F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT) Application Process

Eligible F-1 students studying at colleges, universities, conservatories, or seminaries level may qualify for OPT, which allows them to engage in temporary employment to gain practical experience in his or her field of study.

Eligibility

F-1 student is eligible to apply if he/she meets the following criteria:

- F-1 student who is in valid F-1 status;
- F-1 student who has been enrolled full-time for one academic year;
- F-1 student who anticipates completing all course requirements for the degree within the next 90 days;
- F-1 student who has completed all course requirements for the degree within the last 60 days;
- F-1 student who has not already been granted OPT for the same degree level;
- F-1 student who has a valid passport, at least six months into the future, (unless country of nationality is passport exempt); and
- F-1 student who has not done one year of full time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) employment.

Note: F-1 student does not need a job offer to be eligible to apply for OPT.

When to Apply

The Office of International Affairs (OIA) strongly encourages students to apply for OPT at least 90 days prior to the program end date. Although USCIS will accept the OPT application up to 60 days after the program end date, the F-1 student cannot begin work until the employment authorization document (EAD) is approved and received. A delayed application may result in delayed work authorization and/or potential loss of full OPT eligibility (12 months) due to the 90 days processing time by USCIS.

An F-1 student may submit the OPT Application to USCIS as early as 90 days before the program end date and up to 60 days after the program end date. Please note that the OPT application must arrive at the USCIS-Service Center no later than 30 days after the OPT recommendation date listed on the Form I-20. Failure to meet the OPT filing deadline can result in a denial of the OPT application.

Prior to applying for OPT, a student’s program end date may need to be shortened in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) to reflect an new expected completion of study. The new program end date will be printed on the student’s Form I-20.
How to Apply

Step 1: Prepare OPT Application

☐ Completed and signed OPT Request Form;
☐ Completed and signed Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization marked with the proper code of (c)(3)(B) for post-completion OPT at Question 16 (http://www.uscis.gov/i-765);
☐ Completed and signed Form G-1145 E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (http://www.uscis.gov/g-1145);
☐ Legible copy of employment offer letter (if applicable)
  o F-1 student can apply for OPT without a job offer.
☐ Legible copies of all previously issued Form I-20(s);
☐ Legible copy of valid passport I.D. page(s) to include expiration date and renewal page, if applicable;
☐ Legible copy of all U.S. visa stamp(s) (except Canadian students);
☐ Legible copies of all previously issued EAD (s), (front and back) if applicable;
☐ 2 passport style photos meeting specifications detailed on U.S. Department of State website (http://travel.state.gov/passport/guide/composition/composition_874.html) with name, date of birth, and A# (if applicable) lightly printed in pencil on the back of each photo;
☐ Filing fee in the form of a personal check, money order, or cashier’s check drawn on a U.S. bank and made payable in U.S. dollars to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; do not use initials “USDHS”, “DHS” or “USCIS.” The filing fee for the I-765 may be found at https://www.uscis.gov/i-765 or https://www.uscis.gov/forms/our-fees.

Step 2: Submit Completed OPT Application to OIA

1) F-1 Student prepares documents listed in Step 1 and drops them off at OIA. At that time, the student will schedule an appointment with their International Visitor Advisor (IVA) to return ten business days in the future.
  o If the application is not complete, IVA will inform the student of outstanding documentation.
  o If complete, IVA will process student’s OPT request in SEVIS and student will sign new Form I-20.

2) IVA will provide original new Form I-20 recommending the OPT to the student; and,

3) IVA will submit F-1 OPT application and supporting documents to USCIS.

NOTE: OPT request will not be recommended on the day the student submits OPT application to OIA nor will it be submitted to USCIS if OPT packet is incomplete at the time of appointment.

Step 3: USCIS Processing Time

1) Once USCIS has received the OPT application and supporting documents, it will take a minimum of 90-120 days to adjudicate the application. USCIS should send an I-797 Receipt Notice to the address provided on the I-765 application confirming receipt of OPT application. The I-797 Receipt Notice will contain a unique receipt number/file number and receipt date. Please review carefully the I-797 Receipt Notice to make sure that the name is spelled correctly. If the name is misspelled, contact your IVA immediately. As soon as the receipt notice is received, please provide a copy to your IVA;

2) F-1 Student may use the receipt number/file number on the I-797 Receipt Notice to check the status of the OPT application (https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do);

3) After the OPT application has been approved by USCIS, the EAD will be sent directly to the address listed on the I-765 application; and

4) F-1 Student may not begin employment until USCIS approves the OPT application and receive the EAD.
Note: If the F-1 student’s address changes while the OPT application is pending with USCIS, the F-1 student is required to report any changes of residential address to both OIA & USCIS within 10 calendar days of the change.

- To report a change of residential address OIA, the F-1 student must complete and submit the Change of Address Form (https://www.uth.edu/international-affairs/document/general-documents/oia-change-of-address-form-fillable.pdf) to OIA within 10 calendar days of physical move.

- To report a change of residential address to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the F-1 student must submit a change of address on-line at http://www.uscis.gov/addresschange within 10 calendar days of physical move.

If the F-1 student’s OPT application is pending with USCIS, he/she must also report residential address change by calling the USCIS National Customer Service Center at 1-800-375-5283.

F-1 students should file the change of address as soon as possible. Failure to notify USCIS will result in having the OPT/STEM OPT EAD Card mailed to the wrong address. In addition, USCIS will not forward the OPT/STEM OPT EAD Card. This will delay the F-1 student’s employment start date.

**NOTE:** Every individual who is a non-U.S. citizen is required by U.S. law (Sec.256 of the Immigration and Naturalization Act (8 USC 13505)) to report a change of U.S. residential address and phone number with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security within 10 calendar days of each move. **This means that spouse and unmarried children under the age of 21 years who are not U.S. Citizens must each report their change of address to USCIS.** Failure to report timely residential address change to the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services is a violation of U.S. Immigration regulations.

**Step 4: OPT Granted**

1) If granted OPT and issued the EAD, F-1 student is required to provide OIA with a legible copy of the EAD. Failure to comply will be a violation of the status and may disrupt employment.

   o If F-1 student's current location at the time of OPT approval is outside of the Houston area, a legible copy of the original EAD (front & back) must be scanned and send to utoiahouston@uth.tmc.edu or mailed to OIA at the address listed below:
     
     The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston  
     Office of International Affairs  
     7000 Fannin Street, Suite 130  
     Houston, Texas 77030

   o If F-1 student is currently or will be employed The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, the F-1 student is required to present the original EAD to the OIA in order to determine employment eligibility and comply with I-9 regulations.