

POST-COMPLETION OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a temporary work authorization issued by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to eligible F-1 students. The employment must relate directly to a student's major field of study. F-1 student may be eligible for up to 12 months of OPT per degree level.

What is Post-Completion Optional Practical Training?

- This is temporary employment authorization that takes place after the completion of your course of study.
- The employment must be directly related to your course of study and commensurate with your education level.
- You may be eligible for up to 12 months of OPT per degree level. You may be eligible for another 12 months of OPT when you complete a higher education level.
- OPT must be authorized by USCIS. You must receive an EAD card from USCIS before you begin OPT employment.

Who is eligible to apply for Post-Completion OPT?

- An F-1 student who has completed full-time enrollment for at least one Fall and one Spring semester (one academic year).
- An F-1 student who has maintained status for at least one academic year.
- Students who are authorized for full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) for 12 months or more are **not** eligible to apply for OPT.
- Students who have used all their allowed OPT time at their current degree level are **not** eligible to apply for OPT. This includes students who were authorized for Pre-Completion OPT and those who participated in OPT for a different degree at the same degree level.
- Students who leave the U.S. after completion of their program but before applying for OPT are **not** eligible to apply for OPT if they re-enter the U.S.

What are the regulations regarding OPT?

- You cannot accumulate more than 90 days of unemployment from the start-date listed on your EAD card
- You are required to report any changes in employment, addresses, and contact information to the SEVP Portal and your Designated School Official (DSO).
- Travel Endorsement Signatures are only valid for 6 months instead of 12.
- Your employment while on OPT must be related to your field of study.
- Ask a DSO if you have any questions about the federal regulations regarding OPT.

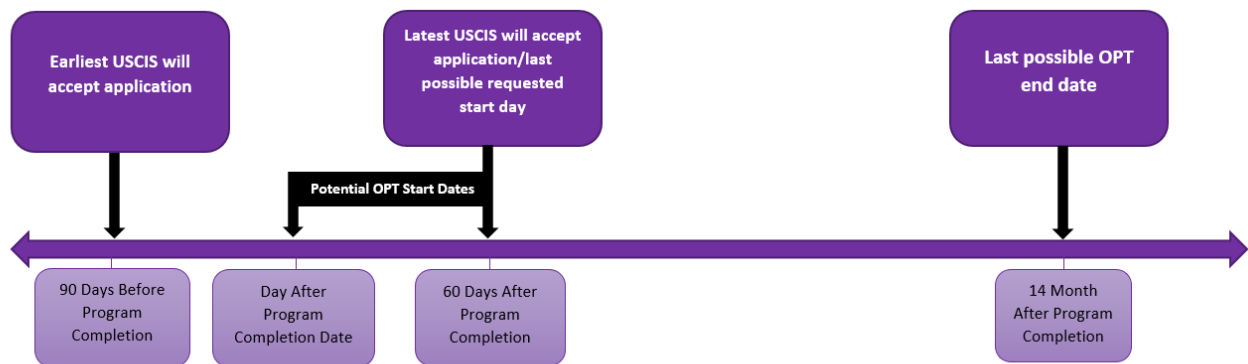
Tips

- **Plan ahead!** OPT authorization can take on average three months or more to obtain.
- **You do not need a job offer to apply for OPT.** You can actively seek employment and accept employment while waiting for your EAD card. However you cannot start before you have your card and until after the date of authorization granted by USCIS.
- **You must have completed two consecutive long semesters at Tarleton to be eligible to apply.**
- **You may apply for post-completion OPT as early as 90 days before you graduate or as late as 60 days after your graduation date.**

- **While you are engaged in post-completion OPT you are still considered to be in F-1 student status.**
 - To maintain your status you cannot accumulate more than 90 days of unemployment from the start date listed on your EAD, if you do, you must immediately leave the United States.
 - You must also report any change in employment or address to a Designated School Official within 10 days and update the SEVP Portal; otherwise you are violating your status.

Important Dates

The earliest you can apply for post-completion OPT is 90 days before your program completion date. Your OPT start date can be as early as the day after your completion date. The last day you can file for OPT is 60 days after your program end date. There are a number of figures you will want to consider when choosing an OPT start date. They include your program end date, employment plans, and USCIS processing times. It can take 3 months or more for USCIS to process your application. Apply early and keep the processing time in mind when selecting your OPT dates.



Determining a requested start date that works best for you can be a difficult decision. If you pick an early date and it takes a while for you to find and begin a job, you will be accumulating days of unemployment. On the other hand if you pick a later date and get a job offer quickly, you will not be able to begin until your start date and you have the EAD card. Also keep the estimated processing time in mind when deciding a date, especially if you are applying later. Contact immigration@tarleton.edu if you have questions regarding choosing a start and end date.

Note: Requested start and end dates are not always the same as the start and end dates granted by USCIS. The dates stated on your EAD card are the dates of your OPT authorization even if they are different than the dates you requested.

How to Apply for OPT

What You Need to Apply

Prepare the Following Documents:

- Graduation Confirmation confirming your major, current degree level, and graduation semester.
 - Undergraduate Students: Request this from the Registrar's Office
 - Graduate Students: Request this from the Graduate Office
- Copy of your valid passport (photocopy of bio page, renewal documentation if original has expired, and pages showing amendments such as name change, corrections, etc.)
- Copy of your most recent Form I-94: current electronic version (<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/>) or front and back of paper card
- One 2" x 2" US passport-style photograph of you taken within the last 6 months
- All previously used SEVIS numbers (if applicable)
- Copies of any previously issued EAD cards
- Copy of your new I-20 with OPT recommendation
- Evidence of any previously authorized CPT and the academic level at which it was authorized

Steps to Apply

Step 1: Complete the CANVAS module and take the quiz. You must pass the quiz with a grade of 80 or higher to demonstrate that you understand the process and the rules governing OPT.

Step 2: Fill out the OPT Request and Compliance Form and send it to immigration@tarleton.edu.

Step 3: Collecting the necessary documents (see above).

Step 4: A Designated School Official will review your request and determine your eligibility. If eligible, the DSO will make the recommendation in SEVIS and issue you a new I-20 with the OPT recommendation. Allow 2-3 business days for a DSO to review your eligibility and make the endorsement.

Step 5: Pick up your new I-20 with OPT recommendation. Sign and date the I-20. You will need to upload a copy of your signed I-20 when you file your I-765. If you are at an outreach campus, the I-20 will be sent to your campus's DSO for pick up.

Step 6: Electronically file your I-765 Application for Employment Authorization at <https://www.uscis.gov>. Please refer to the Post-Completion OPT I-765 Filing Checklist for instructions on how to file your I-765 electronically.

Step 7: USCIS will review your application and make their decision. If your application is approved, you will be assigned OPT dates and mailed an EAD card. Keep in mind it can take three months or more for USCIS to adjudicate your request and for you to receive an EAD card.

Step 8: Once you receive your EAD card and your authorized start date has passed you will be able to begin working. Please make a copy of the front and back of your card and send it to immigration@tarleton.edu. We will keep a copy in your file and use it to ensure that SEVIS correctly updated your OPT status.

Step 9: Report changes to your employment, address, etc. to immigration@tarleton.edu and the SEVP Portal. See below for details.

OPT Reporting

While on OPT, you are required to report the following within 10 days:

- Start of Employment
- Changes or Updates to Employment
- Changes of address, email, and other personal information
- Changes to your immigration status

You are required to report your OPT employment or volunteer work within 10 days of your start date and anytime there is a change. Reporting your employment is important because the Department of Homeland Security must verify that you are employed and not in violation of the 90-day unemployment rule. You will need to update your employment details directly to your SEVIS record through the SEVP Portal and notify a Designated School Official by emailing immigration@tarleton.edu. If you decide to return home early and not use some or all of your approved OPT, let us know by contacting immigration@tarleton.edu.

Using the SEVP OPT Portal

The SEVP Portal is a tool that you can use to meet your reporting requirements. Information entered into the SEVP Portal is updated in SEVIS.

- You will receive an email with instructions on creating a portal account once your OPT is approved. Be sure the email used in SEVIS is one that you check frequently. This email will come from do-not-reply.sevp@ice.dhs.gov. Be sure to also check your spam or junk mail folder. If you still do not see it, email immigration@tarleton.edu to have the email sent again.
- Submit your reporting requirements into the Portal as needed.
- SEVP has created an SEVP Portal Help page with instructions on how to use the portal. If you have any questions about the portal or need assistance, call the SEVP Response Center at 703-603-3400.

You are not required to use the SEVP Portal. You may meet your reporting requirements by completing the OPT Employment Reporting Form and emailing it to immigration@tarleton.edu.

Even if you use the SEVP Portal to meet your reporting requirements, notify a Designated School Official by emailing immigration@tarleton.edu so that they can verify that the information was correctly reported to SEVIS.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **What should I do if I have problems with my OPT application?**
If there is an error on your Receipt Notice or EAD, contact USCIS directly to request a correction if there is an error in your date of birth, name, or EAD dates. If you have any questions, please contact immigration@tarleton.edu. If you receive a Request for Evidence (RFE), schedule an appointment with a Designated School Official by emailing immigration@tarleton.edu as soon as possible to review the RFE as this will be time sensitive.
- **Do I have to be in the United States when I apply for OPT?**
Yes, you must be physically present in the United States when you apply for OPT and when USCIS receives your application.
- **I have submitted my OPT application before graduation. Can I travel outside of the U.S. while I wait to receive the EAD card?**
Tarleton Immigration does not recommend international travel after graduation while your OPT is pending. Traveling during this period can jeopardize the approval of your application. We recommend discussing your travel plans with a Designated School Official before departing the U.S.
- **What documents do I need to re-enter the U.S. while on OPT?**
 - Original I-20 with OPT recommendation with a travel endorsement less than six months old by the date you return.
 - Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card from USCIS
 - Offer of Employment Letter
 - This letter from your employer must include the dates of your employment, a description of your duties, your salary, physical location where you will be

working, and number of hours of work per week. You should also be prepared to discuss how this job experience relates to your major field of study.

- If your employer is sponsoring you for a work visa, this information should not be included in the letter for travel while on OPT. Any mention of plans to change visa status could be interpreted as a misrepresentation of your intentions in the U.S. by a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer.
 - Valid F-1 visa
 - Valid Passport
 - I-94
- **The F-1 visa in my passport has expired and I need to travel out of the U.S. while on OPT. Do I need to get a new visa at an embassy?**

If you are going to Canada, Mexico, or any other continuous territories (except for Cuba) and staying for less than 30 days, you can re-enter the U.S. on your expired F-1 visa, a valid passport, EAD card, and an I-20 with a valid travel signature. This process is called Automatic Visa Revalidation

If you are traveling elsewhere and your F-1 visa is expired, you must visit a U.S. embassy or consulate to apply for a new F-1 visa.

- **In what ways is my application to the embassy or consulate for a new visa affected by being on post-completion OPT?**

Many Tarleton students successfully travel and renew their F-1 visas while on OPT. However, the risk of denial for an F-1 visa renewal while on OPT is slightly higher than when you were in an academic program. The fact that the focus on your stay in the U.S. while on OPT is working rather than going to school could be seen as an avenue for an adjustment of status to permanent residency. As the F-1 student visa requires that applicants have intentions to return to their home country upon completion of their academics, the visa application could be denied if the embassy official is not convinced of your intention to return home. During your visa interview it is important to demonstrate that your intent still matches the purpose of your non-immigration F-1 visa category.

- **How do I get a travel endorsement signature while on OPT?**

For international travel, the travel endorsement signature on page 2 of your I-20 should be less than six months old by the date of your return to the United States. This is different from when you were an enrolled student and the travel signature was valid for 12 months. If you live around a Tarleton campus, you may visit a Designated School Official during office hours to request a travel signature. Email immigration@tarleton.edu to schedule an appointment.

If you are unable to come to a Tarleton campus, you may request a new I-20 with a travel endorsement signature by emailing immigration@tarleton.edu.

- **What if I move before my EAD card is mailed?**

When applying for OPT, choose a mailing address that will be valid 4-5 months in the future. If you plan on moving sooner than that, you may choose to have your EAD card sent to a friend, relative. USPS will NOT forward federal mail. If you are having your card sent to someone other than yourself, be sure to fill in the "In Care of Name" section on the Form I-765 (Part 2, Item Number 5.a.)

If you have already filed your OPT packet, you will need to submit a change of address on <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do>. However, there is no guarantee that the change of address request will be processed in time.

After OPT

USCIS authorized OPT employment up to the end date stated on your EAD card. However, this does not mean that your ability to work legally will not be ended prior to that date.

Your OPT authorization automatically ends if:

- You accumulate more than 90 days of unemployment.
- Your SEVIS record is transferred to another school.

- Your status changes

If your OPT authorization ends and have not received a different type of employment authorization, you must stop working immediately. Continuing to work after your OPT authorization is terminated is a violation of status.

After your OPT you might:

- **Return to your home country**

If you finish your authorized period of OPT without accumulating over 90 days of unemployment, you have a 60 day grace period that you can use to travel before you return home. Once you leave the country you abandon the rest of your grace period and will not be able to enter on your F-1 visa.

If you accumulate more than 90 days of unemployment, you should return home as soon as possible.

- **Obtain a new I-20 and begin another academic program**

If you begin a new program before the OPT end date stated on your EAD card, your EAD authorization is automatically cancelled once your SEVIS record is released to the transfer-in school. Working after your SEVIS record is released is a violation of status.

If you begin a new program after the OPT end date stated on your EAD card, your SEVIS record must be transferred within your 60-day grace period. You must begin your studies during the next available term or within 5 months from your OPT end date, whichever comes first. If you are unable to start your new program within 5 months of your OPT end date, you must exit the country and return with a new I-20 for initial attendance no more than 30 days before the start of your new academic program.

- **Do the STEM OPT 24-month extension**

Certain STEM majors are eligible for a 24 month OPT extension. If you believe that your major qualifies for the extension and would like to apply contact immigration@tarleton.edu before your current OPT authorization ends. You can apply up to 90 days before the end of your current authorization up until the end of your current authorization. Be sure to allow plenty of time for processing.

- **Change visa status**

You might change visa status while on OPT or after. For example, your employer might choose to sponsor you for the H1-B visa. If you change visa types let a DSO know by contacting immigration@tarleton.edu.