12 MONTH POST COMPLETION OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING
APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Practical Training is defined in the regulations as "temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student's major area of study." There are 4 types of practical training for F-1 visa students:

Practical Training during Studies:
1. **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)**: Practical training in an Internship or Cooperative Education program during a student's studies. Requires academic approval, IPGE approval, and enrollment in a fieldwork course.

2. **Pre-Completion OPT:** Practical training application to USCIS during a student's studies. Not common at Sacramento State due to CPT options. Pre-Completion OPT authorizes part-time work and reduces the total amount of Post Completion OPT available to students.

Practical Training after Completion of Classes:
3. **Post Completion OPT**: Students may apply for 12 months of practical training after completion of coursework at each advanced degree level (Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD). See eligibility information below.

4. **24 Month STEM OPT Extension**: Students may be able to apply for an additional 24 month extension after Post Completion OPT if eligible. E-Verify employer required. See https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub for more information. STEM fields include: Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Construction Management, Engineering (Civil, Computer, Electrical & Electronic, Mechanical and Software), Environmental Studies, Geology, Math, Math/Statistics, Physical Science, and Physics.

Students who have questions about CPT, Pre-Completion OPT, or STEM OPT should contact International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) for additional information. This package provides information for Post Completion OPT only.

Eligibility and Filing Period

To be eligible for Post-Completion OPT, students must be in valid F1 status, and have been lawfully enrolled full-time for at least one academic year at a college/university. In addition, the following requirements must be met:
- Undergraduate Level: students must expecting to graduate at the end of the current term.
- Graduate Level students: Must be verified as either:
  - Graduating at the end of the current term
  - Enrolled in Master's Thesis, Project or Culminating Exam and completed with or completing coursework in current term. Students may be eligible to work on their Master's Thesis or Project while on Post Completion OPT. Please see your ISSS Advisor and Graduate Program Coordinator for details.

Regulations allow students to file for OPT up to 90 days before their final term ends and up to 60 days after the term ends.

OPT Requirements

- Location: Student must be physically present in the United States in order to apply for OPT. If approved, the student will be issued an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card by mail. This card constitutes a work permit.
- Duties: OPT is not a general work permit. Employment must be directly related to the student's major field of study and appropriate for the student's degree level completed.
- Hours: Minimum 20 hours per week of appropriate employment is required.
- Unemployment: Maximum 90 days of unemployment allowed. Students exceeding 90 days of unemployment are not meeting their F-1 status requirements and are considered in violation of their status. **SEVIS MAY AUTOMATICALLY TERMINATE STUDENTS' SEVIS RECORDS IF THEY EXCEED THE 90 DAY UNEMPLOYMENT LIMIT. STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO REPORT EMPLOYMENT TO IPGE WITHIN 10 DAYS OF STARTING.**
- Payment: Positions may be paid or unpaid.

OPT Application Process Overview

1. Attend or view an OPT Application Workshop
2. Start the online process but DO NOT submit. Follow instructions here.
3. Submit an "Optional Practical Training" request in your ISSS Portal. This entails inputting the name and email of your academic advisor or graduate coordinator. Their approval is required before Step 4.
4. Your ISSS advisor will review your submission and provide edits and feedback, if necessary. If your application is complete, an OPT I-20 will be issued.
5. Submit supporting documents and OPT I-20 to USCIS via your USCIS portal.
6. Wait for USCIS to adjudicate
7. After approval, report updates according to the Responsibilities and Reporting Requirements

OPT Application Materials

A. **Requested OPT Start Date:** Select your preferred OPT start date. Applicants must provide their requested OPT start date to their ISSS advisor in writing via email, along with the rest of the required application documents. The actual starting date that will be approved on the EAD will be based on the student's requested starting date and the date USCIS approves the OPT, whichever date is later. You will input this date into your OPT request in your ISSS Portal.

- Earliest starting date: The Saturday after final exams end in the current semester.
- Latest starting date: Up to 60 days after the Friday of final exam week in the current semester.

B. **A U.S. Passport Sized Photo:**
1. I-765 instructions state photos must have been taken within 30 days of filing the form.
2. It is recommended to have the photo issued to you electronically for upload to your USCIS portal.
3. Follow measurements exactly:
   - Make sure the photo presents the full head from the top of the hair to the bottom of the chin
   - Center the head with the frame
   - The person in the photo should have a neutral expression and be facing the camera
   - Photo must be 2 inches by 2 inches
   - The height of the head (top of hair to bottom of chin) should measure 1 inch to 1 3/8 inches (25 mm - 35 mm)
   - Make sure the eye height is between 1 1/8 inches to 1 3/8 inches (28 mm – 35 mm) from the bottom of the photo
   - Eye glasses are not allowed
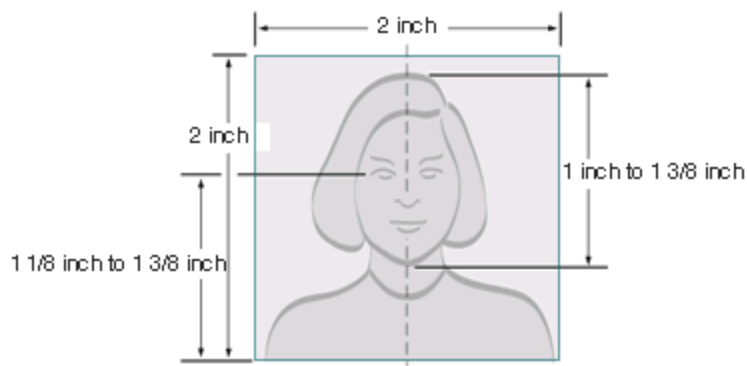
Sample USCIS and DOS photos
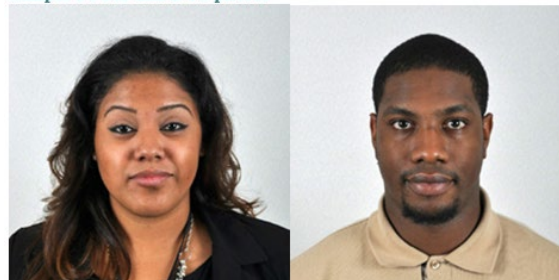
C. **Copies of Immigration Documents:**
- I-20s with previous CPT, OPT, or other work authorization (e.g. economic hardship or SSR)
- Bio page of your passport
- I-94: https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94
- Previous EAD (if you have you have been previously issued one by USCIS)

D. **$410 I-765 Application Fee.** When applying online, you must pay via credit card or ACH

Submit to ISSS for Review and Receive an OPT I-20

After you submit via your ISSS portal, your ISSS advisor will review and provide edits and feedback. If complete, they will issue you an OPT I-20 and final instructions to apply with USCIS. Scheduling an appointment and receiving an I-20 may take up to 7 business days.

USCIS must receive your packet within 30 days of I-20 issuance, or the end of your 60-day grace period, whichever is earlier.

Premium Processing Option

When completing your online I-765, students have the option to pay for premium processing, which is an additional $1,500 and sets the maximum processing time to 30 days. Note this does not include shipping time. If you opt for premium processing, you will be prompted to complete Form I-907 after you submit the I-765. Premium processing can also be added later after you file your I-765. Please be sure to plan accordingly depending on your desired OPT start date.

After Submitting Your Application to USCIS

The USCIS Service Center will process your application payment and send an application Receipt Notice (form I-797) to you within 3-4 weeks. The Receipt Notice confirms the date your application was received by USCIS and provides you a Case Number.

Applications for Post Completion OPT are usually processed within in about 90 days of receipt. This is an average processing time. Early applications can be faster; applications submitted later in the term may take longer due to a higher volume of applications being processed at the service center.

While waiting for the application to be approved, students are allowed to:
- Search for practical training opportunities related to their field of study and at an appropriate professional level
- Interview for appropriate positions
- Accept an offer of employment pending OPT approval.

However, students are not authorized to begin any employment until after they have been approved for OPT and have the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) in their possession. Online confirmation of OPT approval is not work authorization. Once students receive their EAD card, the dates listed on the card are the dates of authorized employment.