Optional Practical Training (OPT) Information, Application Process, and OPT Employment Responsibilities

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 Information and Eligibility Requirements

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
- Post-completion OPT only: have applied to graduate and be cleared for tentative graduation at the end of the semester

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.
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Post-Completion OPT Application Start and End Date Guide

- 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.

You do not need an internship or job 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.

APPLYING FOR OPT

Part 1: Request OPT Recommendation

Step 1. Meet with the 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.

After this meeting, you will need to select the start date of your OPT application. Please review the start and end date guide above for guidance on determining your OPT start date. You will need to provide your requested start date to the International Student Advisor before you receive your OPT 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.
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Part 2: Apply for OPT to USCIS (filing Form I-765)

Please note: It is the student's responsibility to file Form I-765, ensure they understand USCIS requirements, submit correct and valid information, and submit Form I-765 on time. Saint Paul College has no influence over a USCIS decision regarding an OPT application and cannot reverse a decision or guarantee approval. The information provided on this page is a brief overview to help you prepare, and may not be up to date with USCIS requirements.

Step 1. Gather documentation (do this before beginning Form I-765)

- I-94
- Copy of passport photo page
- Copy of F-1 visa or change of status approval notice
- Passport style photo
  - There are many free passport photo cropping websites online. You can take your own passport photo, and upload it to one of these. You can also get a passport photo taken at Walgreens.
- OPT I-20 – all three pages
- Copies of all previous I-20s – all pages
- Copy of Social Security Card (if applicable)
- Copy of previous EAD card (if applicable)
- One copy of any documents you have that have your name and photo:
  - Entry visa stamp with a photo
  - U.S. driver’s license or state ID
  - Saint Paul College Student ID
- $410 payment for I-765 fee

Step 2. File Form I-765 online (apply for OPT to USCIS)

Before you begin, it is important to review filing instructions on the USCIS website: www.uscis.gov/I-765. You will file the Form I-765 online. This will require you to create a USCIS online account.

Watch this helpful video: Filing for OPT Online.

- Pre-completion OPT: you apply as category (C)(3)(A).
- Post-completion OPT: you apply as category (C)(3)(B).

Step 3. Wait for a decision

Once you have submitted your I-765, continue to check your USCIS online account to see where your application is at in the process. Wait for your I-797 Receipt Notice to be mailed to you by USCIS. This can take a few weeks.
Part 3: After OPT Approval (if OPT application is approved by USCIS)


If your OPT is approved, you will be mailed your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card by USCIS. This can take 3 to 4 months. When you receive your EAD card, 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.

Step 2. Look for employment related to your major

If approved for post-completion OPT, you must secure full-time (40 hours/week) employment related to your academic program/major within 90 days of your OPT start date as documented on your EAD card and I-20.

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.

Step 3. Report OPT employment

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.

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

While on OPT, continue to report any address changes to the International Student Advisor. You may change jobs while on OPT, but this change must be reflected in your SEVP Portal Account or to the International Student Advisor.

Step 4. Ending your OPT

You must stop working by the end date on your EAD card and I-20. Your end date stays the same regardless of how many days of the allotted 90 days of unemployment you use.

If you have worked full-time up until the end date of your OPT, you are granted a 60-day grace period after your OPT end date.