**Corpus Questions**

**Q1: What is “OPT”?**

A: Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a work benefit allowed to international students in F-1 immigration status who are enrolled in, or completing a degree program in the U.S. This employment can be used pre-completion of studies, over the annual vacation or leave term, or post-completion of studies, after the student finishes the degree.

**Q2: What is the duration of OPT employment authorization:**

A: the initial post-completion period for which students can apply is 12 months, less any OPT time used pre-completion. The requested employment start date must be between the end of program date, and 60 days later. The employment authorization will begin on the date requested **or** the date the employment authorization is adjudicated, whichever is later. **Exception**: The employment authorization period for the 17-month OPT extension begins on the day after the expiration of the initial post-completion OPT employment authorization, and ends 17 months later, regardless of the date the actual extension is approved.

**Q3: Am I eligible for OPT?**

A: F-1 students who have been enrolled in legal status for a minimum of nine months are eligible for up to twelve (12) months of Optional Practical Training (OPT) work authorization by the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS). Employment under OPT must be directly related to a student's field of study and appropriate to the level of education.

**Q4: Do I need a job to be eligible to apply for OPT?**

A: No, you do not need a job offer prior to applying for OPT, and your job may be anywhere in the United States. You may also change jobs during the course of your OPT period, but you must notify our office of any interruption or change to your employment.

**Q5: When can I apply for OPT?**

A: The earliest you may apply for OPT is 90 days (3-months) prior to the completion of studies\*, and the latest you may apply for OPT is 60 days following program completion. It can take several months to receive the OPT work card, so we recommend that you apply at least 90 days prior to the beginning of your intended job opportunity.

**Q6: What does the immigration service consider “completion of studies?”**

A: Completion of studies is the actual date that you complete all requirements for a program of study (i.e. the date of your final exams, or submission of your thesis or dissertation). **“Completion of studies” is NOT automatically considered to be the date of graduation ceremonies.**

**Q7: Do I have to use the entire 12-month OPT period at once, or may I use it increments?**

A: OPT may be used in "chunks" during an annual vacation term before completion of studies, but after completion of studies it may only be used as a single block of time (minus the difference of any previously used OPT time).

**Q8: May I save any of my unused OPT eligibility and use it at a later time?**

A: No. Once you apply for OPT and complete your program of study, the OPT work eligibility is either used or not. There is no recapture of unused OPT time.

**Q9: May I extend my OPT work eligibility beyond 12-months?**

A: In two instances, it may be possible to extend the period of OPT, based on a new OPT regulation published on April 8th, 2008.

In the first case, the student must be hold a STEM degree (science, technology, engineering or math), be hired by an employer signed up for the government program “E-Verify”, and will have to apply for the 17-month extension on Form I-765 with fee.

**Q10: How can I tell if my degree field or major field qualifies as a STEM program?**

A: These major fields are coded according to a national list – called a CIP list. The Office of Visa and Immigration Services and the Registrar’s Office on campus have lists of these majors and codes.

**Q11: How can I tell if my employer is signed up for E-Verify?**

A: You may ask your employer if they are signed up for E-Verify. In addition, note that some U.S. States have begun mandating employer participation in E-Verify. At the same time, some other States have declared E-Verify illegal. You can find more information on E-Verify

**Q12: My employer is not signed up for E-Verify. How can my employer sign up for this program?**

A: The E-Verify program imposes significant obligations on an employer. Employers can find out more about the program and obligations on this [website](http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.eb1d4c2a3e5b9ac89243c6a7543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=75bce2e261405110VgnVCM1000004718190aRCRD&vgnextchannel=75bce2e261405110VgnVCM1000004718190aRCRD)

**Q13: What are the reporting requirements for me while I am approved for OPT?**

A: All students on OPT are required to report to the DSO:

Must make a validation report to the DSO every six months starting from the date the extension begins and ending when the student's F-1 status ends, the student changes educational levels at the same school, the student transfers to another school, or the 17-month OPT extension ends, whichever is first. The validation is a confirmation that the student's name and address, employer name and address, and/or loss of employment is current and accurate.

**Q14: May I cancel my OPT application once I have applied?**

A: Yes, you may request that the OPT application be withdrawn and the recommendation in SEVIS be cancelled, but only if you have recently mailed it to the government. Contact your advisor as soon as possible, if you need to cancel the OPT application. Once your OPT application has been adjudicated (approved) by the immigration service, it can not be cancelled or revoked.

**Q15: May I travel outside the U.S. before I receive the employment card for OPT, and also after I receive the card?**

A: The answer to this question depends very much on a variety factors specific to what kind of OPT application, and each person's own unique situation. While on OPT you are still considered to be in F-1 (student) immigration status, even if you have completed your studies and have since graduated.

**Q16: Am I eligible for more OPT if I progress to another degree program?**

A: Yes. If you begin a new degree program at a higher level (i.e. Bachelor to Masters or Masters to Ph.D.) program, you will become eligible for an addition block of 12-months of OPT as outlined above. You are, however, only eligible for one period of 17 month OPT-extension

**Q17: When can I start working under OPT?**

A: Only once you possess the OPT employment document (“Employment Authorization Document”) issued by the immigration service, and the effective beginning date listed on the employment document has been reached.

**Q18: Can I be unemployed while approved for OPT, and still legally remain in the U.S.?**

A: The new regulations published on April 8th, 2008, limit periods of unemployment during post-completion OPT. F-1 status is now dependent upon employment, within the following parameters:

Students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during any post-completion OPT carried out under the initial 12-month post-completion OPT authorization.

Students granted a 17-month OPT extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment.

**Q19: How long can I stay in the U.S. after my post-completion OPT ending date expires?**

A: You have a 60 day grace period following the end of your OPT period, unless you have extended your F-1 status for another degree program, or you are under application to change your immigration status to another classification.

**Q20. Can I work on campus while waiting for my EAD?**

Once you complete your degree, you cannot work on-campus or off-campus until you have the EAD in your possession and your selected start date has arrived.

**Q21.What is the average processing time at the USCIS to get my Employment Authorization Document (EAD)? Is there a way to expedite it?**

The average USCIS processing time to issue the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) is 90 days. However, please visit the USCIS Processing Times (link is external) website for the most up to date processing times. There is no way to expedite an application.

**Q22. I am a graduate student and I have completed all required coursework. I only have thesis or dissertation remaining. Can I apply for OPT authorization to begin before I graduate?**

You can apply for either pre-completion OPT or post-completion OPT. There are advantages and disadvantages to consider when deciding which option works best for you. Here is an overview. We recommend you schedule an appointment with your ISS adviser to further discuss your options.

**Q23. How can I check the status of my OPT application after I mail it to the USCIS?**

When you receive your USCIS Notice of Action (receipt), visit [USCIS Case Status Online(link is external)](https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do) and enter your receipt number.

**Q24. How do I contact the USCIS?**

The number on the Notice of Action (1-800-375-5283) is the National Customer Service line. Have the receipt number ready before you call.

**Q25. Does my spouse or children get a new OPT I-20 too?**

Yes, if you did not receive OPT I-20s for your family, contact Berkeley International Office.

**Q26. 90 days have passed since the Notice of Action receipt date. What can I do?**

Verify your status at the [USCIS Case Status Online(link is external)](https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do). If your EAD application has been approved you will need to wait until the card arrives (2-4 weeks after it is approved). If the application is still pending, see an advisor at Berkeley International Office.

**Q27. USCIS said that my EAD was approved, but I have not received it yet – can I start working?**

No. You must be able to show the employer the EAD when you begin employment.

**Q28. USCIS said that my application was approved over six weeks ago and I still haven’t received my EAD. Is there a problem?**

Maybe. Bring your receipt notice to an advisor at Berkeley International Office for more information.

**Q29. How do I get an extension of my EAD?**

Only students who have completed certain STEM majors and have an eligible employer who is enrolled in E-Verify are eligible for the [24 Month Extension OPT.](https://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/students/training/f-1/extension)

**Q30. I lost my EAD. How can I get it replaced?**

The only way to receive a new EAD is by submitting a new I-765 and supporting documents (fee, photos, forms, etc.). It is impossible to replace an EAD if you are outside the U.S.

**Q31. My EAD says “not valid for re-entry” on it. Does that mean I cannot travel abroad and re-enter on OPT?**

It simply means that you must carry other documents to show proof of your eligibility to re-enter the U.S. such as your I-20 and valid F-1 visa stamp. The EAD alone is not enough to re-enter the U.S.

**Q32. What counts as employment?**

Please see the Berkeley International Office website’s [Qualifying OPT Employment](https://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/students/training/f-1/qualifying_employment) for more information.

**Q33. Is there a minimum number of hours I need to work?**

To qualify as employment, you are required to work a minimum of 20 hours/week.

**Q34. I have been unemployed for 80 days. What is going to happen on the 90th day?**

If you accumulate 90 days or more of unemployment, you are in violation of status. Please speak to an advisor at BIO.

**Q35. Do I need a Social Security Number to work in the U.S.?**

Yes. Please see [How to Apply for a Social Security Number](https://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/social_security_application).

**Q36. Do I need to complete any forms with my employer to begin working?**

Yes. Speak with your employer about timelines and specific paperwork.

**Q37. Can I change employers while on OPT?**

Yes, provided the new employment is directly related to your field of study and you work a minimum of 20 hours per week. No special permission is required to change employers.  However, you must update your employer information to Berkeley International Office within 10 days of the change through our online [Student SEVIS Update (SSU)(link is external)](https://io.berkeley.edu/ssu) form.

**Q38. Do I pay taxes while working on OPT?**

Students in F-1 status are subject to all federal, state and local taxes that may apply.  See more information at [Taxes in the U.S.](https://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/taxes)

**Q39. What if I am not able to complete my degree program by the completion date on the OPT I-20 after submitting my OPT application?**

Speak to an advisor at BIO.

**Q40. What status do I have between my degree completion date and the start of my OPT?**

If you have chosen a start date after your degree completion date, you will remain in F-1 status while the OPT is pending.

**Q41. Can I go to school while on OPT?**

Time spent going to school should only be an incidental part of your stay in the U.S. If you decide to go back to school full-time, you must speak to an advisor at BIO about transferring your I-20 to the new institution or updating your I-20 if your degree program is at Berkeley.

**Q42. Do I need to do anything with Berkeley International Office while on OPT?**

Yes, you must report any change in address and employment information to Berkeley International Office within 10 days of the change through our online [Student SEVIS Update (SSU)(link is external)](https://io.berkeley.edu/ssu) form.

**Q43. Can I start working without pay while waiting for my EAD?**

No. Work that is normally paid requires employment authorization. You must have the card in hand and the start date must have arrived to begin working.

**Q44. Does my visa need to be valid while on OPT?**

While in the U.S., your visa may expire. It only needs to be valid if you wish to re-enter from abroad. Please see [Travel and Visa](https://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/travel)information. Your I-20 remains active while on OPT.

**Q45. After I have submitted my OPT application, can I change my start date?**

If your OPT application has not been approved, it may be possible to change the start date. However, there is no guarantee that the request to change your dates will be approved. Please contact an [international student adviser](https://international.missouri.edu/about/staff-directory/index.php) immediately if you would like to change your dates. Once an application has been approved, the start date cannot be changed.

**Q46. What if I do not have my USCIS Form I-797 (OPT receipt)?**

If you do not receive a receipt (or you lose it), your receipt number will be printed on the back of the canceled check or money order you submitted to USCIS for the application fee. If you paid with a check, ask your bank for a copy of the canceled check and look on the back for your LIN number. If you paid with a money order, bring the money order receipt back to the place where you bought it. Ask for a copy of the back of the money order; it usually takes at least 24 hours. It is easier to track a canceled check than a money order.

**Q47. Can I register for graduate examination credit while on OPT?**

You may be eligible if you are past the academic program end date on your I-20 and you already applied for post-completion OPT. Before registering, please [contact an international student adviser](https://international.missouri.edu/about/staff-directory/index.php). If you have not passed the program end date on your I-20 and are applying for pre-completion OPT, you must enroll in research credit until you reach your program end date.

**Q48. What if I cannot find employment?**

Unemployment is limited to no more than 90 days during the whole 12 months of OPT. You are required to work in your field of study to maintain your status on OPT. What is considered work is flexible — you may be employed, intern, volunteer, etc. As long as you are getting full-time experience related to your degree, your status is maintained.

**Q49. How is the 90-day unemployment rule regulated?**

It is your responsibility to report your employment information to the International Center as soon as you have a position. An international student adviser will then update your SEVIS record to reflect your employment. You should use the links provided in your OPT or OPT STEM Extension record in myStatus anytime you have subsequent employment or address changes.

**Q50. Can I take classes during OPT?**

If you have only research left and you already applied for post-completion OPT, you can continue to register until you finish the research requirements. You are subject to the 90-day unemployment rule, even if you are still registered. Beginning a new course of study will automatically cancel your OPT authorization. The International Center does not recommend taking a class that may later be used to satisfy new degree program requirements.