

OPT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

OPT ELIGIBILITY QUESTIONS

What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

OPT allows F-1 students to apply knowledge gained in their degree program to off-campus work in their major field. OPT is authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services USCIS. OPT employment can be used prior to completion of studies (pre-completion OPT), during a leave term, or after completion of degree (post-completion OPT).

Who is eligible for an OPT?

Students are eligible for Optional Practical Training if they

- Have been enrolled full-time at a SEVIS-approved school for one academic year;
- Are currently enrolled full-time with a valid F-1 status; and
- Secure employment directly related to your major field of study.

Do I need a job offer to apply for OPT?

No.

Does my job need to be in California?

No. Your job may be anywhere in the U.S.

Can I change jobs during my OPT?

Yes. You must notify the PDSO or DSO at Antioch University Santa Barbara of any employment changes, including periods of unemployment.

Does participation in pre-completion OPT affect my eligibility for post-completion OPT?

Yes. Pre-completion OPT is deducted from your 12 month cumulative allotment of OPT. Part-time OPT is deducted at a half time rate, so if you use 6 months of part-time pre-completion OPT, you have 9 months of post-completion OPT remaining.

OPT APPLICATION QUESTIONS

When should I apply for OPT?

Pre-completion OPT: up to 90 days prior to the planned start date of employment.

Post-completion OPT: up to 90 days prior to your program completion date or within 60 days after your program completion date.

Please note that it can take 2-3 months for USCIS to review & process your OPT application materials.

How do I apply for OPT?

Complete the following items and then schedule an appointment with the PDSO or DSO to review your application materials:

- OPT Application Packet
- OPT Status Responsibilities Form
- Advisor Approval Form (Post-Completion OPT only)
- I-765 form and supporting documents (see OPT Application Packet for more information)

Why do I have to meet with the PDSO or DSO during the OPT application process?

The PDSO or DSO will review your application materials to confirm that all necessary documents are present. Once verified, the PDSO or DSO will need to issue your recommendation for OPT, which is reflected on a new I-20. The new I-20 is required to complete your OPT application materials.

How do I choose my OPT start date?

For post-completion OPT, your start date must fall within 60 days after your program completion date. You can choose any date within that 60 day window.

What is my program completion date?

The program completion date is the last day of the final term of enrollment. For MEd thesis and PsyD students, the program completion date can be the last day of the final term of enrollment OR the defense date. The defense date must be within the final term of required enrollment.

Can I change my start date while my OPT application is pending?

No. The start date is decided before your new I-20 is issued and can only be changed up until you mail the application to USCIS.

Can I change my mailing address while my OPT application is pending?

You can, but it can (and often does) result in a delay of receipt of your EAD card. Please use a mailing address you know will be valid for at least 3 months on your application, so that your EAD card will be delivered on time.

When can I start working on OPT?

As soon as you receive your EAD card and the start date has passed.

Can I begin working before I complete or graduate from my degree program under post-completion OPT?

Non-thesis/undergraduate students who apply for post-completion OPT may NOT begin working until after their program end date. Thesis/PsyD students who apply for post-completion OPT may NOT work until they have completed all course requirements.

After my post-completion OPT ends, do I have a grace period?

Yes, you have a grace period of 60 days.

Do I need a U.S. Social Security Number?

Students will need to apply for a Social Security Number upon approval of OPT employment. Once the new I-20 endorsing OPT employment is received, a student can apply for a Social Security Number through the [Social Security Office](#).

Do I have to pay U.S. taxes on my salary?

Usually F-1 students who have been in the U.S. for five years or less are exempt from social security taxes. It would be wise to inform your employer of this because many employers are not familiar with this provision of the tax laws. F-1 students are subject to all other applicable taxes (e.g. federal, state, and local).

MAINTAINING STATUS ON OPT

What is my status while I am on OPT?

You are in lawful F-1 status if you meet the following requirements:

- You are employed for more than 20 hours per week in your field of study for post-completion OPT; you are employed for less than 20 hours per week in your field of study for pre-completion OPT;
- You have not been unemployed for more than 90 days during your OPT;
- You report to AUSB any changes of address within 10 days; and
- You report to AUSB any changes in visa status.

How do I let AUSB know if I have changed my immigration status?

Please provide a copy of your approval notice confirming your new immigration status to the PDSO or DSO so your F-1 immigration record can be closed.

What types of employment am I allowed to do on OPT?

Employment must be related to the student's field of study. Employment options during OPT may include:

- Paid. Students may work part-time (at least 20 hours per week when on post-completion OPT) or full-time.
- Unpaid. Students may work as volunteers or unpaid interns, where this practice does not violate any labor laws. The work should be at least 20 hours per week for students on post-completion OPT. A student should be able to provide evidence, acquired from the student's employer, to verify that he or she worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.
- Multiple employers. Students may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the student's field of study.
- Short-term multiple employers (performing artists). Students, such as musicians and other performing artists, may work for multiple short term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration.
- Work for hire. This is also commonly referred to as 1099 employment where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. If requested by DHS, students should be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company.
- Self-employed business owner. Students on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. The student should be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to his or her degree program.
- Employment through an agency or consulting firm. Students on post-completion OPT should be able to provide evidence showing they worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.

Can I study while I am on post-completion OPT?

You are allowed to take classes as long as they are related to your employment. You may not start another degree program while on OPT – if you do, your OPT will be canceled.

How long can I stay in the U.S. after my post-completion OPT end date?

You may remain in the U.S. up to 60 days after your post-completion OPT end date.

Exceptions to this grace period include:

- Extending your F-1 status by starting a new degree program. You must be accepted to the new degree program within the 60 day grace period and the new program must begin within 5 months of your OPT end date.
- Being under application to change your immigration status.

OPT TRAVEL

Can I travel while my OPT application is pending?

AUSB does not recommend that you travel while your OPT application is pending.

If my OPT is approved and I am employed, can I travel?

Yes. When traveling, make sure you have the following documentation:

- Passport (valid 6 months into the future)
- Valid F-1 visa
- I-20 (recently signed by OIS)
- EAD card
- Proof of employment

Can I travel while I am on OPT, but do not yet have a job?

USCIS recommends that individuals should have proof of employment upon re-entry to the U.S. when on OPT status. If you have to travel, bring the following documentation with you:

- Evidence that you have been actively looking for a job and t
- Evidence of job interviews (if applicable) upon your return to the U.S.