

Dear Student,

This **important message** is being sent to you as a foreign national Class of 2023 student possibly graduating May 2023.

If you are NOT looking at immediate **post-MBA** employment in the US at all or if you now hold permanent US work authorization, stop reading this note now!

F-1 Visa - Optional Practical Training (OPT): Timelines and Application Process

International students on an **F-1 visa** may be eligible for permission to work in the USA through **OPT** after completion of degree requirements, provided they meet eligibility and procedural requirements. OPT is permission to work in employment related to your field of study immediately after completion of your studies, authorized by USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) through the issuance of an **EAD card** (Employment Authorization Document).

We are sending you this personal message now, as students considering post-degree US employment should begin the OPT application process soon. **The earliest date to apply for those with an I-20 degree completion date in May is February 16!**

OPT is permitted for a period of up to 12 months per educational level (Bachelors, Masters, etcetera). As CBS programs are all STEM-designated, students may be eligible for an OPT extension of an additional 24 months under certain conditions. Application for the STEM extension can be done no earlier than 90 days prior to the end of the first year of OPT.

To learn more about OPT, the application process, and decisions you need to make, view the ISSO [Post-Degree OPT Information Page](#). For more about the STEM extension: [F-1 STEM OPT Extension](#)

A few important points about OPT:

- **You DO NOT need to have a job offer to apply for OPT.**
- Your OPT must begin within 60 days of the degree completion date on your I-20.
- USCIS approval process alone can typically take at least 2 months (excludes additional time for ISSO to review your application and issue an I-20 with OPT recommendation). It is advisable to **apply as early as possible**, which is 90 days prior to your I-20's program end date.
- For those still in an enterprise job search, certain employers hiring MBAs outside of a leadership development or training program will be looking to fill roles as soon as possible. In such cases, having to wait for your OPT approval after graduation can compromise your competitiveness for the offer if you cannot start a job as soon as they may need.

If you have questions about OPT or your F-1 status, please contact the Columbia University [International Students & Scholars Office \(ISSO\)](#) at isso@columbia.edu. Speak with CMC for any issues related to OPT start date selection in light of your job search status.

For J-1 Visa Students Only: You MUST apply for post-degree completion Academic Training work authorization BEFORE your I-20 program end date. You must have an internship/full time job offer to apply. See complete instructions here: [Academic Training \(AT\) Information Page](#)

Thank you,

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