

Optional Practical Training (Pre- and Post- Completion)

For International Students

Per Immigration Regulations

Index

1. Definition
2. Eligibility for Pre-and Post-Completion OPT
3. Work Hours Allowed
4. Offer of Employment
5. When to Apply for OPT/ When Eligible to Begin Work
6. Type of Work Allowed for Pre- and Post-Completion OPT
7. Days Exceeding Limit of Unemployment (Post-Completion OPT)
8. Reporting Requirements
9. Failing Coursework
10. Thesis/Dissertation/ or Equivalent
11. Cancelling Pre- or Post-Completion OPT
12. Travel
13. Transfer or Change of Educational Level
14. At the End of Post-Completion OPT

1. Definition

-Optional Practical Training (OPT) is work opportunity for F-1 students to gain occupational experience in their field of study that is not necessarily required for their program of study. The work done must be directly related to the student's current degree and major as listed on the I-20.

-One way students know if a job is relevant towards their degree and major is their degree and major is listed on the job application as required or preferred.

-There are 4 types of OPT:

1. Pre-Completion OPT: Training that is done before the student's program of study end date (for definition of end date please see the information listed in the section entitled: "End of Study").
2. Post-Completion OPT: Training that is done at the end of the student's program of study end date (for definition of end date please see the information listed in the section entitled: "End of Study").
3. STEM-Extension OPT: A one-time 17 month extension of Post-Completion OPT. See section on "STEM Extension OPT".

4. Cap-Gap Extension: Extension of Post-Completion OPT or STEM Extension OPT based on the timely filing of an eligible H-1B petition. See the section entitled “Cap-Gap Extension”.

2. Eligibility for Pre-and Post-Completion OPT

1. Students must be enrolled in a bachelor, master’s, or doctoral program. Students enrolled in language study cannot apply. The I-20 must reflect one of these degrees.
2. Students are eligible for OPT per eligible degree level. Students cannot move down a degree level to get OPT.
3. OPT must be based on one major only, not two. The major must be listed on the I-20.
4. Students are eligible to split OPT between two consecutive degree levels as long as they have not applied and been approved for all OPT on the first degree level.
 - a. Example: A student applies for and receives four months of full-time OPT in their first master’s degree. The student then graduates and applies for another master’s degree. The student would be eligible for an additional eight months of OPT.
5. Students must have been in F-1 status for at least one academic year. One academic year may be considered two full semesters such as fall and spring.
6. Students who do pre-completion OPT must still be registered in a full course of study (for rules regarding full course of study, see the section entitled: “Full Course of Study Requirements”).
7. Students are eligible for 365 days of full-time OPT. Time applied for on Pre-Completion OPT counts against time eligible for on Post-Completion OPT.
8. Students who complete one year of full-time CPT (internship or co-op) cannot do Pre- or Post-Completion OPT.

3. Work Hours Allowed

Pre-Completion OPT:

1. 20 hours maximum per week of all types of work while school is in session (ex. If a student works 10 hours on-campus, he/she is only eligible to work 10 hours or less of Pre-Completion OPT). Weeks cannot be averaged. Can be full-time during official school breaks and summer vacation.
2. Students must re-apply for OPT and be approved if switching between full-time and part-time work authorization (when students apply for OPT, the application will ask if it is full-time or part-time work. Students are bound to work the amount of time applied for).
3. Time applied for on Pre-Completion OPT counts against the time eligible for Post-Completion OPT.

Post-Completion OPT:

1. Students must apply as full-time (full-time is considered 20 hours or more per week). Students must work 20 hours or more per week. Weeks cannot be averaged.

4. Offer of Employment

-No offer of work is required for Pre- or Post-Completion OPT. Students on Post-Completion OPT cannot have 90 days of unemployment (see below heading entitled: “Days Exceeding Limit of Unemployment”).

5. When to Apply for OPT/ When Eligible to Begin Work

Pre-Completion OPT:

1. Students are eligible to apply 90 days before completing the one full academic year requirements as long as the employment start date is not before the one full academic year requirements. One full academic year can be considered completing two full semesters such as fall and spring.
2. It takes USCIS up to 90 days or longer to approve the application. There is no way to speed this process.
3. If the Employment Authorization card (EAD card) is issued after the start date listed on the application, the start date listed on the EAD card will be the date the EAD card is created. The end date will remain the same.
4. Students can begin work only after USCIS issues and the student receives the EAD Card, and the start date on the EAD card is valid to the date of intended employment (if a student applies for a specific date, and the EAD card has not been issued, the student cannot work).
5. USCIS must receive the application within 30 days of when the OPT I-20 is issued or else the I-20 is cancelled and will negatively affect the OPT application.

Post-Completion OPT:

1. Students are eligible to apply 90 days prior to the completion of their program of study, and the completed application must be received no later than 60 days after the completion of the program of study listed on the I-20. The end date will be established by the Office of International Education, the student, and potentially the academic advisor based on the regulations found in the section entitled “End of Program”.
2. Students are required to put a start date that is one day after the program end date and before 60 days after the program end date. The end date must be specified whether or not a job is offered.
3. It takes USCIS up to 90 days or longer to approve the application. There is no way to speed this process.
4. If the Employment Authorization card (EAD card) is issued after the start date listed on the application, the start date listed on the EAD card will be the date the card is created. The end date will remain the same.
5. Students can begin work only after USCIS issues and the student receives the EAD card, and the start date on the EAD card is valid to the date of intended employment (if a student applies for a specific date, and the EAD card has not been issued, the student cannot work).
6. USCIS must receive the application within 30 days of when the OPT I-20 is issued or else the I-20 is cancelled and will affect the OPT application.

6. Type of Work Allowed for Pre- and Post-Completion OPT

- Employment **must be directly related** to the **degree and major** listed on the I-20. The degree and major on the I-20 **must match** the OPT application.
- Students must keep documentation of where they work, hours work, etc...
- The hours the student work must correspond to their type of OPT.

1. Paid Employee
2. Volunteer/ Unpaid Employee: Student may choose this option to stay in status if unable to find paid employment. Labor laws cannot be compromised.
3. Multiple Employers
4. Work for Hire: Student must provide proof of contracts, times worked, verification of daily activities, etc...
5. Self-Employed: Student must have proper business license.

7. Days Exceeding Limit of Unemployment (Post-Completion OPT)

1. Students cannot exceed 90 days of unemployment from the start date listed on the EAD Card. Students who are outside the US during OPT and are not working accrue days of unemployment.
2. Students who exceed 90 days of unemployment are considered out of status and can lose future F-1 eligibilities (their status can be terminated).

8. Reporting Requirements

- Students on Pre- and Post-Completion OPT must report to the Office of International Education the: company's name and address, their job duties and job title, start date and end date of employment, and living address. The living address must be reported within 10 days of moving.

9. Failing Coursework

- Students who fail their coursework and must return to take classes (excluding thesis, dissertation, or equivalent) **cannot** apply for post-completion OPT.
- Students who already applied for Post-Completion OPT and discover **before** the new end date (listed on the I-20) that they did not complete their coursework, must do an immediate extension of the I-20. If the extension does not occur before the end-date, the student **will be** terminated.
- Students who already applied for Post-Completion OPT and complete an extension of their I-20 before the I-20 end date can attempt to cancel their OPT. They will lose their OPT application fee, and they may lose all OPT for that degree level.
- Students should never apply for Post-Completion OPT if they are not certain they will pass. They should speak with the Office of International Education immediately.
- Please see "Cancelling Pre- or Post-Completion OPT" below.

10. Thesis/Dissertation/ or Equivalent

-Students who have completed all coursework necessary for their program but are still required to do thesis, dissertation, or equivalent are eligible to do both Pre- or Post-Completion OPT. The immigration rules do vary on how to proceed with each type of OPT, and the rules can greatly affect the student negatively and/or positively, both with their academic studies and/or with their immigration status.

Pre-Completion OPT

1. Students must be registered in a full course of study and follow all rules associated with a full course of study (see the section entitled “Full Course of Study Requirements”). This includes paying and registering for all necessary credit hours.
2. Unemployment does not count towards the days exceeding unemployment limit.
3. Students with thesis, dissertation, or equivalent work remaining can do part-time or full-time Pre-Completion OPT.
4. All days applied for on the OPT application will count against days available for post-completion OPT.
5. Students must re-file their OPT application and pay the application fee to get Post-Completion OPT. Students should apply for Post-Completion OPT 90 days before their program end date to avoid a gap of employment between Pre-Completion OPT and Post-Completion OPT.
6. STEM Extension and Cap-Gap Extension is only available for students on Post-Completion OPT.

Post-Completion OPT

1. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will allow a student to continue working on their thesis, dissertation, or equivalent while on Post-Completion OPT. While DHS does not specify specific rules whether or not a student registers in credit hours associated with their thesis, dissertation, or equivalent, the University will require a student to register and pay for the appropriate amount of credit hours required for their remaining work as deemed necessary by the school.
2. On Post-Completion OPT, students are expected to find a job and work. This is the rule of Post-Completion OPT. The 90 days exceeding limit of unemployment will affect students. If they cannot find a job, or start work because they are focused on their thesis (no matter what the delay is in completing it), their immigration status can be terminated for being unemployed too long.
3. Students are required to apply for full-time employment and are expected to work the appropriate hours for Post-Completion OPT.
4. Students who meet eligibility requirements for STEM Extension and Cap-Gap Extension OPT can apply.
5. Students **cannot** change their program end date.

11. Cancelling Pre- or Post-Completion OPT

-The OPT application can only be cancelled by the student and the Office of International Education. If the application is already received by the service center, the student will lose their application fee, and

it is possible all OPT will be lost, not just the days applied for on the submitted application, but also future OPT.

- Once a request to cancel an application is given, it cannot be stopped.
- If the cancelation is done prior to the end date listed on the I-20 (because a student needs more time to complete his or her program of study or the student failed to complete his/her program of study) the student must do an immediate extension of the I-20 or else if the I-20 end date passes and an extension is not done, the student will be terminated.
- Other rules do apply.

12. Travel

- Please see the section entitled: "Vacation and Travel".

13. Transfer or Change of Educational Level

- If a student on post-completion OPT completes a transfer to another school, or change of educational level at TTU, and the information is submitted to DHS by TTU, the student must stop all OPT. It will be cancelled. The student will lose all remaining time.

14. At the End of Post-Completion OPT

- Students have 60 days after their end date of Post-Completion OPT to:
 1. Have already completed a transfer to a new school and have received a new I-20
 2. Received a new I-20 from TTU to start a new program
 3. Leave the US
- STEM Extension OPT must be submitted to the service center and be received before the Post-Completion OPT end date.

*At all times, a student is responsible to maintain his/her own immigration status.

*The above information is susceptible to change.

*The above information is not an exhaustive list pertaining to Pre- or Post- Completion OPT information.

*For additional information, students can visit: <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/index.htm>

*At all times students are responsible for properly informing the Office of International Education of their immigration status and academic status (as pertaining to immigration matters).