

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 students is intended to provide hands-on practical work experience complementary to the academic program. F-1 students are eligible for 12 months of OPT for each level of education. When a student begins a new academic program at a higher level (e.g. master's after bachelor's degree, or PhD after Master's), the previous OPT time is lost, but the student is eligible for a new 12 months of OPT.

Note: Certain science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degree holders may be eligible for additional 17 months of OPT time. [See STEM Extension information.](#)

Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for Optional Practical Training, you must:

- have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for one full academic year in the US
- currently be maintaining a full-time program of study and valid F-1 status
- seek employment directly related to your major field of study

Types of OPT

Pre-completion OPT:

- part-time or full-time employment during the student's annual vacation and at other times when class is not in session, if the student intends to register for the following semester
- part-time employment (20 hours or less) while class is in session

Post-completion OPT:

- full-time employment after completion of the course of study

Reporting Requirements While on OPT

Students on OPT remain in F-1 visa status and are therefore required to report to our office any change of name or address and any changes to employment within 10 days. Reporting should be done via e-mail to intl@dickinson.edu. Any changes to your immigration status, such as a change of status to another visa type, should also be reported.

Unemployment Time Limit

During post-completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment. Students may not exceed more than **90 days** of unemployment during post-completion OPT. Employment is defined as a paid or unpaid position related to your field of study and which consists of 20 hours or more per week.

OPT Filing Window

A student can submit a **pre-completion OPT** application up to 90 days before the planned employment. A student can submit a **post-completion OPT** application up to 90 days before the degree completion date, and up to 60 days after the degree completion date.

The OPT application requires official endorsement in SEVIS by International Services. It is recommended that you request an OPT appointment as you approach 3 months prior to date you intend to start working. Once the OPT application is endorsed by International Services, you must submit the application to USCIS within 30 days.

Processing times for OPT applications vary depending on the time of year and the current staffing level at USCIS. On average, application processing takes 3 months. Current processing times can be found on the [USCIS website](#). Beware that these times are AVERAGE. Actual processing time may take longer than expected, so it is important for you to apply early.

Duration of OPT Employment Authorization

Employment authorization will begin on the date requested or the date the employment authorization is adjudicated, whichever is later. The official date will appear on the Employment Authorization Document, which is known as the EAD or OPT card. *Note: OPT will be automatically terminated if you begin study at another educational level or transfer to another school.*

Application Process

1. Gather the following application documents:

- A. A personal check or money order for **\$380** payable to **US Department of Homeland Security**. The fee information is correct as of the printing of this handout. The fee may change, so check the amount when you download the Form I-765 as instructed below.
- B. Two (2) identical color passport-style **photos**. The photos must meet USCIS specifications, so we recommend getting photos made from a professional who produces official passport photos regularly. CVS pharmacy is the closest vendor to campus where you can purchase passport photos.
- C. Completed Request for **OPT Application Form** (found attached to this information sheet). You must choose dates for your OPT period before International Services can endorse your application. Consider your dates carefully. It cannot start later than 60 days after completion of your studies, and you cannot begin working until you receive your EAD card.

AND

Completed USCIS [Form I-765](#). We will check the form for errors during your appointment, but do not come to your appointment with a blank form.

For item 3, use an address where you can receive mail in your name for the next 4 months. If you will be moving in the next 4 months, you can use our address, but be careful to include the “c/o” or the mail may be misdirected:

c/o Global Center P.O. Box 1773
Carlisle, PA 17013

For item 10, write the number on your [I-94 card](#).

For item 16:

- For pre-completion OPT, enter “(c) (3) (A)”
 - For post-completion OPT, enter “(c) (3) (B)”
- D. Completed USCIS [Form G-1145](#). This form is not required but is recommended. It registers you to receive electronic notices about your application which allows you to receive updates faster.
 - E. Photocopies or originals of ALL previously issued **I-20s**. If you attended a different school before coming to Dickinson, include copies of those I-20s. During the appointment, you will receive a new I-20 showing our endorsement of your OPT application.
 - F. Photocopies or originals of your current:
 - [Form I-94](#) (front and back)
 - Passport biographical pages
 - Visa sticker

G. *If you previously used OPT or another work authorization:* photocopies or original of your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) cards (front and back).

2. Make an OPT appointment with [International Services](#). During the appointment, we will check your application documentation, verify that your SEVIS record is accurate and up-to-date, enter your requested OPT dates into your SEVIS record, and print a new I-20 showing our endorsement of your OPT application. Bring all of the application documents with you to the appointment.

3. Double-check that your application is complete and assembled in order:

- A. Application fee
- B. Envelope containing your photos
- C. Form I-765
- D. Form G-1145
- E. Photocopies of current and previous I-20s
- F. Photocopies of current Form I-94, passport bio pages, and visa sticker
- G. Photocopies of any previously issued EAD cards

4. Make a photocopy of the complete application for your records.

5. Send the OPT application to USCIS:

U.S. Postal Service deliveries:

USCIS
P.O. Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

Send “certified mail,
return receipt requested.”

OR

Express mail and courier deliveries (recommended):

USCIS
Attn: AOS
2501 S. State Highway 121 Business
Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067
Phone: 800-375-5283

We recommend that you send the application via UPS from the FAS mail room in the HUB.

Note: If you decide not to send your OPT application to USCIS, notify us to cancel your request in SEVIS. If you take no action within 30 days of your meeting with us, your OPT application will be voided.

USCIS will send a receipt with an identification number for your application. You can call 1-800-375-5283 to track the status of your application by phone or [online](#). You can also sign up for updates on your case on the USCIS website. If you do not receive a receipt within 2-3 weeks of sending your application, [contact our office](#) to check for a receipt number in your SEVIS record.

If you receive a Request for Further Evidence (RFE), contact us immediately for assistance. You will have limited time to send additional documentation to USCIS.

Decision from USCIS

USCIS determines if you are eligible for OPT. Denial is unlikely unless you send an incomplete application or USCIS finds evidence that you have violated F-1 status (for example, by working without authorization). If your application is denied, your application fee will not be returned.

If your application is approved, you will receive an official notice that your EAD card will be printed and mailed to you. When your EAD card arrives, check it carefully for accuracy. If there are any mistakes contact the number provided with the notice immediately. [Email](#) a copy of your EAD and accompanying notices to us for our records. *Note: Your EAD will have a notation “not valid for reentry to US.” This is printed on all EAD cards and simply means that the card alone is not sufficient for reentry to the US.*

Travel Information

If you are approved for **pre-completion OPT**, you can enter as you normally would with your F-1 visa documentation.

If you are approved for **post-completion OPT**, it is prudent to consult [International Services](#) prior to leaving the US as immigration regulations can change at any time. If USCIS has approved your OPT and you depart before you get a job, your OPT ends and you cannot reenter unless you have a written job offer. If your OPT request is pending, USCIS states that you can reenter to search for employment. However, we recommend that you remain in the US while the OPT is pending as you cannot predict when the OPT will be approved or whether you will be required to provide further evidence for your OPT application.

Currently the following documentation is suggested when returning to the US while using post-completion OPT:

- A passport valid for 6 months in advance
- A valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport (except Canadian and Bermudian citizens)
- I-20 endorsed for reentry by [International Services](#) within the last six months
- Valid EAD card for OPT
- Evidence of employment such as a job offer or employment verification letter

H-1B Cap-Gap Extension

Duration of F-1 status and work authorization will be extended for a student on OPT who is the beneficiary of a timely-filed, non-frivolous H-1B petition requesting an employment start date of October 1 of the following federal fiscal year (October through September). The extension occurs automatically in SEVIS if the H-1B petition is accepted for adjudication. If the petition is rejected, denied, or revoked, duration of status and work authorization automatically terminates.

STEM Extension

If you graduated with a major in science, technology, engineering or mathematics, you may be eligible for a STEM extension. To apply for a [STEM extension](#), you must complete a new [Form I-765](#) and submit documentation proving your eligibility:

- You must have a degree with a major included on the official [STEM list](#) published by USCIS.
- You must be currently working for a US employer in a job directly related to your STEM major.
- You must have a job offer from an employer registered with the [E-Verify](#) employment verification system at the time of application for the 17-month OPT extension.

If you have questions about your eligibility, contact [International Services](#).

REQUEST FOR OPT APPLICATION REVIEW

Name (LAST, First): _____

Major(s): _____ Expected graduation date: _____

OPT dates requested (cannot be longer than 12 months)

From: _____ To: _____

Explain the type of employment you are planning (must show intent to work within your field of study):

If applying for pre-completion OPT, number of hours per week requested:

_____ Full-time

_____ Part-time (no more than 20 hours per week)

Previous dates of authorized CPT or OPT Employment: _____

Statement of understanding:

- I have maintained valid F-1 status since I began my study at Dickinson College.
- I understand that I remain an F-1 visa student while using OPT and must continue to follow all relevant regulations to maintain F-1 status.
- I understand that I must report any change to my name or address and changes in employment within 10 days to International Services.
- I understand that accruing an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during my post-completion OPT is a violation of F-1 status.

Signature

Date