Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) Information for F-1 Student

Current USCIS Processing Time: 90 – 110 days

DEFINITION
Post-Completion Optional Practical Training is temporary work authorization, for a job related to the field of study, available to international students in F-1 status who completed degree requirements to graduate from a US higher education institution. Any student in F-1 status must receive approval by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to work off-campus. Unauthorized paid employment may result in loss of student status and future visa application.

DURATION
Students in F-1 status are eligible to apply for up to 12 months of Optional Practical Training. OPT is not renewable.

ELIGIBILITY TO APPLY
Eligibility requires that you are in good academic standing at the Fletcher School and that you have been in F-1 visa status for at least one academic year (9 months.) If you take a leave of absence for any reason during the academic year and leave the US for five months or more, you will then lose your eligibility for practical training until you have again maintained F-1 status in the US for at least one academic year. You DO NOT need to have a job offer in order to apply for OPT.

WHEN TO APPLY FOR POST-COMPLETION OPT
You may apply for post-completion OPT up to 90 days prior to your academic completion date (not your graduation ceremony day), and up to 60 days after your academic completion date. Once the USCIS has granted employment authorization, it cannot be cancelled or changed for another period. Practical Training time lost as a consequence of the delayed completion of studies or not being employed may not be recovered.

VERY IMPORTANT: Your OPT application documents must be received by the United States Immigration and Citizenship Services (USCIS) within 30 days from your “OPT Recommended” I-20 issuing date in order to avoid a potential OPT application denial.

LIMITS ON PERIOD OF UNEMPLOYMENT
Students on post-completion OPT are allowed a total of 90 days (Saturday and Sunday included) of unemployment from OPT start date written on EAD card. The 90 days of unemployment are cumulative, and students are considered out of status once they accumulate more than 90 days of unemployment.

Since Spring 2016, SEVIS database began counting “no employment reporting date,” and any OPT students who reported no employment to his/her Designated School Official (as known as International Student Advisor) for more than 90 days will be named on “Current OPT No Employment Reporting List.”

VALID OPT EMPLOYMENT
The following are an activity that students can report as his or her OPT employment. The work must be directly related to the student’s program of study:
1. Regular paid employment (full time or part time)
2. Multiple short-time employment
3. Work to hire
4. Self-employed – start your own business
5. Employment through an agency
6. Volunteer or unpaid internship - at least 20 hours per week. Can be multiple works
(Note: students may work as volunteers or unpaid interns, where this does not violate labor laws and if the student can provide evidence. The work must be at least 20 hours per week for students on post-completion OPT.)
**CAP-GAP EXTENSION**

A student who is the beneficiary of a receipted H-1B petition will have his or her OPT and F-1 status extended to September 30. Students are responsible for checking with their International Student Advisor and verifying that their SEVIS record has been updated with the extension.

**LEAVING THE UNITED STATES AND RETURNING DURING OPT**

*(After sending OPT application to the USCIS – AFTER your I-20 end date)*

If you leave the United States without receiving an approval notice and Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card from the USCIS, you will be considered to have abandoned your OPT application. Although it is not prohibited to travel outside of the United States while your OPT application is pending, this may be risky and you should only travel outside of the country if necessary. In that case, you should be carrying your OPT application receipt notice (Form I-797) to prove the application has been filed and is pending approval. **You still need a valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport and a travel signature on your I-20.**

*(After receiving an approval with EAD card for your OPT application)*

The Fletcher School strongly advises AGAINST leaving the United States AFTER receiving your EAD card WITHOUT securing a job or job offer in writing. Even if you have received your EAD card for OPT, if you have no job or job offer in writing, your re-entry into the United States could be questioned or even denied at a US Port-of-Entry. It is strongly recommended by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) as well as Customs and Border Protection (CBP) for OPT students to carry; (1) EAD card; (2) valid I-20 with a valid travel signature (given within 6 months from the returning date to the US); (3) a statement explaining his or her OPT employment; (4) valid passport (with minimum 6 months of validity for future); and (5) valid F-1 visa stamp when they return to the United States after traveling outside of the United States.

**HEALTH INSURANCE DURING OPT**

If you are graduating, it is important to think about health insurance because you will no longer be eligible for the student health insurance plan after completing degree requirements. If your employer is not providing you with coverage, you may purchase a private health insurance coverage that is effective for F-1/OPT students. Some private companies specialize for international students’ health insurance issues, such as Compass Benefits Group ([https://www.compassstudenthealthinsurance.com](https://www.compassstudenthealthinsurance.com)), International Student Insurance.com ([http://www.internationalstudentinsurance.com/opt/](http://www.internationalstudentinsurance.com/opt/)), International Student Organization ([https://www.isoa.org/](https://www.isoa.org/)) and The Gateway Plans ([http://www.gatewayplans.com/](http://www.gatewayplans.com/)). You are recommended to review rates and plans carefully to ensure your full knowledge of the coverage.

**RESPONSIBILITIES WHILE ON OPT**

While on post-completion OPT, you are still on an F-1 student visa and you are still The Fletcher School student for visa purposes. **You are responsible for communicating the following information to your International Student Advisor, Reiko Morris during your time on OPT:**

1. Update your US local address every time you move to a new location within ten days from the moving date
2. Update your employer information; (1) employment effective date; (2) total working hours per week; (3) name of employer; (4) your employment location/address, not the employer’s head office address; within ten business days after your new job start day
3. If changing to a different visa status from F-1, provide a copy of your new visa status approval notice from the USCIS. Due to the new status, your F-1 SEVIS record needs to be terminated.
4. If you are leaving the United States BEFORE your OPT end date.

**REMEMBER**

1. You will have **60 days after your OPT completion date as a grace period.** If you have no plan to pursue another degree program in the United States or getting a different visa status, such as H-1B in order to continue working after the OPT period, you must leave the United States before your grace period ends.

2. You **SHOULD NOT** go outside of the United States and come back to the country during your grace period unless you have a new I-20 to study after the OPT or approval notice for getting different visa status and a new visa stamp on your passport.
PROCEDURE FOR OPT APPLICATION

STEP 1: EMAIL Reiko Ohmura to receive all necessary OPT application forms (writable PDF)

STEP 2: FURNISH all necessary items and documents to apply:
(1) TWO U.S passport-size color photos of yourself. Photo must be on a white background, taken no earlier than 30 days before submission to the USCIS. It is HIGHLY RECOMMENDED to get your picture at one of the local drug stores, such as CVS, Walgreen or Rite Aid, instead of using personally taken photos. Once you get your photo taken, WRITE your full name, SEVIS ID number, and date of birth with a pencil on back of your each photos.
(2) The application fee, $410.00 – Available payment methods are: [1] Bank check, personal check or money order - make payable to DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY; or [2] Credit or debit card – fill out and send USCIS Form G-1450
(3) USCIS Form I-765 (Application for Employment Authorization)
(4) USCIS Form G-1145
(5) Copy of your “OPT I-20”* – Reiko will issue this I-20 once she verified your OPT application documents at the second appointment
(6) COPY ALL of your I-20s that you received from The Fletcher School – if you are Tufts-Fletcher dual-degree students, please also copy of your Bachelor’s degree I-20s
(7) COPY your passport bio page – must be valid with minimum 6-month validity for future
(8) COPY your F-1 visa – can be an expired one
(9) PRINT-OUT of your I-94 information – Go to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection website at: www.cbp.gov. You need to have your passport handy.
(10) COPY of your previous EAD card – only if applicable

STEP 3: Make an OPT application appointment at https://fletcherinternational.as.me/ and bring completed application forms, the photos all of your I-20s and passport for the meeting in order to get “OPT recommendation.” Special I-20 for your OPT application will be issued, which is one of the required OPT Application documents. Reiko will check all of your application forms before you send them to the USCIS.

STEP 4: SEND THE DOCUMENTS – your OPT application must be received by the USCIS within 30 days from your “OPT I-20” issuing date - in order to avoid a potential OPT denial!

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<tr>
<td>2501 S. State Hwy.121 Business Suite 400</td>
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<td>Lewisville, TX 75067</td>
<td>Dallas, TX 75266</td>
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PLEASE NOTE:
- All documents from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), including your EAD card, will be mailed DIRECTLY to Reiko at The Fletcher School office address. You will be emailed by Reiko as soon as your EAD card arrived at Fletcher.
- IF YOU WOULD PREFER receiving documents from the USCIS at your residential address in the United States, you then need to download the USCIS Form I-765 at www.uscis.gov/forms and enter your US address. [ATTENTION] Any documents from the USCIS will NOT BE forwarded to other addresses BUT the address you provide on your I-765 form. In this option, it is your responsibility to make sure receiving all the documents from the USCIS, which will be sent by regular mail by the US Postal Service without tracking number.
- Current USCIS Processing Time for OPT application is: 90 – 110 days. You are NOT permitted to start working UNTIL you receive your EAD card.
**OPT Application Fee**

**How to Prepare OPT Application Fee: Get Money Order**
You can get a domestic money order at a local post office. For more detail, please refer to the following webpage: [https://www.usps.com/shop/money-orders.htm](https://www.usps.com/shop/money-orders.htm)

**How to Prepare OPT Application Fee: Get a Bank Check**
Go to the closest branch office of your bank and request a check for $410.00. You then need to write “Department of Homeland Security” as the recipient name.

**How to Prepare OPT Application Fee: Write a Personal Check**
If you have a personal check, write a $410.00 check for “Department of Homeland Security.” Make sure to sign the check before sending it.

**Mailing OPT Application Documents to the USCIS – Make sure to use the CORRECT mailing address! Check page 3**

**Send Your OPT Application by Courier – RECOMMENDED!**
*(Option 1: Using Fed-Ex Drop-Off box)*
2. Make a shipment/payment arrangement on-line – credit card needed!
3. Print out shipping labels from the website – you need to print out two of the same shipment labels
4. Bring your OPT application documents and shipment label to Fed-Ex Drop-Off box at Packard Ave, directly across from The Olin Center.
5. Fed-Ex envelope is stored inside of the Drop-Off box. Put documents in an envelope, seal it and put BOTH (two) shipment label into the front pocket.

*Closest Fed-Ex Shipping Center from the Fletcher School – Fed-Ex Office Print & Ship Center (@Station Landing ) 5 Revere Beach Parkway, Medford, MA 02155 (Phone) 781-391-2708, Sunday: Closed.*

*(Option 2: Using UPS or DHL)*
The UPS Store - DHL service is also available at this location
411 Highland Ave., Suite A, Somerville, MA 02144 *Right before Davis Square (Phone) 617-776-4949, No Saturday pick-up/delivery service available

**Send Your OPT Application by United States Postal Service (Post Office)**
You are highly recommended to mail your OPT application by Certified Mail or Priority Mail (with tracking number)!

**Local Post Office – you may search other locations at USPS.com**
Tufts University (at Curtis Hall)
470 Boston Ave., Medford, MA 02155-5802 (Phone) 617-625-5755

**Lobby hours:** Monday to Friday: 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, Saturday & Sunday: closed (subject to change by the USPS)
Tufts Post Office (at Curtis Hall) is open for your convenience in purchasing stamps or sending packages. The United States Postal Service operates it.

**West Somerville**
58 Day Street, Suite 100, Somerville, MA 02144-9998 (Phone) 617-666-2255

**Lobby hours:** Monday to Friday: 8:00am to 5:00pm, Saturday: 8:00am to 1:00pm, Sunday: Closed

*Nearby crossing road:* just after Holland Street and Dover Street.
Photo Requirements for I-765 Application

You must provide one photo with your passport application.

- Your head must face the camera directly with full face in view.
- You must have a neutral facial expression or a natural smile, with both eyes open.
- Taken in clothing normally worn on a daily basis
- **Taken in the last 6 months**
- Use a plain white or off-white background
- Be sized correctly
  1. 2 x 2 inches (51 x 51 mm)
  2. Head must be between 1 - 1 3/8 inches (25 - 35 mm) from the bottom of the chin to the top of the head

- Printed on matte or glossy photo quality paper
- Printed in color
- You cannot wear glasses.
  - If you cannot remove your glasses for medical reasons, please include a signed note from your doctor with application.
- You cannot wear a hat or head covering.
  - If you wear a hat or head covering for religious purposes, submit a signed statement that verifies that the hat or head covering in your photo is part of recognized, traditional religious attire that is customarily or required to be worn continuously in public.

**Example**
Acceptable—Subject's full face is visible, no shadows or clothing obscure the face

**Photo tip:** You may not wear hats or head coverings, except for religious or medical purposes and with a signed statement.

- If you wear a hat or head covering for medical purposes, submit a signed doctor's statement verifying the hat or head covering in your photo is used daily for medical purposes.
- Your full face must be visible and your hat or head covering cannot obscure your hairline or cast shadows on your face.
- You cannot wear headphones or wireless hands-free devices.

(Source: the US Department of States – Passport Photos web page)
https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/requirements/photos.html