

# Optional Practical Training for F-1 Students

A benefit for international students  
to legally work in their field  
after completing a course of study

This presentation was last updated in  
April 2024

# What is OPT?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is an F-1 student employment benefit.

- You can be authorized for up to **12 months** of off-campus employment **per educational level** (Associate, Bachelors, Masters, PhD)
- You can work **anywhere** in the US
- There are no restrictions on salary

# Who is eligible for OPT?

- You must have been in valid F-1 student status on your current SEVIS record for **one academic year** (3 quarters) or longer
- You must be **completing** a program of study (for example, an Associate Degree or a Certificate)
- You must **not** be a participant in Highline's Short Term Program
- You must be **present in the US** at the time of application

# What kinds of jobs can I get?

- You must work in your “**field of study.**”
- All jobs must be “directly related to [your] **degree program.**”

...Basically, your job responsibilities have to connect to the **major** listed on your I-20. This is easier in some majors than in others!

# How do I maintain my status while on OPT?

1. You must work at least **21 hours per week** (on average) to be considered “employed.”
2. You must not be “unemployed” for more than **90 days** during the authorization period. (Time out of the US counts as “unemployment” time!)
3. You must **report** all job changes and changes to your personal information to the SEVP Portal within **10 days**.

# How do I apply?

**USCIS now allows you to file online!**

<https://myaccount.uscis.gov/>

- reduces errors in form filling
- provides instant receipt number
- allows for instant payment
- saves paper and ink
- avoids hassle of looking for an envelope and paying for shipping!



**FILE ONLINE**

# When can I apply?

- The earliest you can apply is **90 days** before your last day of study.
- All applications must be received by the US government before the end of your **60-day grace period**. Applicants who apply during their grace period will likely get authorized for less than 12 months of work.

# When can I apply?

Final Quarter	Application Window Begins	Quarter Ends	Application Window Ends
	(90 days before quarter end date)		(60 days after quarter end date)
Winter 2024	12/23/2023	3/22/2024	5/21/2024
Spring 2024	3/15/2024	6/13/2024	8/12/2024
Summer 2024	5/17/2024	8/15/2024	10/14/2024
Fall 2024	9/14/2024	12/13/2024	2/11/2025
Winter 2025	12/21/2024	3/21/2025	5/20/2025
Spring 2025	3/14/2025	6/12/2025	8/11/2025



# How Long Does It Take?

Gather materials and begin filing:	2-3 hours
I-765 Review Meeting:	1 hour
Finish filing online:	<1 hour

Wait for Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and Social Security Number (SSN):  
**30 - 90 days**

**Try to file by the middle of your final quarter!**

# What do I need to prepare?

## A complete OPT application packet includes:

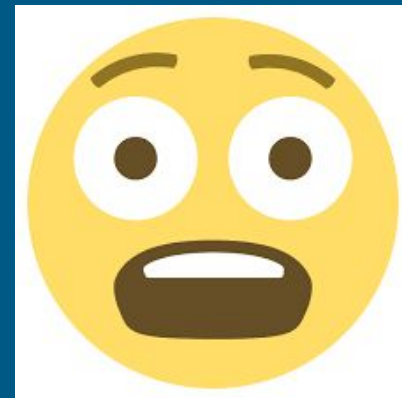
1. OPT-endorsed I-20 (see [OPT I-20 Request Form](#))  
(and any CPT-endorsed I-20s)
2. Completed [I-765](#) form (this includes an SSN request)
3. Photo page from passport
4. [Electronic I-94](#)
5. Recent passport photo (US format: white background, 2"x2")
6. Payment of \$470 (US credit/debit card or bank transfer)

  
**NEW FEE**

# Premium Processing

- Became available June 2023 for OPT applicants
- Can be filed at same time as OPT application
- Reduces processing time to 30 days (or fewer?)
- Requires additional fee of...

**\$1,685 !!!**



# OK! I'm ready. What do I do?

## Step 1.

Apply to graduate! You may do this as soon as you enroll in your final quarter of classes.

<https://registration.highline.edu/graduation/>

## Step 2.

Fill out ISP's OPT I-20 Request Form.



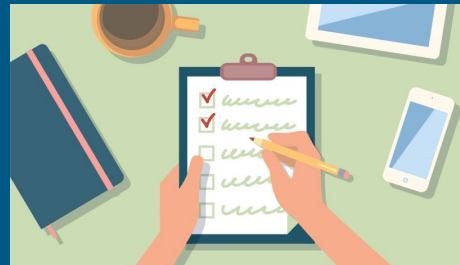
You'll be asked to choose a date that you'd like to start working. (We'll go over that in a few minutes.)

## Step 3.

### Schedule your I-765 Review Meeting with an ISP Advisor.

- Zoom: be ready to screenshare
- In-person: bring your laptop

Before your meeting, **prepare all documents, make a USCIS.gov account, and start the online I-765 application... but DO NOT SUBMIT!**



## Step 4.

### Attend the I-765 Review Meeting.

The ISP Advisor will check your online application for accuracy and completeness and issue you an OPT I-20.

- We'll **shorten your program length** so that your program end date matches your last date of study.
- We'll indicate your **requested OPT dates**.
- I-20s are issued **ELECTRONICALLY** via password-protected email.

## Step 5.

**Submit the completed application online!**



**This must be done within 30 days after the OPT I-20 is issued. If you file it late, you WILL be denied.**

**Your case will be assigned a receipt number immediately upon submitting.**

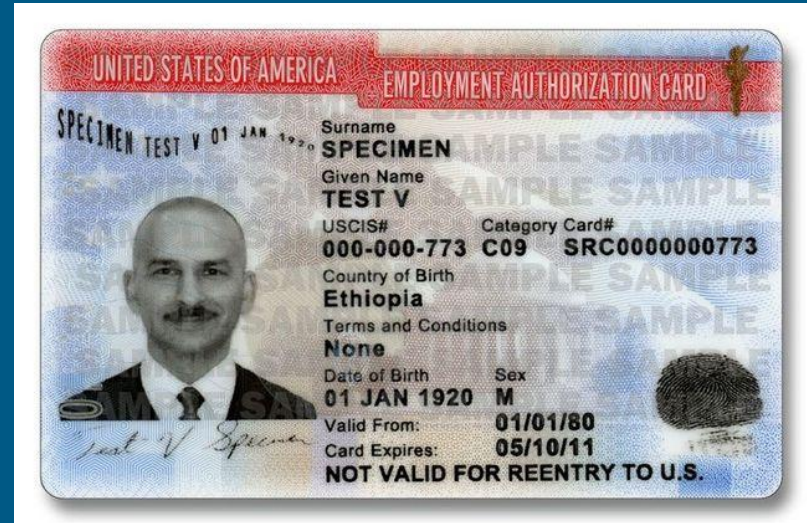


Your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) will be processed within 30-90 days (and the SSN shortly after). **DON'T TRUST THE ONLINE TRACKER TOOL.**

WHILE YOU WAIT...

**Step 6.**

**Start looking for jobs!**



You can apply, interview, etc. before you receive your EAD, but you cannot start working until the date printed on it.

## Step 7.

Get approved!!

Receive your EAD and SSN.

Begin working on or after  
the EAD Start Date.



You will receive a link to create a **SEVP Portal Account** on your EAD Start Date. Create your account within **14 days** or the link will expire.

- Report your employer within **10 days**.
- Report any changes to your contact info.
- Log in at least once every **90 days**.

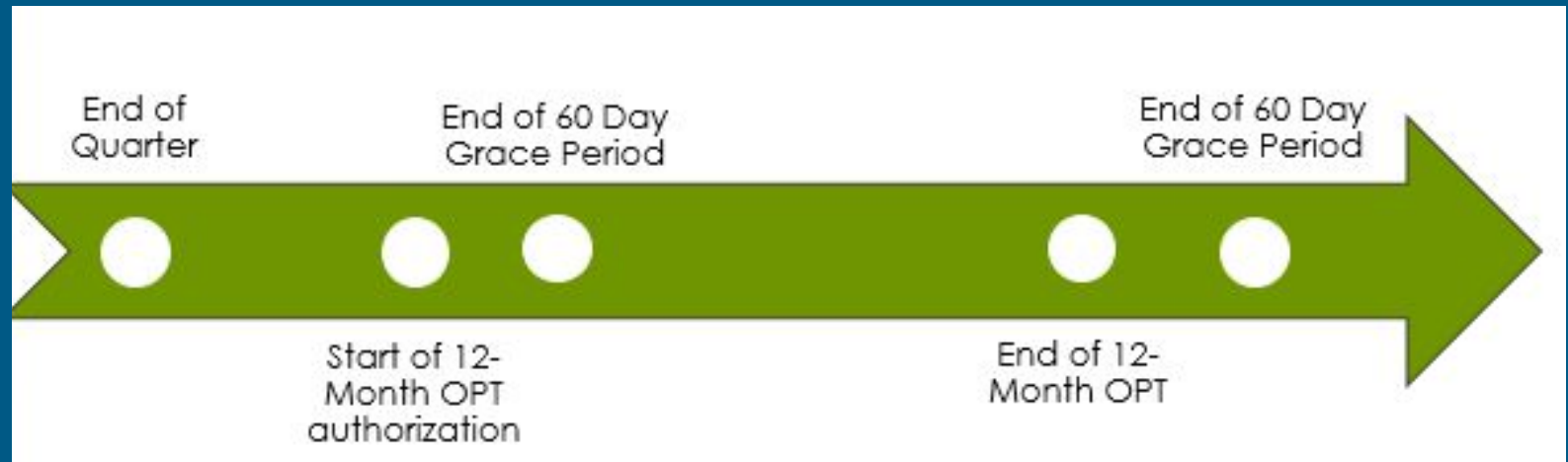


**FREQUENTLY**

**QUESTIONS**

**ASKED**

# How do I choose a start date?



**Your OPT start date must be within your 60-day grace period. USCIS will take the same amount of time to approve your application regardless of the date that you choose.**

**→ Most students choose a LATE date.**

# Here's that table again...

Final Quarter	Application Window Begins	Quarter Ends	Application Window Ends
	(90 days before quarter end date)		(60 days after quarter end date)
Winter 2024	12/23/2023	3/22/2024	5/21/2024
Spring 2024	3/15/2024	6/13/2024	8/12/2024
Summer 2024	5/17/2024	8/15/2024	10/14/2024
Fall 2024	9/14/2024	12/13/2024	2/11/2025
Winter 2025	12/21/2024	3/21/2025	5/20/2025
Spring 2025	3/14/2025	6/12/2025	8/11/2025

# How can I find a job?

Highline's Student Employment website has a lot of great links!

<https://studentemployment.highline.edu/>



- Multiple jobs ok
- Volunteer work ok

# When can I start working?

You can begin work on your EAD start date if you have already received your EAD card.

**Example 1:** You applied to have a start date of September 1. It is September 10 and you have not received your EAD card yet. Can you work?

**NO – not until you receive your EAD card.**

**Example 2:** You applied to have a start date of September 1. It is August 25 and you just received your EAD. Can you work?

**NO – not until the date printed on the card (Sept. 1).**

# How do I end OPT?

- You may not work after the EAD End Date. In the US, it is recommended that you give “2 weeks’ notice” to your employer.
- If you maintain status for the full OPT period, you will receive another 60-day grace period after OPT is over. During that time, you must transfer out, return to Highline for a new program, or leave the US.
- You may stop OPT early by transferring out or leaving the US (with no plan to return). Speak to an ISP advisor.
- The “5-month Rule” states that there must not be a “gap in activity” (work or study) greater than 5 months.



# International Travel Requirements

Documents	Before completing program and before EAD issuance	After completing program and before EAD issuance	After completing program and after EAD issuance
Valid passport	✓	✓	✓
Valid F-1 visa stamp	✓	✓	✓
OPT I-20 with a valid travel signature	✓	✓	✓
Evidence of financial support	Strongly recommended	Strongly recommended	Strongly recommended
OPT receipt: I-797 Notice of Action		✓	
Job offer letter from employer		Strongly recommended	✓
EAD (Employment Authorization Document)			✓

Thanks to UC Berkeley for this great chart!

Travel is RISKY. Is it worth it?

# Other Considerations

- **Medical Insurance Eligibility**
  - Not required but strongly encouraged
  - Must be continuous
  - Must check eligibility before each quarter
- **Studying During OPT**
  - Optional
  - Must be part-time (below 12 units per quarter)
  - Must be at/below your OPT educational level
- **STEM OPT Extension only available for Bachelors level and higher**

# Other Considerations

- **Campus View Housing**

Graduating ISP students may be eligible to remain in CV for up to one quarter after graduating, IF all of the following are true:

- 1) they are already living in CV during final study quarter
- 2) they inform CV of intent to remain in CV by week 6 of final study quarter
- 3) they apply for OPT during final study quarter (not grace period)

# How can I get more information?

**Please meet with an ISP Advisor  
to discuss your specific situation.**

**OPT can be a life-changing  
experience. Good luck!**

