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# Reporting Requirements

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What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

Optional Practical Training is a benefit of the F-1 students status. It allows students to have work authorization for off-campus employment in their field of study. To be eligible, you must be in valid F-1 status for one academic year.

The name of the work permit for OPT is the Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

OPT Application Process

The application is completed in three steps:

1. Request OPT I-20
   The I-20 will be ready for pick-up 3-5 business days after submitting your request to the Kearney International Center.

2. Prepare and Mail your application materials
   Allow approximately 1 week to gather and organize your materials for mailing.

   3 months on average after your application has been received by the Service Center.
Highlights:

1. One year of OPT is available after completing each degree program at a higher level. For example, you may use 12 months of OPT after completion of your Bachelor’s, then your Master’s and then your Ph.D. = 3 years total.

2. OPT is available both before or after completing a degree program.

3. A job offer is not required to apply for OPT.

4. The employment may occur anywhere in the U.S.

5. No special permission is needed from the USCIS or Minnesota State University, Mankato to quit a job or change employers. However, you must notify Kearney International Center of these changes at http://www.mnsu.edu/international/currentstudents/f-1/opt/info_update.php.

6. During the period of OPT, a student remains in F-1 status.

7. An extension of OPT is allowed for up to 17 months if at the time of the extension you have a degree in a Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics (STEM) field and your employer is enrolled in E-Verify. For more information, see our web page, 17-Month STEM Extension.

Considerations:

1. The application for post-completion OPT must be received by the USCIS no earlier than 90 days before program completion and no later than 60-days after your date of completion.

2. It may take up to three months to receive the EAD (Employment Authorization Document).

3. More than 90 days of unemployment during OPT is a violation of F-1 status.

4. Once you complete your degree and your I-20 has expired, you must have a valid EAD to begin working on or off campus.

5. Once the OPT application is submitted to the USCIS, it is impossible to change your selected authorization dates.

6. Canceling the OPT application is very difficult and must be discussed with an advisor at Kearney International Center.

7. OPT can only be extended beyond 12 months in limited circumstances (see item #7 at left.)

8. Employment must be related to the degree program noted on your I-20.

9. Students are required to report the following information to the Kearney International Center within 10 days of any change:

   name, residential address, employer name, employer address, employment status at http://www.mnsu.edu/international/currentstudents/F-1/opt/info_update.php
## Types of OPT

### Pre-completion OPT

**Work permission before degree completion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When employment occurs</th>
<th>Hours per week allowed to work</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer or Winter Break (Pre-completion)</td>
<td>There is no minimum or maximum hours per week a student is required to work on pre-completion OPT.</td>
<td>The amount of time you use for pre-completion OPT will be deducted from your 12-month allowance. Part-time OPT is deducted from the 12 month limit at 50%. For example, if you work part-time for 4 months, only 2 months will be deducted. You will retain 10 months to use at another time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall or Spring Semester (Pre-completion)</td>
<td>Must not exceed 20 hours per week. Graduate student who have completed all coursework and only have APP/thesis remaining may work up to 40 hours per week. Must be enrolled full time or have an approved Reduced Course Load Form</td>
<td>Students on Pre-completion OPT are not eligible for STEM Extension OPT or the H-1B cap gap extension. Curricular Practical Training is a better option in most cases for working prior to your degree completion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After degree completion (Post-completion)</td>
<td>Students must work or volunteer an average of 20 hours per week during post-completion OPT to be considered “employed” and maintaining F-1 status.</td>
<td>No more than 3 months of unemployment are allowed during the 12-month post-completion OPT period. See “Qualifying OPT Employment”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Post-completion OPT

**Work permission after degree completion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application Deadlines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-completion OPT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-completion OPT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Is OPT right for you?

If you can answer “yes” to all the questions on this page, you are ready to apply for OPT.

Yes!

If you answer “no” to any of these questions, talk to an Advisor about your situation.

No!

Each time you apply for OPT it requires a fee of $340.

Pre-Completion OPT
If you have an internship, have you considered using Curricular Practical Training (CPT) instead?
For most students, CPT is a better option. It allows you to get work experience in your field of study without using any of the 12 months of OPT time. See our website for a detailed description of CPT on the ISSS website: http://www.mnsu.edu/international/

Have you been in F-1 status for one academic year? At Minnesota State University, Mankato, one academic year means enrollment for consecutive fall / spring or spring / fall semesters. You can count the time you spent at other U.S. schools in degree programs before you came to Minnesota State University, Mankato as long as your SEVIS I-20 was transferred to MSU.

Will your job offer still be valid three months from now? Getting the OPT permit can take three months. If your employer is not willing to wait for you, then it’s not worth the effort to apply for OPT.

Do you plan on applying for STEM extension or H-1B cap gap extension? Only post-completion OPT students are eligible for these two extensions. If you want to apply for either of these extensions, you must submit a second application for post-completion OPT.

Are you wondering if you are allowed for OPT? You will not have a full year of OPT after you graduate if you choose to use some of it for pre-completion employment. You may use OPT during the semester on a part-time basis however it will cost $340 and up to three months processing time.

Post-Completion OPT
Have you been in F-1 status for one academic year?
You can count the time you spent at other U.S. schools in degree programs before you came to Minnesota State University, Mankato as long as your SEVIS I-20 was transferred to Minnesota State University, Mankato. At Minnesota State University, Mankato, one academic year means enrollment for consecutive fall / spring or spring / fall semesters.

Will you be completing your program of study at Minnesota State University, Mankato within the next three months? The application for OPT cannot be submitted earlier than 90 days before your completion date.

Are you enrolled full-time this semester or authorized by Kearney International Center to have a reduced course load? You must have approval from Kearney International Center before you withdraw or for graduate students using Filing Fee.
Step 1
Request your OPT I-20:

1. Complete OPT Request Form
2. Choose authorization dates
3. Submit OPT Request Form to Kearney International Center.
The OPT Request Form

To request your OPT I-20, you must submit a completed OPT Request Form to Kearney International Center.

Choosing Authorization Dates
On the Request Form, you must indicate what dates you want your work authorization to begin and end before submitting it to the Kearney International Center.

The authorization dates you choose will be noted on your new OPT I-20 and cannot be changed. The dates will also be noted on your EAD.

• The start date/beginning date is the day on which your EAD becomes valid and you can begin working. The “clock starts ticking” on the start date whether you have a job or not.
• The end date/ending date is usually 12 months later, unless you request a shorter period of time or your application is approved 61 days or more after your program completion date.

If you change your mind about your authorization dates.....
You will NOT be able to adjust your OPT authorization dates once you have mailed your application to the Service Center. Consider the authorization dates carefully before submitting your Request Form to the Kearney International Center.
The OPT Request Form

Expected Program Completion Date

The "Completion Date" for OPT purposes is the day you complete your final degree requirements. Your actual completion date may not necessarily be the day of your graduation ceremony or the date on your current I-20 expiration.

- **Undergraduate Students**
  The last day of final exams of the semester your degree requirements are fulfilled.

- **Graduate Students**
  The day on which all degree requirements are fulfilled, such as filing the thesis or APP.

  If you do not have a research component to your degree program (such as in the MBA program or other professional schools), your completion date would be the last day of final exams of the semester your degree requirements are fulfilled.

If you don't complete your program as expected...

Once your OPT I-20 has been created, changing your completion date can create serious complications for your OPT application. Consider your expected completion date carefully and make every attempt to finish your program on that day. Students who do not complete all coursework by the program end date may extend their program prior to the I-20 end date but they are limited to part time post-completion OPT until they satisfy all degree requirements.

Official Degree Completion Certification/Signature

A signature from an official at MSU is required on this form. This signature verifies your completion date and your registration status at the time of application.

- **Undergraduates** should obtain the signature from their academic advisors.
- **Graduates** should obtain the signature from their Faculty advisor.
The OPT Application Timeline

OPT Application Period = 90 days before completion or 60 days after.

Program completion date (example)

60-day grace period ends

OPT start date must occur within the 60-day grace period

Jan 18  Feb  March  April  May 8  June 15  July 17

Points to Consider

• You can submit your application to the USCIS up to 90 days before the completion date of your program or during the 60-day grace period after completion.
• If you leave the US during your 60-day grace period and you haven’t applied for OPT, you lose your opportunity to apply for OPT. You cannot apply for OPT outside of the US.
• The USCIS must receive your application no later than 30 days after your OPT I-20 has been issued or your application may be denied. You may obtain a recent signature on page 2 if the signature is close to 30 days.
• It can take 3 months or more to receive the EAD from the USCIS. Plan ahead there is no way to expedite your EAD.
• Your OPT start date can be no later than 60 days beyond your degree completion date.
• You cannot start working until you have received the EAD and your start date is current.
• If you receive the EAD before your start date has arrived, you cannot work until the start date (noted on the EAD).
• You cannot change your start date once the OPT I-20 has been mailed to the Service Center.
• As long as you have applied for OPT, your F-1 status remains valid while you are waiting for the EAD even if there is a gap between your completion date and the start date of OPT. During this “gap,” you can remain in the U.S. or travel abroad and re-enter as an F-1. More details on traveling while on OPT are discussed on pages 25-26.

Timelines illustrating two common scenarios can be seen on the next page.
Choosing Authorization Dates -- Typical Scenarios

**Scenario 1: Student with a job offer submits her OPT application early**

On Feb. 8, Xingyuan mails her application for OPT to the USCIS. She is completing her program on May 8 and chooses June 15 as the OPT start date because she has a job offer beginning that day. She receives the EAD on May 1. Her employer is pleased to see proof of the work permission early even though she cannot start working until June 15, as noted on the EAD. Xingyuan decides to go home for one month to celebrate her program completion.

**Scenario 2: Student with no job offer submits his OPT application rather late**

George doesn’t have a job offer or time to search for one until after he finishes school. He chooses the latest date possible to start his OPT—July 7—which is the 60th day after his completion on May 8. He knows that he will be legal to stay in the U.S. as long as he has submitted the OPT application on time. He finally mails his OPT application on May 1. On July 7, George still hasn’t received his EAD, so he can’t work. George receives his EAD on August 1 and it expires the following year on July 6. George has lost 23 days of his 12 month OPT because his application was approved after the latest available OPT start date.
Three-five business days after submitting your OPT Request Form to the Kearney International Center, you will get a new OPT I-20. This sample shows how your I-20 will be updated for OPT purposes.

Check It for Accuracy!

When you pick up your OPT I-20, make sure to check the following items:

Item #4: The education level should reflect your current level. If this is not accurate, contact the Kearney International Center.

Item #5: The completion date will be updated to match the completion date on your OPT Request Form. It may look like it will expire soon, but don’t worry --- the I-20 remains valid for the length of your OPT authorization period. This issue is important to note especially if you plan to travel abroad during your OPT period.

Item #10: Make sure the Advisor has signed it. Also, make sure the I-20 was issued less than 30 days in the past.

Item #11: Sign and date the I-20 after receiving it from the Kearney International Center.

I-20 Page 2: No Changes

This page of your I-20 will not change. It contains a description of the F-1 regulations affecting your stay in the U.S. You should have already read them at some point during your stay in the U.S. If not, it’s never too late—read them now!
Page 3: Authorization Information and Travel Endorsement

On this page of your OPT I-20, you will see the following information:

- The authorization dates you have selected
- A statement indicating that you are eligible for OPT and you will work in a job related to your major
- This statement means if your application is approved after your requested OPT start date, your OPT expiration date will be no more than 14 months after your program completion date

- A new travel endorsement from the Kearney International Center Advisor. Traveling while on OPT is allowed, with certain precautions. Details of travel-related issues are covered on pages 25-26 of this Guide.

Your OPT application must be sent to the USCIS no later than 30 days after the date of 1-20 issuance. If your I-20 is more than 30 days old, see an advisor in the Kearney International Center for instructions to receive an updated signature.
Step 2

Preparing and Mailing the Application

1. Gather the required materials
2. Complete the form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization
3. Mail your application package to the USCIS Service Center
   (items listed on next page)
Gather the Required Application Materials  Photocopy each document for your own records.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application Fee</th>
<th>Form I-765</th>
<th>Photocopies of Your:</th>
<th>Photocopy of I-94</th>
<th>Photocopy of Passport &amp; Visa</th>
<th>2 Photos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$340</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.New OPT I-20</td>
<td>This small, white card is usually stapled into your passport. Include a copy of both sides of the I-94, even though the back side may be blank.</td>
<td>Your passport biographical information page and F-1 visa stamp or copies of the front and back of past EAD cards.</td>
<td>OPT photos need to be a certain size. See Page 19 of this Guide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.All previous I-20s*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Make sure all your I-20s are signed before copying them. Keep the originals for your records.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Optional. We recommend you include these especially if you have used Curricular Practical Training (CPT).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use a personal check or money order made payable to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make sure there is a name and address printed on the check (do not use the “temporary checks” often issued by the bank when you open a new account).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OPT photos need to be a certain size. See Page 19 of this Guide.

Write your name and I-94 number on the back of each photo in case they get separated from your application.
Form I-765:
Application for Employment Authorization

The I-765 is the USCIS form you need to submit with your OPT application. A sample I-765 form is shown here.

Download the I-765 form can be downloaded from the USCIS web site at www.uscis.gov

Important: You must always use the most current version of the I-765. It is best to download the I-765 right before you mail your application since the USCIS updates their forms frequently.

How to Complete the I-765
Completing the I-765 for OPT is a simple task, but a few items can be confusing. The next two pages will cover how to complete those "tricky" questions so that you can avoid any delays in receiving your work authorization.

BE SURE THE BARCODE HAS PRINTED AT THE BOTTOM OF THE FORM I-765. If it has not printed, you need to download the form and use a different PDF viewer to print the I-765 with the bar code. USCIS has created this form to be compatible with Adobe Acrobat Reader (The 'Preview' application on the Macintosh will NOT print this bar code properly).
### Completing the I-765

1. Please note the table at the top of the form where it says "Do not write in this block." You do not need to complete that area since it is reserved for the USCIS use only.

2. Check the box indicating that you are requesting "Permission to accept employment."

### Items 3-11

#### Item #3: Address in the United States

The address you put here is where the EAD will be mailed. This address needs to be valid for at least 3 months, the length of time it may take to process your OPT application. If you think you might move in the months after you mail your application, use a reliable friend or family member's address to receive your EAD. (Click your mouse again to see how to complete #3 if you are using an alternative address. "C/O" means "in care of").

If you are remaining in Minnesota you will mail to * if you will be in another state see mailing instructions for form I-765 on [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov).

#### Item #9: Social Security Number (SSN)

If you have never worked in the U.S., you may not yet have a SSN. If this is the case, you can leave this space blank. You will be able to apply for your SSN when you get the EAD.

#### Item #10: I-94 Number

On this item, you will use your current I-94 number. This is an 11-digit number found on the top left corner of your I-94 card (see sample on page 19). As an F-1, you may not have an Alien Registration Number.

#### Item #11: Previous Employment Authorization

Check "yes" if you have ever received an EAD. Fill in the next two lines (at the top of the right column—shown on next page) with the information related to that previous work permit. A photocopy of that EAD must be included with your application package. (If you have lost it, write "lost EAD" in this space).

If you have never had an EAD, check the "no" box here. If you have worked on campus or have used CPT, you will still check "no" here.
Completing the I-765

**Items 12-17**

**Item #12: Date of Last Entry into the U.S.**
This is the date of your most recent entry into the U.S. This entry date can be found stamped on your I-94 card.

**Item #13: Place of Last Entry into the U.S.**
This is the name of the city where you landed in the U.S. This information is also on the I-94 (usually as a code like “SFR” for San Francisco). If you drove across from Canada or Mexico, write the name and the city where you entered in the blank.

**Item #14: Manner of Last Entry**
This is the status you had upon entering the U.S. For example, you may have initially entered with an H-1B work visa.

**Item #15: Current Immigration Status**
Your current status should be F-1 student. If not, talk to an Advisor in the Kearney International Center immediately.

**Item #16: Eligibility Category**
Use the following codes depending on the type of OPT you are requesting:

\( (c)(3)(A) \) Pre-Completion OPT

\( (c)(3)(B) \) Post-Completion OPT (see sample here)

Please note: the code \( (c)(3)(C) \) should only be used for 17-month STEM Extensions of OPT for eligible students. You can apply for the STEM Extension only after your 12-month OPT EAD has been issued.

**Item #17: 17-Month Extension**
Only those individuals who are eligible for the 17-month extension need to complete this section. If you entered \( (c)(3)(A) \) or \( (c)(3)(B) \) on item #16, you are not required to fill out this item.
**Finishing the I-765**

Sign your name, fill in your telephone number and the date of your signature at the bottom of the form.

**Please note that your signature must fit between the lines on the form. If your signature is too big, your application may be returned to you and may delay your work permission. Be conservative and use a signature smaller than your normal handwriting.**

**If You Get a “Request for Evidence (RFE)”**

*We strongly advise you to see an advisor at the Kearney International Center if you receive an RFE.* In most cases, the USCIS will not call you at the telephone number you put on the I-765. If there is a problem with your application, they will send you a notice by mail called the “Request for Evidence (RFE).” An RFE does not mean that your application has been rejected. It simply means that you need to send in additional documents before your EAD can be issued. Please note the deadline to respond to the RFE. If you fail to meet this deadline, your application will be automatically canceled.

Getting an RFE will delay the processing of your application for OPT usually by about one month. For this reason, it is important to make sure that you have completed the I-765 correctly and sent the proper documents to the USCIS.
Photo Specifications

The photos you are required to use for the OPT application must meet the specifications of U.S.-style passport photos. To see a full description of these specifications, go to the U.S. Department of State web site at http://www.state.gov/.

Most places that take passport photos are already familiar with the specifications. However, you may want to print this page, or the pages from the web site above to take with you when you get your photo taken. USCIS officials have stated that if the photo is the same as on your visa and/or passport they will request one that is more recent (within 30 days.)

Frequently Asked Questions

What type of paper are the photographs to be printed on?
The photos should be printed on thin photo-quality paper.

Do the photos have to be in color?
Yes, the photos must be in color.

How big must the photos be?
The photos must measure exactly 2 inches by 2 inches.

Can hats or religious headgear be worn for the photo?
Unless worn daily for religious reasons, all hats or headgear should be removed for the photo. In all cases, no item or attire should cover or otherwise obscure any part of the face.

Can eyeglasses be worn for the photo?
Eyeglasses worn on a daily basis can be worn for the photo. However, there should be no reflections from the eyeglasses that obscures the eyes. Dark glasses or nonprescription glasses with tinted lenses are not acceptable unless you need them for medical reasons.

Where can I get my photos taken in Mankato?
Walgreens, FedEx Kinko’s, Dept of Motor Vehicles

7 Steps to Successful Photos:

1. Your photo should show your full face, front view, eyes open.
2. Make sure the photo shows your full head from top of hair to bottom of chin; height of head should measure 1 inch to 1-3/8 inches (25 mm to 35 mm).
3. Your head should be centered within the frame.
4. Make sure eye height is between 1-1/8 inches to 1-3/8 inches (28 mm and 35 mm) from bottom of photo.
5. The background should be plain white or off-white.
6. There should be no distracting shadows on the face or in the background.
7. Make sure you have a natural expression.

Write your name and I-94 number lightly on the back of each photo in case they get separated from your application.
Preparing and Mailing the OPT Application: Mailing Options

Express Mail (Federal Express)
Regular Mail is sufficient for submitting your OPT application. Federal Express is another option.
If you use express mail, use the express mail (courier) address at the USCIS, which is different from the regular mail address (see next page).

Certified Mail / Return Receipt
“Certified Mail / return receipt” service is available through the U.S. Postal Service. You can request this service at the post office and pay a minimal fee (approx. $2). With certified mail, you will get a receipt showing what date the USCIS got your application.
A sample of the Certified Mail form and receipt is shown here.

E-Filing your OPT Application
Currently, it is not possible to E-File OPT applications because your application must include photos.
Mailing Your Application: Final Review Before Mailing

Checklist Review

Put the following items in an 8.5" x 11" envelope and mail them to one of the USCIS address noted here.


- Form I-765 (original)
- Photocopy of OPT and any previous I-20s (page 1-3). Don’t forget to sign it!
- Photocopy of I-94 card (both sides)
- Photocopy of previous EAD, if applicable
- Photocopy of your passport biographical page and F-1 visa stamp (if you have one)
- 2 Passport Photos (with name and I-94# written lightly with pencil on back)

Application Deadline

The USCIS must receive your application no later than 30 days after your OPT I-20 has been issued. The issue date is located next to the Advisor’s signature on Page 1 of the OPT I-120. Please account for mailing time.

USCIS Mailing Addresses

_for people who list an address in Minnesota on the I-765 form*

For Express Mail:

USCIS
Attn: AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S
Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034

For Regular or Certified Mail:

USCIS
PO Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

*If your return address is not in Minnesota, discuss this with an Advisor at the Kearney International Center or see the instructions for details at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)

E-Notification

To receive an e-mail and/or a text message that your application has been accepted at USCIS, complete Form [G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance](http://www.uscis.gov/files/article/G-1145.pdf) and clip it to the first page of your application.
Step 3

Receiving Your EAD

1. The Notice of Action from USCIS
2. Traveling Abroad on OPT
3. Applying for a Visa
4. Frequently Asked Questions
The Notice of Action

This is your OPT application receipt from USCIS. It normally takes about 2 to 6 weeks to get it in the mail.

The Notice of Action is a very important document. You will need it to inquire about the status of your OPT application and for travel outside the U.S. If you lose the receipt, there is no way to replace it.

Click your mouse to zoom in

Your Address Information
Verify the address on your I-765 receipt notices to make sure your name and address are correct. If it is incorrect, contact us immediately.

The “Receipt Number”
This is your case number at the USCIS. You should check the status of your case online through the USCIS web site at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do.

It’s important to sign up for automatic email updates or check the status regularly. If the Service Center sends you a Request for Further Evidence (RFE), you’ll see the notification on this website and look for it in the mail. The case status site will alert you if there is any mail delivery problems.

If you do not get your Notice of Action within 6 weeks after mailing your application to the USCIS, contact an advisor in the Kearney International Center for instructions.

The Received Date
This is the date when the USCIS begins processing your application. It may not be the actual date they received your application but it is when your case was entered into the system.

The Notice Date
This is the date your Notice of Action was produced.
Traveling Abroad on OPT

Since you will remain in F-1 status during your 12-month OPT authorization period, traveling abroad and re-entering the U.S. as an F-1 is allowed (In fact, if you re-enter in a status other than F-1, you will lose your OPT eligibility). However, be aware that any time you leave the U.S., there is no guarantee that you will be allowed to re-enter. Being denied entry is more probable for some people than others, although in general, Minnesota State University, Mankato students have not reported problems. To avoid problems, make sure you have the proper documents as listed here.

Documents Required For Re-entry to the U.S.
The travel documents you will need depend on the timing of your re-entry to the U.S.:

**Before Completing Your Program and Before Getting Your EAD**
- A valid passport
- A valid F-1 visa stamp
- Your OPT I-20 with a valid travel endorsement signed on page 3 by an Advisor at the Kearney International Center
- Evidence of continued enrollment
- Evidence of financial support
- The OPT receipt - Notice of Action

**After Completing Your Program and Before Getting Your EAD**
- A valid passport
- A valid F-1 visa stamp
- Your OPT I-20 with a valid travel endorsement signed on page 3 by an Advisor at the Kearney International Center. The travel endorsement is valid for 6 months while on OPT
- The OPT receipt - Notice of Action
- Evidence of financial support for the OPT period is strongly recommended (such as a bank statement or letter from sponsor or employer)
- If you have employment, a job offer letter from the employer is strongly recommended

**After Completing Your Program and After Getting Your EAD**
- A valid passport
- A valid F-1 visa stamp
- Your OPT I-20 with a valid travel endorsement signed on page 3 by an Advisor at the Kearney International Center. The travel endorsement is valid for 6 months while on OPT
- The EAD (Employment Authorization Document)
- Evidence of financial support for the OPT period is strongly recommended (such as a bank statement or letter from sponsor or employer)
- A job offer letter is required
Applying for a Visa

CAUTION: There is no assurance you will successfully receive a visa if you attempt to renew on OPT ------ if your visa application is denied, you may not be able to return to the U.S. to complete the remainder of your OPT. Inform your employer of such travel plans.

If you are traveling abroad and the F-1 visa in your passport has expired, you must obtain a new one before re-entering the U.S. To apply for a new visa during OPT, the basic documents you will need are:

1) A valid passport
2) A valid I-20 with travel endorsement from the Kearney International Center within the past six months
3) The EAD
4) A job offer in your field of study
5) Evidence of sufficient funds (e.g. a bank statement, a letter from a sponsor or a job offer letter)

Check the U.S. Department of State web site for more information about getting a visa at www.travel.state.gov.

Tips for Travelers

- Be prepared to tell the U.S. immigration officer at the U.S. port-of-entry your plans for the OPT year. They may want to know:
  - What have you done to find a job?
  - What kind of job do you plan to look for?
  - What will you do after the OPT is expired?
  - How will you support yourself while you are job- seeking?
- If you travel after getting your EAD, you must have a job offer letter to be able to re-enter the U.S.
- Don’t leave the U.S. for long periods of time during the OPT year. A few weeks of vacation is reasonable, but if you are gone for several months, you may encounter difficulty in re-entering. Remember, unemployment is limited to 90 days. Time outside the US may count as a period of unemployment.
- Be careful about trying to re-enter the U.S. close to the expiration date of your OPT. You may not be allowed to re-enter as an F-1.
- Students who need to apply for a new visa should consult the Kearney International Center prior to travel to discuss the visa application process and possible risks.
- Don’t attempt to re-enter the U.S. in a status other than F-1 unless you are willing to forfeit your OPT permanently.
Frequently Asked Questions

**How can I know the status of my OPT application?** As soon as you have your Notice of Action, check the USCIS website at [https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do](https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do) and click on the “Case Status Online” button. The main information you can get from this is whether your application has been approved yet or is still in process. The processing time indicated is a standard message that often has no connection with actual processing times.

**When will I get my EAD?** The USCIS will mail the EAD to you at the address you gave on the I-765 form. It should arrive approximately three to five months from the “received” date indicated on the USCIS “Notice of Action.”

**I never received a ‘Notice of Action.’** The USCIS usually sends this within two to six weeks of their receipt of the EAD application. If you have not received the Notice of Action after this time, check your bank account to see if USCIS cashed your check. If so, you can request a copy of the check from your bank that should have your USCIS tracking number printed on it (ten digits beginning with “WAC…”). Keep in mind that it may take up to two weeks to get a copy from the bank. Check the status of your application online at [https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do](https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do) with the WAC.

**How do I contact the USCIS?** The number on the Notice of Action (1-800-375-5283) is the National Customer Service line. Be sure to have your “WAC” receipt number ready before you call. Inquiries through the National Customer Service line may delay the processing of your application. Contact an Advisor at the Kearney International Center first.

**Is there any way to change the information on the EAD application (address, dates, etc.) once I have mailed the application?** After you have mailed your application to USCIS no changes can be made except for address updates. If you change your address while your application is pending, contact the Kearney International Center for instructions. You will need your Notice of Action receipt number.

**How long can I stay in the US after the end date of my OPT?** You have 60 days after your OPT ends to leave the US, request a transfer of your I-20, or change your status. You cannot work.

**Does my wife or kids get a new OPT I-20 too?** When your new OPT I-20 is printed, you should also get an I-20 for your family members with the updated information on it. If you did not receive OPT I-20s for your family, contact the Kearney International Center.

**90 days have passed since the Notice of Action receipt date. What can I do?** First, verify your status at [https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do](https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do). If your EAD application has been approved you will need to wait until the card arrives (2-4 weeks after it is approved). If the application is still pending, see an Advisor at the Kearney International Center.

**USCIS said that my EAD was approved, but I have not received it yet - can I start working?** No. Employers are required to verify that you are eligible to work before they can put you on payroll under I-9 employment verification regulations. You must be able to show them the EAD when you begin employment.

**USCIS said that my application was approved over six weeks ago and I still haven’t received it. Is there a problem?** There may be. Have you moved? If so, did you update your OPT address? See an Advisor at the Kearney International Center for more information.

**How do I get an extension of my EAD?** Only students who have completed certain STEM majors and have an employer who is enrolled in E-Verify are eligible for the 17 Month Extension OPT.

**I lost my EAD. How can I get it replaced?** If you lose your EAD the only way to replace it is with a new EAD application. You must submit the same items as the initial application to USCIS (fee, photos, forms, etc.) and it will take 3 to 5 months. It is impossible to replace an EAD if you are outside the U.S.

**My EAD says “not valid for re-entry” on it. Does that mean I cannot travel abroad and re-enter on OPT?** All EADs are marked with this notation. It simply means that you must carry other documents to show proof of your eligibility to re-enter the U.S. such as your I-20 and valid F-1 visa stamp. The EAD alone is not enough to re-enter the U.S.
Frequently Asked Questions

What counts as employment? Immigration has provided many options to satisfy the employment requirement including paid, unpaid, and volunteer work related to your field of study. Please see the Kearney International Center website’s [http://www.mnsu.edu/international/currentstudents/f-1/opt/info_update.php](http://www.mnsu.edu/international/currentstudents/f-1/opt/info_update.php) for more information.

Is there a minimum number of hours I need to work? There is no minimum for students on Pre-Completion OPT. All students on Post-Completion OPT, whether they have completed their degree or not, are required to work or volunteer at least 20 hours per week. Students who do not work/volunteer an average of 20 hours per week are not meeting the employment requirement.

I have been unemployed for 80 days. What is going to happen on the 90th day? If you accumulate 90 days or more of unemployment, you are in violation of status which may affect your ability to travel in and out of the US in F-1 status, future immigration benefits, and change of status applications.

To avoid the status violation, you may do one of the following before the 90th day:
1. Secure unpaid or volunteer work related to your field of study at least 20 hours per week;
2. Request a ‘transfer out’ of your I-20 to a new school;

For more information on the 90 day unemployment rule, please see [http://www.mnsu.edu/international/currentstudents/f-1/opt/info_update.php](http://www.mnsu.edu/international/currentstudents/f-1/opt/info_update.php) on the Kearney International Center website.

Do I need a Social Security Number to work in the US? Yes. If you plan to work in the U.S. you will need a valid Social Security Number (SSN). To apply, please obtain instructions and directions to the Social Security Office from the Kearney International Center. The Social Security Administration will process your application and mail your Social Security number to you.

Do I need to complete any forms with my employer to begin working? Yes. Within the first three days of beginning work you and your employer must complete a form entitled Employment Eligibility Verification (Form I-9). This form will be kept on file by your employer and must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission. Your employer will provide this form and assist you in its completion.

Can I change employers while on OPT? Yes. OPT work authorization is not job-specific. Therefore, you may change employers, or have multiple employers at the same time, provided that each position is directly related to your major field of study and commensurate with your educational level. You will need to update the employer information with the Kearney International Center within 10 days of the change at [http://www.mnsu.edu/international/currentstudents/f-1/opt/info_update.php](http://www.mnsu.edu/international/currentstudents/f-1/opt/info_update.php)

Do I pay taxes while working on OPT? Students in F-1 status are subject to all federal, state and local taxes that may apply. Check the IRS’ web site, [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) for tax information and to see if your country is one of the few that has a tax treaty with the US allowing students to exclude a limited amount of earned income from federal taxation.

In general, however, F-1 students who have been present in the US for no more than five calendar years are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare taxes. Be sure to bring this to the attention of your employer, as many employers are unfamiliar with this provision of the tax laws. See publication 519 available for download from the IRS web site [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) for information on how to claim salary incorrectly deducted for FICA or Medicare.
What if I am not able to complete my degree program by the completion dated noted on the OPT I-20? If your application has not been adjudicated, you can withdraw your OPT and request a program extension of your I-20. Your fee will not be refunded if you are:

An undergraduate student: You must extend your I-20 end date if you still have course work to complete. Your OPT will be limited to part time during the semester until you finish your degree. You are still held to the 90 day unemployment rule. See an Advisor at the Kearney International Center before that completion date has passed.

A graduate student: Graduate students finishing their thesis or APP cannot change their program end date. They are eligible to work full time before filing and are held to the 90 day unemployment rule. It is important that the student finish their degree before their OPT ends.

What status do I have between my degree completion date and the start of my OPT (EAD start date)?
If you have chosen a start date well after your degree completion date, you will still remain in F-1 status. Even though there seems to be a gap in your status, you are still legally allowed to remain in the U.S. or re-enter the U.S. from abroad during this time.

Can I go to school while on OPT?
Time spent going to school should only be an incidental part of your stay in the U.S. New regulations do not allow you to pursue a degree program while participating in post-completion OPT.
If you decide to go back to school full-time, you must get a new I-20 from the school and forfeit the remainder of your OPT time. See an advisor at the Kearney International Center or at your new school if you are considering this option.

Do I need to do anything with the Kearney International Center while on OPT? Yes. As a condition of your F-1 status, all students must report any changes in address and employment information on the following website within 10 days of any changes: http://www.mnsu.edu/international/currentstudents/f-1/opt/info_update.php

Can I start working without pay while waiting for my EAD? This is generally not a good idea. The USCIS may see it as "employment without authorization" and is a risky situation for you and your employer.

Does my visa need to be valid while on OPT? Your visa only needs to be valid to re-enter the U.S. from abroad. Thus, if it expires while you are still in the U.S., there is no problem. Your F-1 immigration status remains valid as long as you have an EAD that has not expired.
The Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
Reporting Requirements on OPT
The following information must be reported to the Kearney International Center at http://www.mnsu.edu/international/currentstudents/f-1/opt/info_update.php during the OPT period of authorization:

- Your Name
- Your Residential address
- Your Phone and email address
- Employer name
- Employer address
- Start Date of Employment
- More than 10 days of unemployment (During the initial 12-month OPT, students may not accrue a cumulative total of more than 90 days of unemployment. Periods of up to 10 days between the end of one job and the beginning of the next job will not be included in the calculation for the time spent unemployed.)
- Date of exiting the U.S (You need to provide date of exit if you decide to exit the U.S and complete your OPT status prior to the end date of your OPT)

You will also be required to update this information within 10 working days of any changes.