What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

“Temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student’s major area of study”

- 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 OPT Available

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When employment occurs</th>
<th>Hours per week allowed to work</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</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>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Application Deadlines

**Pre-completion OPT**
No earlier than 90 days before desired employment start date.

**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.
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. 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.

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

**Step 3:** Mail your complete OPT application to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

*ISS strongly recommends that you carefully review this entire OPT tutorial for detailed instructions and important information about your OPT authorization requirements and responsibilities*
To request your OPT I-20, you must submit a completed OPT recommendation form to the OISS.

Download the OPT I-20 Request Form (pdf) here.

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.
**Academic Recommendation**
Your Academic Advisor will complete the bottom portion of the OPT I-20 Request Form.

**Expected Program Completion Date**
The degree completion date for OPT purposes is the last day of the quarter in which you complete your degree requirements. Your degree completion date may not necessarily be the day of your graduation ceremony or the expiration date on your current I-20.

Please review the [Academic Calendar](#) for DePaul University’s term end dates.

For students completing their program in the **Summer term**: please be sure that your course schedule is finalized before submitting your OPT I-20 request form. Ask your ISS Advisor if you have any questions.

If you do not complete your program as expected
Once your OPT I-20 has been issued, changing your degree program completion date can create serious complications for your OPT application. Consider your expected completion date carefully and make every attempt to finish your program on that day. Students who do not complete all degree requirements by their program end date may extend their program before the I-20 expiration date but this could affect your OPT authorization. Please see your ISS Advisor if you have applied for OPT and your degree completion date changes.

**Academic Advisor Signature**
A signature from your Academic Advisor is required on this form. This signature verifies your expected degree program completion date at the time of application for OPT.

Signatures from Faculty Advisors or professors will not be accepted.
OPT Filing Timeline

OPT Application Period: Window opens 90 days before degree program completion and closes 60 days after degree program completion.

Degree program completion date (example)

Recommended OPT start date must be within your 60-day grace period

Feb 15
March 15
April 15
May 15
June 15
July 15
Aug 15

Please note: dates shown are for example only. Please refer to the Academic Calendar for DePaul University’s term end dates.

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 60 to 90 days (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.
- 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 without withdrawing your application completely.
- As long as you have mailed 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.

Timelines illustrating two common scenarios can be seen on the next page.
Selecting Your OPT Start Date

Scenario 1: **Student with a job offer submits his OPT application early**

On March 15th, Alex mails his application for OPT to USCIS. He is completing his program on June 15th and chooses July 15th as his recommended OPT start date because he has a job offer beginning that day. Alex receives his EAD card on June 1st. His employer is pleased to see proof of work authorization early even though he cannot begin working until July 15th, as noted on his EAD card. Alex decides to go home for one month for vacation.

Scenario 2: **Student with no job offer submits her OPT application rather late**

Becky doesn’t have a job offer or time to search for one until after she finishes her degree. She chooses the latest date possible to start her OPT -- August 14th -- which is 60 days after her completion on June 15th. She knows that she can lawfully stay in the United States as long as she has submitted her OPT application on time. She finally mails her OPT application on June 1st. On August 14th, Becky still hasn’t received her EAD card, so she can’t begin working. Becky receives her EAD card on September 1st and it expires the following year on August 13th. Becky has lost 13 days of her OPT authorization because her application was approved after the latest available OPT start date.

Please note: dates shown are for example only. Please refer to the [Academic Calendar](#) for DePaul University’s term end dates.
Important Reminders

OPT Application Filing:
- Your application for post-completion OPT must be received by USCIS no earlier than 90 days before degree completion and no later than 60 days after your date of completion. Apply for pre-completion OPT no earlier than 90 days prior to your intended employment start date. USCIS must also receive your OPT application within 30 days of when ISS made the OPT recommendation in SEVIS. If you miss this deadline, USCIS will reject/deny your application!
- 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. 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:
- You cannot start working until you receive your EAD card in-hand and the start date printed on your EAD card has passed.
- F-1 students on post-completion OPT are limited to no more than a total of 90 days of unemployment for each period of post-completion OPT at each educational/academic level (that is 90 days counting from the OPT start date showing on your EAD card). 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. This unemployment limit does not apply to 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 level/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.
- ISS and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) recommend that students keep clear written/electronic records of all periods of employment and unemployment while on OPT. This information should include: job title; proof of employment duration (start and end dates); number of hours worked per week; location; contact information for supervisor/manager; description of work responsibilities; and, evidence that work performed is/was related to your field of study. Additional evidence may include: pay-stubs; W-2 forms; copies of contracts; offer letters; and, employment verification letters.

OPT Reporting:
- Report any changes to your employment information in Campus Connection.
- Update any changes to your name by contacting DePaul University’s Office of Student Records.
- Update any changes to your address, phone number, or email address in Campus Connection.
- 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.
All students on post-completion OPT must report changes on the following information to ISS within 10 days of any change:

- **Personal Information:**
  1. Legal Name
  2. Email Address
  3. Residential Address
  4. Mailing Address
  5. Email Address
  6. Telephone Number

- **Employment Information:**
  1. Employer/company name
  2. Employer/company address
  3. Employment start date
  4. Employment end date (when applicable)
  5. EIN (Employer Identification Number)
  6. Supervisor Name/phone number/email address
  7. Explain how employment is related to field of study (1-2 sentences)

- Report changes to your personal information by updating your demographic portfolio in the DePaul Campus Connection system.
- Report changes to your employment information in Campus Connection:
  1. Login to https://campusconnect.depaul.edu by using your Campus Connection ID and password.
  2. Click on Menu>Self Service>Student Resources>ISS Forms Requests.
  3. Select “OPT Update” to proceed.
- Effective March 23, 2018, the government created a SEVP Portal (government database) for students to report directly to SEVIS. However, you still **must report to ISS via Campus Connection**, so ISS can issue an updated I-20 form, if applicable. You will receive an email from the government once USCIS approves your OPT application to set up a SEVP Portal account. For more information on the SEVP Portal, please visit this link: https://studyinthesates.dhs.gov/sevp-portal-help
Prepare OPT Application Materials

- Original **signed** Form I-765 (review pages 14-17 for instructions).
- Form G-1145 (recommended/optional - review pages 13 for instructions).
- Two identical color photographs not older than 30 days (paper-clipped to the top of Form I-765; see photo specifications on page 18 for instructions).
- Money order for the appropriate USCIS filing fee: [https://www.uscis.gov/i-765](https://www.uscis.gov/i-765) made payable to the **U.S. Department of Homeland Security** (paper-clipped or stapled to the bottom of Form I-765, with your name and I-94 card number written in the memo section, if the space allows for it).
- Copy of your **signed** I-20 form showing the OPT recommendation issued **within 30 days** by ISS. Don’t forget to sign the I-20 form!
- Copies of any previously issued EAD card(s) and corresponding I-20 forms, if applicable.
- Copies of any previously issued I-20 forms showing Curricular Practical Training (CPT) authorization.
- Copy of your biographical passport page(s) showing the validity date.
- Copy of your current/latest visa page in your passport showing your last entry-date stamp into the U.S.
- Copy of your current I-94 record: [https://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors/i-94-instructions](https://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors/i-94-instructions) showing your latest entry into the U.S.
- Copy of your I-797 approval notice (and I-94 card), if you did not travel and obtained a “change of status” to F-1 from USCIS.

*** Remember to keep a copy of your OPT application for your records before mailing it to USCIS! ***
Form G-1145

e-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance

Submit form G-1145 with your OPT application and USCIS will alert you via SMS text message and/or email that your application has been accepted for review. You will also receive your receipt number in this text/email.

A sample G-1145 form is shown here. Complete the form with your name, e-mail address and mobile telephone number as directed. Please type the information on this form to avoid USCIS misreading your hand-writing.

Form I-765

Application for Employment Authorization

Form I-765 is the other USCIS form you need to submit with your OPT application. A sample Form I-765 form is shown here (Page 1 of 2).

Important: You are required to use the most current version of the I-765. It is best to download it directly from USCIS website: [https://www.uscis.gov/i-765](https://www.uscis.gov/i-765) right before you mail your application since USCIS updates forms frequently.

How to Complete Form I-765: Completing Form I-765 for OPT is a simple task, but a few items can be confusing. The following pages will cover how to complete those “tricky” questions so you can avoid any delays in receiving your work authorization.

Please type most of the information on this form to avoid USCIS misreading your handwriting. Note, some information will not always fit (name and address information primarily). For these areas, if applicable, please hand write the information clearly.
Completing the I-765

Do not write in the space at the top of the I-765 form.

Begin by selecting the box labeled “Permission to accept employment.” on Page 1

I am applying for:

- [x] Permission to accept employment.
- [ ] Replacement (of lost employment authorization document).
- [ ] Renewal of my permission to accept employment (attach a copy of your previous employment authorization document).
Completing the I-765

Items 1-13

**Item #1: 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.

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

**Item #3: Address in the United States**
The address you put here is where your new EAD card will be mailed if approved. This address needs to be valid for at least the next 3 months, 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.

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. You may use the ISS address if you are unsure if your current address will be valid for 3 months. 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.*

**Item #9-13: SSN Related Questions**
If you do not have a social security number (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. The reason your SSA card says “valid for work only with DHS authorization” is because SSN is just a tax identification number, and in order to actually work in the U.S. you need some kind of work authorization document like an EAD card.

Items 14-19 (continued)

**Item #14: I-94 Number**
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](https://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors/i-94-instructions).

**Item #15: Previous Employment Authorization**
Check “Yes” if you have ever received an EAD card previously. Fill in the next three lines with the information related to that previous work permit. A photocopy of your EAD card(s) must be included with your application package. If you have lost it/them, write “lost EAD” in this space.

If you have never received an EAD card, check the “No” box here. If you have worked on-campus or have been authorized for CPT, you will still check “No” here.

**Item #16: 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, on your electronic I-94 record, or in your passport admission stamp.

**Item #17: 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.

**Item #18: Status of Last Entry**
This is the status you had upon entering the U.S. Most students entered in F-1 status, however, you may have initially entered with an H-1B work visa or in another visa/status, and later changed their status with USCIS.

**Item #19: Current Immigration Status**
Your current status should be F-1 student. If not, talk to your ISS advisor immediately.
Completing the I-765

Items 20-23

Item #20: 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

Item #21: (C)(3)(C) Eligibility Category
Leave this line blank. Note, only students who are applying for the 24-month OPT STEM extension should complete this item. If you are applying for pre-completion of post-completion OPT, and you entered (c) (3) (A) or (c) (3) (B) in Item #20, you should leave item #21 blank.

Item #22: (c)(26) Eligibility Category
Leave this line blank.

Item #23: (c)(35) and (c)(36) Eligibility Category
Leave this line blank.

Finalizing the I-765

Remember to sign your name, include the date of your signature, and enter your telephone number at the bottom of the form. Please note that your signature must fit in the space provided on the form. If your signature is too big your EAD card may not contain your signature or your application may be returned to you and delay the processing time of your application. Be conservative and use a signature smaller than your normal handwriting. Signatures must be in BLUE ink so they look original!

Applicant’s Signature
I certify, under penalty of perjury, that the foregoing is true and correct. Furthermore, I authorize the release of any information that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services needs to determine eligibility for the benefit I am seeking. I have read the “Who May File Form I-765?” section of the instructions and have identified the appropriate eligibility category in Question 16.

Signature __________________________
Date of Signature (mm/dd/yyyy) 09/05/2015
Telephone Number (312) 123-4567

Signature of Person Preparing Form, If Other Than Applicant
I declare that this document was prepared by me at the request of the applicant and is based on all information of which I have any knowledge.

Signature __________________________
Date of Signature (mm/dd/yyyy) __________________________
Printed Name __________________________
Address __________________________
Photograph Specifications

You **must** submit two identical color photographs of yourself taken within 30 days of filing your application:

- The photos must have a white to off-white background, be printed on thin paper with a glossy finish, and be unmounted and unretouched.
- The passport-style photos must be 2” by 2”.
- The photos must be in color with full face, frontal view on a white to off-white background. Head height should measure 1” to 1 3/8” from top to bottom of chin, and eye height is between 1 1/8” to 1 3/8” from bottom of photo.
- Your head should be centered within the frame.
- There should be no distracting shadows on the face or in the background.
- Make sure you have a natural expression.
- Your head must be bare unless you are wearing headwear as required by a religious order of which you are a member.

Please refer to I-765 instructions on USCIS website: [https://www.uscis.gov/i-765](https://www.uscis.gov/i-765) for details. You may also refer to the U.S. Department of State website: [https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/photos.html](https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/photos.html) for additional information on photo requirements.

Using pencil or felt pen, lightly **print your name** and I-94 card number on the back of each photo in case they get separated from your application.

Most places that take passport photos are already familiar with the specifications. However, you may want to **print this page**, or the pages from the web site above to take with you when you get your photo taken.
Mailing Instructions

Mail your (paper) OPT application to the appropriate USCIS Service Center based on your residential address using a fast and trackable mailing service like Priority Express, certified USPS mail, FedEx, UPS, or DHL. Do not E-file your OPT application!

Please do not use regular USPS mail, as it may take too long and/or get lost in the mail. Check USCIS website https://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses for the appropriate/current USCIS mailing address. Note, USCIS offers two different addresses, including a P.O. Box address, depending on the type of mailing service you use. FedEx e.g. does not deliver to P.O. box addresses.

Remember to keep a copy of your OPT application for your own records before you ship it to USCIS. If anything happens to the shipment and/or if there are any discrepancies/mistakes on your EAD card later, USCIS will want to see proof of what you submitted.

Application Deadline

Don’t delay! Mail your complete application to USCIS as soon as you receive your OPT I-20 form. USCIS must receive your application no later than 30 days from the date your OPT was recommended by ISS and before your 60-day grace period expires. Please account for mailing time. Questions? Contact your ISS Advisor for more information.