

## **POST-COMPLETION OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) GUIDELINES**

Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) is available to eligible F-1 students interested in engaging in employment in the U.S. directly related to their major field of study after their degree completion. F-1 students are eligible for an initial 12 months of OPT per higher degree achieved.

### **ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

To be eligible, F-1 students:

- Must have maintained valid F-1 status for at least one academic year
- Must not have had 12-months of OPT authorization for the same degree level
- Must not have accrued 12 months of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) authorization for the same degree level
- Must be completing a UCLA degree program in the next 90 days
- Must not have completed a UCLA degree program more than 60 days ago
- Must be within the U.S. at the time they submit their OPT application to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

### **APPLICATION PROCEDURES**

**Step 1:** Complete the [OPT Online Workshop](#) available on the Dashew Center website

**Step 2:** Pay the \$40 DCISS OPT [Administrative Processing Fee](#)

*Log in to your DCISS account and click on the "OPT Administrative Processing Fee" to pay fee.*

*Include a copy of your email payment confirmation with your OPT I-20 Request documents.*

**Step 3:** Request an OPT I-20 from the Dashew Center

*(Students must submit their completed OPT I-20 Request form, signed Verification of Degree Completion form, a copy of their \$40 OPT Administrative Processing Fee and F-1 Document Shipping Request form (if applicable) via email to [dcissf1unit@saonet.ucla.edu](mailto:dcissf1unit@saonet.ucla.edu))*

**Step 4:** Receive OPT I-20 from the Dashew Center (via email or by FedEx)

**Step 5:** Prepare and complete OPT application forms and supporting documents

**Step 6:** Mail OPT application materials to USCIS for processing

### **APPLICATION TIMELINE**

All documents listed in the OPT Application Checklist (on the OPT I-20 Request form) must be emailed to the Dashew Center to request an OPT I-20 before an OPT application can be submitted to USCIS for processing. The Dashew Center requires up to 15 business days (3 weeks) to issue an OPT I-20.

OPT applications may be submitted to USCIS for processing as early as (but no earlier than) 90 days before a student's program completion date and up to 60 days after a student's program completion date. All OPT applications must be received by USCIS within 30 days of a student's OPT I-20 issue date.

Please note that USCIS requires approximately 4 months to approve an OPT application. It is highly recommended that students submit their OPT application to the Dashew Center at least 3 months before their requested OPT start date.

### **AFTER SUBMITTING AN OPT I-20 REQUEST TO THE DASHEW CENTER**

- After you submit your OPT Request documents to the Dashew Center via email, an F-1 Counselor will issue your new OPT I-20 and send it to you via email or by FedEx (to the address provided on the [F-1 Document Shipping Request Form](#)).
- Please sign the bottom of page 1 of the OPT I-20 and make a copy of pages 1 and 2 to include with your OPT application to send to USCIS for processing.
- Prepare your OPT application materials for shipment to USCIS by following the [OPT Application: Preparation and Mailing Instructions](#).

***NOTE: USCIS must receive your OPT application within 30 days of your OPT I-20 issue date. Applications received by USCIS more than 30 days after your OPT I-20 issue date will be denied.***

- You will receive a *Notice of Action* receipt in the mail (to the 'Mailing Address' you provided on your I-765 Form) from USCIS approximately 2-4 weeks from the date your OPT application was received by USCIS. This receipt notice will include your application receipt number. You can check the status of your OPT application with your application receipt number at: <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do>
- You will receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card approximately 3-4 months from the date your OPT application was received by USCIS.

### **OPT REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

1. Copies of the front and back of the EAD card must be emailed to the Dashew Center: [OPT@saonet.ucla.edu](mailto:OPT@saonet.ucla.edu)
2. You must report the following information to U.S. Department of Homeland Security within 10 days of any change during your OPT period through your [SEVP Portal](#) account:
  - **OPT Employment Status**
  - **Change of Address**
  -

### **OPT EMPLOYMENT TIMELINE**

F-1 students on OPT have a total of **90 days** (including weekends and holidays) of allowed unemployment during their initial 12-month OPT period that begins on the start date of their OPT (as indicated on their

EAD card). You may not begin employment until you have received your EAD card and until the start date of your OPT (as indicated on your EAD card) has been reached.

## **OPT EMPLOYMENT TYPES**

All OPT employment must be directly related to your major field of study and appropriate for your degree level.

- **Paid employment** – A student may work part-time (at least 20 hours per week), or full time.
- **Multiple Employers** – A student may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the student's degree program.
- **Short-term Multiple Employers (performing artists)** – A student, such as a musician or other type of performing artist, may work for multiple short term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration.
- **Work for Hire** – This is also commonly referred to as 1099 employment, where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. If requested by Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the student must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract period and the name and address of the contracting company.
- **Self-employed business owner**– A student on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to the student's degree program.
- **Employment through an agency or consulting firm** – The student must be able to provide evidence showing he or she worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.
- **Unpaid Employment** – A student may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern, where this practice does not violate any U.S. labor laws. The work must be at least 20 hours per week. A student must be able to provide evidence acquired from the student's employer to verify that the student worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.

**NOTE:** *If requested by U.S. Department of Homeland Security, students must be prepared to provide evidence of OPT employment dates and duration, and the name and address of OPT employer(s).*

## **TRAVELING ABROAD DURING OPT**

### **Before OPT I-20 End Date:**

The following documents are required for re-entry to the U.S. in valid F-1 status **before** a student's program completion date (as indicated on their OPT I-20):

- Valid passport
- Valid F-1 visa (*Canadian citizens exempt*)
- Endorsed OPT I-20 (*each travel authorization signature is valid for 1 year from the date it was last signed, and must be valid at the time of re-entry to the U.S.*)

### After OPT I-20 End Date:

The following documents are required for re-entry to the U.S. in valid F-1 OPT status **after** a student's program completion date (as indicated on their OPT I-20):

- Valid passport
- Valid F-1 visa (*Canadian citizens exempt*)
- Endorsed OPT I-20 (*each travel authorization signature is valid for **6 months** from the date it was last signed, even though the I-20 says one year, and must be valid at the time of re-entry to the U.S.*)
- Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card
- Proof of Employment or Job Offer Letter

**NOTE:** Students who have received their EAD and are engaging in OPT are still considered F-1 students and must travel with a valid F-1 visa to re-enter the U.S. in valid F-1 OPT status. Students with an expired F-1 visa must apply for a new F-1 visa from a U.S. Consulate or Embassy during their next trip abroad to re-enter the U.S. in valid F-1 OPT status. As it may be difficult to obtain a new F-1 visa during OPT, we recommend that students secure OPT employment before applying for a new F-1 visa. F-1 visa applications for students on OPT may require additional time for approval. For F-1 visa application requirements, please visit <http://travel.state.gov>

### Additional Questions?

Please review the 'Frequently Asked Questions' section of the [OPT Online Workshop](#), the [COVID-19 Updates](#) page, or contact the [Virtual Dashew Center Front Desk](#) to schedule an appointment with an F-1 Counselor.