

OPT Quick Guide

1. What is OPT?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is temporary employment authorization that allows F-1 students to work in the U.S. in a job directly related to their major field of study. OPT provides practical experience to complement your academic coursework.

- Pre-completion OPT: During studies (part-time in session, full-time in breaks).
- Post-completion OPT: Up to 12 months of work authorization after graduation.
- STEM OPT Extension: 24-month extension for eligible STEM majors.

2. Eligibility & Deadlines

- Must be in valid F-1 status for at least one academic year.
- Apply up to 90 days before program end date, or within 60 days after (OPT).
- STEM OPT must be filed before current OPT ends.

3. Application Steps (OPT)

1. Attend OIA CPT/OPT Info Session.
2. Choose OPT start date (within 60-day grace period).
3. Submit draft I-765 and documents to OIA for review.
4. Receive new I-20 with OPT recommendation from OIA.
5. File Form I-765 with USCIS within 30 days of I-20 issuance.

4. Required Documents (OPT)

- Completed Form I-765
- Copy of passport, visa, and I-94 record - not history record
- 2 U.S. passport-style photos
- Copies of prior EADs, CPT and/or OPT I-20s issued (if any)
- Proof of enrollment such as official transcript
- OPT-recommended I-20 from OIA
- Filing fee payment
- DOCUMENTS ONLY FOR OIA:
 - Letter from academic advisor (see [OPT Guide](#))
 - Completed Acknowledgment of Responsibilities form (see [OPT Guide](#))

5. After Applying

- USCIS will send a Receipt Notice (keep for records).
- Approval = EAD card. Cannot begin work until start date on EAD.
- Must work at least 20 hrs/week in a field related to your degree.
- Report employer changes within 10 days to OIA on [OPT report form](#) and SEVP Portal.

STEM OPT Extension (24 Months)

6. What is STEM OPT?

STEM OPT is a 24-month extension of work authorization available to F-1 students who completed a degree in an eligible Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM) field and are currently on Post-completion OPT. Employment must be with an E-Verify employer and directly related to the STEM degree.

7. Application Steps (STEM OPT)

1. Complete Form I-983 Training Plan with employer and submit it to OIA.
2. Receive new STEM OPT I-20 from OIA.
3. File Form I-765 with USCIS before current OPT EAD expires.
4. Receive new EAD valid for 24 months.

8. Required Documents (STEM OPT)

- Completed Form I-765
- Copy of passport, visa, and I-94 record
- Current OPT EAD card
- New STEM OPT I-20 (issued within 60 days)
- Form I-983 Training Plan
- Filing fee payment

9. After Applying

- USCIS will send a Receipt Notice (keep for records).
- Approval = EAD card. Cannot begin work until start date on EAD.
- Must work at least 20 hrs/week in a paid position with an E-Verify employer (STEM).
- Report employer changes within 10 days to OIA and SEVP Portal.
- Submit a [validation report](#) to OIA every 6 months.

10. Limits & Travel

- Unemployment: Max 90 days (OPT) + 60 additional days (STEM) = 150 total.
- Travel: Carry EAD, signed I-20 (within 6 months), passport, visa, and job letter.

Questions? Contact OIA: oiasss@nccu.edu | 919-530-7912