. USCIS regulations provide a variety of opportunities for you to be employed during your time in F-1 status. The CIE is responsible for advising and counseling you regarding your responsibilities, but it is your responsibility to comply with all immigration regulations which apply to F-1 students.

#### ➤ **Authorization May Not Be Rescinded**

Once your OPT request is approved by USCIS, it may not be withdrawn or canceled. Any delays in completing degree requirements, inability to find work, or loss of a job may result in loss of otherwise eligible time to work. Your 12 months of OPT will begin to accrue and cannot be regained once used. OPT automatically terminated when you transfer to another school, or when you change your educational level at SSU and receive a new I-20.

#### ➤ **Health Insurance**

You may continue to use the CSU Health Insurance policy during your OPT period. You may use the Monthly Health Insurance Request Form that you can submit directly to Wells Fargo:

<http://www.sonoma.edu/cie/international-students/forms/cie-monthly-health-ins-request-form.pdf>