

Optional Practical Training

What is OPT?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a benefit of F-1 visa status. According to the immigration regulations, OPT is defined as paid employment directly related to your major area of study. There are two types of OPT – Pre-Completion and Post-Completion. I do not recommend Pre-Completion OPT at the Associates level due to the one-year eligibility requirement, cost & time of application, and job likelihood in your field without some level of degree attained. Post-Completion OPT applications have a high level of approval from my experience and you will have a better job outlook with completing your degree. Remember, OPT is designed to allow you practical job experience in your field of study to better develop the skills that you have been learning. OPT allows up to 12 months of full-time work experience. The 12 months of work authorization must be completed within 14 months of your program end date.

Who is eligible?

An F-1 student is eligible for OPT if the following conditions are satisfied:

- The student has been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for a minimum of one full academic year ;
- The student is in legal F-1 status;
- Associates degree is the first earned degree in the U.S.;
- no previous OPT authorization*;
- The student is currently in the final semester of the degree program.

You are not eligible for OPT at the Associate's level if you have completed a higher degree level regardless of whether you used OPT during that degree. If this is your second Associate's degree but you did not receive OPT authorization for the full 12 months, you may still be eligible for OPT with this degree. You should speak with the International Student Counselor regarding your specific situation.

How do I apply for OPT?

The authorization for OPT comes directly from the office of your International Student Counselor (ISC). This process typically takes two meetings. First, we will review the required documentation needed. In the second meeting, we will process the I-20, make needed copies, and prepare the completed application for mailing. All documentation is required for the second meeting. A complete copy of the application is required for your immigration file. Once the application is completed, you must mail it to USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) for approval.

The following are the requirements you must complete for OPT authorization:

- Check Fee for \$410 to “USCIS”
- Form I-765 (available from ISC)
- Form G-1145 Notification Form
- Photocopy of SEVIS I-20 w/ OPT Recommendation
- Photocopy of previous I-20’s
- Photocopy of passport
- Photocopy of recent visa
- [I-94](#)
- Two passport style photos

It is recommended that you use the International Admissions Office’s address on the I-765 as USCIS does not forward immigration-related materials. If you move, this may delay the receipt of your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and delay your start of work. The address is: SUNY Broome Community College; C/O International Admissions, 907 Front Street, Binghamton, NY 13905. A job offer is NOT required in order to apply for Optional Practical Training.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Immigration regulations require that you submit your application within 60 days of completion/program end date. So, it is important to begin this process early in your last semester before your program ends. The application should not be submitted to USCIS more than 90 days before the end of your program or 120 days before the requested start date.

When Can I Begin Working?

Upon approval of your OPT application, USCIS will mail an approval notice and an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). It is the SEVIS I-20 with the OPT authorization on page 3 AND the EAD card that maintains your legal F-1 status and work authorization in the United States. You are not able to begin working until you receive the EAD card arrives, AND the date on the EAD if it has not passed.

How Long Will It Take to Process My Application for OPT?

USCIS processing times may vary depending on the number of applications the service center has received and the time of the year. In general, applications may take anywhere from one to three months for adjudication. I recommend planning on three months so that you can obtain authorization in time for your requested start date.

Can I Travel on OPT?

Current guidance states that an F-1 student who has filed an application for Post-Completion OPT may travel outside the U.S., for example, during spring break, while the OPT application is pending, provided the student can present the USCIS Receipt Notice proving the application has been submitted. However, once the EAD card has been issued, the student can only re-enter the U.S. to resume employment. Therefore, you must have the I-20, EAD card, and letter of employment offer on company letterhead. You do not need to begin the job before traveling but the letter should state your start date. There is always a risk that you may not be allowed to re-enter the U.S. without proper documentation. Also, be sure that your visa is valid

because it may be unlikely to get a renewal during OPT as your degree program has technically ended. OPT is an additional benefit.

Will CPT affect my eligibility for OPT?

CPT, Curricular Practical Training, will only impact your OPT eligibility if you have more than 11 months of full-time CPT. This is very unusual at the Associate's degree level. Part-time CPT is not counted against your OPT eligibility.

Can I Check on the Progress of My Application?

Once we receive the receipt notice, you will be assigned a case number that begins with EAC. You can check your [Case Status Online](#) and enter the entire case number, including EAC, in the box. They will give you the current status of your application. Please understand that it is computer-generated updates so it may not be extremely detailed but will identify if it has been received, is being processed, additional information has been requested or received, and when it is approved.

Can I start another degree program while on OPT?

Authorization to engage in OPT is automatically terminated when a student transfers to another school or begins full-time study at a different educational level. Remember your SEVIS record must be transferred to the new school to issue a new I-20, hence you can not continue the OPT benefit from SUNY Broome when transferring to another school. You can transfer to another school before your OPT ends but you will be ending your OPT early and not receive that time back. You can also delay transferring until your OPT ends to gain the full benefit of OPT. Your plans to transfer after OPT are important to discuss with your International Student Counselor as these plans should be considered when selecting the dates of work authorization you are requesting.