Optional Practical Training
“OPT”

For students wishing to find a position of employment related to their field of study after graduation

GENERAL INFORMATION

Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 students:

- is intended to provide hands-on practical work experience that is directly related to a student’s major area of study;
- is authorized by Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) for a maximum of 12 MONTHS
- is available again to those students who have used 12 months of OPT, but have changed to a higher educational level;
- F-1 students who completed a bachelor’s or master’s degree in a STEM field (STEM = Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) and are currently engaged in post-completion OPT may apply for the STEM extension (24 months) if they have a job or job offer that meets the STEM OPT requirements.
- may be full-time or part-time, but part-time OPT (20 hours per week or less) is deducted from the 12-month available training period at one-half the full-time rate. Part-time OPT can be used only prior to completion of your degree;
- is available to students who have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for at least one academic year (9 months). While on OPT for immigration purposes, individuals are still considered to be F-1 students at the College of Charleston even though they may be working elsewhere in the United States;
- is not available to students who have completed more than 12 months of full-time curricular practical training (CPT);
- is available in the following cases:
  1. full-time after completion of the course of study;
  2. part-time (20 hours or less) while school is in session; or
  3. part-time or full-time after completion of all course requirements for the degree, excluding thesis

NOTE: Students applying based on option #1 (after completion of the course of study) must complete the entire application procedure no sooner than 90 days before and no later than 60 days after the program end date (graduation for most students). The Form I-765 and I-20 in support of post-completion OPT must be received by USCIS no later than 30 days after the Center for International Education (CIE) creates your OPT I-20.

If you have further questions, please contact Melissa Ochal, Associate Director, Center for International Education at (843) 953-7822 or ochalm@cofc.edu
APPLICATION PROCEDURES AND INSTRUCTIONS

Step 1: Bring the following to the CIE:
1. completed Form I-765
   Make sure your address is accurate—USCIS mail will not be forwarded to a new address by the Post Office, even if a forwarding request is on file. The Employment Authorization Document (EAD) will be mailed to the address on the I-765 ONLY. If you think that you might change your mailing address within four months of sending this application to USCIS, you can have your card mailed to the CIE. You will list the CIE under U.S. Mailing Address and your local address under U.S. Physical Address.
   Box 27 should be completed as (c) (3) (B) for post-completion OPT or (c) (3) (C) for STEM extension.
   Page 7, part 6- fill out your name and under 3.d. List all previously used SEVIS receipt numbers and any previously authorized CPT or OPT and the academic level in which it was authorized.

2. completed Advisor Recommendation Form for Optional Practical Training found in this packet;
3. photocopies of all previous Forms I-20; copy only 1st & 2nd pages;
4. photocopy of both sides of Form I-94 or print off of I-94 record;
5. photocopy of your F-1 visa;
6. photocopy of picture page of your passport- preferably in color and enlarged; and
7. two photos with white background.
   Photo specifications:
   The 2 photos should have a white background, be un-mounted; printed on thin paper; glossy and not re-touched. The photos should show a frontal view of your face, as in passport photos. The photo should not be larger than 2 x 2 inches, with the distance from the top of the head to just below the chin between 1-1 3/8 inches. Lightly print your name and your I-94# in pencil on the back of each photo.

Step 2: The CIE will review your OPT request for eligibility. If you are eligible, the CIE will recommend to USCIS that practical training permission be granted by certifying that the proposed employment is directly related to the student’s major area of study and commensurate with the student’s educational level. Your I-20 will be endorsed indicating whether the employment is full-time or part-time and the recommended beginning and ending dates.

THE FOLLOWING ITEMS NEED TO BE MAILED TO USCIS:
1. Form I-765;
2. $410 check or money order made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security. You may also pay via credit card by completing and submitting Form G-1450. Please note: You may use Visa, MasterCard, American Express, and Discover. Make sure the card has enough money to cover the fee. USCIS will reject your application, petition, or request if the card is declined, and we will not attempt to process your credit card payment a second time.
3. photophy of SEVIS I-20 endorsed for OPT;
4. photocopy of all previous Form(s) I-20 from the College of Charleston;
5. photocopy of both sides of I-94 or print off of I-94 record;
6. photocopy of your F-1 visa;
7. photocopy of passport picture page; and
8. two photos taken according to the directions on page #2 with name and I-94 number written on the back of each photo.
9. OPTIONAL: Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance
PREPARATION NOTES: DO NOT send your passport or your original I-20 or I-94 to USCIS. DO NOT staple photos or the check to the application. Paperclip both items to the top of the I-765.

Mail To: USCIS Dallas Lockbox
For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries: USCIS PO Box 660867 Dallas, TX 75266
For Express mail and courier deliveries: USCIS Attn: AOS 2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business Suite 400 Lewisville, TX 75067

The CIE recommends that these materials be sent by certified mail, return-receipt.

- USCIS will send a receipt notice (I-797) to the applicant at the address listed on the I-765. Usual processing time for OPT can range from 60 to 120 days from the “Receipt date”.
- You MAY NOT legally begin working until you have received an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and approval notice from USCIS that authorizes OPT and it is your start date listed on the card.
- Always carry your EAD, proof of employment and your I-20s when you are traveling.

STUDENT REQUIREMENTS DURING OPT

***After OPT has been authorized, you must submit a photocopy of your EAD to CIE. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) requires that a copy of this document be kept in your file***

***Student MUST report their employers’ name, address, job title, and start date along with an explanation of how employment is related to his/her course work. Also, the employer’s tax identification number (EIN) and supervisor’s name and phone/email address, if possible.***

College of Charleston students on OPT are required by the Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) to report the following to the CIE throughout the authorized period of OPT within 10 days of the change:

1. Legal name changes
2. A change in residential or mailing address
3. Changes in employer, including the employer name and employer address
4. Loss of employment and unemployment
5. Employment start date and end date

- Students on post-completion OPT may accrue up to no more than 90 days of unemployment within the dates of the authorization, shown on the Employment Authorization Document (EAD). If a student exceeds the 90 day unemployment limit, he/she is no longer considered to be in maintenance of F-1 status.
- Time spent outside the United States during post-completion OPT does count against the limit on unemployment, unless the student is employed and in an authorized period of leave from the employer, or if the student is traveling for his/her job.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Am I eligible for OPT if I have engaged in Curricular Practical Training (CPT)? Yes, as long as you have not engaged in 12 months or more of full-time CPT.

Do I have to have a job offer to apply for OPT? No, you can still be looking for a position. You can be looking for a position even after your OPT has been approved, but you cannot have more than 90 days of unemployment during your OPT.
When will I be able to start working? You may not begin until the OPT application has been approved by USCIS and the student has received his or her ‘employment authorization document’ (EAD) card.

When will my OPT start? CIE will be able to recommend an OPT start date when they are creating your OPT I-20. The recommended employment start date must be after your official program end date (graduation) but no later than the end of your 60 day grace period. You should think in advance of meeting with the staff at CIE when you would like your OPT to start. Note that you will not be able to start work until that date arrives AND you have received your EAD card.

Should I keep a copy of my application? Always keep copies of all official documents that you send through the mail. If something happens and your application is lost, you will have copies of your documents.

How can I check on the status of my application? On your receipt notice (Form I-797) you will receive a receipt number that begins with the letters “YSC”. You can use this “YSC number” to access information about your application by checking on-line https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/. If you are having the documents mailed to you, we recommend signing up for Informed Delivery with the Post Office: https://informeddelivery.usps.com.

Will I be able to travel outside of the U.S. while I’m on OPT? Yes, you can re-enter in order to resume a position of employment. In order to re-enter the U.S. after you have completed your program of study, you must have an I-20 that has been signed by a CIE staff member in the past six months, proof of employment and your EAD card. You should not travel without your EAD card.

Can I travel while my OPT is pending? Yes, you are allowed to re-enter the U.S. if your visa is still valid to search for employment. You should bring with you your receipt notice for your I-765 application to show that you have applied for OPT.

If I work on OPT for a year after I finish my degree and then go back to school to study for a higher degree, will I get 12 more months of OPT when I finish my next degree? Yes, you are entitled to 12 months of OPT after each degree obtained at a higher academic level. For example, if you complete your Bachelors degree and engage in 12 months of OPT, then you would be eligible for another 12 months of OPT after completing a Masters, and another 12 months after completing a PhD degree.

Can I get an extension of my OPT? Yes, but only if you graduated in a STEM field and are currently engaged in post-completion OPT may apply for the STEM extension if they have a job or job offer that meets all of the STEM requirements.

How long am I allowed to remain in the U.S. after I finish OPT? You may remain in the U.S. up to 60 days after completion of OPT as long as your passport is still valid.

What if I decide to pursue a new course of study? If you wish to study after completion of OPT, then you must be accepted by a new program and have your record released from the College of Charleston to the new program (even if it is still at CoC) no later than the date of expiration of your EAD card. The start date of the new program must be within five months of the expiration of your EAD card.
Name of Student: ____________________________________________

SEVIS ID: N00_________________ CWID: ___________________________

TO BE COMPLETED BY FACULTY ADVISOR OR DEPARTMENT CHAIR

This memo serves to confirm that the above named student is currently, or was, a student in the Department of ____________________________ at the College of Charleston specializing in the field of _______________________. The practical training sought by this student is directly related to his or her major of study, is commensurate with his or her educational level, and is recommended by the department.

This student (choose only one):

_____ has completed, or is expected to complete the course of study on ____/____/____; or

_____ has completed all course requirements excluding thesis.

___________________________________    ______________________
Print name of Advisor      Title

___________________________________    ______________________
Signature        Date

For CIE only

Proposed dates of employment: _____________ to _____________

Part Time (20 hours/week or less) _____   Full time (more than 20 hours/week) _____