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I. The Basics of Post-Completion OPT

How can I qualify for OPT?
You must have been enrolled full-time for at least one academic year.

You should plan to work at a job related to your major. You do not have to have a job offer to apply for OPT. (If you are applying for pre-completion of studies OPT, it is wise that you be as sure as possible of a job so that you do not waste any of your 12 months of OPT time.)

How long does OPT allow me to work in the U.S.?
F-1 students are eligible for up to 12 months or OPT per degree level. An additional 24-month extension may be possible for certain majors. Please see the STEM OPT FAQs for more information.

If I applied for Pre-Completion OPT, will I still have 12 months or Post-Completion OPT after I graduate?
If you were authorized for Pre-Completion OPT, that time will be deducted from the 12 months you have available for Post-Completion OPT. If you used Pre-Completion OPT part-time, it will have no impact on your 12 months Post-Completion OPT.

How does Curricular Practical Training (CPT) factor into OPT?
If you have already used 12 months of full-time Curricular Practical Training, you are not eligible for any OPT.

Do I have to have a job in order to apply for OPT?
No, OPT is not employer specific. You can apply for OPT prior to having a job and you can change employers while on OPT.

What is my visa status while I am on OPT?
While you are on OPT, you are still in F-1 status.
Does my employer have to be part of the E-Verify program?
No, your employer does not have to be part of the E-verify program when on Post or Pre-Completion OPT. E-Verify is only a requirement of the 24-Month STEM OPT extension. Please see the STEM OPT FAQs for more information.

What type of work am I limited to once my OPT is approved?
OPT employment must be directly related to your major field of study. The U.S. government recommends that you retain proof of each job you have worked including: the position you held, the duration of that position, the job title, contact information for your supervisor or manager, and a description of the work. Please be sure to obtain this documentation for your records.

If it is not clear from your job description that your work is directly related to your degree (for which you received OPT), it is highly recommended that you obtain a signed letter from your hiring official, supervisor, or manager stating how your degree is directly related to the work you perform. It is your responsibility to be able to prove to the U.S. government the direct relationship between your work and your major area of study.

If I used my post-completion OPT for another degree program, am I eligible for an additional 12 months of OPT?
Yes, but only at a higher degree level. For example, you completed a bachelor’s degree and used OPT. You would be eligible for OPT at the Master’s and/or PhD level.

I returned home before my OPT authorization expired. I plan to stay in my home country for now. Can I save that unused time for use at a later time?
No, once you have been approved for OPT, there is no recapture of unused OPT time.

When can I start working on OPT?
You may only work after you have received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and the effective state date on the EAD has been reached.

Can I work before I receive my EAD?
No. If you work without proper work authorization, it is a violation of your F-1 status. It may affect your ability to obtain immigration benefits or legally remain in the U.S.

II. OPT Application Process

In general, how early can I apply for OPT?
Post-Completion: You may apply no earlier than 90 days before completing your program of study.

Pre-Completion: You may apply no earlier than 90 days before the requested start date.

Can I apply for Post-Completion OPT during my 60-day grace period?
Yes. However, if you apply within the 60-day period after completion, you are not likely to receive your full 12 month OPT benefit due to USCIS processing times.
What is the application process?
Complete and submit the [OPT Request Form](mailto:OPT.Request.Form@stevens.edu) to ISSS.Application@stevens.edu or in person. Make sure you are cleared for graduation with the Registrar’s Office before submitting your application.

ISSS will issue you a new Form I-20 if you qualify for OPT. The new I-20 will have a recommendation for OPT.

You will receive your new OPT I-20 from ISSS. Sign the I-20 and make a copy for your application. Mail your application to USCIS according to the instructions on the [OPT Application Checklist](mailto:OPT.Application.Checklist@stevens.edu).

As long as you submit all of the documentation listed on the OPT Application Checklist, USCIS will adjudicate your application, which takes approximately 90 days. If USCIS has any questions, they will send you a request for information/evidence.

If your application is approved, USCIS will mail you an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) for, which will list the start and end dates you are authorized to work on OPT.

How do I fill out the I-765?
Please refer to the [Sample I-765](mailto:Sample.I-765@stevens.edu) on our webpage.

Make sure the address you put on the I-765 form will be valid when you receive the card. USCIS will mail the card to the address you listed. The card cannot be “forwarded” to another address by the United States Postal Service.

If your card is lost in the mail, you will need to file a new I-765 and pay a new fee. Please consider the detail of your address carefully.

What documentation must I submit to ISSS, and which documents must I submit to USCIS?
Please refer to the [OPT Application Checklist](mailto:OPT.Application.Checklist@stevens.edu) for a complete list of documents to submit to ISSS and USCIS.

How long will it take to receive my I-20 with the OPT recommendation from ISSS?
Please consult our website for processing times.

The OPT Request Form asks for a Start Date. How do I select one?
You need to select the start date for your OPT. The earliest day you can select is the day after the end date of your program. The latest day you can select is 60 days after your program end date.

If your card is processed after the start date you selected, USCIS will adjust the start date. USCIS will also adjust the end date accordingly, but the end date will be no later than 14 months after your program ends. You may also find our [OPT Timeline Handout](mailto:OPT.Timeline.Handout@stevens.edu) useful.

I am doing a CPT in my final semester. How can I start OPT with the employer right after my CPT?
While CPT is authorized by the ISSS staff at Stevens, OPT is granted by USCIS. It can take 90 days or more to receive an EAD card for OPT. We recommend that you have an honest conversation with your employer about the timing of your OPT. If you complete a CPT employment on the last day of the semester, and you do not have an EAD card for OPT, you should not continue to work or even be paid with that employer once the CPT ends. You
should only commence working with the company once you have your EAD card and the date on the card has been reached.

The U.S. government recommends that you retain proof of each job you have worked, including the duration of that position so be sure to obtain this documentation for your records.

**How long after receiving my Form I-20 must I mail my application to USCIS?**

USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of the date your OPT was recommended in SEVIS. Since this date is not listed on your I-20, please make sure USCIS receives your application within 25 days of the date the I-20 was issued (the date next to the ISSS staff member’s name on the first page of your new I-20). If you are too close to the deadline to be sure the application will arrive in time, please contact your ISSS advisor (listed at the ISSS website) for assistance.

**How long will it take USCIS to process my application? Can I expedite the process?**

The average length of time for USCIS to adjudicate an application is 90 days but sometimes it takes longer. USCIS does not typically expedite applications. However, you can review the process for expediting at this website: [https://www.uscis.gov/forms/expedite-criteria](https://www.uscis.gov/forms/expedite-criteria)

**How can I stay updated with ISSS about OPT changes?**

We strongly encourage all students to sign up for the Stevens ISSS OPT List Serve to stay abreast of changes and updates to the OPT and STEM OPT application process. To sign up, please go to [https://lists.stevens.edu/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/international_student-opt](https://lists.stevens.edu/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/international_student-opt), enter your e-mail address/name in the appropriate boxes, create a password; then hit “Subscribe.”

### III. Requirements While on OPT

**How many hours per week must I work?**

You must work a minimum of twenty (20) hours per week to be considered employed.

**Does work have to be paid while on Post-Completion OPT?**

No, unpaid employment is permitted on post-completion OPT. Students are allowed to intern or volunteer in a position that is directly related to their program of study.

**Can I volunteer for a company until they decide to hire me?**

Please be cautious of volunteer work. There are labor laws (separate from immigration laws) that prohibit volunteering at for-profit entities. You can find more information here: [http://webapps.dol.gov/elaws/whd/flsa/docs/volunteers.asp](http://webapps.dol.gov/elaws/whd/flsa/docs/volunteers.asp)

**Can I change jobs on OPT?**

Yes, you can change jobs on OPT as long as the employment is directly related to your major/coursework. You should submit your [OPT Employment Update Form](#) to ISSS within 10 days of the change.
How many days of unemployment am I allowed on Post-Completion OPT?
You are only allowed a total of 90 days of unemployment in the whole 12 month period.

What happens if I exceed the 90 days of unemployment?
After 90 days of unemployment, you are out of status. You should depart the U.S. on or before or on the 90th day of unemployment.

While I am on OPT, can I enroll in another degree-seeking program?
No, you cannot enroll in a degree-seeking program while on OPT. If a student decides to begin a new full-time program during OPT, he/she must get a new I-20 from the school and forfeit the remainder of his/her OPT time, depending on when the new program begins. If you start a program at another school, you must request your SEVIS record be transferred to that school.

IV. Options After Post-Completion OPT

How long can I stay in the US after my OPT ends?
You have a 60-day grace period following the end date of your OPT if you remained in status during the OPT period.

Can I extend my OPT?
You may be eligible to apply for the 24-month STEM OPT extension if your major is qualifying STEM degree. For more information, please see the STEM OPT FAQ or the ISSS Website.

Can I continue to study after my Post-Completion OPT ends?
If you have been accepted to another degree program at another institution, your SEVIS record may be eligible for transfer to that institution if your new program begins within 5 months of your post-completion OPT end date. For more information about transferring your SEVIS record, please see the Transfer Out Request Form.

If you plan to continue your studies at Stevens, your Immigration Advisor will issue you a new I-20 issued for that degree program. Please see the Change of Level Information and Checklist for more information.

V. Travel on OPT

Can I travel outside the U.S. while my OPT application is pending?
It depends. Before you graduate, during your program, you can consider traveling. However, since you are enrolled in courses at Stevens, you should only have a brief trip so you do not miss classes. You should travel with proof of enrollment, your latest I-20 with a valid travel signature, valid passport, and valid F-1 visa.

After your program is over (that is, the program end date on your I-20 has arrived), you need to be cautious of traveling. We recommend that you travel with the following documents: I-20 with valid travel signature, valid passport, and valid F-1 visa, your EAD card and a job offer letter or a letter verifying your job on letterhead from your employer.
Please note: we do not recommend you travel after your program end date unless you have the EAD card in your possession, as well as the job offer letter or employment letter.

In most cases, students on Pre-Completion OPT are free to travel outside of the U.S. while their OPT application is pending. More information about travel can be found on the Travel Information section on the website.

My application has been approved and I have received my EAD. What documents do I need for re-entering the U.S? You should have the following documents: I-20 with travel signature that is less than 6 months old, valid passport, valid visa, letter of employment/offer letter, EAD card.

More information about travel can be found on the Travel Information section on the website.

V. Timeline Graph

Post-Completion OPT Timeline

- **90 Days**
  - The earliest USCIS will accept an OPT application is 90 days before your program end date.
  - ISSS will accept your OPT application materials 100 days before your program end date.

- **Program End Date**
  - Last day of the final exam period

- **60 Days**
  - The latest USCIS will accept an OPT application is 60 days after your program end date.
  - The requested start date for post-completion OPT must be a date within the 60 days after your program end date.

- **25 Days**
  - USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of when the OPT recommendation was made in SEVIS. For timely filing, please send your application to USCIS within 25 days of the date listed on the first page of the Form I-20.