



International Programs Office

Occidental College
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<http://oxy.edu/ipo.xml>

Applying for Optional Practical Training

1. Read through the entire application packet before completing.
2. Ask your academic advisor to complete the attached "*Academic Advisor's Recommendation Form.*"
3. Complete the "*International Programs Information Sheet for OPT Application*"
4. Complete *Form I-765*, found on the USCIS website (<http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis>). Click on "Forms" on the top left. The I-765 fillable form – complete it electronically and then print. DO NOT SIGN!
5. Print a copy of your most current grade report from the *myOxy* gateway.
6. Make an appointment with IPO. A DSO must recommend OPT in SEVIS and print a new I-20 to include in your application packet. Bring *unsigned* I-765 application, and all supporting documents.
7. Make a photocopy or scan of all documents for your records.
8. Mail the documents on the checklist below to:

For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:

USCIS

P.O. Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

For Express and Courier deliveries:

USCIS

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

The address to mail the completed application to will be on the instruction forms for the I-765. Please be sure the address has not changed!

OPT Application Checklist

- ☐ **Make an appointment with an advisor in IPO.**

Bring with you to your appointment:

- ☐ Completed, **unsigned**, form I-765.
- ☐ Photocopies of **ALL** previous I-20's.
- ☐ Photocopy of the I-94 – print from <http://www.cbp.gov/>
- ☐ Photocopy of identification photo page of your passport.
- ☐ Photocopy of the F1 visa stamp in your passport.
- ☐ Photocopy of any previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) cards, if applicable.
- ☐ Two color, full frontal passport style photographs. Print your name and Alien Receipt number lightly in pencil on the back of photos, and put the photos in an envelope and attach it to the I-765 application. Photo specifications are listed under “Required Documentation” on the Instructions for filing the I-765.
- ☐ \$380 application fee, made payable to the “U.S. Department of Homeland Security” (money order or check, no cash). Attach check to the front of the I-765.
- ☐ Complete Form G-1145 (<http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf>) if you would like to get e-mail confirmation of receipt of application.
- ☐ Completed Advisors form (see below).
- ☐ Completed Information form (see below).

A new I-20 with DSO recommendation for OPT will be printed and signed. A photocopy must be included in the application.

Send documents by **certified mail with a return receipt**. The application **must be sent to USCIS within 30 days of DSO recommendation for OPT** (on the new I-20). After mailing in the documents, you will EITHER receive a receipt notice (Form I-797) or a request for further information (RFE). The application approval takes approximately 3 months, possibly longer. If you have not received your EAD in 90 days, you may make an appointment through “Infopass” on the USCIS website (<http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis>). The entire application must be received by the immigration service no later than 60 days beyond your graduation date.

Instructions for Filling out Form I-765

I am applying for: Check first box “permission to accept employment”;

Complete lines 1 through 16; **DO NOT sign** and date under “certification” UNTIL YOU MEET WITH IPO.

#3 Return Address: Insert the address the EAD card will be mailed to. Government mail cannot be forwarded, nor can it be sent abroad. If you don't know where you will be, put the International Program's address. The return address must be in one of the following states in order to send the application to the Phoenix lockbox – Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Guam or the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands.

#10 Alien Registration Number: Use your I-94 number found on the print-out.

#11 Previous employment authorization: You must check “yes” if you have previously applied for work authorization at this or any other institution. It is “no” even if you have had CPT. If you are applying for a 17 month extension, please answer “yes” and complete the related information.

#14 and #15: Insert “F-1 student”

#16 Eligibility categories:

- (c) (3) (A) – for OPT prior to graduation (pre-completion)
- (c) (3) (B) – for Post Completion OPT
- (c) (3) (C) – for 17 month extension of OPT

Remember: sign and date the I-765 at your meeting with a DSO in IPO!

**ACADEMIC ADVISER'S RECOMMENDATION FORM FOR
F-1 OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING**

This form provides the information required by the USCIS for the granting of employment for practical training to an international student. The student's academic adviser must complete and sign this form. Thank you for your assistance.

Student Information (to be completed by the student)

STUDENT'S NAME: _____ MAJOR: _____

ADVISER'S NAME	TITLE	DEPARTMENT
EMPLOYER'S NAME	ADDRESS	TELEPHONE

When do you anticipate this student completing his or her studies at Occidental College?
(Please fill in date and check one of the following)

____/____/____
DATE

[] Graduation/Conferral of Degree date
[] Completion of semester/last day as registered student
[] Other: _____
(explain)

Please note: An international student must be registered full time to maintain legal F-1 visa status.

Adviser, please describe the type of employment the student is seeking and its applicability to their major course of study. (Required by USCIS) **What kind of work does this major prepare a student for?**

To the best of your knowledge, is this type of employment experience related to the student's field of study and appropriate to the student's educational level? [] Yes [] No

_____ Adviser's signature	_____ Date	_____ Phone number	_____ E-mail
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**International Programs
Information for OPT Application**

We will enter the DSO advisor recommendation for your OPT in the SEVIS database and print out a new I-20 with our recommendation and your requested dates printed on page 3. In order to do so, please provide the following information:

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

SEVIS ID# (upper right hand corner of the I-20): N _____

OPT Start Date: _____ OPT End Date: _____

The start date must fall within the 60 days after graduation or the end date on item #5 on your I-20, whichever is earlier. The end date will be 12 months later within 14 months of graduation.

Dates of previous employment: _____ to _____
_____ to _____
_____ to _____

E-mail address while you are on OPT: _____

Graduation Date: _____

Major Field: _____

If you are graduating with more than one major, you must choose only 1 major in which to seek practical training

Additional information required for 17 month extension):

End date of current OPT card: _____

Your job title: _____

Name of employer: _____

Employer Address: _____

Employer E-Verify ID#: _____

Supervisors name: _____

Supervisor phone: _____

Date: _____ Student Name: _____

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) FOR STUDENTS IN F-1 STATUS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is F-1 Optional Practical Training?

Practical training is the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to a practical work experience off campus. Optional practical training is authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This authorization can take up to 120 days to obtain. The maximum amount of time granted to work in F-1 practical training status is 12 months per degree level or a 17 month extension for those who qualify. You may use some or all of the available 12 months of practical training during your course of study OR save the full twelve months to use after graduation. Post-completion OPT must be completed within 14 months of graduation.

What are the Eligibility Requirements for the F-1 Optional Practical Training?

To be eligible to apply for OPT, you must: (1) have been in full time student status for at least one academic year, (2) be maintaining valid F-1 status at the time of the application, and (3) intend to work in a position directly related to your major field of study.

If I complete one degree program, take 12 months of practical training, and then begin a second course of study at a higher level, am I eligible for an additional 12 months of practical training?

Yes. F-1 students may take 12 months of OPT (less any OPT used during the program-see below) after completion of each higher degree level. You may take 12 months of OPT after your BA and another 12 months after a Master's degree. You may not use an additional 12 months if you get a second BA. Remember, 12 months of full-time CPT make you ineligible for OPT.

How can I use optional practical training before I complete my academic program?

Students meeting the eligibility requirements listed above may apply for OPT (1) part-time while school is in session, (2) full-time during annual vacation periods, and/or (3) full-time after you completed all course requirements for the program. Any periods of OPT used before the completion of your studies will be deducted from the 12 month allotment after graduation. Or, at half the rate for part time OPT – for instance, four months of part-time practical training will result in two months deducted from your 12 months total. See IPO for other options.

How long does it take to get authorization for OPT and when should I apply?

Authorization for optional practical training is granted by USCIS and can take up to three months to process. Therefore, it's important that you apply for the authorization well in advance of the date you wish to commence employment (but not more than 120 days prior to your work start date). The application must be received by USCIS no later than 60 days after the program end date listed on your I-20.

Do I need to have a job to apply for optional practical training?

No. You do not need to have a job offer before applying for OPT. However, if you are applying for OPT during your course of study or vacation periods, you will want to either have a job offer or a firm job prospect because periods of OPT cannot be rescinded once the period requested has been authorized.

Does the job I have on OPT have to be paid employment, or can it be unpaid?

A student who is self-employed, interning or volunteering in a position directly related to the academic field would be considered "employed." Remember, only 90 days of unemployment are allowed. For the 17 month STEM extension, employment must be traditional paid employment. You are allowed

an aggregate of 90 days of unemployment while on OPT or 120 days if you apply for and receive the 17 month extension.

How will I know if the practical training application has been approved?

You will receive from the USCIS a small photo identification card, called an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). This card will state the type and length of the period of employment authorized. When you receive this card, check to make certain all the information is correct.

Can I begin working before I receive the Employment Authorization Document?

No. You may not begin employment before you receive your EAD from USCIS; working before practical training has been authorized by the USCIS constitutes illegal employment that will jeopardize your legal status in the U.S. Nor can you begin work before the start date on the card.

Will I have to pay U.S. taxes for income earned while on practical training?

In general, F-1 students who have been in the U.S. for fewer than six calendar years are exempt from social security (FICA) and Medicare taxes. You should be sure to bring this to the attention of your employer, as employers may not be familiar with this provision of the tax law. You will be subject to all other taxes that may apply; federal, state, and local. You should check to see if your country is one of the few that has a tax treaty with the U.S. allowing students to exclude a limited amount of earned income from federal taxation.

Do I need to report to the IPO while I am on OPT?

Yes. You must report your contact information (address where you are living and mailing address, if different), telephone number and your e-mail. You must report to IPO the name and address of your employer, the job position and the start date. Additionally, you must report any periods of unemployment. E-mail ipo@oxy.edu **within 10 days** of a change in this information.

Information on 17 month “STEM” extension

What is the 17 month STEM extension of OPT?

A new regulation allows F1 students on OPT who have received a degree in the fields listed below, referred to as “STEM” fields (science, technology, engineering or mathematics), to apply for a one time 17-month extension of their regular 12 month OPT period. You will not apply for 29 months initially. The 17 month extension allows students to have continuous work authorization at least through Oct. 1 of the following year. Students who file an application on time and correctly for the 17 month OPT extension will be able to continue employment while the extension application is pending, until a final decision on the I-765 or for 180 days, whichever comes first.

STEM Fields:

- Computer Science Applications. CIP Codes 11.xxxx
- Biological and Biomedical Sciences. CIP Codes 26.xxxx.
- Mathematics and Statistics. CIP Codes 27.xxxx.
- Physical Sciences. CIP Codes 40.xxxx.
- Science Technologies. CIP Codes 41.xxxx.

I think I qualify for the extension, how do I apply?

Students graduating with degrees in these fields will first apply for the regular 12 month OPT. Once you have begun your 12 month OPT, if you meet the following criteria, you can apply through the IPO for your 17 month extension.

Criteria for 17 month extension:

- Your employer must be enrolled in the “E-Verify” program
- You must have graduated with a major in one of the STEM fields and be working in that field.
- You must have maintained status while on OPT.

I am currently on OPT and my employer has applied for an H1B visa for me. My OPT ends in May and the H visa would be valid in October. Do I need to leave the US between May and October?

Duration of status and any OPT work authorization will be automatically extended for an F-1 student who is the beneficiary of a timely-filed H-1B petition requesting change of status and an employment start date of October 1 of the following fiscal year. If USCIS denies a pending H1B petition, the F1 student has the standard 60 day grace period (from notification of the denial or rejection of the petition before they have to leave the US.

TRAVEL WHILE ON OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

As you prepare to submit the application for Optional Practical Training (OPT), you may have questions regarding how the application affects your ability to travel outside the U.S. Below are some of the more common ones:

Now that I've sent in my application, can I travel outside the U.S. while I wait for the card to come?

Yes. However, your EAD card can only be sent to a US address. You should arrange to have your EAD card sent to a friend or trusted other who will send the card to you abroad.

What documents do I need to re-enter the U.S. while on OPT?

You will need your I-20 recommending you for OPT that has been endorsed on the travel line by the IPO within the last 6 months; the EAD from the USCIS, your valid passport, a current visa stamp and **a letter from your employer or proof of employment stating you will be resuming work.** This letter should be on company letterhead.

What if I still have some time left on my student program? Can I travel during that time, even though my I-20 shows that I've been authorized for OPT?

Yes. You must be returning as a student to complete academic requirements. For example, a student who has applied for OPT in March, but who doesn't graduate until May, may still travel as a student until the graduation date, re-entering the U.S. with a valid passport, current visa stamp, and the I-20 endorsed by the IPO.

The visa stamp in my passport has expired, but I need to travel outside the U.S. while on OPT. Do I need to get a new visa stamp at an embassy?

If you are going to Canada or Mexico, and staying for less than 30 days, you may be able to re-enter the U.S. on your expired F-1 visa stamp, with a valid passport, your EAD card, a valid I- and employer letter. Check the consulate website. If you are traveling elsewhere, you will need to go to a U.S. embassy or consulate and seek a new visa stamp.

What documents do I need to show at the embassy for a new visa stamp under OPT?

You need to take a valid passport, the I-20 endorsed by the IPO within the last 6 months, the EAD card, and if you have employment already, an official letter of offer of employment showing salary, location, job duties, and beginning date as well. You should also be prepared to discuss how this job experience will apply to the job market in your home country, and how you intend to apply it there.

I want to leave the U.S. for a little while during the time my OPT application is in process, but I need to return long before the card will have arrived. I have a tourist visa (B-2) that is valid for 10 years. Can't I just enter the U.S. on my tourist visa while I'm waiting to get the EAD card, then start work with the card once I get it?

If you leave the U.S. and re-enter with a B visa, you will have an entry records that shows that you have been admitted under B status, and you will have lost your F-1 status. Hence, your OPT application and card will be invalid.

Regulations while you are on Optional Practical Training

Immigration regulations require that you notify the IPO (ipo@oxy.edu) of the following information within 10 days of the occurrence while on OPT:

- The address and telephone number where you reside
- Mailing address (if you cannot receive mail at your residence)
- Name of company and address of employer
- Job position and start date of employment
- Your personal e-mail address or best way to contact you
- Copy of the back and front of your EAD card, when received.

Regulations while on OPT:

- You are authorized to work only in your field of study.
- You may not begin work in the U.S. until you receive the EAD.
- You must update your address and telephone with IPO each time you move.
- You must update IPO of employers name and address.
- OPT rules permit an aggregate of 90 days of unemployment only.
- If you apply to and are accepted by a graduate school after OPT, IPO will need to transfer your SEVIS record.
- Stay in touch with IPO!

While on OPT, you are still under the auspices of Occidental College and IPO. On occasion, we are required to verify your information, so be sure IPO has your current contact information.

Important Information while on Optional Practical Training

IMPORTANT:

Read all information below. It is important to your immigration status while you are on OPT.

Save This Information - You will need this information again and again

1. Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
2. No Employment without Permission
3. Address Reporting Requirement
4. Employment Reporting Requirement
5. Penalty for Unemployment
6. Travel
7. Visa Renewal While on OPT
8. H-1B "Cap Gap" Relief

9. Graduate School after OPT

1. Employment Authorization Card (EAD)

The EAD is proof that Immigration has approved your work permission under OPT. This card is very important. Do not keep this card in your wallet. Instead, keep it with your passport, I-20 and other important documents. You will need the EAD only when entering the U.S. after travel abroad and when beginning any new employment. Otherwise, you will not need to carry the EAD with you. Pay careful attention to the employment start and end dates as listed on the EAD! If the card is lost, you will need to pay the fee to have it replaced.

2. No Employment Without Permission

You may NOT work in the U.S. before the start date listed on the card itself. You must have the card in your possession.

3. Address Reporting Requirement

Address updates needed! IMMIGRATION requires that, while you're on OPT, you report to me your home address and telephone number. If you change your residential address during the OPT period, please notify me within 10 days of your move. I will update SEVIS with your new address.

4. Employment Reporting Requirement

Employment updates needed! IMMIGRATION requires that, while you're on OPT, you report to me your employment. You must email me your:

- Employer Name (this is the company name, not the supervisor)
- Employer Address (the company address where you work)
- Job position
- Start date of new employment

5. Penalty for Unemployment

An F-1 student with OPT who is unemployed for a significant period similarly puts F-1 status in jeopardy. The rule permits an aggregate maximum allowed period of unemployment of **90 days** for students on 12-month OPT. This period allows students time for job searches or a break when switching employers.

6. Travel

YES - You may travel while on OPT! But, after graduation, you must be prepared to show an official employment letter or letter of request for an interview to an Immigration officer upon reentry, if asked to do so.

Documents for Travel While on OPT:

- I-20 *
- valid passport
- valid F-1 visa (Canadian citizens are exempt from this requirement)
- EAD **
- employment letter ***

* You must travel with the I-20 that shows the requested OPT dates; you do not require another travel signature from me while you are on OPT!

** The EAD includes a notation that says, "Not valid for reentry." This means that the EAD alone is not enough documentation for your reentry to the U.S. If and when you travel, you must have the following documentation with you:

*** Letter of Employment / Letter of Request for Interview:

There are no guidelines for this letter other than it should be on business letterhead paper (recommended). And, although Immigration officials have been instructed to request a letter of employment from F-1 visa holders entering the U.S. while on OPT, there is no guarantee that you will be asked to present a letter. As your International Advisor, I recommend that you have a letter ready, just in case. Keep the letter simple; include your name, the client (if freelance/contract work) or employer name, the start date of the employment (be sure the start date is AFTER the start date of your authorized OPT period), and a one- or two-sentence description of the work to be done.

7. Visa Renewal While on OPT

Remember that, while you are on OPT, you are in F-1 status. OPT is not a “status.” OPT is work authorization granted to you as a benefit of your F-1 status.

If you plan to travel outside of the U.S., be sure to check your F-1 visa stamp expiration date. If your F-1 visa stamp has expired, please plan to visit a U.S. consulate abroad to apply for a new F-1 visa. I can provide a visa support letter, upon request. You will also need your official school transcript and the other travel documents listed above as part of the “Travel” section.

CAUTION: If your F-1 visa has expired and you plan to travel outside of the U.S. AFTER being approved for H1b (employee visa status) but BEFORE H1b status actual begins, please talk to an immigration attorney before leaving the U.S.! Travel during this time is generally not recommended. Why? Because if the U.S. Consulate gives you an F-1 visa stamp, you risk the possibility that they will cancel your H1B approval. Or, if the U.S. Consulate gives you an H1b visa stamp, you might need to wait outside of the U.S. until the appropriate time to return in H1b status.

8. H-1B “Cap-Gap” Relief

USCIS is authorized to extend the status of F-1 students caught in a “cap gap” between the end of the student’s OPT and the start date of an approved H-1B petition. The rule automatically extends the status and employment authorization of an F-1 student who is the beneficiary of a timely-filed H-1B petition that has been granted by, or remains pending with USCIS. This means that if the H-1B petition filed on behalf of the student is selected as a “cap case,” the F-1 student may remain in the United States and continue working until the October 1 start date indicated on the H-1B petition.

If USCIS denies a pending H-1B petition, the F-1 student has the standard 60-day grace period (from notification of the denial or rejection of the petition) before they have to leave the United States. Unlike the extension of post-completion OPT, which is limited to F-1 students who have obtained STEM degrees, the extension of status for F-1 students in a cap-gap applies to all F-1 students with pending H-1B petitions.

9. Graduate School after OPT

If you apply to and are accepted by a graduate school after completing OPT, please let IPO know. Your SEVIS record will need to be transferred to the new institution. You must begin the new program within 5 months of completing OPT.