

# SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES

### Applying for Post-Completion F-1 Optional Practical Training

#### What is Post-Completion Optional Practical Training?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a temporary employment authorization – for a total of 12 months – that gives F-1 students an opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to a practical work experience off campus after they have completed their degrees. Authorization for Optional Practical Training is granted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) and can take up to 90 days or more to obtain. It is important that you apply for the authorization in the correct time frame.

#### What are the eligibility requirements for F-1 Optional Practical Training?

To be eligible to apply for Optional Practical Training, you must:

- have been in full time student status for at least one full academic year immediately preceding the submission of your OPT application.
- be maintaining valid F-1 status at the time of the application.
- intend to work in a position directly related to your major field of study and commensurate with your educational level.

#### When should I apply?

You may apply up to 90 days prior to the program end date (look at your I-20).

If your program end date is June 1<sup>st</sup>, you should apply anytime from March 4<sup>th</sup> onward. If your program end date is January 1<sup>st</sup>, you should apply anytime from October 4<sup>th</sup> onward.

*Do not apply earlier than 90 days before the end of your program date.*

*If you plan to travel outside of the U.S. during spring or winter break, you should apply after your return.*

NOTE: Use [www.timeanddate.com](http://www.timeanddate.com) to calculate dates and timing.

#### Dates of OPT Authorization:

OPT is approved for a specific beginning and end date. You must identify those dates on the *OPT Request Form* (below). For OPT after completion of studies or graduation, the beginning date can be no later than 60 days after your program completion date.

## Frequently Asked Questions about Post-Completion OPT

### **Do I need to have a job to apply for Optional Practical Training?**

No, but OPT only permits employment related to your field of study. You may not be unemployed for a total of more than 90 days during the authorized period of OPT. The 90 day period begins on the start date of your OPT authorization. If there is a gap of 10 days or fewer between periods of employment, these days will not be counted.

### **What if I cannot find a paying job?**

You may do an unpaid internship position if directly related to your field of study.

### **If I complete a degree program, take 12 months of practical training, and then begin a second course of study, am I eligible for an additional 12 months of practical training?**

An F-1 student may become eligible for another 12 months of OPT when they transfer to another educational level. For example, this benefit a student who has used 12 months of OPT after completing a bachelor's degree and is now completing a master's program.

### **What are the guidelines for the dates I choose on the OPT request form?**

OPT is approved for specific beginning and end dates. For OPT after completion of studies or graduation, the beginning date can be no later than 60 days after the date you complete your studies. You will choose your own start date depending on your plans.

### **Can I begin working before I receive the Employment Authorization Document card?**

No. You must have the EAD when you start working. You may not begin employment before you receive your EAD from the USCIS. Working before practical training has been authorized by the USCIS constitutes illegal employment and may jeopardize your legal status in the U.S.

### **Can I travel outside the U.S. while my OPT application is pending at USCIS?**

Unless necessary, it is not recommended that you travel outside of the U.S. while your application is pending. You absolutely should not leave the U.S. prior to receiving a "receipt notice" from the USCIS.

### **Can I travel outside of the U.S. after my OPT is approved, but before I find a job?**

This is not recommended because re-entry to the US is never guaranteed. Some students do this, but it is very risky.

### **What about travel abroad after I completed my studies while I hold practical training status?**

If you completed your course of study and received your EAD, you may travel abroad and re- enter the U.S. in F-1 status. You will need the following documents for re-entry:

1. a valid passport, good six months into the future
2. a valid/unexpired F-1 visa stamp in your passport (except for Canadian citizens)
3. the new SEVIS I-20 recommending OPT signed by the DSO/PDSO every six months.
4. your original EAD card
5. proof that you have a job in the U.S. appropriate for practical training and that you are returning to the U.S. to resume or start this employment (an official letter from your employer).

If you do not have all of these documents, you should NOT travel abroad.

**Notes:**

- If your OPT application is still pending, you must carry the receipt notice from USCIS as proof that you have applied. If you have an offer of employment, you should carry the offer letter.
- If your OPT application has been approved, you must carry your EAD and proof of continuing or offered employment. Please note this letter must be for the duration of your OPT and not for a permanent position.
- Your EAD will have the notation "Not valid for re-entry to the U.S." This simply means that the card alone is not sufficient documentation to return in F-1 status. You must present your EAD along with the above-mentioned documentation at the port of entry.

**What should I do when I get a job?**

When your OPT is approved, you will receive information from SEVP on how to create your SEVP Portal. <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sevp-portal-help> Read everything carefully and follow instructions, as it will be your responsibility to report your employment information in the SEVP Portal.

It is very important that your SEVIS record is always accurate and up-to-date. **NEVER delete a job from your record. If you have started a new job, add that job in, but do NOT delete the previous job.**

**Do I need a new updated I-20 when I get a job?**

If you are applying for a new student visa in your home country while you are on OPT, you should ask the DSO/PDSO for an updated I-20 to be sent to you before you leave the U.S.

**Am I still in F-1/student status?**

While you are on OPT, you are still in F-1 status. You are required to report employment information, any interruptions of employment, address changes or legal name change to the DSO/PDSO *within 10 days*.

**After my OPT ends, when must I leave the U.S.?**

Your "duration of status" in F-1 will end 60 days from the completion of OPT. This 60-day grace period does not allow you to continue to work. During the grace period, you may depart the U.S., transfer to a new full-time program of study and extend your F-1 status with a new I-20, or apply to USCIS for a change of status.

**Should I keep copies of all of my I-20s?**

Yes. Use the I-20 issued for OPT to re-enter the US, but always keep all previously issued I-20s. You may need copies in future applications with USCIS.

**Do I need a U.S. Social Security card? If so, how do I get one?**

Yes, you must have a Social Security card in order to work or do an unpaid internship. If you do not have a Social Security card, you may apply at the same time you apply for OPT. There is a special section in the I-765 to fill out.

**What should I do upon receiving my EAD?**

Make a copy for your records, send a copy to the DSO/PDSO, and keep it in a safe place. On or around this date, you will receive information from SEVP on how to create your SEVP Portal here: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sevp-portal-help>. Read everything carefully and follow instructions, as it will be your responsibility to report your employment information in the SEVP Portal. It is very important that your SEVIS record is always accurate and up-to-date. **NEVER delete a job from your record. If you have started a new job, add that job in, but do NOT delete the previous job.**

**Do I still need a signature on my newest I-20?**

Yes. You must get a signature from the DSO/PDSO every 6 months.

**Will I have to pay U.S. taxes for income earned while on practical training?**

In general, F-1 students who have been in the U.S. for fewer than five calendar years are exempt from social security (FICA) and Medicare taxes. Your earnings are subject to applicable federal, state, and local taxes. Students must file a tax return on or before April 15 of each year. Students may be entitled to a refund of taxes withheld from their wages if the amount of tax owed is less than the amount withheld.

**Follow these steps to complete your OPT application:**

1. Read this packet and be familiar with the information.
2. Choose your OPT start date.
3. Print out the checklist (page 6) and use it to assemble your papers correctly. You **MUST** bring this checklist to our appointment.
4. Make an appointment with the DSO/PDSO. This session will take about one hour.
5. Incomplete applications cannot be processed!

**Send your application to USCIS**

1. Online here: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>
2. **EXPRESS MAIL** to one of the below addresses. The express mail receipt will provide proof that your application was timely, in the event that the application is lost.

*Students who list a mailing address on the I-765 in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, or Pennsylvania must send the application to:*

<b>FedEx, UPS, or DHL:</b> USCIS Attn: I-765 C03 (Box 805373) 131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor Chicago, IL 60603-5517	<b>U.S. Postal Service(USPS):</b> USCIS Attn: I-765 C03 P.O. Box 805373 Chicago, IL 60680	<b>U.S. Postal Service(USPS):</b> USCIS Attn: I-765 C03 P.O. Box 805373 Chicago, IL 60680
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*If you use a mailing address in another state, visit this page to determine where to submit your application: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>*

## PROCESSING TIME

The USCIS can take up to 90 days or more to process an OPT application. Within 2 to 3 weeks of mailing your application, you will receive a Notice of Action (receipt notice) with a 13-digit receipt number. Once you have that number, you can check the status of your pending application online at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov). Contact the DSO/PDSO if your application has been pending for more than 100 days from the receipt date.

Your application must be received by the USCIS Service Center within 30 days of the date that the OPT I-20 is issued. If it is not received within 30 days of the issuance date, your application will be denied by USCIS, your \$410 fee will not be returned or refunded to you, and you may not have enough time before the end of your 60-day grace period to request a new I-20 so that you can submit another application.

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## Special Considerations:

- You are not permitted to begin working until the start date of your OPT and until you have received your EAD.
- Once you have mailed your OPT application to USCIS, there is no provision for withdrawing or canceling the request.
- Contact **the DSO/PDSO** immediately if you receive any correspondence from USCIS about your application other than the Notice of Action receipt or if the start and end dates on the EAD differ from the dates recommended on your I-20.

**NOTE: Remember that your I-20 needs a validation signature every six months. Mark your calendar accordingly. If you are out of town, mail your I-20 to the DSO/PDSO.**

## USE THIS CHECKLIST TO ASSEMBLE YOUR OPT APPLICATION

Forms listed below are available on MySLC here:

[https://my.slc.edu/ics/Campus\\_Life/Departments/International\\_Students/Employment.jnz](https://my.slc.edu/ics/Campus_Life/Departments/International_Students/Employment.jnz)

- ❑ Fill out the **OPT Request Form** of this packet for the DSO/PDSO.
- ❑ Fill out, sign and print the **OPT Acknowledgment of Responsibility form**.
- ❑ Fill out **Form G-1145**. You must type this form and print it out. This form is for the USCIS to notify you by email and/or text message that they have received your application.
- ❑ Print your most recent I-94 form Arrival/Departure record at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home>. (You do not need to print the Travel History)
- ❑ Fill out **Form I-765**. *Please follow the Form I-765 instructions very carefully, item by item, especially from page 15 onward.* You must type as much as possible of this form on-line. You will then print it out for your application packet, use black ink to sign the application. Your entire signature must fit inside the box.
  - Be sure to enter your name EXACTLY as it is in your passport.
  - You will need a U.S. mailing address that is not Sarah Lawrence College. If you give a friend's or relative's address, please make sure that your name is on the mailbox.
  - Item # 21.a – type your I-94 number
  - Item # 27 Eligibility Category: **(c) (3) (B)** is the code for Post-Completion OPT
- ❑ There is a required fee of **\$410**. Make the check or money order payable to: **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**; write "USCIS I-765" in the memo line of the check. (See sample at: [https://my.slc.edu/International\\_Students/Employment-How to write a check](https://my.slc.edu/International_Students/Employment-How_to_write_a_check) on how to write a check)
- ❑ **Make photocopies of all of your I-20s** (pages 1 & 2) issued to you since you first entered in F-1 status, including previous schools (single-sided copies). If you do not have all of your previous I-20s, you should request copies from your international student adviser or from your previous schools.
- ❑ **Make a photocopy of your passport** including the photo, biographical information, expiration date, and visa page.
- ❑ **Two U.S. passport-style photos**. The USCIS requires that the photos meet the specifications for the full frontal/passport type and not be more than 30 days old when the application is filed. Write your name lightly on the back of each picture in pencil. Do not use passport photos from your home country. Only submit U.S. style passport photos obtained within the United States.
- ❑ If you have previously done OPT, include photocopies of any previous EAD cards.

**\*NOTE: Make sure to bring all the required documents to the meeting, otherwise we will not be able to submit the OPT request. See the checklist.**

# Request Form for Post-Completion OPT (after completion of degree)

Fill in this form, print and give to DSO/PDSP at the time of your appointment.

Family Name: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

SLC ID# \_\_\_\_\_ SLC Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

*Once submitted, requested dates cannot be changed. You cannot redeem OPT time even if you don't work. The start date must be within the 60-day period following completion of the program end date.*

*If you have ever been issued an EAD for OPT before, please let your International Student Adviser know.*

1) I would like to work from (mm/dd/yy) \_\_\_\_\_ to (mm/dd/yy) \_\_\_\_\_

**Disregard #2 and #3 if you do not yet have a job/position.**

2) Student's remarks (describe how the employment is related to your area of study):

\_\_\_\_\_

3) Employer's information **(if applicable)**:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_  
Last Name First Name

Telephone #: \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

4) Expected date of graduation: \_\_\_\_\_

5) Registrar's verification that student is on track for graduation: \_\_\_\_\_ (Required for U  
(210 Westlands)

*I have read and understood the instructions for the OPT application and I accept full responsibility for completing and submitting the correct paperwork for this F-1 benefit.*

Student's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_