

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a type of work authorization to allow F-1 students to gain experience directly related to their major field of study. Students may apply for OPT authorization during their program (pre-completion OPT), after completion of their program (post-completion OPT), or a combination of both. OPT is recommended by the International Student Advisor, but students must apply to USCIS by filing Form I-765. OPT authorization is approved or denied by USCIS and Saint Paul College has no influence on USCIS decisions.

Below you will find more information on OPT eligibility, requesting an OPT recommendation, and fulfilling employment reporting responsibilities once approved for OPT.

OPT Eligibility

Requirements:

- Have completed 2 semesters of full-time enrollment while in F-1 status at Saint Paul College
- Be in valid F-1 status at the time of the OPT request
- Have not exceeded 12 months of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) authorization or 12 months of previous full-time Optional Practical Training (OPT) authorization at the same degree level

If all of the above conditions are met, you may be eligible for OPT.

Types of OPT

- **Pre-Completion OPT**
 - OPT prior to the completion of your program, while you are still enrolled. A student on pre-completion OPT is authorized for part-time employment (20 hours/week) in their field of study, while enrolled in a full course of study. Students who are not eligible for CPT and wish to complete an internship in their major field during their program may want to consider this option.
- **Post-Completion OPT**
 - OPT after the completion of your program. A student on post-completion OPT must work full-time (40 hours/week) in their field of study, after completion of their program. Students approved for post-completion OPT have 90 days from the OPT start date to secure employment in their field of study and begin working.

Students have 12 months of total OPT eligibility per academic level, between both pre- and post-completion OPT.

Students must meet with the International Student Advisor before applying for OPT.

Requesting an OPT Recommendation

You do not need an internship offer to apply for OPT. It can often take USCIS several months to adjudicate an I-765 OPT application, so it is important to plan ahead, and apply **early**.

For post-completion OPT:

- The *earliest* you can apply is 90 days before the program end date on your I-20.
- The *latest* you can apply is 60 days after the program end date on your I-20.

- *USCIS cannot receive your application on day 61 – your application will be denied, and your \$410 fee will not be refunded.*

Step 1. Meet with International Student Advisor

Schedule a meeting with the International Student Advisor through [Navigate](#) to discuss OPT and formally request an OPT recommendation.

At this meeting, the International Student Advisor will review your major, coursework, SEVIS record, past CPT and OPT, and determine your eligibility for OPT. If you are applying for post-completion OPT, you must have submitted your graduation application and have been cleared to graduate before the recommendation can be entered in SEVIS and printed on your I-20.

Step 2. Receive OPT I-20

If you are eligible for OPT, the International Student Advisor will provide you with an I-20 with an OPT recommendation on page 2. You must receive the I-20 with the OPT recommendation before submitting your application, Form I-765, to USCIS. Once the recommendation is printed on your I-20, **you must file Form I-765 within 30 days.**

Review the guide [Form I-765 \(OPT Application\) Overview](#).

After Form I-765 Filing and OPT Approval

1. Receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card from USCIS. Review it to ensure all information is correct. Send a copy of your EAD card to the International Student Advisor once you receive it.

You are eligible to start OPT employment related to your major during the USCIS approved dates on your EAD card.

2. Fulfill employment reporting requirements. Students approved for OPT must find and report employment within **90 days** of the OPT authorization start date. You must report employment information through your SEVP Portal Account or to the International Student Advisor within your 90-day unemployment window to fulfill your reporting requirements.

If you are struggling to find OPT employment:

- Utilize Saint Paul College [Career Services](#) resources. Reach out to career.services@saintpaul.edu for support!
- If you are nearing 90 days of unemployment and have not found a job, you *can* do at least 20 hours/week of volunteer work while you continue to find a job. You must still report this volunteer work through your SEVP Portal Account or to the International Student Advisor.

Failure to report OPT employment is a violation of your F-1 status.

Please reach out to the International Student Advisor if you have questions about reporting OPT employment.