What is Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a benefit available to those in valid F-1 student status. It is 12 months of work authorization granted by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) to F-1 students for the purpose of gaining practical experience directly related to their program of study. The Office of Global Services (OGS) first recommends OPT and the student then applies to USCIS for work authorization, which is authorized in the form of an Employment Authorization Document (EAD card). Post OPT takes place after the program completion date (the end of the program of study, not necessarily the date of graduation).

When should I apply for Post-Completion OPT?

You may apply for Post-Completion OPT work authorization no earlier than 90 days prior to your program completion date. For immigration purposes, program completion date corresponds with the last term/semester of enrollment, not necessarily the date of the graduation ceremony. Post-Completion OPT applications cannot be submitted later than 60 days after the program completion date (i.e. during the 60 day grace period). In this case, it is highly recommended that students submit paperwork with the OGS no later than one (1) month after the new I-20 end date.

Processing Time

The OGS requires 10 business days to process a request for Post OPT recommendation. USCIS generally requires 3 months to process an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card.

USCIS will not expedite OPT requests before the 90 day processing time has elapsed.

If you do not receive your EAD after 90 days, call USCIS Customer Service at 1.800.375.5283 and submit a service request to expedite. If you receive your EAD and there are errors on your card, please call the USCIS Customer Service line to rectify any mistakes.

Am I Eligible to Apply for Post-Completion OPT?

You may apply for Post-Completion OPT only if all of the following criteria have been met:

- You have maintained valid F-1 student status
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- You have studied full-time for at least one academic year
- You have completed fewer than 365 days of full-time Curricular Practical Training

Note: Students can apply for 12 months of Post OPT upon completion of each higher degree level. Only one Post OPT application is allowed per academic degree level (i.e. Bachelor’s, Master’s, PhD).

How can I apply for Post-Completion OPT?

**Step 1:** Submit Post-OPT I-20 request E-form through myOGS

You must upload the following documents on the e-form:
- Copy of completed Certificate of Program Completion Form
- Copy of passport identity page
- Copy of I-94 card (front and back) or Electronic I-94 printout
- Screenshot of $200 Post Graduation Fee receipt (paid through myNEU)

**Step 2:** Send the documents listed below to USCIS:

- Original I-765 - see Suggestions for Completing Form I-765
- Original G-1145
- Copy of new I-20 with OPT recommendation on page 2
- Copy of all previous I-20s
- Copy of passport identity page -- include all correction and extension pages
- Copy of most current F-1 student visa stamp or change of status approval notice
- Copy of I-94
- Copy of previous EAD (front and back) – if applicable
- Check, money order or bank check for $380 made payable to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Two passport photos with white background (lightly print name and SEVIS ID on back of each photo; passport photo MUST be less than 30 days old)
- Official copy of your Northeastern transcript

Once you have your documents and I-20 for Post-completion OPT, and you have copied all documentation and assembled the packet, you should send it to one of the following addresses depending on where you live (the address you put on Form I-765). It is recommended that you mail your OPT packet through certified mail which includes a tracking number and guaranteed delivery date.

If you live in: Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, U.S. Virgin Islands or West Virginia

You will be sending your application to the USCIS Dallas Lockbox:

**For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:**
USCIS
P.O. Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

**For express mail and courier service deliveries:**
USCIS
Attn: AOS
2501 S. State Hwy. 121
Business Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067
You will be sending your application to the USCIS Phoenix Lockbox:

For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:
USCIS
P.O. Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

For express mail and courier service deliveries:
USCIS
Attn: AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S
Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034

Important reminders about mailing OPT documents

- USCIS must receive the OPT application within 30 days of the OPT recommendation by the OGS; if the application is not received by USCIS within 30 days after the issuance of OPT I-20, the application will be denied.
- Do not mail in your application so that USCIS receives it more than 90 days before your program end date or more than 60 days after the program end date. Applications received outside of these times will be denied.
- If the application is returned to you (in plastic), consult with an OGS Advisor before resubmitting the application; your application may not be considered “received” and you may need a new I-20 with OPT recommendation.

What happens after I submit my documents to USCIS?

- You should receive a receipt notice from USCIS.
- Once your OPT is approved, expect to first receive an approval notice and then an EAD card.
- You may not work until you receive your EAD card and you may only work within the dates specified on the EAD.

Can I travel abroad while on OPT?

Students on Post OPT can travel abroad. In order to re-enter the United States the following documents are required:

- A passport that is valid for 6 months from the date of your return to the United States.
- A valid F-1 student visa stamp.
- A valid I-20 with OPT documentation and a valid travel signature on page 2.

*Travel signatures are valid for 6 months while you are on OPT.
- A valid EAD card.
- Proof of employment (an offer letter can be used).

Given the information above, travel before an EAD has been approved and received is not advisable. Please note that if you depart the U.S. before your OPT application has been filed, received and receipted by USCIS, you may become ineligible to apply for Post-OPT.

The 90 Day Unemployment Rule

During the authorized Post-OPT dates on your EAD card, you are allowed to be unemployed for up to 90 days. This 90 days is cumulative. If you exceed 90 days of unemployment, then you are considered out of status. If employment is not...
updated to OGS within 90 days of the start date on the EAD card, then your SEVIS record may be auto-terminated. It is your responsibility to keep a personal record of all OPT activity.

**Type of Employment**

It is the responsibility of the student to determine if the accepted employment is related to their program of study.

The following criteria must be met when you engage in work during Post-Completion OPT:

- You **must** work a minimum of 20 hours per week
- All work **must** be directly related to your program of study

When considering work opportunities, you are covered under the following criteria and may engage in the following:

- Paid or unpaid employment
- Multiple employers: you may work for multiple employers while on Post OPT. All work obtained **must** be directly related to your program of study.
- Work for hire: This is often referred to as 1099 employment. You can contract yourself out to a company. This is similar to working as a freelancer.
- Self-employed/business owner: You may start their own business. Talk to a lawyer in order to find out what is needed to start a company.
- Employment through an agency or consulting firm: You may work for a placement agency or consulting firm. This experience will usually involve temporary or contract work.

Note: Guidelines for STEM employers differ; please see [STEM Extension Guide](#) for details

**Reporting Requirements**

The following **must** be reported to the OGS within 10 days of any changes. Updates can be submitted electronically via the links below:

- [Address Updates](#)
- [Employment Updates](#)
  - Name of company
  - Address of company – This is the address from where you are conducting your work
  - Start date with company
  - Description of how it is related to your course of study/major
  - Unemployment – If you work and then become unemployed for more than two weeks, this must be reported to the OGS by completing OPT Employer Update e-form and providing the correct end date.

It is student’s responsibility to provide employment information to OGS. If no employment is provided within the first 90 days on the EAD card, the student’s SEVIS record may be terminated automatically.

**Additional Information that Must be Reported to OGS**

- A decision to discontinue OPT and depart the U.S.—Submit [the Request to Complete OPT and SEVIS Record Form](#) along with a copy of a flight itinerary indicating you have/will depart the U.S.
- Change of status to a status other than F-1
- A decision to begin a new program of study at Northeastern or transfer to another school in the U.S.
Invalidating Your OPT

Your Post OPT will be invalidated if you:

- Start a new program of study
- Transfer out to a new college or university
- Change your status
- Enter the U.S. using any visa status other than an F-1
- Violate your immigration status

Social Security Numbers and Taxes

If needed, you may apply for a Social Security Number (SSN) as of the start date on your EAD - See Social Security Number Information.

All students must submit the appropriate tax documents. Please be aware that OGS does not give tax advice. For tax-related questions, students can refer to irs.gov or contact a tax professional.

Suggestions for Completing Form I-765 for Post-Completion OPT

The numbers below correspond to the numbered items on Form I-765. This form may be downloaded from uscis.gov. Please refer to USCIS I-765 Instructions. Below are some general guidelines for completing Form I-765 for Post-Completion OPT. Please read the instructions for each item and write the information on the form, printing clearly and legibly or you may type the form online and print it.

1. **Name:** Please print clearly or type your family name in capital letters, followed by the first or given and middle name(s) if any. Please write your name as it appears in your passport.

2. **Other names:** You may fill this out if you use other names on official documents or if you have a maiden name (name used prior to marriage, usually applies to women who have married).

3. **Address:** The address you enter here should be the address to which correspondence can be sent for the next three or four months during the OPT application period. If you are unsure which address to enter here, please consult with an advisor at OGS. *Address errors are a common cause of delay or failure to receive OPT permission.*

4. **Citizenship:** The country of citizenship should match what appears on the applicant’s I-20.

5. **Place of Birth:** Enter the city, state and country in which the applicant was born.

6. **Date of Birth:** Enter the numerical date of birth as month, day, and year (4 digit) e.g., June 29, 1988 should be entered as 06/29/1988.

7. **Gender:** Check the appropriate box.

8. **Marital status:** Check the appropriate box.

9. **Social Security Number:** Please leave this item blank if you have not yet received a Social Security Number. Before beginning OPT work, you will need to obtain a Social Security Number. Information on obtaining a number is available at the OGS.

10. **I-94 Number:** Enter the 11-digit I-94 number, which can be found on the electronic I-94. It is called “Admission (I-94) Record Number.” If you still have the older version of the I-94 which is a small white card, you can find the I-94 number at the top left side of the card. If there is a handwritten number, enter this one instead of the pre-printed one.
11. **Previous Employment Authorization**: Check “no” if you have never applied to the USCIS for F-1 OPT or other employment. If you have previously applied, check “yes”. The USCIS Center serving the northeast region of the U.S. is the “Vermont Service Center”, though many OPT applications are processed at the “Potomac Service Center”. Enter the dates of employment authorized indicated on the Employment Authorization Card; under “Results” enter “Granted” or “Denied” and if granted, attach a photocopy of your EAD (Employment Authorization Document).

12. **Date of Last Entry into U.S.**: Enter the date of last entry stamped in your passport.

13. **Place of Last Entry into the U.S.**: The place of entry is often written in three letter abbreviations such as “BOS” for Boston and “SFR” for San Francisco. Enter the place and date of last entry, which can be found in your passport or I-94.

14. **Manner of Entry**: If “F-1” appears on your I-94, enter “student”. If you entered in another status and changed your non-immigrant status in the U.S. and have not travelled outside of the U.S. since receiving your change of status, please indicate the status you held upon entering the U.S.

15. **Current Immigration Status**: Enter “student”.

16. **Eligibility Categories**: For Post-Completion OPT, enter the following codes in the three consecutive parentheses: (c) (3) (B)  
*Note: Pre-OPT and STEM have different codes.*