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.

NOTE: OPT is not a separate type of visa or status, but an optional benefit for F-1 students. While on OPT, you are still considered to be in F-1 status.

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 (*MOST COMMON*)**
  - 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.

When should you apply 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.*

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**.

When should a requested *start date* for post-completion OPT be?

The *start date* you request for your post-completion OPT can be as soon as the day after you graduate. The start date must be within your 60 day grace period.

For example, if a student graduates on May 15, the earliest requested start date can be May 16. The latest the requested start date can be is July 15. See the timeline on the last page of this document for a visual.

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 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 discuss the start date of your OPT application. 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.

International Student Services
SAINT PAUL COLLEGE

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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.**

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 provide 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
- OPT I-20 – all three pages
- Copies of previous I-20s (all may not be needed, but you should be able to access all of them)
- 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.

Review the "How to Apply for OPT Online to USCIS" presentation linked on the ISS webpage.

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.

After OPT Approval (if OPT application is approved by USCIS)

Step 1. Receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

If your OPT is approved, you will be mailed your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card by USCIS. **This sometimes can take up to 3 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. <u>You are eligible to start OPT employment related to your major during the USCIS approved dates on your EAD card.</u>

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. <u>You must still report this volunteer work through your SEVP Portal Account or to the International Student Advisor.</u>

If you want to know how many days of unemployment you have remaining, contact the International Student Advisor or ISS.

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 or through your SEVP Portal Account. 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.

<u>Important note:</u> you cannot start a new academic program while on post-completion OPT. Starting a new academic program, even if you do not request the transfer of your SEVIS record, will automatically end your OPT and is a violation of F-1 status. Any study while on post-completion OPT should be "incidental study". Contact the International Student Advisor with questions.

Updated: November 2023

Post-completion OPT application timeline

Program Completion Date

(I-20 end date)

USCIS accepts post-completion OPT applications

Not yet eligible to apply for post-completion OPT

Requested OPT start date

No longer eligible to apply for post-completion OPT

90 days

60 days

(grace period)

Post-completion OPT employment timeline

Program Completion Date (I-20 end date)

OPT Start Date (on I-20 and EAD card)

Deadline to secure and report OPT employment

OPT End Date (on I-20 and EAD card)

USCIS accepts post-completion OPT applications

Unemployment "allowance" (time)

Not yet eligible to start working on post-completion OPT (still completing program)

365 days
(maximum duration of post-completion OPT)

SEVIS record completes automatically at end of 60 days if record is not transferred/updated to a new academic program

Requested OPT start date

Time on OPT -- can work

STOP WORKING!

60 days (grace period)

90 days

60 days (grace period)

International Student Services
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