FAQ

Q: What is OPT
A: Optional practical training (OPT) is defined in the regulations as "temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student's major area of study."

Q: When should I apply for OPT?
A: You may apply up to 3 months before you finish your degree. The date you finish your degree is the last day you submit your final paper/project/exam. It is not the day you attend the graduation ceremony.

Q: I graduated, and did not apply for OPT. Is it too late?
A: You can apply for OPT up to 60 days past the last day of your class. However, you will not be able to have the full 12 months of OPT, since you applied late.

Q: Do I need to have a job offer before applying for OPT?
A: You can apply for OPT without a job offer.

Q: I heard that I am allowed to volunteer on OPT. Is this true?
A: Yes, you can volunteer, do an internship, or have traditional paid employment on OPT. The position must be 20+ hours per week, related to your field and at your educational level (i.e. Masters or Ph.D.).

Q: What day will my OPT start?
A: You select the day your OPT will start. You must decide at the time you are ready to send the applications which day you will start OPT. You can start immediately upon finishing your courses, and up to 60 days later. For example, if you finish your degree on May 15, then your OPT can start anytime between May 16 and July 15. You must know the day you wish to start your OPT when you meet with International Student Counselor.

Q: I am a Ph.D. student. What is considered the last day of class for me?
A: For doctoral students, the day you submit your dissertation to the Registrar’s Office is considered your last day. Note: it is not the day you defend your dissertation or the day you finish revising your dissertation. You can check with the Registrar for the final date to submit your dissertation. You will need to apply for OPT 3 months before you submit the dissertation. Please plan ahead.

Q: How long can I remain in the country unemployed on OPT?
A: You may be unemployed on OPT for a cumulative total of 90 days. For many students, this means that from the start date on your card, you have 90 days to find a job. If you cannot find employment, you must leave the United States.

Q: I am graduating in May, and my OPT starts in July. Can I go home in between this time?
A: Please see the “Travel While on OPT” handout.
Q: I finished my last exam on May 10th. My OPT has not started yet. Can I work on campus until my OPT begins?
A: No, once you have completed all course requirements for the degree major, you cannot work on campus anymore. You may work on campus using OPT, if your OPT has started, you have received your card, and if your job is related to your major and educational level (i.e. masters or Ph.D.) and 20+ hours a week.

Q: Why do I need a local address that is good for 3 months for my I-765 (OPT) application?
A: The EAD (OPT) card will not be forwarded in the mail if you move. You need to have a local address where you can receive the card for the next 3 months. If you put down your address, and you move, you will not get your card in the mail. We recommend if you will not be at your current address for 3 months, then you should ask a trusted friend to use his or her address.

Q: What size should the photos requested for the application be?
A: The photos should be US passport photos. (Please note: your passport may have a different size than US passports.) The background should be white. The size should be 2” by 2”. The head height should be 1” to 1 3/8” from the bottom of the photo.

Q: I heard that the authorized length of time for OPT was extended beyond one year. Is that true?
A: No. All OPT applications are approved for a one-year period for the same educational level. Some students will qualify to apply for a 17 month STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Math) Extension. Please see your International Student Counselor, for additional information.