Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 international students

International Student and Scholar Services (ISS)

312 362 8376
iss.depaul.edu
OPT is off-campus employment authorization for F-1 students that may be obtained from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to lawfully pursue employment in your academic field of study.

You are eligible to apply for OPT once you have maintained your F-1 status (full-time enrollment) for a minimum of one academic year. At DePaul University this is equivalent to at least three (3) consecutive quarters.

F-1 students may apply for a total of 12 months of OPT to be used before completion of studies (pre-completion OPT) and/or after completion of studies (post-completion OPT).

F-1 students are eligible to apply for 12 months of OPT at each educational/academic level (i.e. Bachelor’s, Master’s, PhD). Students who complete two degrees at the same educational/academic level (e.g. two Master’s degrees) are not eligible for additional OPT time after completion of the second degree.

Some students in an eligible STEM (science, technology, engineering or mathematics) degree program may be eligible to apply for a 24-month extension of their OPT authorization. Please review separate OPT STEM tutorial on ISS website for details.
### Types of Available OPT

**Pre-completion OPT**

Earliest you can apply is 90 days before desired start-date. Very few students use pre-completion OPT. If you are considering Pre-completion OPT please speak to your ISS advisor.

**Post-completion OPT**

USCIS must receive your application no earlier than 90 days prior to your degree program completion date and no later than 60 days following your degree program completion date. In most cases, we recommend that you apply as early as possible to avoid unexpected delays.

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<tr>
<th>When employment occurs</th>
<th>Hours per week allowed to work</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual vacations or school breaks (Pre-completion)</td>
<td>Employment authorization may be part-time (20 or fewer hours per week) or full-time (more than 20 hours per week).</td>
<td>Authorized pre-completion OPT will be deducted from your 12-month allowance. Part-time OPT is deducted from the 12 month allowance at a half-time rate. For example, if you work part-time for 4 months, only 2 months will be deducted. You will have a remaining balance of 10 months of OPT.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regular academic year (fall, winter, spring quarters) (Pre-completion)</td>
<td>Employment authorization can only be part-time (20 or fewer hours per week) and you must continue to maintain full-time enrollment. The 20 hours per week maximum includes all employment, both on and off-campus.</td>
<td>Students on pre-completion OPT are not eligible for the 24 month OPT extension or the H1B cap gap extension. If available to you, Curricular Practical Training (CPT) may be a better option for working prior to your degree completion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>After degree completion (Post-completion)</td>
<td>Employment authorization is full-time. Students must work a minimum average of 20 hours per week during post-completion OPT in order to maintain lawful F-1 student status.</td>
<td>No more than 90 days of unemployment are allowed during the 12-month post-completion OPT authorization period.</td>
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Which OPT Should I request?

Pre-Completion OPT

*Have you been in F-1 student status for one academic year?* At DePaul University, one academic year means full-time enrollment for at least three (3) consecutive quarters. This begins when you first entered the United States in F-1 status – time spent studying abroad prior to entry will not count toward one academic year. You may be able to count the time you spent at other U.S. schools in degree programs as long as your SEVIS record was transferred directly to DePaul University. Enrollment in English language programs cannot be counted toward meeting this requirement.

*Have you considered using Curricular Practical Training (CPT) instead?* For many students, CPT can be a better option. It allows you to get work experience in your field of study without using any of your 12-month OPT allowance. Please see the ISS website for a detailed description of Curricular Practical Training.

*Will your job offer still be valid three months from now?* OPT processing can take 60 to 90 days and you may not begin employment before receiving authorization. If your employer is not willing to wait for your authorization approval, OPT may not be the best option for you.

*Do you plan on applying for the 24-month OPT STEM extension or the H-1B cap gap extension in the future?* Only eligible post-completion OPT students may apply for these two extensions. If you plan on applying for either of these extensions in the future, you must have at least part of your original 12-month OPT allowance remaining to use as post-completion OPT.

*Are you willing to use some of your 12-month OPT allowance?* You will not have a full year of post-completion OPT time after degree program completion if you are authorized for any pre-completion OPT.

Post-Completion OPT

*Have you been in F-1 status for one academic year?* At DePaul University, one academic year means full-time enrollment for at least three (3) consecutive quarters. You may be able to count the time you spent at other U.S. schools in degree programs as long as your SEVIS record was transferred directly to DePaul University. Enrollment in English language programs cannot be counted toward meeting this requirement.

*Will you be completing your program of study at DePaul University within the next 90 days?* Your application for OPT cannot be submitted to USCIS any earlier than 90 days before your degree program completion date.

*Are you enrolled full-time this quarter or authorized by ISS to have a reduced course load?* If eligible, you must receive a reduced course load authorization from ISS before enrolling less than full-time.
How to Request / Apply for OPT

**Step 1:** Submit OPT request form to ISS to obtain OPT I-20 form.
This form must be submitted online – you can find the link on our Employment Page.
Please be sure to indicate your academic advisor on this form.
Please allow 5-7 business days for review/processing. If your request is incomplete, it will require more time.

**Step 2:** Prepare your OPT application forms and supporting documentation.

**Step 3:** Submit your complete OPT application to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) through their online application.
Be sure to file within 30 days of your OPT I-20 issue date and before the expiration of your grace period.

*ISS strongly recommends that you carefully review this entire OPT tutorial for detailed instructions and important information about your OPT authorization requirements and responsibilities.*
Be sure to submit this form to the correct academic advisor and ISS advisor.

Do not put your name in these fields or your application will not move forward.
Choosing Authorization Dates

On the OPT recommendation form, you must indicate what dates you would ideally want your employment authorization to begin and end before submitting it to ISS. Your recommended OPT dates are subject to change based on USCIS processing times.

Your recommended OPT dates will be printed on your new OPT I-20 and cannot be easily changed after processing. If approved by USCIS, your OPT dates cannot be changed and will be printed on your EAD card.

• Your recommended OPT start date is the day you would ideally like your EAD card to become valid and when you would ideally like to begin off-campus employment.
• Your recommended OPT end date is usually 12 months later minus one (1) day unless you request a shorter period of time.

If you change your mind about your authorization dates

You will NOT be able to adjust your recommended OPT dates once you have mailed your application to USCIS without withdrawing your application completely. Consider the authorization dates carefully before submitting your OPT recommendation form to ISS.
**Points to Consider**

- USCIS can receive your OPT application up to 90 days before your degree program completion date and no later than 60 days following your degree program completion date.
- If you leave the United States during your 60-day grace period and you haven't applied for OPT, you will lose your opportunity to apply for OPT.
- USCIS must receive your OPT application no later than 30 days after your OPT has been requested in SEVIS by your ISS Advisor or your application may be denied.
- It can take 2 to 4 months (sometimes more, rarely less) for an OPT application to be reviewed and (hopefully) approved by USCIS.
- Your recommended OPT start date must be within your 60-day grace period.
- If you will graduate in winter term and want to take advantage of the H-1B cap gap benefit: [https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/temporary-workers/h-1b-specialty-occupations-and-fashion-models/extension-post-completion-optional-practical-training-opt-and-f-1-status-eligible-students-under-h-1b-cap-gap-regulations](https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/temporary-workers/h-1b-specialty-occupations-and-fashion-models/extension-post-completion-optional-practical-training-opt-and-f-1-status-eligible-students-under-h-1b-cap-gap-regulations), select an OPT start date closer to the end of your 60-day grace period. Note, if your OPT authorization ends before your employer files the H-1B COS petition with USCIS, you will not qualify for the H-1B cap gap benefit.
- You cannot begin employment until you have received your EAD card and the start date on the EAD card is valid/current.
- You cannot change your recommended OPT start date once your OPT application has been mailed to USCIS.
- As long as you have submitted a timely application for OPT to USCIS, your F-1 status remains active and you can continue to stay in the United States while your OPT application is pending.
- Travel outside of the United States while your OPT application is pending and once it has been approved can be risky; please schedule an appointment with your ISS advisor for more information as far in advance as possible.
OPT Application Filing:

- If you miss this deadline, USCIS will reject/deny your application! If you have international travel plans, be sure USCIS receives your post-completion OPT application before you leave the country and contact your ISS advisor before making travel arrangements. If you timely file your post-completion OPT application with USCIS, you may remain inside the U.S. until USCIS makes a decision on your case.

- If you receive a "Request for Evidence (RFE)" from USCIS, schedule an appointment with your ISS advisor right away. If there is a problem with your application or if USCIS needs additional information/documents to make a decision on your case, USCIS will send you an RFE notice by mail or through the online portal. You may track status of your OPT application on USCIS website: https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/ by entering your I-765 receipt notice number.

OPT Employment:

- If/when USCIS approves your OPT application, USCIS will issue an employment authorization document (EAD) card. You cannot start working until you receive this EAD card and the start date on that EAD card has passed. You will not accrue any unemployment time while USCIS reviews your OPT application. Your unemployment clock will start as of the start date showing on your EAD card. F-1 students on post-completion OPT are limited to a total of 90 days of unemployment for their entire post-completion OPT period. If you exceed 90 days of unemployment while on post-completion OPT, this is considered a violation of your F-1 status. It may result in denial of future immigration benefits and can have long-term negative consequences for your immigration record and status in the U.S. Note, this unemployment limit does not apply to students on pre-completion OPT.

- In order not to accrue unemployment time while on OPT, you must be employed in a position that directly relates to your degree level and major field of study showing on your I-20 form for at least 20 hours per week. You can have multiple employers while on OPT as long as each job fits this criteria and you report your employment information to ISS. Employment while on OPT does not need to be paid, however, unpaid or volunteer work should also not violate any labor laws. In other words, if the law dictates that you should be getting paid for a particular position, then you should be getting paid for that position. Volunteering for a non-profit organization could be a valid form of employment while on OPT, but it depends on the particular position. Please contact ISS advisor for additional information.

- If you transfer to another school/college or start new degree program while on post-completion OPT, your OPT work authorization will no longer be valid.

- If you witness fraudulent activity by an OPT recruiter or company, you should contact the ICE’s Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) tip line immediately at 1-866-DHS-2ICE or www.ICE.gov/tips and make a report. If you rely on recruitment agencies to obtain OPT placements, please ensure these agencies are trustworthy and reputable. For example, reputable recruiters will not modify your resume or academic background to secure OPT placement.

Important Reminders
OPT Reporting Requirements: What to report

- You are required to report changes to your personal and employment information **within 10 days** of any change.

- When explaining **how your employment relates** to your degree/major field of study showing on the I-20 form, please list 3-5 courses from your transcripts where you gained knowledge that you will utilize on the job. List specific skills, knowledge, or theories you learned at DePaul that you will utilize on the job. Note, stating your job duties alone is not sufficient. Please explain **how** your duties relate to your degree/major field of study. Stating your employer/company’s nature of business is also not sufficient, since all organizations hire employees with various degrees and skill sets. Please visit this form for examples.

- The **employer address** should be the address the student reports to for work. If working at a client site, which is different from the employer address, please report this in SEVP. If your site of activity and/or **supervisor information** changes, please remember to report within 10 days of the change.

- Please **keep a good record** of your job offer letter(s); print-outs of your course syllabus; Department of Labor’s description: [https://www.onetonline.org/](https://www.onetonline.org/) that best matches your position; as well as job postings of similar or comparable positions showing the required/preferred education in case the government later questions the direct relationship between your OPT employment and your degree. The more documentation you have, the better.
OPT Reporting Requirements: How to Report

• If/when USCIS approves your OPT application, the government will create an SEVP Portal account for you so you can access/review/edit your information directly in SEVIS. You should receive an email notification regarding the SEVP portal from the government shortly after your OPT start-date.

• This e-mail will go to the preferred e-mail address you have listed in Campus Connect, likely this will be your DPU e-mail account.

• Students must make the SEVP Portal Account within 30 days of their OPT start-date.

• For detailed information on using your SEVP Portal and troubleshooting assistance, please review the SEVP Portal Help page.

• Failure to report employment within 90 days of your OPT start-date may lead to automatic status termination in SEVIS.

• If you would like an updated I-20 showing this new information, you can request a I-20 reprint from ISS.
I did not receive an e-mail from SEVP.

- Please check your spam/junk inbox for an e-mail from do-not-reply.SEVP@ice.dhs.gov. This e-mail will go the e-mail address listed in SEVIS; which will match your preferred e-mail address in Campus Connect.

My OPT is approved but I did not receive an e-mail.

- This e-mail is generated on your OPT Start-date. In the event that your OPT application is approved prior to the start-date, you will need to wait for the start-date to receive the e-mail.

What information do I need to report?

- Students on active OPT must report any changes to their personal or employment information to the SEVP Portal within ten days of the change.

What do I do if I am locked out of my SEVP account?

- Please review this video for assistance.
Items to prepare:

- Passport-style photograph – see travel.state.gov page for full guidance
- Electronic I-94
- Most recent EAD (if applicable)
- Copy of passport
- Proof of enrollment at SEVP-Certified school
- All previously used SEVIS numbers to be submitted in ‘additional information’ section of application
- Evidence (I-20s) of any previously issued CPT or OPT and the academic level for which each was authorized
- I-20 showing OPT Request that is less than 30 days old

https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/how-apply/photos.html
Completing the I-765: Required Information

What is your reason for applying
Permission to accept employment

Your Name
Please list your full legal name as it appears on your passport (the spelling and order should match). It’s best to list your family (last) name in ALL CAPS. If you have several given names and do not have space to list all of them, that is okay.

Other Names Used
You only need to complete Item #2 if you had a name change while studying in the U.S.

U.S. Mailing Address
The U.S. mailing address you list here is where your new EAD card will be mailed, if approved. This address needs to be valid for at least the next 3-5 months; check current USCIS I-765 processing times for the typical length of time it will take to process your OPT application. If you think you may move in the months after you mail the application, use a reliable friend or family member’s address to receive your EAD. We do not recommend using the ISS address.

If you are using an address other than your own, use “c/o” to indicate that your mail is being delivered “in care of” the resident of that address. For example, c/o Friend’s Street Name, Apt #, Chicago, IL, 60604. Otherwise, USCIS will think that is your new address, and it will conflict with the address showing in SEVIS (database).

Note, USCIS does not forward mail when applicants move. USPS will simply return your mail to USCIS as undeliverable. If your name does not appear on the c/o address you list, USPS may also return your mail to USCIS as undeliverable; USCIS will destroy EAD cards returned as undeliverable by the U.S. Postal Service after 60 business days if USCIS is not contacted by the document’s intended recipient to provide the correct address.

U.S. Physical Address
The address should be where you currently reside (sleep). This address should also match your U.S. home address in Campus Connect (so ISS can link it to your SEVIS record). Note, if the U.S. mailing address you list on your I-765 form is the same as your U.S. physical address, then you only need to populate the U.S. mailing address field.

USCIS Online Account Number (in any)
You will only have an online account number if you previously submitted a form online or you submitted a paper form that has a receipt number that begins with the letters IOE. If you are just setting up an account, or do not have a previously issued online account number, you can select the option that says “I do not have or know my USCIS Online Account Number,” and continue.

Social Security Number (SSN) Related Questions
If you do not have an SSN, then this is your opportunity to request it. If, however, you already have an SSN, then it is yours for life and you should inform USCIS that you do not want the SSA to issue you the SS card.
Completing the I-765: Required Information

I-94 Arrival Information
Use your current I-94 number. This is the 11-digit number found on the top left corner of your paper I-94 card or on your electronic I-94 record: https://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors/i-94-instructions.

Country That Issued your Passport
The country that issued your passport is the same as the country that issued your citizenship. Note, if you happened to renew your passport at a Consulate/Embassy in a different country, this does not change the country of issuance.

Date of Last Entry into the U.S.:
This is the date of your most recent entry into the U.S. This entry date can be found stamped on your paper I-94 card, noted in your electronic I-94 record, and in your passport admission stamp.

Place of Last Entry into the U.S.
This is the name of the city where you landed in the U.S. This information is found on your passport admission stamp (usually as a code like “CHI” for Chicago). If you drove across from Canada or Mexico, enter the name and the city where you entered the U.S.

Status of Last Entry
This is the status you held when you last entered the U.S. Most students entered in F-1 status, however, you may have initially entered the U.S. with a different visa/status e.g. as a B-1 visitor or H-1B work visa and later changed your status to F-1 student with USCIS.

Your Current Immigration Status
Your current immigration status should be F-1 student. If not, talk to your ISS advisor immediately.

Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) Number
Your SEVIS ID number starts with letter N. You will find this number in the top left corner of your SEVIS I-20 form issued by DePaul University.

Eligibility Category
Use the following codes depending on the type of OPT you are requesting:

- (c) (3) (A) Pre – Completion OPT
- (c) (3) (B) Post – Completion OPT
For full instructions regarding the USCIS Online System, please view USCIS ‘How to File a Form Online’ page here.

This page includes how to:
- Create a USCIS online account
- Upload evidence and evidence file requirements
- Digitally sign your form
- Pay the filing fee
- Respond to Requests for Evidence
- Check the status of your case
- Receive a decision
- Troubleshoot browser errors
- Reset/change password

Online Filing Benefits

- Case status alerts and secure messages
- See all case correspondence
- Check your case status and update personal information
- Upload evidence