



What You Need to Know About Optional Practical Training

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is an important opportunity for F-1 students. To maintain F-1 status during OPT you must comply with U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) employment and reporting requirements. The CSU Stanislaus Office of International Education provides the following information to assist you in meeting those requirements.

WHAT IS OPT?

OPT is employment authorization for F-1 undergraduate and graduate students that allows them to legally work for up to 12 months in a position related to their major per education level. Students must have been enrolled under the current I-20 for at least 1 academic year in order to be eligible for OPT. Students need to apply at the beginning of their final semester. The student is responsible for choosing a start date. The start date must be within 60 days from the student's last day of classes of their final semester. Language Learning students are not eligible for OPT.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Eligibility for Optional Practical Training

Use of full-time CPT for 12 months or more eliminates eligibility for OPT. Part-time CPT does not affect OPT.

HOW TO APPLY APPLICATION

Contact the Office of International Education to set up an appointment to apply for OPT. The appointment will last approximately 30 minutes. Students can apply as early as 90 days before the last day of classes and up to 60 days after the last day of classes. The student's application must be received by USCIS BEFORE the 60th day. Once the OPT I-20 is printed, the student will need to have it mailed to USCIS within 30 days. You will need the following documents in order to apply for OPT:

- Completed I-765 form
- Copy of the first page of all I-20s.
- Copy of Passport
- Copy of Visa
- Copy of most recent I-94
- 2 Passport size photos (must not be older than 6 months)
- Check or money order for \$410 made out to the Department of Homeland Security.
- Completed Office of International Education OPT Application

Make sure you bring all of these documents with you to your appointment. If any of the items on this checklist are missing or incomplete, your appointment will be canceled and rescheduled for another day.

OPT STEM EXTENSION

Students with I-20s issued under certain STEM majors are eligible to apply for a 24 month OPT extension. You can find a list of eligible STEM majors at studyinthestates.dhs.gov. Students must be employed (paid) by a company with an E-verify number at the time of the time of the application. Students can apply as early as 90 days before the expiration of their standard OPT but USCIS must receive the student's STEM OPT application package before the expiration of the student's current post-completion OPT. Students will need the same documents as the original OPT applicant and the following additional documents for OPT STEM extension:

- I-983 Training Plan
- Diploma
- Transcripts

If a student completes all course requirements for another qualifying STEM degree at a higher degree level than the first STEM qualifying degree, the student may apply for a second 24-month STEM OPT extension while in a valid period of standard post-completion OPT. A student may not be authorized for more than **two lifetime** STEM OPT extensions.

F-1 STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

REPORTS YOU MUST MAKE TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Within 10 days of each change, you are required to report the following:

- Current U.S. address
- Start or end of employment
- Change of your employer's address
- Change of your employer's name
- Change of your employer's address/phone number/e-mail
- A statement on how the position relates to your degree
- Change of your official name

ALL STUDENTS WITH AN OPT STEM EXTENSION – You are required to report all the above, plus the following:

- Employment status, 6 months after your extension start date, even if your information has not changed.
- Employment status, 12 months after your extension start date, even if your information has not changed.

HOW TO REPORT

To report a change of address or employment, complete an OPT Report Form and submit it via email, fax or in person to the Office of International Education. The PDSO/DSO will report your changes to Homeland Security. Email bfentress@csustan.edu to request the form.

ACCEPTABLE EMPLOYMENT

DHS has ruled that acceptable employment during OPT can include standard employment, contract employment, self-employment and volunteer positions. All employment must be appropriate to your degree and average at least 20 hours per week. Self-employment does not constitute a qualifying job for purposes of a 24-month STEM OPT extension. According to DHS, volunteer or unpaid positions do not constitute qualifying jobs for purposes of a 24-month STEM OPT extension.

UNEMPLOYMENT LIMITS

STUDENTS IN INITIAL OPT PERIOD – Maximum of 90 days unemployed allowed during the 12-month OPT period.

STUDENTS WITH AN OPT STEM EXTENSION An additional 30 days applies, for a maximum of 120 days allowed during the 36-month OPT period.

NOTE: It is crucial that you report all periods of employment to avoid unnecessary accrual of unemployment days.

H-1B CAP GAP – An F-1 student who has an H-1b petition filed by an eligible employer has an automatic extension of status while the application is pending. Students on approved OPT also have an extension of work authorization.

MORE INFORMATION: California State University, Stanislaus, Office of International Education, One University Circle, MSR 180, Turlock, CA 95382, (209 667-3395), fax 209-667-3791), bfentress@csustan.edu