

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

Optional Practical Training is temporary employment authorization that allows F-1 students to secure practical training directly related to their major area of study. There are three types of OPT: pre-completion OPT (OPT done prior fulfilling all graduation requirements and while enrolled full-time); post-completion OPT (OPT completed after all requirements for graduation have been met) and 17 month STEM OPT (associate's degree students are ineligible for STEM OPT). All OPT requests must be submitted in writing and approved and recommended by the DSO in SEVIS.

Who is eligible for OPT?

To be eligible for OPT, an F-1 student must have completed at least one full academic year of study (full-time enrollment in the fall and spring semesters) and work in a position directly related to their course of study. A student studying English in an intensive English language training program is not eligible for practical training. Students applying for pre-completion OPT must be in good academic standing per SOAP (Standards of Academic Progress) guidelines. F-1 students are allowed 12 months of full-time OPT at each educational level (associates, bachelor, masters, and doctorate). OPT may be granted for either part-time (*maximum* of 20 hours per week) or full-time (*more than* 20 hours per week) employment and may be used during the following time periods as indicated:

- During the summer term (or annual vacation) – part-time or full-time
- During the academic year – part-time only
- After completion of all degree requirements - full-time only

F-1 students do not need to have a job before applying for OPT but are required to be employed within 90 calendar days of the OPT start date. Application for OPT may be submitted up to 90 days in advance of the graduation or completion date, including 60 days after graduation (also known as the 60 day grace period). The OPT start date is chosen by the applicant, but the dates cannot be changed once the application is processed by USCIS. OPT is obtained through USCIS (US Citizenship and Immigration Services); a filing fee and Employment Authorization Document (EAD card) are required.

What is pre-completion OPT?

Pre-completion OPT is OPT “authorized to be worked before the student's program end date. Students with approved pre-completion OPT may work up to 20 hours per week while school is in session. Students who are eligible to register for the next term, and who plan to do so, may have approval to work full-time when school is not in session” (SEVP OPT Policy Guidance 3.2.1-2).

Students must remain enrolled in a full course of study during pre-completion OPT. Students may apply for pre-completion OPT “up to 90 days before being enrolled for one full academic year, provided that the period of employment will not start prior to the completion of the full academic year” (8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(11)(i)(B)(1)).

Students are allowed 12 months of OPT at each educational level; the time worked during pre-completion OPT counts towards the 12 month total and is deducted at a rate of 50 percent. For example, if a student work six months pre-completion OPT; they will have taken away three months of post-completion OPT. Only nine months of post-completion OPT would then be available. ECC encourages students to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of completing pre-completion OPT while maintaining a full course of study.

What is post-completion OPT?

Post-completion OPT is granted to students who will work after completion of a course of study. Students may file for post-completion OPT up to 90 days before the program completion date and before the end of the student's program completion grace period (60 days after degree completion). A student must file for OPT within 30 days of the DSO's recommendation in SEVIS. Students should apply for OPT before completion of coursework. The application for OPT must arrive at the USCIS office before the 60 day grace period is over. The OPT start date must begin within the grace period (i.e. within 60 days of graduation) and cannot be changed once processed. Post-completion OPT requires that you work at least 20 hours or more per week.

Important reminders about OPT:

- Terminate all on campus employment
 - You may only work until the last day of the term in which you complete your degree requirements. You cannot be engaged in on-campus employment and OPT at the same time.
- Verify completion of all degree requirements
 - All degree requirements need to be completed before beginning post-completion OPT.
 - If degree requirements are not finished, post-completion OPT employment cannot begin until the degree requirements are completed. Any OPT employment time already granted by USCIS will be lost.
- Verify your mailing address
 - Your home address needs to be valid for at least 90 days after filing the application to avoid the return of the application by USCIS. The college address may be used if you are unsure of an address change. You are required to inform ECC of any address or phone number changes within 10 days. USCIS requires you to update this information with the Center Global Engagement to maintain your immigration status while on OPT.
- Be aware of travel risks
 - You should not travel outside the United States (U.S.) until receiving the EAD card from USCIS. USCIS may consider pending applications to be abandoned if the applicant departs the U.S before receiving the EAD card.
 - For travel outside the U.S. after receiving the EAD card, you must have the following documents in your possession to be granted re-entry to the U.S.: a letter from your employer verifying employment, latest pay stub, a valid passport, valid F-1 visa, and a valid I-20 document with a travel signature that is less than one year old. Note you cannot travel outside the U.S. without a job offer that is verifiable through your employer.
 - If you travel outside the U.S. and your F-1 visa is not valid, you must apply for one at the U.S. Embassy in your home country. Please note that it may be difficult to obtain a new F-1 visa if degree requirements are already completed and the sole reason for returning to the U.S. is to complete OPT.
- Keep in contact with the Center for Global Engagement
 - You are still considered a student at ECC while engaging in OPT. It is your responsibility to ensure your contact information is up to date with ECC.
 - You are required to notify the Center for Global Engagement of your planned departure date upon completion of OPT.
- Unemployment while on OPT
 - You must not be unemployed for more than 90 days while on OPT or you will be considered out of status. USCIS has allowed volunteering on OPT as long as the work is directly related to your major.



Optional Practical Training Request Form and Checklist

Federal regulations allow for an F-1 student in good standing to engage in Optional Practical Training upon meeting certain eligibility requirements. All OPT must be recommended by a DSO at Elgin Community College and all work done on OPT must be directly related to your major. Please complete the following form to apply for OPT and bring the required documents to your appointment with the DSO.

Name: _____	Student ID: _____
<i>Last</i> <i>First</i> <i>Middle</i>	
Address: _____	City: _____
State: _____ Zip Code: _____	Phone: _____
Email: _____	Start Date at ECC: _____
Program of Study: _____	Anticipated Graduation Date at ECC: _____
Type of OPT Requested: _____	_____
OPT Requested Start Date: _____	

OPT Checklist:

1. The OPT application process involves both ECC and United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and can take 3-5 months. OPT applications must be received in a specific time frame, and the application can be rather complex. You must be physically present in the U.S. when your application is received by USCIS. Schedule an appointment to meet with the Center for Global Engagement and bring the following documents:
 - Completed Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization. The Form I-765 and instructions are available on the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Web site (www.uscis.gov) under Immigration Forms. When completing the I-765, mark the proper eligibility code at item 20: (c)(3)(A) for pre-completion OPT or (c)(3)(B) for standard post-completion OPT. You should complete a hard copy of this form even if you plan to file online as it will be helpful to you as you e-file.
 - Provide a written letter to the DSO with a description of how your practical training opportunity relates to your major area of study. This letter will be reviewed and retained by the DSO.
 - A written letter from your academic advisor indicating your current academic status and the expected date of completion of studies. Please request this letter at least 10 business days prior to your DSO appointment.
 - Printout of electronic I-94 record (<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/>) or copy of paper Form I-94 (both sides).
 - Photocopies of the passport pages that contain: name, photograph, passport number, passport expiration date, birth information and pages showing any amendments such as name changes, corrections, etc.
 - Photocopy of most recent visa used to enter the U.S. (even if it is now expired).
 - Photocopies of all previously issued I-20 documents.
 - Photocopy of INS Notice of Action approving change of status to F-1 international student status (if applicable).

- Photocopies of all previous EAD cards.
 - Two U.S. passport photos, taken within the past 30 days. USCIS Instructions for Form I-765 state: "You must submit two identical color passport-style photographs of yourself taken recently. The photos must have a white to off-white background, be printed on thin paper with a glossy finish, and be unmounted and unretouched. The two identical passport-style photos must be 2 by 2 inches. The photos must be in color with a full face, frontal view, on a white to off-white background. Head height should measure 1 to 1 3/8 inches from the top of your hair to the bottom of your chin, and eye height is between 1 1/8 to 1 3/8 inches from the top of your eyes to the bottom of photo. Your head must be bare unless you are wearing headwear as required by a religious denomination of which you are a member. Using a pencil or felt pen, lightly print your name and A-Number (if any) on the back of the photo." If you are e-filing, you must either scan them or take a picture with your phone. See instructions in the online I-765 application.
 - USCIS Fee. See the USCIS I-765 page at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765> for the current filing fee. If you e-file the form I-765, the online form will automatically calculate the correct fee and you will pay online when you submit the e-filed application. You must pay with a valid credit or debit card, or provide your bank routing and checking account numbers to have money taken directly from your U.S. bank account. If you file by mail, Check/Money Order should be made payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security" with SEVIS number in the memo line. Money orders can be purchased at banks, post office, and some local grocery stores. Make sure a name and address are printed on the check. If the address has changed, that is fine. Do not use "temporary checks" often issued by the bank when opening a new account. These checks have no name or address in the upper left-hand corner. For credit card payments, submit form G-1450 from USCIS. You may only use a credit card account with a U.S. billing address—no foreign billing address is allowed.
2. At the appointment with the Center for Global Engagement, the DSO will review your application and discuss what type of work you will be engaging in, or wish to engage in, on OPT. If OPT is recommended, the DSO will issue a new I-20 recommending OPT.
 3. Assemble your materials with a cover letter and your new I-20 recommending OPT.
 4. Make two photocopies of all materials. The Center for Global Engagement will keep a copy for your student file.
 5. File the application with USCIS in a timely fashion. USCIS must receive your complete OPT application no later than 30 days after the original OPT I-20 issue date on page 1 of the I-20. Mail to the correct address using an approved method of delivery to USCIS. Check <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses> for the most current address. Do not send your passport or original I-94 card to USCIS. Forms may be submitted using any form of USPS delivery or an approved courier service. Acceptable courier services include FedEx, DHL and UPS. Due to delays with USPS deliveries, ECC recommends you use another approved service if you mail your application.

If you plan to e-file your application, visit <https://myaccount.uscis.gov/> and create an account. Follow the instructions provided for filing your application. The Center for Global Engagement is unable to file your application for you online.

6. Processing time with USCIS has ranged from 3-5 months. However, during peak season, it may take longer. Employment may not begin until EAD card is received from USCIS.



By signing below, I affirm I understand the following:

- All students doing OPT are still considered to be an F-1 international student under the jurisdiction of the institution that issued the I-20 for OPT permission. Any changes of name, address or any other changes in plans (i.e. quit or change job, transfer to another school, change immigration status, etc.) must be reported to the Center for Global Engagement.
- Any travel outside of the U.S. for any reason during OPT requires an I-20 travel signature from the DSO.
- For pre-completion OPT, you can file the Form I-765 up to 90 days before being enrolled for a full academic year, as long as the OPT will not begin until after you have completed a full academic year. If you have been enrolled for a full academic year, you can file the Form I-765 up to 120 days prior to the requested OPT start date.
- For post-completion OPT, you can file the Form I-765 up to 90 days before your program end date and no later than 60 days after your program end date.
- The Form I-765 must be received by USCIS within 30 days of the date your advisor made the OPT recommendation in SEVIS (see page 1 of the printed Form I-20 for the date).
- If you move and do not provide USCIS with your new address, your EAD will be returned to USCIS. To change your address, submit an online Form AR-11 to USCIS, and ask the Center for Global Engagement to update SEVIS.
- Once you receive your EAD card, please email a copy to international@elgin.edu.
- Your OPT employment must be directly related to your field of study and cannot begin until you have the EAD card in hand (and the start date has arrived). F-1 status is dependent upon full-time employment or volunteer service while on post-completion OPT. You cannot accrue more than 90 days of unemployment while on post-completion OPT. If you are close to 90 days, consult with your DSO.
- You will need to continue to update the Center for Global Engagement with address changes and changes in employment while on post-completion OPT.

I certify that I have read this form and the instructions and certify that all information is correct to the best of my knowledge. I understand that information and processes related to OPT filings with USCIS may change without notice, and that I am alone responsible for the authenticity and proper filing of my application. I understand that ECC will, if approved by a DSO, recommend OPT in SEVIS and generate a new I-20 to include with my application. I understand that ECC is not responsible for the filing of my application or filing fee, the inappropriate or late filing of an application, missing components from my application, delays in mail service or USCIS processing, and that any review of OPT documents does not constitute legal advice or approval of my application. I understand that I may contact a licensed immigration attorney for additional questions regarding OPT.

Student Signature

Date

This information is subject to change without notice.