

## **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 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
- 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) for the same degree level

### **APPLICATION TIMELINE**

All documents listed in the OPT Application Checklist must be submitted to DCISS to request an OPT I-20 before an OPT application can be submitted to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for processing. DCISS requires 5 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 completion date. Please note that USCIS requires approximately 3 months to approve an OPT application. It is highly recommended that students submit their OPT application to DCISS at least 3 months before their requested OPT start date.

### **APPLICATION PROCEDURES**

**Step 1: Complete the [OPT Online Workshop](#) available on the DCISS website**

**Step 2: Pay the \$40 DCISS OPT [Administrative Processing Fee](#)**

*Log in to your DCISS account and click on the "OPT Administrative Processing Fee" to pay fee.  
Print the payment receipt confirmation from your e-mail to submit with your OPT application.*

**Step 3: Prepare and complete OPT application forms and materials**

**Step 4: Submit completed OPT application at an OPT Hand-In Session**

**Wednesdays OR Thursdays | 3PM - 4PM**

*If you are unable to attend an OPT Hand-In Session, you must schedule an appointment with an F-1 Counselor to submit your OPT application.*

## **AFTER SUBMITTING AN OPT APPLICATION TO DCISS**

- Applicants **must return** to DCISS one week after their submission date to sign their OPT I-20.

**NOTE:** *Failure to sign the OPT I-20 on time will result in the cancellation of the OPT application.*

- DCISS will mail completed OPT applications to USCIS Phoenix Lockbox for processing only **after** the OPT I-20 has been signed.
- Applicants will receive a *Notice of Action* receipt from USCIS approximately 3-4 weeks from the date the OPT application was received by USCIS. The status of an OPT application can be viewed online with a Receipt Number at: <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do>
- Applicants will receive their Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card approximately 3 months from the date the OPT application was received by USCIS.

## **OPT AUDIT/REPORTING REQUIREMENT**

1. Copies of the front and back of the EAD card must be submitted to DCISS via e-mail to [OPT@saonet.ucla.edu](mailto:OPT@saonet.ucla.edu)
2. The following information must be reported to U.S. Department of Homeland Security within 10 days of any change during the OPT period through your [SEVP Portal](#) account:
  - **OPT Employment Status**
  - **Change of Address**

## **OPT EMPLOYMENT TIMELINE**

F-1 students on OPT have a total of **90 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). Students may not begin employment until they have received their EAD card and until the start date of OPT (as indicated on the EAD card) has been reached.

## **OPT EMPLOYMENT TYPES**

All OPT employment must be directly related to the student's field of study and appropriate for the student's 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.
- **Short-term Multiple Employers (performing artists)** – 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.
- **Work for Hire** – This is also commonly referred to as 1099 employment, where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. If requested by Department of Homeland Security (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.

- **Self-employed business owner**– A student on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to the student's degree program.
- **Employment through an agency or consulting firm** – The student must be able to provide evidence showing he or she worked an average of 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 dates and duration, and the name and address of OPT employer(s).*

## **TRAVELING ABROAD DURING OPT**

### **Before OPT I-20 End Date:**

The following documents are required for re-entry to the U.S. in valid F-1 status **before** a student's program completion date (as indicated on their OPT I-20):

- Valid passport
- Valid F-1 visa (*Canadian citizens exempt*)
- Endorsed OPT I-20 (*each travel authorization signature is valid for 6 months from the date it was last signed, even though the I-20 says one year, and must be valid at the time of re-entry to the U.S.*)

### **After OPT I-20 End Date:**

The following documents are required for re-entry to the U.S. in valid F-1 OPT status **after** a student's program completion date (as indicated on their OPT I-20):

- Valid passport
- Valid F-1 visa (*Canadian citizens exempt*)
- Endorsed OPT I-20 (*each travel authorization signature is valid for 6 months from the date it was last signed, even though the I-20 says one year, and must be valid at the time of re-entry to the U.S.*)
- Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card
- Proof of Employment or Job Offer Letter

**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 a U.S. Consulate or Embassy during their next trip abroad to re-enter the U.S. in valid F-1 OPT status. As it may be difficult to obtain 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 'Frequently Asked Questions' section of the [OPT Online Workshop](#) on the DCISS website or contact DCISS to schedule an appointment with an F-1 Counselor.