

## Thinking about OPT? Frequently Asked Questions about Optional Practical Training

**What is OPT?** Optional Practical Training (OPT) is designed for international students to gain practical work experience in their field of study. Simply put, OPT is an opportunity for F-1 students to work full-time for 12 months, during their studies or immediately following their degree completion.

**Who is eligible for OPT?** F-1 international students in both the undergraduate or graduate programs are eligible for OPT as long as you have been in valid F-1 student status for *one academic year*. Please note that you are required to attend an OPT workshop offered by ISSS before you can apply for OPT. Please visit our website to sign up for a workshop: [www.usfca.edu/iss/workshops](http://www.usfca.edu/iss/workshops).

**Where can I work with OPT?** Students on OPT can work anywhere in the United States in a paid or unpaid position, can work with multiple employers at one time, and can change employers as many times as they wish. However, all jobs need to be related to your degree of study. Remember that it is ultimately up to you to determine if the job relates to your study.

**What about unemployment?** OPT regulation were updated in April 2008 to include a limit on unemployment during Post-Completion OPT. Students need to work full-time (more than 20 hrs per week) or they will accrue days of unemployment. Students can only be unemployed for a total of 90 days during Post-Completion OPT. The 90 days of unemployment are cumulative and once a student has reached 90 days of unemployment they are considered “out of status” and should leave the U.S. immediately. Please report your employment to the ISSS office through our website to ensure that you do not reach 90 days of unemployment. Pre-Completion OPT students do not accrue days of unemployment and do not need to report their employment.

**Can I volunteer and/or intern during OPT?** Yes, you can volunteer or intern during OPT, but it needs to be related to your field of study. When volunteering or interning it is recommended that you get a contract or agreement from your supervisor that indicates your job description and your time commitment. Work during OPT does not need to be paid but always needs to be related to your degree. Please report all internships and volunteer work at employment to the ISSS office to avoid accruing days of unemployment.

**What is the difference between Pre-Completion OPT and Post-Completion OPT?** Pre-Completion OPT occurs before you complete your degree and Post-Completion OPT happens after the degree is completed. Students cannot engage in either until they have been in valid F-1 status for one academic year, however you can apply as early as 90 days before you reach the one academic year requirement.

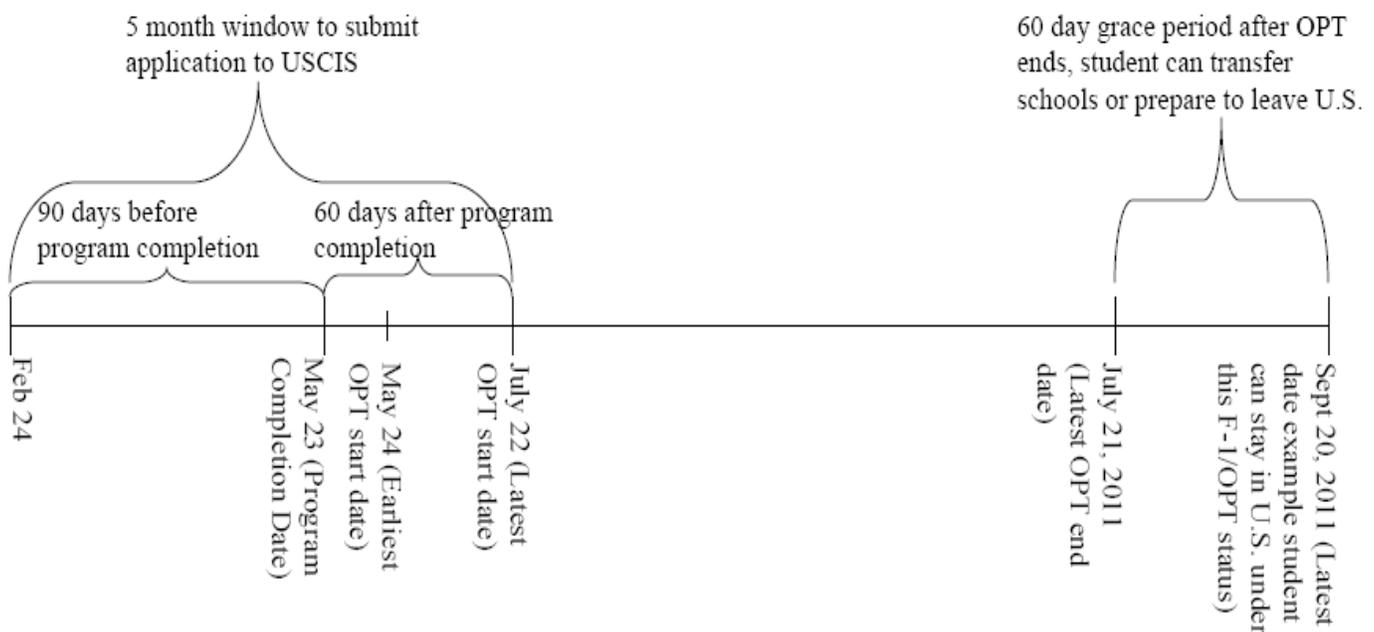
**Pre-Completion OPT:** Pre-Completion OPT can be used during your studies. Students can work over 20 hrs per week during breaks between terms of study (full-time Pre-Completion OPT), and less than 20 hrs per week while classes are in session (part-time Pre-Completion OPT). Students who use part-time OPT, deduct days at half the rate. For example if you work for 5 months on part-time, Pre-Completion OPT, only 2.5 months are deducted from the total 12 months. Pre-Completion OPT is a great option for students who have found a job they really want or wish to work over summer vacation. Please note that if you use part of your 12 months of OPT as Pre-Completion OPT, you will have to apply again, and pay the \$380 filing fee, to use the remaining time as Post-Completion OPT. Students can only work on Pre-Completion OPT within their period of studies; once a student has finished their degree, Pre-Completion OPT is no longer available. Many students do not apply for Pre-Completion OPT so that they can have 12 full months of OPT after they graduate.

**Post-Completion OPT:** Post-completion OPT can start as early as the day after a student completes the requirements for their degree, or as late as 60 days from their degree completion.

*When to apply for Post-Completion OPT:* Many students want to know when they should apply for OPT, however the answer to this will depend on the individual student. It typically takes from 2-3 months for an OPT application to be processed by the U.S. immigration office, so apply early. Students have a 5 month window to submit a completed OPT application to the U.S. immigration office (USCIS) to apply for Post-Completion OPT. A student who graduates on May 23, 2010, has from 90 days before degree completion (February 24, 2010) to 60 days after degree completion (July 22, 2010). After July 22, this student cannot submit an OPT application to USCIS. Please view the example timeline below for a student who graduates on May 23, 2010.

*Choosing dates for Post-Completion OPT:* A student who finishes all degree requirements on May 23, 2010, can choose an OPT start date from May 24, 2010 to July 22, 2010. The end date for OPT will be 12 months after the start date. The latest OPT end date for the student in this example is July 21, 2011. The latest end date for a student on Post-Completion OPT is always 14 months after the student completed their studies.

*Grace Periods on OPT:* Students have a 60 day grace period after their OPT has ended to stay in the United States to prepare for their departure, or to transfer to a new school. Students cannot work during this grace period.



\* In the sample timeline above, the student chose the latest possible OPT start date and therefore had the latest possible OPT end date. *Your* OPT end date will be 12 months from *your* OPT start date. Students who have used some OPT time already will have less than 12 months of OPT remaining.

**Can I travel on OPT?** You can travel on OPT, however you will need to have your EAD work authorization card, an I-20 with a current travel signature, a valid visa and passport and a letter from your employer. Travel before your OPT is approved is more complicated and you should ask about this at the OPT workshop.

**What should I do next?** All students wishing to apply for Post-Completion OPT need to attend an ISSS OPT workshop. We will not process your application until you have attended a workshop. Please sign-up on our website: [www.usfca.edu/iss/workshops](http://www.usfca.edu/iss/workshops).