What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

Optional Practical Training is temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student’s major area of study. The maximum amount of time that a student may participate in OPT is 12 months per degree level. The application for OPT does not require proof of employment at the time of application.

Who is eligible for OPT?

Any F-1 student who has been continuously enrolled in full-time status for one full academic year (9 months) may apply for OPT. No practical training is available to students in English Language training programs.

When can I participate in OPT?

A student may only participate in OPT **AFTER** the application has been processed and approved by USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) and **AFTER** the student is in possession of the EAD (Employment Authorization Document) card and the start date has been reached.

Periods of eligibility are:

- After completion of a course of study
- After completion of course requirements for the degree excluding thesis or equivalent
- While school is in session, provided that OPT does not exceed 20 hours per week
- During the student’s annual vacation or at other times when school is not in session

*Any portion of the 12 months used prior to completion of a degree level will be subtracted from the 12 months of total time of eligibility after the completion of an academic program.

What is the deadline for OPT application?

The student must apply to USCIS **BEFORE** the student’s “completion date”. In order for this processing to be complete, the OBU International Office will schedule workshops for which the
students must attend. It is important to note that USCIS can take 2-3 months or longer to process applications. It is highly recommended that a student mail the OPT application **90 days before** the program completion date.

**It is NOT possible to file an OPT application on or after the “completion date”**.

**What is the “completion date”?**

The “completion date” is the day a student’s program is complete. This is usually the last day of final exams. The completion date does not necessarily correspond with the official end of the term. **The completion date is NOT the day of graduation.**

**How do I apply for OPT?**

**THE OBU INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS OFFICE DOES NOT PERMIT E-FILING OF OPT APPLICATIONS.**

1. Contact the OBU International Programs Office and make an appointment regarding OPT.

2. Prior to the Appointment:
   - Print the OPT Completion of Degree Information Form (available on the International Office website), and have it completed and signed by your dean or academic advisor.
   - Obtain two color passport size pictures taken anywhere.
   - Make three copies of:
     - Current passport (Pages that include Name, Picture, & Expiration Date)
     - Current visa
     - Most recent I-94 card (front and back)
     - Pages 1 and 3 (travel signature page) of your most recent OBU I-20 Form for your current degree program

3. Bring to the appointment:
   - Three copies of the documents listed above
   - OPT Completion of Degree Information Form signed by the student’s dean or academic advisor
• Two color passport size pictures taken anywhere

• Check or Money order made payable to Department of Homeland Security for $340.00 – You may confirm this amount by checking the following web site: (http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis) and click on the hyperlink at the top of the page for “Immigration Forms”

• The OPT Application Form (I-765) will be distributed and completed at the Appointment

4. Mail your application. **Do not send the application by certified or registered mail.** This will slow the application process. The application may be sent by regular or express mail as long as such mailing does not require a USCIS individual to sign for the envelope in order to complete the delivery.

**How long will it take to process my OPT application?**

It can take 2-3 months or longer to process your OPT application. It is highly recommended that a student mail the OPT application **90 days before** the program completion date.

**How will I be updated on the progress of my application?**

USCIS will send two “Notice of Action” forms. The first notice will be the receipt for your application. If your application is approved, the second notice will contain your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card for OPT. When the EAD card arrives, the International Programs Office will contact you by e-mail. It is the student’s responsibility to provide the OBU International Programs Office with an updated e-mail account after completion of their program.

**What if my card has not arrived after 90 days?**

Students who have not received authorization for OPT after 90 days from their “receipt date” may contact the International Programs Office to request help. The International Programs Office can try to contact the USCIS Service Center that is adjudicating on your I-765 petition.

**When can I begin employment?**

Employment can begin only **after** you receive documented approval in the form of the EAD card and the start date has been reached. You may work only during the valid dates indicated on the card.

**Where can I work?**

Employment may be obtained in any business or organization within the student’s major area of study and commensurate with their educational level.

**Can I change my job during OPT?**
There is no limit to the number of jobs a student may take during the OPT period.

**Can I travel while waiting for my OPT to begin?**

After completion of studies, we recommend that students do not travel while their OPT is pending. If you decide to travel, we recommend that you take with you a current passport, valid visa, EAD card, your OPT I-20 endorsed for travel while on OPT by an International Student Adviser (valid for 6 months), and letter of employment (or correspondence with potential employers).

**Can I travel when my OPT as begun?**

Again, we recommend that students do not travel while on OPT. Once the OPT has started, re-entry into the U.S. without the EAD card and letter of employment can lead to denial of re-entry into the United States and forfeiture of OPT.

By itself, the EAD card is not valid for travel purposes. International travel during OPT requires an OPT I-20 endorsed for travel while on OPT by an International Student Adviser (valid for 6 months), a current passport, a valid visa, EAD card, and letter of employment.

**What is required of the student during OPT?**

- The student may only participate in employment, which is related to the student’s major area of and commensurate with their educational level.
- The student must fax a letter of employment on company letterhead to the OBU International Office
- An OPT travel signature on the I-20 is required for international travel (valid for 6 months).
- Change of visa status notification (such as F-1 to H1B)
- DHS regulations require the student to notify the OBU International Office for the following reasons:
  - Any changes in address, phone number, or e-mail
  - Name change
  - Termination of employment
  - Strike activity at place of employment

**Do I have to pay taxes during my OPT?**
Federal income taxes will be withheld from the paycheck of an F-1 student during OPT. Nonresident alien F-1 students should not pay Medicare and Social Security taxes. If there is confusion concerning taxes, the employer can be directed to the IRS web site: (http://www.irs.gov/business/small/international/article/0,,id=131635,00.html)

**May I take classes during OPT?**

An F-1 OPT student may take classes part-time. Enrollment in a full-time program requires a new I-20 which will terminate the OPT. If a decision is made to begin a full-time academic program, care should be taken to have clear communication between the student and the OBU International Programs Office, which issues the new I-20, regarding when the OPT employment will be terminated.

**What are my options when my OPT expires?**

Employment must terminate on or before the last day of OPT authorization.

- Departure date will be determined by your OPT start date. Further information will be provided during the appointment.
- Continue in F-1 status by pursuing further F-1 studies (such as an advanced degree) according to DHS requirements. This process should begin before the OPT expiration date.
- Apply to change status to another nonimmigrant classification according to the DHS requirements. This process should begin before the OPT expiration date.